

**AN INTERPRETIVE EXPLORATION
OF UNDER-REPRESENTATION
OF WOMEN EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS
IN UK FTSE-100 COMPANIES**

Ksenia Penchukova

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

OXFORD BROOKES UNIVERSITY

OXFORD BROOKES BUSINESS SCHOOL

DECEMBER 2020

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In 1953 Sir Edmund Hillary and Sherpa mountaineer Tenzing Norgay were the first climbers to have reached the summit of Mount Everest. Hillary reflected: "...Sherpas play a very important role..., [they] lead along the ridges and up to the summit." Having climbed mountain Kilimanjaro in 2014, I am well aware of Sherpas' invaluable role.

And so, my biggest 'thank you' goes to my Sherpas.

Dr Louise Grisoni, who has supported me from day one. Dr Grisoni gave me her knowledge, feedback, encouragement and guidance throughout my PhD journey. Dr Kate Clayton-Hathway, for her advice and for always bearing me in mind whenever she came across new and interesting reading material. Professor Simonetta Manfredi, who has given me many learning opportunities, especially in the crucial early stages of my research. Dr David Bowen, for his candid comments and for challenging my thinking. Dr Charoula Tzanakou, Dr Sarah Quinton and other members of Oxford Brookes University for their direction, feedback, training and support. Thank you to my fellow PhD student colleagues for the many stimulating discussions and for sharing the learnings and experiences.

I would also like to thank my friends and family for their patience, interest in my work and words of encouragement. Thank you for being actively involved in my progress and nudging me on in the toughest of moments.

And finally, my sincere thanks go to the participants of this research, without whose time, honesty and reflections this study would not have been possible.

ABSTRACT

The subject of workplace gender diversity has become very topical over the last decade. A capitalist view advocates the positive impact of gender diversity on business performance; a feminist view promotes the moral argument; the utilitarian view perceives gender equality as critical to the sustainable development of society, while the humanist view recognises the 'shared-value' of all the contributing arguments.

Whether viewed individually or as inter-dependent, all these arguments build a strong case in support of gender diversity in the workplace. Despite this, women's representation in the UK corporate world is not at the level where the society would like to see it today.

A disproportionate number of initiatives and prior research studies have focused on tackling the issue of women's under-representation at non-executive director level, with the executive and other senior leadership levels below the board largely ignored. This study focuses on filling this gap by exploring women's under-representation specifically at executive directorship level.

Through a qualitative study I explore career journeys of 13 top executives, representing nine industries and eight corporate functions drawn from the UK FTSE-100 businesses, with the aim of finding possible clarifications to the primary research question of this study: what are the perceived explanations of women's under-representation at the executive directorship level of the FTSE-100 companies in the UK?

This research study evaluates explanations for women's under-representation presented by existing academic research, including: concept of merit, lack of women mentors and female role models, gendered organisations, roles and leadership, preference theory, and some elements of the glass ceiling concept.

Contrasting these theoretical explanations with the findings gathered through 13 in-depth interviews, this research study generates eight primary conclusions.

Economic benefits of workplace gender diversity speak louder than the less tangible arguments on ethics and sustainability.

Voluntary targets are preferred over mandatory quotas.

Advocates are needed more than role models.

While women are typecast as caregivers, men are equally stereotyped as breadwinners and providers.

Childbearing is inevitable, but childcare support is inadequate.

Today's 'motherhood and career' is a brave commitment to pay the price for both.

Effective modern leaders exhibit gender-neutral qualities.

Successful women are not passively meritocratic: they don't wait, they take action.

While the findings of this study do not represent the opinions of all the men and women, the views expressed by the participants of this research is a candid and meaningful testimony, which forms basis for this study's contribution to theory, knowledge and practice, and inspires new ideas, some of which are translated into recommendations for further academic research.

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2
ABSTRACT	3
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	7
1.1. Foreword	7
1.2. British women: setting the scene	7
1.3. Research aim and objectives.....	10
1.4. Structure of the thesis	13
1.5. Conclusion	14
CHAPTER TWO: GENDER DIVERSITY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE UK FTSE WORLD	16
2.1. Introduction.....	16
2.2. The meaning of workplace gender diversity	16
2.3. The advantages of workplace gender diversity	17
2.3.1. The socio-economic case	19
2.3.2. The moral case argument	23
2.4. Gender diversity and the UK FTSE-100 organisations.....	25
2.5. Gender diversity at Executive versus Non-Executive Director level.....	27
2.6. Key initiatives – what has and has not worked so far	29
2.6.1. Lord Davies Review	30
2.6.2. Hampton-Alexander Review	33
2.6.3. The 30% Club.....	36
2.6.4. The myths and realities unearthed in ‘Cracking the Code’	38
2.6.5. The impact of key initiatives	41
2.7. Conclusion	42
CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL EXPLANATIONS FOR LACK OF WOMEN IN SENIOR ROLES	44
3.1. Introduction.....	44
3.2. Literature review methodology.....	45
3.2.1. Barriers evaluation approach	45
3.2.2. ‘Traffic light’ assessment model of theoretical explanations	47
3.3. Selected theoretical explanations	49
3.3.1. Concept of Merit.....	51
3.3.2. Lack of mentors and positive roles models	54
3.3.3. Gendered Organisations Theory.....	56
3.3.4. Gendered Roles Theory.....	58
3.3.5. Gendered Construction of Leadership Theory	62
3.3.6. Preference Theory	64
3.3.7. Glass Ceiling Concept	66
3.4. Conclusion	72

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	74
4.1. Introduction.....	74
4.2. Structure of the study	74
4.2.1. Research problem.....	75
4.2.2. Research question	76
4.3. Research design	77
4.3.1. Research purpose	78
4.3.2. Reasoning approach	81
4.3.3. Philosophical stance	84
4.4. Research methodology.....	93
4.4.1. Research methods	96
4.4.2. Data collection methods	96
4.4.3. Fieldwork and data collection instruments	99
4.4.4. Data analysis methods	106
4.5. Quality assurance in the context of qualitative research	113
4.5.1. Researcher's role	114
4.5.2. Quality assessment criteria used in this research study.....	116
4.5.3. Ethical considerations	121
4.6. Conclusion	125
CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS	127
5.1. Introduction.....	127
5.2. Participant group	127
5.3. Primary and secondary themes identified	128
5.4. Primary Theme 1: 'How I became successful'	129
5.4.1. Secondary Theme A-1: 'What made me successful'	129
5.4.2. Secondary Theme B-1: 'Career development strategies'	134
5.4.3. Secondary Theme C-1: 'Gender-based differences'	140
5.5. Primary Theme 2: 'Obstacles and enablers to career progression'	146
5.5.1. Secondary Theme A-2: 'The role of mentors, role models and inspirational figures'	146
5.5.2. Secondary Theme B-2: 'Childcare and work-life balance support mechanisms'	150
5.5.3. Secondary Theme C-2: 'Explanation of career obstacles as experienced by women'	153
5.5.4. Secondary Theme D-2: 'Explanation of career obstacles as viewed by men'	158
5.6. Primary Theme 3: 'Social cost of career progression'	163
5.6.1. Secondary Theme A-3: 'High price to pay for a top job'	164
5.6.2. Secondary Theme B-3: 'Regrets'	169
5.7. Primary Theme 4: 'What does the future of gender diversity in the UK look like?'	172
5.7.1. Secondary Theme A-4: 'Outlook for the future of gender diversity'	172
5.7.2. Secondary Theme B-4: 'On positive action, positive discrimination, and quotas'	177
5.7.3. Secondary Theme C-4: 'The impact of Lord Davies and Hampton-Alexander Reviews'	181
5.7.4. Secondary Theme D-4: 'Is gender diversity advantageous to business?'	183
5.8. Primary Theme 5: 'Practical action moves the dial'	186
5.8.1. Secondary Theme A-5: 'Where does the responsibility lie?'	186

AN INTERPRETIVE EXPLORATION OF UNDER-REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS IN UK FTSE-100 COMPANIES

5.8.2.	Secondary Theme B-5: 'Best practice gender diversity initiatives steered by British top businesses'	189
5.8.3.	Secondary Theme C-5: 'Advice to aspiring career women'	196
5.9.	Conclusion	200
CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION		205
6.1.	Introduction.....	205
6.2.	Mentors or advocates?.....	206
6.3.	Women as carers or men as providers?	209
6.4.	Motherhood or career?	212
6.5.	Alpha male or gender-neutral leadership characteristics?	215
6.6.	Gendered organisations or emerging best practice?	221
6.7.	A 'wait' for merit or proactiveness?	224
6.8.	Conclusion	226
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS		230
7.1.	Introduction.....	230
7.2.	Review of research aim and objectives.....	234
7.3.	Research contributions.....	235
7.3.1.	Contribution to theory	235
7.3.2.	Contribution to knowledge	238
7.3.3.	Contribution to practice	239
7.4.	Research limitations.....	241
7.5.	Recommendations for further research	244
7.6.	Concluding reflections	246
BIBLIOGRAPHY		250
APPENDIX 1: LIST OF FIGURES		276
APPENDIX 2: APPLICATION OF ABDUCTIVE REASONING APPROACH		277
APPENDIX 3: UREC APPROVAL.....		278
APPENDIX 4: UREC APPROVAL OF AMENDMENT.....		279
APPENDIX 5: EXAMPLE OF INITIAL APPROACH EMAIL.....		280
APPENDIX 6: PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS		281
APPENDIX 7: EXAMPLE OF PRE-INTERVIEW EMAIL		282
APPENDIX 8: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET		283
APPENDIX 9: INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM.....		285
APPENDIX 10: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....		286
APPENDIX 11: EXAMPLE OF INTERVIEWER SENTIMENTS ANALYSIS.....		288
APPENDIX 12: EXAMPLE OF KEY THEMES ANALYSIS.....		289
APPENDIX 13: EXAMPLE OF IDENTIFIED CONTRADICTIONS.....		290
APPENDIX 14: EXAMPLE OF RECURRING STATEMENTS.....		291

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Foreword

Despite the social, political and economic changes of the last 70 years, gender inequality can still be observed within British society. Specifically in the areas of workplace and employment, examples of gender inequality include gender pay gap and lack of workplace gender diversity across a large number of roles, industries and hierarchical levels. Professional women continue to be under-represented in highly skilled and highly paid jobs, and many find it hard to reach and retain senior leadership positions.

This research study sets out to explore the issue of gender inequality, specifically focusing on the UK employment area. This choice is made with clear understanding and appreciation that there exist other types of diversity in addition to gender, based on culture, race, age, sexual orientation, disability. However, gender diversity is of a particular relevance to this study, given the aim and objectives of this research, which are presented in more detail in this chapter.

To highlight the significance and relevance of the topic chosen for this study – workplace gender diversity, I would like to start by setting the historical background pertaining to the evolution of British women's status.

1.2. British women: setting the scene

Within the UK population the number of women exceeds the number of men: there are 33.82 million of women in comparison to 32.98 million of men (Statista, 2020). The proportion of women starts to increase from the age of 30 (ONS, 2019) and is mainly attributed to the higher number of women among immigrants who arrived in the UK at the end of 20th and beginning of 21st century. In addition, life expectancy of British women at birth is four years longer than men's, with an average life expectancy of 83 and 79 years, respectively (ONS, 2019). Moreover, the mortality rate of adult British women is significantly lower than that of men: with 55 and 86 per 1000 adults respectively (The World Bank, 2020).

The last 100 years have seen significant changes in the socio-economic and political status of women in Great Britain. Known as 'women's revolutionary years' (The Guardian, 2018), these

years saw gender transformation of British political institutions taking place and witnessed the rolling out of gender equality policy within socio-economic spheres of British society.

A significant increase in the percentage of women within the UK workforce in late 60s-early 70s is attributed to the rise of the second wave of Women's Rights Movement. While the primary goal of the first wave of the movement (late 19th-beginning of 20th century) was to give women voting rights, the second wave saw the rise in demand for equality of opportunities, working conditions and pay. One of the key characteristics of the second wave of the Women's Rights Movement was the exposure of gender inequality within both private and public spheres of life. "What is private - is public" became a slogan of the movement, putting on the forefront of the public agenda a range of topics, which traditionally were considered 'private', such as reproductive rights and domestic violence.

Under the influence of Women's Rights Movement, the British government introduced two gender equality legislations: The Equal Pay Act 1970 and The Sex Discrimination Act 1975.

The Equal Pay Act 1970 was designed to cover every form of pay, including basic salary, overtime and bonus pay. In line with this legislation women had the right to claim pay equal to their male colleagues through employment tribunals, if they worked for the same employer and performed the same work. The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 made it unlawful to discriminate between genders in the spheres of employment, education, provision of products, services or social benefits. Gender discrimination became illegal in processes pertaining to recruitment, conditions of employment and access to career development opportunities.

While both legislations were put into place as a provision of equal rights for women, they were presented as gender neutral and applied to both men and women. Nevertheless, both legislations facilitated British women's integration into the socio-economic and political life by granting them equal civil rights to men. British women were able to enjoy some benefits of the new legislation in the first few years since its inception. However, the impact of these legislations was limited. Such elements of British society as family, government structure, education system and trade unions were not ready to fully embrace the changes. Very soon the complexity and the 'red tape' surrounding the legislation started to make its application more difficult. The claims process was lengthy and often subjective, and employers were finding creative ways of bypassing the legislation. By early 90s the number of employment tribunal claims has significantly reduced (British Academy of Management, 2014). Despite this, the cases that were

concluded in women's favour helped create legal precedents and gave women confidence to fight workplace inequalities (Simpson, 2018).

UK National Minimum Wage introduced in 1999 played an instrumental role in decreasing one type of workplace inequality - the gender pay gap. This legislation covered every employed person of 18 years and above, including those employed on part-time and temporary basis, irrespective of employer's size. Over one million women benefited from this legislation, representing mainly the lower paid jobs. Since its introduction, the National Minimum Wage has risen faster than average earnings and inflation. On 1 April 2019 the National Living Wage reached £8.21 per hour, in contrast to £3.60 back in 1999 (Low Pay Commission, 2019). Women workers continued to gain most from the minimum wage increase: the number of women within the National Minimum Wage bracket has doubled between 1999 and 2019. Despite this, a gender pay gap continues to be a reality in British society.

Women continue to be over-represented in the UK lower paid sectors, industries and roles. British women have traditionally been employed in professions which are considered to be 'feminine': secretarial and administrative roles, personal care sector, nursing, social work and childcare, service sector, as well as retail. In 2020 women represented 76% of the workforce of the health and social care sectors; 73% of education sector; and 56% of hospitality sector (ONS, 2021).

However, the number of women entering employment continues to grow, and so does the success of their fight against gendered stereotypes. Today women represent 46% of UK employment force. The proportion of women in employment of working age (16 to 59 years old) increased from 55% in 1971 to over 70% in 2017 (IFS, 2018). This is one of the highest figures across Europe: only six countries are ahead of the UK on this dimension: Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Switzerland (ibid). An increased number of women are entering universities and choose to study a wider and more diverse range of disciplines. Since the introduction of The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 the percentage of women students entering universities increased from 33% to 57% (Bolton, 2020). Women gradually join professions that traditionally were out of reach for them: lawyers, doctors, university professors, journalists. More and more women enter the industries that were previously male-dominated, such as IT and industrial manufacturing. The number of women entrepreneurs is also on the increase (Rose, 2019). In the last decade British government has put in place mechanisms to support small and medium sized enterprises which are specifically led by women (FSB, 2018).

While British women have been able to break into the traditionally 'masculine' professions, they still tend to concentrate within the lower paid clusters. As an example, within medical professions, there are more women GPs, than men. In 2013, 70% of the newly qualified GPs in London were women (NHS Digital, 2014). However, looking at the higher grades of doctors, only 28% of consultants are women and women doctors are significantly under-represented in certain specialities, particularly surgery (NWPGMD, 2009).

When it comes to senior roles, women's representation has historically improved: between 1974 and 2017 the percentage of women middle managers in the UK increased from 1.8% to 33.1%, and the proportion of women directors – from 0.6% to 14.4% (CMI, 2018). However, seeing women in positions of senior authority is still more of an exception than the rule. In 2018, women represented 17% of UK senior judges, 18% of senior police officers, 18% of newspaper editors in chief and 6% of CEOs of FTSE-100 businesses (Jewell and Bazeley, 2018).

Today, it is a widely held belief that the lives of 21st century British women were transformed to such an extent, that their rights and opportunities are entirely on par with those of men. But if so, why is UK ranked lower than New Zealand, Rwanda, Nicaragua and the Philippines on the 2020 Gender Gap Index (WEF, 2020), an annual report published by the World Economic Forum (WEF), which benchmarks national gender gaps on the basis of economic, political, education and health-based criteria?

With this historical background in mind, this research study sets out to explore the significant and pertinent issue that continues to prevail today – gender inequality within the UK employment area. The topic of gender diversity is of a particular significance to this study, given the aim and objectives of this research, which are presented next in more detail.

1.3. Research aim and objectives

The overarching goal of this research study is to explore the topic of gender diversity in the UK corporate sector. Specifically, the study aims to evaluate the problem of women's under-representation within the leadership echelons of the UK private sector, with a specific focus on the executive directorship level of publicly listed FTSE-100 organisations in the UK.

The FTSE-100 index consists of 100 'blue chip' businesses listed on the London Stock Exchange. These companies are rated as the largest in their capital value, and their performance is considered to be a good indicator of the health of British and international economy (Cunniffe,

2020). These top 100 companies have been chosen for this research because of their prominence in the British corporate scene, and because these firms tend to set the standard for policies and act as benchmark for practices across the UK corporate sector.

The focus on the executive directorship level was chosen for two reasons. Firstly, women's representation at executive director level of the UK FTSE-100 organisations remains low. In 2019 the FTSE-100 companies have reported 28.6% of women in executive roles (Hampton-Alexander, 2019). In parallel, the numbers of women in non-executive directorship positions grew steadily over the last decade (Vinnicombe, Atewologun and Battista, 2019), which brings me to the second argument. Several studies compare the non-executive and executive directors' engagement in day-to-day management of the firm and the different depth of their involvement in the organisation (Treadwell, 2006; AICD, 2014). They suggest that executive directors make a more direct and impactful contribution to the business in comparison to non-executive directors. While much research has been conducted focusing on women's representation at non-executive director level, this study examines whether it is at the executive directorship level that a more impactful contribution to the organisation is made and, therefore, is the level at which women's representation should be targeted.

The key aim of this research study is to identify the perceived causes of women's under-representation at the executive directorship level of FTSE-100 companies in the UK by exploring and comparing the views and experiences of a selected group of senior executives, men and women, in order to determine the barriers and obstacles that prevent women from progressing their careers.

As discussed in more detail in Chapter Four: Research Structure and Design, this study sets to achieve this research aim by exploring possible explanations to the following research questions:

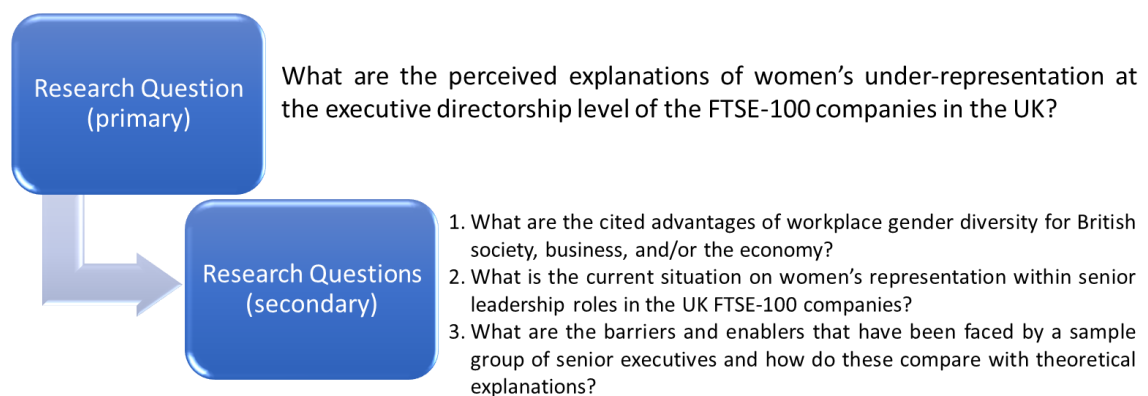


Figure 1: Research questions this study sets to address

This research study has four key objectives:

- to evaluate the context and analyse the current levels of women's under-representation at executive directorship level of the UK FTSE-100 businesses;
- to explore and compare the experiences of a selected group of women and men executive directors;
- to examine and contrast some of the main theoretical explanations for women's under-representation with research participants' perceptions and experiences;
- to consider the implications from findings of this research study on theory, future research, organisational practice and on career decisions of aspiring executives.

In order to meet these objectives, I conducted an exploratory research study (Singh, 2007; Leedy and Ormrod, 2014; Schutt, 2015), using abductive reasoning approach (Sober, 2013; Bryman and Bell, 2015; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). My ontological, epistemological and axiological views were largely influenced by interpretivist and pragmatist ideologies (Grix, 2004; Morgan, 2007; Myers, 2013; Chowdhury, 2014; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). I relied on qualitative research methodology (Vaus, 2002; Creswell, 2014; McLeod, 2019), selecting semi-structured in-depth interviews (Bryman, 2012; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012; McNamara, 2018) and a framework method (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994; Smith and Firth, 2011) as my preferred data collection and data analysis techniques, respectively.

In this research study I explore career journeys of 13 senior executives, eight women and five men. Women were chosen into the sample population to help explore the barriers and enablers they faced during their professional careers, and identify the possible reasons why some women at senior levels opted out of further career progression. All of the interviewed women are current or former executive directors of the UK FTSE-100 organisations. Men who feature in this study hold, currently or formerly, CEO, Managing Director or General Manager positions of the UK FTSE-100 companies. Men were selected into the sample population, as representative key decision-makers in hiring and promotional matters, to provide their perspective on why women are under-represented at executive director level. In addition, men's participation in this research study was critical to enable to compare men and women executives' views and experiences and identify any gender-specific differences and similarities in behaviours, styles and decisions. Research participants represented nine different industries and eight corporate functions.

1.4. Structure of the thesis

This thesis comprises of seven chapters, with an introductory outline of each chapter being presented below.

Chapter One: Introduction sets the historical background to the issue of gender inequality in the UK, before presenting the aim and objectives of this study in support of research significance of the topic of gender inequality. In addition, this introductory part presents the structure of the thesis and outlines the content of each chapter.

Chapter Two: Gender Diversity in the Context of the UK FTSE World explores the topic of diversity within the workplace context, specifically focusing on gender. To highlight the significance of workplace gender diversity, the socio-economic and the moral arguments are considered. This chapter introduces the UK FTSE-100 private sector organisations and explains why the executive directorships level within these companies was selected as the focus of this research study which explores workplace gender diversity. Finally, this chapter presents key workplace gender diversity improvement initiatives, spearheaded by Lord Davies and Hampton-Alexander Reviews and the 30% Club, and analyses their strengths and limitations.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Explanations for Lack of Women in Senior Roles is dedicated to a literature review; it explores possible explanations for women's under-representation in senior roles of British corporate world by analysing selected theories pertaining to obstacles and barriers identified in academic literature and prior research, including: concept of merit; lack of women mentors and positive roles models; gendered organisations; roles and leadership; preference theory and some elements of the glass ceiling concept.

Chapter Four: Research Design and Methodology presents the structure and design of this research study, introducing the research problem and research questions. This chapter explains the purpose and logical reasoning approach chosen for this research. The influence of philosophical ideologies on my ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions is also discussed. In this chapter I defend my choice of research methodology and present arguments for the selection of data collection and data analysis techniques. This chapter explores the importance of high standards of quality in qualitative research and explains the steps undertaken for this research study to achieve them. I reflect on the impact of the researcher's role on the study, present the quality assessment criteria chosen and discuss the ethical standards that this study adhered to.

Chapter Five: Findings presents findings from participants' interviews, gathered and examined as part of data collection and analysis stages of this research study, with the aim of uncovering first-hand explanations and advice on tackling the issue of women's under-representation in senior roles of the UK FTSE-100 organisations. The findings in this chapter are presented through a group of five primary themes that have emerged as part of the data analysis process, each containing between two and four secondary themes. Primary themes that feature in this chapter include: the meaning of success; obstacles and enablers to career progression; the social costs of a high-flying career; the future outlook for workplace gender diversity and practical advice on tackling the issue of women's under-representation in senior roles. This chapter summarises the key messages that have transpired, supported by quotes from the interviewees, as they reflect on their career development journeys.

Chapter Six: Discussion aims to compare and contrast the theoretical explanations for women's under-representation in senior leadership roles discussed in Chapter Three with interviewees' perceptions and experiences outlined in the study findings in Chapter Five. Existing theoretical contributions are then supplemented with contemporary research findings from the study. Key messages which transpire in this chapter highlight the perceived preference for advocates over traditional mentors; emerging shift towards gender-neutral leadership characteristics; the heavy social cost of a successful career, which is greater for executive women than men; prevailing gendered roles stereotypes; and the role that growing awareness, publicity and training play in transforming the gendered structures of the UK FTSE-100 organisations.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions reflects on the research aim and objectives presented at the outset of the study. This chapter discusses contributions to theory, knowledge and practice, and critically analyses this study's limitations. The thesis concludes with recommendations for further research and final reflections on the overall process and learnings captured as part of this research study.

1.5. Conclusion

This interpretive exploration inquiry travels through seven steps that shape the structure of this thesis.

AN INTERPRETIVE EXPLORATION OF UNDER-REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS IN UK FTSE-100 COMPANIES



Figure 2: Structure of this thesis

This thesis presents findings uncovered as part of the research process, in the hope that they will be found useful and interesting to different communities, including corporate and public, as well as academic.

CHAPTER TWO:

GENDER DIVERSITY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE UK FTSE WORLD

2.1. Introduction

The term 'diversity' has become widely used in recent years, but what does it actually mean? In organisational literature diversity is often described in terms of different perspectives, resulting in potential behavioural differences among cultural groups, as well as identity differences among group members in relation to other groups (McGrath, Berdahl and Arrow, 1995; Larkey, 1996). In the context of business environment, diversity can touch on many areas: customers, geographical presence, sectors, products, employment.

In this chapter I will explore workplace diversity with a specific focus on gender. I will start by investigating what gender diversity means in the workplace context. I will then build the case for workplace gender diversity by exploring its cited advantages for British society, business, and/or the economy, suggesting that it is no longer 'good to have', but a 'must have' for the UK corporate sector. In support of this case, I will discuss workplace gender diversity through the socio-economic and the moral case arguments.

In the next section I will focus on the influential FTSE-100 organisations within the UK private sector and explore workplace gender diversity, focusing specifically on the senior leadership roles within these businesses. As part of this discussion, I will differentiate between the non-executive and executive directorship levels and present the reasoning for my argument that the workplace gender diversity initiatives, instigated by the UK private sector in recent years, have been focusing on improvement at the wrong executive layer.

I will conclude this chapter by exploring the key initiatives, that have been undertaken in the UK, with a view to improve the workplace gender diversity in the senior echelons of the FTSE world, and consider which actions have been effective to the improvement agenda, and which ones have not worked well.

2.2. The meaning of workplace gender diversity

CIPD (2021) describes diversity as recognition of differences, which encompass both the visible and non-visible factors. From a workplace employment perspective diversity exists in a variety

of forms: cultural background, education, social standing, the diversity of race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, education and gender.

Stemming from the concept of equality (Jewson and Mason, 1986; Cockburn, 1991; Rubery, 2002), diversity considers such dimensions as discrimination, disadvantage and identity. Kirton and Greene (2005) specifically differentiate between equality and diversity, noting a detectable shift in discourse, particularly among employers, from the traditional notion of equality towards a discourse of diversity.

Within the workplace setting Kirton and Greene (2016) identify three main uses of the term diversity: a descriptor, a policy and a theoretical framework. As a descriptor of the workforce, specifically in the context of gender (as women's under-representation is the main focus of this research study), diversity in the workplace entails organisations having equitable or fair representation of people of different genders. It most commonly refers to an equitable ratio of men and women, but may also include people of non-binary genders (Sytsma, 2006). When viewed as a policy approach to managing the workforce gender diversity in organisations involves policies and monitoring mechanisms that organisations put in place when it comes to recruiting, retaining, developing, managing the performance, rewarding and providing opportunities equally and irrespective of one's gender. Workplace gender diversity means, that men and women are hired at a similar and consistent rate, are paid equally for equal work, are promoted at the same rate, and are offered the same career prospects with the same promotional opportunities (Gray, 2018).

When viewed through a theoretical framework lens, diversity highlights the significance of socio-bio-demographic differences. Specifically in the context of gender, workplace gender diversity may offer a spectrum of advantages to British society, business, and/or the economy. These will be explored in more detail in the next section.

2.3. The advantages of workplace gender diversity

It can be argued that gender diversity in the workplace is not only important, but should be treated as a business priority similar to the commercial and Corporate Social Responsibility commitments of any organisation. In this section I discuss this argument in more detail.

For the purpose of this research study, I refer to the terminology of 'business', 'companies' and 'organisations' in the context of the UK private sector. Private sector is part of British economy

formed by organisations that are owned by individuals (Chappelow, 2019). Private sector organisations are financed by private funds from shareholders and through bank loans. These businesses are driven by profit, which benefits the owners, shareholders and investors.

Data published by the Office for National Statistics (2020) indicated, that British private sector remains the UK's largest employer: in the first quarter of 2020 British private sector represented 83.2% of the UK total employment across all sectors.

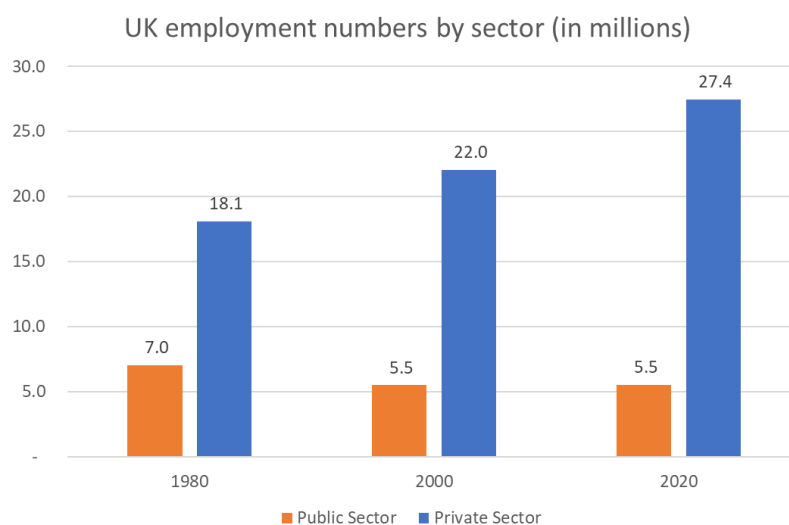


Figure 3: UK employment numbers between 1997 and 2020 by sector. Source: ONS

Between 1980 and 2020, the UK private sector experienced significant growth, increasing by 51.8%, (ONS, 2020) and reaching a figure of 27.4 million people in employment by the UK private sector at of the beginning of 2020.

British private sector businesses, therefore, represent the largest stakeholder group with vested interests in any type of initiatives and practices that would add value to their organisations in the form of better reputation and increased company performance.

Two key arguments can be identified which strengthen the case in support of workplace gender diversity within the UK private sector: socio-economic and moral lines of reasoning.

Firstly, I will present a socio-economic case for gender diversity, where I will explore the social (sustainability) and commercial (business benefits) arguments. In its broader sense, sustainability protects the socio-economic and ecological future of humanity (Mason, 2019). From a gender diversity perspective, sustainability argument examines the numbers of employable men and women in the country, suggesting that disregarding any part of the 48% female working population is not a sustainable approach to the future. Hence this argument has

been presented first, on the premise that without a sustainable development, any societal improvements which benefit humanity, including those related to workplace gender diversity, become obsolete. However, no conception of sustainable development can be adopted without making sound commercial choices (Owens, 2003). Thus, commercial argument, underpinned by the business performance advantages also forms part of the socio-economic case for workplace gender diversity, supported by the assertion that there is a positive correlation between workplace gender diversity and organisational performance (Guest and Conway, 2004; Hubbard, 2004; Jackson and Joshi, 2004; Carter *et al.*, 2010; MacLeod and Clarke, 2011; Joecks, Pull and Vetter, 2013; McKinsey, 2018).

Secondly, I will present a moral case for gender diversity, founded on the rights-based approach and underpinned by the concepts of social justice and ethics (Chant and Sweetman, 2012; Humbert, Kelan and Clayton-Hathway, 2019).

I approach the socio-economic and moral arguments for workplace gender diversity without favouring neither the capitalist, nor the feminist or utilitarian perspectives. Rather, I take a holistic approach, viewing the socio-economic and moral cases for workplace gender diversity as complimentary and mutually-reinforcing.

2.3.1. The socio-economic case

As of December 2019, 15.61 million women in the UK aged 16 and over were in employment (Powell and Mor, 2019). The female employment rate reached a record high of 72.4% in December 2019 (Devine and Foley, 2020). At the end of 2019, the number of women in work was 1.62 million higher than the decade before.

Period	Number of women in UK's employment
1951 to 1960	6.91 million
1961 to 1970	8.35 million
1971 to 1980	10.12 million
1981 to 1990	11.7 million
1991 to 2000	12.72 million
2001 to 2010	13.99 million
2011 to 2019	15.61 million

Figure 4: The increase in number of women in the UK employment between 1950 and 2019. Source: ONS

In general employment trends, there has been an increase in the number of women reaching higher positions across all areas of business. There are more women on FTSE-350 boards than ever before, with representation of women more than doubling since 2011 – to 32.4% on FTSE-100 boards and 29.6% on FTSE-250 boards as at October 2019 (Hampton-Alexander, 2019). A variety of initiatives were instrumental to achieving these changes.

Several formal Reviews, such as the Lord Davies and the Hampton-Alexander, which are discussed in more detail later in this chapter, have provided publicity within the British society, assessing the current situation, highlighting the advantages and attempting to dispel the myths surrounding workplace gender diversity. Through a combination of efforts around disclosing every company's individual progress with regards to workplace gender diversity in the league tables, as well as sharing best practice of British leading organisations, these reviews have helped to propel the topic of gender diversity onto the top of the UK public's agenda. Some researchers have argued that such publicity has a limited effect on countering the gender biases toward women directors (Knippen, Shen and Zhu, 2019). However, the general consensus within the academic and business communities indicates that external socio-economic pressure has a positive impact on women's representation on company boards (Hillman, Cannella and Harris, 2002; Helfat, Harris and Wolfson, 2006; Dobbin and Jung, 2011).

The government guidelines on flexible working, equal pay, anti-discrimination and equal opportunities have translated into many private sector organisations re-visiting the policies and practices that discourage working women from starting or progressing their careers (Dickens, 2005).

To improve their workplace gender diversity, many leading organisations have placed hiring, retention and development of women talent on the forefront of their priorities through a variety of initiatives. Lloyds Group, for example, has worked to accelerate the development of their senior women, by placing them into roles which would address any gaps in skills or competencies these women may have, to be able to operate at the Group Executive Committee level (Lloyds Banking Group.com, 2021). Diageo-UK have introduced a 52 weeks' parental leave, with the first 26 weeks fully paid, regardless of gender, or how their employees become a parent (Diageo.com, 2019). Others thought outside of the traditional policies around motherhood. At Apple-UK and Facebook-UK, women employees from mid-management level and above have been offered the benefit of IVF egg-freezing - a process fully paid for by the company (Robinson, 2017). This was deemed a rather attractive benefit by those professional women, who would

like to preserve their career momentum without depriving themselves of parenthood in the future.

In this study I explore the social element of the socio-economic case for gender diversity through the sustainability lens. No universally agreed definition of 'sustainability' exists – it is a broad area of enquiry, and the views vary on what it entails and how it can be achieved. For the purpose of this study, I maintain that sustainability can be described as the processes and actions, through which humankind avoids the depletion of any of its resources – natural, human or economic (Wahl, 2020). Sustainable development is thus a development, that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Brundtland *et al.*, 1987). If women represent half of the UK workforce at present, ignoring their participation at any hierarchical level of the corporate ladder may impede the continued sustainable development of the British economy and British society.

In addition to the social element discussed above, it is important to consider the commercial aspect of the socio-economic case for gender diversity.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, British private sector businesses, which employ 83.2% of the UK total workforce, represent the largest stakeholder group with vested interests in the type of initiatives and practices that would ensure sustainability and bring both tangible (increased performance) and intangible (better reputation) value to their organisations.

When it comes to the tangible benefits, the strength of evidence of the economic impact of gender diversity on organisational performance indicators is disputed, and several studies (Adams and Ferreira, 2009; Gregory-Smith, Main and O'Reilly, 2014) argue that the correlation between company performance and gender diversity shown in prior literature has insufficient evidence to confirm any positive interdependency. It is important to highlight the term 'insufficient' as opposed to 'non-existent', because a number of studies that identify some positive impact of gender diversity on business performance do exist. Prior research involving scholars, as well as consulting firms (Robinson and Dechant, 1997; Daily, Certo and Dalton, 1999; Erhardt, Werbel and Shrader, 2003; Carter, Simkins and Simpson, 2003; Jackson and Joshi, 2004; Campbell and Minguez-Vera, 2008; Joecks, Pull and Vetter, 2013; McKinsey, 2018) suggest that gender workplace diversity can bring such organisational benefits as improved financial performance, greater competitive advantage, increased customer focus and client retention, ability to recruit the best talent, greater organisational flexibility, increased levels of innovation and enhanced strategic decision-making.

A number of studies examined the relationship between gender diversity of the board of directors and the financial performance of the firm. Erhardt, Werbel and Shrader (2003) found a significant positive link between the percentage of women on the board and such business indicators as Return on Assets and Return on Equity. The studies of Carter, Simkins and Simpson (2003) and Campbell and Minguez-Vera (2008) discovered that board gender diversity had a positive effect on firm value as measured by Tobin's Q (a ratio of company's market value and its assets' replacement cost).

Others argue that gender diversity at the workplace can be a source of greater competitive advantage. The product/market scope strategies require a diversity of perspectives to meet both local and global customer needs and one way of increasing diversity of perspective is by inclusion of women on the board of directors (Daily, Certo and Dalton(1999). It can be argued that being females themselves, women understand the preferences and buying behaviours of female consumers. Thus, women's involvement in corporate strategy is key, because of the potential to develop and tailor products to women.

Another school of thought believes that gender diverse organisations are better able to recruit the best talent. People are company's most valuable asset: "The most valuable assets of a 20th-century company was its production equipment. The most valuable asset of a 21st-century institution (whether business or nonbusiness) will be its knowledge workers and their productivity." (Drucker, 1999, p.79). Robinson and Dechant (1997) offer a human resource acquisition reasoning, highlighting that organisations constantly need to be able to attract and retain competent workforce. Discrimination of any nature will impede company's ability to recruit and retain the best talent. Exclusion of certain groups of candidates will narrow the talent pool, thereby decreasing the quality of candidates. Moreover, the company's discriminatory practices will negatively impact firm's reputation. Therefore, organisations that embrace gender diversity are better positioned to achieve successful recruitment and retention of the strongest talent available.

Additionally, studies by Jackson and Joshi (2004) found gender and other forms of diversity were linked to greater innovation and improved strategic decision-making processes in the workplace. They conclude that diverse teams, including gender diverse teams, generate innovation, because creativity more often comes from individuals who are different from the majority of the group.

Recognition and awareness of workplace diversity in general, and gender diversity specifically, is now seen as a critical component which is required for businesses to remain competitive in an increasingly global arena and operate in a diverse employee labour market (De Anca and Vega, 2007).

In summary, it can be argued that all the above cited benefits, including greater financial performance, competitive advantage, improved decision-making, as well as the ability to attract better talent – may translate directly or indirectly into increased company profitability. Given that the private sector organisations are driven by profit, it can be inferred that workplace gender diversity, more often than not, can positively effect business performance.

However, the economic case for gender diversity has its limitations: a) it lacks sufficient empirical evidence in support of positive relationship between workplace gender diversity and business performance (Adams and Ferreira, 2009; Gregory-Smith, Main and O'Reilly, 2014), and b) it may seem to support diversity only if and as long as it drives competitive advantage and organisational profit (Noon 2007).

Business case argument cannot therefore be viewed in isolation and needs to be positioned in the context of social justice and morality. This echoes Dickens (1999) 3-pronged approach, which considers broader-based strategies, where legal and social regulation strategies complement the business case, thereby providing a multi-pronged support to gender diversity.

The moral case for workplace gender diversity is explored next.

2.3.2. *The moral case argument*

Despite the fact that there remains insufficient academic evidence for the positive impact of gender diversity on business, it can be argued that the moral case for building a fairer and more inclusive labour markets and workplaces is undisputable. Irrespective of an individual's background or characteristics, everyone deserves an opportunity to work in safe and inclusive environment, to be able to develop his or her skills, to be fairly rewarded and recognised for the work that one does, and to have a say in matters that affect them. Similarly, regardless of individual differences, everyone should have equal access to opportunities.

However, looking at today's reality, more men than women continue to work in better paid and more prestigious occupations as managers, directors, or senior officials, with 14% of men in these roles compared to 8% of women (Devine and Foley, 2020). Men are also more likely than

women to be working in skilled trades, as well as in professional and technical occupations. Women continue to be more likely than men to be working in supportive roles, such as administrative and secretarial, caring, leisure and other service occupations, as well as in sales and customer-service professions (ONS, 2020).

Also, a gender pay gap continues to exist. As of April 2019, the gender pay gap in hourly pay for men and women stood at 17.3%. In 2019, the average full-time salary for men managers stood at £38,817, £8,964 more than the average women managers'. At the director level, this gap is higher, with men earning an average basic salary of £131,673, which is £16,513 more than women at the same level (CMI, 2016). Moreover, the UK gender pay gap has barely improved from 2018, when British government introduced new rules pertaining to data disclosure (Wisniewska *et al.*, 2019).

Van Dijk, van Engen and Paauwe (2012) assert that equality and business case perspectives on diversity from an ethical reading appear stuck, as they are based on two different moral perspectives (deontological and utilitarian), which are difficult to reconcile with each other. Many academics have called for the rights-based approach (Chant and Sweetman, 2012), where ensuring women's representation is seen as the right thing to do, based on a social justice argument. Such an approach would mean moving away from focusing on efficiency and productivity gains and, instead, concentrating on women's rights to participate and contribute to decision-making in the workplace (Humbert, Kelan and Clayton-Hathway, 2019).

It can be argued that the moral case for making a change is straight-forward: it is the right thing to do, and it will help in building a gender equal and balanced society.

While every individual argument may have its valid points, examining women's under-representation in the workplace through either socio-economic or moral lens in isolation is a narrow-minded approach. There exists a growing body of research suggesting a matrix co-relationship between ethics, profitability and sustainability (Moon, 2007; Du, Bhattacharya and Sen, 2010; Lashley, 2016). I take a holistic approach and adopt a 'shared-value' mindset, under the premise that business competitiveness, the health of the society and the community's future development are mutually dependent (Porter and Kramer, 2011). Thus, I consider that it is important to acknowledge these inter-dependencies and build on them in order to achieve social and economic progress, recognising that a 'tripod' strategy, where in addition to business arguments, legal and social regulations can stimulate action with respect to workplace gender

diversity initiatives in areas where it has not yet been possible to construct a convincing business case (Dickens, 1999).

The arguments in support of workplace gender diversity examined earlier are of specific relevance for this research study. As discussed in the next section, this study is set in the context of business environment, and more specifically, with a focus on 100 of the UK top organisations. It can be argued that some of the leading companies today recognise that their responsibility is to look beyond profits and examine the impact and additional value that their business creates for society (PwC, 2018). Businesses have to ensure, that in addition to maximising profits for their owners or stakeholders, they operate sustainably and ethically. Thus, the socio-economic and the moral case for gender diversity resonate with the corporate-social responsibility agenda of the UK corporate sector. Whether viewed individually or as inter-dependent, these arguments build an overall strong case in support of gender diversity in the workplace. Despite this, women's representation in the UK corporate world, and within FTSE-100 companies specifically, is not perceived to be at the appropriate level today. In the next section I will examine the current state of gender diversity with a specific focus on the UK FTSE-100 businesses.

2.4. Gender diversity and the UK FTSE-100 organisations

The FTSE-100 or Financial Times Stock Exchange-100 is an index consisting of 100 largest, 'blue chip' businesses listed on the London Stock Exchange. The term 'largest' is used in the context of full market value of a company, calculated by multiplying the share price of the company by the total number of shares in issue. 'Blue chip' description originates from the world of poker, where a blue chip represents the highest value.

The performance of FTSE-100 companies is often used as an indicator of the UK stock market condition. Moreover, it is frequently used to measure the health of the British, as well as international economy, given that the index comprises both domestic and international companies.

In totality the UK FTSE-100 companies employ four million people across a network of 20,000 subsidiaries, which encompass every sector and operate in more than 100 countries. In 2020 their total revenue stood at £1.814 trillion. Due to the magnitude of these companies' size, span and visibility, their performance against financial, social, environment and ethical objectives has an impact on millions of people in the UK and around the world.

As a result, these top 100 companies were chosen for this research because of their influence on British society, and because these firms tend to set the standard for policies and act as benchmark for practices across the UK corporate sector. Thus, a research into how gender diverse the top levels of these leading organisations are, is the primary focus of this study.

As can be observed from the figure below, the representation of women on FTSE-100 companies' boards has improved from 12.5% in 2011 to 32.4% in 2019 (Davies Review, 2015; Vinnicombe, Atewologun and Battista, 2019).

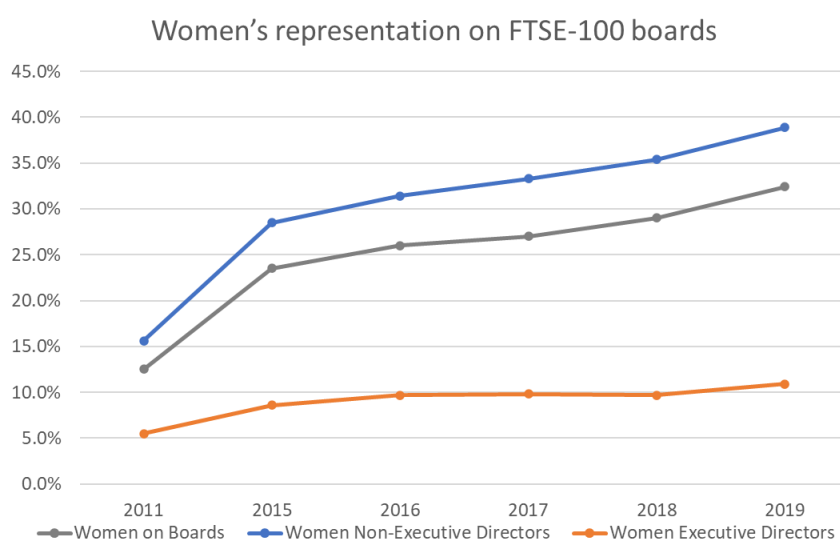


Figure 5: Percentage of women represented on FTSE-100 boards between 2011 and 2019

This improvement has been largely driven by board appointments at the non-executive directorship (NED) level, where the percentage of women NEDs was at the all-time high of 38.9% in 2019. The number of women executive directors, however, remains very low, and little progress has been made from 5.5% in 2011 towards the 10.9% in 2019. In just one quarter of FTSE-100 organisations women executive directors hold board positions: 28 women in 25 of the 100 FTSE-100 companies (Vinnicombe, Atewologun and Battista, 2019).

When put into perspective of sustainable development, profitability and the moral case arguments, this is an extraordinarily low number, especially in view of the fact, that statistical data points to a healthy starting base. For example, at the end of 2018, 57% of all students in high education were women (HESA, 2019). In 2017, the employment rate of women graduates stood at 79%, (ONS, 2017). Six in 10 women aspire to be a senior leader of a company in the future, and more than half of women aspire to be on the board of an organisation (KPMG, 2015). Despite this, only 20% of women go on to become managers and a mere 5% - senior managers

(Maznevski, 2011). In 2019, women represented just 28.6% of all directorship positions of the FTSE-100 companies and there were only six women CEOs (Taylor, 2019).

Through a variety of initiatives, which I will discuss later in this chapter, in 2019 the business world reached 32.4% of women representation on FTSE-100 boards, up from 12.5% in 2010 (Hampton-Alexander Review, 2019). At the outset – good progress seems to have been made. However, if we differentiate between executive and non-executive board positions, we see that out of a total of 76 women appointments to FTSE-100 boards between 2015 and 2019, only four were made at executive director level, with remaining 72 being non-executive director appointments (Vinnicombe, Atewologun and Battista, 2019).

In the next section I will present an argument that FTSE's celebration of gender diversity success appears to be superficial, and improvement efforts were prioritised at the non-executive directorship level, instead of the executive layer, where the focus should have been directed to from the outset. This argument reinforces the fact that the executive level, where women's representation has seen very little improvement since 2010, is chosen as the focus for this research study. I will now explore this notion further.

2.5. Gender diversity at Executive versus Non-Executive Director level

Several studies compare the non-executive and executive directors' engagement in day-to-day management of the firm, as well as the different depth of their involvement in the organisation, and suggest, that executive directors make a more direct and impactful contribution to the business in comparison to non-executive directors (Treadwell, 2006; AICD, 2014). Much effort focused so far on improving women's representation at non-executive director level (Catalyst, 2004; KPMG, YSC and 30% Club, 2014; Davies Review, 2015). However, I maintain that it is the executive directorship level, that has more impact on the organisation and, therefore, is the level, where women's representation should be targeted.

Non-Executive Directors

CIPD (2015) defines non-executive directors (NEDs) as strategic, entrepreneurial mentors, who usually do not engage in the day-to-day management of the organisation. Treadwell (2006) describes a non-executive director as an experienced outsider, who brings wisdom and strategic acumen to the board debate. A company expects a NED to dedicate between 10 and 40 days per year to its board proceedings, either on a pro-bono basis or for a modest per-diem fee

(Rayner, 2015). NEDs are neither expected to have the experience, nor the know-how of the industry in which a company is operating. NEDs call upon the expertise of executive directors as and when required to enrich the strategic decision-making process. NEDs can hold multiple non-executive board positions, but cannot hold an executive role in the same organisation or form part of the executive management team. His/her main value-add comes from the perceived ability to 'see the wood for the trees' and provide an objective, external viewpoint to the board. Some of the largest corporate scandals (the fall of Independent Insurance in 2001; near collapse of TeleWest in 2003; Shell crisis in 2004; collapse of Marconi in 2006) increased the importance of the role that non-executive directors played in corporate governance and control.

In 2002, the British government appointed Derek Higgs to conduct an independent review into the role and effectiveness of NEDs on British corporate boards. In his 2003 report Higgs highlighted the importance of an independent objectivity that a non-executive director brought to the board. What followed was the launch of the 2014 UK Corporate Governance Code, which listed a set of recommendations, including that 50% of FTSE-350 publicly listed companies' boards should be represented by non-executive directors.

As a result, the number of women holding NED positions on the UK FTSE-100 boards has almost tripled from 117 in 2010 to 311 in 2019. However, in 2019 only 25 of these seats were occupied by women executive directors – an increase of just three seats from 2015 – arguably, a disproportionate progress.

Executive Directors

In contrast to non-executive directors, executive directors manage the day-to-day operations of the business through their knowledge, experience and industry know-how. AICD (2014) suggests that an executive director is always an employee of that organisation, who is empowered with executive functions to manage and administer the company. It is well accepted that the executive director has powers of day-to-day management of a company, which can be exercised without board's involvement. Executive directors are typically appointed by the organisation and shareholders. Often, a significant part of the executive director's remuneration is linked to the performance of the organisation. Through his/her privileged position, an executive director has an intimate knowledge of the workings of the company (Deloitte, 2014). Thus, there is often a difference in the quality and volume of information regarding the company's affairs, possessed by executive and non-executive directors. Additionally, unlike for non-executive directors, for

executive directors the knowledge of the industry and sector that the organisation operates in, is a must.

While NEDs are appointed externally, the executive directors can often be developed internally and promoted from within the organisation. In the context of women's representation, this point is particularly important for companies, as it supports the building of an internal talent pool and creates career progression opportunities for women.

The above comparison highlights that, in contrast to their NED counterparts, executive directors are more involved in day-to-day management of the organisation, possess a deep understanding of the sector, industry and business, and have vested interests in the performance of their company. Thus, I maintain that it is through the executive directors of the organisation, and not through independent, external non-executive directors, that the direct and more impactful contribution is made to the business.

Yet, prior research, as well as previous gender diversity initiatives, that have taken place within British corporate world, explored and focused on improving women's representation at the non-executive director level, belatedly noticing the all-important executive layer. Aiming to fill this gap in prior research, executive directors of the UK FTSE-100 organisations were chosen as the participant group for this research study.

The next section will critically evaluate some of the key gender diversity initiatives most pertinent to the FTSE world, which have taken place to date.

2.6. Key initiatives – what has and has not worked so far

In the last decade, the issue of gender diversity and equality has become very topical in the UK. This attention was originally sparked by the five-year strategy adopted by the European Commission in 2010, devised to promote the equality between men and women across Europe. The strategy was based on the principles set out in the European Commission's Women's Charter (Barroso, 2010) and outlined a measurable action plan to tackle, among others, such issues as gender pay gap and women's under-representation in key decision-making roles.

As a then member state of the EU, the UK was committed to translate this focus to its national policies. In 2010 the UK coalition government put together a partnership programme, in which the government recognised the vital role of women in economic development, acknowledged a number of barriers to equal opportunities in Britain, and committed to tackle these barriers to

help build a fairer society. One of the specific commitments of the government in this programme was to promote gender equality on the boards of listed companies.

The government expressed concerns about the slow rate of progress towards better women's representation in many senior public, private and voluntary roles. A report by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (2011) suggested that at the current rate of change it will take more than 70 years to achieve gender-balanced boardrooms in the UK largest 100 companies. Sex and Power 2010/11 Index (EOC, 2011) highlighted that women's representation in the UK senior roles across the public, private and voluntary sectors, has stalled.

To understand where women's board representation stood at, specifically within the private sector, the government commissioned an independent review, which would become known as the Davies Review.

2.6.1. Lord Davies Review

Led by Lord Davies of Abersoch, Minister of State for Trade, Investment and Small Business, this independent review aimed to identify the barriers preventing more women reaching the boardroom and to make recommendations regarding what government and businesses could do to increase the proportion of women on corporate boards.

When Lord Davies launched his independent review in September 2010, he started by examining the current gender diversity situation within the UK FTSE businesses. In 2011 Lord Davies released a 'Women on Boards' report which summarised his initial findings. Using the data from FTSE-350 UK companies, the review found that while there was a healthy percentage of women in high education and at the start of their professional lives, attrition rates increased as women progressed their careers. Looking specifically at board-level roles, Lord Davies indicated that in 2010 only 12.5% of all available corporate board positions in FTSE-100 companies were held by women. Although this figure increased from 9.4% in 2004, the growth was too slow.

The review cited the challenges of supply and demand as possible explanations. Poor corporate pipeline meant that few women were growing through the organisations' ranks, leading to insufficient number of women candidates being ready to take up board positions. On the demand side, the evidence suggested, that even where women were available and capable to take up board positions, they were not given the opportunity to do so. Lord Davies argued that the business case for gender-diverse boards was strong and urged the UK businesses to make rapid changes. As an outcome, Lord Davies set the voluntary target of 25% women on boards of

FTSE-100 companies by the end of 2015. And so, the UK business world embarked on a five-year voluntary, business led journey, which was actively steered towards the target by such key stakeholders as companies, investors and executive search firms, without government or EU legislative intervention.

The Davis Review steering board regularly assessed the progress and reported annually. It was supported by the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Government Equalities Office, Cranfield University and other key partners.

The first annual review in 2012 reported the increase to 15.6% in the number of women on FTSE-100 boards, up from 12.5% in 2011. This figure further increased to 17.3% in 2013, to 20.7% in 2014 and finally over-achieved the target at 26.1% in 2015.

Through a variety of mechanisms, including publicising the league tables, praising successes, sharing best practices, and by effectively engaging a full spectrum of stakeholders, including business leaders, executive search firms, investors and women executives, the Lord Davies review facilitated considerable progress in improving the number of women on the UK FTSE boards.

At the time of the five-year review in 2015, there were more women on FTSE-350 boards than ever before, with representation of women more than doubling since 2011 (26.1% on FTSE-100 boards and 19.6% on FTSE-250 boards). There have been 550 new women appointments over four years and women came from increasingly varied and more diverse backgrounds.

By 2015, there were no all-male boards in the FTSE-100 and only 15 in the FTSE-250 – a substantial reduction from 152 all-male boards in 2011.

UK emerged as a leader and a role model on the international arena for having made such good progress under an entirely voluntary regime. By 2015 UK was ranked sixth among the main international stock markets, with gender diversity progress in all of the countries ahead largely being driven by the legislative quotas.

While at first glance considerable progress was made, a variety of blind spots and opportunities to improve women's representation at senior levels of the UK listed companies remained.

At the time of the final report in 2015, there were only three women chairs throughout the FTSE-100. InterContinental Hotels and Unilever were the only two company boards with an equal gender split.

More progress was required further down the FTSE list: within FTSE-250 and FTSE-350 companies. In 2015, the number of women on boards stood at 19.6% for FTSE-250 businesses and at 21.9% for FTSE-350 businesses – both behind the 25% Lord Davies Review target and behind 26.1% figure of FTSE-100 organisations.

Reaching the 25% target for the FTSE-100 was a significant achievement and major milestone for British business in its quest to improve gender balance at senior leadership echelons. In his closing comments, Lord Davies called for the progress to continue: the steering board recommended a five-step action plan. Firstly, the review board urged to keep the momentum, maintain focus on the issue of gender balance and continue monitored voluntary efforts for the next five years. In addition, it was recommended to increase the target of women on boards to 33% across the FTSE-350 sector. Lord Davies review team has also advised over the next five years to focus on Executive Committee and senior-most leadership positions of the UK FTSE organisations. To spearhead these efforts, the review board called for an independent steering body to be set up, taking over from Lord Davies and ensuring and reporting on the sustained progress.

In conclusion, it can be argued that The Davies Review has been very effective at tackling the challenges of demand identified in the 2011 findings report, by influencing the evolution of the UK business culture and encouraging the creation of more women-friendly workplaces. The Davies Review was instrumental in pushing the issue of gender equality forward, publicising and promoting the cause amongst the UK leading organisations. British businesses have transitioned from believing there are no capable senior women out there to challenging the traditional conceptions, raising awareness and building the courage to take positive risks. The review's practical, business-led recommendations, inclusive approach and voluntary nature of the efforts opened opportunities for women to play a bigger role at the top of British business.

However, I argue that a more crucial supply challenge – and specifically the talent pool of women at the executive directorship level, remained unaddressed by The Davies Review. Although the review indicated that there had been an increase in representation of women within both Non-Executive and Executive appointments in the FTSE-100, the executive numbers continued to remain low at 9.6% in 2015, compared to 5.5% in 2011. Within the FTSE-250, there was practically no improvement at all: from 4.2% of women Executive Directors in 2011 to 5.2% of women Executive Directors in 2015.

With the mandate to shift focus onto the executive directorship layer and replicate the impact Lord Davies review had on women's representation on FTSE boards, a new steering Hampton-Alexander committee had been formed in 2016.

2.6.2. Hampton-Alexander Review

In February 2016, a new steering group, led by Sir Philip Hampton, Chair of GlaxoSmithKline, and Dame Helen Alexander DBE, took over from Lord Davies committee. Their task was to continue driving British business to improve further the number of women in senior leadership positions of the UK listed businesses. Specifically, Hampton-Alexander Review's goal was to see Lord Davies' recommendations put into action: 1) achieve a third of FTSE-350 board roles to be occupied by women by the end of 2020, and 2) extend the focus to the executive directorship layer.

Similar to Lord Davies initiative, The Hampton-Alexander Review was an independent review body, which adopted a voluntary business-led approach. The review had a dual focus: to improve women's representation at board level and also in leadership roles two layers below the board, covering over 23,000 positions across all sectors of the British business.

In November 2016, the Hampton-Alexander Review steering group published their first 2016 FTSE Women Leaders Review report. Although the Review included an assessment of the progress made with the number of women on boards of the FTSE-350 from 2016, its main focus was on the executive pipeline. FTSE Women Leaders Review took stock of the gender diversity situation within the leadership roles below the board of FTSE-350 companies and reported a mixed picture.

The report highlighted several things that worked well: FTSE-100 companies had strong reporting mechanisms in place and openly shared their data and progress when it came to gender representation. In addition, there was a healthy turnover of 17% in appointments at both the Executive Committee and direct reports level, which translated into a steady stream of opportunities for women leaders.

However, gaps and challenges have also been identified. A lack of public disclosure on gender performance at senior levels, particularly within the FTSE-250, made data gathering and reporting of the FTSE-350 progress very challenging. In addition, focusing on gender diversity beyond board level introduced a whole new set of stakeholders: Chief Executive Officers, HR

Directors, and women executives – they all needed to be engaged with and brought into the process.

The review found that the pace of increase of women on boards slowed during 2016, and sensed some complacency, particularly on the part of the FTSE-100 sector. While the number of women on boards of FTSE-350 companies increased to 23% from 21.9% in 2015 and from 19.6% to 21.1% in FTSE-250 companies; the FTSE-100 reported a mere 0.5% increase: 26.6% up from 26.1% in 2015.

As part of its analysis the steering group requested all FTSE-350 companies to voluntarily disclose the data on gender representation of their leadership teams, specifically their Executive Committees and their first line of direct reports. Responses were received from 92 FTSE-100 companies and 148 FTSE-250 companies.

FTSE-100 data showed that women comprised 25.1% of the Executive Committees' members and their direct reports combined. When looked at separately, women representation was at 26% within the direct reports layer and at 18.7% at the Executive Committee level. Such a low number of women holding Executive Committee positions in the FTSE-100 highlighted a significant bottleneck at this level and in the levels below. It was a clear indication of the need for these companies to assess their recruitment, retention, promotion, performance management and reward strategies, if they were to improve the number of women in their senior leadership positions.

One positive finding was that many of the FTSE-100 companies had already 33% or more women's representation on their Executive Committees and within their direct reports layer. However, the review also found a disappointing 12 all-male Executive Committees among the FTSE-100 companies.

When it comes to FTSE-250 companies, only half responded with their data. And while among those responses that did come back Hampton-Alexander review group did not find significantly different figures from those reported by the FTSE-100 organisations, the committee did determine that the data was not sufficient to draw any firm conclusions.

Another important contribution of the 2016 report was to revisit the findings of the 'Cracking the Code' 2014 research by 30% Club/YSC/KPMG to explore the evidence of how the assumptions and stereotypes about women in leadership had changed over the last two years. The review found that while some myths have been debunked, certain stereotypes still

remained. For example, women were no longer seen as lacking ambition, and were credited with becoming more motivated by senior leadership roles as their career progressed. Similarly, men were no longer seen to possess superior leadership qualities, and both men and women were now regarded as equally effective leaders. On the other hand, a confidence gap continued to underpin women's underestimation of their capabilities, thereby driving them to opt out of competing for promotion opportunities. Similarly, unconscious gender bias still existed in the workplace.

In conclusion, the first Hampton-Alexander Review's report asserted that while British businesses started their 'beyond boards' gender representation improvement journey from a good base, challenges laid ahead pertaining to data transparency, reporting and stakeholder commitment. The steering group put forward five practical recommendations, including a FTSE-100 target of 33% women's representation across the Executive Committee and its direct reports by the end of 2020, and a request for UK government to impose the disclosure requirement on all listed companies.

Four years since its inception, the Hampton-Alexander Review steering group has been monitoring the progress and reporting annually. At the time of writing this thesis, Hampton-Alexander Review is in its final year, noting significant progress made by companies towards meeting the Review's 33% target of women's representation on boards of FTSE-350 companies by the end of 2020, and 33% target for women across all senior leadership positions in the FTSE-100. Inspired by a healthy starting point, in 2018 the target of 33% of women in senior leadership positions within FTSE-100 organisations has been extended to FTSE-250 companies.

Looking at board-level gender representation, it seems that great progress has been made over the last four years. The FTSE-100 progressed to 32.4% of women on their boards, up from 26.6% in 2017, while the FTSE-250 saw their percentage of women on boards increase to 29.6%, up from 21.1% in 2018. In 2019 there were only two FTSE-350 boards made up of only men and forty-two that had only one woman on their board. However, the Chair - top job in the boardroom, remains to be overwhelmingly occupied by men. Despite certain challenges, FTSE-100 is set to reach the 33% target, and FTSE-250 is well on track to outperform it by the end of 2020.

While I recognise that some progress has been made on gender representation within senior leadership positions, the outlook for the future may look less optimistic. In 2019 the FTSE-100 companies reported 28.6% of women in the combined Executive Committee and direct reports

layer – up from 25.1% at the time of Hampton-Alexander’s first report in 2017. FTSE-250 reported similar progress with an increase to 27.9% in 2019 from 24.9% in 2018. However, if we look at the appointment rates, two thirds of all available roles still go to men. It is becoming increasingly clear that unless FTSE companies reach an appointment rate of close to 50%, meaning that half of the appointments will go to women and half to men, the target of 33% of women on Executive Committees and their direct reports will not be reached by the end of 2020. In addition, I see evidence of significant lack of gender role diversity. Within both FTSE-100 and FTSE-250 companies women overwhelmingly lead functions that have no direct commercial or ‘profit and loss (P&L)’ responsibility - HR, Administration and Legal.

I take away three key findings from the Hampton-Alexander Review initiatives to date:

- we need more women in top jobs (CEOs);
- we need to ensure half of all the leadership appointments go to women;
- more men need to join the gender diversity debate.

As we are yet to witness the progress of 2020 and see the final summary of the five-year Hampton-Alexander Review effort, it remains clear that women’s under-representation at senior echelons of the UK businesses continues to exist. The all-important executive layer immediately below the board remains a much more complex and longer-term challenge, with change taking place much slower than expected. This supports the focus of this research study on the executive leadership roles below the board level, as opposed to non-executive directorship appointments, and backs the argument that invisible barriers continue to persist when it comes to women’s career progression to most senior levels of the UK organisations.

2.6.3. The 30% Club

The 30% Club has been another driving force in raising the issue of women’s under-representation to the top of business agendas.

Set up in 2010 by Dame Helena Morrissey, a British financier and campaigner, 30% Club was launched in the UK with a goal of achieving a minimum of 30% women’s representation on FTSE-100 boards. Inspired by critical mass theory (Schelling, 1971; Granovetter, 1978) and its application to women in the boardroom (Konrad, Kramer and Erkut, 2008), suggesting that when the minority group reaches a critical mass of 30% - a qualitative change will take place in the nature of group interactions, a target of 30% was born.

Through its membership base the 30% Club runs a diverse range of activities including contributing to research, organising diversity-focused events, leveraging media exposure and sharing information and best practice. In addition, the 30% Club runs a number of targeted initiatives that look to broaden the pipeline of women at all levels of organisations, including offering women scholarships at business schools, establishing cross-company and cross-sector mentoring schemes for women, providing senior women an opportunity to get board experience through 'Future Boards Scheme', and co-ordinating the investment community's approach to diversity through the 'Investor Group Initiative'.

Membership of the 30% Club is open to Chairs, CEOs, and equivalents, generally representing listed companies or leading professional services firms. The 30% Club does not employ staff, the participation in the club's events is free of cost and its steering committee members volunteer their time. The Club does not charge a membership fee, operating on a premise that companies will 'share the load' by volunteering to host events whenever possible.

The 30% Club believes that businesses and senior business leaders should drive the diversity agenda and influence the change in their own organisations. By joining the 30% Club, it is understood that members would publicly endorse the aspiration to have 30% of women represented at boards and within senior leadership roles and lead by example in taking action to increase gender diversity within these layers.

The 30% Club is described by its members as a campaign of influence, driving change through three key stakeholder groups: companies, investors and government. Firstly, with Chairs and CEOs as its members, the Club is able to influence the practice within the business community. Secondly, by engaging with investors and owners of the businesses, the Club is able to contribute to the strategic, board-level decisions. Thirdly, by working with government in areas such as corporate governance code, the Club is able to have a say in the public policy.

At the time of its inception in 2010, the Club's main focus were FTSE-100 boards. In 2016, the 30% Club has extended the scope of its 30% original target to FTSE-350 boards by the end of 2020. In addition, with the appointment of Brenda Trenowden CBE and Ann Cairns as 30% Club Global Co-Chairs, the Club was able to expand its focus beyond boards and concentrate on supporting more women into senior leadership roles. Echoing the Hampton-Alexander Review target, the 30% Club committed to work towards a 2020 pipeline goal, aspiring for every FTSE-100 company to have 30% of its senior management roles held by women.

Initiating and driving the research has been central to the 30% Club's ability to educate and influence businessmen, companies and governments on the subject of gender diversity in business. In collaboration with professional services and consulting firms (KPMG, McKinsey & Co., YSC consulting) and educational institutions (Centre for Diversity Policy Research and Practice at Oxford Brookes University, Cambridge Judge Business School) the 30% Club has conducted a number of studies on women's under-representation.

2.6.4. *The myths and realities unearthed in 'Cracking the Code'*

One of the most significant pieces of research undertaken by the Club was 'Cracking the Code' project. With the first report published in 2014 and conducted in partnership with KPMG and YSC, it aimed to help shed more light on the health of the pipeline of talented women within the UK listed companies. It also set out to better understand the key issues, that continued to slow down the pace of change in the area of workplace gender diversity. To achieve this, the research analysed the data of FTSE-100 and FTSE-250 organisations and conducted surveys and questionnaires with 4805 respondents, both men and women, from seven hierarchical levels - entry positions up to Executive Committee and board roles, representing 109 companies and 11 sectors.

To understand the gender diversity of the talent pool below board level, the research analysed the pipeline pyramid going from Executive Committee level – a level reporting to the board, up to four levels below. The findings indicated that the internal talent pipeline of executive women feeding into board positions was not strong: women representation was at 18% at Executive Committee level. This meant that, if the 30% board target were to be achieved by 2015, it would have to be done mainly through Non-Executive Director women appointments.

The research also found that a man was 4.5 times more likely to make it into an Executive Committee (ExCo) role than a woman, starting out at the same time. Four levels below the ExCo, women's representation was at 41%, dropping to 29%, 28%, 23% and finally down to the above mentioned 18%, when viewed from the bottom of the pipeline pyramid up to the ExCo level. This staggering figure led me to one of the secondary research questions: why do women drop out and what are the key issues that continue to slow the pace of change?

'Cracking the Code' research then looked at existing stereotypes and explanations pertaining to causes of women's under-representation in senior roles. It painted a reality picture, that dispelled some of the myths which became deeply imbedded in corporate mindset and

individual opinions. Firstly, the findings challenged the commonly accepted opinion, that childrearing is a barrier to women getting to the top (Dame Morrissey herself being the example, as a mother to nine children), arguing that significant promotion gaps emerged much earlier on. The research acknowledged that small difference did exist in the level of ambition, confidence and leadership capabilities, and suggested that women's career paths may follow a different pace to men. However, the research argued that these differences were highly exaggerated by corporate systems and individual interpretations. Supportive organisational cultures and authentic leadership commitment to creating an inclusive environment was found to be instrumental to retaining the best women talent.

One myth that the research did not dispel was that women lacked the general management experience required for board-level roles. Evidence continued to show that women reached the top mainly through functional, internally facing route with limited or no 'profit and loss (P&L)' responsibility, such as HR or Legal. Only 7% of all Executive Committee roles across the FTSE-100 companies were held by women with 'profit and loss (P&L)' responsibility. This still resonates with Hampton-Alexander finding of 2019 on the significant lack of gender role diversity: women in Executive Committee roles overwhelmingly represent support functions such as HR, Administration and Legal.

The main conclusion of the first 'Cracking the Code' project was that women were not the problem, when explaining the lack of gender diversity in leadership roles. FTSE-100 gender pyramid was not balanced and women's lack of aspiration, their weaker leadership capabilities and their low confidence was not to blame. The issue was one of rigid organisational cultures, poor gender intelligence and lack of authentic leaders of change, who were committed to the diversity agenda and not just talk, but act on what they advocated.

The research outlined a set of practical recommendations, revolving around three areas that it found instrumental in improving the numbers of women in senior leadership roles: how to effectively use the power of data management, how to build high quality authentic leadership, and how to instil the culture of responsibility and accountability.

In 2016 the 30% Club, again in collaboration with KPMG, YSC and Why Women Work, issued a follow up report, titled 'How CEOs are Cracking the Code'. This report built on the initial 2014 'Cracking the Code' findings and captured the experiences and perspectives of CEOs of multinational organisations around the world on the progress of gender diversity within their organisations. Reflecting the 30% Club's increasing international footprint, this report was

international in its scope. It analysed the data of 12 organisations across 180 countries and interviews with 10 CEOs.

The key findings painted a mixed picture. On a positive note, it was clear that the CEOs of multinational organisations recognised the benefits of gender diversity and were regarded both in public eye, as well as behind closed doors, as advocates for more of the talented women forming part of their leadership teams. At the same time, however, the CEOs were becoming more sceptical about the realistic amount of change that could still be achieved within the gender diversity area; many were no longer seeing gender diversity as a top priority on their strategic agendas. In their responses, CEOs overwhelmingly rebutted the commonly held myths challenged by 'Cracking the Code' in 2014, urging their counterparts to revisit any unconscious biases and give women exposure and visibility.

The report reinforced that data, accountability and authenticity remained the primary points of leverage for those CEOs, who were aiming to improve the number of women in senior leadership roles within their organisations.

Two years on from its original report, the 30% Club have revisited their 2014 'Cracking the Code' FTSE research to analyse the progress made on gender diversity within senior leadership roles of the UK listed businesses. Once again, the findings of 2016 'Revisiting the Executive Pipeline' research pointed to a combination of positive and less encouraging results.

Firstly, there was a clear evidence of increased involvement of women in the boardrooms, however, this has not translated into a greater pipeline of senior executive women. In addition, while CEOs were seen as strong advocates of their commitment to gender diversity, a gap remained between their words and actions. Although still deemed marginal, as identified in the 2014 research, the preconceived differences in leadership capabilities, level of confidence and ambition continued to have a disproportionate effect on women's career outcomes. However, there were indications of women making more courageous choices in favour of better and unconventional career opportunities. There were also noticeable signs of senior women executives starting to contribute to the reduction of gender pay gap.

Comparing the figures with the 2014 gender pyramid, the report found that, although the figures had not changed significantly, marginal progress on women representation had been made across all levels, with the exception of the Executive Committee layer, where no change occurred at all. One explanation to this could be the tough economic environment, which saw large

corporations shift their focus onto business challenges and away from gender diversity. Another possible reason given by the research was the critical mass, which was only just arriving to the 30% mark at the levels below Executive Committees, and was yet to make an upward difference to the pipeline.

Although progress has been made, the pace of change has been very slow. The report argued that at the current speed it was impossible to predict 'if', let alone 'when', the FTSE community would reach the 30% of women in senior leadership roles target. 'Revisiting the Executive Pipeline' research concluded by urging the FTSE businesses to reboot their focus on gender diversity and continue leveraging the power of data, authentic leadership and accountability. It offered a set of practical recommendations, including the need for businesses to benchmark themselves, communicate progress, make gender diversity relevant for everyone, celebrate successes, encourage women and be honest.

Both the 30% Club and the Hampton Alexander Review have set targets to increase the number of women in senior management positions by the end of 2020 (30% and 33% respectively). As of November 2019, there were 28.2% women at Executive Committee and direct report level of FTSE-350 companies.

2.6.5. The impact of key initiatives

Although there is still much work to do to achieve better gender balance at the top of UK businesses, progress has been made. The efforts of Lord Davies, Hampton-Alexander review and the 30% Club have been instrumental in leading the gender diversity agenda in the UK. Each campaign brought in its own unique contribution.

Lord Davies Review propelled the issue of gender diversity to the forefront of British corporate and government agenda. The review convinced the business world of the advantages of gender diversity and effectively used its influence to raise awareness of women under-representation; it created visibility and publicity for the issue. The Davies Review steering committee was perceived as disciplined and transparent in reporting the progress; throughout its five-year mission, the group continuously drove the momentum. Lord Davies Review seemed to have correctly identified the relevant stakeholders – from companies and individual CEOs to investors and government. The committee has been very successful at engaging with all of them, which resulted in the level of buy-in and commitment sufficient to move the dial. With hindsight, however, focus on improving women representation at board level may have been a less

impactful layer to start gender diversity improvement journey from. More women in boardrooms was predicted to become a development platform of mentors and role models for the senior leadership levels below. However, so far it failed to create a trickle-down effect for women in the executive pipeline. Moreover, an increased demand for women Non-Executive Directors seems to have led to creating career bottlenecks for senior women executives.

Taking over from Lord Davies, Hampton-Alexander Review had a solid foundation and good momentum to start from. However, tackling the 'below the board' layer has proven to be a harder challenge to address. The steering committee also lost a keen contributor, Co-Chair, and insightful influencer in Dame Helen Alexander after her demise. The review is seen by many as more of a progress monitoring and reporting mechanism, and is regarded by sceptics as less capable, in contrast to Lord Davies Review, to influence change. Despite this, Hampton-Alexander Review has been instrumental in raising awareness about the all-important leadership layer and driving forward the momentum towards improving women's representation in senior roles.

The 30% Club's contribution to the progress of more women taking up leadership roles in the UK FTSE organisations has also been considerable. The Club's operating model and its structure generated a level of personal commitment and greater buy-in on the part of Chairs and CEOs, without which it would be an impossible task to ensure that businesses had gender diversity on the forefront of their strategic priorities. 'Cracking the Code' series stands out for its practical and business relevant recommendations, as well as for its convincing, fact-based challenge of gender stereotypes and some of the commonly held assumptions.

2.7. Conclusion

I started this chapter by exploring the meaning of gender diversity in the context of a workplace environment. I then attempted to find possible explanations to my secondary research question 1: *'What are the cited advantages of workplace gender diversity for British society, business, and/or the economy?'*. I evaluated three principal arguments: sustainable development, business performance and the moral argument, and concluded by presenting the 'shared value' approach, suggesting that building gender diverse workplaces leads to the sustainable, profitable and ethical development of the British economy and the society at large.

I then explored workplace gender diversity, specifically within the context of influential FTSE-100 organisations. Before assessing the gender diversity situation at senior leadership roles

within these businesses, I found it important to differentiate between the non-executive and executive directorship levels. By comparing the two directorship levels, I have suggested that the progress of workplace gender diversity initiatives instigated by the UK private sector in the recent years has been encouraged at the wrong executive layer. While the representation of women non-executive directors on boards has improved, the numbers of women at levels below the board – the executive level, have seen little progress. A disproportionately small number of initiatives and research studies has been conducted to explore the issue of women's under-representation at the executive level – this being the gap that my research study aims to fill.

I concluded this chapter by exploring possible explanations to my secondary research question 2: *'what is the current situation on women's representation within senior leadership roles in the UK FTSE-100 companies?'*. I evaluated the efforts of Lord Davies Review, Hampton-Alexander Review, as well as the 30% Club, as the key initiatives undertaken to improve workplace gender diversity in the senior echelons of the UK FTSE world. I have concluded that neither of these campaigns could have influenced the progress that British business has made in the area of women under-representation on their own. It is their combined effort and their collective influence that finds gender pyramid within the UK FTSE businesses in a better position to where it was 10 years ago.

Whilst there is no silver bullet to resolve the gender diversity and inclusion challenge, affecting some of the UK top companies, efforts need to continue to break the barriers that prevent talented women from rising through the ranks. The next chapter sets out to explore the body of academic literature that identifies such barriers, and discusses possible theoretical explanations to women's under-representation in senior leaderships roles.

CHAPTER THREE:

THEORETICAL EXPLANATIONS FOR LACK OF WOMEN IN SENIOR ROLES

3.1. Introduction

Chapter Two highlighted that gender diversity in the workplace is no longer viewed as a ‘good to have’, but a ‘must have’ (De Anca and Vega, 2007; McKinsey, 2019), yet the number of women in executive positions of the UK top 100 organisations remains at a low 28.6% (Hampton-Alexander Review, 2019). Two thirds of all available executive roles still go to men and there is a significant lack of gender roles diversity (Hampton-Alexander Review, 2019).

An investigation into possible explanations that shed light on the obstacles and barriers faced by women executives, when trying to reach senior ranks within UK organisations, will help to understand why British business is struggling to make progress on the issue of women’s under-representation in senior roles. This chapter aims to unpick these obstacles and barriers by reviewing literature and prior research in order to identify theoretical explanations to women’s under-representation in leadership positions.

I commence this chapter by explaining my literature review methodology, and introduce the barriers evaluation approach based on the different barrier levels to women’s representation that transpire from an interaction of women’s various career phases with several specific types of organisational involvement in these. I then utilise the barrier evaluation approach’s criteria to conduct ‘traffic light’ assessment in order to evaluate women’s representation at every phase, as perceived by the body of academic literature and previous research on the topic of gender diversity in the workplace. In the following section I focus on areas with largest gaps in women’s representation identified, and review academic literature in more detail, presenting a selection of seven theoretical explanations to women’s under-representation.

I conclude this chapter by discussing how these theoretical explanations fit within this research study and formulate the link between the theoretical ‘traffic light’ assessment model and the findings of this research study, presented in Chapter Five.

3.2. Literature review methodology

As I conducted the review of academic literature on the subject of women's under-representation in the workplace, I realised that it was a complex topic, encompassing a variety of activities, career phases and hierarchical levels. Some theoretical explanations focused on early stages of women's career journeys, while others identified the obstacles effecting women in executive roles. Similarly, some researchers pointed to the barriers faced by women at recruitment stages, while other studies explored the difficulties associated with women returning to work after career breaks.

With the aim to bring structure to my literature review, I identified the various levels of barriers to women's representation that may exist, which translated into the barrier evaluation approach, explained below.

3.2.1. Barriers evaluation approach

The approach assumes that the various barrier levels to women's representation that may exist, can be viewed through two sets of lenses: a woman employee's and the employer's. The woman employee's perspective looks at women's under-representation at various stages of her career development. The employer's lens examines the specific obstacles to women's representation as organisations appoint, retain and encourage their women employees to return back to work after career breaks. The interaction between these lenses and levels subsequently translate into varying degrees of women's access to opportunities and equality of treatment.

The diagram below integrates the two set of lenses, and the following section explains the logic I applied to barriers evaluation approach's criteria selection.

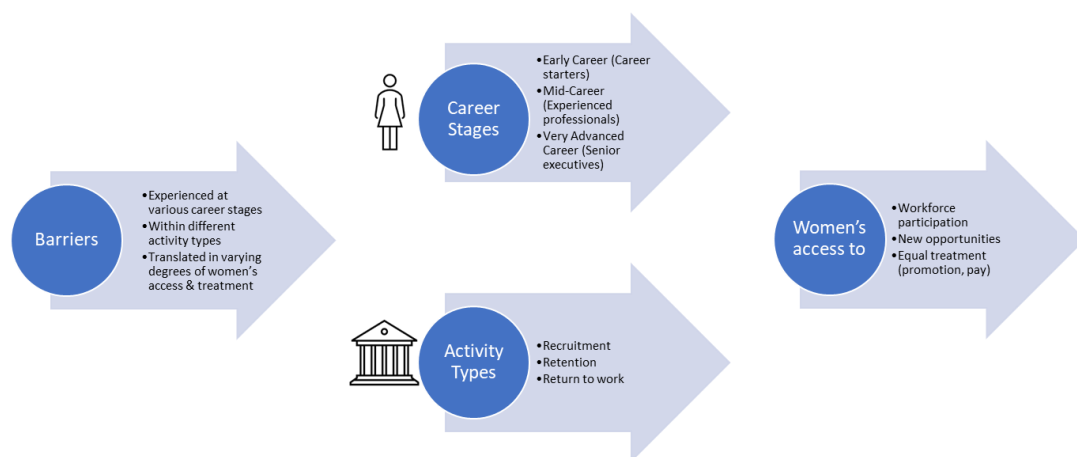


Figure 6: Summary of various barrier levels to women's representation

Career stages: women employees' lens

I selected three career developmental stages, arguing that these correspond to the most significant milestones in women's professional advancement based on their age and seniority of professional experience (O'Neil and Bilimoria, 2005).

Stage 1: Early Career

Characterised by young women, most often fresh graduates of high-educational institutions and young career starters. Women considered in this stage will have zero to very little professional experience, being at the very beginning of their career trajectories.

Stage 2: Mid-career

Characterised by more experienced professional women, with anywhere between five and 15 years of professional experience. Women considered in this stage would often have reached mid-management roles and hold positions of reasonable authority over their function and people.

Stage 3: Very Advanced Career

Characterised by very senior women executives, who hold top positions in their organisations. These women would operate at Director level or equivalent, with the direct and sole responsibility for their function, often covering a multi-site and multi-geographical scope.

As the 'traffic light' assessment model demonstrates further on in this chapter, women's representation significantly varies within each of these phases, thus further justifying why career stages have been selected as one of the criteria for theoretical evaluation of career barriers.

Career involvement points: employers' lens

Review of literature indicated that organisations are met with different levels of barriers to women's representation at various stages of their involvement with women's careers. It appears that the volume, quality and treatment of women candidates varies between recruitment, retention and return back to work processes. Thus, the employer's lens examines these processes more closely.

Recruitment:

Refers to the process of women candidates being appointed into new roles within organisations. More often this process involves organisations recruiting external candidates, since the appointment of internal women employees into new roles within the same organisation falls under the retention processes.

Retention:

Refers to a variety of actions and initiatives applied by the organisation as it strives to retain and keep their existing women employees from leaving the organisation. Examples include initiatives focused on succession planning, offering training, development and formal mentoring, providing exposure and visibility.

Return to work:

Refers to the efforts of organisations to make it attractive and feasible for women employees to return back to work after maternity leaves or career breaks. Examples include offering women flexible working arrangements, opportunity to work shorter hours, virtual working and providing childcare support.

Within each of these career involvement points, I select to evaluate the size of talent pool of women, ease of access of professional women to opportunities and how equally they are treated with respect to promotions and pay during each of their career stages and within each of the points that organisations are involved in their careers.

3.2.2. *'Traffic light' assessment model of theoretical explanations*

While conducting my secondary, desk-based research, the process which is discussed in more detail in section 4.4.2. of this thesis, the topic of gender diversity has clearly emerged as a prominent subject in academic literature. Having conducted the review of academic literature and prior research on the issue of workplace gender diversity, it was evident that women's representation was seen as more problematic in some career stages than in others. Similarly, the cited difficulties varied depending on whether organisations were trying to recruit women, retain them or attract them back from career breaks.

This allowed me to draw a visual interpretation of how problematic women's representation is perceived in academic literature. This is a personal interpretation, where I have used a 'traffic light' approach to depict the 'health' of each element.

AN INTERPRETIVE EXPLORATION OF UNDER-REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS IN UK FTSE-100 COMPANIES

For example, **Recruit** → **Very Advanced Career** → **Talent Pool** → is rated as ‘●’ because academic literature often cites a weak talent pool of women senior executives that organisations are able to draw candidates from, when recruiting for senior leadership roles. Applying similar assessment logic to the rest of the barrier levels, the following picture of ‘health’ based on theoretical perception has emerged:

Legend: ● Strong ● Average ● Weak

		Talent Pool	Access to Opportunities	Equal Treatment (promotion, pay)
Recruit	Early Career (Graduates & career starters)	●	●	●
	Mid-Career (Experienced professionals)	●	●	●
	Very Advanced Career (Senior executives)	●	●	●
Retain	Early Career (Graduates & career starters)	●	●	●
	Mid-Career (Experienced professionals)	●	●	●
	Very Advanced Career (Senior executives)	●	●	●
Return	Early Career (Graduates & career starters)	‘return back to work’ scenario does not apply to career starters		
	Mid-Career (Experienced professionals)	●	●	●
	Very Advanced Career (Senior executives)	‘return back to work’ scenario does not apply to senior executives		

Figure 7: Literature-inspired personal interpretation of women’s representation using ‘traffic light’ assessment model

In a more detailed example, a weak talent pool of women candidates is often cited as a major obstacle to healthy levels of women’s representation. However, when examined closely within each of women’s career phases, evidence indicates that talent pool of young women is larger today than ever before. The number of women graduates undertaking all types of degree levels has grown by over 185% from 2005 to 2018 (HESA, 2019). 86% of women graduates entered employment in 2018 (Gov.uk, 2019), translating into a pool of close to one million women in 2018, in comparison to just over 270,000 in 2004. Despite these healthy early career numbers, women’s representation, and subsequently the talent pool, declines as they move through career phases:

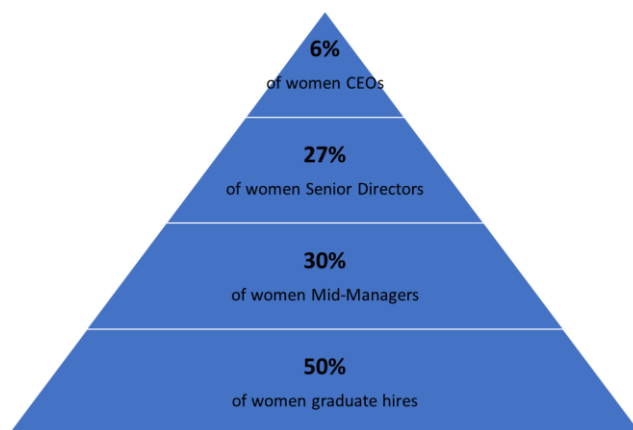


Figure 8: Numbers of women at various levels of FTSE-100 hierarchies. Source: Cranfield University Report, 2018

In another example, literature review unearthed reference to the phenomenon of the “pinched middle” (Prevett, 2012; WIC, 2017), used to describe the severe drop out of women at mid-career level, with many taking breaks to have children. Consequently, some mothers found it difficult to re-integrate back into the corporate world, either choosing not to return at all or come back to lower-skilled, lower-paid roles. A term ‘motherhood penalty’ featured prominently, denoting systematic disadvantages in pay, difference in perceived level of competence, and poorer benefits that working mothers experienced comparative to their childless women colleagues (Benard, Paik and Correll, 2007). Examples of mothers being perceived as less committed to their jobs, less dependable, and less authoritative than non-mothers stood out in the literature (Kahn, García-Manglano and Bianchi, 2014).

Using the ‘traffic light’ assessment model, I was able to then highlight specific theories that explain the gaps in women’s representation at every barrier level, as cited in academic literature. The following section discusses this methodology in more detail.

3.3. Selected theoretical explanations

A variety of theoretical explanations emerged as part of the literature review, highlighting a range of barriers that are cited to prevent women from entering and progressing their careers in organisations. Having the explanations for women’s under-representation uncovered as part of the literature review grouped into a matrix which considers women’s career stages and organisations’ involvement in these, I selected the following few theories that I deemed were most relevant to this research study:

AN INTERPRETIVE EXPLORATION OF UNDER-REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS IN UK FTSE-100 COMPANIES

Legend: ● Strong ● Average ● Weak

		Talent Pool	Access to Opportunities	Equal Treatment (promotion, pay)
Recruit	Early Career (Graduates & career starters)	●	●	●
	Mid-Career (Experienced professionals)	●	●	●
	Very Advanced Career (Senior executives)	●	●	●
Retain	Early Career (Graduates & career starters)	●	●	●
	Mid-Career (Experienced professionals)	●	●	●
	Very Advanced Career (Senior executives)	●	●	●
Return	Early Career (Graduates & career starters)	'return back to work' scenario does not apply to career starters		
	Mid-Career (Experienced professionals)	●	●	●
	Very Advanced Career (Senior executives)	'return back to work' scenario does not apply to senior executives		

Figure 9: Theoretical explanations identified as part of literature review

I selected seven theoretical explanations which explore the impact that the concept of merit, lack of mentors and role models, gender stereotypes, individual preference and gendered organisations have on workplace gender diversity. More specifically, the theoretical explanations selected as part of this research study's literature review are:

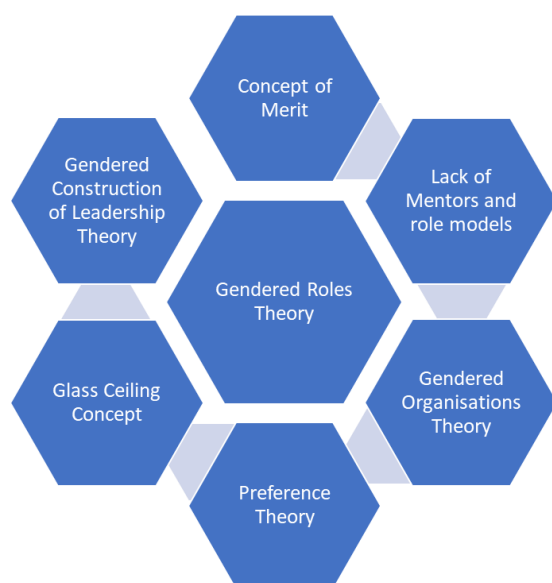


Figure 10: Selected theoretical explanations

These are further explored in the next section.

3.3.1. *Concept of Merit*

One theory that is used to explain women's under-representation at executive echelons of the UK private sector is the concept of merit, or more specifically – the false theory of meritocracy (Nicholson, 2010, 2013a), based on the notion that construction of merit is not as objective and rational process as it is claimed (Kumra, 2014).

Farber and Sherry (1995, p.856) define merit as a principle "...that positions in society should be based on the abilities and achievements of the individual rather than on characteristics such as family background, race, religion or wealth. This ideal requires that merit be objective in the sense of being definable without reference to those personal characteristics".

In 1958 British sociologist Michael Young first explored meritocracy, suggesting that merit is the product of intelligence and effort (Young, 1961). While Young's book was a satire, the formula of Merit = IQ + Effort introduced two of the potentially crucial ingredients. Some studies of meritocratic ideals suggest that the 'components' of merit extend beyond intelligence and effort, and include individual's work ethic, physical abilities and moral character (Levinson, Cookson and Sadovnik, 2014).

In today's corporate world organisations believe, that in order to retain competitive advantage and remain a successful business, companies need to recruit and retain the best talent. Some of the previous research studies suggest that most performance outcomes could be attributable to a small group of high performing individuals (O'Boyle and Aguinis, 2012) and these high performers may potentially be as much as 400 percent more productive than average ones (Keller and Meaney, 2017). When applied to the context of the workplace, it can be argued that merit-based policies and practices help companies recruit, reward and promote the best people, based on their demonstrated merits, irrespective of gender, race, age or other profile features or personal attributes. Advancement within a meritocratic system is based on performance, as measured through assessment or demonstrated achievement (Castilla and Benard, 2010).

Based on the above, merit appears to be an objective and rational measure which helps create a level playing field and a fair environment for all, including women. It is argued that the concept of merit is fundamental in present day Western economies (Son Hing, Bobocel and Zanna, 2002). Modern principles of leadership are built on a notion that organisations, and individuals' careers within them, function on the basis of meritocratic ideals. However, if that is the case, the question arises why there are so few women in the leadership echelons of the leading organisations.

Research indicates that performance assessment and reward distribution practices, that are designed to be meritocratic (Joshi, Son and Roh, 2015), often result in an unequal allocation of success in favour of some, irrespective of the actual merit (Vinkenburg, 2017). It is suggested that biases that exist in favour of men, pertaining to merit measurement criteria and assessment mechanisms, act as obstacles to women's career progression (Son Hing, Bobocel and Zanna, 2002). This is echoed by Lewis, Simpson and Sealy (2010), who argued that senior women saw lack of evidence of meritocracy in several global organisations studied, that boasted robust meritocracy mechanisms. Their research found that women's trust in meritocracy diminished over time, and they saw merit defined less by ability and experience, and more by political behaviour.

According to Son Hing: "Meritocracy is a principle or ideal that prescribes that only the most deserving are rewarded. As such, meritocracy can operate accurately only in an unbiased system" (Son Hing, 2002, p. 494). She believes that one of the obstacles to women's career progression are biases that exist in favour of the dominant white male group in terms of:

- a) criteria chosen to measure merit;
- b) tests used to assess merit;
- c) subjective evaluation of performance.

One of the primary concerns with meritocracy theory is the unclear definition of 'merit' (Pérez and Sabelis, 2020). The views on what qualities are most valued may vary, thereby creating differing opinions as to what standard is the 'best' and what constitutes merit. For example, a study of performers found that although men and women were judged using the same criteria, these criteria had different parameters (Dean, 2005). Some of these parameters narrowed women's opportunities and shortened their careers (ibid).

Nicholson (2010) believes the idea of meritocracy is an illusion, created in the world of men by and for them, and is supported by contradicting HR practices. Nicholson calls it 'the false theory of meritocracy'. In his opinion, hierarchical pyramid structure of today's corporations is a primary obstacle to a true model of meritocracy. Most of the leading organisations today are run by an 'alpha' leader – the most talented and deserving, in meritocracy terms, standing at the top of company's hierarchical pyramid. This can certainly be seen within FTSE-100 companies, where 94 out of 100 CEOs are men. The 'alpha' leader is then followed by a team of 'betta', or second-best executives, followed by third-best 'gammas', and down to the hierarchically lowest 'omegas'. In Nicholson's opinion, men turn hierarchical organisations into

tournament-based pecking orders whenever they get the chance (Nicholson, 2013b). Meritocracy becomes a pitiless struggle to get ahead and stay ahead. Instead of focusing on true leadership and striving to bring out the best in oneself and those around, individual's career becomes a competitive race to the top. Research indicates that women are less inclined to self-nominate, self-promote and compete (Bosquet, Combes and García-Peñalosa, 2019; Exley, Niederle and Vesterlund, 2020). As a result, many women opt out of the competitive selection processes. In contrast, flatter organisational structures with broad opportunities for achievement and reward offer much better prospects for women leaders. As long as monolithic pyramid structures exist – meritocracy, according to Nicholson, remains a myth.

McNamee and Miller (2009) also challenge the widely held belief that within merit-based structures people receive back as much as they put in, based on individual merit. They have identified a variety of non-merit factors, such as inherited social class, financial standing and education levels, that suppress or even negate the effects of merit. Thus, they have argued, pure meritocracy is impossible to achieve.

Moreover, Castilla (2016) argues that merit-based organisational practices can have an opposite effect and unintentionally lead to disparities based on gender, race and nationality. He talks about 'the paradox of meritocracy', suggesting, that when managers believe their company is a meritocracy because formal merit-based assessment and allocation practices are in place, they are in reality more likely to display the very biases that those mechanisms strive to prevent. Castilla explains this phenomenon by suggesting that the knowledge that meritocracy mechanisms are in place creates false sense of confidence in managers. This leads to managers becoming less vigilant and less prone to guard against being influenced by stereotypes and hidden biases in their decision-making.

Despite the above challenges, Castilla is optimistic when it comes to organisation's ability to develop into a successful merit-based environment. Although he acknowledges that practical application of meritocracy is more difficult than it may appear, it is not impossible. The key in his opinion, is having in place merit-based assessment and reward systems, which are based on transparency and accountability.

In summary, the concept of merit remains a controversial topic. In theory the ideology of meritocracy is seen as an enabling mechanism for women's career progression, as well as a method to foster gender equality in the workplace. A merit-based environment is perceived to be preferable to any unequal models. Good application of meritocracy could be the basis for

healthy corporate environment and could lead to fairer workplace processes. However, it is argued that the construction of merit is not as objective and rational as some theories lead to believe, making its practical application difficult. In order to see more women progress to leadership roles within merit-based structures, implementing merit-based reward policies is not sufficient by itself. The shift in organisational mindset is required, where companies start to:

- a) recognise individual's potential over experience;
- b) stop searching for a ready-made skillset and help develop the required competencies;
- c) look for qualities that add value, and not just fit the existing culture.

According to Bastian (2019), employers must create opportunities before rewarding accomplishments; in other words: equity must come before meritocracy.

3.3.2. Lack of mentors and positive roles models

One of the earliest definitions describe a mentor as a veteran professional, who takes an active interest in the career development of an executive (Wright and Wright, 1987). The role of a mentor was initially explored in the work of Levinson in 1978, who emphasized the importance of mentors in a professional's occupational success. "Having a mentor is associated with increased job satisfaction, higher salary, faster promotion, firmer career plans, and the increased probability that the protégé will also become a mentor" (Wright and Wright, 1987, p.204). Collins and Scott (1978) argued that everyone who 'makes it', or in other terms – achieves high level of professional success, has a mentor. Successful leaders operate believing that nothing important gets done alone (Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee, 2001).

Organisations today recognise an important role mentors play in leadership development. Among the companies surveyed for 2010 World Economic Forum report, 59% offered internally led formal mentoring programs (Ibarra, Carter and Sylva, 2010).

Mentoring has many definitions (Crisp and Cruz, 2009), one of them essentially sees mentoring as a supportive form of individual's development, a deliberate pairing of experienced associate with an inexperienced person to direct and cultivate that person's development (Pitton, 2006). Thus, a mentor becomes a source of wisdom, learning and support to the mentee. In the classic form of mentoring, a mentor acts simultaneously as a guide, a coach, a friend, an advocate and a role model (Tatum and McWhorter, 1999; Chapel, 2003).

As a guide, mentor needs to provide advice, encouragement and support to help broaden his/her protégé's skills (Smith, 2005). An advocate does a lot of what the 'classic' mentor does, but with one difference: advocates are in a position to make their protégé visible to top people internally within the company, as well as externally (Hewlett, 2013). A role model also has a specific function different from that of a mentor. Role model is a person other people look up to in order to help determine appropriate behaviours (Holton, 2004). Role model's contribution is based on the attributes, which a mentee perceives as desirable and strives to emulate (Gibson, 2004). Role models can be either positive or negative. Positive role models offer a range of helpful or useful behaviours.

It is argued that women with mentors are more successful than women who do not have mentors (Dworkin, Ramaswami and Schipani, 2013). More specifically, research provides compelling evidence of the fact that role models have a significant impact on women's performance (Latu *et al.*, 2013). Their study found that role models inspired women to perceive their performance in a more positive light and provided a boost to their task-related self-confidence. Similarly, Townsend (2002) suggests that role models can help transform women's perspective from a point of isolation and pessimism, to the one based on confidence and positivity.

A study which looked at the gender significance within the mentoring relationship, found that the gender of role models was more important for women than men (Lockwood, 2006). The findings indicated that because women generally encountered more negative gender-related stereotypes in the workplace, they appeared to be more inspired by female role models, who they perceived were able to overcome gender obstacles to achieve professional success.

Recognising their positive impact, the lack of role models is often cited as a barrier to women's representation in leadership positions and certain industries. Nearly a third of professional women within STEM industries say that the lack of women leaders and role models has a hindering impact on their careers (Cody, 2018). In a survey conducted by YouGov for Facebook, 46% of young women were unable to name a woman business leader, and twice as many young women than men said that a lack of role models could be a barrier to setting up a business (Golding, 2020).

If women see no other women represented at the higher levels of an organisation, it becomes difficult for them to perceive themselves as capable and worthy of a seat at the decision-making table (Oliver, 2013). It is impossible for a woman to envision herself as a president or chief

officer, when she has never seen someone who looks like her in that position (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt and Van Engen, 2003). Research conducted by Employment Opportunity Commission into 20,000 private sector companies found that, as the percentage of women top managers increased, so did the percentage of women in middle-management roles (Kurtulus and Tomaskovic-Devey, 2012), potentially highlighting a link between the number of female role models and women's representation in management roles.

Jackson (2001) also suggests that the lack of women role models is a major obstacle for women's career progression. Jackson states that because senior leadership roles are 'blocked' by male majority, it becomes very difficult for organisations to develop women role models, who would inspire and motivate women and counterbalance the male-dominated culture. In addition, the environment where female leaders are in minority, '...inhibits self-perception and evaluation of a woman's potential to be a leader' (Jackson, 2001, p.31). This may consequently lead to anticipatory socialisation (Merton, 1957), where women are obliged to adapt their attitudes and behaviours in order to fit in with their new group (men), alienating themselves from their former peers (women).

Within the UK FTSE world, organisations cite that the most significant problem posed by lack of gender diversity within leadership ranks is, that there are too few senior women to act as role models and mentors (Davies Review, 2011). The relatively low number of successful women role models often compounds stereotypes and reinforces perceived difficulties in women's rising up the corporate ladder (ibid).

3.3.3. *Gendered Organisations Theory*

Another theory that may help explain the under-representation of women executive directors is the theory of gendered organisations (Acker, 1990; Acker, 1992; Acker, 2012), which argues that organisational structures are not gender-neutral and that gendered biases are deeply embedded into organisational processes and practices.

Acker suggests that organisations and everyday workplace interactions contain normative gender expectations, that privilege men and disadvantage women. The images of masculinity are deeply imbedded into organisational processes, marginalising women and leading to gender inequality and discrimination. Acker (1990, 1992) identified several distinctive processes that reproduce gendered biases in organisations: division of labour, symbolism, interactions and individual identity.

For Acker, gendering within organisations can be seen in the division of labour, where the duties are allocated based on the perception that some are more suitable for men than women. Lublin (1997) found that 60% of women work in supporting functions such as Human Resources or Public Relations. Over twenty years later the situation has remained unchanged. ONS (2018) report showed that 77% of administrative and secretarial positions continued to be dominated by women, while 67% of managerial and senior official posts were occupied by men.

Another process of gendering that can be observed within organisations is through creation of symbols, images and other forms of consciousness that justify and reinforce the division of gender lines. Such symbols are often distributed through press, culture and ideology by way of visual aids, language and appearance.

Acker argued that interaction between individuals is also gendered, and gender inequality is created in normal interactions, based on how individuals of a particular gender communicate with others. Women's communication style tends to differ from men's: women are more likely to adopt a softer, less direct communication style, and have a tendency to request, as opposed to issuing orders. Men often mistaken this style for lack of self-confidence or failure to effectively exercise authority, rather than an attempt to be respectful and considerate. Acker suggests that such differences in interaction tend to highlight dominance and subordination and create alliances and exclusions. The study of Grisoni and Beeby (2007) also found elements of gendered organisational context when examining the impact of gender on decision-making behaviour within a team meeting format. They noted gendered nature of meetings and cautioned against potential barriers to women's ability to express feminine forms of leadership.

Another contributing factor to gendered organisations is individual's identity. Acker describes the gendered identity as individual's internal mental work which contributes to creating the individual's 'correct' gendered persona, and hides the aspects of one's life that do not 'comply' with gendered stereotypes. The evidence of internal mental work can be seen in individual's choice of line of work, dress and language, all of which are used to present an individual as a gendered organisation member.

While there exist a variety of academic supporters of Acker's theory (Britton and Logan, 2008), in the decades following her initial research, the work environment has significantly transformed. Acker's theory explains how gender is embedded in traditional organisations characterised by long-term job security, individual contribution, pre-determined career paths, standardised job descriptions, and non-merit-based performance rewards. In today's era of

‘new economy’, work is increasingly characterised by job insecurity, teamwork, merit and networking, and some of Acker’s observations are thus outdated (DiMaggio, 2001; Kalleberg, 2001; Williams, Muller and Kilanski, 2012; Vallas and Cummins, 2014). It is argued that some organisational features under the ‘new economy’ are less rigid in comparison to the older systems of standardised career ladders and job descriptions, therefore making them more compatible with women's careers (Hewlett, 2007).

In addition, while Acker states that gender inequalities within organisations privilege men and disadvantage women, suggesting that the very definition of a “job” contains an implicit preference for male workers. Consequently, for many employers the “ideal worker” is a man – a preference that excludes many women on the assumption that they are pre-occupied by motherhood. The critics of this view argue that gendered organisations theory does not take into consideration the increasing number of men taking on primary family responsibilities roles (Makarem and Wang, 2016). The role of men in family life has dramatically shifted in post-war Britain, giving rise to a new ideal of highly involved and ‘hands on’ fatherhood (Davis and King, 2018).

Acker also suggests that gender inequalities in organisations can only be corrected if the current bureaucratic structures are abolished, and work relations are redefined. Britton (2000) suggests that some level of bureaucracy and regulation may in fact be beneficial for women. These can bring standardisation and clarity to recruitment and promotional processes, and help improve women’s representation in certain roles.

There is little doubt that through her work Acker was able to challenge the social and gender inequalities in our society. However, three decades since her original research, this study takes an opportunity to explore if Acker’s gendered organisations theory stood the test of time.

3.3.4. Gendered Roles Theory

Gendered roles theory assumes that men and women in a society are inclined to adopt specific roles within the societal frameworks and are subsequently judged by that society based on how they are expected to behave within these roles. Within the workplace context, gendered roles theory suggests that men and women tend to develop different skills, they behave differently and are evaluated differently. Such different expectations lead to divisions of labour, related to the roles that men and women occupy.

Henslin (1981) developed a gender socialisation theory and argued that from an early age boys and girls are socialised to behave in gender appropriate ways. Boys play with tanks, spend time outdoors and get 'dirty', while girls dress dolls and learn from their mothers how to cook. Through their exposure to different learning environments, boys and girls grow up with a different set of expectations of what to 'do' and who to 'be'. As adults, men and women receive negative responses from the society if they diverge from their gender-expected roles. For example, men entering the nursing line of work have difficulty defending their masculinity. Similarly, women are obliged to prove their ability to be as good as a man when entering a male-dominated industry or profession.

Bohnet (2016) argues that gender biases became strongly inbuilt at the subconscious level of British society. One such stereotype associates women with motherly qualities, known as the '3Cs': care, concern, and connection (Charles and Grusky, 2004). It is argued that a woman executive constantly faces a choice between two opposing value systems: the 'traditional feminine' value system and the 'traditional masculine' one. Working women of the corporate world, especially those holding executive roles, are double burdened by the deeply imbedded stereotypes that expect them to meet masculine standards in the office, while keeping up their feminine role of nurturer at home (Tower and Alkadry, 2008).

Scholars argue that gendered role stereotyping leads to vertical segregation, where men occupy the majority of managerial and senior official positions, while women take on supporting roles (Charles, 2003). In addition, it is argued that gendered roles stereotyping creates horizontal segregation, where women become over-concentrated in certain types of roles, which are often lower in status and weaker in prospects. Women are more likely to be moved up through support functions such as HR or Legal, rather than operational and 'profit and loss (P&L)' roles (Hampton-Alexander Review, 2016). This ruins women's odds of getting the top job: only 7% of all Executive Committee level roles across the FTSE-100 businesses are held by women with 'profit and loss (P&L)' responsibility (KPMG, YSC and 30% Club, 2014).

Prior academic research often refers to the 'sticky floors' and 'springboards', which are created by the organisations, privileging men and disadvantaging women. When women experience 'sticky floors', they get stuck in low status, supporting roles, rarely progressing upwards. By contrast, entry level, low-paid jobs act as 'springboards' for men, where they spring from entry level roles into higher paid positions (Jones, 2019).

Eagly (1987, 1997, 2000, 2003) has conducted significant research in the area, arguing that gendered roles are assigned by the society, where they are known and accepted by the members, who reinforce the standards and comply with expectations. She notes that "...these beliefs are more than beliefs about the attributes of women and men... Many of these expectations are normative in the sense that they describe qualities or behavioural tendencies believed to be desirable for each sex" (Eagly, 1987, p.13).

More specifically, Eagly (1987) notes that men are expected to enact 'agentic' roles involving authority, independence and task focus, while women are expected to assume public, or 'communal' responsibilities, that require them to be nurturing, selfless and caring. These expectations, according to Eagly (2000, 2003), lead to labour division, where men occupy high-status positions in the workplace and women fulfil domestic responsibilities. Eagly (2000) suggests that men and women may consequently become constrained to certain roles in the workplace, where they could assume the psychological characteristics of those roles.

Eagly and Diekmann (2005) talk about role congruity, suggesting that a group will be judged positively if it is perceived that its characteristics are aligned with that group's typical social roles. Building on role congruity idea, they propose a notion of prejudice that exists towards women leaders. They argued that the incongruity that exists between the feminine gendered roles and the leadership roles gives rise to two forms of prejudice. In the first form, similar to descriptive gender stereotyping (Heilman, 2012), women are perceived less favourably than men as potential occupants of leadership roles. The second form of prejudice is founded on predisposition that when in leadership roles, women's behaviour is evaluated less favourably in comparison to men. Such prejudices lead to a variety of negative consequences: from the emergence of negative attitudes towards women potentially assuming leadership roles, to difficulties arising for women to achieve success in leadership roles, therefore deterring them from senior positions.

Gendered expectations can lead to self-fulfilling prophecies, with people enacting what others expect of them. Consistent with social role theory (Eagly and Wood, 2016), gendered roles have pervasive effects. By categorising people through diverging expectations, gender stereotypes are created (Schein and Mueller, 1992; Banaji and Hardin, 1996; Butler, 2007; Sinclair, 2013).

Heilman (2012) defines gender stereotypes as generalisations applied to the attributes of men and women. She suggests that gender stereotypes have two distinctive properties: descriptive gender stereotypes: designating what women and men are like; and prescriptive gender

stereotypes: designating what women and men should be like. Heilman argues that both descriptive and prescriptive gender stereotypes promote gender biases in the workplace. Viewed through a descriptive lens, women are expected to perform poorly in male gender-typed roles because women are not believed to possess the necessary attributes, in other words - because of what women are like. Similarly, when seen from the prescriptive perspective, gender bias is promoted, when a woman's success is viewed as a violation of expected norms of behaviour. Social disapproval is induced if a woman does become successful in a male gender-typed role, going against the accepted norms and, therefore, against what is believed a woman should be like.

Gender bias created from gender stereotypes gives rise to biased judgments and decisions, which have negative career consequences for women and hinder their advancement in the workplace. Sinclair (2013) argues that because women are judged through role-related stereotypes, it is easier to undermine their leadership capabilities. Researchers believe that gender stereotypes can be neutralised only if there is awareness of such stereotypes and motivation to neutralise their influence (Plant and Devine, 1998; Kunda and Sinclair, 1999).

Despite the fact that gender stereotypes continue to exist in today's workplace and their consequences are significant, there is evidence of change. Progress has been made to increase awareness, both at personal and organisational levels, and there are many examples of the efforts being made to neutralise the negative effects of gender stereotypes (for example: introduction of new rules on gender stereotyping in ads by the Committee of Advertising Practice in 2019; organisations having in place policies and monitoring mechanisms, as well as training programs to tackle unconscious bias and gender stereotypes). In addition, communal attributes that have been traditionally associated with feminine characteristics are becoming increasingly valued in leadership (Eagly and Carli, 2003). There is also some evidence to suggest, that a transformation is taking place with respect to how women are perceived. Recent research (Hentschel *et al.*, 2018) suggests, that while women are still viewed through the gender role lens by being more communal and less agentic in comparison to men, on average, they tend to show more transformational leadership than men; and competence and intelligence is more often ascribed to women than men (Eagly *et al.*, 2019). In summary, it can be concluded that while women's career progress continues to be hindered by gender stereotypes, there is reason for cautious optimism (Heilman, 2012).

3.3.5. Gendered Construction of Leadership Theory

The gendered construction of leadership can be traced back to leadership research which, like most research in management, has been gendered (Alimo-Metcalfe, 2010). Most studies on leadership, including the 'great man theory' (Carlyle, 1841), the 'trait theory' (Stogdill, 1948; Mann, 1959) and the 'new paradigm' (Barrett, 2011) featuring charismatic and transformational leadership models, have been studies of men, by men.

It is, therefore, not surprising that the stereotype that associates management with masculinity still persists and permeates organisational culture (Willemssen 2002; Ryan and Haslam 2007). Prior research studies often describe characteristics associated with women's leadership style as opposite to men's (Stoker, Van der Velde and Lammers, 2012). In its 2005 research study Catalyst described the prevailing stereotype as: "...women leaders take care, and men leaders take charge" (Catalyst, 2006).

Studies (Latu *et al.*, 2011) have found that both men and women hold implicit associations between men and leadership; and that both men's and women's responses to male leaders are more positive, than their responses to women leaders. Not only are women considered less favourably than men for leadership positions (Lyness and Heilman, 2006), but if they do display the qualities considered important for leadership, these qualities are perceived less favourably than when demonstrated by a man (Sinclair, 2013). As a result of this, particular qualities associated with men are normalised and prioritised within key organisational processes, such as candidate selection, recruitment and promotion, thus creating gender bias, which leads to the continued 'cloning' of the dominant group (Jones, 2019).

Conceptions of leadership, that draw on social identity theory, offer a useful lens through which to view gendered constructions of leadership. Haslam and Platow (2001) describe the importance of leaders' membership of in-groups or out-groups, and the use they and others make of these overlapping and intersectional memberships. This in turn influences how their behaviour is described and interpreted, which determines the extent to which their leadership is valued by others around them. Leadership, they argue, is a socially constructed group process, in which leaders and followers are joined together in shared endeavour. The authors argue that 'heroic' or 'trait' models of leadership risk reinforcing the stereotypes in which, through an essentialist elision of practice, behaviour and qualities, masculine behaviours are those most often associated with leadership qualities. Leadership in the social identity model is about understanding the identity of the group, being seen to reflect the identity and interests of the

group, and advancing the group's interests in the wider world. Although the processes of social construction of leadership can (unlike essentialist discourses) create spaces in which to negotiate the meanings of gender, race and other aspects of personal identity, this negotiation may present additional challenges for those leaders, current or aspiring, whose personal identity places them in the out-group.

Some research on women's under-representation in senior management roles highlights the differences between men and women's experiences, circumstances and aspirations. Mulla-Feroze and Krishnan (2000) argue that men are traditionally seen as possessing a set of characteristics termed 'initiating structure behaviour', while women are seen as possessing 'consideration behaviour' characteristics. Differences are explained not only in terms of biological differences but, more significantly, as a result of the effects of socialisation. Researchers propose that women have higher interpersonal sensitivity and human relation skills, suggesting that women can be more effective leaders than men (Broussine and Fox, 2002).

Research into unconscious bias highlights the human tendency to magnify differences between members of the in-group and members of the out-group (Everett, Faber and Crockett, 2015). Bastian and Haslam (2006) caution against essentialism and gender differences stereotyping, deeming them unhelpful and stimulating commonly held beliefs regarding the style of men's and women's leadership. O'Neil and Domingo (2015) highlight that women are not a homogenous group and may have more in common with men from their own social group, than with other women representing a different race, culture or ideological persuasion.

Empirical research tends to point to the absence of significant differences between men and women, often de-emphasising any difference. Difference becomes understood as socially and culturally specific and historically fluid rather than biological. Minow (1988, 1990) suggests that by either stressing or ignoring the differences, the society risks recreating it, generating the dilemma of difference.

The concept of effective leadership in business continues to be largely based on masculine qualities, yet many of the traditional feminine traits are starting to be recognised by organisations as instrumental for their business to be able to adapt to change and survive in an increasingly volatile business environment (Page, 2011). In contemporary organisations leadership also requires communal behaviours such as relationship building, empathy and taking care of others – behaviours that are generally attributed more to women than men (Koenig *et al.*, 2011).

3.3.6. *Preference Theory*

Prior research suggests that men have traditionally followed a linear career progression pattern, advancing through the ranks of the organisational hierarchy, while women's careers are understood to be strongly influenced by change and compromise (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006). Women, therefore, are more likely to willingly opt for portfolio careers, with a focus on self-management, lack of dependence on one organisation (Cohen and Mallon, 1999), and generally comprising of a mixture of part-time roles, including freelancing, self-employment and part-time working (Clayton-Hathway and Manfredi, 2017).

Women, it is argued, often find themselves at 'priority junctions', where certain family responsibilities (pregnancy, raising young or teenaged children, eldercare) take priority over other commitments. Thus, another possible explanation for women's under-representation at the leadership echelons of the UK corporate world is the notion that women willingly choose to focus on their families, giving preference to personal life over professional career.

Hakim (1998) introduces this argument in her 'preference' theory, which suggests that women prefer to follow a different path to men when it comes to work and life, and willingly take themselves out of the 'running' for certain jobs, roles and projects. Consequently, women become under-represented in senior roles and gender pay gap prevails.

Hakim (2006) suggests that modern society was able to cultivate a new operating model, which gives women the right to choose how to structure their lives. Equipped with this freedom of choice, Hakim argues, that women voluntarily and intentionally opt for one of three lifestyle patterns: home-focused, adaptive or work-centred. Hakim believes that women willingly pursue whichever one of the patterns that best suits their circumstances and priorities.

While home-focused lifestyle described by Hakim revolves purely around family life, adaptive lifestyle entails woman's combined focus on both work and family commitments. When choosing this lifestyle pattern, women see work being more of a necessity, rather than a career choice. Hakim states that almost 80% of women opt for home-focused or adaptive lifestyles, and are content to either not work at all or work in lower paid part-time roles. Hakim further suggests, that women who opt for either of these lifestyles tend to be less reliable employees, because they take more sick leave and experience higher turnover in comparison to men. Based on these arguments, Hakim states that it becomes justifiable for organisations to favour men over women in decisions pertaining to recruitment and promotions.

In her arguments, Hakim often takes the side of organisations and justifies the inflexible and demanding organisational practices as sensible and necessary for organisations to adopt, in order to operate in today's competitive environment. She thereby further strengthens the explanation why women willingly opt for home-focused lifestyle and notes that by being 'masters' of their own destiny, women, in contrast to men, have access to more choices.

Hakim's work-centred lifestyle pattern sees women prioritise their professional career over everything else, including creating a family. Hakim suggests that around 20% of women willingly adopt work-centred lifestyle. Within the work-centred pattern a woman is fully dedicated to her occupation and is prepared to make family sacrifices in pursuit of a career. As a result, Hakim argues that in each generation we will consistently see around 20% of women remain childless (Hakim, 2006). This view became a point of contention, with critics of Hakim's theory pointing out that family and career are deemed equally important by men on the scale of their priorities (EOC, 2006). Moreover, data show, that it is particularly women who have reached a high professional status and a significant level of corporate activity, that the majority are married and have children: 80% of women business leaders consider themselves happily married and content with their family life (Babaeva and Chirikova, 1997). Susan Wojcicki, CEO of YouTube, has five children. Helena Morrissey, former CEO of Newton Investment Management, and a founder of the 30% Club, has nine. At a seminar in 2012 the keynote speaker Andrea Jung, the CEO of Avon at the time, was asked how she manages her work/life balance and she responded: "I don't get to all of the meetings and I don't get to all of the school activities, but I get to all of the important meetings and to all of the important school activities". Research also indicates that work and family are not separate "domains", but instead are interrelated and should be treated as such (Clark, 2000; Baker and Ciuk, 2015).

The critics of the preference theory disagree with some of Hakim's other arguments. For example, Hakim sees women's decision to work part-time as a voluntary choice, while others see childcare considerations being the major contributor. Gill and Davidson (2001) cited inhibiting costs of childcare and determined, that access to a full-time childcare was only available to a small minority: either high-earners or those relying on family's support for free childcare. A report on childcare found that UK was ranked as the seventh highest European nation with childcare costs representing 67% of average wage and 35% of household's income (OECD, 2020). Ball (2018) states that for many families high cost of childcare does not make financial sense for both parents to work, and if one parent is obliged to leave employment it is overwhelmingly likely to be the mother.

Hakim suggests that many women, who willingly chose to work part-time due to their family commitments, are satisfied with their jobs. However, additional research indicates that women part-timers often have no choice, but to resort to inferior part-time jobs, because of the lack of other options available to them. Walsh's (1999) study found that a majority of part-time women employees wanted to work full-time, but were unable to find full-time opportunities. Similarly, Ginn *et al.* (1996) conducted a study of women who moved into lower-level part-time roles after becoming mothers, and found that overwhelming majority of women would have preferred to return to the same higher-level roles they had before motherhood, but with shorter working hours. In the majority of cases, however, such opportunities were not available.

Another flaw of Hakim's theory is that it fails to recognise that women may adapt their preferences in response to gender inequalities they experience (Leahy and Doughney, 2006). Consequently, women may make a conscious decision not to play by the current rules of the gender inequality 'game' and opt out or reduce their commitment to paid employment.

Critics of Hakim's theory (Crompton and Harris, 1998a, 1998b) disagreed not only with her conclusions, but also with her empirical procedures, challenging Hakim's measurement of the hours worked over the number of jobs, and questioning the inclusion into the calculation of a population group that in fact was not asked a question.

In conclusion, while Hakim's preference theory might explain the drop in a number of women in full-time employment from entry up to middle-management level, it may not explain the decreasing numbers of mid-level managers progressing further into directorship levels. It could be argued that these women have already made work and life balance choices before reaching middle-management level, and yet, the higher the hierarchical level of the organisation - the less women we see.

3.3.7. Glass Ceiling Concept

The term of 'glass ceiling' has been introduced by US feminists in the late 1970s (Loden 1978; Lawrence and Schreiber, 1979) and is most commonly defined as a subtle, yet strong set of barriers that prevents women from moving up in the management hierarchy (Morrison and Von Glinow, 1990).

Cited explanations for 'glass ceiling' are numerous and include a number of invisible obstacles, which block women from rising to senior hierarchical ranks in large organisations. These can be

grouped into three main categories: organisational barriers, behavioural differences and cultural specificities.

Organisational barriers

An array of organisational barriers has been identified in prior research as those that prevent experienced professional women from advancing their careers further. Most of these are induced by organisations themselves.

Among organisational barriers that prevent women in middle management positions from advancing their careers further most frequently cited by the scholars are lack of training and career development systems (Vecchio, 2002; Pichler, Simpson and Stroh, 2008) and poor performance management processes (Oakley, 2000; Ibarra, Carter and Sylva, 2010).

With lack of adequate training and career development systems, women tend to lack the necessary attributes such as assertiveness, networking capabilities or confidence to advance their careers (Vecchio, 2002). Pichler, Simpson and Stroh (2008) found that almost twice as many women (26%) left management positions in comparison to men (14%) – and not due to women having more family commitments, as it is often argued, but because women faced dissatisfactory training and development opportunities, thus becoming disillusioned in their jobs.

Informal and hidden promotional processes (Singh and Vinnicombe, 2004; Alimo-Metcalfe, 2010) were also described as organisational barriers to women's advancement, referring to lack of clarity and fairness of decisions on promotions to more senior roles. Ibarra, Carter and Sylva (2010) argue that women often have to prove themselves to be considered for a promotion, while men are often given a progression opportunity based on their potential.

Other studies (Frisby and Brown, 1991; Frisby, 1992; Shaw and Frisby, 2006) examined the specific factors reported by women managers as hindering to their career development in organisations. Authors identified and grouped the various barriers into organisational, legislative, individual and family factors. Among organisational barriers they highlighted patriarchy, where women were seen as being inferior to men in various realms of corporate life, and difficulty in dealing with male-dominated organisational culture, where women felt there was a lack of social, emotional and work support mechanisms available to them (O'Neill and O'Reilly, 2011).

Lyness and Thompson (2000) suggested that women's satisfaction with their positions was significantly lower than that of men. In part, this was because the positions they occupied tended to be more restrictive, involved less authority and offered fewer tangible rewards.

Many scholars believe that such invisible 'structures' as organisational cultures, which shape the choices that women make, work against women. Shinew, Anderson and Arnold (1999) identified rigid work schedules and an absence of programs that supported work-life balance, as the most common organisational barriers, that prevented women in middle management positions from advancing their careers further. The UK working week is ranked six longest among European countries with an average working week totalling 42.5 hours (Eurostat, 2020). Many companies perceive working long hours as a sign of commitment to the organisation (Kodz *et al.*, 2003) and reinforce a long-hours culture by conducting training and development events out of hours and at weekends. More women than men assume domestic and family caring responsibilities and are therefore unable to attend such events (Jones, 2019).

Behavioural differences

In addition to organisational barriers, 'glass ceiling' concept identifies obstacles that derive from behavioural differences that men and women exhibit in the working environment.

While examining gender behavioural differences, Rudman and Phelan (2008) found that women tended to be more modest than men within the working environment. They argued that women might be reluctant to self-promote for fear of being judged unfeminine, pushy and domineering, which in turn limited their perceived suitability for many occupations. Similarly, the study of Doherty and Manfredi (2010) found that women were held back by their reluctance to get involved in self-promotion activities. In addition, Catalyst research (2006) found that lack of confidence in women was one of the largest barriers cited by Chief Executives of the UK top organisations. The research found that women's reluctance to put themselves forward for promotions, as well as shyness to attract attention to their achievements, was the major obstacle for women's career advancement.

Scholars argue that men's and women's leadership style also tend to differ. Eagly and Carli (2003) observed that women tended to look for input from others in an effort to make people feel included and create open communication channels. This willingness to share power and information does not fit the masculine perception of authoritarian control. Annis and Gray (2013) concluded that while men emphasised the end-result and 'quick wins' of relationships in

their leadership style, women tended to focus on the means of reaching the outcome and the quality of relationships.

Gender stereotyping discussed earlier (Schein and Mueller, 1992; Butler, 2007; Sinclair, 2013) is also cited as one of the behavioural explanations. The theory argues that in today's workplace, stereotypically, men are perceived as self-confident, assertive, emotionally stable, direct and competent. In contrast, women are expected to exhibit the traits opposite of men, arguably making them emotional, lacking self-confidence and being less competent. This poses a dilemma: if a woman tries to replicate masculine traits at a workplace, she will be perceived as pretentious; but if she chooses to retain her feminine traits, she may be perceived as ineffective, because these qualities do not fit within the male norms.

Networking is another area where notable gender-related differences were highlighted in academic literature. Networking has become one of the primary channels through which executives today identify opportunities for advancement both inside and outside their organisations (DiMaggio, 2001; Babcock and Laschever, 2003). Susan RoAne, an American author and speaker, once said: "It's not what you know or who you know, but who knows you." (RoAne, 1993). Recent research indicates that 85% of all jobs are filled via networking (Adler, 2016). Ibarra and Hunter (2007) suggest that a three-pronged networking approach (operational, personal and strategic) has become an integral part of professional men's and women's leadership arsenal.

However, prior research highlights significant differences in the way men and women network, both in terms of the quality of their networks (McGuire, 2002; Belliveau, 2005; Uzzi, 2019), but more specifically, in terms of differences in networking behaviours, potentially pointing to one more explanation to women's under-representation in senior roles (Morrison, 2008; Fisher, 2009; Waller, 2016; Bushell, Hoque and Dean, 2020).

The quality of women's networks is deemed to be poorer than men's: men have more network centrality, which appears to be positively correlated with access to new opportunities (Belliveau, 2005). In addition, for men quality of their networks supersedes quantity, in other words, men focus not just on how many people they know, but more importantly – who and how powerful these people are (Uzzi, 2019).

When it comes to behavioural differences in networking, several are highlighted in academic literature. It appears that when men network they have a clear goal in mind; they focus on their

short-term need and directly ask for what they want (Fisher, 2009). Women in contrast, tend to develop long-term, personal connections and are more hesitant to straight-forwardly state their need (ibid). Men are comfortable mixing friendship with business, possibly because they perceive the benefits of friendships in terms of career advancement and operational advantages of 'getting the job done', while women perceive friendship mainly as a source of emotional and social support (Morrison, 2008). In addition, a lot of the networking events generally take place outside of work and working hours – since many working women remain the primary caregivers, many of them are reluctant to attend such events, preferring to be home with their families (Waller, 2016). Moreover, women tend to avoid networking with men outside of work because they do not want their behaviour to be misconstrued and potentially have negative impact on their personal and professional reputation (Castrillon, 2019).

Despite the recognised gender-based differences, Ibarra and Hunter (2007) argue that building a leadership network is more a matter of will than of skill. They recommend that both men and women executives continue to allocate enough time and effort to see the benefits of networking.

However, despite the various gender differences in styles and behaviours cited above, academic literature points to no proven evidence for men's superior leadership ability. In fact, various studies (Yukl, 2002; Hurley and Shumway, 2015) rate women higher in practicing self-development, taking initiative and driving for results. This may potentially challenge the belief that leadership continues to be essentialist in nature – a gap that this research study aims to explore through contemporary research findings.

Cultural specificities

When it comes to cultural obstacles, several barriers are believed to stimulate the creation of the 'glass ceiling' phenomena in the workplace, including male-dominated office culture, prevalence of 'old boys' clubs' and tokenism (Oakley, 2000).

Kanter (1977) first introduced the concept of tokenism, stating that when women are in a minority at the top of large companies, they are regarded as 'tokens', making up the required 'quota'. According to the token theory, women are placed in highly disadvantageous position. Firstly, 'tokens' are subject to more on-the-job pressure and scrutiny because they are more visible to the rest of the group. Furthermore, women-'tokens' are often not valued for their true contribution, since their presence is used to merely 'tick' the representation box. Over 40 years

since the introduction of tokenism concept, it appears that women still feel like they stand out and are underestimated by their peers (Stichman, Hassell and Archbold, 2010).

The existence of 'old boys' club' culture within organisations is another barrier that women face. Lalanne and Seabright (2011) define the 'old boys' club' as an informal male social system that stretches within and across organisations and excludes less powerful men and all women from membership. Women in top positions are perceived as a threat to the 'old boys' club', which is believed to already function well in maintaining and improving the rewards for men at the top.

Research indicates that it is not the lack of experience, skills or ambition that prevents women from reaching the top, but their exclusion from the powerful male-dominated networks of key organisational decision-makers, which women struggle to penetrate (Bushell, Hoque and Dean 2020).

The glass ceiling, the labyrinth or the glass cliff?

It is argued that using 'glass ceiling' metaphor to conceptualise women's under-representation in leadership roles can be misleading. Carli and Eagly (2016) are critical of 'glass ceiling' concept for a number of reasons, most notably because it conveys the idea of a single, unvarying obstacle. This not only fails to capture the complexity of the barriers encountered by women in their careers and the effect on their progression within an organisation, but also encourages the adoption of interventions that focus simply in one direction, for example mentoring and sponsorship, which may not sufficiently tackle the problem. They identify a series of additional factors, that can act as barriers for women in achieving leadership positions, including family responsibilities and lack of role models.

All, or a combination of these factors may be faced by women at different stages of their careers, and this renders their professional journey a complex endeavour. Hence, they argue, that a more meaningful metaphor to use is that of a 'labyrinth' where professional women find themselves having to negotiate several 'twists and turns' along the way.

Another metaphor adopted to describe gender biases faced by women, once they have achieved leadership roles, is that of the 'glass cliff'. This describes the fact that women are more likely to be appointed on company boards that are under-performing, or to be the subject of greater scrutiny and criticism compared to men, making their standing as senior leaders correspondingly more fragile. This is also supported by a significant body of academic literature, which has explored the gendered construction of leadership, as discussed earlier in this chapter

(Willemsen 2002; Ryan and Haslam 2007; Alimo-Metcalfe, 2010; Stoker, Van der Velde and Lammers, 2012; Sinclair, 2013).

While the 'glass ceiling' concept may examine some of the organisational factors that contribute to the lack of women at senior levels of organisations, it does not examine the role that other factors play in women's under-representation at executive directorship levels, including the lack of women mentors and women role models, nor does it explore in more detail the deeply embedded stereotypes that exist.

3.4. Conclusion

This chapter discussed a selection of possible theoretical explanations of women's under-representation in senior leaderships roles by exploring the barriers identified through academic literature review.

Using the 'traffic light' assessment model introduced in this chapter several theoretical explanations of women's under-representation were identified, as identified in academic literature and previous research.

Some academic literature suggests that professional women do not see enough of women mentors and women roles models in senior positions to aspire to. While prior research into the impact of mentors and role models on one's career is abundant, whether women executives see this lack of mentors and role models as an obstacle to their career advancement, and how gender-sensitive this relationship may be, remains unclear.

In addition, review of existing theories highlights that gendered role stereotyping has a tendency to label women mainly in motherly and caring roles, limiting their chances to rise to positions of authority. Additional research is required to explore the perceived impact of this stereotype on careers of senior women executives, and to particularly seek out any male-specific gendered role stereotyping and the perceived impact it may have had on careers of men.

Drawing on the preference theory, it can be argued that women opt out of successful careers, willingly giving preference to full-time motherhood. While this theoretical view looks at women's choices from the 'agency' perspective, this research aims to explore the perceived impact of structures within the career and parenthood experiences of a group of executives, with a view to add contemporary insights into 'structure' and 'agency' debate.

The review into gendered construction of leadership concept suggests that leadership continues to be essentialist in nature: associated with masculine qualities, contrasting with some ascribed women's behavioural attributes, making it hard to accept that a modest, soft-spoken, empathetic woman can succeed in an 'alpha' position of authority. However, emerging research suggests that certain elements of style and behaviour traditionally attributed to women are becoming increasingly sought after in leadership positions, potentially indicating a shift towards gender-neutral leadership characteristics. This specific notion, which remains under-researched, will be another aspect that this study aims to explore.

Moreover, the theory of gendered organisations highlights that organisational structures are not gender-neutral and gendered biases are deeply embedded into organisational processes and practices, which potentially creates strong barriers for professional women to overcome if they were to move through organisational ranks. The critical review of literature indicates that some of the concepts discussed in this theory are outdated and therefore need to be explored within the context of a modern organisational environment. This research study aims to explore some responses to this gap.

Also, the review of literature relating to the concept of merit indicates that organisations fail to implement meritocratic systems, and so women who are seeking merit-based environments more than men become disillusioned and leave. The gap identified in this concept, and which this research aims to explore, pertains to the passive element associated with merit, which implies that women 'wait' to be recognised and rewarded. This study aims to explore further whether it is indeed the expectation of merit that women executives attribute to progression of their careers, and/or what other criteria drive their success.

In summary, the review of academic literature offered several plausible explanations to women's under-representation in senior roles, but it also highlighted possible limitations of each theory. The gaps identified in prior research and outlined above will form basis for comparative discussion in Chapter Six, where possible theoretical explanations of women's under-representation in senior roles discussed in this Chapter are explored in the context of fieldwork findings presented in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FOUR:

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1. Introduction

This chapter explores the design and methodology of this research study and explains my structural choices through the decision flow framework described in the first section.

In this chapter I present and defend the argument that a robust research design is critical to the production of a research study that is credible, useful and of high quality.

I start by presenting the research problem and a set of primary and secondary research questions which shaped this study. I then move on to identifying the purpose of this research, before explaining my logical reasoning approach. In the following section I talk about the philosophical ideologies which shaped my ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions. This chapter also discusses my choice of research methodology and presents arguments for the selection of my preferred techniques for data collection and data analysis processes.

The concluding section explores the meaning of quality in the context of qualitative research and explains how I have approached quality assurance as part of this study. The various researcher roles are then explored, and quality assessment criteria used in this research study is presented. The final part of this chapter discusses the significance of ethical considerations in academic research, where I describe the measures that I have undertaken to ensure this study follows strong moral standards of conduct.

4.2. Structure of the study

My goal for this research study was for it to be specific, clear, well planned out and structured in order to be manageable, credible and successful (Woodhouse, 1998). Before any research took place, it was imperative for me to define the What? (the research problem), the Why? (the research question) and the How? (the research design). In this research study I have adopted the following decision flow framework to bring structure to my research study:

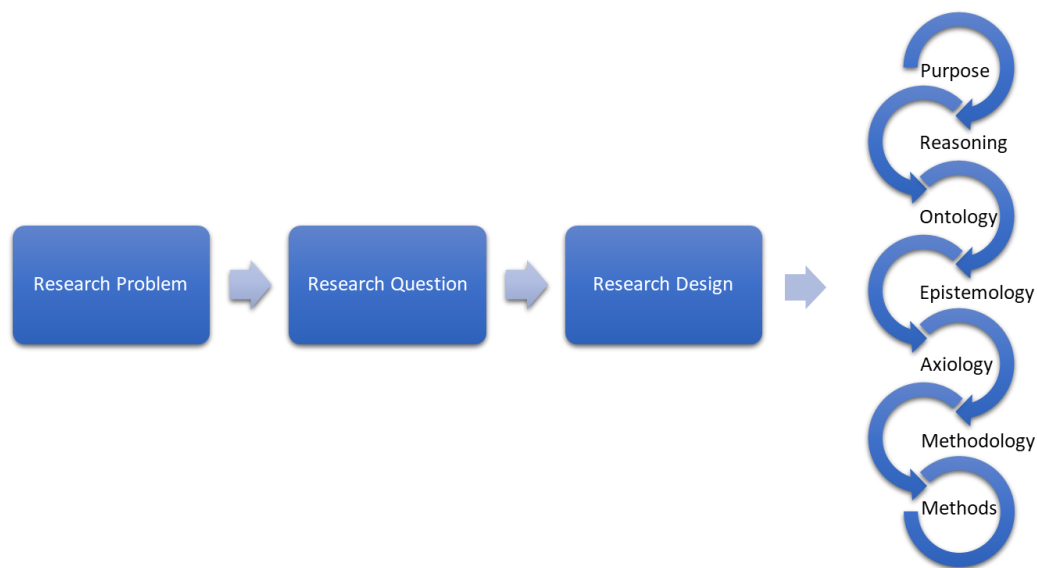


Figure 11: Research structure decision flow framework

4.2.1. Research problem

Like any academic research, I have set out to conduct this study with the purpose to bring results that will help with social, professional or scientific evolution (Pouspourika, 2018). Having a concrete problem to investigate gave me the basis to be able to contribute new and relevant insights (McCombes, 2019). This research study aims to contribute new and develop existing knowledge, thus the starting point of this research is to zoom into investigating a specific area of concern, in other words – to identify a specific research problem.

The overarching topic for this research study is gender diversity. Within this subject, the research problem identified is the under-representation of women executive directors in senior leadership roles within the UK leading private sector companies.

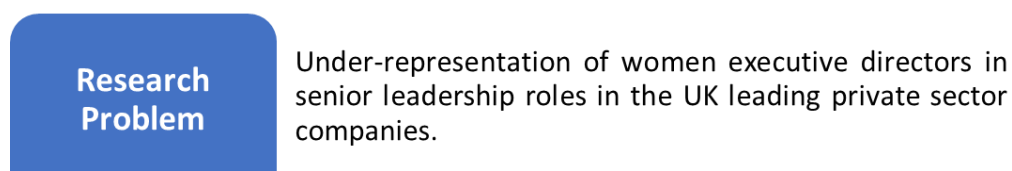


Figure 12: Research problem

Chapter Two identified the issue of women's under-representation by discussing the state of gender diversity within the context of FTSE-100 organisations, specifically focusing on women in senior leadership roles. Chapter Two also highlighted the significance of workplace gender diversity by presenting the socio-economic and moral arguments. Understanding why women's under-representation at executive level is problematic will be addressed in this research study.

4.2.2. Research question

Another crucial methodological step for this research study was to specify the research question. Creswell and Creswell (2017) suggest that formation of the research question is largely determined by, and likewise influences, where and what kind of information will be sought.

When forming the research question for this study, I adopted a blended approach. I considered that this research needed to describe the variables before exploring their relationship. I have thus introduced a mix of descriptive and relational elements in the research question and have adopted primarily a descriptive approach with a marginal relational component.

A descriptive research question is well suited for this study, which is designed to primarily describe a particular phenomenon – the under-representation of women executive directors.

The largely descriptive ‘big’ question that this research study sets to address is: “What are the perceived explanations of women’s under-representation at the executive directorship level of the FTSE-100 companies in the UK?”

Primary Research Question	What are the perceived explanations of women’s under-representation at the executive directorship level of the FTSE-100 companies in the UK?
----------------------------------	--

Figure 13: Primary research question

I maintain that it is unfeasible for this research study to find possible explanations to the primary question, without exploring three secondary questions, and evaluating the relationship between the four, thus introducing a need for a relational component. Three secondary questions have been identified, which are:

Secondary Research Question 1	What are the cited advantages of workplace gender diversity for British society, business, and/or the economy?
Secondary Research Question 2	What is the current situation on women’s representation within senior leadership roles in the UK FTSE-100 companies?
Secondary Research Question 3	What are the barriers and enablers that have been faced by a sample group of senior executives and how do these compare with theoretical explanations?

Figure 14: Secondary research questions

In addition to the descriptive and relational research questions, there exists the third, causal type question (Trochim and Donnelly, 2001). When forming my research questions, I have found a causal approach unsuitable for this study, as my research is not aimed to evaluate whether and how certain factors affect the various outcome variables; rather it is interested in a qualitative and interpretive exploration.

Having introduced the research problem and research questions for this study, I present below how the design phase of this research took shape.

4.3. Research design

As I embarked on this stage of my study, I encountered numerous approaches used to describe research design. Selltiz *et al.* (1959, p.70) referred to research design as "...the arrangement of conditions for the collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy and procedure". Zikmund (1988, p.41) defined research design as "...a master plan specifying the methods and procedure for collecting and analysing the needed information". Manheim (1977, p.140), argued that "...research design not only anticipates and specifies the seemingly countless decisions connected with carrying out data collection, processing and analysis, but it presents a logical basis for these decisions." De Vaus (2001) considered that research design referred to the overall plan that a researcher selects, which helped to integrate the different components of the study in a coherent and logical way, thereby, ensuring that the researcher effectively addressed the research problem.

I found that these definitions described research design primarily in terms of methods and procedures used to collect and analyse the variables specified in the research question. My argument, however, is that research design goes beyond a mere procedure. Thus, I prefer a more profound definition offered by Creswell (2014), who suggests that although research design is based on a methodical plan, it involves a combination of philosophical and logical decisions. These decisions include the worldview assumptions that a researcher brings into the research study, procedures of inquiry, otherwise referred to as strategies, and specific methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation. Thus, research design involves the blend of philosophy, strategies of inquiry and specific methods.

I adopted the following decision flow framework as a basis for my research design:

Research Design = Research Purpose -> Reasoning Approach -> Ontological assumptions -> Epistemological assumptions -> Axiological Assumptions -> Research Methodology -> Methods chosen for data collection and data analysis.

The final shape that the research design of this study has assumed is depicted in the following pyramid:

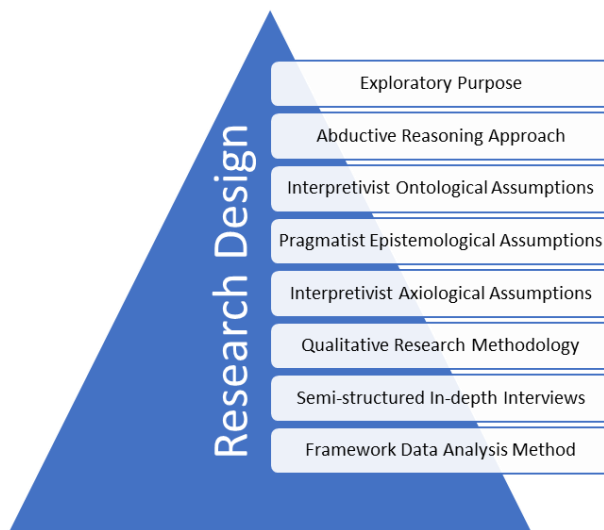


Figure 15: Research Design Pyramid

Research design has a significant impact on the reliability of the research study, acting as a foundation for the entire study. It is thus important that in the following section I explore each of the components individually and describe my own position as a researcher within each of them.

4.3.1. Research purpose

When formulating the research purpose, I viewed it as a goal of my study, where the purpose could be to identify or describe a concept, explain a situation or predict a solution to a situation (Beckingham, 1974).

The three types of research purpose: descriptive, experimental and explanatory, have been deemed unsuitable for this research study.

A descriptive method would focus more on the “what”, rather than the ‘why’, thus helping to effectively describe the nature of the studied subject – the under-representation of women in executive roles, but neither explaining why this phenomenon occurs, nor leading to a solution

to a problem. Also, being a precise, scientific and statistical method by its nature (Trochim and Donnelly, 2001), descriptive approach would not help to explain relationships and thus would not be an appropriate method to tackle the relational element of this study's research questions.

Similarly, while experimental research is deemed to be an effective method to test the causal relationship under controlled conditions (Kothari, 2004), and is respected for its 'classical scientific' nature (Mitchell, 2016), this approach is not appropriate for this research study. Firstly, this research study relies on qualitative data, as will be explained later. Experimental research, in contrast, typically relies on quantitative data, where the independent variable would be manipulated to test its effect on the dependent variable, while the conditions remain unchanged, and would thus not suit the methodology selected for this study. Also, the fact that in experimental research a researcher is able to control and manipulate the research environment, goes against the spontaneous essence of this research study, which calls for the emergence of unprompted data and unforced findings.

Explanatory research is mainly appropriate to situations where there is a scarcity of previous research on the subject, which makes it unsuitable for this study. The purpose of explanatory research is to identify the extent and nature of cause-and-effect relationships (Zikmund, Carr and Griffin, 2013). In this research study I work with an over-researched and highly topical subject of gender diversity. The main purpose of this research study is to explore the issue of under-representation of women executive directors in senior leadership roles in the UK leading private sector companies. My aim is not to explain how women's under-representation arose, but to explore why, despite being in the societal limelight for decades, women's under-representation continues to prevail.

Thus, this research study was conducted with an ***exploratory purpose*** in mind for two reasons.

Firstly, while some research has been carried out on the topic of gender diversity in general, and women's under-representation at senior roles in UK companies specifically, most of the research has been focused on women on boards and at Non-Executive Director level. Very little research has been conducted specifically exploring women's representation within executive director roles, in other terms – level one and two below the board of UK FTSE-100 companies. Exploratory research refers to the initial research into a hypothetical or theoretical idea (Kowalczyk, 2020). Thus, the purpose of an explanatory research is to further explore the existing theories associated with a particular event or phenomenon by building on researcher's existing ideas and thoughts on the subject. Schutt (2015, p.42), suggests that "...the goal [of

explanatory research] is to learn 'what is going on here?' and to investigate social phenomena without explicit expectations”.

Secondly, while various theories have been presented over the years offering an explanation to gender imbalance at senior roles of the UK leading companies, many of them are outdated. The theory of gendered organisations if viewed in the context of the 'new economy' is one such example. The method of exploration allows a researcher the flexibility to explore the topic to the varying degree of depth and creativity and generates new ideas and subjects for further research (Leedy and Ormrod, 2014). Singh (2007) suggests that exploratory research should be the researcher's starting point, over any other research type. He believes that if a researcher starts the initial study with an exploratory purpose, the information a researcher will have in hand at the end of such research will then form basis and determine the type of study required for further, more conclusive research on the subject.

Exploratory studies more often rely on qualitative information: the flexibility, creativity and adaptability to change that exploratory design offers, make it an appealing format for scenarios, where data cannot be measured quantitatively. And although exploratory research is less likely to be able to quantify 'how often?' or 'how many?', it is deemed to be the most effective method to provide answers to the research question, which involves 'why?', 'how?' and 'when?' (Leedy and Ormrod, 2014). This is a qualitative research study which relies on a combination of primary and secondary research tools, further supporting the selection of exploratory type of research purpose.

When examining exploratory research limitations, several stand out. Firstly, given the qualitative data collection methodology that exploratory studies gravitate towards, one limitation of this method is the lack of conclusive evidence. It can also be argued that an exploratory research study cannot be generalised to a wider population, because such studies are most often based on a limited data, which may not adequately represent the target sample. Additionally, as the name implies, this type of research sets out to explore an existing problem and does not aim to offer final and conclusive solutions to it, thus rendering such type of research futile for decision-making at a practical level.

This study aims to further clarify my understanding of a problem, namely: women's under-representation at senior roles (below board level) in British companies. At the beginning of this research I stand unsure of the precise nature of the problem (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016) and would thus like to build on my existing theoretical knowledge and assumptions, in

order to investigate this social phenomenon further, thereby keeping to the exploratory purpose of this research study.

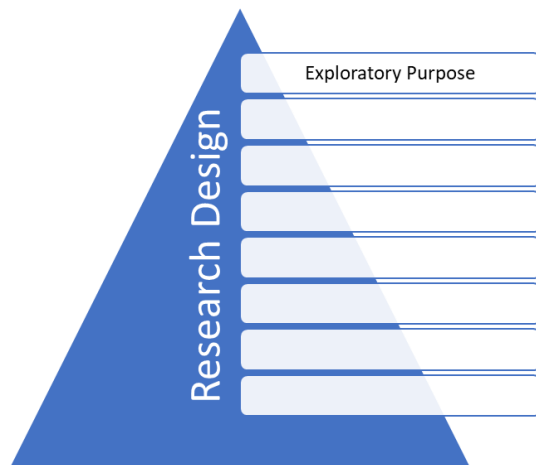


Figure 16: Step 1 of research design - Defining exploratory purpose

4.3.2. Reasoning approach

The research process is about inquiry - asking questions and developing explanations through thoughtful reflection and critical thinking (Elder and Paul, 2010). A key element to sound critical thinking is one's ability to 'reason effectively' (Liu, Ludu, and Holton, 2015).

Both deductive and inductive reasoning approaches were deemed unsuitable in the context of this research study. When selecting my preferred logical reasoning approach, I acknowledged the key advantage of deductive reasoning approach, in that it could help me as a researcher to transition from known to unknown and lead to reliable conclusions (Barton and Tucker, 2020). I was also aware that a deductive reasoning approach was an effective method to use, if the research study aimed to explain causal relationships between concepts and variables, and if there were a large quantitative element to the study. This would have been my preferred reasoning approach, if my research study could not afford any risk element, given that a deductive researcher relies on accuracy and precision. In addition, using the deductive reasoning approach would be challenging for me as a researcher to select a specific theory that could be tested.

An inductive approach generates a spectrum of probabilities (Regoli, 2016), and while not all probabilities would turn out to be true or possible, a researcher would get a variety of options. In addition, inductive reasoning fuels further exploration, potentially allowing to not only test, if the probable inferences are right or wrong, but also to understand how accurate or inaccurate

the initial assumptions have been. While this approach would enable me to generate a variety of empirical data, the sheer diversity of it would not allow me to build a clear theory (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p.152).

Building on the exploratory purpose of this research study, an abductive logical reasoning has been adopted as my preferred approach.

Introduced to modern logic by C.S. Peirce (1886), abductive reasoning approach is typically used to explain a surprising observation (Magnani, 2001; Lipton, 2004; Aliseda, 2006). This approach is based on a convincing set of preconditions and, assuming that the conclusion and the rule holds true, it attempts to select some possible premises that, if also true, can, but not necessarily will, support the conclusion.

In abductive reasoning approach the research study begins, when a researcher encounters an 'empirical phenomenon' which cannot be fully explained by existing theories. A set of 'surprising facts' or 'puzzles' thus emerges, and the research process is then dedicated to their explanation (Bryman and Bell, 2015). If resorting to the abductive reasoning, the researcher seeks to arrive to and select the 'best explanation' among the many possibilities in order to clarify the 'surprising facts' or 'puzzles' identified at the start of the research process.

This research study started out from an abundance of theories, which however could not lead to any one conclusive finding. Many theories became outdated or no longer applied to the corporate setting that had undergone changes over the last years (legislation, technology, attitudes), since the gender diversity became such a topical issue within the FTSE environment. It did not seem feasible to derive a theory using qualitative data collection methodology at the start of the study. As a researcher, I felt the need to start my research from selecting a phenomenon: under-representation of women in top jobs of the FTSE-100 companies; then exploring the existing literature and theories that attempt to explain it.

In addition, there are several 'surprising facts' or 'puzzles' that I have encountered during the initial stage of my research when reviewing the existing data and theories:

- a) despite prior research highlighting different dimensions of advantage that gender diversity brought to the business, companies still needed a strong push to instigate a change within their corporate environments;
- b) notwithstanding the notion that childbearing is one of the primary obstacles for professional women making careers, suggesting that they drop out of career

progression as soon as they get pregnant and do not return to their managerial roles, there was an abundance of examples of women in top positions, who were successfully able to juggle husbands, partners, children and other pressing family commitments with very demanding jobs;

- c) the issue of women's under-representation has become very topical and highly publicised, with the majority of the FTSE-100 companies pledging their commitment to the cause. Yet, looking at the evidence, little progress has been made to have more women form part of Executive Committees and below.

Finally, while some of the existing theories made a good attempt at explaining the above puzzling facts, it soon became apparent, that while each theory had its advantages, it also had its limitations, thus not any single theoretical explanation could be selected to explain women's under-representation. Instead, a blended theoretical approach had to be adopted. Also, more data were required to lead to some probable explanations, based on first-hand evidence.

While abductive reasoning has been adopted for this research study, this approach has its downfalls. Unlike deductive reasoning, abductive reasoning "...leads to a plausible conclusion, but does not positively verify it" (Sober, 2013, p.28). Abductive conclusions are thus deemed to possess some residual uncertainty or doubt, which is then phrased by terms, such as "best available" or "most likely".

Despite its weaknesses, abductive reasoning approach is designed to address the downfalls and capitalise on the strengths of the deductive and inductive approaches (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). APPENDIX 2 summarises the application of abductive reasoning approach within this research study in contrast to other reasoning approaches.

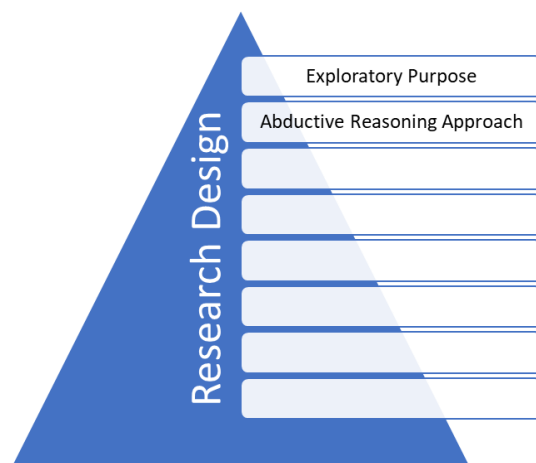


Figure 17: Step 2 of research design - Adopting abductive reasoning approach

4.3.3. Philosophical stance

A well-designed research study involves not only clearly defined procedures of inquiry and appropriate methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation, but first and foremost researcher's philosophical positioning; in other terms - the worldview assumptions that he/she brings into the research study (Creswell, 2014).

Johnson and Clark (2006) argue that researchers must be aware of the philosophical approaches they commit to, because this not only impacts on how they conduct their research, but very importantly, helps to understand what it is they are exploring.

Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2012) define research philosophy as the development of research assumption, its knowledge and nature. Žukauskas, Vveinhardt and Andriukaitienė (2018) define a research assumption as an initial statement of reasoning, built on the researcher's own knowledge and insights. This means that assumptions may vary from one study to another, and each researcher will have his/her own views about the nature of truth, knowledge and its acquisition (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2013).

Given that the purpose of academic research is to seek the truth and new knowledge with a view to enhance social development (Ho, 2014), it has been important for me as a researcher to formulate my personal view on what knowledge is, how it fits into the reality and, in the context of this research study, to justify the approach I have selected to generate new knowledge.

Scholars (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Heron and Reason, 1997) suggest that in a research study a philosophical stance, or paradigm, touches on five elements: ontology, epistemology, axiology, methodology and methods. There are five key areas in which the researcher needs to formulate his/her beliefs and assumptions and define his/her philosophical stance. In this research I will use the following framework to explore each of the elements individually.

- 1) Reality → What do we know? → Ontology → Which paradigm influences the view?
- 2) Knowledge → How do we know? → Epistemology → Which paradigm influences the view?
- 3) Value → What do we value in research? → Axiology → Which paradigm influences the view?
- 4) Methodology → What approach do we use to find the new knowledge out?
- 5) Methods → What means of collecting and analysing the data do we intend to utilise?

In this section, I will explore the significance of each and discuss how my philosophical ideology, underpinning the five above elements, has influenced the research design of this study.

Research Paradigm

Before explaining my own philosophical position with regards to how I understand reality and how I view the process of knowledge generation and its application, it is important to take a closer look at some of the paradigms and explore their relevance.

Kuhn (1970, p.175) refers to research paradigms as "...the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, ...shared by members of a given community". Patton (2002, p.134), stresses the importance of framing one's research within a specific paradigm, because if "...researchers operate from different frameworks, their results will not be readily interpretable by or meaningful to each other". Rehman and Alharthi (2016) emphasise that a sound researcher should be well-versed in other schools of philosophical thought, because a researcher who is ignorant of other ideological frameworks is not well-positioned to evaluate research conducted under the umbrella of a different tradition.

While a wide variety of branched out frameworks has been developed over the years, there are four core pillars of philosophical positions in research that should be mentioned: positivism, realism, pragmatism and interpretivism (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016).

Neither positivism nor realism paradigms had any influence on my research study. Firstly, the concepts of leadership, emotional intelligence, ambition and success, which I explore in this study, cannot be measured to the empirical standard of knowledge validation of a positivist. In addition, this research study explores human behaviours, interactions and experiences, where precision, prediction and control are an almost impossible objective to achieve. Similarly, realistic philosophical stance does not give me the freedom to examine subjective nuances of complex interactions and inter-relationships between individuals, hierarchies, teams and organisations that the business context of this study is set in.

I would like to take a closer look at the two paradigms that are of specific interest for this research study: ***interpretivism*** and ***pragmatism***. As I will explain in more detail in the following section, my interpretive beliefs have guided the ontological and axiological aspect, as well as methodological choices of this research study, while my pragmatic views have influenced the epistemological element.

Interpretivism

As a philosophical tradition, interpretivism has been developed in opposition to positivism; Grix (2004, p. 82) has described it as a “response to the over-dominance of positivism”. The term was formally introduced at the beginning of the twentieth century by a group of German sociologists (Simmel, 1918; Weber, 1922), who believed that positivist ideology and its adaptations were too general and did not appropriately represent the complexity of human interactions.

Interpretivist paradigm is based on the notion that “...research on human beings by human beings...” cannot be objective, since it is conducted by researchers who bring their own experiences and beliefs into the study (Miller, 2005, p. 48). Thus, “...rather than seeking an objective perspective, interpretivists look for meaning in the subjective experiences of individuals engaging in social interaction” (ibid).

Myers (2013, p.39) suggests that “interpretive researchers assume that access to reality (given or socially constructed) [takes places] only through social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings and instruments”. Within the philosophy of interpretivism, Grix (2004) suggests that the world does not exist independent of our knowledge of it, and that there are as many realities as individuals. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016) interpretivism allows a researcher to understand differences between humans in their role as social actors. This enables the researcher to take into consideration individual experiences of the participants. Chowdhury (2014) suggests that interpretivism accounts for the differences in opinion, therefore stimulating a deeper understanding of the underlying personal issues.

Interpretivist approach “requires that social phenomena be understood through the eyes of the participants rather than the researcher” (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2013, p.21). Thus, an interpretivist research study aims to understand and interpret the meanings in human behaviour. For an interpretivist researcher it is important to understand the motives, meanings, reasons and other subjective experiences, which are bound by time and context (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988; Neuman, 2000).

There are two main complications associated with interpretivist approach: impact of biases and generalisability of data. A research into experiences, opinions, behaviours and other individual and unique elements is a subjective exercise. Interpretivist research involves a study of human beings conducted by human beings, incorporating an intricate web of personal viewpoints, values and beliefs. This matrixed interlace of elements creates a plethora of bias-prone

situations and should thus be acknowledged and mitigated by the researcher throughout the research process.

In addition, an interpretivist study is hard to generalise. Many leading qualitative researchers consider generalisation as an important criterion to measure the quality of a research study (Polit and Beck, 2010). However, given that the experiences, opinions and behaviours, that an interpretive study explores, are very individual and unique elements, generalisability of a study can be undermined, which in turn can negatively impact the reliability of the study.

Despite these limitations and looking specifically at the value that an interpretivist ideology brings to business related research, a number of elements stand out and are particularly worth discussing in the context of this research study.

Firstly, an interpretivist view allows for complex and often difficult to quantify phenomena to be studied in more detail. Subjects such as leadership, emotional intelligence, ambition can be explored from an interpretivist point of view by understanding the motives, meanings, reasons, and other subjective experiences. In this particular research study I analyse such concepts as success, motivation and career progression, for which I adopt an interpretivist ontological stance, when trying to understand these phenomena through participants' eyes, rather than my own.

Secondly, not only does the interpretivist perspective help explore complex and vague concepts, but it can be especially effective, when the researcher is trying to reflect a particular set of circumstances and interactions involving individuals coming together at a specific time (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). In this research study I explore the career journeys of 13 top executives, while trying to establish what enabled or tried to prevent them from getting to the point in their professional careers that they have reached to date. Thus, an interpretivist view helps me to establish the subjective factors that shaped their individual realities and interpret the explanations of women's under-representation as perceived by the participants.

Pragmatism

As a philosophical tradition, pragmatism dates back to 1870s, originating from the work of such American philosophers as C.S. Peirce, W. James, and J. Dewey (Hookway, 2008). Pragmatist stance supports the notion that most philosophical topics, such as the nature of knowledge, language, belief and science—are all best viewed in terms of their practical application, and are best evaluated on the basis of how successfully they can be put to use. James (1909) himself

regarded the function of thoughts and words as instruments used to predict, problem solve and put ideas into action; he refuted the notion that the thought's purpose is to merely describe, represent or mirror reality.

In the context of research, pragmatist philosophy recognises that “there are many different ways of interpreting the world and undertaking research, that no single point of view can ever give the entire picture and that there may be multiple realities” (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p.58). Pragmatist researchers believe that the research question is the sole key factor underpinning the research process. Pragmatist research paradigm is translated into the proposition, that researchers should select the methodological approach, which is most suitable for the particular research problem, that the research study is exploring (Tashakkori, Teddlie and Teddlie, 1998). Several research strategies, methods and approaches can thus be integrated within one research study, according to the nature of the research question (Wilson, 2014). Thus, pragmatist paradigm does not favour any particular research method and advocates the use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches, based on the need.

One of the key limitations connected with the pragmatist tradition is that its action-focused stance transforms it more into an approach, as opposed to a philosophy. There are arguments that pragmatism should focus on methodology, since methodology is an area that connects abstract philosophical issues with actual mechanical methods (Morgan, 2007).

Another aspect of pragmatism that should be approached with care is the fact that the researcher controls most of the decisions and processes within a research study. According to Elkjaer and Simpson (2011), the researcher uses his/her system of beliefs and senses to drive the process and overcome doubt. The choices the researcher makes thus greatly depend on and are, therefore, biased by the background of the researcher, his/her socio-political standing and beliefs (Morgan, 2007).

Despite these limitations, there are several advantages, that I believe a pragmatist tradition offers in the context of business research, and more specifically, pertaining to this study. Firstly, to a pragmatist researcher, the emphasis is on ‘workability’ of the study. In other terms, the research study starts with a problem and aims to contribute with practical solutions that would inform future practice. In the context of this research study, my aim is to explore the problem of under-representation of women executive directors in senior leadership roles within the UK leading private sector companies. The practical contribution of this research study will include a set of best practice recommendations, that the various business actors (e.g.: policymakers,

organisations, seasoned directors, aspiring executives) could adopt to help increase the presence of women at executive leadership level of the UK FTSE-100 organisations.

Secondly, adopting the pragmatist epistemological worldview allowed me to design my study and select methodologies and methods that were best suited for the purpose of this research. Guided by my action-based view of knowledge, I was able to determine that a combination of primary and secondary research, the former utilising qualitative methodology through in-depth semi-structured interview methods, were the most appropriate instruments for me to explore my primary research question: “What are the perceived explanations of women’s under-representation at the executive directorship level of the FTSE-100 companies in the UK?”.

Pragmatist epistemological stance also supports my choice of abductive logical reasoning approach. Pragmatism is typically associated with abductive reasoning that moves back and forth between deduction and induction (Goldkuhl 2012; Morgan 2007). This has allowed me to be actively involved in creating the data, as well as evaluating and shaping the theories throughout the research process.

In the next section I will further explore the individual essence of the three areas (reality, knowledge and value) and explain my philosophical position within each.

Ontological assumptions

Identification of ontological choice is an important step in research design, as it further influences the choice of epistemology, methodology, and data collection and data analysis methods.

Ontology refers to the form and nature of social reality and explores the things that exist within that reality. Guba and Lincoln (1994, p.83) suggest that “...ontology is concerned with what kind of world we are investigating, with the nature of existence, with the structure of reality as such. The ontological assumptions are those that respond to the question ‘what is there that can be known?’ or ‘what is the nature of reality?’”.

Ontology views reality as a relationship between various aspects of society, mainly between social actors and social entities, and believes this interaction to be either objective or subjective in its nature (Jupp, 2006).

While objectivism portrays the position that social entities exist in reality external to social actors concerned with their existence (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012), subjectivism is an ontological position which asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors (Bryman, 2012).

In my view, reality is subjective. To some extent siding with the pragmatist stance, I believe that reality is complex and rich and is influenced by the ever-changing processes, experiences and practices. However, in its entirety I favour the *interpretive ontological stance* and believe in a socially constructed reality, shaped by the culture and language of social actors. I maintain that a reality can have multiple meanings and interpretations and agree with the subjectivist view, which asserts that social entities are a direct result of the perceptions and consequent actions of social actors, in contrast to objectivism, where social phenomena and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors (Bryman, 2012).

Epistemological assumptions

If ontology is concerned with what social reality actually is, epistemology looks at ways of building knowledge about this social reality. Within the context of academic research, epistemology specifically refers to the possibilities, nature, sources and limitations of knowledge in the field of study. Bryman (2012, p. 13) defines epistemology as “an issue [which] concerns the question of what is (or should be) regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline”.

I have used a variety of sources throughout this research study to generate or apply the knowledge - facts, logical reasoning, intuition and expertise (Pecorino, 2001). Epistemological thought process helped me to integrate all of the sources of knowledge within this research study. I also found that my epistemological beliefs helped me define the criteria applied to determine what constitutes acceptable knowledge (Priest and Hallebone, 2009).

I take a *pragmatist epistemological stance*. I believe in a practical meaning of knowledge, deeming that knowledge is only useful if it can have a practical purpose and can be applied. I agree with Saunders' (2016) definition, where “... ‘true’ theories and knowledge are those that enable successful action”. In my view, the subjective meanings and the observable phenomena can generate sufficient knowledge and lead to acceptable explanations to the research question – together or separately. In addition, while I recognise the importance of theoretical and knowledge contribution that my research study should make, I maintain that contribution to practice is an equally crucial component of my legacy as a researcher.

Axiological assumptions

If ontology is concerned with what social reality actually is, and epistemology looks at ways of building knowledge about this social reality, axiology deals with the value question of what is essentially worthwhile. Axiology highlights the "values of being, about what human states are to be valued simply because of what they are" (Heron and Reason, 1997, p. 287).

I approach axiology as being primarily concerned with classifying what things are good, and how good they are. As part of axiological question, I assessed two elements in terms of their worth and value: me, as a researcher and the research study itself (Li, 2016). Several questions helped me to define and assess the impact that my researcher-based values had on this study.

Me, as a researcher

- What values do I bring into this research study? What impact do these have on my research study?
- What makes a good researcher? How valuable and how present are these qualities in me, as a researcher?
- What biases are present in my views? How do these impact on the research process and findings?

The research study

- What is the purpose of this research study?
- What is valued in the results of the research study?
- Why is the chosen research problem deemed worthy the research?
- What value will my research bring to society, to research community, to the participants?

Similar to ontology and epistemology, my philosophical ideology has influenced my axiological beliefs. In this research study my **axiological** thinking was guided by the **interpretivist philosophy**. This ideology has helped shape the way my own personal values have applied to this research, and also translated into the assessment of value of this research study.

Looking from a researcher's perspective, three specific personal values affected how I approached this research study: curiosity, fairness and integrity. Curiosity had an impact at practically every stage of the research process. In life I believe that there is always a reason behind everything; every phenomenon is rooted somewhere. Thus, exploring the underlying

reasons may help to understand the resulting actions, behaviours and consequences. Curiosity guided my thinking when selecting the overarching topic of gender diversity for this research study. More specifically, I could not understand why the commonly held arguments, which convincingly explained women's under-representation in the UK top jobs, had done little to help to improve the situation. I became curious to understand whether these commonly held assumptions were, in fact, legitimate, and wanted to do so by exploring the views and experiences of the executives by and about whom these assumptions were constructed.

In addition, my strong sense of fairness complemented my curiosity. I believe in situational justice. Although in its essence fairness implies an impartial treatment and equal distribution, I feel that justice has a subjective element to it and decisions pertaining to treatment should be based on individual situations and circumstances. My secondary research indicated that there was a large number of women capable and willing to progress their careers, yet less than half of them were able to do so. This situation was unfair, and I was strongly driven by my moral compass to explore this inconsistency in more depth.

Integrity also played a big role in my approach to this study. As an experienced executive myself, who held positions of reasonable decision-making power and influence when it came to people's financial rewards, career progression and job futures, I always strived to ensure that my decisions were consciously guided by strong moral principles, above anything else. In this research study integrity has translated for me in:

- a) staying honest with the participants, my research supervisors and in relation to the findings of this study;
- b) acting professionally;
- c) remaining committed to the value and quality of the study;
- d) being accountable for the impact this study may have on the participants and others.

Thus, this research study is value bound, where throughout every stage of the research process I remained an active part of what was being researched. I could relate to many of the experiences and views that had been expressed by the participants and could not stay detached from the data; I was thus empathetic and subjective in my interpretations.

If I unpick the meaning of value from the perspective of this research study's worthiness, several elements support the interpretive axiological stance. The primary reason for this research is to understand and describe meaningful social actions and experiences, and specifically, to

understand the individual experiences of the studied participants; to explore how their individual decisions and choices have contributed to the development of their careers; to understand how they were able to overcome the obstacles that they faced during their careers. This research study saw a lot of value in the individuality and uniqueness of the decisions and choices that the participants had described. Uniqueness was also central to the type of contribution that I was determined for this study to make. Gender diversity had become an over-researched topic over the last decade, and it was crucial for me to find a niche, a gap that was under-researched in order for this research study to contribute something new and unique to theory, knowledge and practice. My interpretations of findings as a researcher formed a key part of such contribution. Quality and ethics have also been highly valued in this research study both in terms of their impact on the participants, but also on the research community – I will discuss these in more detail later on in this chapter.

In conclusion, the influence of my interpretivist beliefs had axiological implications on this research study, and had an impact on my role as a researcher, as well as on the contribution that this research study would make.

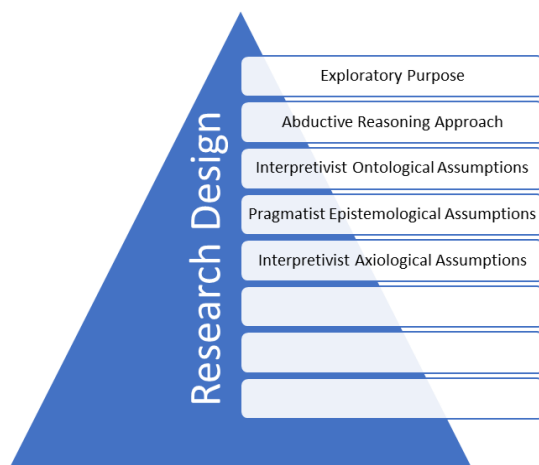


Figure 18: Steps 3, 4 and 5 of research design - Adopting interpretivist and pragmatist view as part of ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions

4.4. Research methodology

Within the context of research, methodology refers to a system of study and critical analysis of data production techniques. Research methodology is the “strategy, plan of action, process or design” that informs one’s choice of research methods (Crotty, 1998, p. 3).

Summarising the above points of view, research methodology guided my decision as a researcher on what type of data was required for this research study, and which data collection tools were the most appropriate for the purpose of my research (Grix, 2004). It was the methodological question that built on my ontological and epistemological assumptions, and defined how the reality should be studied and – as part of this study – how the knowledge should be gathered, analysed and applied.

I took three main types of research methodologies into consideration: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method approaches, before selecting ***qualitative research methodology*** as the framework for data collection and data analysis of this study.

This specific research study sets out to explore the issue of women's under-representation and to determine the main causes of women's under-representation at the executive directorship level of the FTSE-100 companies in the UK and, as part of this, to analyse a variety of aspects that cannot be measured quantitatively, specifically:

- 1) the lived experiences of senior executives as they were building their individual successful careers;
- 2) the behaviours of these executives in reaction or in response to the obstacles and enablers they have faced throughout their career development journey;
- 3) the feelings of these executives on the current situation of gender balance in top jobs of UK FTSE-100 companies;
- 4) the thoughts of these executives in the form of their recommendations to the business world and aspiring professionals on how the issue of women's under-representation can be overcome.

The primary research question of this study is not 'how much' of women's under-representation is the FTSE-100 world facing – a question that a quantitative research methodology would help to address. The questions raised in this research study are qualitative in nature: they are about the 'how' women's under-representation has come about and is sustained; the 'why' little improvement has been made; and the 'what now' action can help move the progress forward. These are less tangible, subjective elements that require a qualitative approach. The qualitative method has thus been selected over the quantitative method because:

- a) the study explores the experiences and perceptions of participants (Merriam, 1998);
- b) the data gathered is descriptive, rather than numeric (Marshall and Rossman, 1995);

- c) this research study is not intended to verify a specific hypothesis (Creswell, 2014), but to make a practical contribution, that offers a set of solutions and recommendations, as well as a theoretical contribution by supplementing existing theories with contemporary research findings.

Several characteristics of qualitative research make it an appropriate methodology for this study. A qualitative research approach allowed me to explore the experiences of people with the choice of using a variety of research methods (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey, 2011). In addition, qualitative approach fits well with the exploratory purpose of this study, as it seeks to explain the 'how' and the 'why' of a behaviour, event or phenomenon (McLeod, 2019). Vaus (2002, p. 5) suggests that "qualitative methods are often regarded as providing rich data about real life people and situations and being more able to make sense of behaviour and to understand behaviour within its wider context."

Qualitative research is not without its limitations. Some of the key criticisms of qualitative approach pertain to researcher's bias, challenges with replicability and poor generalisability. Firstly, because a qualitative research is being too reliant on the subjective interpretations of researchers, it is open to personal biases influenced by the researcher's own views, background and beliefs. Secondly, because the research process and, more specifically, the collection and interpretation of data is largely controlled by the researcher, its individuality may make it incapable of replication by subsequent researchers. Also, qualitative research methodology often works with a small sample of participants, raising criticism over its lack of generalisability.

These limitations are not insignificant, and I will explain how I have mitigated these in sections 4.5 and 7.4 of this thesis.

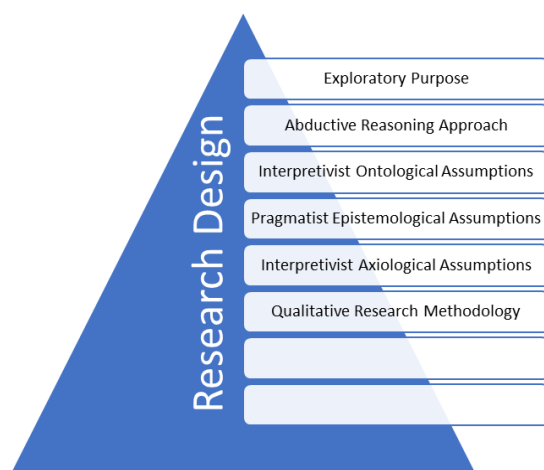


Figure 19: Step 6 of research design - Choosing qualitative research methodology

4.4.1. Research methods

In the earlier discussion, I have established that methodology was the strategy, which formed basis for the selection of individual processes and techniques, otherwise known as research methods, which were then used in the collection and the analysis of data, in order to uncover new information or create better understanding of a topic (Crotty, 1998).

The chart below further demonstrates the choices I have made with regards to specific tools and techniques, where the selected methods are marked in dark blue, standing out from the other commonly used alternatives that exist, marked in light blue. In the next section I will elaborate on the reasons behind the selection of each method.

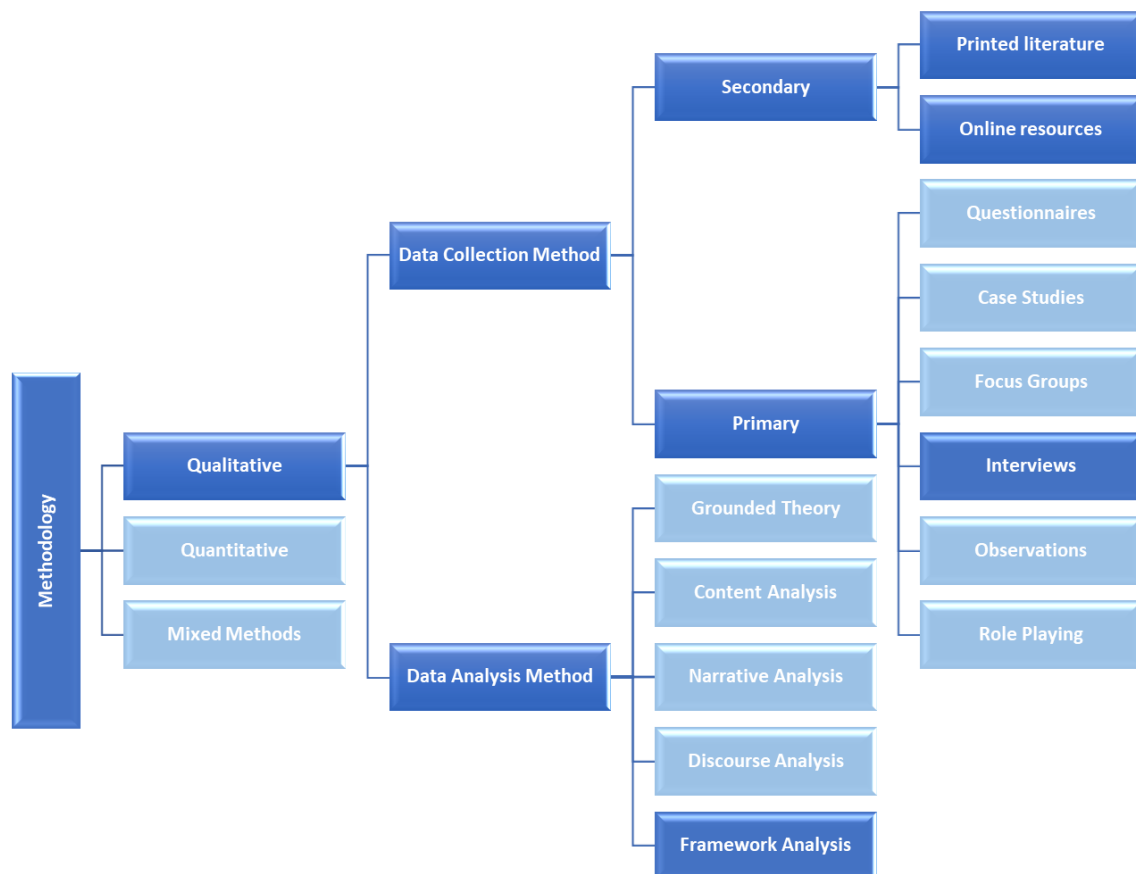


Figure 20: The summary of my methodological preferences

4.4.2. Data collection methods

Data collection is a systematic process of gathering the information from a variety of sources in order to: a) form a complete and accurate picture of a topic that is being studied; b) find answers to the research problem; c) test the hypothesis; d) evaluate the outcomes; and e) make predictions about future probabilities and trends (Jovancic, 2019). Accurate data collection is

vital for the integrity of the research study, since it supports the researcher in making informed and thus more accurate decisions within the research study process.

Data collection methods can be divided into two categories: *primary and secondary methods*, both of which have been utilised in this research study.

For my secondary, desk-based research I have relied on a combination of printed material and online resources. Bibliography section lists the various secondary sources that I have utilised in this research study.

Throughout my secondary data collection, I was conscious of the fact that there is an abundance of data available and unverified sources would undermine the validity and reliability of my research study. I have thus paid careful attention to the credentials of the authors, the quality of content, the credibility of arguments, and the depth of analysis, when selecting my secondary data sources.

For the primary data collection method I used original information sources, where data was collected by me first-hand. With this research study being qualitative in its methodology, I had a variety of qualitative primary data collection methods to select from: in-depth interviews, questionnaires, observation, focus group discussions, case studies, visual methods and biographies (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey, 2011).

I considered the purpose of this research study, its aim and objectives while choosing the most suitable primary data collection method. The individual level of analysis also played a key role in my selection of appropriate method (Cassell and Symon, 2004).

This research was primarily concerned with individual people's experiences, where it was important to select a data collection method, which allowed me to capture the uniqueness of participants' histories. The study was undertaken at an individual level. Interviews, and more specifically, *in-depth interviews* have been selected as the most appropriate method for this research study based on several arguments. Qualitative research interviews:

- a) allowed me not only to explore the understanding, experiences and views of research participants, but also to look into the significance of the meanings that they generated (Bauman *et al.*, 2002);
- b) enabled me to understand the themes that were central to the life world of the subjects (Kvale, 1996);

- c) gave me the ability to gather valid and reliable data, that were relevant to the research questions and purpose of this research study (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012);
- d) were especially effective in uncovering the story behind participant's experiences, where I, as an interviewer, could probe further into a specific topic (McNamara, 2018).

When making my selection, I took three most commonly accepted formats of interviews into consideration: structured, semi-structured and unstructured (May, 1997; Bryman, 2012). A ***semi-structured format of interviews***, both ***face-to-face and telephonic***, has been chosen for this research study, guided by several strong arguments in its favour.

Firstly, this format allowed me, as an interviewer, to mix elements of structure with elements of flexibility. While I was working from a pre-determined set of questions translated from a pre-determined list of themes (Boyce and Neale, 2006), at the same time I had the opportunity to 'probe' answers, where I wanted the interviewees to explain, or build on, their responses (King, 2004). This flexibility also helped to create a less formal interview atmosphere, where interviewees could get more personal when sharing their private experiences. In addition, because I had control over the direction of interviews, I was able to guide my questioning in such a way, as to ensure that multiple interview rounds would not be required. And finally, given the exploratory purpose of this research study, the flexibility of the semi-structured format allowed me to take creative advantage of the entire interview and explore.

Despite the advantages that the semi-structured interview format offers, I am not oblivious to its limitations. One of the major challenges I faced was at the data analysis point, where in some instances it was difficult to compare answers when my questions differed between interviewees in their structure and phrasing. On occasion, this led to me having to infer responses, which might have had an impact on the reliability of this study. I will explore this further in the 'Quality assurance in the context of qualitative research' section of this chapter.

While telephone interview format offered such advantages as easier access to potential respondents (Fenig *et al.*, 1993), better response rate (Tausig and Freeman, 1988) and greater sense of anonymity (Greenfield, Midanik and Rogers, 2000), it lacked the opportunity for the interviewer to read potentially important visual cues (Miller, 1995), and significantly limited the speed and extent of the emotional rapport between the interviewer and the participant (Novick, 2008), which the face-to-face format offered. Despite these contrasting features, I found that both interviewing formats yielded similar results, thereby reconfirming the view, that saw both

formats as equally productive and effective methods in qualitative research (Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004).

In conclusion, this was a qualitative research study, which relied upon both the secondary and primary data collection method, while semi-structured in-depth interviews, both face-to-face and via the telephone, had been used as the primary data sources.

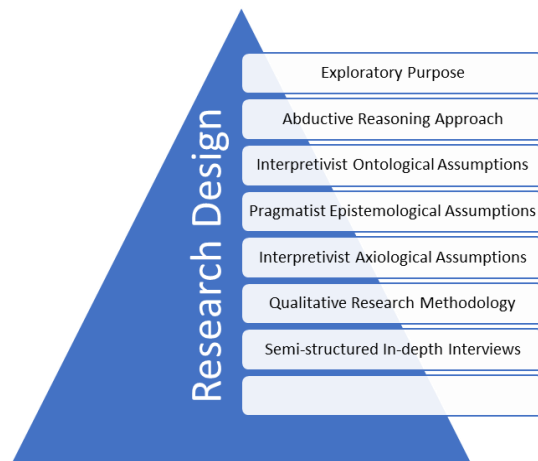


Figure 21: Step 7 of research design - Selecting semi-structured in-depth interviews

4.4.3. Fieldwork and data collection instruments

Fieldwork and data collection stage has been a key part of this research study. In its core, this stage took 18 months (between February 2018 and August 2019) to complete, and comprised of three main steps: sampling, approaches and interviews. The first step was to identify the targeted sample list of research study participants, followed by initiating the approaches to prospective interviewees and finally, conducting the actual interviews.

Step one: Sampling

In this research study I have adopted a purposeful sampling technique containing elements of both criterion (Patton, 2002) and snowball-based strategies (Patton, 2014). Purposeful sampling enabled me to identify and select individuals that are experienced and especially knowledgeable in the phenomenon of interest (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011), which in the context of this research study was the subject of obstacles to women's under-representation in leadership roles.

The figure below visually demonstrates how I have applied criterion-based strategy to identify and select a target group of participants that met predetermined criteria of importance (Patton, 2002):

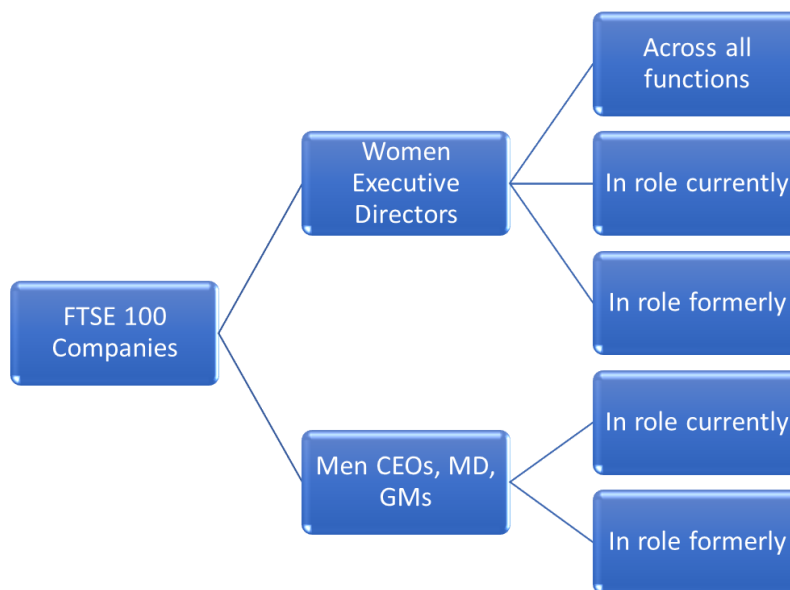


Figure 22: Predetermined criterion of importance used as part of purposeful sampling technique

I had also utilised snowball strategy to identify additional cases of interest arising from criterion-based sampling strategy, where the executives I approached and established a connection with would refer other potential interviewees with characteristics similar to their own (Patton, 2014). Snowball sampling is a referral technique where the existing research participants help recruit new participants from among their circle of acquaintances (Morgan, 2008). Snowball sampling is often used to access low incidence sample groups and individuals who are difficult for researchers to gain access to (Ochoa, 2017). Cassell and Symon (2004, p.43) specifically recommend snowball sampling method in relation to very senior executives, saying “...where participants are easily identifiable but difficult to access, such as organisation’s chief executives, using snowball sampling can allow these people to be reached”.

As part of criterion-based purposeful sampling strategy, I began creating a working database of the sample population as soon as the approval of Ethics Committee for the commencement of fieldwork was granted (copies can be found in APPENDIX 3 and 4). Firstly, through desk-based research I generated an up-to-date list of the UK FTSE-100 companies, extracting such information as the company name, its sector, value of the business measured in its market capitalisation, as well as the total number of employees. In preparation for the next step, I then created a worksheet template ready to be populated with information about prospective interviewees. This template contained such sections as the name, gender, position and contact information of the targeted participant, the source of contact and the status of communication.

I then started to identify women executive directors across all functions and former or current men Chief Executive Officers, Managing Directors and General Managers within these businesses. At the initial stage I used my LinkedIn connections database to identify first, second and third level of contacts with the executives who met the desired criteria. LinkedIn allows access to contact information between two people at first level of connection, which enabled me to identify 47 potential interviewees with usable contact details. This was an insufficient number, given that my target for initial approaches was set at 350 potential interviewees. I derived this target from a conservative response rate assumption. Considering that the response rate to approaches for interviews cited in academic literature ranged anywhere between 5% and 52% (Keeter *et al.*, 2006; Holbrook, Krosnick and Pfent, 2008), I have assumed a conservative 5%. In addition, given that many potential interviewees would not come from my direct contacts, I have assumed a further 50% 'drop out' rate due to the wrong contact information or electronic firewalls, which would prevent my communication reaching some of the addressees.

As the 47 initially identified contacts was not a sufficient number, I had to widen my scope. Firstly, I have upgraded my LinkedIn membership to a status which allowed me to search for executives by company name and eventually, with this level of membership I was able to send out in-mails to prospective participants. This strategy enabled me to tap into not only current, but also former executives of FTSE-100 organisations, creating a larger target field.

Secondly, I expanded the range of my resources beyond the LinkedIn, to include other professional networks, such as the IMD Business School alumni network, CIPD chartered network and the 30% Club. These networks were to a varying degree effective in target list identification, but I encountered several stumbling blocks along the process.

Initially, I anticipated an unlimited access to IMD Business School alumni network, which includes executives who have undertaken MBA and Executive MBA degrees, as well as attended Open Development Programs since the business school's inception in 1990. IMD's alumni network comprises of 100,000 international executives and grows at a rate of 9,000 annually. While I had access to IMD Business School alumni network, I had the right to approach only the MBA alumni and was not able to include any of the EMBA or Open Development Programs participants in my target list due to mailings and solicitations restrictions of the Business School.

In addition, while I was permitted to use the CIPD database for direct approaches, the database had two key limitations. Firstly, it contained no history of previous employers, which limited the

target scope to only the current organisations. This led to its second limitation, where none of the executives I had access to through this database represented FTSE-100 businesses.

Despite the initial obstacles, I was able to create a working database of 347 potential interviewees representing the sample population and comprising of women executive directors across all functions, as well as former or current men Chief Executive Officers, Managing Directors and General Managers of the UK FTSE-100 organisations. This set a stage for the next step in the fieldwork process: the approaches.

Step Two: Approaches

347 potential interviewees from the target list were approached electronically via email or LinkedIn in-mail. In instances where I had a first-hand connection with the potential interviewee, a direct email has been sent to the executive, giving a brief overview of the research study and inviting them to participate (an example of such email can be found in APPENDIX 5). Where I had second- and third-level of connection with the potential interviewee, my upgraded LinkedIn membership status allowed for an in-mail to be sent to prospective participants. LinkedIn in-mail allows for a limited number of characters, so I had to adapt my approach communication to be concise, yet eye-catching.

By and large, the response from prospective participants was underwhelming. Three main participant categories emerged based on their level of response during the approaches stage: 1) those who never became engaged, 2) partially engaged and 3) engaged.

The largest category comprised of those participants who had been approached and never became engaged. While reflecting on the causes, I identified two most likely explanations: outdated contact information and lack of interest. Frequently, the contact information appeared to be outdated or incorrect, resulting in undelivered emails. In these cases, I have attempted to track the executive's more recent contact information through additional desk-based research and re-contact the prospective participant. In the remainder and majority of approaches, the participant did not express interest in participating. Most often my approach has gone unanswered, making it impossible to determine the precise reason. However, in five cases (two women and three men) I received a response either directly from the prospective participant I approached, or from a Personal Assistant, apologising for their inability to participate. In these responses the reasons given were rather generic, including: 'unable to help', 'have to decline the request', and 'prefer not to participate'.

A portion of the approached prospective participants became 'partially engaged', wherein they confirmed their initial participation, but then stopped responding to any further communication. This was mainly the case with third-level connections approached through in-mails of LinkedIn. These potential participants had the tendency of disengaging from further dialogue after receiving the second wave of communication containing more in-depth information about the research study. In each case I made a follow-up, but in order to avoid the consequences of incessant communication, a reminder has been sent just once per addressee. While the data was not sufficient to pinpoint the reason for such withdrawal, it could only be presumed that having seen more details about the study, the potential participant had no time to dedicate or their initial level of interest had been overestimated.

The final group of 'engaged', purposefully selected participants comprised of 13 interviewees: eight women and five men senior executives, who expressed interest and participated in the interview stage of this research study.

It can be argued that a sample size of 13 participants is relatively small. However, no rule for determining an optimal sample size in qualitative research exists (Guest, Bruce and Johnson, 2006; Saunders, 2012). The sample size in this research relied on the concept of saturation, the point at which no additional data or themes were emerging (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). In addition, I used the 'depth' of information as another determinant of the sample size on the premise that it was the profundity rather than the frequency of data that was best placed to represent the research topic (O'Reilly and Parker, 2013). Also, an element of structure provided by the semi-structured interview format aligned with the suggestion that semi-structured, in-depth interviews required a minimum sample size of between 5 and 25 (Guest, Bruce and Johnson, 2006). Moreover, the homogeneity of the interviewed group of participants further supported the selection of a relatively small sample size (Creswell, 2007). The interviewees represented a homogeneous group in that they all formed part of FTSE-100 organisations; they occupied executive level roles, with positions of large operational and people leadership responsibility and with a broad international geographical remit; they represented two genders and possessed similar number of years of professional experience.

The interviewed participants represented nine FTSE-100 industries, including Tobacco, Mining, Oil & Gas, Telecommunications, Airline & Travel, Pharmaceuticals, Banking & Financial Services, Retail, Professional Services; they came from eight corporate functions, including Marketing, HR,

Operations, PR & Communications, Research & Development, Legal Affairs, Risk Management and General Management.

The age of interviewees ranged between 48 and 66 years. Average total number of years of professional experienced was 35 years and interviewed participants spent between six and 38 years within their FTSE-100 organisations. Four of the 13 interviewees spent their entire professional career with their FTSE-100 company, while three participants had experience with two FTSE-100 organisations: one within the same sector and two with two different sectors, as depicted in APPENDIX 6.

Women were represented by either current or former executive directors of the UK FTSE-100 businesses. Men held either current or former Chief Executive Officer, Managing Director or General Manager positions of the UK FTSE-100 companies. Women were chosen to help to explore the barriers and enablers they themselves faced during their career progression and to understand the reasons, why women at certain levels opted out of the carrier progression. Male CEOs were chosen as key decision-makers in hiring and promotional matters to provide their perspective on why women were under-represented at executive director level.

Throughout the approach stage all prospective participants were provided with varying degree of detail about this research study, depending on the type of contact (new or existing connection) and level of initial engagement with the topic (partial or high interest/response). Diagram below depicts how the depth and volume of information shared with participants increased as their level of engagement and connection grew:

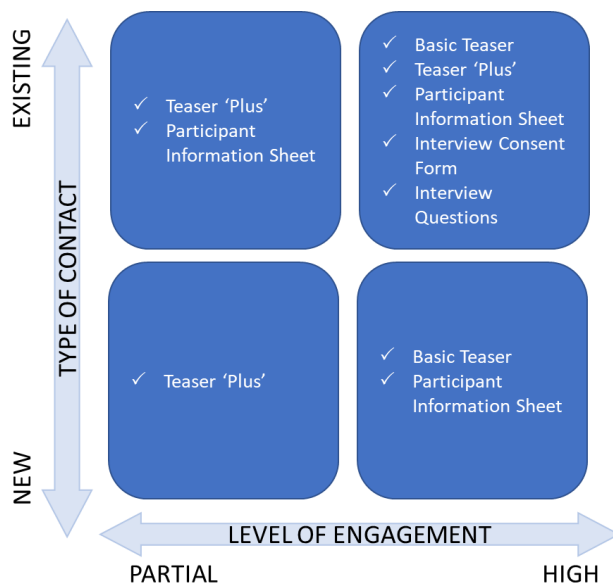


Figure 23: Varying degree of detail shared with potential participants

Step Three: Interviews

Prior to each interview, the participants were sent an email (copy is provided in APPENDIX 7), containing a copy of the Participant Information Sheet (APPENDIX 8), giving them an overview of the research project, explaining the level of commitment required on their part, as well as clarifying the ethics and confidentiality aspects of the study. Prospective interviewees who confirmed their participation in the research study were then interviewed.

As discussed earlier, semi-structured format of interviews was chosen for this study. Prior to each interview, the interviewee was also sent an Interview Consent Form (copy is provided in APPENDIX 9), to review, sign and return to the interviewer. Some signed forms have been returned electronically, while the originals of others were collected in person prior to the start of the interview. In addition, the example of interview questions was also shared with each participant in advance (APPENDIX 10).

The interview questions were prepared in advance and consisted of 27 questions representing five broad categories relating to interviewee's personal and professional background, and topics of career, gender diversity, Davies/Hampton-Alexander reviews and other government initiatives. Four of the interview questions were phrased to be specific to men, and were designed to seek out their opinions and explanations for women's under-representation in senior roles. Although women were asked similar questions, these were aimed to bring out their direct experiences with the issue of workplace gender diversity.

Eight interviews were conducted with women and five with men. These lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and were held one-to-one, either face-to-face or telephonically. Eight interviews were conducted face-to-face (four with women and four with men) and five interviews were conducted by telephone (four with women and one with a man). Both men and women were equally content to be interviewed in person, with the exception of three interviewees, who have been abroad or on the road at the time of the interview; two others preferred the telephonic format due to time constraints.

The face-to-face interviews were conducted at a venue convenient for the participants. This included coffee shops, business centres or individual's own office. Given that this study explores personal experiences, the approval of interviewee's employers was not required. To avoid any sensitivity on employer's part, the interviews were only conducted at participants' offices if that was the interviewee's strong preference. The interview timings were selected to suit the

timetable of the interviewees, with a conscious effort to minimise any disruption to their other commitments. All interviews were conducted within the UK.

I requested each interviewee to give their consent for the interview to be audio-recorded and permission was given by all the participants. In addition to the audio-record, I took written notes, also with the interviewee's consent, documenting any specific words, facts or years that stood out. This was mainly done to ensure I had a factual back up in case the audio-record resulted in poor quality due to surrounding noise and interferences. I also took notes in the form of a field journal to record my sentiments and impressions as they were forming during each interview, which allowed me at a later stage to reflect on each phase of this research study and my role in it as a researcher (Jootun, McGhee and Marland, 2009; Smith and Firth, 2011). The field journal also formed basis for Interviewer Sentiment Analysis, an example of which is included in APPENDIX 11.

4.4.4. Data analysis methods

Data analysis is a process of inspecting, cleansing, transforming and modelling the data with a goal to discover useful information and arrive to informing conclusions (Bihani and Patil, 2014). With the help of data analysis process, I aimed to narrow down the abundance of data and translate it into meaningful insights. There is a variety of data analysis techniques available that can be applied in both quantitative and qualitative research with recognisable differences between the two methodologies. In the context of this research, however, I will take a closer look at data analysis process from qualitative perspective.

Similar to other research studies that follow qualitative methodology, I began performing data analysis as soon the data became available and continued carrying on the analysis throughout the entire data collection phase (Savenye and Robinson, 2005).

Data analysis in qualitative research is exploratory in nature as it tries to identify common patterns within the qualitative data made up of non-numeric information, in the case of this research: transcripts, notes, audio recordings, and critically analyse them (Bhatia, 2018).

I considered several methods that could be used to analyse qualitative data for this research study: content analysis, narrative analysis, discourse analysis, grounded theory and framework analysis. **Framework analysis** (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994), was of a particular interest for this research study, because it was adopted as my data analysis method of choice.

Framework analysis

Framework analysis was developed in 1994 by two qualitative researchers (Jane Ritchie and Liz Spencer) at the UK National Centre for Social Research. Although it is regarded to be quite similar to the grounded theory, it is also considered a more advanced and highly structured approach to qualitative data analysis (Smith and Firth, 2011).

Framework analysis is well suited for research studies that aim to analyse concrete issues (the issue of women's under-representation in top jobs of FTSE-100 companies), explore specific questions (what are the perceived causes this under-representation), work with a pre-determined sample of participants (top executives of the UK FTSE-100 companies), and may be bound by time constraints (for as long as gender diversity still remains a topical issue or before the identified participants leave their executive roles and/or the corporate world entirely).

Ritchie and Spencer (1994) suggest that although framework analysis may generate theories, the primary goal of this method is to describe and interpret what is happening in a particular context. This proposition is very appropriate for this research study, as it became clear from the early stages of data collection process, and was reconfirmed at later stages of data analysis, that new theoretical justifications, that may explain the lack of gender diversity at executive levels of the UK leading private sector companies, were unlikely to emerge. Strong existing theoretical frameworks stood behind the topic of gender diversity, such as the theory of gendered organisations (Acker, 1990, 1992, 2021), the preference theory (Hakim, 1998, 2006) and the glass ceiling concept (Shinew, Anderson and Arnold, 1999). Some of their elements might still be relevant, but some others were outdated and no longer applied to the present context of the corporate reality. Thus, framework analysis was particularly useful in helping to build on several partially applicable theoretical explanations in order to develop a blended theoretical view by way of organising data by main themes, concepts and categories (Ritchie, Spencer and O'Connor, 2003).

Framework analysis helped me to introduce a structured method of sorting the data in accordance with key issues and themes, and consisted of five stages:

- 1) Familiarisation
- 2) Identification of a thematic framework
- 3) Indexing, sorting and coding
- 4) Data charting

5) Mapping and interpretation

It is important that I elaborate in more detail on how these data analysis stages have translated within the context of my research study process.

Stage 1: Familiarisation

With 13 audio-recordings and pages of field notes on hand, the first step was for me to familiarise myself with fieldwork data.

Firstly, all of the audio recordings were transcribed. Instead of outsourcing this task, I intentionally chose to undertake my own transcribing. Transcribing my own interviews provided me with two advantages. Firstly, this allowed me to reconnect with the data. As some of the interviews were conducted several months prior to the transcribing process, it was helpful for me to re-immense into the topic and get re-acquainted with individual views of the interviewees. Secondly, transcribing gave me an opportunity to re-live each interview and explore my own feelings as an interviewer, further adding sentiments to my field journal.

In search for an optimal transcription tool, I have tested such software as Express Dictate and Speech to Text application. Some of the sampled tools generated poor quality of transcription, while others did not prove user friendly. Ultimately, I have chosen to invest in professional transcribing software (Express Scribe) and hardware (Infinity Foot Control and Spectra Headphone Set), finding a credible balance between time efficiency and output quality.

Stage 2: Identification of a thematic framework

In parallel to the transcribing process I was able to start constructing the initial thematic framework. Here I was working with five varieties of data simultaneously, which enabled me to monitor two levels of saturation: data and thematic saturation. Firstly, while reviewing the data collected as part of the interviews, I monitored for the degree to which new data repeated what was expressed in previous interviews. As soon as I started encountering the same comments repeatedly, I knew the data saturation point had been reached (Fusch and Ness, 2015). Similarly, during the data analysis process, I monitored for the emergence of new codes and themes. As soon as I encountered non-emergence of new themes, I knew the thematical saturation point was reached (Given, 2016).

While transcribing the first two interviews several distinctive varieties of data started to surface. While at this stage the emerging data was too rich, an initial set of topics was starting to form,

echoing some of the issues and opinions that I uncovered as part of literature review. The examples of emerging, yet still very general topics, included:

- Pipeline
- Merit
- Networking
- Role of mentors
- Ambition
- Childcare
- Supportive partner
- Opportunity

Stage 3: Indexing, sorting and coding

At this stage I could already see a possibility of funnelling these emerging topics further. At the end of each transcription I would go over the interview transcript once again and extract statements and quotations in support of data that I could now sort and group into the following categories:

- 1) Main interview points
- 2) How does the interview answer the research questions?
- 3) Interviewer sentiments

Having conducted this initial data extraction for several interviews, two additional areas of potential interest started to emerge:

- 4) Recurring statements
- 5) Contradictions

While the first three areas pertained to each individual interview, the latter two opened an opportunity for future data comparison between interviews.

For coding purposes and to ensure confidentiality, all data gathered was anonymised. In all the records the names of the participants were substituted with an anonymous code, a pseudonym (a list can be found in APPENDIX 6). Each pseudonym corresponded to the participant number, which was allocated following the order that interviews took place. All women were given a pseudonym of a randomly selected female name starting with 'F', while men's pseudonyms corresponded to male names starting with 'M'. The findings of this study were also presented

anonymously in Chapter Five, where no specific reference is made to individuals, organisations or any personal circumstances that might act as identifying features.

Stage 4: Data charting

As the next step I extracted each of the several categories into a common comprehensive list with an objective to group each type into overarching themes.

From the ‘Main Interview Points’ data I was able to extract some unique views and corresponding statements that stood out in each interview. After I extracted these points from each individual interview into a combined list, I was able to group the data into large themes. Initially I was able to come up with 18 themes, which I then revisited and funnelled down into 14 themes such as: ‘Childcare & Support Mechanisms’ and ‘On mentors, roles models and inspirational figures’.



Figure 24: Data charting of ‘Main Interview Points’ category

Each theme contained the supporting quotes and was split by gender, as depicted in APPENDIX 12.

Similar data extraction and funnelling exercise were conducted with ‘How does the interview answer the research question?’ category. Firstly, I extracted supporting data from each interview that responded to the primary research question of this study: What are the perceived explanations of women’s under-representation at the executive directorship level of the FTSE-100 companies in the UK? I then merged the answers from all of the interviews and grouped the

responses into themes. I was able to identify seven themes, ranging from 'Obstacles and Barriers' to 'Work and Family Life Balance Strategies'

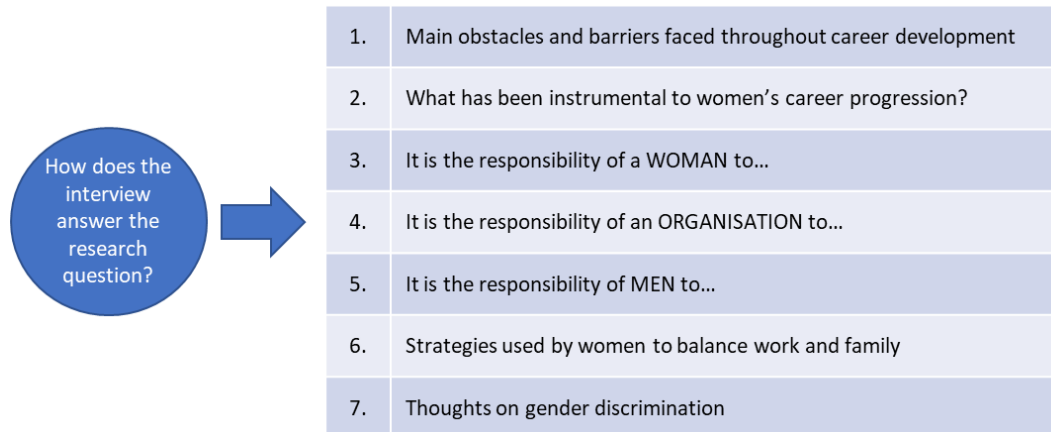


Figure 25: Data charting of 'How does the interview answer the research question' category

Interviewer sentiment analysis contained a summary of the various impressions and feelings that I experienced as an interviewer. Reflections on this data helped in the analysis of my development as a researcher and formed basis for the assessment of my role and the reliability of this study.

In addition, while transcribing the data I came across various contradictory statements, where the interviewee would make one point, but would then go on to self-contradict in the next sentence. Rather than considering such self-contradictions as undermining the reliability and validity of data, I chose to analyse them on the assumption that these could reflect the contradictions that were encountered in personal and professional lives of the interviewees (Lamb and Fauchier, 2001; Sølvsberg and Jarness, 2019). For this I extracted all the instances of the initial point that was being made along with its corresponding contradiction, and segregated these by gender. This exercise generated a list of 18 contradictions ready for consideration during the next level of data analysis (a copy can be found in APPENDIX 13).

While transcribing the interviews I also came across recurring statements, where several interviewees would make a very similar point, often using the same wording in their description. I found such similarities interesting to be considered for an in-depth analysis and thus created a list comprising of 17 such recurring statements (copy can be found in APPENDIX 14).

Stage 5: Mapping and interpretation

With the variety of data extracted, I was ready to move to the next stage of funnelling the vast volume of data, analysing and interpreting it, and determining what information would be relevant and useful for this research study to be able to make a unique contribution.

Firstly, I revisited the 'Main interview points', 'How does the interview answer the research question?' and 'Recurring Statements' with an objective of grouping the data and identifying predominant primary and secondary themes. I was able to identify five primary themes, each containing between two and four secondary themes.

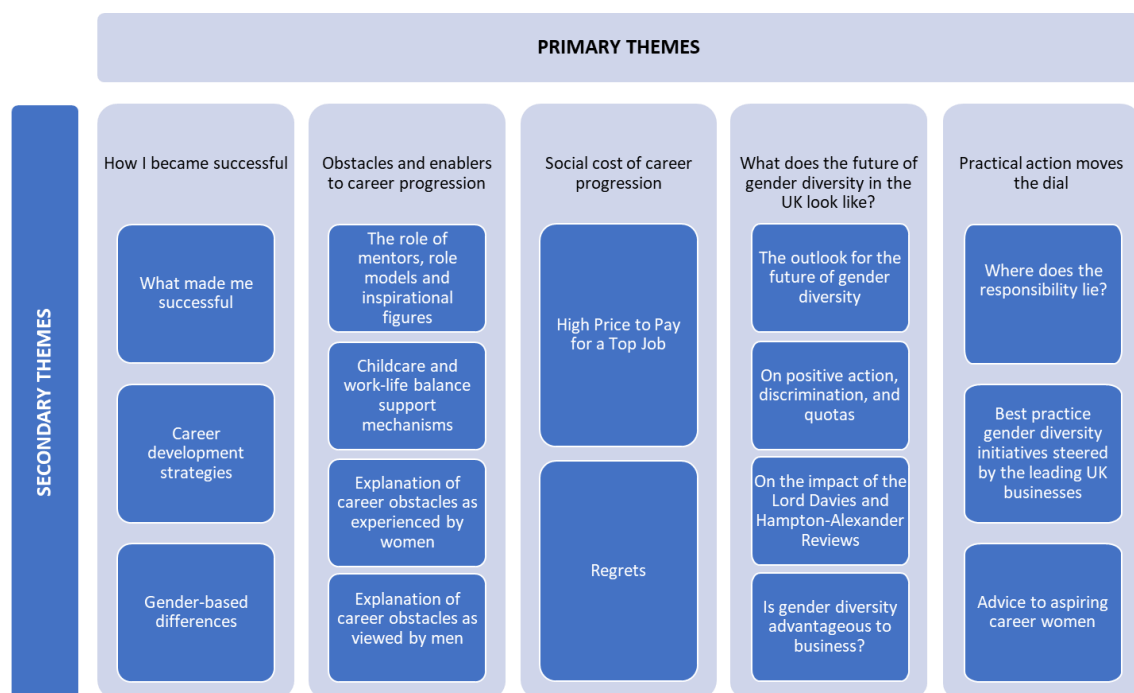


Figure 26: Primary and secondary themes identified

Having arrived at the five primary themes, I have consolidated and analysed them in the context of their impact on theory, future research and organisational practice. At this stage I was confident that these themes represented key findings that could help make unique contribution to research. With this confidence I was able to commence working on the Findings section of this thesis, where I would elaborate on each primary and secondary theme in more detail in Chapter Five.

On reflection, I came across several challenges when applying a framework method of data analysis. Firstly, devising and refining a thematic framework is not an automatic or mechanical process, but involves both logical and intuitive thinking (Srivastava and Thomson, 2009). It has

thus taken a lot of my time and resources to 'tease out' the emerging themes and group them into workable, meaningful and interesting clusters. Secondly, the terminology used as part of framework analysis can be confusing and daunting: 'index', 'coding', 'themes', 'categories' may be interpreted differently by each researcher. When working through the various stages I decided to follow the recommendation of Ritchie, Spencer and O'Connor (2003), who advised not to get caught up trying to work out the nuances and terminology differences, but to concentrate on the logic behind the analytical stages and to be guided by the process and not the technical jargon. Finally, as the qualitative data gathered were quite ambiguous and subjective, I found the interpretation to be a complex and intricate process, where it was crucial for me not to lose sight of the research purpose and its primary and secondary questions throughout every stage of the analysis (Parkinson *et al.*, 2016). I thus ensured that I continuously reverted back to the research problem and research questions to assess whether the emerging findings were addressing these, and that the research study remained on track.

Overall, I found the application of framework process a very helpful method for data analysis in this research study. As a novice qualitative researcher, I needed a tool that would provide me with a structured, yet flexible roadmap for my data analysis process (Smith and Firth, 2011). In addition, framework analysis approach allowed me to transition back and forth between the data, move between the individual and multiple participant accounts, looking for cross-lineages and common trends, which supported the formation of the final themes (Gale *et al.*, 2013). Also, as framework is a highly structured approach of data analysis, it has helped me to keep a clear track of my path of analysis and maintain a detailed and transparent record of the process and the data (Tobin and Begley, 2004; Vivar *et al.*, 2007).

4.5. Quality assurance in the context of qualitative research

In this section I explore what quality means in the context of qualitative research and explain how I have approached quality assurance as part of this study.

I start by presenting the various roles I have adopted as a researcher throughout the study and explain how my prior knowledge, interests and affiliations have influenced, both positively and negatively, every stage of this research. I then discuss the importance of quality in research and present a quality assessment criteria model used specifically in this study. The final section discusses the significance of ethical considerations in research, where I describe the measures I have undertaken to ensure this study follows strong moral standards of conduct.

4.5.1. Researcher's role

Given that the researcher is the principal instrument for collecting and analysing the research data (Creswell, 2014), my role was critical to shaping the direction and outcome of this research study.

Specifically, this research study is qualitative in nature, where I explore people's thoughts and feelings, and the impact that these thoughts and feelings have on individual behaviours. My role as a qualitative researcher is to attempt to access the thoughts and feelings of research study participants (Sutton and Austin, 2015).

The roles of actor, learner, and expert

The interpretivist paradigm which influenced my ontological assumptions shaped my researcher's relationship with the participants (Sciarra, 1999). In this qualitative research relationship I adopted two distinct roles while conducting this study: of an **actor** and a **learner**. I entered the world of other 'actors', the research participants, "...not as a person who knows everything, but as a person who has come to learn; not as a person who wants to be like them, but as a person who wants to know what it is like to be them" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1997, p.79).

In addition, during my research, I found that assuming the role of an **expert** helped me to gain access to participants more easily. Considering that one of greatest challenges in conducting research successfully is gaining access to the field of prospective participants (Patton, 2002; Shenton and Hayter, 2004; Okumus, Altinay and Roper, 2007), the role of an expert helped me to open doors and establish credibility and trust with the interviewees.

Also, my own prior knowledge, interests and affiliations have influenced every phase of the research study, from design through to the data collection and interpretation stages (Sciarra, 1999). It is important to explore in more detail how my knowledge and affiliations have benefited or potentially hindered the progress of this research study.

I am a mature research student with over 18 years of Human Resources management experience within the corporate world. In my last three roles I have operated at an executive level, forming part of the Executive Committee, and reporting directly to the CEO of the business. Having held senior leadership roles with several multinational companies, I have regularly interacted with Chief Executive Officers and Directors of large organisations. During my career I have also spent several years within the executive search industry, which helped me build a vast professional

network. This professional network proved a valuable benefit to my role as a qualitative researcher.

Researcher's experience

My professional experience in running an HR function and an executive search practice gave me a strong background in structuring and conducting interviews of various types (structured, unstructured, face-to-face, telephonic, formal, probing, informational). This experience also helped me to build a skillset for analysing the findings and drawing conclusions.

In addition, my previous experience of communicating with senior executives within a corporate setting facilitated the flow of communication with research participants, starting from the introductory stages and through to the actual interview. I felt and exhibited confidence in understanding the various situations, organisational settings and corporate terminology described by the participants during the interviews, which contributed to building my credibility with them and helped me to improve the quality and rigour of this study.

Researcher's professional network

This research study involved interviews with top executives of British leading businesses, including women executive directors across all functions and former or current men Chief Executive Officers, Managing Directors and General Managers of the UK FTSE-100 companies. Gaining access to senior level executives was anticipated to be a critical, yet one of the most challenging elements of this study.

When exploring the topic of accessing the field of research participants, Gummesson (2000) identifies three different types of access. Firstly, physical access gives the researcher an ability to get close to the participant. Secondly, continued access refers to an environment where opportunities for ongoing physical access are created. And final, mental access, enables researcher to grasp what is happening within the investigated setting, and why (Okumus, Altinay and Roper, 2007).

I found that to create and maintain all the three types of access: physical, continued and mental, was paramount to the success of this research study. Some elements of my background and experience had been beneficial, while others had proven to be a hindrance.

Firstly, my vast professional network helped with gaining access to prospective participants. While relying heavily on LinkedIn at the initial stages of devising the target list, using my existing connections gave me an opportunity to build on the existing level of trust and facilitated gaining

participants' agreement to form part of the study. One of LinkedIn's features allows an individual to see the connections of the person who is making contact. When the prospective participants I was approaching saw the quality of my professional network, it helped to establish credibility and gain their attention.

My professional network also helped with snowball sampling, where interviewed participants were able to nominate others who met the criteria for interview. It has to be noted, however, that although my professional network is broad and includes a large number of senior executives, not many of them work currently or in the past with FTSE-100 organisations. Given that FTSE-100 universe had been specifically chosen for this research study, this led to a smaller sample group of participants than I originally anticipated, as discussed earlier in section 4.4.3. of this thesis.

Researcher's background and experience limitations

On the other hand, while I am an experienced interviewer, the interview work that I had undertaken previously was conducted within a different context and purpose to academic research. At work I interviewed mainly with a purpose to evaluate, assess and form opinions, which almost always led to a concrete decision or outcome. In the context of academic research my primary interview purpose was to explore and be open to potentially arrive at several alternative outcomes, while being particularly conscious about the influence of my own personal opinions. I had to re-adapt my mindset from business interviewing to an academic interviewing; constantly referring to the purpose of my research and the research questions helped me in this process. Moreover, fieldwork in the context of PhD research required me to develop additional skills that were relevant to the academic environment, such as qualitative data analysis, usage of analytical software, academic writing and critical reflective thinking.

Finally, my own experience as a woman senior executive who built a professional career within a FTSE-350 business and witnessed some of the obstacles and enablers along the way, could have influenced my view and might have marginally biased my role as a qualitative researcher. I will explain how I have mitigated the influence of such biases in the next section.

4.5.2. Quality assessment criteria used in this research study

It is my firm belief that quality assessment of a research study forms basis for building trust in the work of the research community. The principles and standards that underpin this

assessment ensure that the way the research is designed, conducted and disseminated, exhibits a degree of excellence, or in other terms, is of good quality (Andrew and Halcomb, 2009).

Quality Assessment Criteria

Generally, two concepts -- reliability and validity – are viewed as the primary standards for evaluating research findings (Middleton, 2019). However, other scholars offer a more expanded view and suggest that the quality and rigour of a research study can be assessed using such evaluation criteria as generalisability and replicability, in addition to validity and reliability (Trochim and Donnelly, 2001; Andrew and Halcomb, 2009).

In contrast to quantitative research, where it is possible to strengthen the data accuracy by statistical methods, issues of validity and reliability are particularly challenging for qualitative researchers. As stated by Creswell (2014, p.157), “qualitative researchers have no single stance or consensus on addressing traditional topics such as validity and reliability in qualitative studies”.

To help in establishing quality assessment criteria specific to qualitative research, concepts of credibility and dependability have been suggested to be more appropriate to gauge the validity of qualitative research (Creswell and Miller, 2000; Green *et al.*, 2007).

The Four-Dimensions Criteria

Lincoln and Guba (1990) explored the quality assessment criteria in the context of qualitative research and created the ‘Four-Dimensions Criteria (FDC)’. Their stringent criteria of evaluating quality of a research study consisted of such measures as credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability.

This research study sets out to analyse the issue of gender diversity with a specific aim to identify the perceived causes of women’s under-representation at the executive directorship level of the FTSE-100 companies in the UK. I am committed to produce a research of high-quality standard and to offer a credible study that can be respected for its theoretical, knowledge-based, as well as practical contribution to research, specifically given the fact that its findings can potentially have implications for future research, policy and organisational practice.

Given the qualitative methodology of this research, I believe that Lincoln and Guba’s Four-Dimensions Criteria: credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability, is an appropriate framework to apply in order to assess the quality and rigour of this research study. With the four criteria in mind, I have undertaken several action steps throughout the stages of

this study (from design, through to data collection, analysis and dissemination of findings) to ensure the overall quality of this study is evaluated positively.

Credibility

I have approached this evaluation criterion with the purpose to establish confidence that the findings from participants' perspective are true, credible and believable. For this I have adopted the following strategies:

Strategy	Specific actions to improve credibility
Prolonged and varied engagement with each setting	It is estimated that as an interviewer I have spent approximately four hours in communication with each participant. This includes the actual interview time (between 45 and 90 minutes per interviewee), as well as the period of correspondence before and after the interviews.
Interviewing process and techniques	- I have tested the interview protocol in a prototype setting as part of 'Women in Hospitality 2020' research project that I formed part of during prior years. This enabled me to practice the process, improve the areas of weakness and build on strengths. - I ensured that consistent application of the chosen research methodology, including using the same communication tools with all the participants and posing the same interview questions. - The intentional choice of semi-structured interview format helped to avoid leading the interviewees and gave me the opportunity to 'probe' answers. - Through semi-structured format I could build on participants' responses, while at the same time following a pre-determined list of themes and questions.
Establishing investigators' authority	As an HR professional, I am an experienced interviewer with 18 years of experience with interviewing nuances. I am also familiar with corporate dynamics and business jargon.

	▪ Transparent and honest communication with all the participants took place. ▪ Participants' consent was sought throughout the data collection stage of the study and no data was gathered without the knowledge of interviewees.
Collection of referential adequacy materials	▪ I have kept my researcher's field notes in a securely stored location and analysed them as part of my reflections.
Peer debriefing	▪ Regular progress update meetings have been held with my supervisory team of Oxford Brookes University. ▪ Constant 'fitness for purpose' check took place by way of my regular reflections on the progress of the research, the interviews and the suitability of emerging themes.

Dependability

In order to produce a dependable research study, I focused on ensuring that the findings of this qualitative inquiry could be repeated within the same cohort of participants, coders and context and, once replicated, it would generate consistent findings. The following strategies helped me achieve this:

Strategy	Specific actions to improve dependability
Rich descriptions of the study methods	▪ I have drafted the research study protocol for this study which has been scrutinised to ensure its richness throughout the registration, UREC approval and transfer processes as part of Oxford Brookes University milestone measure.
Establishing an audit trail	▪ I have kept a detailed record of the step-by-step process of every stage of this research study.
Stepwise replication of the data	▪ The step described above has ensured that it would be possible to repeat this study, if conducted by different researchers and with different participants, but following the same methods. ▪ The audit trail helped to ensure that similar findings could be drawn from a research study as a result.

	▪ Some and/or all parts of this research study would become openly available to the public. ▪ Interview transcripts and interviewer notes would be available to participants on demand. The research abstract and thesis would be accessible to a wider public at the first possible opportunity.
--	--

Confirmability

I adopted an assumption that a confirmable study was a neutral and objective study, where the findings were shaped by the participants' responses, and not by the biases, personal interests or motivations of the researcher. Thus, when improving the confirmability of this research study I strived to strengthen the confidence that the results would be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers.

Strategy	Specific actions to improve confirmability
Reflexivity	▪ Regular peer reviews took place throughout this research study by way of frequent brainstorming discussions with my supervisory team. ▪ The progress of my research was presented at its various stages to the team of fellow research students and Professors from Oxford Brookes University, allowing me to build on their feedback, critique and suggestions. ▪ I utilised a reflective fieldnote journal to document my sentiments after every interview. ▪ I regularly reflected on my progress, verbally and in writing, as part of the End of Year reports to Oxford Brookes University team. ▪ A conscious effort to stay objective when collecting and analysing the data was made to ensure that any of my residual biases, personal interests and motivations had no impact on the study.
Triangulation	▪ I applied a combination of theoretical and methodological data sources, and utilised multiple approaches to analyse

	the data, as described in Research Methodology section of this thesis.
--	--

Transferability

In the context of this study, high degree of transferability meant that the findings of this research could be generalised and applied to other contexts and settings. To strengthen this research study's transferability element, I adopted the following strategies:

Strategy	Specific actions to improve transferability
Purposeful sampling technique to establish a sample population group	▪ Bearing the research problem and the research questions in mind, I selected a sample of executive directors within UK FTSE-100 listed companies with a view that these could be logically assumed to be representative of the population.
Data and thematic saturation	▪ 13 interviews have been conducted, deemed a sufficiently large number to determine that data and thematic saturation point has been reached, as discussed in section 4.4.4. of this thesis. ▪ Data collected and themes identified as part of data analysis process, were monitored for non-emergence of new elements to ensure saturation point had been reached.

Finally, as part of my commitment to high quality research, I strived to abide by the strictest standards of ethical research practice and remained acutely aware of the limitations that this research study might have. Both of these areas are discussed in more detail further on in this thesis.

4.5.3. Ethical considerations

In the context of academic research, ethical standards are not regarded as a mere set of rules or a formal institutional requirement, but instead as an integral element of research process (Ciuk and Latusek, 2018). Ethical considerations are vital when it comes to justifying, legitimising and protecting the researchers and their study (Creswell, 2014). Moreover, sound ethical considerations help protect research participants and build trust between the researcher and participants (Israel and Hay, 2006).

There were several reasons why I considered it particularly important to adhere to ethical norms while conducting this study.

Firstly, as with any research, my aim was to ensure that my study was honest. Ethical rules helped safeguard the data, methods and findings of this research study from being falsified or misrepresented. Thus, ethical principles have supported the purpose of my research by promoting truthful knowledge and reducing the chance of an error.

Secondly, ethical principles helped to promote my socially responsible behaviour as a researcher in order to safeguard the health, safety, wellbeing and rights of the participants. This ensured that my research produced no negative consequences to the public, participants and others involved in this study.

Additionally, ethical standards are designed to protect intellectual property interests, such as copyrights and patents. They helped to ensure that all the contributors to my research study are acknowledged and no work appropriation took place in the form of plagiarism.

Moreover, throughout this study ethical rules helped to ensure that I was accountable for my work. When conducting a research study, I was conscious that as a researcher I had specific obligations to the stakeholders involved in the process: the participants of this study, Oxford Brookes University as the institution I was representing, my supervisory team. Ethical standards warranted that I was held liable against fulfilling these obligations.

Ethical issues may arise in the design, implementation and as a consequence of the research study, and should be considered carefully by the researcher at every stage of research (Shamoo and Resnik, 2009). Thus, to ensure that no ethical aspect of this study is overlooked, I have followed the guidelines outlined in the Oxford Brookes Research Ethics for Research Involving Human Participants Code of Practice.

Application for approval to conduct a research study involving human participants has been made to the Oxford Brookes University Research Ethics Committee in January 2017 prior to commencement of the fieldwork stage of this research. Approval for the research study to begin was granted on 13th April 2017 (APPENDIX 3). A subsequent approval for an extension has been requested in January 2019 and received on 1 February 2019, valid for one year (APPENDIX 4).

The following steps have been undertaken to ensure that the research participants, the researcher and the research study are safeguarded.

No research should cause harm:

This research was undertaken strictly bearing in mind that it should cause no harm to participants, researcher or any other stakeholders involved in this study. The participants comprised of men and women senior executives and CEOs of several of the UK FTSE-100 organisations, falling within the 48-66 years age bracket.

I was acutely aware of gender differences and whilst interviewing professional women, I anticipated the possibility of them recalling particularly difficult experiences or choices they made to get to the career level they were at. In the event where an interviewee could become distressed or upset during an interview, I was prepared to stop the interview and offer emotional support and compassion, depending on the situation. In addition, I intended to rely on my HR background as an experienced interviewer and employee relations manager, to help me to manage the situation sensitively and respectfully.

Coercion:

All participants were recruited on a voluntary basis, giving every individual the freedom to decide whether to take part. Participants have also been given freedom to withdraw from the research process at any stage of the study without having to specify a reason for withdrawal.

Data collection has been conducted by way of semi-structured interviews. I ensured that the interview questions were open-ended in nature, to avoid leading the participants towards a particular response.

Confidentiality and anonymity:

When choosing the interview venue for face-to-face interviews, I gave interviewees the choice of the location. To ensure confidentiality, I strived as much as possible to avoid participant's office as an interview venue. However, there were cases where interviewees insisted on his/her office as a location. In these cases, I made sure to specifically check with the interviewee that being interviewed at the workplace and/or during office hours was a reasonable and comfortable practice.

Anonymity was an important aspect of this study, especially in the cases where participants described their negative experiences with their employers. The audio-recorded interviews have been transcribed by me alone. In all the records, the names of the participants and their

organisations have been substituted with a pseudonym. The findings of this study have also been presented anonymously.

The data has been stored in three locations: on Google Drive, with which the Oxford Brookes University has a storage agreement in place; my personal firewall protected laptop; and my external memory bank, as a back-up. All the three repositories are password protected and can be accessed only by the researcher.

Consent:

Prior to the interview, each interviewee was sent an Interview Consent Form to review, sign and return to me, along with a copy of questions that would be asked during the interview. The Interview Consent form asked for the interviewee's permission to audio-record the interview, which none of the participants refused. In addition, each interviewee was asked for and granted their permission for me to take notes during the interview.

Dissemination of research findings:

Some parts of this research study have already been disseminated and other segments will be publicised through a variety of channels.

Firstly, the interim results of the study have been presented during the 20:20 workshop sessions organised by the Oxford Brookes University Business School on 4th of December 2019 for the team of fellow research students and Oxford Brookes University Professors.

Secondly, the PhD thesis will be made available in its entirety as part of the RADAR repository of the Oxford Brookes University Library. In addition, an abstract from this thesis will be published on the website of the Centre for Diversity Policy Research and Practice at Oxford Brookes University.

The executive summary of the key findings will be sent to the interviewed participants of the study by way of an email. In addition, a digital copy of the full and final PhD thesis will be shared, on request, with the participants.

In summary, every stage of this research study has been conducted within ethically permissible boundaries and data protection guidelines. No issues that have not been anticipated by the researcher, my supervisory team or the Oxford Brookes University Research Ethics Committee have been experienced or reported.

4.6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the earlier discussion has highlighted the significance of research design decisions and presented a variety of alternatives that are available for a researcher in order to produce a credible, high quality and valuable study.

Through the research design decision flow, I explored each of the components individually and described my own position as a researcher within each of them, summarising the research design of this study in a clearly defined framework.

I started by identifying the purpose of this research study, setting out arguments for its exploratory nature and defining a primary and three secondary questions that this study aimed to explore possible explanations for. I then discussed my selection of the logical reasoning method, highlighting abductive reasoning as the preferred approach for this study. In continuation, I explored the various paradigms through the impact that they had on my ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions, focusing specifically on interpretivist and pragmatist ideologies. The next section provided arguments for my choice of qualitative research methodology and within that, I highlighted the reasons behind selecting semi-structured in-depth interviews and a framework method, as my preferred techniques for data collection and data analysis processes, respectively. The final shape that the research design of this study assumed is depicted below:

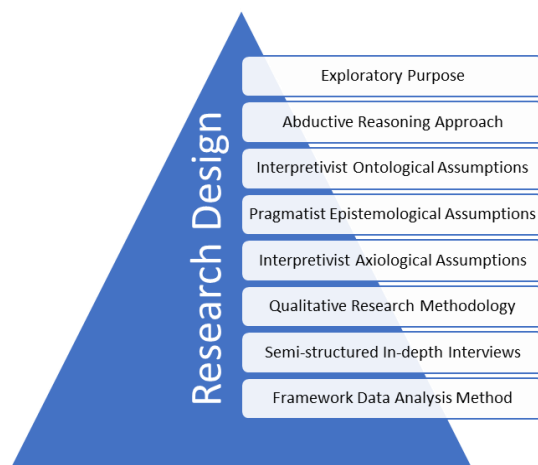


Figure 27: Research design pyramid summarising the structure of this research study

In this chapter I also highlighted the importance of quality assurance in qualitative research and discussed the quality assessment criteria including validity, reliability, generalisability and replicability.

I concluded that neither criterion alone is sufficient for good quality research. For example, a study can consistently produce the same result, however, if the research tool measures the wrong elements, the study will not be of a good quality. In addition, specifically within qualitative research, it is often not possible to strengthen the data accuracy by statistical methods. Thus, issues of validity and reliability are particularly challenging for qualitative researchers.

This chapter described specific action steps I undertook to ensure the overall high quality of this research study using Lincoln and Guba's 'Four-Dimensions Criteria', based on the measures of credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability. In the final section I evaluated the significance of ethical standards for this qualitative research study and presented the examples of moral conduct and behaviour I adhered to, following the guidelines outlined by the Oxford Brookes University Research Ethics for Research involving Human Participants Code of Practice.

CHAPTER FIVE:

FINDINGS

5.1. Introduction

This chapter explores the findings from participants' responses, which are the result of the data, collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and analysed using the framework methodology.

I start by re-introducing the group of interviewed participants, reiterating why they have been purposefully selected to represent the sample population for this research study. I then recap the key themes that have emerged as part of the data analysis process and explain the order and format that the findings are presented in, to cover these themes.

The main part of this chapter was dedicated to the quotes and citations from the interviewees, as they expressed their views on workplace gender diversity in general, and reflected on the development of their careers in particular.

I conclude by summarising the key messages, that have transpired, and explain their significance in preparation for the discussion which follows in Chapter Six.

5.2. Participant group

In this research study I explored the career journeys of 13 top executives, while trying to establish what enabled or hindered the development of their successful careers. For this I purposefully selected a group of eight women and five men senior executives.

The interviewed participants represented nine FTSE-100 industries, including Tobacco, Mining, Oil & Gas, Telecommunications, Airline & Travel, Pharmaceuticals, Banking & Financial Services, Retail, Professional Services, and came from eight corporate functions, including Marketing, HR, Operations, PR & Communications, Research & Development, Legal Affairs, Risk Management and General Management.

Women were represented by either current or former executive directors of the UK FTSE-100 businesses. Men held either current or former Chief Executive Officer, Managing Director or General Manager positions of the UK FTSE-100 companies. Women were chosen to help explore

the barriers and enablers they themselves faced during their careers and to help understand the reasons, why women at certain levels opted out of the carrier progression. Male CEOs were chosen as key decision-makers in hiring and promotional matters to provide their perspective on why women were under-represented at executive director level.

For coding purposes and to ensure confidentiality, all data gathered was anonymised. In all the records, participants' names were substituted with an anonymous code, a pseudonym. Each pseudonym corresponded to the participant number, which was allocated following the order that interviews took place. All women were given a pseudonym of a randomly selected female name starting with 'F', while men's pseudonyms corresponded to male names starting with 'M'. The findings of this research study were presented anonymously, where any specific reference made by the interviewees to organisations, names or any personal circumstances that might act as identifying features, were substituted by fictional names.

5.3. Primary and secondary themes identified

As described in Chapter Four on Research Design and Methodology, the final stage of data analysis using the framework approach involved mapping and interpretation of data gathered through participants' interviews. Having grouped the data, I was able to identify five primary themes, each containing between two and four secondary themes. These are depicted below:

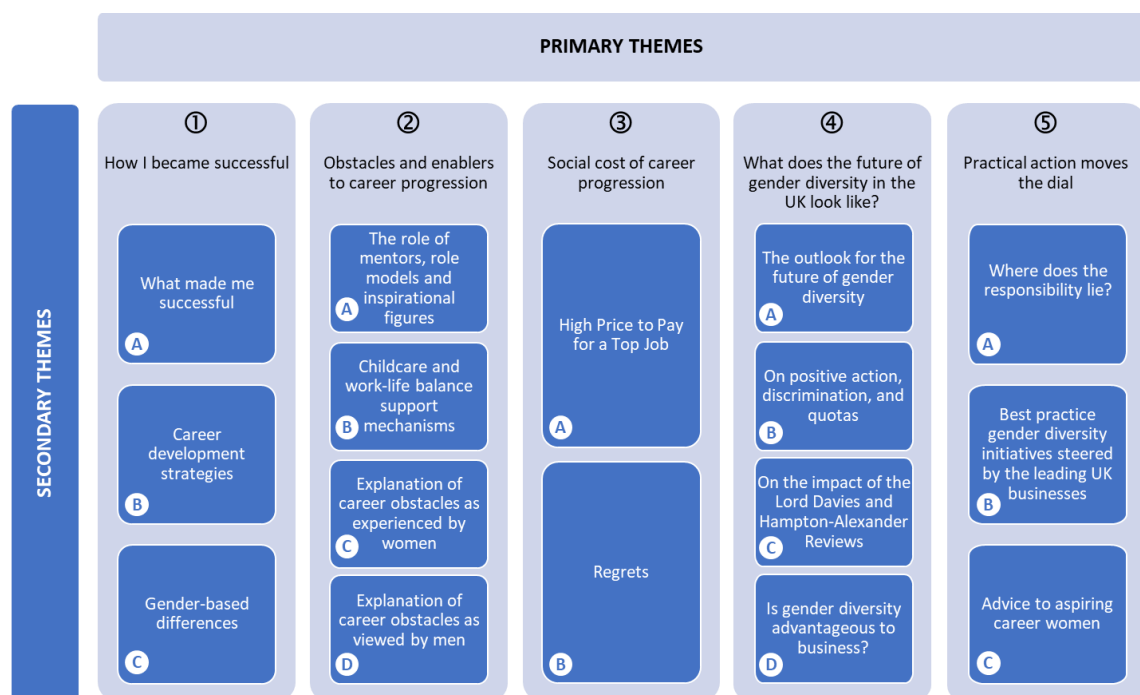


Figure 28: Final grouping of primary and secondary themes identified during data analysis

I would like to explore certain secondary themes within gender specific findings context; as an example, I would like to suggest to contrast the type of career obstacles cited by men and women, as they reflected on the development of their individual careers.

The findings are grouped by primary themes, whereby the views of the interviewed participants are presented as corresponding a specific secondary theme, each of them building into its primary counterpart.

5.4. Primary Theme 1: 'How I became successful'

The term 'successful career' in this research study is used in the context of a person achieving a senior hierarchical position within an organisation, specifically executive directorship level, and having attained a substantial scope of influence and decision-making.

Before I embarked on the analysis of responses pertaining to the topic of success, I anticipated to find a straightforward list, a standard 'recipe for success', where the majority of interviewed executives would highlight the same few 'bread and butter' skills which, as they would collectively have agreed, got them to the level of professional success they currently enjoyed. The reality turned out to be much more complex, comprised of very unique and very personal examples of the various behaviours, strategies and qualities that helped the interviewees reach and retain their career-highs. Most of the skills described by them were acquired and developed at various points of their career journeys. The diversity of these responses is presented below.

5.4.1. Secondary Theme A-1: 'What made me successful'

In this section I explored the successful careers of the interviewed executives from the perspective of specific actions, decisions and qualities demonstrated by them throughout their career progression, and which in their opinion underpinned their professional success and enabled them to reach the positions of substantial authority and respectable status. I start by examining the views of interviewed men and women, with the aim of building towards the comparison of these accounts and exploring any gender-specific factors examined as part Secondary Theme C-1 findings.

One of the elements that resonated with several of the interviewees' views on professional success was opportunistic mindset. Both men and women spoke of how being open to change and remaining curious to new experiences and knowledge were the key drivers of new

opportunities throughout their careers. They recalled that risk taking and adaptability were instrumental to their ability to reach their individual levels of professional success:

"...I was pretty open to any challenges and open to going out of my comfort zone. I was not afraid to jump in. Another thing is speaking out and asking questions, getting to know what is offered and not being afraid to jump out of your comfort zone." (Felicity)

"...I am very open to opportunities and change. I have had a lot of opportunities...just because I have always said that I am available for opportunities. I think when you are open to them - people notice." (Flore)

"I made it a point of not saying 'no' [to an opportunity]." (Fillis)

"...a bit of an opportunistic mindset and curiosity,...always keep your options open, don't try to fix yourself too hard to a path." (Florence)

"...I have a natural drive to move forward, so after two or three years in a row I was beginning to think: "Great, what else can I do?" (Fern)

"...it has come about really: personal connections, hard work and willingness to take a risk." (Matthew)

Building professional experience, that was broader and more generalist, was credited by several participants for some of their career moves, where they chose not to specialise in any particular area too early and built a more versatile, well-rounded experience. This not only gave these executives a competent understanding of the areas beyond their immediate functions and specialisations, but created new possibilities and opened doors to additional professional opportunities:

"...I have always kept my practice very wide, not wanting to specialise in anything." (Flore)

"I had a very varied career... I moved jobs every two years. I then very deliberately joined a dot.com, ...very much to demonstrate flexibility, that I was open to new ideas, that I was not just a corporate person. And then I moved into banking." (Fillis)

"...in the early parts of our careers we have tried a lot of different things. I then specialised..." (Mark)

The interviewees highlighted, that no career could be built without an executive establishing credibility and respect through demonstrating solid work ethic and professionalism, consistently delivering over and above targets and objectives, and having a strong know-how in his or her area of expertise:

"Being very professional. And a lot of things are behind the word 'professional': following up, being organised, ...being prepared, knowing your topic." (Florence)

"I deliver very strongly. I build high performing, highly diverse teams." (Faith)

"...I did the very best that I could...and I was focused, and I delivered... And quite naturally I just got the opportunities time and time again. I am renowned for...demonstrating delivery and then getting respect." (Fiona)

"...[for] women in executive positions, you need to...have a really good sense of financial activity,...know how to read a balance sheet,...know how to read a P&L... Many women in professions like HR, Legal or Supply Chain think they cannot talk about the numbers." (Flore)

However, several participants went on to stress that hard work alone was not sufficient to establish a successful career. The interviewed executives argued that you could be the hardest worker in the whole organisation, yet, if no one knew who you were, your career progression would be hampered. To be successful, one needed to be professionally visible, making him- or herself be heard, showcasing oneself in the best possible light:

"...you need to...position yourself in the best possible light for that appointment or that promotion." (Francine)

"...showing them when I was in the room, that I did have a voice. If I look at the board that I sit on now, I am probably the most vocal on the board." (Fiona)

"Because a lot of people knew me, when things came up, I was quickly approached." (Felicity)

"You are at that table...because you have an opinion. And if you do not have an opinion, do not be there. I am hugely willing to express my opinion on things where I feel I can add value, but also not afraid to lean into a consensus." (Flore)

"I...sat on reasonably senior international groups..., so I was involved in [various] discussions." (Malcolm)

Some of the interviewed women executives stressed how, as senior executives, they developed a personal 'unique selling point' (USP), a competitive advantage comprising of one or more differentiating qualities or skills, that distinguished them from the others and made them be sought after. Some interviewees spoke of such USPs as their international exposure, global experience, ability to embrace and engage cultural, and often other types of diversity. Others highlighted the importance of having experienced turn-around situations, having navigated through poor performing environments and towards saving the business on the brink of a collapse.

"I needed to have international exposure,...I needed to be ready to move out of my home country to eventually finish at the top...level role." (Florence)

"In the case where I was, this was a turnaround of an operating company,... a role where [we] have really helped the organisation to come back from the brink." (Fern)

"I speak English, French and German... My [other] competitive advantage was...my international experience and my background to deal with complicated situations..." (Felicity)

"I lived...and travelled widely abroad." (Flore)

"I went to what was a train crash, trying to fix it. It is the hardest thing in the world to fix a business..." (Martin)

One interviewee reflected how, at the very beginning of her career, being a woman in a male-dominated industry was her competitive advantage. She never felt guilty that she was promoted because she was a woman, when her male-dominated employer strived to improve organisation's gender balance (*Francine*).

Echoing some elements of the mentoring and networking concepts described in Chapter Three, in many cited experiences, building networks, developing relationships, and thereafter using these established connections to one's advantage often led to the interviewees being presented with interesting opportunities, some of which gave their careers a boost. Many types of relationships cited by participants contained more of an internal focus, rather than external, reinforcing the advocacy element (Hewlett, 2013) within the mentoring concept:

"...I was working on...relationships... I would have been building individual relationships with...people, ...sounding them out... So, establishing that mutual relationship: you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours." (Fiona)

"You get there...by nurturing the relationships..." (Flore)

"...it is about networking. Who you know...really matters... [I made sure] I had the connections in the right places and was signalling: 'I am interested in other things.'" (Fern)

But above all else, most of the interviewees believed that throughout the development of their careers they relied on no one and nothing else, but themselves, building on such qualities as courage, perseverance, professionalism and resilience:



Figure 29: Skills and qualities cited by participants as critical to their professional success

However, very importantly, even if not all of the interviewees explicitly cited it, one element that seemed to unite their journey towards their current level of professional success, was their passion, their absolute commitment and dedication to their jobs, their careers and their organisations. Throughout the development of their careers, their jobs remained priority number one, standing over and above anything else:

"I have been always passionate about my work,... the people I work with and the things that I am doing". (Fern)

"...my emotional levels of engagement with this organisation at times are too strong. Because I feel it, I get it, I care about it." (Fiona)

"I probably always put the firm and my career first..." (Malcolm)

"...my career has always been very important to me ... and I've always put that ahead of work/life balance." (Mark)

In summary, it was not one specific skill, but a combination of various qualities, competencies and behaviours that were cited by interviewees as instrumental to their successful careers. Risk-taking, versatility, professionalism, visibility, commitment, dedication and building relationships were the predominant enablers described. Several of these qualities, such as risk-taking and use of relationships, resonate with some, largely masculine attributes under the gendered construction of leadership theory, which are further examined in Chapter Six: Discussion of this thesis. Most of qualities and behaviours described by the participants were not innate, but acquired and developed by the interviewees along their career journeys.

The next section moves away from qualities and explores concrete actions in the form of career development strategies that interviewed participants have resorted to, while building their successful careers.

5.4.2. Secondary Theme B-1: 'Career development strategies'

As part of this sub-theme, I set out to explore the career trajectories of the interviewees. Through their responses, I was seeking to understand how did the career development strategies differ between men and women executives, if at all, thereby exploring some of the notions uncovered as part of the gendered roles theory and certain elements of the glass ceiling concept, presented in Chapter Three. In this section I describe the reflections of the interviewed executives on what strategies they applied to their career development, how new opportunities came about, and how they made their career-related decisions and choices. I start by exploring the responses of interviewed women, before describing the reflections of men.

Career development strategies of women executives

In contrast to the previous clear-cut responses on qualities, competencies and behaviours required for success, the career development strategies described by women were more fluid and at times contradictory. I would often observe the cited examples float back and forth between being described as opportunistic or calculated. Some interviewees would attribute their success to being at the right place at the right time, yet they would give examples of purposefully moving towards a specific professional aim. Interviewed women reflected on the

role education played in their careers, commented on the impact of maternity breaks, considered how their level of ambition changed through the various stages of their careers and concluded that not luck, but they themselves, created new opportunities that drove their careers.

At the outset, most of the interviewed women started their professional careers after obtaining their University degrees. Some were recruited before they even took their final year exams (*Faith*). Others left the University not knowing what exactly they were going to do professionally, and accepted trainee and similar entry level roles (*Fern, Felicity, Flore*). A strong educational background seemed to be a distinctive competitive advantage for a corporate woman (*Florence, Fiona*).

Several women executives described their career trajectories as opportunistic: women agreed that in the corporate world the opportunities constantly came along. Yet, they argued, that it was up to the person to spot and grab them. Women felt that there was a small element of luck, and a big element of 'YOU' in their career progression. The 'YOU' element encompasses the skill, hard work, and work ethic, which led to the overall ability to present oneself in a favourable light for these opportunities. Thus, the 'YOU' element helped these executive women to create their own opportunities. In the examples cited by interviewed women there seemed to be no evidence of vertical or horizontal segregation they experienced, as examined as part of gendered roles stereotyping theory discussed earlier.

"...being in the right place at the right time. But...also...as a person I am very open to opportunities and change." (Flore)

"...with my experience plus the languages - that opened quite a lot of doors for me and gave me the...career kick in the early part of my career. My career...was driven by two things:...I was at the time at the right place and also I was...open to any challenges and...to going out of my comfort zone." (Felicity)

"In many cases I was at the right place at the right time, but in other cases...I knew that it was also up to me to make the opportunities happen." (Fern)

"The opportunities came along, so I tried to be quick." (Florence)

"I...have determined my own career. But...I have [also] been in the right place at the right time." (Faith)

"...early on – more opportunistic, now – a bit more calculated." (Fiona)

When analysing the career decision-making process, it was clear that ambition was the driver for several women's career development, contradicting some literature that highlighted differences in men's and women's level of ambition and confidence. From their interviews, women executives appeared to be in the driving seat of their career decisions, yet their ambition was not blind to the challenges it might have caused to the business or others around:

"Most of the time I am determining what I want to do. I am very keen, and I get up in the morning and do things that excite me...." (Faith)

"...I have a natural drive to move forward... I did have a vision. I wanted to be able to work towards having a senior role in an industry... I was absolutely set on being able to bring that vision to life." (Fern)

"I have collected a bigger empire over the years... I have been able to say to [my boss]: I would now like to take that area into my responsibility. I am not Machiavellian though: if I genuinely believed there was somebody better for that position,... I would...step back..." (Fiona)

"I deliberately targeted it: I wanted to leave England. I wanted to go to...a big blue-chip company." (Fillis)

"...I always wanted to be in business, I wanted to be part of a corporate." (Flore)

Six out of eight interviewed women were mothers. When reflecting specifically on the impact of maternity breaks on their careers, most observed that time taken off for childbirth did not have a long-lasting impact on their progression (*Faith, Fillis, Fern*). However, interviewees did refer to some pitfalls. For example, one woman was no longer able to return to her much-enjoyed operational role after her maternity break: during her absence an internal candidate was placed into that position, so she (*Francine*) had to return into a different function. Although *Francine* spoke positively about this unexpected career turn, it is important to acknowledge that with legal provisions that were put in place since then such employer's action would no longer be considered lawful.

Another woman executive cited how family circumstances, and more specifically – her husband's career moves, shaped the early stages of development of her own professional career:

"...most of the time me moving at the beginning of my career was driven by my husband's career." (Florence)

Several interviewed women reflected on how important having connections and signalling their interest in potential opportunities had been to the advancement of their careers. This approach in turn often led to them being headhunted into more interesting or higher-positioned jobs:

"...I...was headhunted for a role... And then from there I was headhunted into [my next position]". (Fern)

"I have never really sought anything...with every opportunity and every role...people called me... Every time [before] I...think that I could do with a change,... something else comes up and I move on." (Flore)

In summary, it was clear from women's responses that not one specific approach, but rather a blend of multiple strategies, at times contradicting and overlapping, shaped the development of their professional careers. Strategies described by interviewed women disagreed with certain opinions explored as part of literature review, which suggested that women's career paths followed a different, slower pace to men, where women's career choices were more risk-averse and conservative. Several distinct messages emerged from interviews with women executives on the topic of career development strategies.

- University degree, which often, but not always, aligned with prospective employer's sector, acted as a door opener to entry positions with reputable organisations.
- Women created their own opportunities by building connections, signalling interest, and developing a broad skillset and experience.
- Women's ambition grew as they progressed to more advanced stages of their careers.
- Maternity breaks of women executives did not take away from their career progression timeline, at times even creating unexpected and positive career turns.

Career development strategies of men executives

Having explored the responses of women on what strategies they have applied to their career development, I now present men's reflections, before concluding by the comparison of experiences of the two gender groups.

Firstly, some interviewed men shared confirming examples in support of the 'springboard' theory discussed in Chapter Three, where in contrast to women, men were understood to

effectively utilise their entry level roles to springboard them into higher paid positions. Several men spoke about starting their corporate career straight after university, enrolling into either a graduate or a management development scheme with a large corporation and progressing through the ranks of that organisation for many years to come:

"I...started on a graduate programme, which lasted for three years and the rest is history. ...by the time I finished that I feel that I accelerated where I was in my career." (Matthew)

"I joined them at the lowest possible level...and over the years I managed to get promotions and just develop my way up this organisation." (Marwin)

"I joined...an International Managers scheme... [and] worked for [the company] for 25 years." (Mark)

When the interviewees were asked to reflect on whether their career progression was more opportunistic or calculated in nature, similar to women, the responses were not black and white. Interviewed men spoke of numerous factors which influenced the direction of their careers, largely driven by their ambition and a calculated pursuit (*Martin, Marwin, Malcolm*).

Several interviewed men executives specifically highlighted how their personal, largely internal connections, established over the years through professional relationships, opened doors and led to new opportunities. Some of the men ultimately ended up following their boss through several roles around the world:

"He brought me back with him to become his Chief of Staff...I very much worked with him over a number of years." (Mark)

"...I knew somebody who left and gone into ... as the UK Managing Director, so I followed him..." (Martin)

"...[he] picked up the phone and said: [Malcolm], can you get on the plane to India because you know exactly what the problems are, and you did a great job in Japan..." (Malcolm)

"...a friend of mine...put them on to me...I connected with a guy who I worked with previously,...spent some time working with [him], [he] then moved to Ireland. He called me...and said would I be interested in moving to Ireland to help him..." (Matthew)

When asked to reflect on what they attributed their successful career progression to, men spoke of such factors as hard work, patience and being able to take risks on an opportunity (*Matthew, Marwin, Malcolm*).

As interviewed men reflected on their career choices and the decision-making process associated with it, I asked them to share their top criteria, used to evaluate a new career opportunity. Given several prior references to how many of the new opportunities in their careers developed through personal relationships, it was not surprising to see the 'Who will I work for' being the number one factor for some. Financial reward was also cited as a top criterion.

"I've always chosen jobs based on who I work for. Is there a bond there, will I learn something from that person, are they inspiring, will they treat me properly?... And...the hygiene factors around the rewards and status." (Matthew)

"And the reason I went there was effectively the financial reward...it was a pure financial transaction for me." (Martin)

Moving down the list, other factors that contributed to the attractiveness of a career opportunity for men included personal status, business reputation, the financial health of the organisation and the challenge associated with the role in question:

"Number two has to be ... the calibre of the team, ... the calibre of the business, how solid is this business, ...reputation of the business..." (Martin)

"It's the organisation and its values..." (Matthew)

In conclusion, it was interesting to observe from the responses, that while the women mostly inherited new colleagues and new bosses with each of their new roles, men were more likely to form lasting bonds with their peers and bosses, which often led to new career opportunities. This notion resonated with the internal relationship element of the advocacy theory. Several men executives followed their boss into new businesses, new roles and new geographical locations throughout their careers. In addition, it was evident that the career paths of the majority of the interviewed men indeed followed a linear career progression pattern, as suggested by prior research, where men steadily and mostly vertically advanced through the ranks of the organisational hierarchies. Status and financial stability remained an important element of the role, as viewed by the men, while the women more often spoke of fit with

corporate values, and how important it was for their role to contain a meaningful and interesting dimension.

I suggest that such gender-based differences in strategies and rationales are of particular significance to understanding the issues surrounding the persistence of women's under-representation. Thus, as part of Primary Theme 1 which explored the career trajectories of the 13 senior executives interviewed for this research study, it was important to evaluate their views and reflections on any witnessed gender-based differences when it came to actions, qualities and/or styles, that men and women exhibited, as they built and maintained their successful careers. The findings in the next section were presented with a proposition that some of the cited gender-based differences might stand out as barriers for women, while some others could be considered as enablers in women executives' journey towards gender balance at senior leadership levels. The next section also provided me with an opportunity to explore some of the gendered theories discussed in Chapter Three, specifically relating to the gendered construction of leadership, gendered roles and the concept of merit.

5.4.3. Secondary Theme C-1: 'Gender-based differences'

To explore this sub-theme, I asked the interviewed participants to think back over their experiences working with their colleagues and reflect on any gender differences, that they might have perceived in levels of ambition, leadership styles, behaviours; or any traits that they would attribute to specifically men or specifically women. Looking at the summary of the responses, I observed two distinct camps of thought emerged.

The first camp reacted strongly to the question itself, believing that such a gendered reflection was dangerous and morally wrong, given that it opened room for gendered stereotypes and biases (*Matthew, Francine, Mark*):

"I think [stereotypes] are a convenient explanation of the world as it is. But I am not sure I believe it. Gendered differences are stereotypes. I don't know if there is any biological basis for this, ...any scientific basis for it. I think it has become a convenient explanation of what is going on. ... we tell ourselves, ...that there are characteristics that we look for...which then reinforces the bias. The idea of a charismatic leader... Most roles models in the world are male and this becomes self-perpetuating. Margaret Thatcher was an extreme example, but is anyone going to say that she was not strong willed, ambitious? [There] are lots of women who are. I don't think there is any [gender-based] difference at all." (*Matthew*)

Interviewees representing this view were against any gender stereotyping and firmly believed, that there existed no gender-based differences and assessment of one's competencies should be gender-neutral. This contradicted the findings of prior research on gendered stereotyping which suggested that stereotyping continued to prevail within the leadership construction, role distribution and organisational processes and practices. Several interviewees argued that it was not gender, but the specificities of individuals' personalities that influenced one's style and behaviour:

"Because of the difference in personality profiles there is definitely an influence on leadership style... I think most people's careers develop in the same way, ...it is not gender specific." (Florence)

"I've employed probably more women than men. I have not met different levels of ambition." (Martin)

"...the women I worked with...were every bit as driven to success as men. For the women who are driven and want a career, if they are given the opportunities, they can have them." (Mark)

Others believed that there were clear differences in men's and women's styles: be it the style of leadership, communication, networking, level of ambition or confidence. Interviewees argued that these differences were a normal and healthy phenomenon, which in fact offered a variety of benefits to the working teams and the corporate environment. Their view was that there was no one superior style, no one 'fits-all' behaviour. It was important for businesses and executives within them to learn how to embrace the different qualities, varied styles and diverse views that both men and women brought to the table, and capitalise on the strengths of each style.

"...there are differences in styles between men and women, but it is about embracing them and recognising them and making sure that you do not have biases..." (Faith)

"We [women] reflect, we put pressure on ourselves, we always try to be the best that we can be, and we can be hypersensitive at times. But then in another way that is absolutely brilliant. Because what we bring then will be: think of things from this point of view, consider how we can collaborate and get back together." (Fiona)

Reflecting on specific working style differences between men and women, two interviewees observed that women were more collaborative in their style, putting emphasis on teamwork.

This resonated with the notion of women's 'communal' responsibilities discussed earlier as part of the gendered roles theory:

"Women are generally more collaborative... the vast majority of women would generally look for a win-win solution. They will work in conjunction with colleagues. Their egos are smaller." (Faith)

"[a woman] is the 'green person' who is very much about collaboration, ...listening to people, very different style [to a man]." (Fiona)

Several comments pointed to how differently men and women networked – both in terms of the difference in networking techniques, as well as the different level of importance that men and women executives placed on networking as their career progression booster.

"...men and women do [networking] differently... Women have not got the: let us do a round of golf for example... they find other ways of doing it, ...more informal..." (Fern)

"...[women] want to be home with their families, not out drinking cocktails in an all-women's network talking about the economy... that is why the women do not network so much." (Flore)

One participant perceived that certain elements of a feminine style made networking easier for women, than men:

"...networking...is...easier for [a woman]. She puts forward her female charm and finds it remarkably easy to network and people will genuinely help her. I think [more] doors are open for [a woman] than they would be for a male." (Marwin)

Another felt that men were particularly successful at using networking as a tool to help other men along career journey, while senior women did the opposite and pulled the ladder behind them:

"...women don't help women. They do not generally support women on their journey. ...men's networks...help each other. Women most often see other women, particularly in senior roles, as threats to each other." (Flore)

Several of the interviewed executives spoke about men exhibiting more rational behaviours, while women demonstrating more emotional and empathetic qualities in their working styles:

*"Men can move between the emotional and the rational more easily than women."
(Fern)*

"...men move on quicker than women. [Women] will internalise a lot more than...male counterparts. I don't see the same soul searching [in men]..." (Fiona)

"People say that women listen better, are more empathetic and that is certainly true of a number of senior women that I have worked with." (Mark)

Some believed that a man's action-focused approach and a woman's careful internalising led to different degrees of confidence exhibited in their roles, with men leaning towards bold decisions and behaviours, and women adopting a more modest, background stance. These perceptions resonated with the male 'agentic' role involving authority (Eagly, 1987) and women's '3Cs' stereotypes of caring, concern and connection (Charles, 2003) presented in Chapter Three:

"Women...more often than not stand behind rather than stand in front. I've never had a woman in my team ask for a pay rise, but I had a lot of the guys ask for a pay rise." "...men will always say: of course, I can...do all of that. The only thing a woman will see in this list of requirements is: I cannot do that and that." (Flore)

"Men usually over-inflate what they can do, and women under-inflate what they can do. [A man] automatically thinks he can do more than he can... [a woman] finds all the reasons why she cannot do the role. Whereas...a man does not think of the negatives." (Fillis)

"I have been in meetings where I thought: 'yes, I could have said that', but it is the voice of the man who said it." (Fern)

A man's bold confidence was cited by several interviewees, when they were comparing the quantity and quality of both genders' output. Several participants felt that men had always things to say, and despite the fact that their opinion might at times lack substance – they would voice it anyway. A woman was seen as more reflective, perhaps speaking more rarely, but often providing a deeper and more insightful contribution:

"...men...will always have something to say. [But] what is the content and value of that versus a woman that maybe has quietly taken her notes but then will come at it in a different way – is the main point." (Fern)

"...guys...were fighting for position...to be heard. You could not get a word in, everybody had to say something about everything, there was all that banter." (Fiona)

"When the woman speaks, she is normally certain of her ground, [women] normally speak with knowledge and insight, whereas men will speak just to say something." (Mark)

Another interesting observation was made with regards to women's ability to balance a variety of interests and priorities. One participant felt that men generally had a narrower focus and smaller scope of interests, meaning that when a man focused on work, he gave it his 100%. Women, in his opinion, were better at multi-tasking than men, and thus were able to distribute the 100% of their attention among a variety of different interests and activities. As a consequence, this diversity of woman's pursuits led to her having to periodically re-evaluate the list of priorities, re-ranking her professional career within these:

"...majority of women are more balanced in their interests, in their life... Women have more interests. Men tend to be very much more singular, so their focus is very limited... Whereas women have the propensity to do a variety of different things." (Malcolm)

In addition, some of the interviewed participants cited several behaviours specific to women executives, that they believed were limiting their career choices and slowing the pace of their corporate progression. For example, women's desire to be liked and accepted was perceived as going against the harsh realities of the corporate world and the unpopular decisions that an executive role often entailed:

"...the idea to be liked, the idea to be accepted is something that is more important to women than to men. You cannot be liked at the executive position. The natural traits of a woman to care, to be responsible, these female characteristics do not help you in a professional life at the executive level." (Felicity)

Others felt that women's own belief in gender stereotypes often translated into a self-re-enforcing prophecy:

"...there is a slight element of the victim mentality it this... I do not want my daughters to hear that women are less ambitious or less risk-taking, because they might start to believe it. And it becomes self-re-enforcing..." (Matthew)

Echoing certain elements presented in the theoretical concept of merit in Chapter Three, women's interpretation of merit and their strive towards accomplishment-based recognition and reward was another woman-specific attribute that was cited, arguing that it was crippling women's courage to pursue new avenues:

"Women want to get-on on merit and want to get-on on the basis of their experience, education and intellect... Women are...driven by: I want to get there because I deserve to be there, and they have a very different view of what deserving means." (Flore)

And finally, several interviewed executives, both men and women, highlighted the examples from their experiences, where a woman would assume an alpha-female persona, often poorly imitating the masculine characteristics associated with authority and success, thereby creating fear and distrust among her colleagues of all genders:

"I think the need to be alpha-female comes from females themselves. It does not come from men requiring a woman to act as an alpha-female. My experience is that men are a little bit almost fearful of the alpha-female, the really strong, wanting to be one of the boys." (Flore)

"I've come across a...disappointing high percentage of female managers who have been bullies. Females with power are very difficult individuals to work for..." (Marwin)

"I have seen [women] who exhibit more of characteristics that I would normally associate with men than some of the men did." (Mark)

In conclusion, while three participants believed that there existed no gender-based differences in styles and behaviours exhibited by men and women within their working environment, the majority of ten felt that a number of differences did exist. While these interviewees did not directly refer to gender stereotyping as presented in the literature review section of this thesis, they observed a clear distinction of qualities and behaviours that they attributed to the men and to the women, when describing their encounters with the various gender-specific differences,. The participants who acknowledged gender-specific differences also argued, that such differences should not be hushed up, on the contrary: awareness should be raised, differences emphasised and capitalised upon, depending on what qualities the specific business situation called for. Three concrete examples of women-specific behaviours, largely supporting the theories behind the gendered construction of leadership and theory of merit, emerged. These included examples of women imitating the alpha-male behaviour, them exhibiting victims' mentality or getting too stuck within the meritocracy parameters, which were perceived by some participants to be instigated by women themselves and to stifle their career progression. Moreover, echoing some elements of the earlier discussed theory of networking, it was felt that women could learn a thing or two from men's networking methods, on the premise that

connections were cited by practically all interviewees as important enablers to one's career progress, and relationships were seen to play a more significant role the higher the executive, man or woman, progressed in their careers.

5.5. Primary Theme 2: 'Obstacles and enablers to career progression'

This theme explores the main obstacles and enablers that accompanied the interviewed executives through their career development journey. In this section I present four secondary themes. The first one evaluates the impact of role models, mentors and other inspirational figures as enablers to the individual career progressions of the interviewed executives. The second sub-theme explores the interviewees' reflections on the various coping strategies and support mechanisms they put into place throughout their career in order to find a balance between their demanding professional and family lives. And finally, I present the examples of career obstacles, as experienced by women and contrast them with the views expressed on this subject by the interviewed men.

5.5.1. Secondary Theme A-2: 'The role of mentors, role models and inspirational figures'

In an attempt to explore the main obstacles and enablers, that accompanied the interviewed executives throughout their career development journey, I asked each individual participant to reflect on: a) who were the key players and b) how instrumental they were in influencing the direction or pace of their professional careers. This section explored their responses in terms of the impact that the mentors, role models and inspirational figures might have had on the career progressions of the interviewed participants.

Almost every interviewee, both men and women, were able to single out a specific influential figure, one or more key players who left a memorable mark at some point during their career development. For some participants these were personal, non-professional role models, including spouses, parents, grandparents and friends (*Florence, Matthew*).

However, most of the interviewed participants experienced mentoring as a professional relationship, where mentors came from within their work setting. These inspirational figures came mostly from the executive's internal environment and included former bosses, company executives, CEOs, Managing Directors and colleagues (*Fern, Faith, Fiona, Flore, Fillis, Matthew, Martin, Malcolm, Mark*):

"...four people who have been the main influencers on my career, all of whom I have worked for in various stages of my career. They are all very strong leaders. Very strong but very different leaders with different styles. So, they all taught me the importance of good leadership and how that can be expressed. They taught me a lot about strategy, about vision, about how to play office politics. More than anything, working for people that you could see ultimately very successful and who got right to the very tops of the organisation, it showed me what it takes to be completely successful in a career. The one thing they all had in common – they lived and breathed their jobs 24/7. There is an absolute commitment and intensity about all of them." (Mark)

"I can think of three individuals at [company x] who took the time to correct me, to give me feedback. I think feedback is a critical part of career development. And people don't use that enough. But I was taught at [company x] very early on that getting a lot of feedback and listening to it and acting on it actually did help your career. And I believe it did. I think at [company y] I had a Chairman...that I learnt a lot from just observing him, how he conducted board meetings, I learnt a lot from that. And then when I got to [company z], I had a specific sponsor who had known me from my days at [company x] that sponsored me into the organisation. And once I was in, I definitely tried to make sure that I knew the top team. You've got to know the seniors at an organisation: you have got to be comfortable talking to them and you have got to make sure that you have interesting things to say to them that is of interest to them." (Fillis)

I asked each interviewed participant to describe the sort of role and the type of contribution that their mentors made to their professional and personal lives, which uncovered six distinctive roles that a mentor might assume:

1. to act as a sounding board;
2. to give feedback, highlight the person's weaknesses and provide different perspectives;
3. to provide support and encouragement;
4. to be a role model, someone whose qualities and behaviour the interviewees have observed and tried to mirror and replicate;
5. to be a teacher, so that interviewees could learn from mentors' knowledge and experience;

AN INTERPRETIVE EXPLORATION OF UNDER-REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS IN UK FTSE-100 COMPANIES

6. to act as a career fast tracker, who some of the interviewed executives relied upon as a source of available opportunities, and whose influence and connections helped to open doors.

Mentor as a sounding board	Mentor as a career fast tracker	Mentor as someone who provides support and encouragement	Mentor as a role model	Mentor as a teacher	Mentor as someone who gives feedback
"...where I struggled with a business challenge...I wanted to be able to bounce plans back with people." (Fern) "I use him as my sounding board." (Florence) "I was having all that difficulty with the board, so it was really useful to have him to talk to." (Fiona) "...you can share your concerns, your questions on your career path and sometimes even reflect on other aspects of your life..." (Florence) "If I've got things to discuss or I want a second opinion, he is the person I would normally go to..." (Mark)	"I had a specific sponsor who had known me...that sponsored me into the organisation. And once I was in, I definitely tried to make sure that I knew the top team." (Fillis) "People often seek a senior mentor in an organisation to be able to make it up fast or to hear about opportunities." (Florence) "These were people who worked with me and would say: it would be great if you come and join us to do this. And that was driving the challenges that I was willing to investigate." (Felicity) "A mentor is fine, but the mentor is just listening and discussing. A sponsor is much more active. A sponsor is actively sponsoring someone to get a role." (Fillis)	"[my mentor] has...pushed me particularly into roles that I wouldn't have thought of." (Faith) "[he]...gave me a huge degree of responsibility and autonomy. But at the same time gave me huge support to perform the role." (Flore) "He was very supportive, very encouraging... He was certainly interested in my career. He was interested, asked questions... therefore I could talk about the situation..." (Marwin) "But at certain moments of your career someone will say something to you or maybe give you an opportunity and that makes a difference." (Malcolm) "...he...plunged me into the water and said: see what you can do. And he was constantly giving me those projects, but also giving me his support and affirmation that I can do it, which helped me say that yes, I can do this." (Flore)	"...I am looking to her because I see how she behaves in meetings is a bit more stoic and she is a bit tougher than I am." (Fiona) "I had a Chairman...that I learnt a lot from just observing him, how he conducted board meetings..." (Fillis) "...you look at someone and think: oh, I can do that, or they've done that - maybe I can get there..." (Matthew) "I took a lot from my dad in terms of the way he behaved, and I saw how he managed success, how he managed people." (Marwin) "...who is a very inspirational figure; ...due to his personal charisma I made the final decision to join. They...all taught me the importance of good leadership and how that can be expressed." (Mark)	"[my mentors] took out the interest in me and tried to help me and I learnt from them. So, it is that kind of exchange of kindness, I guess, an investment in someone, that has a positive impact." (Matthew) "...she's had a big influence on me. Because she showed me that women don't come in that little humble box." (Fiona) "I think it is very important to have people that you can learn from in the business if you want to get on." (Martin) "They taught me a lot about strategy, about vision, about how to play office politics. It showed me what it takes to be completely successful in a career." (Mark) "I may have gone a totally different direction if I had somebody who would have helped me, who had experience and knowledge that I didn't have." (Marwin)	"I like to share ideas with other people, particularly those with different views that can then hold the mirror up to me and say, 'that is definitely not for you, but this type of career could be'." (Fern) "...[they] took the time to correct me, to give me feedback. I think feedback is a critical part of career development." (Fillis) "[my mentor] was quite pivotal in keeping me on the straight and narrow, getting me to focus on my weaknesses and how to address those." (Martin) "The only way you can grow and develop beyond what you are capable of doing is by having other perspectives." (Marwin) "One of them...said: '...you are very good at solving problems, but...instead of...me telling you what is the problem, I'd rather you just come in saying there was a problem and I solved it'." (Malcolm) "...[my two] bosses...were...wise enough to think through not how this person presents or...talks, but...what his values are, his skills are, his particular strengths are and how we can use those." (Martin)

Figure 30: Examples of roles that a mentor can assume

Building further on the view of mentor as someone who opened career doors, some participants thought, that it was not mentors that the executives needed most in their career growth, but such figures as 'critical friends', 'advocates' and 'sponsors' (Felicity, Fillis, Fiona, Martin):

"I think mentors are helpful, but [in reality] you need is a sponsor. A mentor is fine, but the mentor is just listening and discussing. A sponsor is much more active. A sponsor is actively sponsoring someone to get a role. That is a game changer." (Fillis)

"He picked me out and he said to senior management at the time: this girl has something about her. He was the [position x] at the time and he had about 2000 [team] at the time. His ability: he saw something in me and when I interacted with him he then became an advocate for me." (Fiona)

Some participants, although they could name inspiration figures, that made an impact at some point in their professional lives, did not credit their success to anyone but themselves:

"I would say that most of it is me. People make their own careers." (Malcolm)

"I never had a mentor. I achieved what I achieved through my own efforts." (Marwin)

While it was the general consensus among the interviewed participants on their positive experience with mentoring relationships, some participants highlighted the challenges that mentoring presented:

"...mentoring...is very useful, but it's one of these words that's used a lot and I am not sure people really understand what it is all about most of the time." (Martin)

"Mentoring is mis-used by most mentees and therefore mentors are not necessarily very eager to pick up mentoring in some instances." (Florence)

"...certainly, one of the things that is absent today in the corporate world is the availability of female mentors for females." (Flore)

"Some people are using mentoring as a way to advance their career, which is a wrong way." (Florence)

For mentoring to bring value and be effective, the interviewed participants highlighted specific features, that in their experience needed to be present. They stressed the importance of the right fit between the mentor and the mentee, for the mentoring relationship to bring mutual benefit, and for mentoring to be goal specific (Florence, Flore, Martin, Fern, Fillis, Fiona):

"...[having a mentor] is really important. As long as it is the right mentor. I think it is really important to get the right fit. The women I am mentoring today in our business – we have a good relationship which is not hugely structured... I have operated most of my life in male dominated businesses and industries and sectors. I think it is really important for those younger, more junior women to have someone who has been through it and who is able to translate their experience into real life for them. I think it is incredibly important that it is the right person, otherwise there is no reason why seek female mentors specifically. There are male mentors out there who get the issues around women trying to make it in the male dominated world or business who are equally as good. I am not in the camp of thinking it has to be a woman, but if there is a woman with relevant experience and can lend those experiences to a younger, more junior – then great. But if you have got men who are supportive of the diversity agenda, ...then it works very well." (Flore)

Some of the interviewed participants reflected on the role that gender might have played within the mentor and mentee's relationship, and whether it was crucial for men to have male role models and for women to have women role models. The executives' view was that while the gender fit could be beneficial, especially when tackling women's under-representation at senior levels, ultimately the personality fit superseded gender. The experience, the knowledge and the advice that the mentee sought in the majority of scenarios was not gender sensitive (*Flore, Matthew*).

"...mentors and role models are critical. You look at someone and think: oh, I can do that, or they've done that so maybe I can [also] get there, or if you are lucky enough somebody helps you... So absolutely, it's critical. Now, do men need male role models and do women need female role models? I think it's great for my children, my girls, that Theresa May is a prime minister. It's a really good thing. I think it does matter, female role models do matter to women and male role models matter to men. But equally you can cross over. I've worked for women and that's important." (*Matthew*)

In conclusion, this section brought together the perceptions of the interviewed participants on the role that mentors and inspirational figures played in the development of their careers. Here I explored what influence these figures had on the career choices and decisions, that the interviewed executives took. The preliminary conclusion was that with the exception of a small minority, mentors and inspirational figures were considered as enablers by the vast majority of the executives, resonating with the literature views presented within the mentoring concept in Chapter Three. It is the role of the advocate in particular that has been highlighted by the participants and will be further analysed in Chapter Six: Discussion. The interviewees attributed much of their success, especially in the early stages of their executive careers, to the contribution of mentors, critical friends, advocates, sponsors and coaches. In addition, while some of women's under-representation at the senior jobs of the UK FTSE-100 companies is explained by the absence of women role models they can aspire to, the evidence from interviews does not point to the significance of gender in mentoring relationships.

5.5.2. Secondary Theme B-2: 'Childcare and work-life balance support mechanisms'

I inquired with the research participants, who were able to combine their successful careers with raising children and other family commitments: how do they manage? In their interviews I asked them to reflect on coping strategies and management mechanisms, which they found useful to

be able to balance their professional and family lives. This section examines their individual experiences.

One key observation that transpired from most of the participants' responses, both men and women, was that balancing a successful career with other life commitments did not happen by accident. In fact, it most often was a result of painstaking planning, strict discipline and ruthless prioritisation.

"...with ruthless planning. We always had a parent at home every evening.... We always tried to be back every Friday night to make sure that we were together as a family.... I spent the weekend very focused on the family." (Fillis)

"You have to be extremely disciplined in the amount of energy and therefore time that you contribute to work. But this is very hard to achieve...[it is] important to know what your priorities [are] and be honest with yourself. It can't be accidental." (Francine)

"...I would have to leave the office in time for [my kids'] pick-ups." (Faith)

"I've maybe not done a social event for work in preference to spending time with my children or with the family. But I am also at a more senior level and I feel I can decide what I want to do, when I want to do it." (Fern)

"...one of the really important things in terms of balancing home life and business life is that you remember to balance it. It is hugely important that we find time for things other than work and that you have a perspective." (Flore)

"...you [have to] let go of work enough to focus on the other part of your life. And that is just a personal discipline..." (Matthew)

"I'd get home late, so I wouldn't see the children probably during the week. But I saw them at weekends. After we...divorced, we had a rule that I would see the children for 26 weekends a year plus some time at Christmas and summer holidays. And I just organised my working life around that." (Malcolm)

In addition, rarely the interviewed executives achieved this balance on their own; they often relied upon the support of internal and external resources and mechanisms. 11 out of 13 interviewees referred to having an understanding and supportive partner at home, who made it possible for them to have a successful career and raise the family at the same time. Partners' support was defined by some interviewees as being accepting and accommodating of the harsh

demands that the executives' careers sometimes dictated. Others spoke of the occasions, when they had to call upon the support of the network of extended family and friends. In most cited examples the support network would step in to cover for the executive's absence, providing physical and logistical support, so that the family and personal commitments could be met.

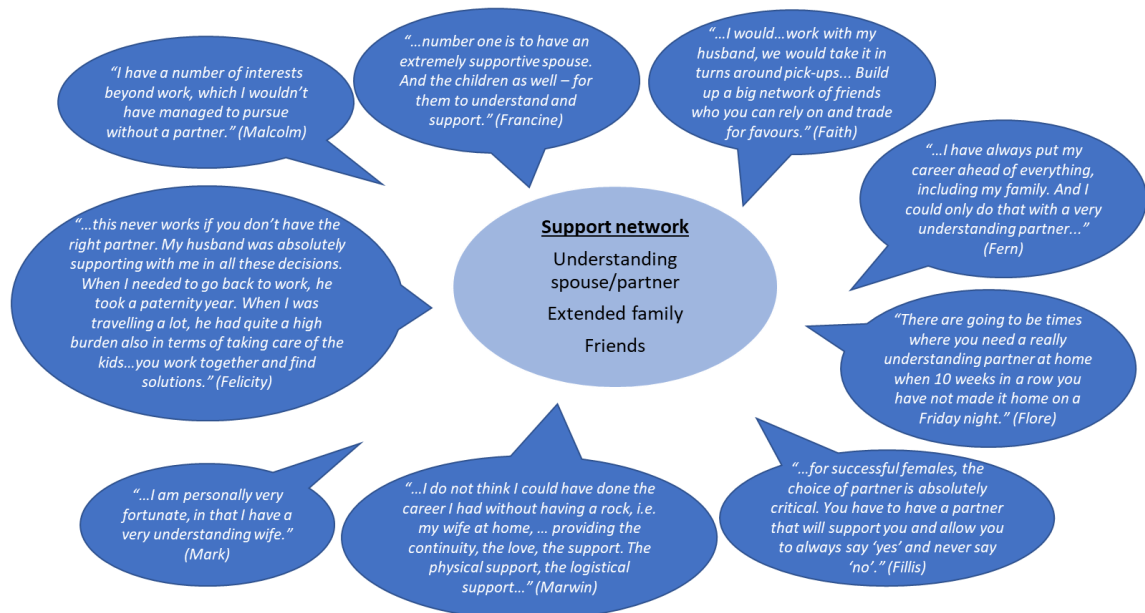


Figure 31: Quotes describing the importance of support network

While internal support systems represented by partners and close family members were cited as critical, many of the interviewed executives recalled how instrumental, albeit expensive and intrusive, some of the external mechanisms were in their attempt to balance personal and professional life commitments. Examples cited included the use of nannies (*Fern, Fillis*), au pairs (*Felicity*), childcare facilities, cleaning ladies (*Mark*) and other forms of external help.

Some other interviewed participants resorted to making specific logistical arrangements in order to be able to meet family commitments: either through long-distance commuting during the week, organising business travel to make sure to be back home for the weekends or by choosing to live in close proximity to work (*Florence, Matthew*).

Interviewed executives spoke of work-based support mechanisms, where some chose to empower and delegate more tasks to their teams, while others relied on virtual working (*Francine, Faith*).

However, it was interesting to hear some of the executives, both men and women, speak of how difficult they believed it was to achieve a healthy balance between a successful career and family commitments. They referred to a 'mammoth' task of being able to simultaneously meet the

demands at work and at home, where either the 'healthy' or the 'balance' element was compromised.

"You get [women] who try to do it and are absolutely ragged with it. When I was coming up in my career, I saw it as impossible...it's just not possible to juggle that..." (Fiona)

"...working as a senior person...it is a massive amount of pressure. So, your family life and your family relationships do suffer as a result of that." (Martin)

In conclusion, starting off with an assumption, that family and care-giving responsibilities in general were thought to reduce the commitment of executives to their careers, I set out to explore the first-hand experiences of successful mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, family and community members, who at the same time happened to be top executives of the FTSE-100 companies, to see, if this assumption was, in fact, true. The findings, based on the vast majority of the experiences are, that an executive can 'have it all'; men or women; one can find a 'balance' between private life commitments and a successful career. The 'health' of this balance, however, can be questionable. This balance requires rigorous and ruthless planning, financial investment, a strong family partnership to make it work; and as Secondary Theme A-3 'High price to pay for a top job' explores - it comes at a high price to top executives, which may 'rob' the 'healthy work-life balance' of its 'healthy' element.

5.5.3. Secondary Theme C-2: 'Explanation of career obstacles as experienced by women'

There is substantial evidence presented in Chapter Two pointing to the fact that the issue of women's under-representation at executive levels of the UK FTSE-100 companies continues to exist. To explore this further, I asked both men and women executives to express their views on the reasons behind such under-representation, comment on possible explanations and reflect on the obstacles and barriers, which in their opinion prevent women from entering, progressing further or re-entering the corporate world. I suggest it is important to separate men's views from women's, proposing that it would be enlightening to compare the first-hand experiences with side-line observations. Thus, I would like to contrast the experiences of women executives, as the group directly affected by the issue of under-representation, with those cited by men, as observed by them through working with senior women.

In this section I examined the responses of women, as they reflected on the obstacles they witnessed throughout their careers.

Women offered a very rich variety of thoughts on the subject; it was clear from their responses that not a single societal actor was at fault, and that it was a combination of several factors that contributed to women's under-representation in top jobs - some induced by women executives themselves, and others by the organisations and the society at large.

Interestingly, many of the interviewed women placed the onus of under-representation on women themselves. They spoke of women executives not being proactive, lacking confidence, and allowing the doubt to creep in:

"Some women lose confidence to get back into the business place; ...it's [about]: do women have the confidence and self-belief [that] they can get back into work or do a global job." (Faith)

"It is about going after, being proactive, so proactively seeking opportunities..." (Florence)

"...[at mid-management level] we witness the first signs of the doubt, ...because women step out of the accepted norms." (Francine)

Many women executives spoke of the pressures of responsibility that came with executive level positions. It is too lonely at the top, it is too stressful, it is too 'Alpha', it requires too much travel – are some of the reasons cited by women. The examples cited by interviewees echoed several elements within the gendered organisations theory, touching specifically on the gendered division of labour, interaction and individual's identity. Yet rather than highlight the persistent reluctance of some organisations to allow for senior jobs to be performed flexibly, remotely or part-time, the participants felt that some women were throwing in the towel on the stresses of the big job:

"...the executive positions...is a rough environment, it is not a nice environment, it is competitive. The focus is on being able to present, being sharp, being able to anticipate political games and to step up to that game. It can be quite lonely sometimes." (Felicity)

"You have to be resilient and be almost an alpha-female to operate in some male-dominated industries at the executive level or board table...there is a huge number of women who say: I am not doing this. They get tired and they opt out at a certain level." (Flore)

"...when you get to a certain level you have to travel in an international company. And travelling and managing families and careers is not easy." (Faith)

"...I will have to travel; it is going to be complicated... [women] can't get the support to do all this, so a lot get stuck in the middle management type of roles." (Florence)

On the other hand, where organisation offered reasonable flexibility in working practices, one interviewee felt that such flexibility should be mutual. She went on to give examples of how she witnessed flexible policies being misused by women, thereby creating a bad impression and ruining the credibility of other working mothers in management roles:

"...because of their other responsibilities they milked [the flexible policies] a little bit. And if I put my hand on my heart, I think: you really could do a little more or you could be a little more flexible. But for them it's: I've got to pick my children up, or I've got school parents evening tonight or I've got this or I've got that, where it almost became a bit of a blocker. I might think twice about how flexible that person is." (Fiona)

Several interviewees spoke of the need for women to be more proactive in gaining access to available opportunities by developing their networking skills and building a unique skillset, a differentiating niche, that would make them stand out in a competitive run for the limited number of executive positions:

"... [my experience]...is very rich..., the way [my] career [was] built...is through natural progression because you are so special..." (Florence)

"Men have informal contacts and network better than women and therefore they automatically get better jobs and better assignments." (Fillis)

Some interviewees thought that senior women executives were not doing enough for their women peers. One interviewee in particular felt, that senior women executives had the responsibility to help others come up the ladder behind them by acting as roles models and by helping junior women navigate through the career obstacles (Fern).

When it came to the question about the strength of women's talent pool, the opinions of the interviewed women were divided. Some believed that there simply was not enough of women in development for organisations to draw senior talent from:

"If I look at the succession plan, ...there are women who have the potential to grow into these roles, but it is not going to be their next appointment." (Francine)

"The pipeline is very slim in STEM. Many schools find it difficult to articulate to girls what the attractiveness of STEM subjects is." (Faith)

However, others disagreed, firmly believing there were plenty of talented women out there; organisations just needed to be creative about seeking them out and put in a relentless effort to retain them:

"I think there are plenty of women out there. You have just got to be innovative, ...work harder at finding them. A good search firm will work very, very hard to find a diverse list." (Fillis)

"...you [have to] work [hard] trying to get out there and find the right women, so you have to seek." (Faith)

"When you put a lot of focus on [gender diversity], you start making a lot of progress, but it is a relentless effort. The minute...it [is] not on the top of the agenda, you start to fall back straight away." (Francine)

"It is a bit of a myth to say women are not really out there...they are just...doing things in a different way." (Fern)

Drawing parallels with the preference theory discussed in Chapter Three, the implications of motherhood featured prominently in the interviews. Nothing will change the fact of nature, that only women are physically capable of bearing children. So, it is not surprising, that challenges with childbearing and childcare were the barriers discussed by many women. Interviewees spoke about lack of supportive policies at organisational level, highly expensive mechanisms offered by the government and stress, associated with finding possible solutions, when trying to balance a career and family commitments. All these made it difficult for women to remain at work or return to their careers after having children. Yet six out of eight interviewed women were mothers:

"...one of the biggest challenges facing women in the workplace has been [weak] policies from an HR perspective, government policy [on] what is allowable in terms of childcare, support in terms of time off." (Fern)

"If you are living in England and you have children, it is very difficult and extremely expensive to find childcare to bring your children up,... the support systems and the facilities are not great." (Florence)

"They reach the first management job and then...they leave because [it] is the time a lot of women have children and there is no good pathway to come back." (Francine)

"We don't have the support...to enable...women to return to work after raising a family...childcare arrangements or better paternity cover, we just don't have that network."
(Flore)

Many of the interviewed women executives spoke about the biases they experienced or witnessed throughout their professional careers. It was disappointing to see, that even within the most prominent businesses of the country, such opinions as 'soft women are unable to perform tough jobs'; 'woman's place is at home with children'; 'some industries are not cut out for women', - could still be heard in our society:

"...it is not women having children that is the biggest impediment...it is the biases that exist... These are very deep biases around the fact that women are not fit to do the tough jobs, ...women are softer...[and] if a woman...is soft-spoken, she is not tough enough."
"...there is a prejudice that kicks in that once you have a child your priorities are elsewhere, and you cannot do it." *"...people start putting excuses that it is a mining business, or it is an oil business, so we can never have gender diversity."* (Francine)

"You are at a senior level either because you are slightly odd, and you put your career in front of everything else or you are divorced..." (Fern)

"There is still the stigma around men staying at home with children...it's just easier for people to think the husband will work and wife will stay home with children." *"We are not set up to permit women to come back to work..."* *"Firms...are reticent to [promote] women...because they think once a woman gets to a partnership [level], she is suddenly pregnant."* (Flore)

Participants reflected on the role that men played in creating and maintaining these barriers for women. Women suggested that there was a lack of understanding among men executives of what women could really bring to the table. Women argued that as long as men were put in charge of solving women's under-representation, little progress would be made (Flore, Francine).

And finally, certain unique elements of British society were cited as a tough obstacle for women to overcome, when building their careers:

"...In comparison to other cultures [British society] tends to react a lot more to [one's accent] or [background]... [In the UK] you need to have the connections if you want to grow the ladder." (Florence)

“Women have demanded to be given rights doing the same jobs as men, now being given the access and the right societal support to demand the same payment as men. But then [British] legal and statutory policies have lagged behind slightly to underpin and follow that.”
(Fern)

In conclusion, while it is widely believed, that motherhood is the largest obstacle to the development of women’s careers, the interviews with women executives have pointed to a different source. Not childbearing, but childcare was cited as the primary obstacle, or rather the lack of thereof. The extent of support that companies and government provided for working parents with respect to childcare was deemed inadequate. Moreover, the corporate world still did not become comfortable with seeing women in corporate positions of power, and the biases continued to exist. In the next section I will contrast these opinions of women executives with the views of the interviewed men.

5.5.4. Secondary Theme D-2: ‘Explanation of career obstacles as viewed by men’

In the previous section I have concluded that despite a commonly held belief, it is not the inevitable issue of motherhood, but the lack of support systems around it, as well as the gender related prejudices that continue to be present within British society, that are the biggest impediment to women’s career progression. In this section, I would like to present the opinions of the interviewed men, by exploring what in their view explains the lack of women senior executives in the top jobs of UK FTSE-100 companies.

Interviewed men were equally transparent in sharing their views and offered a range of opinions. Some of their thoughts echoed those raised by women: existing bias, impact of childbearing and poor provision of childcare facilities, that impeded women from coinciding successful careers with family commitments, if they chose to. Also, new insights emerged with regards to the stifling legislation which, instead of encouraging gender diversity, had the opposite effect. In addition, men spoke about women’s own unrealistic expectations, anti-role modelling behaviours and the counter-productive impact of cultural diversity initiatives. I will now discuss these in more detail.

Resonating the experiences shared by women, interviewed men reflected, that various biases continued to exist, acting as barriers for women in the development of their professional careers. Men spoke of the gendered role stereotypes:

"...there is a view that a particular role is male, and a particular role is female. Which is just wrong,...there is a bias at work..." (Matthew)

"... traditionally you would never encourage females to become an engineer...because it was a man's work, women couldn't do that." (Marwin)

"...if you were not raised in a household where...you see the females in your life who are nurturing, motherly figures, you will probably find it hard to see them as peers, equals, or even bosses." (Matthew)

Every one of the interviewed men executives cited, that childbearing made a stalling impact on the career progression of women by either eliminating them from the race for attractive opportunities, as they opted for extended career breaks, or by taking them out of the corporate world entirely, when they consciously chose a full-time motherhood:

"If you have taken time out to have children or raise the family, you have missing pieces in your [career] history." (Matthew)

"If somebody has...taken five years out of their career experience, then they are at a disadvantage experience-wise when it comes to being considered for the next promotion... Having children...is not considered a business skill." (Malcolm)

"...women chose to take an extended career break after giving birth...or...they or their partners decide that one of them stays at home." (Martin)

"I do not know how many companies would [promote] a female employee who is also a mother of young kids, who has just had maternity leave on two occasions." (Marwin)

"...a lot of women are either not as focused on their careers or they didn't have the opportunities because they needed to take time off to have families." (Mark)

Several interviewed men remarked that the provision of childcare was not adequate in the UK. They noted, that despite women having the potential to build a successful career and having access to attractive opportunities, poor childcare support systems often influenced women's decision to opt out of their careers (Mark, Martin). Men observed, that when career women did come back to work, many could not devote the same time and energy to work because of the inadequate childcare. They believed it was down to the government to make sure that good childcare provisions were in place.

While men felt that UK organisations rolled out their own initiatives to fill the childcare provision gaps left by the government, some interviewees spoke of the bad habits that became traditionally imbedded in the UK corporate world:

"In our own business...we have had...a cultural norm that leads men to appoint men to roles." (Matthew)

"There is a lot of people promoting in their own image, so if you are a white alpha male, you may tend to promote other white alpha males." (Malcolm)

"...in the end it will be down to individual managers who will be looking at different candidates, especially women, and making judgements" (Marwin)

Other cited examples included unhelpful attitudes towards what was perceived as normal and the paralysing fear, that many traditional businesses continued to have towards the notion of working flexibly:

"...the reality is...you have to accept remote working and flexible working; you have to accept technology." (Martin)

"I see more people working flexibly, but I still think it is a struggle for people. The policies might be there, the procedures might be there, the legal entitlement might be there, but culturally there is still a bias against flexible working." (Matthew)

"... it is down to the society as well, down to the government, to make sure that ... there [is] more flexibility around working hours." (Mark)

Poor talent pool of women was cited by men as obstacles to a healthy women representation at senior levels – women were neither incentivised nor encouraged to reach senior positions; neither remain within them, nor return to them:

"When you get to the level of UK Managing Directors...there might be a lack of [talent] availability..." (Martin)

"...senior female executive...does not have any senior women reporting to her. So, there is no opportunity for internal promotion in the short term." (Malcolm)

"... you have got to be focused on performance and reward people accordingly. That is the way that you can make it more attractive for people who might want to go back to work." (Martin)

"...[our] statistics is not going to change any time soon because we have no pipeline. It is going to take at least five years to make a difference to the pipeline." (Malcolm)

Some of the interviewed men placed the responsibility for creating barriers and the onus of removing the obstacles for women's under-representation on companies, claiming businesses were not making enough of effort:

"Women cannot do it on their own. [If] companies do not create the opportunities, women will never ever find equality." (Marwin)

"...despite a lot of conversation and written word, but very little effort, [gender diversity situation] hasn't really changed very much." (Malcolm)

"... companies...have...to help women develop their careers and ensure that if they have taken time off for childbirth and...that they are given the opportunities to get back into the workplace." (Mark)

At the same time, several men executives accused career women themselves of having unrealistic expectations and trying to have the best of both worlds – have a flexible personal schedule to fulfil family and other commitments, while enjoying a generous paycheck for a prestigious jobs, that boasted high levels of authority:

"...a [woman]...wants [a big job] and to work part-time and be home when the kids come home from school." (Martin)

"...most of the clients do not accept when we say we can't provide this piece of advice today because today the person who services you is a woman who has taken a day off or is on four-day week or three-day week. That's not acceptable." (Malcolm)

"The problem arises if the step up involves more hours needing to be put in and a woman does not want to do it..." (Martin)

"Individually women need to actually want it and push for it. Some onus is on the [women] to make sure that even if they take time out that they continue keeping their knowledge up to date." (Mark)

"...[not] many women have elected to stay in that sort of [harsh, target driven] environment for long enough to actually have the skills to get to that sort of job." (Martin)

Some interesting new thoughts emerged as part of my interviews with the executive men. For example, one interviewee strongly believed, that an abundance and rigidity of legislature, that had been recently introduced around gender diversity, became stifling for companies (*Martin*). He reflected how the costs of covering the maternity leave could introduce biases into recruitment process. Similarly, the impact of parental leave absence could see organisations lose profits and contracts.

Another man believed that the focus of the corporate world on other types of diversity could have a counter-productive effect on improvements in the area of gender diversity specifically. For example, the attention on creating cultural diversity could detract focus from the gender diversity agenda:

"I've seen more issues in terms of the male/female diversity with males from other cultural backgrounds... [in] the Arab and the Japanese world...family culture...is dominant. So, in a way potentially the more attention goes into creating cultural diversity, the more challenges you may have on female diversity." (*Malcolm*)

The same interviewee spoke of women anti-role models, where women, who strived to achieve successful careers, repelled their younger counterparts by imitating male behaviours – resonating with gendered organisations theory, and by placing unrealistic demands on junior women:

"...the first generation of women that came through in their profession were women in physiognomy, but they behaved like men, because that's how they perceived they had to behave in order to be successful." (*Malcolm*)

"...they did not create role models that encouraged the majority of women below them to want to aspire to that role. The younger women looked up and said: that is a woman pretending to be a man, that is not what we want to be. They were almost counter-productive." (*Malcolm*)

Some interviewed men firmly believed that now was the best time for a woman to progress to senior roles in the UK. One interviewee attributed this to the great level of publicity around the topic of gender diversity, more awareness of its benefits, and an evident shift in some of the societal traditional attitudes and perceptions (*Marwin*).

In conclusion, having explored the experiences of interviewed women it can be argued that, despite a commonly held belief, it was not the fact of childbearing itself, but the lack of support

systems around it, as well as the strong biases that continued to exist against seeing a woman in corporate positions of power, that was the biggest impediment to women's career progression. Some nuances of the preference theory featured among the interviews, more so echoing the obstacles to woman's ability to coincide childbearing with a successful career, rather than pointing to an 'either-or' woman's preference – this thought will be further development in section 6.4 of Chapter Six: Discussion.

I also looked at the thoughts and opinions of the interviewed men on the subject of gender diversity and explored their views on the obstacles, barriers and other explanations that relate to the issue of women's under-representation at FTSE-100 companies' executive levels. Most of the findings resonated with those that emerged from interviews with women: for example, the fact that gendered roles stereotypes, childbearing and poor provision of childcare facilities continued to act as obstacles, for those women who wished to combine a successful career with a fulfilling family life.

It was interesting to observe that most of the interviewed women did not view a single specific factor as their obstacle, but attributed women's under-representation to a combination of several elements - some induced by women executives themselves, and others - by the organisations and the society at large, reflecting the literature around gendered roles stereotypes and gendered organisations. Men, on the other hand, were more direct at blaming the government for introducing stifling regulations; criticising women for creating anti-role models and unreasonably 'wanting their cake and eating it', and reprimanding organisations for not doing enough in support of gender diversity agenda.

The notion of cost and sacrifices was frequently cited by the interviewees in relation to career obstacles. In the next section I explore this theme in more detail, by evaluating the price of success.

5.6. Primary Theme 3: 'Social cost of career progression'

This theme explores the notion of social costs attached to one's successful career. The overarching idea behind this theme bears its roots at the preference theory and aims to explore whether coinciding parenthood with a successful career is as a straight-forward choice as this theory suggests. For the purpose of this research, private cost was used in the context of sacrifices or losses experienced as a result of individual's choices. In the case of executive

directors, both men and women, I explored private costs as the price that individuals had to pay for their professional success and achieving a high-ranking position within an organisation.

In the same context, external costs that I evaluated were those that people in the executive's immediate relationship spectrum had to incur as an indirect contribution for the individual's career success.

I conclude by presenting the interviewees' retrospective reflection on regrets associated with the price they had to pay for their success.

5.6.1. Secondary Theme A-3: 'High price to pay for a top job'

This section evaluates the price of success of the 13 interviewed top executives, as reflected by the interviewees themselves and explores whether both men and women incurred an equal social cost. The quotes presented below were selected as illustrative of the notion that there was a pricey consequence, that each executive endured in return for a big job and a big salary. In some cases, these were monetary implications, in others the cost came in the form of an impact on psychological or physical wellbeing, and in certain cases all of the above.

Social cost to women

There was a general consensus between women interviewed for this research study, that finding balance between work and family commitments was a very challenging task. Some participants spoke of the need for women to make various sacrifices and be prepared to strictly prioritise and make tough choices:

"I do think that balance between work and home weighs heavily." (Francine)

"...there is so much more competition from men that is difficult for women to make it to the top unless they are prepared to make a lot of sacrifices." (Florence)

Women cited various forms of cost that they encountered throughout the development of their professional careers. Some reflected on the negative impact their careers had on their public image:

"They were saying I was a bad mother and [my husband] was a fantastic father. This was quite heavy. It is tough...to resist that pressure." (Felicity)

"You want to give it everything and you want to be successful and prove yourself. You feel that firstly you have to be there at 10pm in the evening and you want to be the last one

out of the office. ...[Women] often feel that they need to do more than the guy sitting next to them, to be heard or to be successful.” (Flore).

One participant recalled how the pressure of trying to meet the professional, family and personal commitments left a mark on her emotional and physical wellbeing (*Fillis*).

Guilt also featured as a feeling that some of the interviewed successful career women experienced while juggling family commitments with their careers:

“...when the girls were small, there were a couple of times that I could have gone for bigger roles and I didn’t. In my head I was still juggling, compromising, feeling guilty.” (Faith)

Financial sacrifices were often recalled, especially in the early stages of women’s careers, when they were starting to build their reputation in the business world, while trying to raise young children in parallel. Childcare costs, including money spent on nurseries, day care facilities, nannies and au pairs, were cited as the highest financial burden for many women executives (*Felicity, Fern, Fillis*).

Several women executives highlighted, how their focus on their professional careers ate into the time spent with children and other family members. Women spoke of occasions when they had to miss some of the important events in their children’s lives, not being able to help with homework, and growing apart with their partners.

“... [my son] has not done as well academically...can I honestly say that I have done everything possible to support him, the maximum? The answer is no.” (Francine)

“...I have not been there for all of the important moments; I have missed many of the milestones that many other parents [haven’t]...” (Fern)

“I think my work took over quite a lot of my time with my husband. And I just was not around an awful lot... I did get divorced.” (Fiona)

“I remember standing in Atlanta airport with a baby under each arm waiting for my husband to get off a plane, handing my children over and then getting on a plane myself.” (Fillis)

One woman expressed how nervous she felt about the impact her absence might have had on the emotional wellbeing of her daughters, fearing, that her not being there might have affected them as individuals (*Fern*). Others were cautiously optimistic:

"...[balancing my career with family life] has always been a challenge... [my children] are now 22 and 25 and hopefully that's worked." (Fillis)

While six interviewed women were mothers, the remaining two never had children of their own. Some interviewees believed, that successful careers often came at the price of childlessness for some women executives:

"I genuinely feel that I didn't have children because of my career... I have my girlfriends, they are all in their 40s and 50s. ...There is 10 of us, all women, ... and we are all successful females – there is only one of them who has kids." (Fiona)

"...you have to make a decision in life, ...it's career or children." (Flore)

In conclusion, there was a general consensus among interviewed women, that there was a hefty price to pay for having a successful career.

"You have to accept that there is a price." (Felicity)

However, for women, the price tag was double or even triple, particularly being burdened by the commonly held expectations, that the society placed on them pertaining to the responsibilities of raising children, managing the household and supporting their partner. Women who chose to accept paying the price for having a successful corporate career, whatever this individual price might be, as demonstrated from the above examples, had tough choices to make, which often translated into feelings of guilt, emotional pressure and stress.

In the next section I explore the responses of men and compare, whether in their high-flying executive careers men have incurred similar social costs to the interviewed women executives.

Social cost to men

Interviewed men too cited that their successful careers came at an expense. However, often it were the women in their lives, who incurred the cost and made sacrifices on their behalf. Several working wives gave up their own careers in favour of their husbands' and became full-time housewives, dedicated to bringing up the children and managing the household.

"...[my wife] gave up [her] role... She was understanding and put my career before hers... [she] decided that she would... [be] raising our children, rather than going back and focusing on her career." (Mark)

"My first wife...was a professional mother. She looked after the kids, she was there all the time, took the kids to school, supported them in their studies." (Marwin)

In fact, four out of five interviewed men acknowledged and attributed their ability to pursue professional careers to their wives and partners, who, by making their own sacrifices, allowed their men to pursue their careers. Women were described as the rock at home, who took care of all family and home commitments, allowing their men to meet the demands of their jobs, including frequent absences due to extensive travel schedule and long working hours (*Marwin, Mark, Malcolm*). One participant openly acknowledged that his career would not have happened without his wife by his side:

"I've known my wife for 20 years, we have been married for 14 this year. A very understanding wife who has made sacrifices along the way. And [my career] would not have happened without that. I am really clear about that." (Matthew)

Having a partner that men executives could rely on for family management meant, that they could prioritise their professional lives. Several interviewed men cited, that they always put their professional careers above all else, including their family and interests:

"I...always put the firm and my career first...with the view that my family would benefit from that position in their lifestyle..." (Malcolm)

"I always consciously ignored the family and made the career decision." (Martin)

"...my career has always been extremely important, and I've always put that ahead of work/life balance." (Mark)

Only one out of all the men interviewed regarded his career as secondary to his family on the list of priorities:

"...I've never let work dominate... People who say they have not got any work life balance...are really saying they don't care about [their] family..." (Matthew)

Majority of the interviewed men used the word 'choice' when describing their priorities. For these interviewees, careers and families were not about a balance, but an 'either or' choice (*Malcolm, Mark, Martin*). One interviewee recalled, that when faced with a choice to read a business report or a bedtime story to his child, his mindset of a provider and a breadwinner led him to always prioritise work over everything else (*Matthew*).

When reflecting on the social costs, incurred by men throughout the building of their successful careers, the only cost quoted by men was the toll their demanding careers, long working hours and hectic travel schedules took on their relationships. Growing apart from partners, separation and divorce were the examples cited by men. Out of five men, three were divorced, acknowledging that their careers costed them their marriage (*Martin, Marwin, Malcolm*).

Some believed, however, that the financial rewards and perks that the corporate success provided not only to the man himself, but to the wife and children, outweighed and justified the strain their careers had put on their families and relationships. Men's successful careers meant that they could afford boarding schools for their children, family holidays abroad and could provide a better lifestyle for their families in general:

"...my family would benefit from that position in their lifestyle, in the opportunities that they would have." (Malcolm)

"...we always had people working for us...so that we were able to work hard and play hard... [my sons] were...in the UK boarding school system." (Mark)

"We had a great family life..." (Marwin)

"We had a very fulfilling [family] time...very happy memories." (Matthew)

In addition to material benefits, one interviewed man felt that his career brought emotional benefits for the family. He recalled how the fact that this career took him away from family made them value more the time, that they spent together, ultimately bringing all family members closer together (*Mark*).

In conclusion, the interviews highlighted that both men and women paid a price for success and their place in the top echelons of the corporate world. One of the men concluded:

"If you want the big job and you want the big salary to go with it, there is a price to pay for that." (Martin).

For men executives, the price most frequently cited referred to time spent away from family. That can be attributed to the fact that women in interviewed men's lives made sacrifices and incurred cost of men's careers on their behalf. Some women partners gave up their own careers and allowed their husbands jobs dictate the logistics of their personal lives. Men were more likely to consciously prioritise work over any other part of their lives, often believing it was

expected of a provider. Many believed that material and emotional benefits of their success outweighed the social costs incurred by them and their partners.

In contrast, the social cost of successful careers cited by women appeared to be much higher than that of interviewed men.

"I have three children and a husband who works... It is in many ways an unfair competition... The society expects you and the family expects you to have much more dedication and responsibility to your home life... The expectations on the women are still much higher than on the men and that makes it unfair." (Francine)

Women referred to physical, emotional and material sacrifices they had to make throughout their careers. The physical sacrifices included health issues caused by the stresses of their jobs, while the emotional costs involved the feelings of guilt and the psychological pressure of compromise that women were burdened with. Financial sacrifices featured prominently too, especially referring to the early stages of women's careers, and related primarily to high childcare costs.

While supportive partners were frequently cited in interviews with women, it appeared, that women tended to rely on them less than men and played their own active part in management of other non-professional commitments.

In summary, the interviews highlighted that success came at a greater cost to women, making it a much harder decision for professional women to make, when embarking on a career development journey.

In the next section I further explored the cost of success by evaluating interviewees' retrospective reflections on regrets associated with the price they had to pay for their careers.

5.6.2. Secondary Theme B-3: 'Regrets'

I asked all interviewees to reflect back over their professional careers and the personal sacrifices that their careers demanded and identify any regrets. Interestingly, while I could see clear differences between the social costs and sacrifices that both women and men had to make in favour of their professional careers, the differences in the regrets felt by men and women were more subtle.

Several interviewed men cited having no regrets at all on the direction their professional lives took and any sacrifices that they had to make as a result:

"I never look back with any regrets, ever. Should have, would have, could have – no, it does not work career wise." (Martin)

"...no [regrets]... Ultimately [any] regrets are balanced by having a very fulfilling life, ... and that has been extremely rewarding to me." (Mark)

"I can't complain, because I had a lot of fun and achieved quite a lot and saw a lot of the world." (Marwin)

"...[although] the [career] was very all consuming...that was very satisfying, it was very rewarding." (Matthew)

Most interviewed women equally had no regrets when reflecting back on their careers and the impact it might have had on their private lives, however, several women highlighted how difficult the experience had been for them (*Felicity, Fern, Fillis*).

Women reflected on how rewarding their professional experiences were, which for many mellowed down the acute impact of the sacrifices that their high-flying careers demanded:

"I was really blessed with the career where I was challenged, I had the opportunity to try a lot of things and I had as many failures as I had successes." (Felicity)

"I have had an amazing career. I've been very lucky to have worked all over the world, I've had great roles and had great people working for me...and achieved a lot." (Fillis)

For those executives who did have specific regrets to highlight, the impact their careers had on their children and spouse featured most prominently:

"...the biggest regret...is that I didn't spend enough time with [my children]. ... I missed a lot of their growing up... It also meant that my wife and I could not always be together." (Mark)

"...my son...told me that he hasn't suffered from my working while he was growing up. But it is not a guarantee." (Francine)

"I never had children. Have I missed out? Yes. I did get divorced. Do I regret it? I think part of me does." (Fiona)

In contrast, one man executive saw a positive aspect of how his divorce might have indirectly affected his three children –all successful in what they were pursuing today, becoming more self-contained individuals around their own life decisions (*Malcolm*).

On a more positive reflection, and despite having already attained high levels of influence, authority and achievement in their careers, both men and women expressed regret at not pursuing more opportunities, not being bolder in their decisions and choices:

"I don't have any regrets apart from the fact that possibly I could have done far more, or I could have had more experience than I eventually had." (Marwin)

"I could have pushed for opportunities that could have fast-forwarded me even higher to where I ended up." (Florence)

"...I should have been braver on a couple of opportunities and gone for...bigger roles and I didn't." (Faith)

One specific comment was expressed by an interviewed woman executive, who spoke of her regret over having to cut her maternity leave short in order to return back to her role:

"If you were a senior woman, you were expected to almost have your child and then get back to the office. And I went back very, very quickly: I went back in three weeks, which is crazy." (Fillis)

The same woman also expressed regret, that she was not prepared for the volume of discrimination she would face as a career woman:

"I've had [men] try and bully me... And if you know that this is the norm of a big corporate life, it becomes easier to accept this. So, I wish I knew...a lot of the things [I] know now." (Fillis)

In conclusion, when the interviewees were asked to reflect back on their careers and think of any regrets that they could highlight, the majority of comments revolved around minor 'more of' or 'less of' reflections; the interviewees would have opted not to do anything radically different, if they had an opportunity to build their career over again.

In addition, while I could identify gender differences when exploring social costs of men's and women's successful careers in the earlier section, concluding that women paid a much higher price for their place in the top echelons of the corporate world than men; I could not identify significant gender differences, when participants were asked to reflect on any regrets over the price to private lives their careers came at. However, it must be noted that while some of the regrets, such as not pursuing some opportunities, were shared, others, such as the impact of maternity leaves, were women-specific.

Women executives appeared slightly more reflective than men and seemed to analyse their regrets from the perspective of the impact on others, for example: the impact their demanding careers had on their loved ones, while men mostly assumed a more egocentric approach, looking at the impact on themselves.

Most participants stated their belief, that ultimately all the sacrifices they and their families had to make to secure a top job with a top paycheck, was worth it and would not hesitate to make the same journey and take similar decisions again, albeit perhaps with minor and more knowledgeable adaptations.

Women specifically acknowledged the harsh and difficult career journey they had been on to get to their current senior positions. However, retrospectively none would have it any other way and would incur the sacrifices that came with it all over again, as the price of a successful career was worth the rewards that came with it.

5.7. Primary Theme 4: 'What does the future of gender diversity in the UK look like?'

The next two themes are of a forward-looking nature. The first one explores the interviewees' thoughts on what the future of gender diversity within the UK private sector holds. As part of their reflections, interviewed participants voiced their views on the benefits of gender diversity, commented on the effect of such initiatives as the Davies and Hampton-Alexander reviews, and shared their opinions on the benefits of gender diversity. I start by exploring interviewees' reflections on the outlook for the future of gender diversity.

5.7.1. Secondary Theme A-4: 'Outlook for the future of gender diversity'

I asked both men and women to voice their projections on how gender diverse the top echelons of the UK leading private sector organisations would become in the future. In this section I summarise the interviewees' reflections on the pace of progress and effectiveness of developments on the issue of gender diversity they observed throughout the recent years.

Several interviewees expressed that slow progress was made in terms of gender diversity at executive level, citing that any tangible results would require time, and feeling strongly optimistic that the business world was moving in the right direction:

AN INTERPRETIVE EXPLORATION OF UNDER-REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS IN UK FTSE-100 COMPANIES

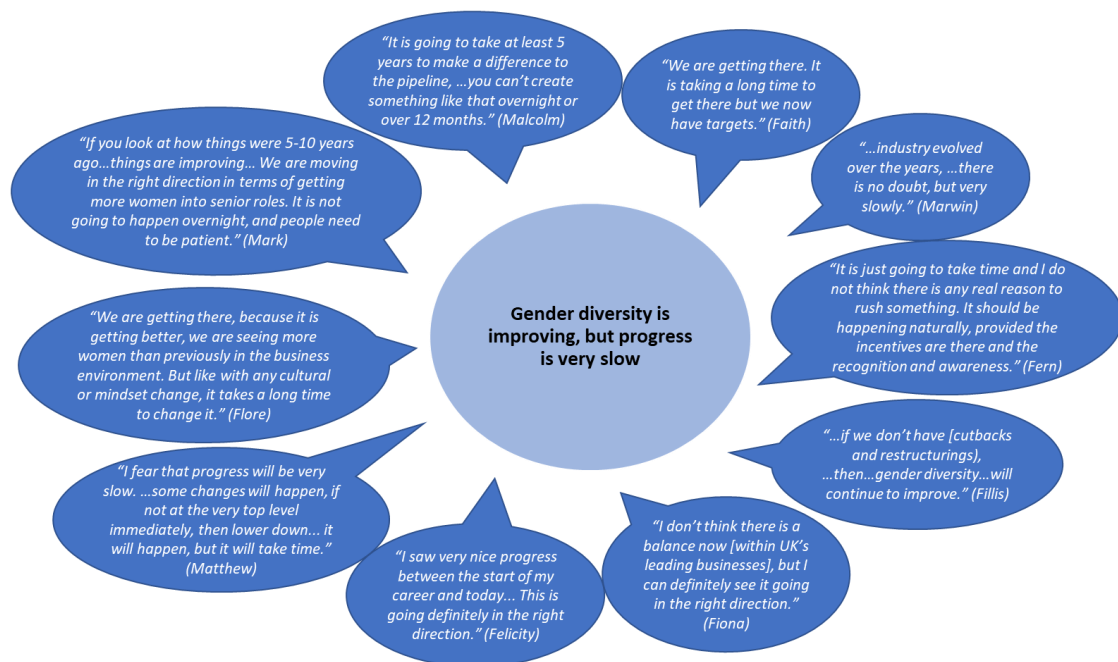


Figure 32: Interviewees' quotes on a slowly improving gender diversity situation

Several interviewed participants attributed this progress, albeit slow, to the fact that gender diversity shot onto the top of the agendas of many leading corporations:

"Over the last 25 to 30 years it has just gone straight up the agenda and it is important to all types of companies." (Fern)

"I know that a lot of CEOs are concerned about it, and they are really trying to take action." (Fillis)

"I see that gender diversity is on the agenda of every company. Everybody wants to have at least 30-40% of women, even 50%..." (Felicity)

Some participants observed that the changes in attitudes of women themselves, as well as the society at large, helped to tackle the obstacles that previously existed to women's representation in the higher echelons of the corporate world. Interviewees perceive that the younger generation of professional women have a confident mindset and believe that they can have it all:

"...graduates that come on our graduate scheme: they just absolutely believe they can have it all... children, ...career, ...flexibility." (Fiona)

"...younger generation...are less scared to do anything." (Felicity)

The society is becoming more sensitive to the inequalities:

"People are realising that there are some biases that happen and are no longer acceptable." (Martin)

This awareness helps break through gendered organisations and roles stereotyping:

"First it was fine to have women as secretaries, then it became fine to have women engineers... Now it is fine to have them as Team Leaders and...to have them in charge. We managed to get rid of some of [those stereotypes]..." (Francine)

"...the other piece that is changing is society's recognition that the job and the career being 'the be all and end all' is not now what people want, ...there are other things in life." (Fern)

People started to realise the benefits of having different perspectives in the corporate environment or in the board room (Flore).

Several participants felt that in today's corporate environment there were more choices and opportunities available for women executives. Legislation around workplace flexibility, technological advances and the growing talent pool of graduating young women entering professional world were seen as enablers that would facilitate creation of new opportunities for women (Fiona, Martin). One interviewee foresaw the rise of women entrepreneurs, predicting that today's flexible work practices would enable more women to balance a successful career with a fulfilling personal and family life:

"...women have started to create their own companies and carve their own style." (Florence)

Several interviewees observed that organisations were shifting towards a gender-blind approach when it came to their talent acquisition practices, placing the emphasis on having the right people in the right jobs:

"...there is definitely culturally a shift to putting the right people in the right jobs..." (Fiona)

"I have always appointed the best person regardless of gender... Gender diversity is important, but as important is...diversity of experience, diversity of backgrounds, diversity of [views]." (Matthew)

"...I do not care if it is a man or a woman, if it is an emotionally sensitive or a tough person – you need everybody, and you need each profile." (Felicity)

"You have got to be recruiting people on the basis of their ability to do the job. Always best person for the job." (Martin)

When probed on what does the concept of 'best person for the job entail', interviewees spoke of unbiased processes, clear and gender-blind criteria for selection and recognition, and looking for a complimentary skillset that would help achieve the objective in hand:

"And those women...are not there because they are women, but because they are the best person for the job. And all of that goes down to making sure that you have got the right criteria and you don't have any bias in your selection and you pick the right person for the job. But you also do a lot of hard work trying to get out there and find the right women, so you have to seek." (Faith)

"I always look for the best person to do the job. I would rather have the team that is a mixture of people, but sometimes I've had all female teams, sometimes I've a mixture of teams where that's changed over time. I have worked for men, probably worked for more men than women, but that really does not bother me either way. It is: can together we deliver what it is we are trying to do, can we make a difference. What I do look for is what do they have that I don't have, so we can then build on each other's strengths and compliment any weaknesses. That is much more important." (Fern)

However, while the overwhelming majority spoke positively of the progress made on the topic of gender diversity at the executive level, some were less optimistic on the pace of progress. Interviewees felt that British business world had a long way to go, and gender diversity issue was a difficult challenge to address, that required patience and a multi-year strategy (*Malcolm, Mark*).

One point, which was highlighted by several participants, was a debate over what the right level of balance was. Participants questioned whether gender balance should be a numerical measure. Some believed in a natural balance that the gender diversity would eventually come to. And once the society stops talking about gender diversity as an issue – that natural balance would have been reached.

"Who is to say that 50-50 is the right balance? If along the way more women have also risen up the ladder and got more opportunities at whatever level, that is a good measure."
(Fern)

"It may not be that 50% of boards are male and 50% are female... We will know it if everyone thinks they are being treated fairly." (Matthew)

"...is [it] realistic to...expect 50% of the roles to be occupied by women? ...we are not going to get there." (Malcolm)

"I wonder whether you will ever get a complete 50% gender diversity...[at] senior management...just because of the fact that some people prefer to be mothers... 40 would be something I would aim at. In terms of non-numerical measures, it's about the influence that women have in the workplace." (Mark)

A weak talent pool of professional women that 'feeds into' the senior positions was highlighted as a strong obstacle to further progress on the topic of better women's representation at senior levels. Several participants argued that the bottom of the hierarchical pyramid needed to be sufficiently numbersome and remain strong throughout career progression stages to be able to 'supply' top women talent:

"...if you have not got enough women coming through who are applying for the job, ... we [will remain] skewed because we've so many males." (Fiona)

"...there are a lot of [women] who...stop...career for undetermined period of time and it does reduce the talent pool within that flow line." (Martin)

"...we have no pipeline. It is going to take at least five years to make a difference to the pipeline." (Malcolm)

Some of the interviewed participants were sceptical about the genuineness of the effort, that organisations were putting into the gender diversity initiatives. Participants described the progress as cosmetic, with organisations exhibiting varying degree of commitment. Some interviewees felt that companies cared more about the optics of how things looked, and opting for quick fixes rather than tackling the deep underlying causes of women's under-representation (Felicity, Martin, Malcolm).

In conclusion, through interviewees' reflections on the outlook for the future of gender diversity in the UK corporate world, I was able to gather a rich variety of views, including the prevailing

opinion on the slow, albeit continual pace of progress, which was taking the corporate world in the right direction. Many spoke positively about gender blind recruitment, recognition and talent development processes, where the best person for the job was selected on the basis of a gender-blind skillset which complimented the existing team and the business in its objective towards an ultimate goal. Participants also referred to favourable behavioural and attitudinal shifts of women, organisations and society on women's ability to 'have it all', to be able to have a successful career and a fulfilling personal/family life. With all of the interviewed participants currently holding or having recently held very senior positions of authority in the leading UK organisations, it was important to observe the emerging debate over what the right gender balance meant to the participants. Many felt that gender balance was not a numerical or timebound measure, but should be attained naturally and evaluated by women's scope of influence, the number of opportunities open to them and by how topical the issue of women's under-representation continued to be. Many of these perceptions contradict the gendered organisations theory, which argues that most of the above processes and practices are gendered and deeply embedded in today's organisations to be able to improve gender diversity. This thought will be further developed in section 6.6. of Chapter Six: Discussion.

In summary, the prevailing opinion of the interviewees saw corporate world moving in the right direction with tackling the issue of women's under-representation in senior roles. Although participants felt the progress of gender diversity initiatives was slow, many found them effective.

The next section explores the opinions of interviewees on the effectiveness of these initiatives in more detail, including their views on positive action, quotas and the impact of the Davies and Hampton-Alexander reviews.

5.7.2. Secondary Theme B-4: 'On positive action, positive discrimination, and quotas'

Positive action was introduced in the UK under the Equality Act 2010 as a range of measures that can be lawfully taken by the employer to improve the representation of marginalised groups, who share a particular characteristic: gender, race, disability, age and others.

When viewed through workplace gender diversity lens and applied in the context of this study, the following understanding of positive action was offered by the interviewees. If the two final candidates are competing for a senior role in a FTSE-100 business – one male and another female, and their candidatures are deemed to be as qualified as each other by the recruiting

organisation, the employer is able to exercise positive action by legally hiring a female candidate in favour of her male 'competitor'. In this context, the introduction of this provision has been deemed to help strengthen the pipeline of female candidates and help organisations overcome the issue of women's under-representation in senior roles.

All the executives participating in this study held positions of considerable authority and contributed to decisions on recruitment and promotion of senior talent in the organisations they had worked in. As part of their responses I wanted to explore how effective the application of positive action provision was in reality. In addition, I wanted to evaluate the views of the interviewees on other talked about alternative measures, such as quotas, that were introduced by some other European countries like Norway, Spain and Finland, but were not regarded in a positive light in the UK. This section explores the experiences and opinions of the interviewed executives on the topics of positive action, positive discrimination and gender quotas.

Firstly, although the majority of interviewees expressed their strong commitment to see more women hired into senior roles, many noted that often they would have to make some sort of a compromise in their recruitment selection. In order to recruit a senior woman, they at times had to waive either a functional or industry experience requirement. Several interviewed executives believed, that such a compromise jeopardised their commitment to do what was right for the business, i.e. recruit the best candidate for the job. Thus, several would resort to a gender-blind, merit-based selection approach (*Francine, Matthew*). Interviewees highlighted that more often than not, the best candidate happened to be the man. Several participants spoke of how they would not be prepared to select a weaker or less experienced female candidate just for the sake of gender diversity agenda (*Martin, Fern*).

Two participants, however, talked about purposely seeking out female candidates for specific roles. However, yet again, some sort of skill- or competency-based compromise would be cited, such as setting aside the need for industry relevance, functional expertise or seniority of experience (*Fillis, Faith*).

One interviewee recalled examples where women were given trust upfront and placed into the roles that were initially too big for them:

"...she has never been in a commercial role, never had a P&L accountability and never had a team reporting to her... Fantastic, capable lady... I...put her into those roles to give her that experience..." (Faith)

Positive action in general was not perceived positively by the interviewees. The executives understood the logical rationale of the concept of positive action. However, when exploring the practical aspect, many saw the basis of the concept an impossible scenario to face in real life. Several interviewees expressed the view, that people were all unique as individuals and it would be impossible to find two candidates who are as qualified as each other. Qualifications come in a variety of forms and there would always be a difference in individuals' skills, competencies, experiences and attitudes and thus the premise of positive action was not perceived by the interviewees to be a realistic one.

"...to me the logic [positive action] is alien... "Inevitably there are differences between people. CVs are about skills and experience and relevance. It is then about fit and as long as you ask the same question to the same people you will always find significant differences. I can't imagine you won't." (Martin)

"I don't know anyone of real integrity who would want to be helped in that way. I think it becomes very problematic. It is one of those things that are done with good intentions, but it does not help the person being progressed, ...it causes all of us to question the integrity...of the decisions being made... I can understand why in extremes it might be necessary, but I do not like it." (Matthew)

Moreover, participants felt that the application of positive action came dangerously close to positive discrimination, which they perceived as unlawful and morally wrong. While interviewees seemed to recognise the difference between both, they expressed concern about any differences potentially being blurred by misinterpretation and inappropriate application. Some highlighted how the preferential treatment of women might alienate their male colleagues:

"...if you exaggerate in the decision-making a diversity factor at the expense of ability then you get...someone...in the role because they are a woman... And that does not appeal to men very much." (Malcolm)

"...a young white guy said to me: the reason I am not even getting near interviews at our senior executive stage, is because I am white, and I am a single male. I need to be black, a woman and probably have two and half children somewhere." (Fern)

As discussed in Chapter Two, the Lord Davies and Hampton-Alexander reviews highlighted that, unlike other countries, the UK adopted a voluntary, quota-free approach to improve women's

representation in senior roles. The introduction of quotas, however, remains an alternative under constant consideration. I therefore took the opportunity to ask the interviewees to reflect on the subject of quotas and share their views as to how effective, if introduced, these could be in tackling the issue of women's under-representation in senior roles. Some interviewees were bluntly against the introduction of quotas or any legislation pertaining to gender diversity in the workplace, advocating the voluntary action. One participant believed that quotas helped boost the numbers at the top of the pyramid, but had no cascading effect and were ineffective at tackling the issue of talent pipeline paucity:

"The hope was that by setting quotas at top levels the cascading effect will happen automatically. But that did not happen." (Francine)

Several interviewees felt that introduction of quotas would take away individuals' accountability over the topic of gender diversity. In addition, interviewed participants identified quotas as detrimental to a gender-blind approach to selection and recognition, going against executives' perceived responsibility to their organisation to choose the best person for the job, as discussed in section 5.7.1. earlier:

"...it is the right person for the job. And if it is seven guys, that is absolutely fine. Just putting a woman in there just because you are filling in a quota, it drives me slightly potty." (Fiona)

"...it is very difficult to legislate to make things happen... [quotas] is not a sustainable system... You are allowing people to almost give up their moral responsibility." (Matthew)

"It is logical and common sense to have the best person for the job. I am dead against quotas...because companies then spend all their time arguing about finding ways to [falsify] that they have met the quota. You have got to be recruiting people on the basis of their ability to do the job." (Martin)

Several interviewees viewed quotas as not an ideal, but an effective short-term solution to rapidly improve gender diversity numbers at the top. Some reflected, that while with quotas the progress would be cosmetic, gender diversity would be widely talked about and women would get more opportunities to be promoted (*Felicity*). Others believed that business-led efforts alone were not sufficient, reflecting how the UK voluntary approach helped boost the number of women on boards, but did not change the number of women in executive roles (*Fillis*).

In conclusion, echoing the recommendations of Lord Davies and Hampton-Alexander Reviews to continue UK's voluntary approach, there was a general consensus among the interviewed executives that the introduction of quotas was not regarded by the corporate world as effective mechanism in tackling women's under-representation at senior echelons of UK FTSE-100 businesses. Similarly, the application of positive action under Section 159 of Equality Act 2010 based on its 'as qualified as' criteria was perceived by the interviewees to be unrealistic in real life when dealing with complex interpretation of the word 'qualifications'. The discussion thus evolved towards alternative tools and initiatives cited by the interviewees as better suited for tackling the issue of women's under-representation. As one example, voluntary key performance indicators (KPI) targets, cascaded to the executive team by the committed to the gender diversity agenda CEO, were quoted by several interviewed executives as an effective strategy. These and other best practice initiatives will be explored in more detail in Secondary Theme A-5.

The next section explored the views of the interviewed executives on the impact that Lord Davies and Hampton-Alexander reviews had on improving the number of women at executive level of the FTSE-100 companies.

5.7.3. Secondary Theme C-4: 'The impact of Lord Davies and Hampton-Alexander Reviews'

As part of this research, I wanted to query the interviewees on their views and their perceived or experienced encounters with the effects of both the Lord Davies and Hampton-Alexander reviews, as described by the executives representing the FTSE-100 organisations. This section examines their responses.

Firstly, it was important to note that an overwhelming majority of the interviewed executives had a comprehensive understanding of, and some direct experience with the reviews of Lord Davies, Sir Hampton and Dame Alexander. I asked them to reflect on the contribution, legacy and impact that these reviews had in their opinions on the issue of gender diversity within the UK FTSE-100 organisations, and specifically, at the executive directorship level. Many saw both reviews as an effective catalyst, the instigator of change.

"With things like the Davis report...people have become more aware that it is no longer acceptable to not give women the opportunities..." (Flore)

"[after] Davis report...you have got a lot of companies who are actively monitoring their gender diversity and measuring it." (Mark)

"I think [reviews like the Davies and Hampton-Alexander] are important... If people think there is a difference between black people and white people, then there will be differences... So, changing people's thinking on this." (Matthew)

Reflecting on the Hampton-Alexander Review, which specifically explores the issue of women's under-representation at executive levels, some participants found, that it failed to gain the momentum that the Davis Review had been able to achieve, and needed more drive and dissemination:

"...it is a fairly low-level dissemination... It has built on the Davis Review, ...[but] it is hugely important to continue to drive the agenda and to drive the conversation...even more ...than...previously." (Flore)

Additionally, while the majority of the interviewed executives spoke positively about the impact of Davies and Hampton-Alexander reviews, they reflected on the shortcomings and were eager to put forward concrete recommendations, as to how the contributions of the reviews could be taken forward.

Some interviewees cited, that while the corporate world needed positive messages of encouragement, it also required specific targets, if tangible progress with the number of women in executive roles of FTSE businesses were to be made:

"...you need a good mix of...positive messages, helping people understand the benefits of diversity, ...[but] you also need...harsh targets. Otherwise you are not going to do it." (Flore)

Others remarked that just the awareness about the issue of gender diversity was not enough: it was the practical advice that organisations required to be able to move the dial and make sustainable progress on the issue of women executive's under-representation:

"...you have to have that practical pieces in place as well. ...you have got to underpin [the hype] with saying how can we practically create the right environment for these changes to happen, what are the policy changes..." (Fern)

"...[these] reviews...are good things, but...unless they are translated into practical action, all they are is recommendations." (Matthew)

Some interviewees felt, that while the Lord Davies and Hampton-Alexander reviews were useful initiatives, their influence was limited and the responsibility for the progress belonged to the corporate actors:

"The CEOs are the main issue and they have to stop talking about it and actually in the business put targets in, put KPIs in." (Fillis)

However, not all of the participants were familiar with the Lord Davies or Hampton-Alexander reviews. One participant, although a senior member of the top FTSE-100 organisation, never heard of the reviews. Despite this, the interviewee was confident that her organisation was making exemplary progress on the issue of women's under-representation in executive roles, stating that *"...our policies on diversity are pretty much top quartile."* (Faith).

In conclusion, it can be summarised that the usefulness of Lord Davies and Hampton-Alexander reviews was recognised by the majority of the interviewed senior executives. The key contribution of these reviews was perceived to be mainly in the areas of raising awareness, creating visibility and getting public engagement on the topic of gender balance. It was, however, deemed that such reviews were primarily a good starting point; and the action and remedial initiatives needed to be instigated and owned by the organisations and their members.

While the findings of this section indicated a strong level of buy-in that the Lord Davies and Hampton-Alexander reviews had created within FTSE-100 organisations, I wanted to probe what stood behind this engagement. Since interviewees often spoke of their obligation to do what was right for their organisations, it was important to explore their views on how beneficial gender diversity was to the business. Next section presents participants' opinions on this topic.

5.7.4. Secondary Theme D-4: 'Is gender diversity advantageous to business?'

In Chapter Two I presented several arguments that strengthen the case in support of gender diversity in the UK private sector. There is a moral case for gender diversity, which is based on the concepts of fairness, ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility. There is a sustainability argument, which in simple terms suggests that disregarding any part of the 48% female working population is not a sustainable approach to the future of the UK economical and societal wellbeing. There is a business case argument, where an increasing volume of research links gender diversity at the workplace with improved business performance.

As part of this research study, I asked the interviewed participants to share if in their opinion a gender diverse executive team brought any advantages to the business, whether measured by tangible or less visible performance indicators. In this section I examine their responses.

In general terms, several interviewees expressed their belief that a gender diverse business was a better performing business.

“Organisations are made out of people... Diverse organisations are successful, so there is a business imperative”. (Malcolm)

“Statistics show that companies have economically improved through more gender diversity.” (Flore)

Some interviewees observed that gender diverse teams were higher performing teams, because through their diverse composition they were able to offer a boarder set of perspectives and exhibited a higher level of engagement than the teams that lacked gender diversity:

“...I believe...diverse teams are high performance teams. [Diverse] teams are...more engaged teams.” (Faith)

“...[with diverse] team...you will get different insights and I always found that more fun, more interesting and more successful.” (Malcolm)

“...performance of your business is going to be dependent on the engagement of your people. I think actually when you go back to some of those smaller things, females can be highly engaged in organisations. And men also will, but I think females because of the nurture in there you will see them doing things like organising birthday presents for somebody, the balloons on the desk, somebody is getting married, somebody is coming back for the first day after maternity. It is always the women that sort all that out and that creates engagement in the workplace.” (Fiona)

Several opinions highlighted the fact that having gender diverse perspectives at the decision-making table gave organisations the ability to understand the gender-specific needs of the customer. This in turn had a positive impact on the organisation’s ability to better respond to customers’ needs and deliver a product that was more suited to the specific requirement:

“...[for] businesses who are developing gender specific products or services you clearly have to have diversity at the top table, otherwise...you would...not [be] getting the right level of input. If you are making stuff for women, how can you have a company that does not have females represented all the way through the hierarchy?” (Martin)

“...for many industries...over half of...customers are women. We’d better understand them...from the inside. And that drives...the consumer industry as a whole and many service sectors.” (Fern)

Another argument presented by several interviewees pertained to the area of decision-making, where some believed that a gender diverse executive team contributed to a richer decision-making process, which led to a better-informed outcome:

“...[with] more women in a team you get more effective, better decision-making.” (Faith)

“If you look at the way decisions are made, ...there is...definitely an advantage to have different personalities, different perspectives, different ways of doing things around.” (Martin)

Some participants felt that organisations would be losing out on a large pool of talent and incur a lot of unnecessary recruitment costs if they neglected women, representing a large number of the employable candidates (Mark).

In conclusion, it can be observed that there were neither negative nor indifferent views with regards to the correlation of gender diversity and business performance. Every interviewed executive saw only a positive contribution that gender diverse executive teams brought to the performance of the organisation. Interviewees saw gender diversity improving companies’ performance through greater customer satisfaction, richer decision-making table, balanced leadership and engaged, high-performing teams.

However, a lot of the positive impact examples were described by the interviewees in non-quantifiable terms, which could potentially explain the lack of research evidence on this issue in academic literature.

Having established through the overwhelming feedback of interviewees, that UK FTSE-100 companies benefited from having more executive women within their leadership layer, but the initiatives instigated so far saw limited and slow progress made towards improving women’s representation, it was important to consider the practical element. The next section examines action-based recommendations that could hold key to the solution of women’s under-representation issue at executive level.

5.8. Primary Theme 5: 'Practical action moves the dial'

The final theme explores the recommendations and advice of the interviewed executives on how best to tackle the issue of women's under-representation. I start by presenting participants' views on where the responsibility for this issue rests, as they evaluate the contribution of governments, companies, and individual executives to the solution. I then explore the examples of best practice gender diversity initiatives, steered by the leading British businesses, before concluding with practical advice given by the interviewees to aspiring career women.

5.8.1. Secondary Theme A-5: 'Where does the responsibility lie?'

During the interviews with senior executives participating in this study, I asked them to reflect on where in their opinion the responsibility laid for the issue of women's under-representation within the UK corporate world. The interviewees examined various corporate actors: women executives, CEOs, employers, executive search firms and the society at large, as they considered these players' individual contribution to either driving or stalling the progress in the area of women's under-representation within executive roles of UK FTSE-100 corporations.

Several interviewees believed, that the ownership and accountability for the outcome of one's life choices, including those related to professional success, were in the hands of women executives. Some of the interviewed participants argued that women were primarily responsible for remaining 'in demand' professionals. Interviewees saw the onus being on a woman to maintain high levels of competency, to actively signal her interest and to fully commit to the demands of a successful career.

"...there is nobody more interested in your career than [a woman herself]. ...it is for a woman to take care of herself... And...if you do not accept [this lonely realisation], just do not hope for anything." (Francine)

"Take ownership of your career development, do not expect it to happen from the company's side. It has to come from [the woman]." (Florence)

"The woman is the driving force, because you need to have the will." (Felicity)

"...[the responsibility] is 100% with the woman. In my industry I am not really bothered about your gender, I am really bothered about: can you do the job, will you do the job, will you fit in?" (Martin)

“...you have to shape your own career and your own life. Individually women need to actually want it and push for it, ...to make sure that they are suitably skilled and can be operating at the same level as the men, ...to make sure that even if they take time out that they continue keeping their knowledge up to date. (Mark)

Some interviewees firmly believed that the responsibility for driving gender diversity topic should start at the very top – with the CEO or Managing Director of the organisation, without whose commitment and support companies would not be able to improve the representation of women in their leadership roles:

“I have one of the most supportive CEOs... He is extremely committed...and...supportive of the gender diversity agenda.” (Francine)

“It has to be led by the CEO and by the senior team They have got to be serious about doing it... to have targets,...to put in KPIs into each of their businesses at multiple levels.” (Fillis)

“[My] CEO...really care[s] about this. [Our] institution is quite forward thinking around diversity.” (Mark)

“...there is definitely a responsibility for the current generation of leaders to be fully engaged in how their organisations make the decisions on reward and promotion.” (Malcolm)

Some of the executives expressed the view that executive search firms had a large role to play in helping to tackle women’s under-representation in senior roles. Participants felt that these firms had the expertise and time to seek out a broader candidate selection, than CEOs would be able to do on their own, so that a more diverse pool of senior candidates could be brought forward:

“The search firms do not put-up diverse lists. They just do the same old thing. They are fulfilling the brief and getting paid. A good search firm will work very, very hard to find a diverse list. It is absolutely possible.” (Fillis)

Government was seen by some other interviewed participants as having its share of responsibility for introducing more supportive legislation to eliminate such obstacles as expensive childcare and limited workplace flexibility arrangements, that often prevent women from progressing to top levels within organisations:

“...it is down...to the government, to make sure that...there [is]...a better [childcare] alternative in place than we currently have; [and] more flexibility around working hours.”
(Mark)

Some of the interviewed participants saw a bulk of responsibility for the gender diversity agenda resting on the shoulders of employers. Interviewees felt organisations required to change their gender-specific mindsets, calling for them to become more flexible, adaptable and move away from the old-fashioned habits and assumptions:

“...as an employer we...need to think differently and...be much more relaxed about [flexible] working ...Employers need to change their thinking...and be a lot more adaptable...”
(Fern)

“...as a business you have to give flexibility...” (Fiona)

“[Companies] who want talent will definitely need to flex; you have to be flexible as an employer.” (Martin)

“...companies...have a role to help women develop their careers and ensure that if they have taken time off for childbirth and the like that they are given the opportunities to get back into the workplace.” (Mark)

Having heard interviewees' opinions on the various societal actors and the role they played in tackling the issue of women's under-representation in senior roles, including women executives, CEOs, organisations in general, executive search firms and government, I asked participants to try and single out one societal actor they perceived to be responsible for the issue of workplace gender diversity. Many interviewees reflected that gender diversity was not a one-sided matter and required a combined effort. Some believed in shared responsibility between people who made the appointments into senior roles and women candidates for those jobs.

“...both parties...have the responsibility. Women need to engage more, the people who make the appointment decisions need to...overcome that bias that tells them that it is a male behaviour, or it is a female behaviour.” (Matthew)

“...management of...organisation[s] need[s] to provide a level playing field for women. And...women have to be able to capitalise on that opportunity. There is responsibility on both sides.” (Marwin)

Others felt, that without the commitment and contribution of every societal actor, no progress could be made to improve women's representation in senior roles:

"...it is not a one-sided story. It is a complex one." (Francine)

"Probably everyone's ... individual people... companies ... the society ... the government... it is a collection of all of those." (Mark)

"...the responsibility lies with each and every one of us, ...it has to be a combination of government, corporate governance code, and individual corporations...it has to come from a number of sources..." (Flore)

Interviewees felt, that for as long as the society as a whole and individuals within it continued pointing fingers and looked for someone to blame for women's under-representation in the workplace, valuable time for progress would be wasted, and the focus would be misplaced. It was clear from the majority of the participants' responses that they thought the onus for gender diversity improvement did not rest with anyone singlehandedly. On the one hand, interviewees perceived that it was the responsibility of under-represented women themselves to take ownership of their careers. But it also emerged from participants views that each and every one individual, living and working within a society, had a moral responsibility to ensure that equal and fair treatment was offered and received by men and women alike, and to seek ways to change things, if they witnessed unfairness.

In the next section I presented the concrete examples of the ways UK organisations sought to change things, including a set of best practice gender diversity initiatives, that were believed by the interviewees to have made the difference.

5.8.2. Secondary Theme B-5: 'Best practice gender diversity initiatives steered by British top businesses'

Every campaign, whether led by Lord Davies, Hampton-Alexander review or the 30% Club contained some element of practical recommendations and action-based suggestions to the UK FTSE listed businesses on what could help to tackle the issue of women's under-representation. Given the direct involvement of the interviewed executives within the FTSE-100 world, I felt it was important, especially for the contribution to practice this study intended to make, to explore the practical element in more detail by examining the sort of initiatives and approaches the interviewees' leading organisations had instigated to improve the numbers of women across their hierarchical pyramid, and more specifically, within their executive layer. This section

compiled best practice examples cited by the participants, as they reflected on what was instrumental to their organisations' ability to successfully tackle the issue of women's under-representation.

Firstly, it was unanimously agreed by the interviewees that gender diversity topic at every one of their organisations started with firm focus and absolute commitment to the issue at the very top management level (*Francine, Fiona, Fern, Malcolm, Mark*):

"Over the last 25 to 30 years it has just gone straight up the agenda and it is important to all types of companies. There is no difference at all. At [company x] we had targets that we were expected to get behind and deliver. And laterally I think all of us within the senior management team were regularly trained in gender diversity and inclusion. The company took it very seriously, still does, and that started to really become part of our values and the way that we did things." (Fern)

"Another observation over the years is: when you put a lot of focus on this, you have to have a CEO who is very committed to this. When you put a lot of focus on this, you start making a lot of progress, but it is a relentless effort. The minute you take your eyes off the ball, or the CEO decides it is important, but not on the top of the agenda, you start to fall back straight away." (Francine)

Several interviewed participants spoke of how setting clear gender diversity targets and objectives helped them to attract and retain women across all hierarchical levels. Interviewees also highlighted how their organisations monitored, measured and rewarded good performance against such targets.

"[We] never had a gender diversity objective at the senior level and for the first-time last year we did it: we set our gender diversity objective." (Francine)

"In...our...business we have a 50% gender target by 2025 at all levels in the organisation... We have [Diversity & Inclusion] team awards and individual awards." (Faith)

"...we had [gender diversity] targets that we were expected to get behind and deliver." (Fern)

"...all of [our] Executive Committee members have KPIs that talk about improving gender diversity. Everybody knows then that their bonus is going to be related to it." (Fillis)

"[We] look at proportion of women promoted each year at every level of the organisation, how we measure this,...and setting realistic objectives is key." (Malcolm)

"[Gender diversity agenda] has been clearly identified and articulated... A lot of companies...are actively monitoring their gender diversity and measuring it." (Mark).

However, interviewees observed that having a CEO committed to gender diversity agenda and having clear targets in place was not sufficient to move the dial, when it came to women's under-representation in senior roles. Interviewees spoke of how crucial it was for them to put up a united effort and to engage everyone's commitment to change, in order to see tangible progress with respect to gender diversity in their organisations:

"We have changed that through a cultural change, through minds and hearts change, where we think it is not about ticking boxes or keeping to rules and regulations." (Flore)

"...we made a united effort..." (Francine)

"...we [took the opportunity] of poor business performance... [to] reboot the culture." (Fern)

"...you have got to have the people who are interested and responsible for managing it at every level." (Fillis)

With poor childcare provisions cited by interviewees in previous sections as impediments to women returning to their careers after childbirth, it was not surprising to hear that many organisations introduced various support mechanisms for their employees. Participants gave examples of how several of their organisations found creative ways to support women executives with childcare, some organising creche facilities within their office premises, and others offering maternity leave support that went over and above the legislative minimum.

"...we...opened a creche on site, which is very good. And a lot of companies are starting to do this as well." (Florence)

"We are systematically looking at [barriers for women coming back from career breaks and maternity]...and support them. Childcare assistance, for example." (Faith)

"...[the organisation] would give us full pay when...we were on maternity leave." (Fern)

"To any female that works for me now I say...to...work out how long she needs [for maternity leave]." (Fillis)

Structured succession planning which translated into development programmes for women with high potential was cited as an example of tools that organisations used to strengthen their internal talent pool of women:

"We now pay more attention to [our succession plan]... With my executive team [we] review our top potential women at each level and decide what we need to do specifically for [them to] develop." (Francine)

"[We] started to encourage managers to try and bring females through the organisation quicker than they had done historically." (Marwin)

When discussing the external talent pool of women, some of the interviewed executives spoke of creative ways they used to seek women candidates. Several highlighted how their organisations had to become more open to industry and functional crossovers (*Faith, Fillis*). Additional organisational examples included companies starting to build their external talent pipeline as early as at university level:

"[We] spend...a lot of time in schools and universities trying to attract girls to go into STEM subjects... it is about broadening people's horizons around what STEM subjects are about." (Faith)

Several interviewees reflected on how women-friendly internal policies, introduced by their organisations, helped them attract, retain and bring talented professional women back from maternity leaves or career breaks. These initiatives often generously exceeded the statutory requirement. Examples cited by participants included flexible working hours, virtual and remote working, part-time schedules, job sharing and skills refresher trainings.

"...flexible working – we have got more and more senior ladies work four days a week, or job share." (Faith)

"We are trying to work with [returning women] to help them back into the organisation. Giving them buddies and mentors, keeping them in contact, ...re-training... With virtual working systems that we have everywhere you can work virtually." (Faith)

"The technology allows us to get away and work from wherever we want... If you do not allow people to work flexibly, it is weak management in my view..." (Matthew)

"We have given women a lot of flexibility and a lot of choice... That is the way that you can make it more attractive for people who might want to go back to work... Remote working, ...flexible working, ...technology." (Martin)

It was widely recognised that as long as the issue of women's under-representation at the top continued to exist, women executives would need extra encouragement and support throughout the development of their careers:

"We tell our women how much we believe in them and how much we want them to progress." (Francine)

"...through a lot more coaching, mentoring, education around: you can do this, and here is a plethora of women who have done it and can show you and help you to it." (Flore)

"...the company stood by her... Her career has gone on unabated, exactly as it would have done had she not had children." (Marwin)

"An increasing number of organisations are running campaigns around returning to work and trying to target people who left several years earlier to have children... And without being proactively contacted they would not themselves [return] to their previous employer." (Malcolm)

The importance of mentors and role models had been discussed by the interviewees:

"I've seen signs that generation of women...that are now coming...into senior roles are themselves more balanced people and therefore will create better roles models. That may be the best most effective way of creating better diversity. At the end of the day you want your younger women to aspire to roles that they see you doing." (Malcolm)

Interviewees, both men and women, gave numerous examples of how they themselves actively became mentors to their junior women colleagues (Florence, Faith, Marwin, Flore):

"I spend a huge amount of time mentoring women, ...I hold women's sessions with talent, talk about career management, talk about mentoring, talk about how women can develop themselves." (Faith)

"When I mentor men and women alike, ...I always say: you only know what you know. You can't bring a fresh perspective to yourself because you have opinions and you have

character traits and that is all you know. The only way you can grow and develop beyond what you are capable of doing is by having other perspectives.” (Marwin)

Some participants spoke about formal mentoring programmes offered by their organisations to their senior executives:

“I have had mentors who have helped me... I...had business coaches externally from [my company] that have helped me.” (Faith)

Interviewees discussed how their organisations were striving to overcome some of the gender biases that existed within their internal processes through building awareness and conducting informal discussions and formal training programmes throughout the organisations:

“Unintended biases and awareness are key – we do a lot of training with men and women on that.” (Faith)

“...all of us within the senior management team were regularly trained in gender diversity and inclusion.” (Fern)

“I...sit down with...my team and...talk...about the importance of female role models... I am just trying to provoke really and put it out there.” (Matthew)

Another success factor highlighted by interviewees was the spirit of transparency and openness that existed within their organisations. Their leadership teams were not afraid to publicly disclose information related to their gender diversity statistics, especially when it pertained to gaps and failures:

“...we published in our annual report the statements about pay equality – and pay is one of the symbols. We know exactly where our gaps are...” (Francine)

“...the Women in Finance Charter...got a lot of attention, ...where it is asking the CEOs for formally sign a target.” (Fillis)

Several interviewed executives reflected on how the initiatives focusing on building a more inclusive organisational environment, helped their companies engage all employees, men and women, junior and senior, in the issue of gender diversity:

“I work a lot on the inclusive environment, as well as the diversity. I spend a lot of time with my teams, ...making sure from the youngest and the least experienced up to the most experienced people have the ability to have the voice in the room, that they are heard.” (Faith)

“...we all have plenty of opportunity to raise our voices and be heard. And particularly at the boardroom table where I sit with colleagues, everyone is treated as equal.” (Fern)

“...we do not want to be seen as a group of these evangelistic women barring men from our discussions and so [men] were invited to come along [for women networking sessions] too... It was only a handful there, only two or three versus 60 women in the room, but a couple of people came saying we would like to know what you are talking about, this is interesting and don't forget that sometimes men are facing similar challenges: how do we make our voices heard.” (Fern)

But most importantly, all of the interviewed executives expressed how crucial to gender diversity progress in their organisations was for the companies and their employees to ‘walk the walk’ by way of treating everyone, men and women alike, as equal (*Fiona, Matthew*), by offering equal opportunities (*Marwin*), promoting on merit (*Fillis*) and eliminating gender pay gaps (*Fiona, Martin*).

In conclusion, it was encouraging to hear such a variety of examples of best practice initiatives cited by the representatives of FTSE-100 organisations working to improve women's representation. Many of these initiatives were targeted not just at women in senior roles, but applied to every hierarchical layer of the companies, echoing the barriers to women's representation highlighted by the theory of gendered organisations discussed in Chapter Three.

It was clear from the various interviews that progress could only be made when organisations put gender diversity on the top of their corporate priorities and demonstrated a united focus and commitment to the cause at every level. Exemplary employers offered all their employees, irrespective of gender, a variety of support mechanisms, where more women employees than before could benefit from the initiatives to help tackle such challenges as childcare, lack of confidence, outdated skills by offering flexible working conditions, training, mentoring and coaching. Companies, which boasted better women representation at executive level, invested a lot of effort into building and developing their internal and external talent pool of women. These companies favoured a structured approach by setting gender diversity targets, some linking success with reward and publicly sharing their progress.

Finally, tackling biases and ensuring fair and equal treatment of their employees irrespective of gender and other diversity characteristics that might exist, was perceived by the interviewees

to be fundamental to every aspect of these organisations' people management processes, including equal opportunities, merit-based recognition and equal pay.

Looking back at the interviewees' themed reflections presented so far, women often appear to be cited as both the source and the solution to the issue of women's under-representation. As part of this study's contribution to practice, I would like the women who are either embarking on, are in the process of, or are pondering the return back to their careers, to hear directly from the executives (men and women), who have built successful careers, on what it takes to make it in the professional world.

5.8.3. Secondary Theme C-5: 'Advice to aspiring career women'

I asked interviewed participants to give their advice or recommendations to professional women, aspiring to reach the level of career success similar to their own. The views did not differ greatly between interviewed men and women, and revolved around skills, attitudes and actions that professional women would benefit from exhibiting more or less of.

Participants highlighted the importance of being seen, broadening one's competency skillset, being confident, courageous, taking risks, as well as having control and taking ownership over one's career.

Participants recommended for women to ensure they got noticed, seeing it as a critical component to one's successful career development. Interviewees reflected that working hard and achieving the result was not sufficient. They felt it was important for women to get exposure and recommended for women executives to 'advertise' their achievements, to have an opinion and not to be afraid to voice it:

"...it is very important to be seen and be known, ...that people in the organisation know your name. You need to volunteer on a lot of different projects outside of your direct responsibilities..." (Florence)

"...you need to...pragmatically position yourself in the best possible light for that appointment or that promotion." (Francine)

"...be really clear about...what it is you stand for. Values, principles, how you talk about yourself. Being good at making an impact talking about yourself." (Faith)

"Always try to speak up, ...try and make people notice you. It is not enough to be knowledgeable; it is important that people know and recognise your abilities." (Mark)

Several interviewees advised women to build their credibility and reputation through delivering a high-quality output and going an extra mile beyond the minimum requirements of their role (*Felicity, Faith, Malcolm*). However, women specifically felt that just doing a good job for a woman was not enough:

"Many women think they just need to do a good job. You do need to do a good job, you do need to deliver, but you also need to work harder at it to get up through the organization as a female. Just doing a good job for a woman is not enough. Research shows, that time and time again you have to work harder at it." (*Faith*)

Several interviewees recommended for women to take ownership, assume control of their professional lives:

"Take ownership of your career development, do not expect it to happen from the company's side. It has to come from you." (*Florence*)

"There is nobody more interested in your career than you. ...it is for a woman to take care of herself." (*Francine*)

Several participants reflected that assuming control over one's career was not without taking risks, translating into their advice for women to get out of their comfort zone and be brave about making bold choices without the fear of consequences:

"Take the calculated risks and go into roles where you get good basic broad experience. Put yourself outside of your comfort zone and network... [Make] those choices...and be brave." (*Faith*)

"Take some chances and be brave. What is the worst that can happen?" (*Fiona*)

"Don't be scared. Just do it. Grab it, take it. Most of the time the [scariest] things bring you quite a long way." (*Felicity*)

"Just go and do it. Stop making excuses." (*Matthew*)

"You...need to be prepared to be outside of your comfort zone, ... to live...part of your life, probably both personal and business, outside your comfort zone." (*Malcolm*)

At the same time, interviewees cautioned women against making compromises, encouraging them to stick to their values, when making life decisions, and to be prepared to move on, if their needs were not met:

"Don't make any compromises. You are not married to the company, this is your life, you are in control, you are in command, so if something is not working for you...find something else. Do not wait for the company to decide for you." (Florence)

"...if you don't like the business, you have a choice." (Fiona)

"Always go to something, don't go from something." (Martin)

Interviewed executives recommended to have a loose career plan, a vision, but warned against the stifling limitations of over-planning:

"...where [do] you want to be in five, ten, fifteen, twenty years? How are you going to get there? Map that out." (Fern)

"Don't always plan too much because things happen. Just have a good idea about what direction you want to go in. And what direction you definitely don't want to go in." (Fiona)

"Make sure that what you've chosen to do is something that you want to do, and you enjoy doing. There is no point in going to work just to earn money." (Malcolm)

Both points above resonated with the passive element within the theory of merit discussed in Chapter Three and highlighted the notion of proactivity that was equally present in the careers of successful professional men and women, a point that will be developed further in Chapter Six: Discussion.

More specifically, several interviewees advised women to build a diverse, well-rounded experience in order to become as broadly versed in business as possible, and versatile in as many areas as possible. They recommended to develop a personal 'unique selling point' (USP), that distinguished them from the others and made them be sought after, including: functional know-how, multi-cultural experience, cross-industry knowledge and international exposure:

"...spend the first five to ten years of [your] professional life broadening [yourself]. Do as much personal development as you can." (Faith)

"...you don't have to worry about your career until you are 30. [until then] get as many experiences as possible..." (Martin)

"Try to build your experience levels across industries, across disciplines, ideally across countries... Continuously...grow your experience and your education." (Marwin)

Ability to effectively network, build relationships and acquire advocates of one's candidature were also cited as important tools for executives, especially women, to have in their arsenal (Faith, Fern, Matthew, Fiona, Marwin):

"Get a good mentor in the organisation. Attract advocates of you through just doing the very best that you can do. Focus on things that you know you are good at. Have a loose plan and then get those people, those advocates and those mentors to help you navigate your way through it." (Fiona)

"It is about who you know, not what you know. So, building your network far and wide is really important, because people from your school days – you can help them, and they can help you." (Fern)

Confidence and perseverance were two qualities highlighted by several participants, who saw them as critical if women were to reach professional success:

"Never tell yourself that you can't do something." (Matthew)

"Have an opinion and give it, ...and be resilient. Keep going." (Flore)

"Have no fears, try and decide what's important to you and...then just really go for it." (Mark)

"You have got to have a lot of stamina. You...need to be ready for tough conversations, for quite tough times..." (Fillis)

One particular advice cautioned women executives from overly focusing on building professional careers and losing sight of their life outside of work:

"...at the same time, be quite strict about your own life outside of work. It is not about working crazy hours, because at the end of the day you will never be paid for the crazy hours." (Florence)

Several interviewees specifically highlighted that their advice would not be any different, whether given to a man or a woman (Florence, Matthew, Mark, Marwin). They stressed that today's aspiring career men and women faced very similar challenges, when entering and progressing through the corporate environment, and would thus benefit from similar recommendations on how to navigate these.

In conclusion, it was interesting to observe that no gender specific advice had been given by the interviewees. Many of them came out united in their thoughts about the importance of being seen, broadening one's competencies and developing one's skills, being confident, courageous and taking risks, as well as having control and taking ownership over one's career.

5.9. Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the findings from interviews with five men and eight women senior executives, representing nine business sectors and eight corporate functions drawn from the UK FTSE-100 businesses.

I explored their career journeys by thematically grouping the findings into five topics, with the aim of uncovering the interviewees' explanations of the issue of women's under-representation in top jobs of UK FTSE-100 businesses and their opinions on the way to tackle it. Among the themes, I explored the executives' perceived meaning of success; highlighted the obstacles and costs incurred by them along the way; brought together participants' views on the level of gender diversity the corporate world should aspire to; and summarised their practical recommendations on how that level could be reached and sustained.

Firstly, I explored the qualities, competencies and behaviours that participants cited to have developed throughout their careers, in order to reach the high level in their professions. Risk-taking, versatility, professionalism, visibility, commitment, dedication and networking were the predominant enablers described.

I then explored specific career development strategies adopted by the interviewees, and contrasted the approaches selected by women to those chosen by men. Findings indicated that women largely followed opportunistic, emerging career trajectories, inheriting new 'circumstances' with each role. Men, in contrast, often followed a linear career progression pattern, where they steadily and vertically advanced through the ranks of organisations, often forming lasting bonds and following their peers and bosses into new opportunities. This finding largely contradicted some of the prior research on the concept of merit, which, it can be argued, generally associated merit with a passive element. Literature review highlighted that women more than men tend to seek merit-based environments (Bosquet, Combes and García-Peñalosa, 2019; Exley, Niederle and Vesterlund, 2020); they become disillusioned and leave (Son Hing, Bobocel and Zanna, 2002; Lewis, Simpson and Sealy, 2010), when organisations fail to implement meritocratic systems (Nicholson, 2010, 2013a, 2013b). Merit-based theories largely

imply that women 'wait' to be recognised and rewarded, in contrast to the interviews findings, where it appeared that women's career paths contained more risky and volatile moves, where they proactively sought and determinedly went after opportunities, while the trajectories of men's careers were more conservative and predictable.

Building on pinpointed gender-different career strategies, the next section evaluated gender-based differences, which could be observed in leadership styles and behaviours. While some interviewees believed that no gender-based differences existed, others noted dissimilarities. Among the extreme examples cited, women were noted to occasionally adopt the alpha-female behaviour, exhibit victim mentality or get stuck within the meritocracy parameters, all of which were described to be stifling behavioural differences, induced by women themselves. Men were seen by participants as over-confident in their own ability, more outspoken and focused on rationality versus emotion. Women's grounded assessment, their reflective nature and emotional engagement were described by interviewees as the qualities which brought balance to the decision-making table of the organisation. These findings reconfirmed the theoretical view that leadership continues to be essentialist in nature: associated with masculine qualities (Willemssen 2002; Ryan and Haslam 2007), contrasting with some ascribed women's behavioural attributes (Stoker, Van der Velde and Lammers, 2012), making it hard to accept that a modest, soft-spoken, empathetic woman can succeed in an 'alpha' position of authority (Sinclair, 2013). However, an interpretation of interviewees' perceptions also highlight that certain elements of style and behaviour traditionally attributed to women is becoming increasingly sought after in leadership positions, potentially indicating a shift towards gender-neutral leadership characteristics.

The next section explored the obstacles and enablers that interviewees faced throughout their career progression. Several participants attributed much of their success to the feedback, advice, support and advocacy of mentors. The findings in this section confirmed the previously discussed theoretical view on the important role that mentors play in leadership development (Levinson, 1978; Collins and Scott, 1978; Ibarra, Carter and Sylva, 2010). The interviews also provided supporting references to networking being regarded as a primary channel for career advancement (DiMaggio, 2001; Babcock and Laschever, 2003; Ibarra and Hunter, 2007). However, the findings in this section contradicted some academic views which suggested that professional women do not see enough of mentors and roles models (Jackson, 2001; Townsend, 2002; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt and Van Engen, 2003; Dworkin, Ramaswami and Schipani, 2013), specifically women mentors and women role models (Lockwood, 2006), in senior

positions to aspire to. In the perceptions of interviewees mentoring was not regarded as a gender-sensitive relationship, and the career trajectories of interviewed executives were influenced and inspired by men and women alike. Participants identified a range of roles that they expected their inspirational figure to adopt, however, the role of advocate was rated as the most valuable.

Interviewees praised the support of their partners and family/friends' networks for facilitating their ability to develop largely un-interrupted careers and meet heavy demands of their jobs. While through the lens of the preference theory (Hakim, 1998, 2006) women were viewed as free 'agents' able to voluntarily chose between full-time motherhood and professional careers, opting out of one in favour of the other, six out of eight interviewed senior women executives were mothers. These women found it exceptionally tough, but possible, to find a balance between private life commitments and a successful career. The findings also highlighted the institutional and structural inhibitors: British childcare provisions were deemed to be insufficient, overly expensive and of inadequate quality.

Personal cost and sacrifices were frequently cited by the interviewees in relation to career obstacles, leading to the findings of the section that followed. It was unanimously highlighted by interviewees that the price for having a successful career was high. Men believed that material and emotional benefits of their success outweighed any costs incurred. The majority of the interviewed men referred to women in their lives making sacrifices on their behalf. In contrast, women executives described the pricey consequences they had to endure in return for a big job and a big salary. In some cases, these were monetary implications; in others the cost came in the form of an impact on their psychological or physical wellbeing; emotional and material sacrifices they had to make in order to reach their professional success, but more often - all of the above.

The findings echoed one element of the gendered roles stereotyping theory, which highlighted an incongruity that existed between the feminine gendered roles and the leadership roles (Eagly and Diekmann, 2005) However, the element of incongruity that emerged from the interviews came not in the form of a prejudice towards women leaders (Heilman, 2012), but as a heftier personal price. The interviews highlighted that success came at a greater cost to women executives, making it a much harder decision for professional women to make, when embarking on a career development journey.

In addition, findings from interviews indicated that gendered role stereotyping continues to exist and has a tendency to label women mainly in motherly and caring roles (Charles and Grusky, 2004; Tower and Alkadry, 2008). However, it can also be interpreted from the interviews that societal stereotypes may put equal if not greater pressure on a man to be a breadwinner and provider for his family. There are some indications that these stereotypes may co-create one another.

Having explored the cost linked by interviewees to their successful careers, I presented their retrospective reflection. Women executives appeared to be more reflective than men, analysing their regrets by looking at the impact of their demanding careers on their loved ones versus themselves. Overall, however, interviewees had mostly no regrets and would have made similar life decisions over again.

Looking at the total issue of women's under-representation in the UK top jobs, the interviewees commented on the benefits and future of gender diversity at executive level. Prevailing opinion saw the corporate world moving in the right direction with tackling the issue of women's under-representation in senior roles. Although participants felt the progress of gender diversity initiatives was slow, many found them effective. Interviewees were largely against the application of quotas and positive action, deeming the former as short-sighted and latter - unrealistic. Participants acknowledged the impact made by the Lord Davies and Hampton-Alexander reviews and saw the publicity they created as a good starting point. However, they believed that now action ought to be owned by the organisations and their members. The findings which transpired from interviews potentially indicated that some of the concepts discussed in the theory of gendered organisations (Acker, 1990; Acker, 1992; Acker, 2012) are outdated, especially in the context of FTSE environment, which has undergone changes over the last years: new legislation, technological advances and shifts in gender diversity attitudes no longer saw organisational structures as gender biased.

In the next section, I explored participants' views on the benefits of gender diversity to business. While none of the negative effects were observed, many examples of the positive impact were described in non-quantifiable terms. Greater customer satisfaction, richer decision-making table, balanced leadership, engaged and high-performing teams were among the cited advantages. Findings resonated with the 'tripod' approach (Dickens, 1999), where business case for gender diversity cannot be viewed in isolation: legal and social regulation, as well as

commitment and contribution of every societal actor was perceived as key for continued improvement of women's representation in senior roles.

I then presented interviewees' recommendations, firstly exploring where, in their opinion, the responsibility for improving women's representation at senior roles rested. Interviewed participants almost unanimously expressed, that the onus for gender diversity improvement did not rest with anyone singlehandedly. Both men and women executives believed that women had to take ownership of their own careers, while also stressing that every societal player had a moral responsibility to ensure, that equal and fair treatment was offered and received by everyone, and to seek ways to change things, if the reality were not a fair one.

In addition, interviewees offered their recommendations and career advice to aspiring career professionals, including women, given that this study is specifically focused on women's under-representation. Many of them highlighted the importance of being seen, broadening one's competencies, developing one's skills, being confident, courageous, taking risks, as well as having control and taking ownership over one's career. However, no gender specific advice was given by the participants: most interviewees would offer the same advice to professional women, as they would to men.

The key findings outlined above, as they transpired from the interviews with participants of this research study, form basis for Chapter Six: Discussion, which follows, where I explore the significance of these findings and discuss them in more detail in the context of the literature review presented in Chapter Three, with the aim to compare the theoretical views with the material gathered through the fieldwork stage of this study.

CHAPTER SIX:

DISCUSSION

6.1. Introduction

This study set out to address the primary research question: “What are the perceived explanations of women’s under-representation at the executive directorship level of the FTSE-100 companies in the UK?” In order to explore the primary question, I raised three secondary research questions. One of the secondary research questions aimed to explore the barriers and enablers faced by a sample group of senior executives and compare these against the possible theoretical explanations and commonly held assumptions.

Through the ‘traffic light’ assessment model introduced in Chapter Three, I identified several possible theoretical explanations for women’s under-representation, as presented in academic literature and previous research. Key theoretical explanations included:

Women executives may see the lack of female mentors and female role models as an obstacle to their career advancement.

Gendered roles stereotyping labels women mainly in motherly and caring roles, potentially limiting their chances to rise to positions of authority.

Women are perceived as free ‘agents’, who willingly opt out of successful careers, giving preference to full-time motherhood.

Leadership continues to be essentialist in nature: associated with masculine qualities, contrasting with some ascribed women’s behavioural attributes, making it hard to accept that a modest, soft-spoken, empathetic woman can succeed in an ‘alpha’ position of authority.

Organisational structures are not gender-neutral and gendered biases are deeply embedded into organisational processes and practices, which potentially creates strong barriers for professional women to overcome if they were to move through organisational ranks.

Organisations fail to implement meritocratic systems, so women, who are seeking merit-based environments more than men, become disillusioned and leave.

Findings presented in Chapter Five explored possible explanations for women's under-representation in senior roles from the UK FTSE-100 companies as viewed by the top executive men and women. The aim of this chapter is to bring a contemporary analysis to the question of women's under-representation by comparing and discussing explanations of causes of under-representation cited in academic literature with those expressed by the interviewees in this study. Each of these will be discussed in turn.

6.2. Mentors or advocates?

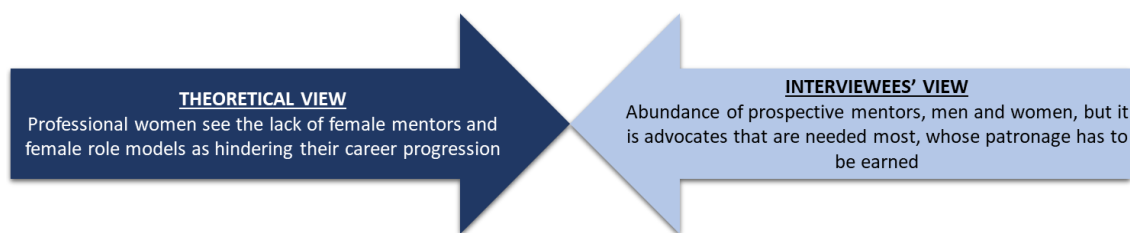


Figure 33: Theoretical versus practical view on the role of mentors

As discussed in Chapter Three, prior research suggests that mentoring plays an important role in the occupational success of an executive (Levinson, 1978; Ibarra, Carter and Sylva, 2010). A mentoring relationship is linked with greater job satisfaction, higher salary, faster promotion, firmer career plans, and increases the probability that the mentee will also become a mentor (Wright and Wright, 1987). Every successful leader has benefited from some form of a mentoring relationship at some point in their career (Collins and Scott, 1978; Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee, 2001). Women with mentors are more successful than women, who do not have mentors (Dworkin, Ramaswami and Schipani, 2013). More specifically, research provides compelling evidence of the fact that female role models have a significant impact on women's performance (Townsend, 2002; Latu *et al.*, 2013). Lack of female role models is often cited in academic literature as a major barrier to professional women's success and is frequently attributed to women's under-representation in senior roles (Davies Review, 2011; Oliver, 2013; Cody, 2018).

This research study supports the view that executives who 'made it' in the corporate world, have at present or have had in the past met an influential figure, who had played a specific role in the development of their professional career. Data gathered from interviews uncovered the multifaceted role that a mentor played in an executive's development, resulting in three key conclusions, discussed in more detail below:

- a) Misunderstood: the role of a mentor was complex and often misunderstood by executives.
- b) Not gender-sensitive: the careers of women executives were influenced mostly by male mentors and male role models throughout their progression.
- c) Advocate/sponsor: if professional women had to pick just one role among many functions of a mentor, then advocate/sponsor would be their top choice.

Every interviewee was able to single out a specific influential figure who had left a memorable mark at some point during their career development. For the majority, mentoring represented a professional relationship, where mentors came from within their working environment.

This study further expands the widely accepted definition of mentor as someone who supports the growth and development of the mentee. Findings confirmed that mentoring was a complex relationship, given the multiple roles that a mentor was expected to fulfil. Participants regarded a mentor as a sounding board, a role model, a teacher, an advocate, someone who provided support and encouragement, and someone giving feedback. Due to its complexity, it appeared that mentoring was the expression overused within the corporate setting, yet often misunderstood by many executives. This research study highlighted that, despite a popular belief, a mentor did not have to encompass all of these roles in one. For example, encouragement would not be the primary need for executives with high level of professional drive. Similarly, while a mentor almost always is a role model at the same time, one's role model does not necessarily happen to be one's mentor. This leads to the conclusion that the role and impact of a mentor is often generalised; instead, it should be individually tailored to the executive's needs at a particular point in time of their career.

Additionally, in contrast to the opinion of some researchers (Lockwood, 2006), findings of this study indicated that a mentoring relationship was not gender-sensitive. Gender compatibility between mentor and mentee was deemed as a 'good to have', but not a 'must'. Personality fit, experience and knowledge were ranked by the interviewees over any gender preference. In addition, most of the role models described by the interviewed women featured men as their influential and inspirational figures. It was not within the scope of this study to discover whether women role models specifically would have a different or greater impact on the development of interviewed women's careers. However, the uncovered findings do lead to the conclusion that academic literature and corporate environment approach the notion of female role models from two different perspectives. While some scholars emphasise the lack of women role models,

seeing it as one of the barriers to women's representation in senior roles, the executives themselves see their availability as enabling force – good to have in one's arsenal, but not a gender-specific necessity.

Seniority and influence were the two key criteria that featured prominently in the examples of mentoring figures, mainly represented by former bosses and senior colleagues, described by the participants. Out of the six distinctive functions of a mentor identified by the participants and presented in section 5.5.1., it was the role of advocate, as a sponsor and a career fast-tracker that was seen as the most crucial for the executive's career growth. Another interesting definition that emerged was that of 'friends in a job', referring to influential people who worked with the executive previously, could vouch for their track record and recommend them further, both inside and outside the organisation. This view resonates with the theories surrounding networking, which today is perceived as one of the primary channels through which executives identify opportunities for advancement both inside and outside their organisations (DiMaggio, 2001; Babcock and Laschever, 2003; Ibarra and Hunter, 2007; Adler, 2016). However, within the networking concept, it appeared that the internal relationships were perceived to be more 'popular' and more often relied upon by the interviewees in comparison to external networks.

Interviewed executives attributed much of their success, especially in the early stages of their leadership careers to the contribution of advocates, who knew of opportunities, made introductions and actively promoted mentee's candidature. These advocates largely came from within interviewee's internal environments, representing current or former colleagues and bosses. Mentees 'earned' the patronage of their sponsor by proving their worth through demonstrating strong track record, development potential and interest. Mentees had to be deemed interesting by their advocates and worth investing time and effort into. These findings led to the conclusion that among the many roles that a mentor could assume within an executive's career life, it was the contribution of a mentor as an advocate that was most valued by the executives, men and women alike.

In summary, the findings in this section confirmed the previously discussed theoretical view on the important role mentors play in leadership development (Levinson, 1978; Collins and Scott, 1978; Ibarra, Carter and Sylva, 2010). The interviews also provided supporting references to networking being regarded as a primary channel for career advancement (DiMaggio, 2001; Babcock and Laschever, 2003; Ibarra and Hunter, 2007). However, while the theoretical view suggested that one of the reasons behind the low numbers of women in executive roles was the

lack of female mentors and female role models for aspiring professional women (Jackson, 2001; Townsend, 2002; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt and Van Engen, 2003; Dworkin, Ramaswami and Schipani, 2013), the findings of this study, in contrast, highlighted that the lack of female role models was not always a significant barrier to women's progression.

In addition, findings indicate that mentoring can be a gender-neutral concept, contradicting some academic views which suggested that professional women do not see enough of women mentors and women roles models (Lockwood, 2006) in senior positions to aspire to. It appeared that the career trajectories of interviewed executives were influenced and inspired by men and women alike, and successful professional women valued experience, knowledge and personality fit over and above gender compatibility.

Internal relationships seemed to stand out over the external networks as interviewees' career progression enablers, where advocates specifically were identified as having greater influence and contribution to success, and were valued the most.

Moreover, many examples of such advocates and sponsors were given. Every manager, director and executive could potentially be one. However, their patronage has to be earned. It can be argued, however, that the way patronage is earned is both gendered and influenced by alpha-male leadership characteristics. This notion is further discussed in the 'Alpha male or gender-neutral leadership characteristics?' section, which follows. In addition, the 'A 'wait' for merit or proactiveness?' section discusses how track record, reputation and credibility were deemed as crucial ingredients for women executive's success, which in turn organically earned them the patronage of their advocates. This resulted in a constant stream of new and bigger opportunities throughout these executives' careers.

6.3. Women as carers or men as providers?

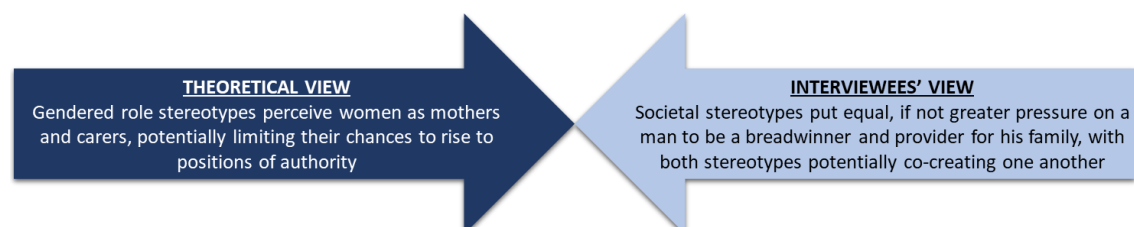


Figure 34: Theoretical versus practical view on gendered roles stereotypes

As discussed in Chapter Three, it is argued that gender stereotypes are a historical construction and continue to live on in today's organisational policies and practices. Prior research suggests that gendered role stereotyping hinders women's career progression by associating them either with domestic responsibilities or with low status jobs (Eagly, 2003; Charles and Grusky, 2004; Tower and Alkadry, 2008).

Findings of this study have partially supported the gendered role stereotyping theory in that:

- a) it is still widely believed that a man's place is at work, while a woman's place is at home with children;
- b) a perception that certain jobs are for men and others for women continues to exist.

Data gathered as part of this research study highlighted, that the corporate world today continues to see a woman's primary role to mother and raise children, albeit it is becoming more tolerant of woman's concurrent interests and commitments, such as work or hobbies. If a woman wants a successful career, she is expected to carefully manage it around her family life. Interviewed women executives were often being labelled awful mothers for leaving their children in the care of others at times, when the demands of work required their undivided attention.

Also, certain roles continue to be deemed as suitable for only men or women. This can be especially observed within engineering and manufacturing industries, where it is still an exception to the norm to see women as truck drivers or maintenance technicians.

However, most of the academic literature explores barriers to women's career progression primarily through gendered roles stereotypes lens pertaining specifically to women (Charles and Grusky, 2004; Tower and Alkadry, 2008). Much less attention has been given in previous research to explanations of women's under-representation through societal expectations of a man to be a provider and a breadwinner, and how this subsequently reinforces women's adaptation of secondary, supporting role. Findings of this research study have indicated, that men executives strive to live up to the expectation of them as a provider, by putting their career commitments on the forefront of their priorities. The choices of men executives were often driven by financial rewards, which they linked to their ability to provide a higher quality of life for their families. However, men were only able to put their careers first with the support of a woman in their life, who managed the household, mothered, and raised their children, often abandoning her own successful career. Thus, the analysis of theoretical explanations against the

fieldwork findings may indicate that societal role stereotyping puts equal, if not more, pressure on men to be breadwinners and providers for the family. The two stereotypes (women as carers and men as providers) can potentially co-create one another, which could lead to a vicious circle: for as long as men are constantly pushed by societal expectations to provide, they will place work that puts bread on the table above all else, leaving women to take on the domestic and family responsibilities.

As discussed in Chapter Three, prior research suggests that gendered role stereotyping leads to vertical and horizontal segregation (Charles, 2003), both of which confine women to roles that are lower in status and weaker in prospects. No evidence for horizontal segregation could be found in this research study. Firstly, looking at the profiles of women participants, half of them represented operational and 'profit and loss (P&L)' functions, and others represented supporting functions. Men showcased an equally balanced functional representation. Similarly, due to the purposeful nature of sampling selection, all women interviewees represented positions of seniority and authority, hence it was not possible to explore the phenomenon of vertical segregation in the context of this research study.

Career development approaches described by women in this study can be summarised as 'emerging strategies', where most successful women would experience a combination of opportunistic and calculated career trajectories. In the former, women would initially establish their credibility and reputation and then courageously 'dive' into unknown areas and new opportunities that come their way. In the latter, women would take ownership of the next steps of their careers by making 'I am interested in more' signals when they begin to outgrow their current roles and are ready for something else. The findings of this research study highlighted that women who reached executive career levels had the following attributes in common, where they:

- had a loose career plan, yet were open to change and new opportunities;
- built a broad experience, skillset and expertise early in their careers, making it easy to specialise later on;
- had a career aspiration, which they worked hard to back up with credibility and reputation;
- developed a network of professional relationships and supporting advocates, who introduced them to new opportunities, often outside of their comfort zone.

It appeared that men executives often followed opportunities as they arose, while women took ownership of their next career steps by proactively looking for new avenues, thereby creating their opportunities.

In summary, while prior academic research suggest that gendered roles stereotype, which perceives women as mothers and carers, limited their progression to the positions of authority, the perceptions of interviewees highlighted that the societal stereotype of a man as a breadwinner and a provider for his family often acted as catalyst for the creation and adaptation by women of 3Cs-inspired role stereotypes of caring, concern and connection (Charles, 2003). It can thus be argued that societal stereotypes today put equal, if not more, pressure on a man to be a breadwinner and a provider for his family and is one of the possible explanations of women's under-representation in senior roles that should not be overlooked. .

6.4. Motherhood or career?

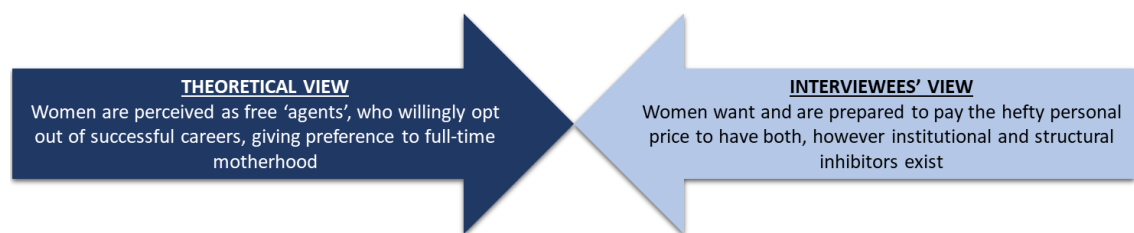


Figure 35: Theoretical versus practical view on women's preferences

As discussed in Chapter Three, it is argued that women's careers were strongly influenced by change and compromise (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006). Women's conflicting priorities, where family responsibilities take precedence over other commitments, prompt women to voluntarily shape their careers around their family lives (Hakim, 1998, 2006). Hakim views women as free 'agents' able to voluntarily chose between full-time motherhood and professional careers, opting out of one (home-focused style) in favour of the other (work-centred style). In Hakim's opinion, those women who willingly choose to coincide the two (adaptive style), see work being more of a necessity, rather than a career choice, and often tend to work in lower paid part-time roles, potentially explaining the under-representation of women in senior roles.

Two out of eight interviewed senior women executives had no children of their own and wives of every interviewed men executives gave up their own careers in order to shoulder the family responsibilities. However, in contrast to 'agentic' preference, it appeared that often such choices were made by women to be able to tackle the institutional and structural inhibitors: for example,

British childcare provisions were deemed by the participants to be insufficient, overly expensive and of inadequate quality. Challenges of childcare, societal stereotypes and organisational expectations seemed to have translated into some form of physical, emotional and material sacrifices that executives had to incur throughout their careers.

While Hakim's work-centred lifestyle sees women prioritise their professional career over everything else, including creating a family, perceptions of interviewees indicate that work-life balance is not an 'either or' choice, but a result of planning, strict discipline and ruthless prioritisation. Six out of eight interviewed women executives were mothers and all five of the interviewed men were fathers. Interviewed women continued to bear a large portion of family responsibilities alongside meeting the demands of their executive careers. For these women family and career was not an 'either or' choice: they were driven by both: a professional ambition to make a successful career and a personal desire to create family and raise children. Most found it extremely difficult, yet possible to balance the two. At various points in their career the balance of priorities may have differed depending on the demands of any particular aspect, indeed indicating the influence of change and compromise (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006). As an example, for some women work demands took priority over family during early stages of their career ascent. At other times, family commitments took precedence.

There is little doubt that childbirth, maternity breaks and childcare will stay a corporate woman's reality for the years to come. Yet, it seemed from the experiences of interviewed women executives, that those who decided they would coincide bearing and raising their children with a successful career, did not become more disadvantaged than men in terms of candidatures. Moreover, some women saw their gender as a competitive advantage, given the scarcity of such talent in executive roles. If they worked hard, gave their role their best, remained flexible, adaptable, visible for their achievements, and delivered on their objectives, career opportunities kept arising.

From a critical perspective, however, women also talked about having to work harder than men to find that work-life balance. While the majority of men executives relied on a woman in their lives, who often had to give up her own career to manage the household and family, women executives had that responsibility, fully or in part, in addition to their demanding careers. It appears that while it is possible for women to combine demanding careers with family, it is a difficult decision, which not every woman is prepared to make. On the other hand, if anyone is able to meet the 'career/motherhood challenge', it is a woman executive. The qualities and

skills, such as discipline, determination and the strength of character, which are expected from a senior executive with high level of responsibility in a multinational organisation, are very similar to those that are required to meet this particular challenge, and are the skills that a woman executive is most likely to already possess.

However, prior research raises the issue of commitment. Studies (KPMG, YSC and 30% Club, 2016) find that for women care-giving is thought to reduce their commitment to a career. Hakim (1998, 2006) also suggests, that women who opt for adaptive lifestyle tend to be less reliable employees, taking more sick leave and experiencing higher turnover in comparison to men. While based on these arguments it can be assumed that family and care-giving responsibilities would potentially have a negative impact on the executives' commitment to their careers, the interpretation of interview data points to the contrary. All men and women in the study had some form of family or other personal commitments beyond their professional careers. All but two of the participants had on average two children. Almost every interviewee talked about consistently putting their career first, over and above any other commitments. In fact, it was evident that their commitment to their job grew stronger the higher their careers progressed. This can potentially be explained by the following circumstances:

- a) children were growing up and required less attention and support;
- b) over the years the executives found a recipe for balance which worked;
- c) the demands of the job grew as the level of executive's accountability increased;
- d) the rewards and personal satisfaction associated with high corporate positions of authority were hard to resist.

It transpired from the interviews that senior executives, men and women alike, believed and were able to have it all; they could find the balance between private life commitments and a successful career. However, this might not necessary be a 'healthy' balance: it does come at a personal cost and requires rigorous, ruthless planning, financial investment and a strong family partnership to make it work. This study found that both men and women paid a price for success and their place in the top echelons of the corporate world. For men, the price which was most frequently cited referred to failed relationships and time spent away from family. In comparison, success came at a greater cost to women. Women incurred physical, emotional and material sacrifices throughout their careers, while many of these sacrifices for men were incurred by their wives and partners on their behalf. It could be argued that such heavy social costs made it a much harder decision for professional women to make, when embarking on a career

development journey, potentially leading to one of the explanations of women's under-representation in senior roles.

Despite this, views expressed by the participants of this study may indicate some changes in attitudes of the younger generation of professional women, who believe that they can have it all. Many young professional women today are perceived to be confident they can raise children, build a successful career and, most importantly, have the flexibility to balance the two. The younger generation of women appears to be less scared to challenge the stereotypes and pursue any combination of priorities they choose to. It is possible that this change in mindset is in part driven by the greater legislation, as well as technological advances in support of flexible working, and in part, by the shift in society's mindset, where creating more choices and opportunities for women is considered the morally right thing to do.

In summary, the Preference Theory view explored in Chapter Three pointed towards the notion that women voluntarily opted out of professional careers in favour of full-time motherhood, believing it was nearly impossible for the two to co-exist (Hakim, 1998, 2006). However, the findings of this research study indicate that this view is outdated and echo several criticisms of Hakim's preference theory (1998, 2006), in that professional women today, both senior and aspiring, appear to 1) want, 2) confidently believe that they can have both and 3) effectively achieve to bear and raise children in parallel to a successful career. While their decision to have both had a minimal impact on the pace of their career development and the range of opportunities available, it did come at a personal cost, which modern professional women were perceived to be prepared to pay. Thus, in contrast to the 'motherhood or career' agentic preference, today's 'motherhood and career' appears to be a brave commitment to overcome institutional and structural inhibitors, where women are prepared to pay the hefty personal price to have both.

6.5. Alpha male or gender-neutral leadership characteristics?

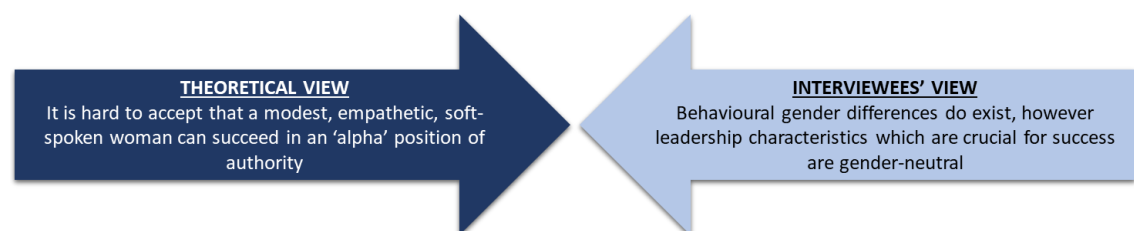


Figure 36: Theoretical versus practical view on gendered construction of leadership

The stereotype that all the top leadership positions in an organisation should be occupied by men has gradually been challenged over the years. Today, women are seen at the helm of businesses and organisations. However, even after reaching top jobs, women still face resistance to their leadership authority: their professional credibility is challenged, as is their ability to combine their business and family responsibilities. Women who have the potential to develop into leadership business roles often doubt their professional capability and business know-how. Fuelled by contradictions of consciousness, the question arises: what leadership style should a woman adopt for successful leadership? leadership style that has proven to be effective for men or a distinct and different style of women?

Academic literature highlights that gender stereotyping within the concept of leadership continues to exist (Mulla-Feroze and Krishnan, 2000; Lyness and Heilman, 2006; Alimo-Metcalfe, 2010; Latu et al., 2011; Sinclair, 2013). Management continues to be associated with being 'male' (Willemsen 2002; Ryan and Haslam 2007), while women's leadership style is often regarded as opposite to men's (Stoker, Van der Velde and Lammers, 2012). Effectiveness of both men and women executives is measured with these gender stereotypes in mind. This creates an unfair playing field: although the assessment criteria applied to men and women leaders appear to be the same, the expectations are different. For instance, both a man and a woman executive can deliver same results, however if both are equally assertive and confident during the process, a woman tends to be perceived as a less effective leader because she demonstrates behaviours, that are not characteristic of her gender. Similarly, whatever anxiety a man may exhibit while making a decision, it is perceived as a sign of commitment. Woman's anxiety, on the other hand, is often regarded as a weakness and mistaken for a lack of confidence (Eagly and Carli, 2003; Rudman and Phelan, 2008; Annis and Gray, 2013).

Theoretical view sees the gendered construction of leadership as one of the obstacles to women executives' career progression (Schein and Mueller, 1992; Butler, 2007; Sinclair, 2013). A professional woman faces a difficult situation: she has to integrate herself into the world of leadership, historically created by and for men, equipped with style and qualities which are opposite to men's, thereby contradicting those that have traditionally been considered as effective leadership traits.

As discussed below, data gathered as part of this study's interviews supported the notion that behavioural differences do exist, as highlighted by some elements of the 'glass ceiling' concept (Rudman and Phelan, 2008; Doherty and Manfredi, 2010). On the other hand, interpreted interviewees' perceptions largely opposed the gendered construction of leadership view.

When it comes to behavioural styles, participants of this study highlighted a plethora of differences in men's and women's different approaches in such areas as communication, decision-making, conflict resolution, confidence, collaboration and networking.

Women executives, in contrast to men, were seen to possess a greater spectrum of leadership strategies and use them more selectively. Women often were described as leaning towards a detailed justification of their decisions and actions. Men, in contrast, appeared to be blunter and curter. It was perceived that men executives exhibited a competition mindset, while for women – cooperation and adaptability were more evident traits. In addition, when facing a conflict situation, women executives often were described as being more attentive and sensitive to the circumstances, striving to achieve a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Men executives were seen as self-confident, persuasive and determined to achieve an end result; they appeared to be independent and focused on the 'big picture'. Examples associated with women's behavioural style were often characterised by attention to detail, desire to stay in the comfort zone, with emotions being the driving force. In the study women executives were cited to demonstrate more emotional and empathetic qualities in their working styles, while men exhibited mostly rational behaviours. It could be that the harsh realities of the corporate world and the unpopular decisions that an executive's role entailed went against women's desire to be liked and accepted – a trait which was cited by some interviewees as a limiting factor to the pace of women's career progression.

Exploring the topic of men's and women's executives career paths, some contradictory elements surfaced. When reflecting during interviews, women executives cited that they tended to select more cautious plan of action in contrast to men, while men were perceived to be more likely to take riskier decisions. Yet when looking at the actual career trajectories of women, they tended to be equally, if not more, risky than men's, containing a number of volatile moves, where women proactively sought and determinedly went after opportunities, often 'diving' into unknown roles, functions and geographies. This contradiction echoes some academic views (Rudman and Phelan, 2008; Doherty and Manfredi, 2010) which suggest that women tend to be more modest than men within the working environment and are reluctant to self-promote for

fear of being judged unfeminine, pushy and domineering. While women tended to weight the pros and cons of any risky move, men were perceived to be more confident in taking bold decisions, which could potentially be explained by a) behavioural differences in the form of men's greater level of assertiveness, more independent mindset, and more acute need for authority and success, but also by b) structural elements, where men had more opportunity to build external networks and an option to rely on a partner at home to shoulder family responsibilities. The findings of this research echoed the academic view that as the women executives' level of professional success increased, so did the degree of risk in their decision-making (Renate *et al.*, 1999).

In addition, it appeared that women executives were putting more emphasis on collaboration and teamwork. The emphasis of woman executive's actions seemed to be on improvement of relationships, while men executive's actions focused on improvement of rules and norms. It could be interpreted from interviews that men viewed a professional relationship as an economic partnership, confirming the view that men perceive the benefits of such relationships in terms of career advancement and operational advantages. For women executives, in comparison, personal characteristics and human qualities of peers appeared to play a more significant role.

It can be interpreted from the interviews that men's action-focused approach often translated into bold decision-making, while women's careful internalising inspired cautious decisions, which at times could be interpreted as the lack of confidence, concurring with previous research findings (30% Club/YSC/KPMG, 2014; Catalyst, 2006). Participants compared men's daring confidence with women's reflective thinking style, with both men and women noting the contrast between the volume and quantity of men's contribution and the depth and relevance demonstrated by the women.

Findings highlighted that women were seen to not network externally as much as men, calling upon informal connections only if needed, reconfirming the gender-based differences highlighted by the networking theory (Morrison, 2008; Fisher, 2009; Waller, 2016; Bushell, Hoque and Dean, 2020). In contrast, interviewees expressed that the higher men progressed within the corporate hierarchy, the more they networked, using networking as a tool to help other men along their journey. Senior women were at times seen to do the opposite, pulling the ladder behind them, often cutting off previous professional ties as their careers developed.

Confirming the 'alpha male syndrome' theory (Ludeman and Erlandson, 2006), some interviewees gave examples of an attempt by women executives to assume an alpha-female persona, which often resulted in poor imitation of behavioural characteristics attributed to men and led to creation of fear and distrust in colleagues of all genders.

As discussed above, the opinions of interviewed executives reconfirmed the theoretical view that leadership continues to be essentialist in nature: associated with masculine qualities (Willemsen 2002; Ryan and Haslam 2007), contrasting with some ascribed women's behavioural attributes (Stoker, Van der Velde and Lammers, 2012), making it hard to accept that a modest, soft-spoken, empathetic woman can succeed in an 'alpha' position of authority (Sinclair, 2013). However, an interpretation of interviewees perceptions also highlighted that certain elements of style and behaviour traditionally attributed to women was becoming increasingly sought after in leadership positions, potentially indicating a shift towards gender-neutral leadership characteristics.

The interviews appeared to highlight the flaw within the gendered construction of leadership theory in that effective leadership was no longer seen to be based on masculine or feminine qualities. Indeed, in the opinion of interviewed senior executives, in order to become a successful business leader, one needs to possess leadership qualities. These include such traits as result-orientation, decisiveness, drive to succeed. It can be argued that how these qualities are designed and performed within organisations may in itself be gendered, and this notion will be explored in the 'Gendered organisations or emerging best practice' section of this chapter. However, the data gathered from interviews indicates that leadership qualities are not considered by today's business leaders to be gender-specific and can be equally possessed by both men and women.

Throughout their careers interviewed women developed and exhibited a set of qualities they deemed integral to effective leadership:



Figure 37: Qualities required by effective business leaders

It was not one specific skill, but a combination of various qualities, competencies and behaviours that were cited by interviewed women as instrumental to their successful careers. Professionalism, commitment, risk-taking, visibility, dedication and versatility were the predominant enablers described. These qualities equally featured in interviews with men, supporting the conclusion that leadership characteristics were gender-neutral and could be effectively used in business leadership by both men and women.

Data gathered through interviews highlighted the paradox, that gender stereotyping of leadership was 'programmed' to look for negative impact of differences in the qualities and behaviours of men and women executives. It falls short of building on the strengths of these differences or recognising any similarities that may emerge. This study found that the identified gender differences were seen as a normal and healthy phenomenon. The overarching view appeared to be that there was no one superior style, no one 'fits-all' behaviour. Gender-based behavioural differences do and will continue to exist. These differences should not be glossed over, on the contrary: awareness should be raised, differences emphasised and capitalised upon, on the premise that the diversity of styles offers a variety of benefits to working teams and corporate environment. It is important for businesses and executives within them to learn how to embrace the different qualities and the diverse views, that men and women bring to the table, and capitalise on the strengths of each style.

In summary, the theoretical view suggested that it was hard to accept a modest, empathetic, soft-spoken woman to succeed in an 'alpha' position of authority. Indeed, the interpretation of the data gathered from interviews led to the acknowledgement that behavioural gender

differences existed. However, the position of authority in today's leading UK organisations is no longer regarded as exclusively male. There appear to be no 'male' and 'female' qualities attributed by senior executives to leadership; effective leadership today is not regarded as gendered. Traits and behaviours that are deemed crucial for business leader's success appear to have become gender-neutral and can be used effectively or ineffectively by men and women equally.

6.6. Gendered organisations or emerging best practice?

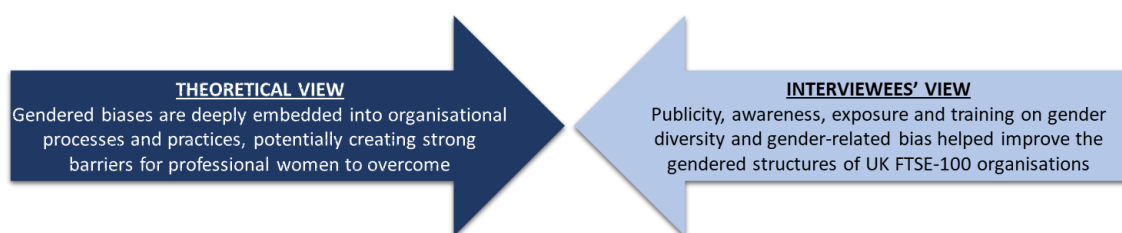


Figure 38: Theoretical versus practical view on gendered organisations

As examined in Chapter Three, the review of academic literature highlights a theory which suggested, that organisational structures and processes are not gender-neutral and have prescriptive gender expectations deeply embedded into them (Acker, 1990; Acker, 1992; Acker, 2012). In an effort to explain the lack of women in executive roles, prior research studies argued that gendering is firmly rooted within organisational processes and can be observed in:

- a) how organisations decide to distribute work: where the duties are allocated based on the perception that some are more suitable for men than women;
- b) images and symbols present in day-to-day corporate life, which justify and reinforce the division of gender lines;
- c) normal individual interactions, where gender inequality is created, based on how individuals of a particular gender communicate with others;
- d) through subconscious drive to comply with 'correct' gendered persona expectations and hide the aspects of one's life that do not 'comply' with gendered stereotypes.

It is suggested that all these elements, designed and presented by organisations, privilege men and disadvantage women.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the organisational context of this research study was the UK FTSE-100 organisations. These have been purposefully selected for this research based on the following:

1. these companies are rated as the UK largest in terms of their capital value;
2. their performance against financial, social, environmental and ethical objectives has a substantial impact on British society;
3. these firms tend to set the standard for policies and act as benchmark for practices across the UK corporate sector.

Thus, it can be argued, that due to the magnitude of these organisations' size, span and visibility, the structures and processes that they introduce and follow would be considered as the standard of practice by their smaller and less prominent corporate counterparts.

The subject of workplace gender equality, diversity and balance became very topical over the recent decade. Following the efforts of the highly publicised Lord Davies and Hampton-Alexander reviews, these FTSE companies were named, shamed and praised for their efforts and progress on the issue of women's under-representation. These organisations have instigated the most number of initiatives, covering both visible and invisible elements of their make-up: structures, processes, policies, behaviours and mindsets.

It is therefore not surprising that the findings of this research study have not found any evidence in support of the four gendered organisations elements cited by Acker (1990; Acker, 1992; Acker, 2012). Instead, it has uncovered a large variety of best practice examples of what the FTSE-100 organisations and the individual executives within these do well to promote and improve women's representation in their businesses. Such best practice examples as offering additional childcare support to parent-employees, granting flexible working conditions, up-skilling and providing training, offering mentoring and coaching – were among the cited practices.

On the one hand, it could be argued that by highlighting the best practice examples, the interviewed executives wanted to showcase themselves and their organisations in the best of light. Their pride for being part of such reputable global companies, having been entrusted with positions of authority, as well as their strong commitment to the cause and purpose of their business may all have contributed to that.

On the other hand, despite the limited scope of this research study, best examples of gender-related practice have been highlighted, and there is an important opportunity to share these learning points with other organisations and individual professionals.

With that in mind, initiatives and approaches that British leading organisations had instigated to improve the numbers of women across their hierarchical pyramid, as indicated by the figures in

Davies and Hampton-Alexander Review reports, seemed to have helped them tackle the elements of gendered structures and processes that might have been present in the past.

The data gathered from participant interviews potentially indicated that in order to improve the numbers of women in their senior roles, FTSE-100 companies made a conscious effort to have gender diversity on the top of their corporate priorities. Their organisational structures demonstrated a united commitment to the cause at every hierarchical level. It appeared that FTSE-100 organisations which boasted better women's representation at executive level in comparison to the other FTSE organisations invested a lot of effort into building and developing their internal and external talent pipelines for women. These companies favoured a structured approach by setting gender diversity targets, some linking success with reward and publicly sharing their progress.

The executives representing these organisations cited that their employers were deeply committed to tackle the biases and ensure that fair and equal treatment was given to all of their employees, irrespective of any divisive characteristics that might exist, including gender. This commitment translated into these organisations' policies and processes pertaining to recruitment, people management, promotions, recognition and reward.

This study found evidence confirming the 'springboard' theory (Jones, 2019), specifically when exploring career trajectories of interviewed men. Generally, men entered an organisation after university by applying for a graduate or management development scheme, progressing through the ranks of that organisation for many years to come. The relationships formed with their peers and bosses served for several men as a springboard to bigger job opportunities; more than once many followed their boss into new businesses, new roles and new geographical locations.

Findings of this research study did not provide evidence for 'sticky floors' theory. The interpretation of interview data translated into a combination of the cited organisational best practice and personal characteristics, such as ambition and courage, that women attributed to their professional success. From organisational perspective, the FTSE-100 companies appear to strive to lead by example, aiming to be regarded in the positive light when it comes to the progress with regards to women's representation. From executives' individual perspective, their cited experiences were characterised by action and change. The notion of 'sticky floors' is passive and change-averse. It was evident in this study that successful people, men and women alike, did not 'stick' to a role. Instead, they act to improve the situation or move on, if their needs are not met. In fact, career development strategies adopted by women executives tackled any

limitations, that would potentially create any 'sticky floors' situations, for example, the lack of diverse experience, narrow functional scope and not being proactive.

In summary, while the theoretical view suggests that organisational structures and processes are deeply gender-biased and everyday workplace interactions contain normative gender expectations, that privilege men and disadvantage women, the findings of this research study have highlighted that publicity, awareness, exposure and biases-related training have improved the gendered structures of today's FTSE-100 organisations. The interviewed executives representing these companies appear to remain committed to tackling the issue of women's under-representation, and it is hoped that their gravitas and visibility will continue to help cascading best practice further along the FTSE pyramid and beyond.

6.7. A 'wait' for merit or proactiveness?

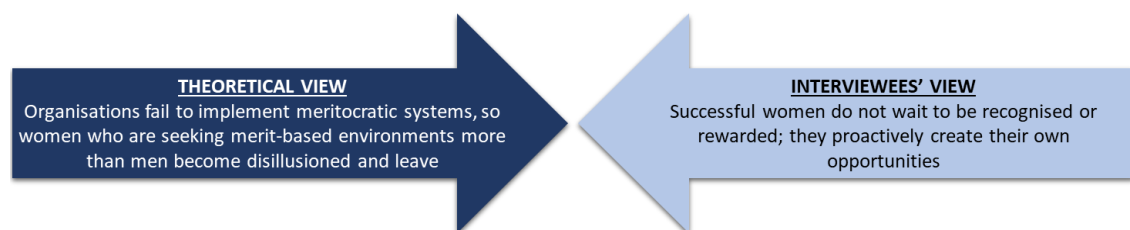


Figure 39: Theoretical versus practical view on women's meritocratic expectations

As discussed in Chapter Three, a meritocratic organisational system, where the most talented advance and the least talented are left behind, remains a myth (Nicholson, 2010, 2013a). Research indicates that the construction of merit is not as objective and rational process as it is claimed (Kumra, 2014). Scholars suggest that the merit measurement criteria and assessment mechanisms that exist within organisations are biased in favour of men, thereby creating barriers to women's career progression (Son Hing, Bobocel and Zanna, 2002). Thus, organisational structures and processes that are designed to be meritocratic often result in an unequal allocation of success, irrespective of the actual merit (Joshi, Son and Roh, 2015; Vinkenburg, 2017). As a result, women's confidence in meritocratic systems is undermined (Lewis, Simpson and Sealy, 2010).

Findings of this research have partially reconfirmed some of these theoretical views and contradicted certain ideas. Firstly, interviewees' views echoed the fact that women specifically would want to progress on merit: they would like to be recognised and rewarded for their

achievements, based on what they deserved through their contribution, experience, education and intellect.

This study reconfirmed the notion that women had a different perception of what 'deserve' means (Pérez and Sabelis, 2020). It could be interpreted from the interviews that women executives felt they deserved the top job, because they earned it, while men felt they deserved to be considered for it. In other words, women felt, that in order to get a promotion, they needed to demonstrate a proven track-record, while men felt they needed to demonstrate potential. Consequently, several interview references potentially indicated that women's meritocratic expectations often hampered their risk-taking ability and hindered their courage to pursue new career boosting opportunities.

The notion of meritocracy entails a passive element. An executive earns merit and waits to be rewarded, handing the decision reigns over to the organisation. Executives, interviewed as part of this research study, are all successful professionals, having attained over and above the average level of authority and influence in the business world. The word 'active' featured numerous times in every interview, highlighting the link between action and success. It appeared in various forms: women spoke about actively pursuing, proactively seeking and determinedly going after opportunities. In other words, successful professional women did not place their careers in the hands of meritocratic ideals. They worked very hard to build their credibility and reputation by always delivering an output which was high in quality and over and above the required minimum. And consequently, many were rewarded with new career boosting opportunities.

In summary, the theoretical view suggested that the pace of professional women's career progression was slowed by meritocratic expectations. Women's attitude towards meritocracy was recognised to cripple women's risk-taking ability, thus cutting off the pursuit of greater opportunities. Academic literature highlighted the paradox of meritocracy, where in organisations deeming to have meritocratic systems in place, decision makers were often ironically biased in favour of men. Consequently, women became disillusioned, when organisations could not live up to their fairness-based beliefs, and failed to progress their careers or left. The findings of this research study highlighted two elements. Firstly, this research found confirming evidence that professional women, more than men, were driven by value systems based on fairness and merit. For example, women executives often referred to a need for a proven track record of achievements and striving to deliver over and above the role's

requirements and objectives. Moreover, while the theoretical view perceived women's meritocratic expectations as barriers for professional women's progression to the top, arguably contradicting an active element of 'progression' with a passive element of 'wait', views gathered from interviewed executives indicated that successful women did not wait to be recognised or rewarded. Instead, they worked hard, often over-delivering on the set objectives, thereby building their professional reputation, credibility and demand for their competence. They did not wait to be merited for their past achievements, but focused on creating their own new opportunities.

6.8. Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter, I set out to discuss how the theoretical explanations of women's under-representation in senior roles of UK FTSE-100 companies cited in academic literature compared to those described by the participants interviewed for this research study.

During the literature review process six primary theoretical explanations of women's under-representation emerged.

Firstly, academic literature suggested that women executives might see the lack of female mentors and female role models as an obstacle to their career advancement, potentially explaining the low numbers of professional women rising to executive level (Jackson, 2001; Townsend, 2002; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt and Van Engen, 2003; Dworkin, Ramaswami and Schipani, 2013). While the findings of this study reconfirmed the acknowledged contribution of mentors and role models to shaping the executive's career, differentiating between the internal mentoring (Levinson, 1978; Collins and Scott, 1978; Ibarra, Carter and Sylva, 2010) and external networking (DiMaggio, 2001; Babcock and Laschever, 2003; Ibarra and Hunter, 2007), interviewees' responses indicated that the role of advocate/sponsor was valued much more by executives. Advocates, who generally represented participants' internal networking sphere, had access to and knowledge of opportunities and were able to make the necessary introductions and promote the candidatures of their protégés. In addition, there was no perceived lack of advocates – they were present in every organisation, potentially every executive could be the one. Successful women executives earned the patronage of their advocates through demonstrating strong track record, development potential and interest, thereby gaining access to opportunities, that were non-accessible to their less proactive colleagues.

The second theoretical explanation suggested that deeply embedded gendered roles stereotype, which viewed women primarily in motherly and caring roles, made it difficult to accept them in positions of authority, thereby limiting their progression to top jobs (Charles and Grusky, 2004; Tower and Alkadry, 2008). However, this study found that it was not the 'motherly' stereotype of a woman alone, but the 'provider' stereotype of a man that contributed to the former, arguably further strengthening barriers to women's progression. It appears that societal expectations put equal pressure on a man to be the breadwinner and the provider for his family, forcing women into the 3Cs-inspired role stereotype of caring, concern and connection.

Another explanation of women's under-representation cited in academic literature pointed to the gendered construction of leadership, suggesting that leadership and authority were associated with masculine qualities (Willemssen 2002; Ryan and Haslam 2007), contrasting with some ascribed women's behavioural attributes (Stoker, Van der Velde and Lammers, 2012). Thus, it is hard to accept a modest, empathetic, soft-spoken woman in an 'alpha' position of authority (Sinclair, 2013). The findings of this study reconfirmed that behavioural gender differences were strongly acknowledged by both men and women. However, leadership appeared to no longer be regarded as a masculine concept. Interpretation of participants' views pointed to an emerging shift towards gender-neutral leadership characteristics. Traits and behaviours that are deemed crucial for business leader's success today seem to no longer be gender-sensitive: effective leadership is beginning to be regarded as gender-neutral.

Furthermore, prior research suggested that gendered biases that are deeply embedded into organisational processes and workplace practices contain normative gender expectations, which privilege men and disadvantage women (Acker, 1990; Acker, 1992; Acker, 2012). Academic view argued that this potentially created strong barriers for professional women to overcome if they were to move through organisational ranks (ibid). The findings of this study highlighted that publicity, awareness, exposure and bias-related training undertaken over the last decade, helped to improve the gendered structures of UK FTSE-100 organisations. In addition, UK FTSE-100 companies appeared to demonstrate a strong commitment to the issue of women's under-representation and led by example on a number of best practice initiatives. These included organisations' practical support in the areas of childcare, flexible working, up-skilling and mentoring, as well as consistent and measured efforts on improving internal and external talent pipeline and diversity targets.

An additional theoretical view proposes, that women are free 'agents', having all necessary supporting structures in place to have the freedom of choice when prioritising between motherhood and professional careers (Hakim, 1998, 2006). This view argued that women voluntarily opted out of professional careers in favour of full-time motherhood, thereby explaining women's under-representation in senior roles. This study found that it was not the opinion nor the experience of the majority of professional women. While a small number of interviewed women executives (two) did not have children of their own, seemingly giving preference to a professional career over motherhood, the majority (six) successfully combined their careers with raising, often several, children. However, as discussed in Chapter Five, this 'freedom of choice' could not be attributed to the supporting structures which made it easier for professional women to balance the demands of a successful career and family commitments. It most often was a result of painstaking planning, strict discipline and ruthless prioritisation, which came at a financial, emotional and physical cost. Moreover, the data gathered from interviews also highlighted that the institutional inhibitors continue to prevail: British childcare provisions were deemed to be insufficient, overly expensive and of inadequate quality. Despite these challenges, it appeared that today's generation of professional women did not only confidently believe, but seemed to be able to effectively achieve combining professional success with motherhood.

Another explanation of women's under-representation cited in academic literature suggested that women more than men tended to seek merit-based environments (Bosquet, Combes and García-Peñalosa, 2019; Exley, Niederle and Vesterlund, 2020). This theoretical view argues that organisations try, but fail, to create meritocratic environments (McNamee and Miller, 2009; Nicholson, 2010, 2013a, 2013b; Kumra, 2014; Castilla, 2016). Consequently, women become disillusioned, when organisations cannot live up to their fairness-based beliefs, and fail to progress their careers or leave (Son Hing, Bobocel and Zanna, 2002; Lewis, Simpson and Sealy, 2010). This study found confirming evidence that professional women, more than men, were driven by value systems based on fairness and merit. However, the interpretation of interview data highlighted a passive element associated with merit, which might imply that women 'waited' to be recognised and rewarded. Interviewed successful women executives did not leave their professional destiny at the mercy of self-proclaimed meritocratic systems. They did not wait to be recognised and rewarded for their past achievements. Instead, they worked hard to build the credibility and demand for themselves, thereby creating their own new opportunities.

In summary, this study uncovered certain evidence confirming some of the theoretical explanations for women's under-representation in executive roles of UK FTSE-100 organisations. However, it also added complexity to certain debates, calling for new critiques and additional research that could contribute to the existing research concepts, forming basis for theoretical contribution aspect of this study, which will be discussed in the next Chapter Seven: Conclusions.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS

7.1. Introduction

The overarching goal of this thesis was to look into the issue of under-representation of women executive directors at the top of the UK FTSE-100 organisations and to explore its nature.

Chapter One introduced the aims and objectives of this study, setting the historical background and presenting the arguments in support of research significance of the topic. This introductory chapter outlined research aim and objectives, presented the structure of the thesis and defined the content of each section.

Chapter Two explored the significance and the current state of diversity within the workplace context, specifically focusing on gender. Analysis conducted in this chapter led to three main conclusions. Firstly, while the importance of workplace gender diversity is undeniable, its significance should not be examined through neither sustainable development, business performance nor moral arguments in isolation. Instead, a 'shared value' view indicates that building gender diverse workplaces leads to sustainable, profitable and ethical development of British economy and society at large (Moon, 2007; Du, Bhattacharya and Sen, 2010; Porter and Kramer, 2011; Lashley, 2016), while the 'tripod' strategy highlights that a combination of business arguments, legal and social regulation can stimulate action with respect to workplace gender diversity initiatives in areas, where it has not yet been possible to construct a convincing business case (Dickens, 1999). Secondly, the progress of workplace gender diversity initiatives in the UK has been stimulated at the wrong directorship layer, focusing on non-executive, instead of executive level. While business world celebrated steady improvements in the numbers of women non-executive directors, the all-important executive layer saw little progress. Thirdly, through the evaluation of effectiveness of key gender diversity improvement initiatives that took place over the last decade, it became apparent that while some progress was made, various barriers still prevented professional women from rising through the ranks.

Chapter Three focused on possible theoretical explanations for women's under-representation in senior leaderships roles by exploring the barriers identified in academic literature. Some academics pointed to the lack of female mentors and female role models as the root cause (Jackson, 2001; Townsend, 2002; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt and Van Engen, 2003; Lockwood,

2006; Dworkin, Ramaswami and Schipani, 2013). Others believed in woman's freedom of choice, facilitated by supporting structures, allowing her to voluntarily choose between career and motherhood (Hakim, 1998, 2006). Alternative theories highlighted gendered organisations (Acker, 1990; Acker, 1992; Acker, 2012), gendered role stereotyping (Charles and Grusky, 2004; Eagly and Diekmann, 2005; Tower and Alkadry, 2008) and gendered construction of leadership (Willemssen 2002; Ryan and Haslam 2007; Stoker, Van der Velde and Lammers, 2012; Sinclair, 2013), which still existed within British workplace environment, and acted as invisible obstacles to women's career progression. The main conclusion of this chapter suggested that academic literature offered several plausible explanations for women's under-representation in senior roles. However, the literature review also highlighted possible limitations of each theory. Moreover, it was apparent that not any one theory could be selected to comprehensively examine the barriers to women's representation. Instead, a 'blended' approach was recommended when comparing theory with fieldwork findings in Chapter Six: Discussion.

Chapter Four presented the structure and design adopted for this research study, which is summarised in the following diagram:

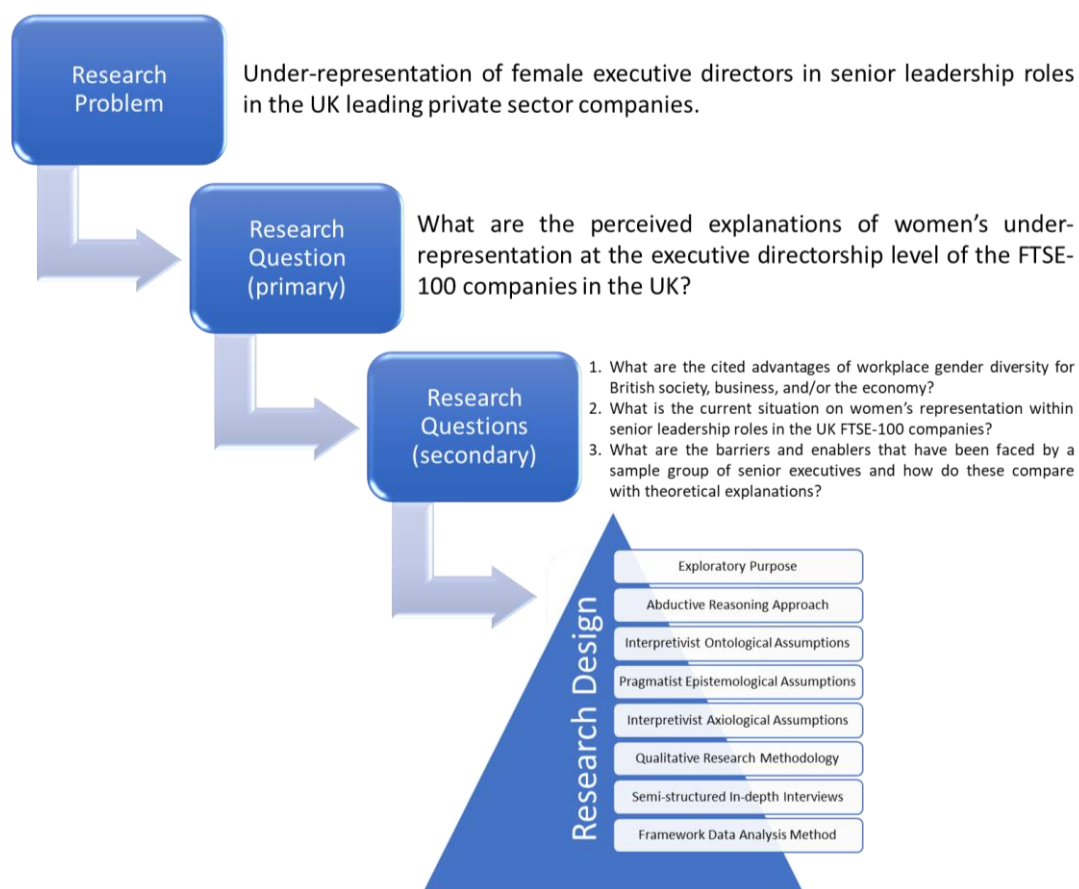


Figure 40: Research structure and design decision flow framework

This chapter discussed the significance of quality in the context of qualitative research by exploring three key components: the impact of researcher's profile, quality assessment criteria chosen and ethical guidelines. Firstly, I explained how my role as researcher-actor and researcher-learner, inspired by interpretivist ontological assumptions, as well as my prior knowledge, interests and affiliations, had influenced my research. Positive effects were observed in the form of interviewer competence, experience in communicating with senior executives, relative ease of access to the targeted population, and ability to conduct snowball sampling. However, lack of experience in conducting fieldwork, analysing and presenting data, specifically within academic setting, was highlighted as a limitation. In addition, my own profile which closely resembled that of the sample population may have potentially influenced and biased my views as a researcher. Secondly, the quality assessment criteria comprising of four measures: credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability, were introduced. A set of stringent actions within each quality assurance measure undertaken throughout this study was presented. Thirdly, this chapter presented evidence for the high standards of moral conduct and ethical guidelines that this study adhered to, defending the supposition that this research study could be deemed a high-quality piece of academic research overall.

Chapter Five presented the findings from interviews with eight women and five men senior executives, representing a variety of business sectors and corporate functions, with the aim of uncovering their perceived explanations and their views on tackling the issue of women's under-representation in senior roles of the UK FTSE-100 organisations. The main part of this chapter contained interviewees' quotes, as they reflected on the development of their careers. The findings were grouped into five primary themes, each containing between two and four secondary themes. Primary themes explored the executives' meaning of success, highlighted the obstacles and costs incurred along the way, and brought together participants' views on the level of gender diversity the corporate world should aspire to, concluding with practical recommendations on how to reach and sustain that level.

Applying the diagram used in section 5.3 to group the themes, below is the summary of the corresponding supporting findings:

AN INTERPRETIVE EXPLORATION OF UNDER-REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS IN UK FTSE-100 COMPANIES

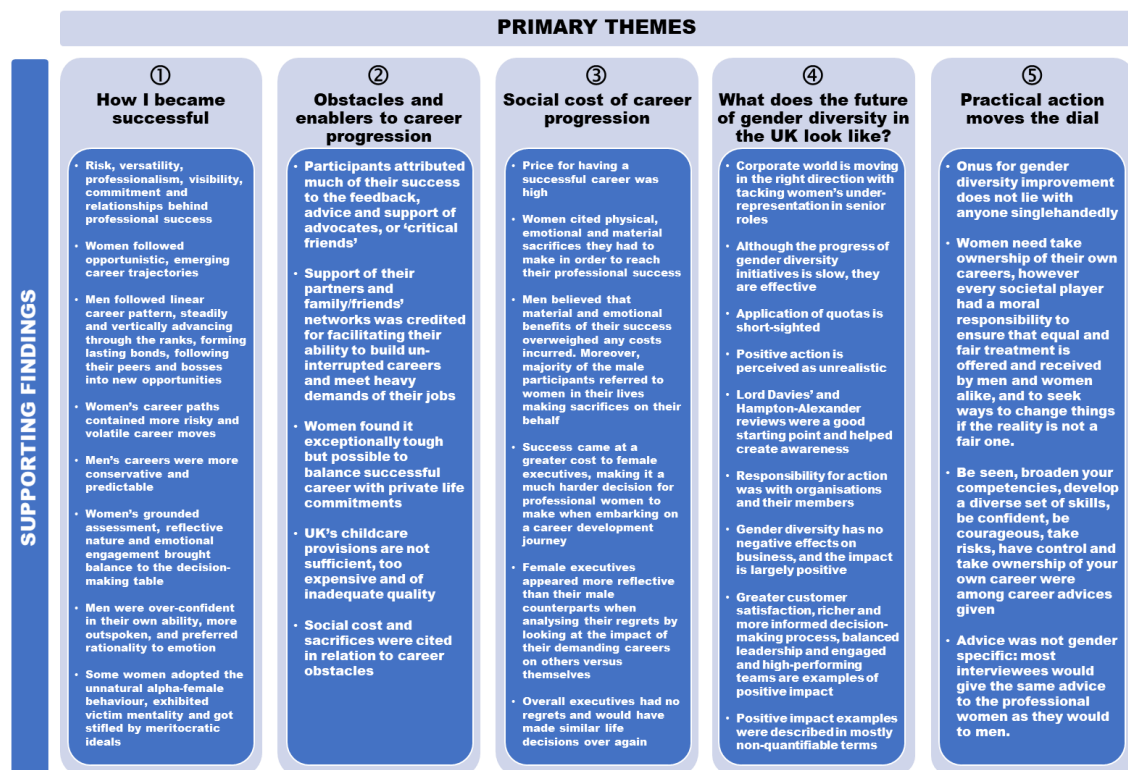


Figure 41: Summary of supporting findings

The key messages summarised above formed basis for the next Chapter Six, which discussed these findings in the context of academic literature, with the aim to compare theoretical explanations of women's under-representation in the UK leadership roles with those offered by the research participants. During literature review process six primary theoretical explanations of women's under-representation emerged, which were then analysed against the findings to reveal the following result:

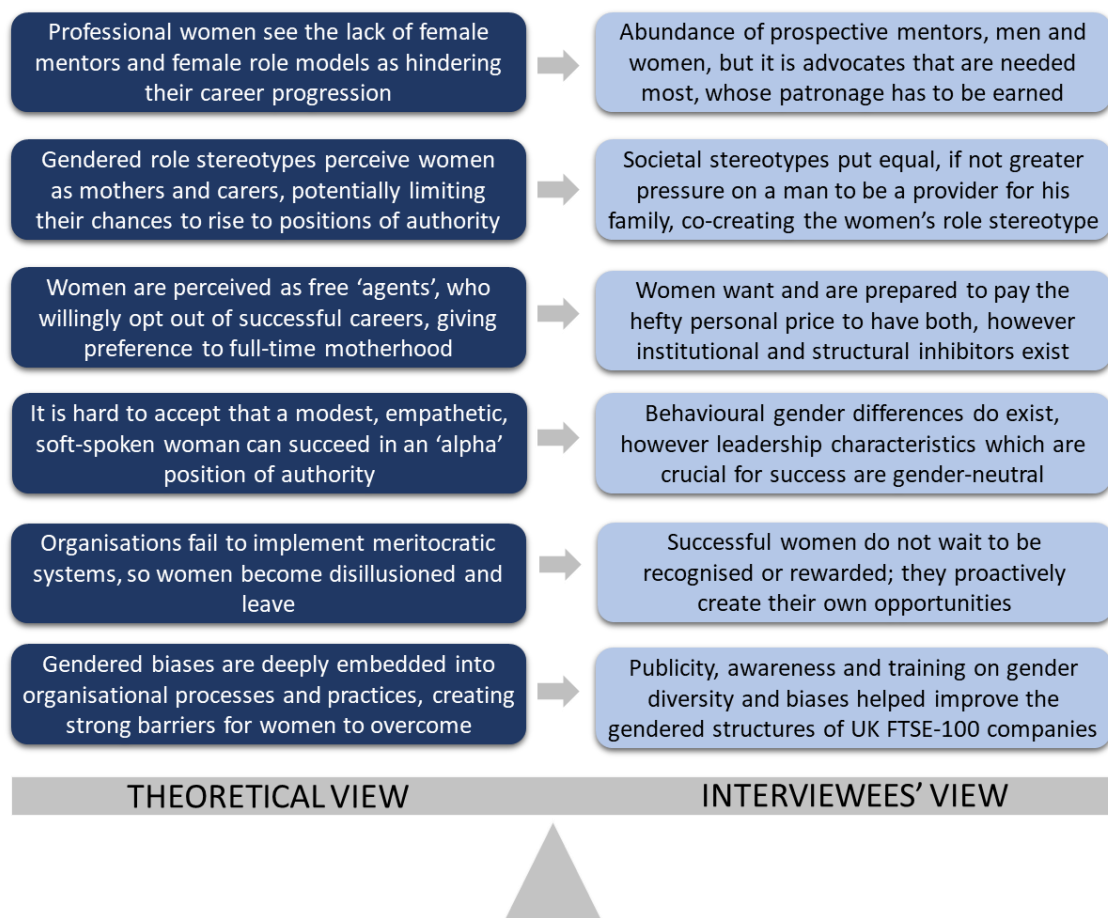


Figure 42: Key messages which transpired from comparing theoretical explanations with research findings

The discussion in Chapter Six highlighted that this research study uncovered certain evidence confirming some of the theoretical explanations behind women's under-representation in executive roles of UK FTSE-100 organisations. However, it also revealed new ideas that contributed to the existing research concepts, thus forming the basis for theoretical contribution aspect of this study, which will be discussed later on in this chapter.

The purpose of this culminating Chapter Seven is to tie the information presented in this thesis with the aim and objectives of the entire research study. In this Chapter I also discuss the contribution that this research study aims to make to the areas of theory, practice and knowledge. This chapter also reflects on the limitations of this study and concludes with discussion about the areas recommended for further research.

7.2. Review of research aim and objectives

The overarching goal of this research study was to explore the issue of gender diversity in the UK corporate sector. Specifically, this study aimed to evaluate the problem of women's under-

representation at the leadership echelons of the UK publicly listed businesses with a particular focus on the executive director level of UK FTSE-100 organisations. The key aim of this research study was to identify the perceived explanations of women's under-representation at the executive directorship level of FTSE-100 companies in the UK by exploring and comparing the experiences of a selected group of men and women executives in order to determine the perceived barriers and obstacles that prevent women from progressing their careers.

This research study had four main objectives:

- to evaluate the context and analyse the current levels of women's under-representation at executive directorship level of the UK FTSE-100 businesses;

- to explore and compare the experiences of a selected group of women and men executive directors;

- to examine and contrast some of the main theoretical explanations for women's under-representation with research participants' perceptions and experiences;

- to consider the implications from findings of this research study on theory, future research, organisational practice and on career decisions of aspiring executives.

In order to meet these objectives, I undertook an exploratory research study, using abductive reasoning approach, where my views were influenced by interpretivist and pragmatist ideologies. I relied on qualitative research methodology, selecting semi-structured in-depth interviews and a framework method as my preferred techniques for data collection and data analysis, respectively.

7.3. Research contributions

This research study aimed to make a theoretical, a knowledge-based, as well as a practical contribution to research.

7.3.1. Contribution to theory

From theoretical perspective, this research study was able to supplement existing theories with contemporary research findings, offering a contribution to theory in two specific areas.

Firstly, the findings of this research study add complexity to some existing theoretical debates, calling for new critiques which address certain outdated arguments and/or new notions which emerged from certain theoretical explanations being refuted.

Contradictory to the preference theory (Hakim, 1998, 2006), it appeared that women's 'freedom of choice' facilitated by the alleged supporting structures was not as free and easy a choice as Hakim suggested. Women's ability to balance a successful career and family commitments was a result of painstaking planning, strict discipline and ruthless prioritisation, which came at a financial, emotional and physical cost. The existence of alleged supporting structures came under question: the perception of insufficient, overly expensive, inadequate childcare provisions and prevailing societal stereotypes further contributed to the complexity of the agency/structure debate.

Moreover, this study uncovered data in support of emerging shift away from the gendered construction of leadership view, which suggested that leadership and authority were associated with masculine qualities (Willemsen 2002; Ryan and Haslam 2007), contrasting with some ascribed women's behavioural attributes (Stoker, Van der Velde and Lammers, 2012); and towards gender-neutral leadership characteristics. The position of authority in today's leading UK organisations is no longer regarded as exclusively male. There appear to be no 'male' and 'female' qualities attributed by senior executives to leadership; effective leadership today is not regarded as gendered. Traits and behaviours that are deemed crucial for business leader's success appear to have become gender-neutral and can be used effectively or ineffectively by men and women equally.

The second area of theoretical contribution comes in the form of this study providing a 'launch pad' for further studies which drill down into specific areas.

Prior research, as well as a number of gender diversity initiatives (Catalyst, 2004; KPMG, YSC and 30% Club, 2014; Davies Review, 2015), that took place within British corporate world, explored and focused on improving women's representation at the non-executive director level, belatedly noticing the all-important executive layer. This study contributed to the understanding that progress of workplace gender diversity initiatives, instigated by the UK private sector in the recent years, had been encouraged at the wrong executive layer. A disproportionate number of initiatives and research studies have focused on tackling the issue of women's under-representation at non-executive director level, ignoring the executive and other senior leadership levels below the board. This study aims to fill this gap in prior research and calls for

additional research on possible explanations to women's under-representation specifically at executive directorship level.

In addition, academic view disputes the strength of evidence in support of the economic impact of gender diversity on business performance indicators. Prior research suggests that there is a lack of quantifiable proof of any positive interdependency between business performance and workplace gender diversity (Adams and Ferreira, 2009; Gregory-Smith, Main and O'Reilly, 2014). This research aimed to gather the views on the perceived business benefits of workplace gender diversity as deemed by the business itself. While participants overwhelmingly referred to advantages that workplace gender diversity offered to their businesses, citing no negative effects, most of the positive impact examples were described in non-quantifiable terms. Greater customer satisfaction, richer decision-making table, balanced leadership, engaged and high-performing teams were among the cited advantages. This research study suggests that while the business benefits of workplace gender diversity cannot be viewed in isolation, the qualitative perception of benefits highlighted in this study can potentially translate into quantifiable impact, positive or negative, in terms of business profitability and efficiency ratios. This study calls for further research to examine the quantifiable benefits of workplace gender diversity to business, a point which is further developed in the 'Recommendations for Further Research' section of this chapter.

Moreover, this study built on and expanded further the mentoring (Levinson, 1978; Collins and Scott, 1978; Ibarra, Carter and Sylva, 2010) and networking theories (DiMaggio, 2001; Babcock and Laschever, 2003; Ibarra and Hunter, 2007), differentiating between the internal (mentoring) and the external (networking) relationship spheres. The study drilled down specifically into the advocacy notion, concluding that the role of advocates, who generally came from participants' internal organisational environment, was perceived by the executives as the most beneficial to their professional development.

The review of academic literature highlighted that each theoretical explanation for women's under-representation had its advantages and limitations; each theory offered plausible arguments. Most importantly, however, not any one theory could be selected to comprehensively examine the barriers to women's representation. The discussion that followed gave rise to recommendations for further research in such areas as gendered construction of environment, the impact of success on family and dependents, and the evolution of workplace

gender diversity in light of its contemporary definitions. These are discussed in more detail in the 'Recommendations for Further Research' section of this chapter.

7.3.2. Contribution to knowledge

This research study explored the level and nature of UK FTSE-100 companies' response to the findings of Lord Davies and Hampton-Alexander Reviews specific to improving women's representation in senior roles, thereby contributing to the area of knowledge.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the efforts of Lord Davies and Hampton-Alexander independent reviews were instrumental in leading the gender diversity agenda in the UK. Prevailing public opinion considers that these reviews have encouraged systematic business-led efforts and have seen the improvement in numbers of women on boards. This research study further built on this view and uncovered additional opinions which contributed to existing knowledge.

- Both reviews were deemed as effective catalysts, instigators of change.
- The initiatives, especially the Davies Review, brought about tangible outcomes.
- They helped to form assessment of the extent of women's under-representation within the FTSE universe.
- Reviews raised awareness and prioritised the issue of women's under-representation.
- They ensured that tangible targets were put in place.
- Both the reviews emphasised the importance of measuring and monitoring the progress of gender diversity initiatives, getting organisations into the habit of doing it.
- They gained support and commitment of business and public.

However, ten years since the launch of the reviews, it remains clear that women's under-representation at senior echelons of British businesses continues to persist. The all-important executive layer immediately below the board remains a much more complex and longer-term challenge, with change taking place much slower than expected.

Hampton-Alexander Review specifically failed to gain the momentum and needed more drive and dissemination. It lacked the hype and visibility of the Lord Davies review, but, most importantly, stopped short of practical advice that organisations required to be able to move the dial and make sustainable progress on the issue of women executive's under-representation.

The findings of this study also highlighted that the publicity generated by both reviews around the issue of women's under-representation was fading and their influence was diminishing. The

responsibility for the progress now transferred to organisations, CEOs and individual executives, giving rise to a question on whether a shift away from government-led targets, albeit voluntary, towards a goodwill approach risking slowing down the progress on the issue of women's under-representation and the all-important executive directorship layer and the levels below.

7.3.3. *Contribution to practice*

This research study contributes to practice by presenting a set of best practice recommendations to help increase the presence of women at executive leadership level of the UK FTSE-100 organisations. This set of recommendations is inspired by two key conclusions:

1. progress can only be made through practical action;
2. gender diversity issues are everyone's business.

This research study has uncovered a variety of valuable examples of gender diversity best practice. These recommendations are not directed at any specific audience. As presented in Chapter Five: Findings, it is clear from the majority of the participants' responses that the onus for gender diversity improvement does not lie with anyone singlehandedly, instead, it is a collective effort. It can be argued that diverse companies make better companies, so gender issues are everyone's business (Lang, 2002; Cox 2019; Business Fights Poverty, 2020).

Collective effort

Some of the cited recommendations were directed at women executives, and others at CEOs, organisations as a whole, executive search firms, as well as the government:



Figure 43: Summary of recommendations for each societal actor in improving gender diversity

Positive action is not at all 'positive'

In the context of this research study, positive action was viewed as applicable to situations where the employer is able to encourage people from disadvantaged groups to apply for work and can provide training to help equip them for particular types of roles. When viewed through workplace gender diversity lens, if the two candidates are competing for a senior role within a FTSE-100 business – a man and a woman, and their candidatures are deemed to be as qualified as each other by the recruiting organisation, the employer is able to exercise positive action by legally hiring a woman in favour of her male 'competitor'. In theory, the introduction of this provision was deemed to help strengthen the talent pool of women and help organisations overcome the issue of women's under-representation in senior roles. The practical element of this research study found that positive action was based on an unrealistic scenario. All individuals are unique, and it is impossible for two 'as qualified as each other' candidates to exist. Within the business environment, when it comes to outcomes pertaining to recruitment selection or promotion, decision makers would always find a difference in individuals' skills, competencies, experiences and/or attitudes. This renders the premise of positive action unrealistic. Furthermore, the application of positive action was deemed to come dangerously close to positive discrimination, which in itself was perceived by the interviewees as not only unlawful, but morally wrong.

Positive action introduced under the Equality Act 2010 as a range of helpful measures, was not regarded by the sample representative group of senior executives to bring positive outcome it was aiming for, specifically within the area of workplace gender diversity.

Recommendations to aspiring career professionals

It is my aspiration that this research study helps eliminate doubts, reduce fear and encourage professionals of every level to strive for professional success and pursue career development. With this in mind, I compiled a list of recommendations and practical advice that the interviewed executives were able to offer for aspiring professionals. Although it was evident from this study that these recommendations were applicable to men and women alike, the findings also indicated, that due to the prevailing institutional and structural inhibitors, women required more support and encouragement. Thus, these recommendations revolve mainly around skills, attitudes and actions, that aspiring career women would benefit from exhibiting more or less of, in order to achieve professional success, as experienced by the executives who have achieved it.

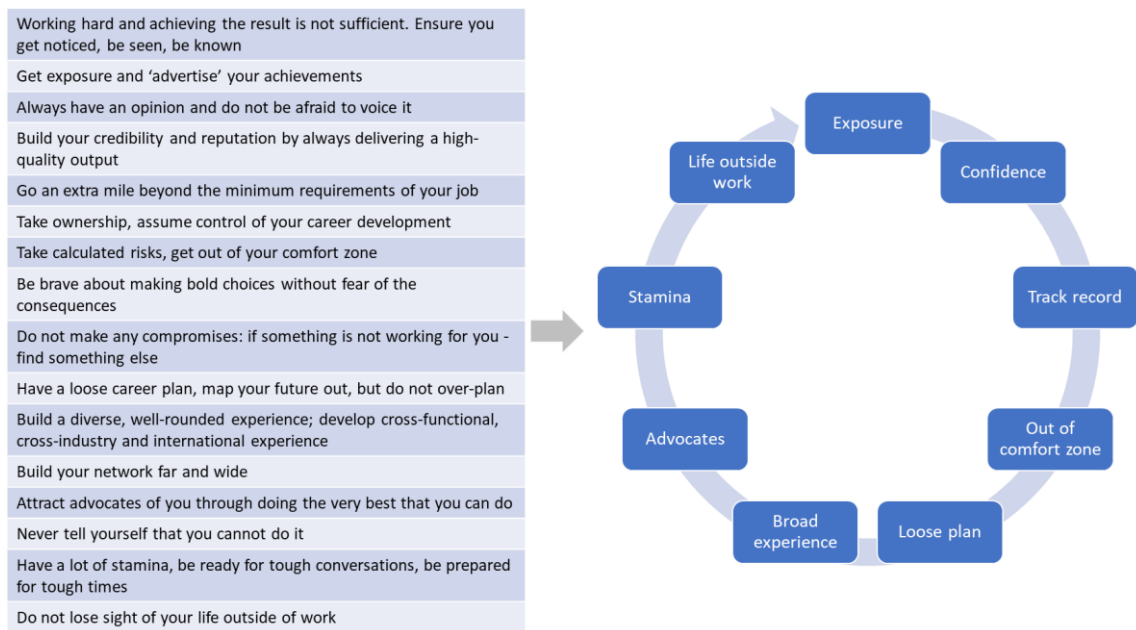


Figure 44: Recommended recipe for professional success comprised of desired skills, attitudes, and actions

7.4. Research limitations

As discussed in Chapter Four, numerous precautions were taken to maximise the quality, rigour, and ethical standards of this research study. However, certain limitations must be reflected upon.

This research study sets out to explore the issue of gender diversity with a specific aim to identify the perceived main causes of women's under-representation at the executive directorship level of the FTSE-100 companies in the UK.

While geographically this study was focused on the UK, the literature review used in this research bore a worldwide context. It is possible that the narrow geographical context used in this study may have limited the diversity of views. Lack of international comparison was another limiting factor in this study. If undertaken carefully, international comparison in research can help create benchmarks by identifying countries performing better on a specific issue and prompt improvement strategies (Smith, 2015). In addition, international comparison acts as an instrument of accountability for government and society in general. Thus, examining the main causes of women's under-representation at one country level (UK) may be a limiting view.

Furthermore, this research study looked specifically at women's under-representation within the UK private sector. The public sector, self-employed or not-for-profit sectors have not formed part of this study's focus. This does not imply, that other sectors are less important or play a

smaller role in British economy or society. It is unknown whether the issues underpinning women's career progression in other sectors would be similar or different to those faced by women within the private sector. Some prior studies have examined the topic of gender diversity through a comparison between private and public sectors (Sealy, Doldor and Vinnicombe, 2009; Wiggan, 2019), however, the number of such studies is scarce and often focuses on board level positions. This study's focus on private sector may be too narrow to reflect the wider situation and a cross-sectoral research study is recommended to help to fill this gap.

Another potential limitation was the reliance on the self-reported data. This was a qualitative research study which involved a series of semi-structured interviews with participants conducted by the researcher herself. During the interviews, participants recalled their experiences and events that happened in the past – the information that had to be taken at face value and could not be independently verified. Throughout this study I was cautious of the following potential sources of self-reported data bias (Bauhoff, 2011):

- a) selective memory: choosing to selectively recall or forget some events that happened in the past;
- b) exaggeration: presenting the events in a better or more significant light;
- c) attribution: crediting oneself with positive achievements and blaming negative outcomes on external forces;
- d) telescoping: temporal displacement of an event leading to an over-reporting of its frequency.

Berry (2002) argued that 'elite' interviewees, senior executives, as in the case of this research study, were more likely than other groups to want to show themselves in a good light, potentially making their responses less truthful.

Despite the potential limitations of self-reported data bias, I considered that, if correctly utilised, the self-reported approach could be valuable in obtaining a much wider range of responses than through many other data collection instruments, for example participants' views and opinions (Althubaiti, 2016). I approached the data collection and data analysis stage of this study bearing the above limitations and advantages in mind. To mitigate the impact of these biases, I had to firstly rely on my professional experience as an interviewer, where as part of hiring and promotional conversations, I was trained to sense out exaggeration and probe deeper into responses that felt ambiguous. In addition, post-interview reflective strategies immediately

following the interview, and later when re-reading the transcribed version, helped me assess the extent of the self-reported data bias and its potential impact.

Additionally, on reflection, some residual researcher bias may have come into play at the very early stages of data collection. This mainly emerged in the form of interviewer bias, which Salazar (1990) more specifically defined as 'personal qualities' bias. During my first interview with a woman executive I found it somewhat challenging to detach the human emotions from the situation. On this occasion, certain personal stories may have triggered in me the emotional reaction of concern, sympathy and compassion. Furthermore, during my first interview with a man, I felt a degree of uneasiness when discussing the issue of women's under-representation with a member of the opposite gender. One of my reflective strategies was to keep an interviewer sentiment journal after every interview. Noting and analysing this emotional response indicated to me that unless I were to remain unbiased as a researcher, I would not be able to produce a high-quality research study. On the one hand, my emotional reaction provided me with a potentially useful source of data, which formed part of my field notes and established basis for my reflections and interview sentiment analysis. On the other hand, it was important in subsequent interviews to make a conscious effort to ensure that my feelings and emotions did not interfere with the data collection and analysis stages of the study.

Finally, at the time of carrying out this research study, gender diversity was a highly publicised topic. It was talked about in media, propagated by the government and raised by and within UK largest and most influential organisations. All of the interviewed participants held highly visible and influential positions with large multinational FTSE-listed companies. It is acknowledged that there is a possibility that some of their responses may have been 'politically correct'. Krumpal (2013) defined it as social desirability bias, where the interviewee tends to provide a response which would be viewed favourably and be better accepted by others, especially when responding to sensitive questions which are personal or controversial in nature. Although, given the qualitative nature of this research, it is impossible to completely eradicate this limitation, I remained acutely aware of this bias and felt that the interviewees provided frank and candid opinions and insights while answering the questions.

Overall, data collection process presented very few challenges. All of the participants were professional, polite, punctual and respectful. They all appeared engaged in the topic and were genuine and candid in their responses. If anything, I underestimated how forthcoming the interviewees would be with their personal stories and how generous they were with their time.

7.5. Recommendations for further research

As a newcomer to academic research, I was somewhat unprepared for the immense sea of data I was about to face. Both secondary and primary data collection methods utilised as part of this study generated a broad spectrum of views, opinions and ideas. From the start of this research I was encouraged to narrow the research scope, be specific about the parameters of the study and maintain focus. This research study was specific, in that it examined workplace gender diversity at executive directorship level of FTSE-100 organisations in the UK.

The narrow focus of my research allowed me to adequately address the research problem identified within the specific space and time allocated (Lloyd-Walker and Walker, 2015).

However, the findings of this study also generated unanswered questions and inspired new ideas, some of which could be translated into beneficial areas for further academic research. I would like to present five such recommendations.

Gendered construction of environment:

While undertaking data analysis process for this research study, I noted a potential connection between the gender composition of the person's environment and his/her subsequent attitude towards workplace gender diversity. For example, several interviewed men who had daughter/s seemed to be more outspoken advocates of women's representation. Similarly, men who grew up surrounded by sisters or with authoritative mothers, saw a woman in position of authority as a standard phenomenon. The sample size in this study was too small to draw any tangible conclusions and provided only initial indications. I believe it would be beneficial to conduct further research into any potential impact of gendered construction of a person's environment on his or her attitudes towards workplace gender diversity. This recommendation is made on the premise that if a positive link is indeed identified, men who are comfortable with female-dominated environments can be relied upon as catalysts of change, and vice versa.

Quantifiable benefits of gender diversity to business:

In Chapter Two, I presented sustainability, moral and business case arguments in support of workplace gender diversity. Subsequently, I discussed how, specifically with the business case argument, the acknowledged benefits were largely qualitative. I recommend conducting further research into any potential quantifiable benefits that workplace gender diversity brings to business. This recommendation is made on the premise that the primary purpose of a business

is to maximise profits for its owners and stakeholders, while operating within ethical and responsible parameters. Although moral and sustainability arguments are important components of today's corporate environment, numbers speak louder than words in the world of business. It is anticipated, that any tangible benefits that would potentially be uncovered by additional research, could help to influence business' attitude towards workplace gender diversity through numbers.

Is it really worth it? The impact on family and dependents

The findings of this research study repeatedly highlighted that both professional men and women paid a hefty price for the attractive rewards, scope of influence and sense of achievement that their successful and high-flying careers provided. Not a single interviewed executive would trade his or her successful career for anything else: overall they had no regrets and would repeat their professional journey all over again, deeming the 'risk' worthy of the 'reward'. However, among some of the examples of price, or social costs, they cited health implications, time taken away from activities with children and divorce. Majority of the interviewed successful executives feel the high-flying corporate life is 'worth it'. But a questions arises: is it really? Could the potential implications on children, other dependents and family life in general be under-estimated and have a long-term impact? As a recommendation for further research, it would be potentially valuable to interview the families of successful senior executives and gather their perspectives on the impact that their parents' and loved ones' demanding careers have had on their psychological, emotional and physical wellbeing.

Gender diversity versus other types of contemporary definitions of diversity

This research study encountered some initial ideas that gender diversity may be cannibalised by other types of diversity within the workplace. These ideas touched on cultural diversity and reflected how men, for example of Arab and Asian heritage, coming largely from male-dominated cultures, may not buy-in into the topic of gender diversity. In other words, organisation's focus on creating cultural diversity, may stand in the way of gender diversity. It is recommended to further explore how gender diversity interacts or integrates with other types of diversity. Furthermore, gender becomes increasingly redefined – Facebook today offers over 50 choices as user profile options, including terms like bigender and pangender. Thus, further research into how contemporary representations of gender diversity translate into workplace attitudes is recommended.

Social cost of career for women with stay-home partners

The findings of this research indicated that the price of career for men with stay-home partners was much smaller than that of women executives. It may be surmised that the physical, emotional and material costs that career women incur could be minimised or avoided altogether by having a stay-home partner to take care of family commitments. Additional research is recommended to explore this premise in more detail. Could stay-home partners help to improve the issue of women's under-representation in senior roles and if so, how would this tie in with the men's 'breadwinning' stereotype?

7.6. Concluding reflections

As I conclude this thesis, I reflect back on the research questions raised at the beginning of this study.

What are the cited advantages of workplace gender diversity for British society, business, and/or the economy?

Views gathered through a combination of printed material and online secondary data sources which included academic, consulting and business material, highlight that gender diversity in the workplace is no longer a 'good to have', but a 'must have'. Ensuring that women, who today make up half of the UK workforce, are equally represented throughout hierarchical pyramids is the key to sustainable development of British economy and society. Gender diversity is now seen as a crucial component for businesses to remain healthy and competitive. In addition, encouraging gender diversity is the morally right thing to do, as it leads to a gender-equal and balanced society.

The primary findings of this study supported these views. Gender diversity was recognised as a crucial component of advanced and healthy society. However, while moral argument for gender diversity was highlighted, it is primarily the economic advantages that were stressed upon. This can be linked back to the earlier discussed argument that while social and moral arguments are regarded as important components of today's corporate environment, in the world of business numbers bear more influence. It appears that the corporate world has not yet fully recognised that a combination of business, legal and social strategies can stimulate greater progress on the issue of workplace gender diversity.

What is the current situation on women's representation within senior leadership roles in the UK FTSE-100 companies?

It is fair to acknowledge that women's participation in senior leadership roles of UK FTSE-100 businesses improved over the last 10 years. Initiatives spearheaded by Lord Davies team, Hampton-Alexander Review and the 30% Club played a significant role in raising public awareness over the lack of gender diversity within the UK private sector. They helped measure progress, publicised successes and failures, and offered some practical advice. Gradually, the numbers of women on boards, mainly in non-executive director positions, grew. However, the levels below, the all-important executive layer, made very little progress on women's representation. Recognising this gap in focus, the above initiatives have redirected their efforts onto the executive leadership layer. Targets were set, regular reviews were conducted. While progress continues to be slow, it is moving in the right direction.

The findings of this study concur with the prevailing opinion that women are greatly under-represented in leadership roles of the UK private sector, more so within specific industries which traditionally are dominated by men. This research uncovered overwhelming opinion against mandatory quotas, but in support of voluntary targets. The business world feels that it will take at least 10 more years to reach gender diverse workplaces. Additionally, a numerically measured 50-50 balance may not be a realistic target to aspire to. It seems that once everyone thinks they are being treated fairly, we would have reached a gender-balanced professional environment.

What are the barriers and enablers that have been faced by a sample group of senior executives and how do these compare with theoretical explanations?

Academic views pointed to various explanations: lack of female mentors and female roles models; leadership seen through masculine traits; impossible balance between motherhood and career; authority inappropriate for motherly women; and women's disillusionment with failed meritocratic structures.

This study found some of these views outdated and narrow-minded. The role of advocate was valued much more by executives, than that of a role model. Similarly, it was found that a man's engraved 'provider' mindset forced women into motherly role stereotype. Motherhood is no longer seen as an obstacle: today's generation of professional women believe they can have it all, albeit at a hefty personal cost. In addition, effective leader is no longer seen through a masculine trait lens, but judged upon gender-neutral qualities. And finally, the career of

successful professional women is not stifled by meritocratic expectations; instead, it is inspired by ambition, which translates into proactivity.

Personally, to me as a researcher, this study was a hard and lengthy journey. As part of my final remarks, I would like to highlight several learning points that stand out for me on reflection.

I do not know it all

I embarked on the PhD process with respectable volume of experience and track-record within the corporate environment. I was equipped with several reputable degrees and believed myself to be quite eloquent and diversely knowledgeable. In hindsight, this was an arrogant approach. Not necessarily wrong, since confidence gave wind to my sails, but naïve. This process has made it clear to me that there is always something new to learn, something new to discover.

Academic approaches to analysis and writing differ from that used within the business environment. I am delighted that I was able to practice both. I have improved my critical thinking. I have made new connections, both academic and business. I still do not know it all, but I definitely know more and look forward to future learning.

One step at a time

Again, I draw parallels with my experience climbing Kilimanjaro. The summit climb was the toughest: darkness, lack of oxygen, I wanted to give up. What helped me was disciplined breathing and taking it one step at a time. This research study was my Kilimanjaro: seems impossible, but it is doable. Discipline proved instrumental in many ways: from strict daily writing habits to striving to meet deadlines and ensuring consistency. During the dark times, when I saw no end in sight, I took it one step at a time. One specific example stands out when I completed the very first level of data analysis. Faced with an ocean of information, I saw little hope in swimming out of it and uncovering unique elements. Discipline, faith and patience were my key learning points.

Seek, and you will find

Very similar to the qualities quoted by the participants in this study which they described as critical for professional success, proactivity, curiosity and perseverance were the three pillars I relied upon. Proactivity helped me anticipate the challenges and better prepare for them. Curiosity kept my horizons wide and inspired me to uncover unique and interesting findings. Perseverance sustained me going and kept the end result in mind. I can only summarise this

learning experience by paraphrasing the saying from the Bible: ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

And finally, I am a firm believer that every action has a chain reaction. Hence, any acknowledged contribution that this study makes to theory, knowledge or practice is important to me, in the hope that my research was able to make a difference to the members of academic, business and the general public community.

It is my aspiration that this research study will help eliminate doubts, reduce fears and encourage professionals of every level to strive for professional success and pursue career development. Especially professional women, who, despite their greater confidence today, may still need more support and encouragement.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Acker, J. (1990) 'Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations'. *Gender & Society*, 4(2), pp.139-158.
- Acker, J. (1992) 'Gendering organizational theory'. *Classics of Organizational Theory*, 6, pp.450-459.
- Acker, J. (2012) 'Gendered organizations and intersectionality: Problems and possibilities'. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*, 31(3), pp.214-224.
- Adams, R.B. and Ferreira, D. (2009) 'Women in the boardroom and their impact on governance and performance'. *Journal of Financial Economics*, 94(2), pp.291-309.
- Adler, L. (2016) *New Survey Reveals 85% of All Jobs are Filled Via Networking*. Available at: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/new-survey-reveals-85-all-jobs-filled-via-networking-lou-adler/> (Accessed: 02 June 2021).
- AICD (2014) *The differences between executive and non-executive directors*. Available at: <https://aicd.companydirectors.com.au/resources/all-sectors/the-differences-between-executive-and-non-executive-directors> (Accessed: 14 April 2020).
- Alimo-Metcalfe, B. (2010) 'An investigation of female and male constructs of leadership and empowerment'. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 25(8), pp.640-648.
- Aliseda, A. (2006) *Abductive reasoning: Logical investigations into discovery and explanation*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Althubaiti, A. (2016) 'Information bias in health research: Definition, pitfalls, and adjustment methods'. *Journal of Multidisciplinary Healthcare*, 9, pp.211-217.
- Andrew, S. and Halcomb, E. (2009) *Mixed methods research for nursing and the health sciences*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Annis, B. and Gray, J. (2013) *Work with Me: The 8 blind spots between men and women in business*. New York: Macmillan.
- Babaeva, L.V. and Chirikova, A.E. (1997) 'Women in business'. *Russian Social Science Review*, 38(3), pp.81-91.
- Babcock, L. and Laschever, S. (2003) *Women don't ask: Negotiation and the gender divide*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Baker, C. and Ciuk, S. (2015) 'Keeping the family side ticking along: An exploratory study of the work-family interface in the experiences of rotational assignees and frequent business travellers'. *Journal of Global Mobility*, 3(2), pp.137-154.
- Ball, J. (2018) *The cost of childcare in the UK, vs the rest of the world: explained*. Available at: <https://inews.co.uk/news/uk/cost-childcare-uk-world-explained-152903> (Accessed: 13 June 2020).
- Banaji, M.R. and Hardin, C.D. (1996) 'Automatic stereotyping'. *Psychological Science*, 7(3), pp.136-141.
- Barrett, R. (2011) *The new leadership paradigm*. Aruba: Lulu Press Inc.

- Barroso, J. (2010) *Women's charter: Our commitment to gender equality*. Brussels: European Commission.
- Barton, K. and Tucker, B. (2020) *Deductive reasoning*. Available at: [https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Communication/Book%3A_Exploring_Public_Speaking_\(Barton_and_Tucker\)/14%3A_Logical_Reasoning/14.03%3A_Deductive_Reasoning](https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Communication/Book%3A_Exploring_Public_Speaking_(Barton_and_Tucker)/14%3A_Logical_Reasoning/14.03%3A_Deductive_Reasoning) (Accessed: 22 May 2020).
- Bastian (2019) *Equity before meritocracy: Why we must create opportunities before rewarding accomplishments*. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/rebekahbastian/2019/01/29/equity-before-meritocracy-why-we-must-create-opportunities-before-rewarding-accomplishments/#60d5b6131634> (Accessed: 8 May 2020).
- Bastian, B. and Haslam, N. (2006) 'Psychological essentialism and stereotype endorsement'. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 42(2), pp.228-235.
- Bauhoff, S. (2011) 'Systematic self-report bias in health data: Impact on estimating cross-sectional and treatment effects'. *Health Services and Outcomes Research Methodology*, 11(1-2), pp.44-53.
- Bauman, Z., Beck, U., Beck-Gernsheim, E., Benhabib, S., Burgess, R.G., Chamberlain, M., Thompson, P., Chamberlayne, P., Bornat, J., Wengraf, T. and Devine, F. (2002). 'Qualitative interviewing: Asking, listening and interpreting', in May T. (ed.) *Qualitative research in action*, 1st edn. London: SAGE, pp.226-241.
- Beckingham, A.C. (1974) 'Identifying problems for nursing research'. *International Nursing Review*, 21(2), pp.49-52.
- Belliveau, M.A. (2005) 'Blind Ambition? The Effects of Social Networks and Institutional Sex Composition on the Job Search Outcomes of Elite Coeducational and Women's College Graduates'. *Organization Science*, 16(2), pp.101-202.
- Benard, S., Paik, I. and Correll, S.J. (2007) 'Cognitive bias and the motherhood penalty'. *Hastings Law Journal*, 59(6), pp.1359-1387.
- Berry, J.M. (2002) 'Validity and reliability issues in elite interviewing'. *Political Science and Politics*, 35(4), pp.679-682.
- Bhatia, M. (2018) *Your guide to qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods*. Available at: <https://humansofdata.atlan.com/2018/09/qualitative-quantitative-data-analysis-methods/> (Accessed: 15 June 2020).
- Bihani, P. and Patil, S.T. (2014) 'A comparative study of data analysis techniques'. *International Journal of Emerging Trends & Technology in Computer Science*, 3(2), pp.95-101.
- Bogdan, R. and Biklen, S.K. (1997) *Qualitative research for education*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Bohnet, I. (2016) *What works*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bolton, P. (2020) *Higher education student numbers*. Briefing Paper Number 7857. London: House of Commons Library.
- Bosquet, C., Combes, P.P. and García-Peñalosa, C. (2019) 'Gender and promotions: Evidence from academic economists in France'. *The Scandinavian Journal of Economics*, 121(3), pp.1020-1053.

- Boyce, C. and Neale, P. (2006) *Conducting in-depth Interviews: A guide for designing and conducting in-depth interviews*. Watertown: Pathfinder International.
- British Academy of Management (2014) *Employment Tribunals - A historical perspective*. Available at: <https://www.bl.uk/britishlibrary/~media/bl/global/business-and-management/pdfs/non-secure/e/m/p/employment-tribunals-a-historical-perspective.pdf> (Downloaded: 16 May 2021).
- Britton, D. (2000) 'The epistemology of the gendered organization'. *Gender and Society*, 14(3), pp.418-434.
- Britton, D. and Logan, L. (2008) 'Gendered organizations: Progress and prospects'. *Sociology Compass*, 2(1), pp.107-121.
- Broussine, M. and Fox, P. (2002) 'Rethinking leadership in local government: The place of 'feminine' styles in the modernised council'. *Local Government Studies*, 28(4), pp.91-106.
- Brundtland, G.H., Khalid, M., Agnelli, S., Al-Athel, S., Chidzero, B., Fadika, L., Hauff, V. and Lang, I. (1987) *Our common future*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bryman, A. (2012) *Social research methods*. 4th edn. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bryman, A. and Bell, E. (2015) *Business research methods*. 4th edn. Glasgow: Bell & Bain Ltd.
- Bushell, M., Hoque, K. and Dean, D. (2020) *The network trap: Why women struggle to make it into the boardroom*. Singapore: Springer.
- Business Fights Poverty (2020) *Gender Equality is Everyone's Business*. Available at: <https://businessfightspoverty.org/gender-equality-is-everyones-business-engaging-men-as-allies-to-advance-gender-equality-across-the-value-chain/> (Accessed: 13 August 2020).
- Butler, C. (2007) 'A possible scenario for the evolution of the family and gender roles'. *The flow of history*. Available at: <http://www.flowofhistory.com/units/pre/1/> (Accessed: 12 March 2020).
- Campbell, K. and Minguéz-Vera, A. (2008) 'Gender diversity in the boardroom and firm financial performance'. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 83, pp.435–451.
- Carli, L.L. and Eagly, A.H. (2016) 'Women face a labyrinth: An examination of metaphors for women leaders'. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 31, pp.514–527.
- Carlyle, T. (1841) *On heroes, hero-worship and the heroic in history*. London: J. Fraser.
- Carter, D.A., Simkins, B.J. and Simpson, W.G. (2003) 'Corporate governance, board diversity, and firm value'. *Financial Review*, 38, pp.33–53.
- Carter, D.A., D'Souza, F., Simkins, B.J. and Simpson, W.G. (2010) 'The gender and ethnic diversity of US boards and board committees and firm financial performance', *Corporate Governance: An International Review* 2010, 18(5), pp.396-414.
- Cassell, C. and Symon, G. (2004) *Essential guide to qualitative methods in organizational research*. London: SAGE.
- Castilla, E.J. (2016) 'Achieving meritocracy in the workplace'. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 57(4), pp.35-41.

- Castilla, E.J. and Benard, S. (2010) 'The paradox of meritocracy in organizations'. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 55(4), pp.543-676.
- Catalyst (2004) *The bottom line: Connecting corporate performance and gender diversity*. New York: Catalyst.
- Catalyst (2006) *Women "take care", men "take charge": Stereotyping of US business leaders exposed*. New York: Catalyst.
- Chamorro-Premuzic, T. (2019) 'As long as we associate leadership with masculinity, women will be overlooked'. *Harvard Business Review*. Available at: <https://hbr.org/2019/03/as-long-as-we-associate-leadership-with-masculinity-women-will-be-overlooked> (Accessed: 14 July 2020).
- Chant, S. and Sweetman, C. (2012) 'Fixing women or fixing the world? Smart economics, efficiency approaches, and gender equality in development'. *Gender & Development*, 20(3), pp.517-529.
- Chapel, S. (2003) 'Responsibilities of subject mentors, professional mentors and link tutors in secondary physical education initial teacher education'. *Mentoring and Tutoring*, 11(2), pp.131-151.
- Chappelow, J. (2019) *Private sector*. Available at: <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/p/private-sector.asp> (Accessed: 22 March 2020).
- Charles, M. (2003) 'Deciphering sex segregation: Vertical and horizontal inequalities in ten national labor markets'. *Acta Sociologica*, 46 (4), pp.267–287.
- Charles, M. and Grusky, D.B. (2004) *Occupational ghettos: The worldwide segregation of women and men*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Chowdhury, M.F. (2014) 'Interpretivism in aiding our understanding of the contemporary social world'. *Open Journal of Philosophy*, 4, pp.432-438.
- CIPD (2015) *The non-executive director role factsheet*. Available at: <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/strategy/governance/non-executive-directors-factsheet> (Accessed: 2 April 2020).
- CIDP (2021) *Inclusion and diversity in the workplace*. Available at: <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/diversity/factsheet#gref> (Accessed: 16 June 2021).
- Ciuk, S. and Latusek, D. (2018) 'Ethics in qualitative research'. *Qualitative Methodologies in Organization Studies*, 1, pp.195-213.
- Clark, S. (2000) 'Work-family border theory: A new theory of work-life balance'. *Human Relations*, 53, pp.747-770.
- Clayton-Hathway, K. and Manfredi, S. (2017) *Women's representation and diversity in the horseracing industry*. Oxford: Oxford Brookes University.
- CMI (2016) *A Broken pipeline*. Available at: <https://www.managers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Gender-Salary-Survey-Infographic-2016-1.pdf> (Downloaded: 3 July 2020).

- CMI (2018) *Leadership equality and management culture: Blueprint for balance*. Available at: <https://www.managers.org.uk/knowledge-and-insights/resource/leadership-equality-and-management-culture-blueprint-for-balance/> (Accessed: 16 June 2020).
- Cockburn, C. (1991) *In the Way of Women*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Cody, D. (2018) *Nearly a third of women in tech say lack of female leaders & role models hinders careers*. Available at: <https://www.women-in-technology.com/wintec-blog/third-women-in-tech-lack-of-female-leaders-role-models-hinders-careers#:~:text=REGISTER%20INTEREST-,Nearly%20a%20third%20of%20women%20in%20tech%20say%20lack,leaders%20%26%20role%20models%20hinders%20careers&text=New%20research%20has%20shown%20that,negatively%20affecting%20careers%20in%20tech> (Accessed: 12 April 2020).
- Cohen, L. and Mallon, M. (1999) 'The transition from organisational employment to portfolio working: Perceptions of boundarylessness'. *Work, Employment and Society*, 13(2), pp.329-352.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2013) *Research methods in education*. 4th edn. New York: Routledge.
- Collins, E., and Scott, P. (1978) 'Everyone who makes it has a mentor: Interviews with F. J. Lunding, G. L. Clements, and D. S. Perkins'. *Harvard Business Review*, 56(4), 89-101.
- Cox, J. (2019) *Corporate Britain is treating gender diversity like a tick-box exercise. It has to stop*. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/gender-diversity-uk-business-equality-practice-women-men-a9003216.html> (Accessed 10 July 2020).
- Creswell, J.W. (2007) *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among five approaches*. 2nd edn. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Creswell, J.W. (2014) *Research design : qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. 4th edn. London: SAGE.
- Creswell, J.W. and Creswell, J.D. (2017) *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. London: SAGE.
- Creswell, J.W. and Miller, D.L. (2000) 'Determining validity in qualitative inquiry'. *Theory into Practice*, 39(3), pp.124-130.
- Creswell, J.W. and Plano Clark, V.L. (2011) *Designing and conducting mixed method research*. 2nd edn. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Crisp, G. and Cruz, I. (2009) 'Mentoring college students: A critical review of the literature between 1990 and 2007'. *Research in Higher Education*, 50(6), pp.525-545.
- Crompton, R. and Harris, F. (1998a) 'Explaining Women's Employment Patterns: 'Orientations to Work' Revisited'. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 49 (1), pp.118-136.
- Crompton, R. and Harris, F. (1998b) 'A Reply to Hakim'. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 49 (1), pp.144-149.
- Crotty, M. (1998) *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.

- Cunniffe, G. (2020) *What is the FTSE-100, or "footsie", and why should you care?*. Available at: <https://www.moneylens.com/topics/investing/what-is-the-ftse-100-footsie-and-why-does-it-matter-to-me> (Accessed: 5 April 2020).
- Daily, C.M., Certo, S.T. and Dalton, D.R. (1999) 'A decade of corporate women: some progress in the boardroom none in the executive suite'. *Strategic Management Journal*, 20(1), pp.93-100.
- Davies Review (2011) 'Women on boards'. *Department for Business, Innovation & Skills*.
- Davies Review (2012) 'Women on boards'. *Department for Business, Innovation & Skills*.
- Davies Review (2013) 'Women on boards'. *Department for Business, Innovation & Skills*.
- Davies Review (2014) 'Women on boards Davies Review annual report 2014'. *Department for Business, Innovation & Skills*.
- Davies Review (2015) 'Women on boards Davies review annual report 2015'. *Department for Business, Innovation & Skills*.
- Davies Review (2015) 'Improving the gender balance on British boards: Women on boards Davies review five-year summary'. *Department for Business, Innovation & Skills*.
- Davis, A. and King, L. (2018) 'Gendered perspectives on men's changing familial roles in postwar England, c. 1950–1990'. *Gender & History*, 30(1), pp.70-92.
- Dean, D. (2005) 'Recruiting a self: women performers and aesthetic labour'. *Work, Employment and Society*, 19(4), pp.761-774.
- Deloitte (2014) *The different types of directors*. Available at: https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/za/Documents/governance-risk-compliance/ZA_TheDifferentTypesOfDirectors_24032014.pdf (Downloaded: 8 May 2020).
- Devine, B.F. and Foley, N. (2020) *Women and the economy*. London: House of Commons Library.
- De Anca, C. and Vega, A.V. (2007) *Managing diversity in the global organization: Creating new Business values*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- De Vaus, D. A. (2001) *Research design in social research*. London: SAGE.
- Diageo.com (2019) *Diageo announces fully paid 26-week equal parental leave for all UK employees*. Available at: <https://www.diageo.com/en/news-and-media/features/diageo-announces-fully-paid-26-week-equal-parental-leave-for-all-uk-employees/> (Accessed: 23 September 2021).
- Dickens, L. (1999) 'Beyond the business case: A three-pronged approach to equality action'. *Human Resources management Journal*, 9(1), pp.9-19.
- Dickens, L. (2005) 'Walking the talk? Equality and diversity in employment', in Bach, S. (ed.) *Managing human resources: Personnel management in transition*. London: Wiley, pp. 178-208.
- DiMaggio, P. (2001) *The twenty-first-century firm: Changing economic organization in international perspective*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Dobbin, F. and Jung, J. (2011) 'Corporate board gender diversity and stock performance: The competence gap or institutional investor bias?' . *North Carolina Law Review*, 89(3), pp.809-839.
- Doherty, L. and Manfredi, S. (2010) 'Improving women's representation in senior positions in universities'. *Employee Relations*, 32(2), pp.138–155.
- Douven, I. (2017) 'Abduction'. *The Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*. Available at: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/abduction/?utm_campaign=%F0%9F%A6%89%2010x%20curiosity&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Revue%20newsletter (Accessed: 12 May 2020).
- Drucker, P.F. (1999) 'Knowledge-Worker Productivity: The Biggest Challenge'. *California Management Review*, 41(2), pp.79-94.
- Du, S., Bhattacharya, C.B. and Sen, S. (2010) 'Maximizing business returns to corporate social responsibility (CSR): The role of CSR communication'. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 12(1), pp.8-19.
- Dworkin, T.M., Ramaswami, A. and Schipani, C.A. (2013) 'The role of networks, mentors, and the law in overcoming barriers to organizational leadership for women with children'. *Michigan Journal of Gender & Law*, 20, pp.83-128.
- Eagly, A.H. (1987) 'Reporting sex differences'. *American Psychologist*, 42, pp.756-757.
- Eagly, A.H. (1997) 'Sex differences in social behavior: Comparing social role theory and evolutionary psychology'. *American Psychologist*, 52, pp.1380-1383.
- Eagly, A. H. (2000) 'Gender roles'. *Encyclopedia of psychology*, 3, pp.448–453.
- Eagly, A.H. (2003) 'More women at the top: The impact of gender roles and leadership style', in Pasero, U. (eds.) *Gender—from costs to benefits*. Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, pp.151-169.
- Eagly, A.H. and Carli, L.L. (2003) 'The female leadership advantage: An evaluation of the evidence'. *The leadership quarterly*, 14(6), pp.807-834.
- Eagly, A.H. and Diekmann, A.B. (2005) What is the problem? Prejudice as an attitude-in-context. In Dovidio, J.F, Glick, P. and Rudman, L (eds.) *On the nature of prejudice: Fifty years after Allport*. Malden: Blackwell, pp.19-35.
- Eagly, A.H., Johannesen-Schmidt, M.C. and Van Engen, M.L. (2003) 'Transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles: a meta-analysis comparing women and men'. *Psychological Bulletin*, 129(4), pp.569-591.
- Eagly, A.H. and Wood, W. (2016) 'Social role theory of sex differences', in Naples, N., Hoogland, R.C., Wickramasinghe, M. and Wong W.C.A. (eds) *The Wiley Blackwell encyclopedia of gender and sexuality studies*. New York: Wiley, pp.1-3.
- Eagly, A. H., Nater, C., Miller, D. I., Kaufmann, M. and Sczesny, S. (2019) 'Gender Stereotypes Have Changed: A Cross-Temporal Meta-Analysis of U.S. Public Opinion Polls From 1946 to 2018'. *American Psychologist*, 75(3), pp.301-315.
- Elder, L and Paul, R. (2010) 'Critical thinking: Competency standards essential for the cultivation of intellectual skills, Part 1'. *Journal of Developmental Education*, 34(2), pp.38-39.

- Elkjaer, B. and Simpson, B. (2011) 'Pragmatism: A lived and living philosophy. What can it offer to contemporary organization theory?', in Tsoukas, H. and Chia R. *Philosophy and organization theory*. London: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, pp.55-84.
- Equal Opportunities Commission (2006) *Twenty-first century dad*. Available at: <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/uploads/publications/284.pdf> (Downloaded: 22 April 2020).
- Equal Opportunities Commission (2015) *Facts about women and men in Great Britain*. Available at <http://www.eoc.org> (Accessed: 1 July 2020).
- Equality and Human Rights Commission (2011) *Sex and power 2011*. Manchester: Equality and Human Rights Commission.
- Erhardt, N.L., Werbel, J. and Shrader, C.B. (2003) 'Board of director diversity and firm financial performance'. *Corporate Governance: An International Review*, 11, pp.102–111.
- Eurostat (2020) *Hours worked per week of full-time employment*. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00071/default/bar?lang=en> (Accessed: 12 May 2020).
- Everett, J.A., Faber, N.S. and Crockett, M. (2015) 'Preferences and beliefs in ingroup favoritism'. *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience*, 9(15), pp.1-21.
- Exley, C.L., Niederle, M. and Vesterlund, L. (2020) 'Knowing when to ask: The cost of leaning in'. *Journal of Political Economy*, 128(3), pp.816-854.
- Farber, D.A. and Sherry, S. (1995) 'Is the Radical Critique of Merit Anti-Semitic?'. *California Law Review*, 83(3), pp. 853-884.
- Fenig, S., Levav, I., Kohn, R. and Yelin, N. (1993) 'Telephone vs face-to-face interviewing in a community psychiatric survey'. *American Journal of Public Health*, 83(6), pp.896-898.
- Fisher, H. (2009) *Why him? Why her?: Finding real love by understanding your personality type*. New York: Macmillan.
- Frisby, W. (1992) 'Women in leisure service management: Alternative definitions of career success'. *Loisir et Société/Society and Leisure*, 15(1), pp.155-174.
- Frisby, W. and Brown, B.A. (1991) 'The balancing act: women leisure service managers'. *Journal of Applied Recreation Research*, 16(4), pp.297-321.
- FSB (2018) *Supporting Women's Enterprise in the UK: The Economic Case*. Available at: <https://www.fsb.org.uk/resource-report/supporting-women-s-enterprise-in-the-uk.html> (Accessed: 20 July 2021).
- Fusch, P.I. and Ness, L.R. (2015) 'Are we there yet? Data saturation in qualitative research'. *The qualitative report*, 20(9), pp.1408-1416.
- Gale, N.K., Heath, G., Cameron, E., Rashid, S. and Redwood, S. (2013) 'Using the framework method for the analysis of qualitative data in multi-disciplinary health research'. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 13(1), pp.1-8.
- Gibson, D.E. (2004) 'Role models in career development: New directions for theory and research'. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 65(1), pp.134-156.

- Gill, S. and Davidson, M.J. (2001) 'Problems and pressures facing lone mothers in management and professional occupations—a pilot study'. *Women in Management Review*, 16(8), pp.383–399.
- Ginn, J., Arber, S., Brannen, J., Dale, A., Dex, S., Elias, P., Moss, P., Pahl, J., Roberts, C. and Rubery, J. (1996). 'Feminist fallacies: a reply to Hakim on women's employment'. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 47(1), pp.167-174.
- Given, L.M. (2016) *100 questions (and answers) about qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Glaser, B. and Strauss, A. (1967) *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. New York: Aldine Publishing Company.
- Golding, J. (2020) *Lack of role models stopping young women going into business*. Available at: <https://ie-today.co.uk/business/lack-of-role-models-stopping-young-women-going-into-business/#:~:text=Almost%20twice%20as%20many%20young,business%2C%20a%20survey%20has%20shown.&text=And%2044%25%20of%20young%20women,to%2027%25%20of%20young%20men> (Accessed: 3 May 2020).
- Goldkuhl, G. (2012) 'Pragmatism vs interpretivism in qualitative information systems research'. *European Journal of Information Systems*, 21(2), pp.135-146.
- Goleman, D., Boyatzis, R. and McKee, A. (2001) 'Primal leadership: The hidden driver of great performance'. *Harvard Business Review*, 79(11), pp.42-53.
- Gov.uk (2019) *Graduate labour market statistics*. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/graduate-labour-markets> (Accessed: 17 April 2020).
- Granovetter, M. (1978) 'Threshold models of collective behavior'. *American Journal of Sociology*, 83(6), pp.1420-1443.
- Gray, L. (2018) *Gender diversity in the workplace: Definition, trends & examples*. Available at: <https://study.com/academy/lesson/gender-diversity-in-the-workplace-definition-trends-examples.html> (Accessed: 11 April 2020).
- Green, J., Willis, K., Hughes, E., Small, R., Welch, N., Gibbs, L. and Daly, J. (2007) 'Generating best evidence from qualitative research: The role of data analysis'. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 31(6), pp.545-550.
- Greenfield, T.K., Midanik, L.T. and Rogers, J.D. (2000) 'Effects of telephone versus face-to-face interview modes on reports of alcohol consumption'. *Addiction*, 95(20), pp.277–284.
- Gregory-Smith, I., Main, B.G. and O'Reilly III, C.A. (2014) 'Appointments, pay and performance in UK boardrooms by gender'. *The Economic Journal*, 124(574), pp.F109-F128.
- Grisoni, L. and Beeby, M. (2007) 'Leadership, gender and sense-making'. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 14(3), pp.191-209.
- Grix, J. (2004) *The Foundations of research*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Guba, E.G. and Lincoln, Y.S. (1994) 'Competing paradigms in qualitative research'. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2(163-194), pp.105-117.

- Guest, G., Bruce, A. and Johnson, L. (2006) 'How Many Interviews are Enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability'. *Field Methods*, 18(1), pp.59-82.
- Guest, D. and Conway, N. (2004) *Employee well-being and the psychological contract: A report for the CIPD*. London: CIPD Publishing.
- Gummesson, E. (2000) *Qualitative methods in management research*. 2nd edn. London: SAGE.
- Hakim, C. (1998) 'Developing a sociology for the 21st century: Preference Theory'. *British Journal of Sociology*, 49, pp.150-162.
- Hakim, C. (2006) 'Women, careers, and world-life preferences'. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 34(3), pp.279-294.
- Hampton-Alexander Review (2016) 'FTSE Women Leaders'. *Improving gender balance in FTSE Leadership*.
- Hampton-Alexander Review (2019) 'FTSE Women Leaders'. *Improving gender balance in FTSE Leadership*.
- Harzing, A.W., Vinkenburg, C. and Van Engen, M. (2018) 'How to make career advancement in Economics more inclusive'. *Economisch Statistische Berichten*, 103(4767s), pp.42-48.
- Haslam, S.A. and Platow, M.J. (2001) 'The link between leadership and followership: How affirming social identity translates vision into action'. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 27(11), pp.1469-1479.
- Heilman, M.E. (2012) 'Gender stereotypes and workplace bias'. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 32, pp.113-135.
- Helfat, C.E., Harris, D. and Wolfson, P.J. (2006) 'The pipeline to the top: Women and men in the top executive ranks of US corporations'. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 20(4), pp.42-64.
- Hennink, M., Hutter, I. and Bailey, A. (2011) *Qualitative research methods*. London: SAGE.
- Henslin, J.M. (1981) *Down to earth sociology: Introductory readings*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Hentschel, T., Braun, S., Peus, C. and Frey, D. (2018) 'The communality-bonus effect for male transformational leaders—leadership style, gender, and promotability'. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 27(1), pp.112-125.
- Heron, J. and Reason, P. (1997) 'A participatory inquiry paradigm'. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3(3), pp.274-294.
- HESA (2019) *Who's studying in HE?* Available at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/whos-in-he> (Accessed: 3 April 2020).
- Hewlett, S.A. (2007) *Off-ramps and on-ramps: Keeping talented women on the road to success*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press.
- Hewlett, S.A. (2013) *Forget a mentor, find a sponsor: The new way to fast-track your career*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press.
- Hillman, A.J., Cannella Jr, A.A. and Harris, I.C. (2002) 'Women and racial minorities in the boardroom: How do directors differ?'. *Journal of Management*, 28(6), pp.747-763.

- Ho, S. (2014) *Real purpose of academic research is to seek truth*. Available at: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/hkedition/2014-04/30/content_17475199.htm#:~:text=The%20purpose%20of%20academic%20research,working%20in%20an%20academic%20institution.&text=This%20utilitarian%20approach%20subsequently%20discourages%20more%20meaningful%20or%20valuable%20research (Accessed: 21 July 2020).
- Holbrook, A.L., Krosnick, J.A. and Pfent, A. (2008) 'The causes and consequences of response rates in surveys by the news media and government contractor survey research firms'. *Advances in Telephone Survey Methodology*, 1, pp.499-528.
- Holton, G. (2004) 'Robert K. Merton'. *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 148(4), pp.505-517.
- Hookway, C. (2008) 'Pragmatism'. *The Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*. Available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pragmatism/> (Accessed: 14 May 2020).
- Hubbard, E.E. (2004) *The diversity scorecard: Evaluating the impact of diversity on organizational performance*. Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- Hudson, L.A. and Ozanne, J.L. (1988) 'Alternative ways of seeking knowledge in consumer research'. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 14(4), pp.508-521.
- Humbert, A.L., Kelan, E.K. and Clayton-Hathway, K. (2019) 'A rights-based approach to board quotas and how hard sanctions work for gender equality'. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 26(4), pp.447-468.
- Hurley, K. and Shumway, P. (2015) *Real women, real leaders: surviving and succeeding in the business world*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons.
- Ibarra, H. and Hunter, M. (2007) 'How leaders create and use networks'. *Growth*, 35(1), pp.101-103.
- Ibarra, H., Carter, N.M. and Sylva, C. (2010) *Why men still get more promotions than women*. Available at: <https://hbr.org/2010/09/why-men-still-get-more-promotions-than-women> (Accessed: 10 August 2020).
- IFS (2018) *The rise and rise of women's employment in the UK*. Available at: <https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/BN234.pdf> (Downloaded: 17 August 2020).
- Israel, M. and Hay, I. (2006) *Research ethics for social scientists*. London: SAGE.
- Jackson, J.C. (2001) 'Women middle managers' perception of the glass ceiling'. *Women in Management Review*, 16(1), pp.30-41.
- Jackson, S.E. and Joshi, A. (2004) 'Diversity in social context: A multi-attribute, multilevel analysis of team diversity and sales performance'. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 25(6), pp.675-702.
- James, W. (1909) *The meaning of truth: A sequel to "Pragmatism"*. Amherst: Prometheus Books.
- Jewell, H. and Bazeley, A. (2018) 'Sex and power 2018'. *The Fawcett Society*. Available at: <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=ea2cb329-e6e0-4e0f-8a0b-5022f99bc915> (Downloaded: 22 July 2020).

- Jewson, N. and Mason, D. (1986) 'The Theory and Practice of Equal Opportunities Policies: Liberal and Radical Approaches'. *Sociological Review*, 34(2), pp.307-334.
- Joecks, J., Pull, K., and Vetter, K. (2013) 'Gender diversity in the boardroom and firm performance: What exactly constitutes a "critical mass"?'. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 118, pp.61–72.
- Johnson, P. and Clark, M. (2006) 'Editors' introduction: Mapping the terrain: An overview of business and management research methodologies', in P. Johnson and M. Clark (eds) *Business and management research methodologies*. London: SAGE, pp.xxv-lv.
- Jones, L. (2019) 'Women's progression in the workplace'. *Government Equalities Office*.
- Jootun, D., McGhee, G. and Marland, G.R. (2009) 'Reflexivity: promoting rigour in qualitative research'. *Nursing Standard*, 23(23), pp.42-46.
- Joshi, A., Son, J. and Roh, H. (2015) 'When can women close the gap? A meta-analytic test of sex differences in performance and rewards'. *Academy of Management Journal*, 58(5), pp.1516-1545.
- Jovancic, N. (2019) *5 data collection methods for obtaining quantitative and qualitative data*. Available at: <https://www.leadquizzes.com/blog/data-collection-methods/> (Accessed: 25 July 2020).
- Jupp, V. (2006) *The SAGE dictionary of social research methods*. 1st edn. London: SAGE.
- Kahn, J.R., García-Manglano, J. and Bianchi, S.M. (2014) 'The motherhood penalty at midlife: Long-term effects of children on women's careers'. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 76(1), pp.56-72.
- Kalleberg, A.L. (2001) 'Organizing flexibility: the flexible firm in a new century'. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 39(4), pp.479-504.
- Kanter, R.M. (1977) *Men and women of the corporation*. New York: Basic Books.
- Keeter, S., Kennedy, C., Dimock, M., Best, J. and Craighill, P. (2006) 'Gauging the impact of growing nonresponse on estimates from a national RDD telephone survey'. *International Journal of Public Opinion Quarterly*, 70(5), pp.759-779.
- Keller, S. and Meaney, M. (2017) *Leading organizations: Ten timeless truths*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- King, N. (2004) 'Using interviews in qualitative research', in Cassell, C. and Symon, G. (eds) *Essential guide to qualitative methods in organizational research*. London: SAGE, pp.11-22.
- Kirton, G. and Greene A. (2005) 'Gender, Equality and Industrial Relations in the 'New Europe': An Introduction'. *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 11(2), pp.141-149.
- Kirton, G. and Greene, A. (2016) *The dynamics of managing diversity: A critical approach*. 4th edn. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Knippen, J.M., Shen, W. and Zhu, Q. (2019) 'Limited progress? The effect of external pressure for board gender diversity on the increase of female directors'. *Strategic Management Journal*, 40(7), pp.1123-1150.

- Kodz, J., Davis, S., Lain, D., Strebler, M., Rick, J., Bates, P., Cummings, J., Meager, N., Anxo, D., Gineste, S. and Trinczek, R. (2003) 'Working long hours: a review of the evidence. Volume 1–Main report'. *Employment Relations Research Series*, 16, pp.1-260.
- Koenig, A. M., Mitchell, A. A., Eagly, A. H. and Ristikari, T. (2011) 'Are leader stereotypes masculine? A meta-analysis of three research paradigms'. *Psychological Bulletin*, 137, pp.616–642.
- Konrad, A.M., Kramer, V. and Erkut, S. (2008) 'The impact of three or more women on corporate boards'. *Organizational Dynamics*, 37(2), pp.145-164.
- Kothari, C.R. (2004) *Research methodology: Methods and techniques*. New Delhi: New Age International.
- Kowalczyk, D. (2020) *Descriptive research design: Definition, examples & types*. Available at: <https://study.com/academy/lesson/descriptive-research-design-definition-examples-types.html> (Accessed: 20 July 2020).
- KPMG, YSC and 30% Club (2014) *Cracking the code*. Available at: <https://home.kpmg/content/dam/kpmg/pdf/2015/04/Cracking-the-code.pdf> (Downloaded: 25 July 2020).
- KPMG (2015) *Moving women forward into leadership roles*. Available at: <https://assets.kpmg/content/dam/kpmg/ph/pdf/ThoughtLeadershipPublications/KPMGWomensLeadershipStudy.pdf> (Downloaded: 3 June 2020).
- KPMG, YSC and 30% Club (2016) *View from the top*. https://30percentclub.org/assets/uploads/UK/30_Club_Reports/Cracking_the_Code_Code_II_-_View_from_the_top.pdf (Downloaded: 22 August 2021).
- KPMG, YSC and 30% Club (2016) *Revisiting the executive pipeline*. https://30percentclub.org/assets/uploads/UK/30_Club_Reports/Cracking_the_Code_III.pdf (Downloaded: 22 August 2021).
- Krumpal, I. (2013) 'Determinants of social desirability bias in sensitive surveys: A literature review'. *Quality & Quantity*, 47(4), pp.2025-2047.
- Kuhn, T. (1970) *The Structure of scientific revolutions*. 2nd edn. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kumra, S. (2014) *Meritocracy in a Professional Organization: Guardian of Gender Equality, or Veil for Inequity?* British Academy of Management Conference Proceedings 2014. Belfast, Northern Ireland.
- Kurtulus, F.A. and Tomaskovic-Devey, D. (2012) 'Do female top managers help women to advance? A panel study using EEO-1 records'. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 639(1), pp.173-197.
- Kvale, S. (1996) 'The 1,000-page question'. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 2(3), pp.275-284.
- Lalanne, M. and Seabright, P. (2011) 'The old boy network: Gender differences in the impact of social networks on remuneration in top executive jobs'. *CEPR Discussion Paper*, No.DP8623.

- Lamb, M. and Fauchier, A. (2001) 'The Effects of Question Type on Self-contradictions by Children in the Course of Forensic Interviews'. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 15, pp.483-491.
- Lang, J. (2002) *Gender Is Everyone's Business: Programming with Men to Achieve Gender Equality*. Available at: <https://xyonline.net/sites/xyonline.net/files/Lang%2C%20Gender%20is%20everyone%27s%20business%20SHT.pdf> (Accessed 24 June 2020).
- Larkey, L.K. (1996) 'Toward a theory of communicative interactions in culturally diverse workgroups'. *Academy of Management Review*, 21(2), pp.463-491.
- Lashley, C. (2016) 'Business ethics and sustainability'. *Research in Hospitality Management*, 6(1), pp.1-7.
- Latu, I.M., Stewart, T.L., Myers, A.C., Lisco, C.G., Estes, S.B. and Donahue, D.K. (2011) 'What we "say" and what we "think" about female managers: Explicit versus implicit associations of women with success'. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 35(2), pp.252-266.
- Latu, I.M., Mast, M.S., Lammers, J. and Bombari, D. (2013) 'Successful female leaders empower women's behavior in leadership tasks'. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 49(3), pp.444-448.
- Lawrence, K. and Schreiber, M. (1979) *Presentation at a National Meeting of the Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press*. National Press Club. Washington, USA.
- Leahy, M. and Doughney, J. (2006) 'Women, work and preference formation: a critique of Catherine Hakim's preference theory'. *Journal of Business Systems, Governance and Ethics*, 1(1), pp.37-48.
- Leedy, P.D. and Ormrod, J.E. (2014) *Practical research: Planning and design*. Boston: Pearson Education.
- Levinson, D.J. (1978) 'Growing up with the dream'. *Psychology Today*, 11(8), pp.20-34.
- Levinson, D., Cookson, P. and Sadovnik, A. (2014) *Education and sociology: An encyclopedia*. Abingdon-on-Thames: Taylor & Francis.
- Lewis, P., Simpson, R. and Sealy, R. (2010) 'Changing perceptions of meritocracy in senior women's careers'. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 25(3), 184-197.
- Li, Y. (2016) *Expatriate manager's adaption and knowledge acquisition: Personal development in multi-national companies in China*. Singapore: Springer.
- Lincoln, Y.S. and Guba, E.G. (1990) 'Judging the quality of case study reports'. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 3(1), pp.53-59.
- Liu, H., Ludu, M. and Holton, D. (2015) 'Can K-12 math teachers train students to make valid logical reasoning?', in Ifenthaler, D., Spector, J.M. and Ge X. (eds). *Emerging technologies for STEAM education*. Cham: Springer, pp.331-353.
- Lipton, P. (2004) *Inference to the best explanation*. London: Routledge.
- Lloyd-Walker, B. and Walker, D. (2015) 'Moving from hunches to a research topic: Salient literature and research methods', in Pasian, B. (ed.) *Designs, methods and practices for research of project management*. London: Routledge, pp.119-122.

- Lloyds Banking Group.com (2021) *Reflecting on our journey towards gender inclusion*. Available at: <https://www.lloydsbankinggroup.com/insights/creating-the-best-workplace-for-women.html> (Accessed: 23 September 2021).
- Lockwood, P. (2006) “‘Someone like me can be successful’”: Do college students need same-gender role models?. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 30(1), pp.36-46.
- Loden, M. (1978) *Panel discussion during Women at Work Exposition*. Women’s Action Alliance. New York, USA.
- Low Pay Commission (2019) *20 years of the national minimum wage - A history of the UK minimum wage and its effects*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/790910/20_years_of_the_National_Minimum_Wage_-_a_history_of_the_UK_minimum_wage_and_its_effects.pdf (Downloaded: 19 April 2020).
- Lublin, J.S. (1997) ‘Few companies plan succession past CEO Level’. *Wall Street Journal*, 8 April, B1.
- Ludeman, K. and Erlandson, E. (2006) *Alpha male syndrome*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Lyness, K.S. and Thompson, D.E. (2000) ‘Climbing the corporate ladder: do female and male executives follow the same route?’. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 85(1), pp.86-101.
- Lyness, K. S. and Heilman, M. E. (2006) ‘When fit is fundamental: Performance evaluations and promotions of upper-level female and male managers’. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 91, pp.777–785.
- MacLeod, D. and Clarke, N. (2011) *Engaging for success: enhancing performance through employee engagement. Report to Government*. Available at: <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/1810/1/file52215.pdf> (Downloaded: 22 August 2020).
- Magnani, L. (2011) *Abduction, reason and science: Processes of discovery and explanation*. New York: Springer.
- Mainiero, L.A. and Sullivan, S.E. (2006) *The opt out revolt: Why people are leaving companies to create kaleidoscope careers*. Palo Alto: Davies-Black Publishing.
- Makarem, Y. and Wang, J. (2016) *Gendered organizations: A critical review*. College Station: Texas A&M University.
- Malamuth, N.M. (1996) ‘Sexually explicit media, gender differences and evolutionary theory’. *Journal of Communication*, 46(3), pp.8-31.
- Manheim, H. (1977) *Sociological research: Philosophy and methods*. Homewood: Dorsey Press.
- Mann, R. D. (1959) ‘A review of the relationships between personality and performance in small groups’. *Psychological Bulletin*, 56, pp.241–270.
- Marshall, C. and Rossman, G. (1995) *Designing qualitative research*. 2nd edn. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Mason, M. (2019) *What is sustainability and why is it important?* Available at: <https://www.environmentalscience.org/sustainability> (Accessed: 1 June 2020).

- May, T. (1997) *Social research: Issues, methods and process*. 2nd edn. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Maznevski, M. (2011) *Light and dark side of diversity*. Lausanne: IMD Business School.
- McCombes, S. (2019) *How to define your research problem*. Available at: <https://www.scribbr.com/research-process/research-problem/> (Accessed: 3 July 2020).
- McGrath, J.E., Berdahl, J.L. and Arrow, H. (1995) 'Traits, expectations, culture, and clout: The dynamics of diversity in work groups', in Jackson, S.E. and Ruderman, M.N. (eds.) *Diversity in work teams*. Washington: American Psychological Association, pp.17-45.
- McGuire, G. M. (2002) 'Gender, Race, and the Shadow Structure: A Study of Informal Networks and Inequality in a Work Organization'. *Gender and Society*, 16(3), pp.303–322.
- McKinsey&Company (2018) *Delivering through diversity*. Available at: https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/business%20functions/organization/our%20insights/delivering%20through%20diversity/delivering-through-diversity_full-report.ashx (Downloaded: 2 April 2020).
- McKinsey&Company (2019) *Women in the Workplace 2019*. Available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Featured%20Insights/Gender%20Equality/Women%20in%20the%20Workplace%202019/Women-in-the-workplace-2019.pdf> (Downloaded: 3 April 2020).
- McLeod, S. (2019) *What's the difference between qualitative and quantitative research?*. Available at: <https://www.simplypsychology.org/qualitative-quantitative.html> (Accessed: 24 June 2020).
- McNabb, D.E. (2010) *Case research in public management*. London: M.E. Sharpe.
- McNamara, C. (2018) *General guidelines for conducting interviews*. Available at: <https://managementhelp.org/businessresearch/interviews.htm> (Accessed: 12 July 2020).
- McNamee, S.J. and Miller, R.K. (2009) *The meritocracy myth*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Merriam, S. (1998) *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. 2nd edn. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Merton, R.K. (1945) 'Sociological theory'. *American Journal of Sociology*, 50(6), pp.462–473.
- Merton, R.K. (1957) *Social Theory and Social Structure*. London: Collier-Macmillan.
- Middleton, F. (2019) *Reliability vs validity: what's the difference?*. Available at: <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/reliability-vs-validity/#:~:text=Reliability%20and%20validity%20are%20concepts,the%20accuracy%20of%20a%20measure> (Accessed: 3 July 2020).
- Miller, K. (2005) *Communication theories: Perspectives, processes, and contexts*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Miller, C. (1995) 'In-depth interviewing by telephone: Some practical considerations'. *Evaluation and Research in Education*, 9(1), pp.29–38.

- Minow, M. (1988) 'Feminist reason: Getting it and losing it'. *Journal of Legal Education*, 38, pp.47-59.
- Minow, M. (1990) *Making all the difference: Inclusion, exclusion, and American law*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Mitchell, O. (2016) 'Experimental research design', in Jennings, W.G. (ed.) *The Encyclopedia of crime and punishment*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, pp.1-6.
- Moon, J. (2007) 'The contribution of corporate social responsibility to sustainable development'. *Sustainable Development*, 15(5), pp.296-306.
- Morgan, D.L. (2007) 'Paradigms lost and pragmatism regained: Methodological implications of combining qualitative and quantitative methods.' *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 1(1), pp.48-76.
- Morgan, D.L. (2008) 'Sampling', in Given, L.M. (ed.) *The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods*. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2, pp.799-800.
- Morrison, R. (2008) 'Are Women Tending and Befriending in the Workplace? Gender Differences in the Relationship Between Workplace Friendships and Organizational Outcomes'. *Sex Roles*, 60(1), pp.1-13.
- Morrison, A.M. and Von Glinow, M.A. (1990) 'Women and minorities in management'. *American Psychological Association*, 45(2), pp.200-208.
- Mulla-Feroze, A.H. and Krishnan, V.R. (2000) 'Consideration, initiating structure, and transformational leadership: The role of gender'. *37th Annual Meeting of the Eastern Academy of Management*. Danvers, USA.
- Myers, M.D. (2013) *Qualitative research in business and management*. London: SAGE.
- Nargundkar, R. (2008) *Marketing research: Text and cases*. 3rd edn. Noida: McGraw-Hill.
- National Working Group on Women in Medicine (2009) *Women doctors: making a difference*. Available at: <https://www.nwpgmd.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/WIMreport.pdf> (Downloaded: 15 May 2020).
- Neuman, W. (2000) *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. 4th edn. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- NHS Digital (2014) *General and personal medical services, England - 2003-2013 - official statistics*. Available at: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/general-and-personal-medical-services/2003-2013-as-at-30-september> (Accessed: 15 April 2020).
- Nicholson, N. (2010) 'The false theory of meritocracy'. *Harvard Business Review Blog*. Available at: <https://hbr.org/2010/06/the-false-theory-of-meritocrac> (Accessed: 10 October 2020).
- Nicholson, N. (2013a) 'Getting there'. *Business strategy review*, 24(3), pp.56-61.
- Nicholson, N. (2013b) *The false theory of meritocracy: why women lose out*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/women-in-leadership/2013/jun/24/false-theory-meritocracy-women-lose> (Accessed: 29 July 2021).

- Noon, M. (2007) 'The fatal flaws of diversity and the business case for ethnic minorities'. *Work, Employment & Society*, 21, pp.773–784.
- Novick, G. (2008) 'Is there a bias against telephone interviews in qualitative research?' *Research in Nursing & Health*, 31(4), pp.391–398.
- Oakley, J.G. (2000) 'Gender-based barriers to senior management positions: Understanding the scarcity of female CEOs'. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 27(4), pp.321–334.
- O'Boyle Jr, E. and Aguinis, H. (2012) 'The best and the rest: Revisiting the norm of normality of individual performance'. *Personnel Psychology*, 65(1), pp.79–119.
- Ochoa, C. (2017) *Non-random sampling: snowball sampling*. Available at: <https://www.netquest.com/blog/en/snowball-sampling> (Accessed: 13 June 2020).
- OECD (2019) *Net childcare costs*. Available at: <https://data.oecd.org/benwage/net-childcare-costs.htm> (Accessed: 3 June 2020).
- Okumus, F., Altinay, L. and Roper, A. (2007) 'Gaining access for research: Reflections from experience'. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 34(1), pp.7–26.
- Oliver, L. (2013) *Why 'real models' not role models will help women get to the top*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/women-in-leadership/2013/may/13/real-models-not-role-models> (Accessed: 3 May 2020).
- O'Neil, D.A. and Bilimoria, D. (2005) 'Women's career development phases: idealism, endurance, and reinvention'. *Career Development International*, 10(3), pp.168–89.
- O'Neil, T. and Domingo, P. (2015) 'The power to decide: Women, decision-making and gender equality'. *Overseas Development Institute report*. Available at: <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9848.pdf> (Downloaded: 18 April 2020).
- O'Neill, O.A. and O'Reilly, C.A. (2011) 'Reducing the backlash effect: Self-monitoring and women's promotions'. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 84(4), pp.825–832.
- ONS (2017) *Graduates in the UK labour market*. Available at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/graduatesintheuklabourmarket/2017> (Accessed: 3 July 2020).
- ONS (2018) *Job quality indicators in the UK – hours, pay and contracts*. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/jobqualityindicatorsintheukhourspayandcontracts/2018> (Accessed: 24 June 2020).
- ONS (2019) *Life expectancy calculator*. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandlifeexpectancies/articles/lifeexpectancycalculator/2019-06-07> (Accessed: 21 October 2020).
- ONS (2019) *Long-term international migration*. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/datasets/longterminternationalmigrationageandsextable207> (Accessed: 11 September 2020).

- ONS (2020) *Private sector employment as % of total employment*. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/timeseries/g9c2/lms> (Accessed: 23 May 2020).
- ONS (2021) *Employment by industry*. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/employmentbyindustryemp13> (Accessed: 19 July 2021).
- O'Reilly, M. and Parker, N. (2013) 'Unsatisfactory Saturation': a critical exploration of the notion of saturation sample sized in qualitative research'. *Qualitative Research*, 13(2), pp.190-197.
- Owens, S. (2003) 'Is there a meaningful definition of sustainability?'. *Plant Genetic Resources*, 1(1), pp.5-9.
- Page, M.L. (2011) 'Gender mainstreaming: hidden leadership?'. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 18(3), pp.318-336.
- Pansiri, J. (2005) 'Pragmatism: A methodological approach to researching strategic alliances in tourism'. *Tourism and Hospitality Planning and Development*, 2, pp.191–206.
- Parkinson, S., Eatough, V., Holmes, J., Stapley, E. and Midgley, N. (2016) 'Framework analysis: a worked example of a study exploring young people's experiences of depression'. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 13(2), pp.109-129.
- Patton, M.Q. (2002) *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. 3rd edn. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Patton, M.Q. (2014) *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Pecorino, P. (2001) *An Introduction to philosophy: An online textbook*. Available at: https://www.qcc.cuny.edu/socialsciences/pppecorino/intro_text/contents.htm#:~:text=Pecorino%20provides%20a%20fantastic%20overview,issues%20that%20interest%20them%20most (Accessed: 22 April 2020).
- Pérez, A. and Sabelis, I. (2020) 'Advancing careers through 'merit': a rationalized-sensemaking narrative in hierarchical organizations'. *Culture and Organization*, 26(4), pp.315-332.
- Pichler, S., Simpson, P. A. and Stroh, L. K. (2008) 'The glass ceiling in human resources: Exploring the link between women's representation in management and the practices of strategic human resource management and employee involvement'. *Human Resource Management*, 47(3), pp.463-479.
- Pitton, D.E. (2006) *Mentoring novice teachers: Fostering a dialogue process*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press.
- Plant, E.A. and Devine, P.G. (1998) 'Internal and external motivation to respond without prejudice'. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75(3), pp.811-832.
- Polit, D.F. and Beck, C.T. (2010) 'Generalization in quantitative and qualitative research: Myths and strategies'. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 47(11), pp.1451-1458.
- Porter, M.K. and Kramer, E.J. (2011) MR (2011): Creating shared value. *Harvard Business Review*, 89(1/2), pp.62-77.

- Pouspourika, K. (2018) *How to conduct a research study*. Available at: <https://ied.eu/project-updates/how-to-conduct-a-research-study/> (Accessed: 11 June 2020).
- Powell, A. and Mor, F. (2019) *Women and the economy*. London: House of Commons Library.
- Prevett (2012) *Mid managers hit the ceiling*. Available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/mid-managers-hit-the-ceiling-nvgxfq36ft7> (Accessed: 1 May 2020).
- Priest, J. and Hallebone, E. (2009) 'Extending the repertoire of research approaches in a professional doctoral program: The place and shape of a critical perspective', in Wolfram Cox, J. et al. (eds) *Critical management studies at work: Negotiating tensions between theory and practice*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, pp.144-159.
- PwC (2018) *Reporting with purpose and impact*. Available at: <https://www.pwc.co.uk/sustainability-climate-change/assets/pdf/reporting-with-impact.pdf> (Downloaded: 4 March 2020).
- Radu, C., Deaconu, A. and Frăsineanu, C. (2017) 'Leadership and gender differences: Are men and women leading in the same way?', in Alvinus, A. (ed.) *Contemporary leadership challenges*. London: IntechOpen, pp.63-81.
- Rayner (2015) *How to: be a non-executive director*. Available at: <https://www.lawgazette.co.uk/features/how-to-be-a-non-executive-director/5050828.article> (Accessed: 15 June 2020).
- Regoli, N. (2016) *3 advantages and disadvantages of inductive reasoning*. Available at: <https://connectusfund.org/3-advantages-and-disadvantages-of-inductive-reasoning> (Accessed: 28 June 2020).
- Rehman, A.A. and Alharthi, K. (2016) 'An introduction to research paradigms'. *International Journal of Educational Investigations*, 3(8), pp.51-59.
- Renate, S., Brown, M., Gysler, M. and Brachinger, H. W. (1999) 'Financial Decision-Making: Are Women Really More Risk-Averse?'. *American Economic Review*, 89(2), pp.381-385.
- Ritchie, J. and Spencer, L. (1994) 'Qualitative data analysis for applied policy research', in Bryman, A. and Burgess R.G. (eds) *Analyzing qualitative data*. London: Routledge, pp.173-194.
- Ritchie, J., Spencer, L. and O'Connor, W. (2003) 'Carrying out qualitative analysis', in Ritchie, J. and Lewis, J. (eds) *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers*. London: SAGE, pp.219-262.
- RoAné, S. (1993) *The secrets of savvy networking: How to make the best connections for business and personal success*. New York: Warner Books.
- Robison, A. (2017) *Egg freezing offered as perk to female employees*. Available at: <https://news.sky.com/story/egg-freezing-offered-as-perk-to-female-employees-10848413> (Accessed: 23 September 2021).
- Robinson, G. and Dechant, K. (1997) 'Building a business case for diversity'. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 11(3), pp.21-31.
- Rose, A. (2019) *The Alison Rose review of female entrepreneurship*. Review for HM Treasury. Available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/784324/RoseReview_Digital_FINAL.PDF (Downloaded: 12 September 2020).

- Rubery, J. (2002) 'Gender Mainstreaming and Gender Equality in the EU: The Impact of the EU Employment Strategy'. *Industrial Relations Journal*, 33(5), pp.500-522.
- Rudman, L.A. and Phelan, J.E. (2008) 'Backlash effects for disconfirming gender stereotypes in organizations'. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 28, pp.61-79.
- Ryan, M.K. and Haslam, S.A. (2007) 'The glass cliff: Exploring the dynamics surrounding the appointment of women to precarious leadership positions'. *Academy of Management Review*, 32(2), pp.549-572.
- Salazar, M.K. (1990) 'Interviewer bias: How it affects survey research'. *AAOHN Journal*, 38(12), pp.567-572.
- Saunders, M. (2012) 'Choosing research participants', in G. Symons and C. Cassell C (eds) *The Practice of Qualitative Organizational Research: Core Methods and Current Challenges*. London: SAGE, pp. 37-55.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2012) *Research methods for business students*. 6th edn. Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2016) *Research methods for business students*. 7th edn. New York: Pearson Education.
- Savenye, W.C. and Robinson, R.S. (2005) 'Using qualitative research methods in higher education'. *Journal of Computing in Higher Education*, 16(2), pp.65-95.
- Schelling, T.C. (1971) 'Dynamic models of segregation'. *Journal of Mathematical Sociology*, 1(2), pp.143-186.
- Schein, V.E. and Mueller, R. (1992) 'Sex role stereotyping and requisite management characteristics: A cross cultural look'. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 13(5), pp.439-447.
- Schutt, R.K. (2015) *Investigating the social world: The process and practice of research*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Sciarra, D. (1999) 'The role of the qualitative researcher', in Kopala, M. and Suzuki, L.A. (eds) *Using qualitative methods in psychology*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE, pp.37-48.
- Sealy, R., Doldor, E. and Vinnicombe, S. (2009) *Increasing diversity on public and private sector boards-Part 2: What is being done to improve diversity on boards and how effective is this?*. London: Government Equalities Office.
- Selltiz, C., Jahoda, M., Deutsch, M. and Cook, S.W. (1959) *Research methods in social relations*. New York: Henry Holt & Company.
- Shamoo, A.E. and Resnik, D.B. (2009) *Responsible conduct of research*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Shanmugam, M., Amaratunga, R.D.G. and Haigh, R.P. (2007) *Leadership styles: Gender similarities, differences and perceptions*. 7th International Postgraduate Research Conference in the Built and Human Environment. Salford, UK.

- Shaw, S. and Frisby, W. (2006) 'Can gender equity be more equitable?: Promoting an alternative frame for sport management research, education, and practice'. *Journal of Sport Management*, 20(4), pp.483-509.
- Shenton, A.K. and Hayter, S. (2004) 'Strategies for gaining access to organisations and informants in qualitative studies'. *Education for Information*, 22(3-4), pp.223-231.
- Shinew, K.J., Anderson, D. and Arnold, M. (1999) 'Is there a glass ceiling in parks & recreation'. *Illinois Parks & Recreation*, 30(3), pp.23-26.
- Shuttleworth, M. and Wilson, L.T. (2008) *Qualitative Research Design*. Available at: <https://explorable.com/qualitative-research-design> (Accessed: 15 July 2020).
- Simmel, G. (1918) *Vom Wesen des historischen Verstehens*. Berlin: Mittler.
- Simpson, S. (2018) *30 landmark employment law judgments*. Available at: <https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/landmark-employment-law-judgments-pt30/> (Accessed: 15 September 2020).
- Sinclair, A. (2013) 'Essay: can I really be me: The challenges for women leaders constructing authenticity', in Ladkin, D. and Spiller, C. (eds) *Authentic leadership: Clashes, convergences and coalescences*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, pp.239-252.
- Sinclair, L. and Kunda, Z. (1999) 'Reactions to a black professional: motivated inhibition and activation of conflicting stereotypes'. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 77(5), pp.885-904.
- Singh, K. (2007) *Quantitative social research methods*. New Delhi: SAGE.
- Singh, V. and Vinnicombe, S. (2004) 'Why so few women directors in top UK boardrooms? Evidence and theoretical explanations'. *Corporate Governance: an International Review*, 12(4), pp.479-488.
- Smith, M.V. (2005) 'Modern mentoring: Ancient lessons for today'. *Music Educators Journal*, 92(2), pp.62-67.
- Smith, P.C. (2015) *Getting the most out of international comparison*. Available at: <https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/news-item/getting-the-most-out-of-international-comparison> (Accessed: 27 May 2020).
- Smith, J. and Firth, J. (2011) 'Qualitative data analysis: the framework approach'. *Nurse Researcher*, 18(2), pp.52-62.
- Sober, E. (2013) *Core questions in philosophy: A text with readings*. 6th edn. New York: Pearson Education.
- Sølvberg, L.M. and Jarness, V. (2019) 'Assessing contradictions: Methodological challenges when mapping symbolic boundaries'. *Cultural Sociology*, 13(2), pp.178-197.
- Son Hing, L.S., Bobocel, D.R. and Zanna, M.P. (2002) 'Meritocracy and opposition to affirmative action: making concessions in the face of discrimination'. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 83(3), pp.493-509.
- Srivastava, A. and Thomson, S.B. (2009) *Framework analysis: A qualitative methodology for applied policy research*. JOAAG, 4(2), pp.72-79.

- Statista (2020) *Population of the United Kingdom (UK) in 2019, by gender and country*. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/281240/population-of-the-united-kingdom-uk-by-gender/> (Accessed: 12 July 2020).
- Stichman, A.J., Hassell, K.D. and Archbold, C.A. (2010) 'Strength in numbers? A test of Kanter's theory of tokenism'. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 38(4), pp.633-639.
- Stogdill, R. M. (1948) 'Personal factors associated with leadership: A survey of the literature'. *Journal of Psychology*, 25, pp.35-71.
- Stoker, J.I., Van der Velde, M. and Lammers, J. (2012) 'Factors relating to managerial stereotypes: The role of gender of the employee and the manager and management gender ratio'. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 27(1), pp.31-42.
- Sturges, J. E. and Hanrahan, K. J. (2004) 'Comparing telephone and face-to-face qualitative interviewing: A research note'. *Qualitative Research*, 4(1), pp.107-118.
- Sutton, J. and Austin, Z. (2015) 'Qualitative research: Data collection, analysis, and management'. *The Canadian Journal of Hospital Pharmacy*, 68(3), pp.226-231.
- Sytsma, S.E. (2006) *Ethics and intersex*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Tashakkori, A., Teddlie, C. and Teddlie, C.B. (1998) *Mixed methodology: Combining qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Tatum, B. and McWhorter, P. (1999) 'Maybe not everything, but a whole lot you always wanted to know about mentoring', in Graham, P. and Hudson-Ross, S. (eds) *Teacher/mentor: A dialogue for collaborative learning*. New York: Teachers College Press, pp.21-33.
- Tausig, J.E. and Freeman, E.W. (1988) 'The next best thing to being there: Conducting the clinical research interview by telephone'. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*. 58(3), pp.418-427.
- Taylor (2019) *Britain's top 100 firms have just 6 female CEOs and have 'some way to go' on equality*. Available at: <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/11/13/britains-top-100-companies-have-just-6-female-ceos-study-finds.html> (Accessed: 11 July 2020).
- The Guardian (2018) *Women's rights: 100 revolutionary years*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/series/womens-rights-100-revolutionary-years> (Accessed: 21 October 2020).
- The World Bank (2020) *Life expectancy at birth – United Kingdom*. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.LE00.MA.IN?locations=GB> (Accessed: 26 October 2020).
- Tobin, G.A. and Begley, C.M. (2004) 'Methodological rigour within a qualitative framework'. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 48(4), pp.388-396.
- Tower, L.E. and Alkadry, M.G. (2008) 'The Social costs of career success for women'. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 28(2), pp.144-165.
- Townsend, G.C. (2002) 'People who make a difference: Mentors and role models'. *ACM SIGCSE Bulletin*, 34(2), pp.57-61.

- Treadwell, D. (2006) 'The role of the non-executive director: A personal view'. *Corporate Governance: The International Journal of Business in Society*, 6(1), pp.64-68.
- Trochim, W.M. and Donnelly, J.P. (2001) *Research methods knowledge base*. Cincinnati: Atomic Dog.
- Uzzi, B. (2019) *Research: Men and Women Need Different Kinds of Networks to Succeed*. Available at: <https://hbr.org/2019/02/research-men-and-women-need-different-kinds-of-networks-to-succeed> (Accessed: 29 June 2021).
- Vallas, S. and Cummins, E. (2014) 'Relational models of organizational inequalities: Emerging approaches and conceptual dilemmas'. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 58(2), pp.228-255.
- Van Dijk, H., van Engen, M. and Paauwe, J. (2012) 'Reframing the business case for diversity: A values and virtues perspective'. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 111(1), pp.73-84.
- Vaus, D. (2002) *Surveys in social research*. London: Taylor and Francis.
- Vecchio, R.P. (2002) 'Leadership and gender advantage'. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 13(6), pp.643-671.
- Vinkenburg, C.J. (2017) 'Engaging gatekeepers, optimizing decision making, and mitigating bias: Design specifications for systemic diversity interventions'. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 53(2), pp.212-234.
- Vinnicombe, S., Atewologun, D. and Battista, C. (2019) *The female FTSE board report 2019: Moving beyond the numbers*. Cranfield: Cranfield School of Management.
- Vivar, C.G., McQueen, A., Whyte, D.A. and Armayor, N.C. (2007) 'Getting started with qualitative research: Developing a research proposal'. *Nurse Researcher*, 14(3), pp.60-73.
- Wahl, D. C. (2020) *Sustainability – What Is It? Definition, principles and examples*. Available at: <https://youmatter.world/en/definition/definitions-sustainability-definition-examples-principles/> (Accessed: 15 June 2020).
- Waller, N. (2016) 'How men and women see the workplace differently'. *The Wall Street Journal*, 27, pp.R1-R2.
- Walsh, J. (1999) 'Myths and counter-myths: An analysis of part-time female employees and their orientations to work and working hours'. *Work, Employment and Society*, 13(2), pp.179-203.
- Weber, M. (1922) 'The Nature of Social Action' in Runciman, W.G. (ed.) *Weber: Selections in Translation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.7-9.
- WEF (2020) *Global Gender Gap Report 2020*. Available at: http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf (Downloaded: 21 July 2021).
- WIC (2017) *The pinched-middle dropping out of management consultancy*. Available at: <https://www.citywomen.co.uk/the-pinched-middle-dropping-out-of-management-consultancy/> (Accessed: 1 May 2020).
- Wiggin, C.J. (2019) *Women at the top: An investigation into the lived experience of women executives holding top posts in the UK*. Oxford: Oxford Brookes University.

- Willemsen, T.M. (2002) 'Gender typing of the successful manager—a stereotype reconsidered'. *Sex Roles*, 46(11-12), pp.385-391.
- Williams, C.L., Muller, C. and Kilanski, K. (2012) 'Gendered organizations in the new economy'. *Gender & Society*, 26(4), pp.549-573.
- Wilson, J. (2014) *Essentials of business research: A guide to doing your research project*. 2nd edn. London: SAGE.
- Wisniewska, A., Ehrenberg-Shannon, B., Tilford, C. and Nevitt, C. (2019) *Gender pay gap: women still short-changed in the UK*. Available at: <https://ig.ft.com/gender-pay-gap-UK-2019/> (Accessed: 13 July 2020).
- Woodhouse, D. (1998) 'Auditing research and the research/teaching nexus'. *New Zealand Journal of Education Research*, 33(1), pp.39-53.
- Wright, C.A. and Wright, S.D. (1987) 'The role of mentors in the career development of young professionals'. *Family Relations*, 36(2), pp.204-208.
- Young, M. (1961) *The rise of the meritocracy*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Yousaf, M. (2017) *Explanatory research definition, types, comparison, advantages and disadvantages*. Available at: <https://scholarshipfellow.com/explanatory-research-definition-types-comparison-advantages-disadvantages/> (Accessed: 8 April 2020).
- Yukl, G. A. (2002) *Leadership in organizations*. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall.
- Zikmund, W. (1988) *Business research methods*. Chicago: The Dryden Press.
- Zikmund, W.G., Carr, J.C. and Griffin, M. (2013) *Business research methods*. Mason: South-Western Educational Publishing.
- Žukauskas, P., Vveinhardt, J. and Andriukaitienė, R. (2018) *Management culture and corporate social responsibility*. London: IntechOpen.

APPENDICES

- APPENDIX 1: List of Figures
- APPENDIX 2: Application of Abductive Reasoning Approach
- APPENDIX 3: UREC Approval
- APPENDIX 4: UREC Approval of Amendment
- APPENDIX 5: Example of Initial Approach Email
- APPENDIX 6: Profile of Respondents
- APPENDIX 7: Example of Pre-Interview Email
- APPENDIX 8: Participant Information Sheet
- APPENDIX 9: Interview Consent Form
- APPENDIX 10: Interview Questions
- APPENDIX 11: Example of Interviewer Sentiments Analysis
- APPENDIX 12: Example of Key Themes Analysis
- APPENDIX 13: Example of Identified Contradictions
- APPENDIX 14: Example of Recurring Statements

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Research questions this study sets to address	11
Figure 2: Structure of this thesis	15
Figure 3: UK employment numbers between 1997 and 2020 by sector. Source: ONS	18
Figure 4: The increase in number of women in the UK employment between 1950 and 2019. Source: ONS	19
Figure 5: Percentage of women represented on FTSE-100 boards between 2011 and 2019	26
Figure 6: Summary of various barrier levels to women's representation	45
Figure 7: Literature-inspired personal interpretation of women's representation using 'traffic light' assessment model	48
Figure 8: Numbers of women at various levels of FTSE-100 hierarchies. Source: Cranfield University Report, 2018	49
Figure 9: Theoretical explanations identified as part of literature review	50
Figure 10: Selected theoretical explanations	50
Figure 11: Research structure decision flow framework	75
Figure 12: Research problem	75
Figure 13: Primary research question	76
Figure 14: Secondary research questions	76
Figure 15: Research Design Pyramid	78
Figure 16: Step 1 of research design - Defining exploratory purpose	81
Figure 17: Step 2 of research design - Adopting abductive reasoning approach	83
Figure 18: Steps 3, 4 and 5 of research design - Adopting interpretivist and pragmatist view as part of ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions	93
Figure 19: Step 6 of research design - Choosing qualitative research methodology	95
Figure 20: The summary of my methodological preferences	96
Figure 21: Step 7 of research design - Selecting semi-structured in-depth interviews	99
Figure 22: Predetermined criterion of importance used as part of purposeful sampling technique	100
Figure 23: Varying degree of detail shared with potential participants	104
Figure 24: Data charting of 'Main Interview Points' category	110
Figure 25: Data charting of 'How does the interview answer the research question' category	111
Figure 26: Primary and secondary themes identified	112
Figure 27: Research design pyramid summarising the structure of this research study	125
Figure 28: Final grouping of primary and secondary themes identified during data analysis	128
Figure 29: Skills and qualities cited by participants as critical to their professional success	133
Figure 30: Examples of roles that a mentor can assume	148
Figure 31: Quotes describing the importance of support network	152
Figure 32: Interviewees' quotes on a slowly improving gender diversity situation	173
Figure 33: Theoretical versus practical view on the role of mentors	206
Figure 34: Theoretical versus practical view on gendered roles stereotypes	209
Figure 35: Theoretical versus practical view on women's preferences	212
Figure 36: Theoretical versus practical view on gendered construction of leadership	215
Figure 37: Qualities required by effective business leaders	220
Figure 38: Theoretical versus practical view on gendered organisations	221
Figure 39: Theoretical versus practical view on women's meritocratic expectations	224
Figure 40: Research structure and design decision flow framework	231
Figure 41: Summary of supporting findings	233
Figure 42: Key messages which transpired from comparing theoretical explanations with research findings	234
Figure 43: Summary of recommendations for each societal actor in improving gender diversity	239
Figure 44: Recommended recipe for professional success comprised of desired skills, attitudes, and actions	241

AN INTERPRETIVE EXPLORATION OF UNDER-REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS IN UK FTSE-100 COMPANIES

APPENDIX 2: APPLICATION OF ABDUCTIVE REASONING APPROACH

	Deductive reasoning	Inductive reasoning	Abductive reasoning	Application of abductive reasoning approach
Etymology	Based on Latin "ducere", meaning "to lead." The prefix de- means "from," and deduction derives <u>from</u> generally accepted statements or facts	Based on Latin "ducere", meaning "to lead." The prefix in- means "to" or "toward," and induction leads a researcher <u>to</u> a generalisation	Based on Latin "ducere", meaning "to lead." The prefix ab- means "away" or "out", and in abduction the researchers takes out the best explanation.	The research process of this study uncovered a plethora of explanations and the 'best' and most probable had to be selected.
Flow	General Rule → Specific Conclusion (always true)	Specific Observation → General Conclusion (may be true)	Incomplete Observations → Best Prediction (may be true)	Interviews with a selected group of senior executives helped dispel some commonly held assumptions, but reconfirm others. In very general terms, it is the best prediction of this research study that women's under-representation should continue to improve, but improvement may also stall. It is also important to note that this study has generated more possible explanations than specific conclusions, thus reaffirming the selection of the abductive reasoning approach.
Logic	In a deductive inference, when the premises are true, the conclusion must also be true	In an inductive inference, known premises are used to generate untested conclusions	In an abductive inference, known premises are used to generate testable conclusions	In this study the premise (women are under-represented at top jobs) was known at the outset, however the inference or inferences were clearly probable (known barriers and commonly held assumptions as to why women do not go for or are not considered for the top jobs).
Generalisability	Generalising from the general to the specific	Generalising from the specific to the general	Generalising from the interactions between the specific and the general	This research study began with an abundance of existing literature on gender diversity (general) and zoomed into senior roles (specific). Within the senior roles I found an abundance of literature pertaining to board level positions and Non-Executive Directors (general), which allowed me to zoom into the level Executive Directors (specific). Over the course of research more information became available, where comparisons and interactions between the 'general' and the 'specific' became feasible.

	Deductive reasoning	Inductive reasoning	Abductive reasoning	Application of abductive reasoning approach
Use of data	Data collection is used to evaluate propositions or hypothesis related to an existing theory	Data collection is used to explore a phenomenon, identify themes and patterns and create a conceptual framework	Data collection is used to explore a phenomenon, identify themes and patterns, locate these in a conceptual framework and test this through subsequent data collection and so forth	Using secondary research tools I have set out to explore the phenomenon of women's under-representation. I then identified key barriers, obstacles and a pattern of commonly held assumptions that were attributed to the scarcity of women in top jobs. I then used primary research tools in the form of semi-structured in-depth interviews to test whether they held true.
Theory	Theory falsification or verification	Theory generation and building	Theory generation or modification; incorporating existing theory where appropriate, to build new theory or modify existing theory	Having initially reviewed a variety of theories that explained women under-representation in senior roles, I have settled on a few that I felt were relevant to my study (theory of gendered organisations; gender role theory; preference theory; role congruity theory; meritocracy theory, glass ceiling theory). As the study progressed it became clear that some theories became outdate (glass theory) and/or no longer fully applied to the studied environment (preference theory). The process of data analysis helped me conclude that modification to the existing theory was required. While each theory had its advantages and limitations, not any single theory could be selected to explain women's under-representation. Instead, a blended approach was required.

APPENDIX 3: UREC APPROVAL



Dr Louise Grisoni
Director of Studies
Centre for Diversity Policy Research and Practice
Oxford Brookes Business School
Wheatley Campus

13 April 2017

Dear Dr Grisoni

UREC Registration No: 171081
Under-representation of female executive directors on company boards

Thank you for the email of 12 April 2017 outlining your response to the points raised in my previous letter about the PhD study of your research student Ksenia Penchukova and attaching the revised documents. I am pleased to inform you that, on this basis, I have given Chair's Approval for the study to begin.

The UREC approval period for this study is two years from the date of this letter, so 13 April 2019. If you need the approval to be extended please do contact me nearer the time of expiry.

Should the recruitment, methodology or data storage change from your original plans, or should any study participants experience adverse physical, psychological, social, legal or economic effects from the research, please inform me with full details as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "S Quinton", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr Sarah Quinton
Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee

cc Simonetta Manfredi, Second Supervisor
Ksenia Penchukova, Research Student
Jill Organ, Research Degrees Team
Louise Wood, UREC Administrator



www.brookes.ac.uk

APPENDIX 4: UREC APPROVAL OF AMENDMENT



Ksenia Penchukova
Research Student
Oxford Brookes Business School
Oxford Brookes University
Headington

1 February 2019

Dear Ksenia

UREC Registration No: 171081
Under-representation of female executive directors on company boards

Thank you for your email of 31 January 2019 requesting an amendment to the original study approved by UREC on 13 April 2017.

Your supervisory team has changed from Professor Simonetta Manfredi to Dr Kate Clayton-Hathway, and Dr Louise Grisoni is still your Director of Studies. You have provided updated participant information sheets and the consent form with the change of supervisory team.

There are no other changes to the study and on this basis I give Chair's approval for this change and to extend the UREC approval until 1 February 2020.

Should the recruitment, methodology or data storage change from your original plans, or should any study participants experience adverse physical, psychological, social, legal or economic effects from the research, please inform me with full details as soon as possible.

I wish you continued success with your research.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "S Quinton", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dr Sarah Quinton
Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee

cc Louise Grisoni and Kate Clayton-Hathway, Supervisory Team
Karen Handley, Research Ethics Officer
Jill Organ, Research Degrees Team
Louise Wood, UREC Administrator

APPENDIX 5: EXAMPLE OF INITIAL APPROACH EMAIL

Sent at: 09/02/2018 10:16:09

PhD Research Project - Under-representation of female executive directors on company boards

From: Ksenia Penchukova <ksenia.penchukova-2016@brookes.ac.uk>

To: [REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED],

I am writing to ask your support with my doctoral research project entitled "Under-representation of female executive directors on company boards".

By way of introduction, I am a PhD Research Student at Oxford Brookes University, conducting a research study on the issue of gender diversity in the UK corporate sector. Specifically, I am evaluating women's under-representation in the leadership echelons of UK publicly listed businesses with a specific focus on the executive director level of UK FTSE 100 organisations.

As part of this study, I would like to confidentially talk to you, as a senior female executive, who has built a career in the UK corporate sector, with a view of exploring your career development experiences. This would entail a one-off face-to-face or telephone interview lasting approximately 45 minutes, at a convenient time and venue over the next 6 weeks.

I have enclosed a copy of the Participant Information Sheet which includes further details about this research study.

I would greatly appreciate your participation and hope that you will agree to our discussion.

Please let me know if you have any questions or queries.

Yours sincerely,

KSENIA PENCHUKOVA, MBA, Chartered MCIPD

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/ksenia-penchukova-mba-chartered-mcipc-6128935/>

PhD Research Student, Faculty of Business
Oxford Brookes University



Vice President – Human Resources, Europe
Toys R Us



Attachments:

Participant Information Sheet FP.pdf (140 KB)

APPENDIX 6: PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

	Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Age	FTSE-100 Sector(s)	Total experience (years)	Tenure at FTSE-100/sector (years)
Participant 1	Florence	Female	Other White	53	Tobacco	30	9
Participant 2	Francine	Female	Other White	51	Mining	29	6
Participant 3	Faith	Female	British White	58	Oil & Gas	37	37
Participant 4	Fern	Female	British White	64	Telecommunications; Retail	39	8
Participant 5	Fiona	Female	British White	54	Airline & Travel	33	25
Participant 6	Felicity	Female	Other White	61	Pharmaceuticals	33	33
Participant 7	Matthew	Male	British White	48	Banking & Financial Services	22	22
Participant 8	Martin	Male	British White	57	Pharmaceuticals	36	36
Participant 9	Flore	Female	British White	59	Retail	37	11
Participant 10	Fillis	Female	British White	59	Banking & Financial Services; Retail	34	21
Participant 11	Marwin	Male	British White	62	Oil & Gas	41	25
Participant 12	Malcolm	Male	British White	66	Professional Services	44	38
Participant 13	Mark	Male	British White	59	Banking & Financial Services	38	25

APPENDIX 7: EXAMPLE OF PRE-INTERVIEW EMAIL

Sent at: 05/03/2018 10:42:02

Research study of female executive directors' under-representation on company boards

From: Ksenia Penchukova <ksenia.penchukova-2016@brookes.ac.uk>
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: [REDACTED]

Hello [REDACTED],

I hope this email finds you well. I look forward to our in-person interview on the 15th of March at 11:30 in relation to the "Under-representation of female executive directors on company boards" research study. As a standard PhD research practice, it is mandatory for Universities to share some specific documentation with interviewees prior to the discussion. In line with this, please find attached the following documentation:

1. Participant Information Sheet: giving you an overview of the research study;
2. Interview Consent Form: allowing you to give your consent for our interview to be audio recorded and **anonymised** quotations to be used in the PhD thesis. I request you to return a signed copy to me via email (or I can collect the original during our meeting);
3. List of Interview Questions: giving you an insight on the sort of questions that I will be seeking your thoughts on.

Thank you for going through the above information and I look forward to speaking next week.

With my best regards,
Ksenia Penchukova

KSENIA PENCHUKOVA, MBA, Chartered MCIPD
<https://www.linkedin.com/in/ksenia-penchukova-mba-chartered-mcipc-6128935/>

PhD Research Student, Faculty of Business
Oxford Brookes University

Vice President – Human Resources, Europe
Toys R Us

Attachments:

Interview Consent Form.pdf (158 KB) Interview Questions FP.pdf (117 KB)
Participant Information Sheet FP.pdf (140 KB)

APPENDIX 8: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET



Research study of female executive directors' under-representation on company boards

Interview Participant Information Sheet

Introduction

You are invited to take part in an interview as part of the above research study. I am a PhD Student at Oxford Brookes University, and this study forms part of my PhD degree. In this study I am exploring the issue of gender diversity in the UK corporate sector and specifically, I am evaluating the problem of women's under-representation in the executive director level of UK FTSE 100 organisations.

As part of this study, I would like to interview a selected group of female Executive Directors and male Chief Executive Officers in order to explore and compare their career development experiences and discover barriers and enablers that have influenced your career progression.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to sign an interview consent form. You are free to withdraw from participation at any stage of the process without giving a reason and any unprocessed data can be withdrawn.

What will happen to me if I decide to take part?

I will contact you to arrange for a convenient date and time for us to meet face-to-face or speak on the telephone or Skype. The interview will last a maximum of 60 minutes. In advance of the interview I will send you a consent form so that you can confirm that you are happy to take part in this project and a list of questions that I would like to ask. I should be grateful if you could please sign the consent form and return it to me (this may be done electronically or via the post if you prefer, in which case I will provide you with a stamped and addressed envelope).

If you agree, I would like to audio-record the interview, to avoid having to write notes throughout the interview (your express permission about this will be sought in the consent form). For Skype interviews specifically, the video-recording facility will be disabled and only audio recordings will be made. Upon request, I will send you a transcript of our interview for you to read and comment on within two weeks after our interview. At this point you will be given the opportunity to confirm that you are happy for the data from your interview to be included in this study or decide to withdraw from the study if you wish. If you decide to withdraw from the study you do not need to give any reasons.

Our interview will cover a set of questions revolving around your career progression experience as a female professional to help explore the barriers and enablers you have faced during your career in the corporate world.

What are the possible disadvantages and benefits of taking part?

The only cost to you for taking part in the study will be your time and I will do all I can to fit in with your timetable.

Please be assured that your participation in this study will be confidential. No one will be able to identify you in the final write-up, and your name and that of any organisation you mention will not be published in any way.

Taking part in this study will give you an opportunity to reflect on your career development experience and potentially identify the factors and behaviours that help increasing diversity in senior roles in the UK's private sector.

Once the research is completed the findings will be presented anonymously and published in a PhD thesis that will be made publicly available. I will send you a copy of this report once it is published and for this purpose only we will keep your contact details.

In other research studies of similar nature, participants have found the opportunity to talk about their experiences enjoyable. As a result of the study I aim to provide a careful and sensitive account of women's experiences in the corporate world.

Confidentiality and Ethics

All the information that you give us will be kept strictly confidential and your name will be substituted with an anonymous code in any records that we keep. The code and data will be kept separate from each other to avoid re-identification. The only persons who will have access to the interview records are the members of the research team. While the research is in progress the interview transcripts will be stored securely in the researchers' computers and they will be accessible by password.

Once the research is completed the electronic files will be deleted and a paper record will be kept in a secure place in the principal investigator department. These will be kept for a period of ten years and then they will be securely destroyed. Anything that is written, once the project is completed, will protect the names and the privacy of the individuals involved.

The findings of this study will be presented in an anonymous format in a PhD thesis that will discuss the overall findings. In order to protect confidentiality no specific reference will be made to individual institutions, and other identifying features, such as individual's personal circumstances and disciplines will also be anonymised. The data will be kept confidential subject to legal limitations.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of this study will be written up for my PhD thesis, as academic papers and other publications. Presentations of the findings will be made at relevant seminars and conferences. I would also provide you with a brief written summary of the findings once the research is complete (via email or post), as agreed with you.

Who is organising and funding the research?

The research is being carried out by me, Ksenia Penchukova. I am a PhD Student at Oxford Brookes University and being supervised by Dr. Louise Grisoni and Dr. Kate Clayton-Hathway (their contact details are below).

Who has reviewed the study?

The University Research Ethics Committee at Oxford Brookes University has reviewed the study. If at any time you had any concerns about the way in which the research is being conducted, please contact them on: ethics@brookes.ac.uk (for more information you can check www.brookes.ac.uk/research/ethics).

Further Information

If you have questions about any aspect of the project, please do not hesitate to contact me:
Ksenia Penchukova, PhD Research Student: ksenia.penchukova-2016@brookes.ac.uk, tel. 07577685172 / 01865 488108.

Supervisors:

Dr Louise Grisoni BSc, MSc, EdD; Senior Research Fellow; Oxford Brookes Business School;
Email: lgrisoni@brookes.ac.uk; Tel.: (+44) 077 343 316 64;

Dr. Kate Clayton-Hathway; Research Fellow; Centre for Diversity Policy Research and Practice; Oxford Brookes Business School; Email: kclayton-hathway@brookes.ac.uk; Tel.: (+44) 018 654 857 96.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

APPENDIX 9: INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM



INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Title of the Research Project:	"An interpretive investigation of under-representation of female executive directors on company boards"
Name of Researcher:	Ksenia Penchukova PhD Research Student Oxford Brookes University Faculty of Business and Center for Diversity Policy Research and Practice Headington, Oxford, OX3 0BP
Researcher's contact information:	Email: ksenia.penchukova-2016@brookes.ac.uk Phone: (+44) 075 776 851 72 / (+44) 018 654 881 08
Supervisory team's contact information	Dr Louise Grisoni BSc, MSc, EdD Senior Research Fellow Oxford Brookes Business School Email: lgrisoni@brookes.ac.uk ; Tel.: (+44) 077 343 316 64; Dr. Kate Clayton-Hathway Research Fellow Centre for Diversity Policy Research and Practice Email: kclayton-hathway@brookes.ac.uk ; Tel.: (+44) 018 654 857 96

Please review the statements below and indicate your agreement by initialing the boxes below:

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study, including the statement about the legal limitations to data confidentiality, and I have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am at liberty to withdraw from participation without giving a reason. ☐
3. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐
4. I agree to the interview being audio recorded.

Yes	No
☐	☐
5. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications arising from this study.

Yes	No
☐	☐

_____ Name of Participant	_____ Date	_____ Signature
_____ <i>Ksenia Penchukova</i> Name of Researcher	_____ Date	_____ Signature

APPENDIX 10: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Research Study: "Under-representation of female executive directors on company boards"

Interview Questions

Background questions:

What is your role title, reporting line, scope of responsibilities, size of the team you are responsible for?

How long have you been with this company?

How long have you been in your current role?

What other roles have you occupied in this company? Please give a short outline of your career history.

What do you consider as the key turning points in your career? Why?

Demographics (these are relevant for the study):

Age?

Are you single/married/living with a partner?

Do you have a caring responsibility for a child/adult/both? Do you have any other major commitments outside paid work?

How do you manage the balance between family, work and other aspects of your life? Has this balance experienced any major shifts throughout your career? responsibilities?

Did you pause your career at all, for example, during children upbringing or other reasons (caring for partner/parents)? Was it a voluntary choice? What made you return to the corporate sector?

Career progression:

How did you enter the corporate world? (Probe for triggers like: purposeful career shaping, support of mentor, by chance, etc.)

Tell me about your career progression so far. Are there times when you felt your career being challenged? Or facilitated? (Probe for triggers like: difficult (leading to challenges) or great (leading to enablers)). Smooth/planned, opportunistic?

General gender diversity questions:

From your experience, does gender equality exist in the UK corporate sector in general? What about your current organisation? If not, where are the areas where you felt most inequalities persist?

Are there any barriers that women of today face when it comes to career progression? If so, what are they?

What would you say are the three main enablers that have helped you reach senior ranks in the organisation?

Have you had a mentor? How important in your career development was having a mentor?

In your opinion, where does the main decision lie when it comes to breaking the barriers to women's under-representation? (Probe for organisations, government, men executives, women themselves).

What have been the main opportunities and barriers that you have encountered at different stages of your career?

What would you like to see as the next step to your career progression? How likely is this ambition? What obstacles and enablers do you foresee along the way?

Today, what is the gender composition of your team? Do you feel it is optimal? Why? Do you have the full decision-making power over the gender composition of your team?

Specific to male CEOs (but female interviewees will also be asked these questions to evaluate the differences in their views):

In your recruitment experience at executive level, what role did gender play in your ultimate candidate choice?

In your observation of female and male leadership styles, what main differences would you highlight?

From your observation, how do women's career ambitions compare to men's?

In your experience, what influence, if any, do family commitments have on a woman's professional life?

Davies/ Hampton-Alexander Review questions:

Have you heard of the Davies Review? To your knowledge, how did your organisation respond to the Davies Review?

Have you heard of the post-Davies Hampton/Alexander review? How is organisation responding to its findings?

If you were to give an advice to a young female professional entering the corporate world today, what would it be?

APPENDIX 11: EXAMPLE OF INTERVIEWER SENTIMENTS ANALYSIS

Summary of Interviewer Sentiments:

When interviewing women	When interviewing men
• Easy to interview, understands the questions, and gives direct answer • Supportive • Interested to see the abstract • Professional • Would love to reconnect at a later stage • Interviewee took control of the interview re: phrasing of questions • Sounded rehearsed, robotic • Kept saying that she will send me documents to read (bio, reports) as if not wanting to spend time discussing them • Comes across as very authoritative, no having much time to spare, very assertive, uses very short, concise sentences. • Kept interrupting the question and moving into the answer. That made me keep the questions very short and concise • Frequently name-throwing • At times her answers were so short that I was not ready with another question • Introduction was [REDACTED] to break the ice. I had to [REDACTED] as it was becoming difficult to pick the right [REDACTED] • I related to her experience and responsibilities – very similar to mine. It was challenging to be subjective • Really passionate about the company. Spent a good portion of the interview proudly talking about the company's strategy and pioneering spirit. • Because of her [REDACTED], I felt I had to be more concise and clear with my questions • Felt she was a bit negative and pessimistic towards future outlook • Answering many questions with a return question • Used lots of colour associations • It was hard not to judge when she said she always put her career before family. • Spoke of other senior women's challenges, but repeated several times: this is not the challenge that I face. • Felt like she had to behave assertively to make an impression • I am phrasing the questions better face to face Vs on the phone, especially if people can't hear me well.	• Men more often than women call their bosses 'chap', 'guy' – [REDACTED] • It was difficult to stop him talking about his career turning points and decisions • Got really uncomfortable and found it hard to choose words when comparing the genders. It is still an uncomfortable subject for some men. • Small talk took up a lot of interview time. • Speaks very confidently and outspokenly about his achievements. • At first I panicked internally when interview started to digress, then learnt to manage the panic and extract positives and manage the flow • Mentions a lot of numbers and figures • Does not listen to the very end of question – quickly moves into response • I was surprised that [REDACTED] on financial gain and be so open about it. • Interviewees often said: great question. I felt pleased; it felt like a compliment. • I was judgemental at first when he said that he always ignored the family and put career first. • He chose a noisy [REDACTED], so I felt uncomfortable discussing private topics and had to consciously keep my voice down • His reasons for [REDACTED] were not convincing. • He was very at ease, relaxed, [REDACTED] throughout the interview. • His office was bare, empty desk, very neat • Likes theatrical expressions: [REDACTED] • I felt more comfortable interviewing men than women; I had to make more effort with women • Uses a lot of tag questions: 'there are, aren't there?'; 'you have, don't you' • He was able to build credibility with his eloquence and quiet confidence that was border line patronising • Fells like he was overplaying the family importance to suit the topic of the research • A very philosophical interview • Good communicator – used a lot of interesting quotes • I found it easier to stick to the generic script of questions in this interview • Swore during the interview • I drew more reflective sentiments in male interviews. Am I being judgemental?

AN INTERPRETIVE EXPLORATION OF UNDER-REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS IN UK FTSE-100 COMPANIES

APPENDIX 12: EXAMPLE OF KEY THEMES ANALYSIS

Category	What women think	What men think
1) Key recurring words	'pretty', 'I wanted' 'always' 'deliberately'; 'you have got to'; KPIs and targets. 'so', 'I wanted' 'always' and 'hugely' 'lucky', 'I want', 'right' 'changing'	'basically', 'sort of', 'I wanted' 'would' and 'xxxxxxxxx? don't know the answer to that.' '?' 'anyway', probably because he digressed quite a bit; 'because' at the start of almost every sentence 'stuff'
2) On mentors, role models and inspirational figures	- Mentoring is often mis-used, where mentees use mentors to fast track own careers and hear about opportunities. Mentors are therefore not very eager to pick up mentoring. - Females need a sponsor, not a mentor - In return for his advocacy, sponsor would know the gossip on the floor - I had two exceptionally good line managers who pushed me into roles that I wouldn't have thought of. - Mentors gave me a huge degree of responsibility and autonomy, but at the same time huge degree of support and affirmation that I can do it. - Key players in career: mainly bosses - Important for more junior women to have a mentor who has been through it - A mentor does not have to be a woman, it is about the fit, the right person. But if a right woman – better. - A mentor believes and supports - She taught me that women don't come in a little humble box. - When I was building my career I saw combining children and career as impossible. I didn't see any role models at all who were doing that.	- My inspirational figures were very successful people, reaching the very tops of organisations. The one thing they all had in common – they lived and breathed their jobs 24/7. There is an absolute commitment and intensity about all of them. - I never had a mentor. I achieved what I achieved through my own efforts. - The word mentor gets overused a lot without people understanding its meaning. To me, critical friend describes the relationship better. - People who have high drive don't really need coaching and support. The mentoring they can definitely do with. But mentoring can't be ongoing, it has to be goal specific. - A mentor needs to have industry experience and direct role experience to be credible with the mentee. - Anyone influenced your career? I would say that most of it is me. People make their own careers. - Must roles models in the world and male and this becomes self-perpetuating.
3) Childcare & support mechanisms:	- I went back to work 2 months after giving birth and my husband took a paternity year. Society was saying I was a bad mother and he was a fantastic father. - For first three years since having my daughter, I was ready to pay everything needed to create the support mechanism that I needed to stay in business even if that meant I was not earning money. Daycare ate most of my salary. - My husband was absolutely supporting with me in all my career decisions. It never works if you don't have the right partner. - For successful females the choice of partner is absolutely critical. - I was obliged to come back to work after only 3 weeks of maternity leave. I would	- My career would not have happened without an understanding wife. - My wife gave up her very good jobs twice to move with my roles. I was very fortunate that she was understanding and put my career before hers. - Professional mother: she looked after the kids, she was there all the time, took the kids to school, supported them in their studies. - I don't think I could have done the career I had without having a rock, ie my wife at home.

Category	What women think	What men think
4) How I became successful	- never let that happen to a woman in my team today. - When women reach the age of 30-35 they ask: is it the right time to have a baby? And the answer is: there is never a good time. Just do it and then figure it out.	- I wanted more experience, faster, I wanted more risk, I wanted more return. - He used his MD and Chairman connection to make a career at the FSA - Pretty much every time I have taken on a new role, someone said to me: no, you should not do that. In a way I kind of like that advice, because then I am going to go and do it then. If someone says 'no', this gives me some determination to do it. - I went into a business where for the first three months there was no money. But I wanted to do it. - But I went to what was a train crash, trying to fix it. And the reason I went there was effectively the financial reward. It was a financial transaction
5) Approach to career development	- The opportunities came along, so I tried to be quick to grab them. - Most of my career moves at the beginning of my career were driven by my husband's career. - My career was driven by two things: I was at the time at the right place and also I was	- I never said 'no' to an opportunity, I just made it work for me. - I always put the firm and my career first, and I would do that with the view that my family would benefit from that position. - To me my career has always been extremely important and I've always put that ahead of work/life balance.

Category	What women think	What men think
6) Gender-based differences	- pretty open to any challenges and open to going out of my comfort zone. - I wanted a new challenge. - I wanted to get out of Basel and move to another country. - I was open at that time to hop around the world. - I had an extensive network and within it opportunities arose. Because a lot of people knew me, when things came up I was quickly approached. - As a female you have to be quite strong to get the right experience to be able to progress. - Feedback is a critical part of career development. - I have crossed several industries, but I am the exception, not the norm. It is very tough to do in the UK. - Being in the right place at the right time. - I have never really sought anything, people have called me - I had to relocate - I have become more calculating as I got older. - Networking is crucial. I made sure I had the connections in the right places and was signalling: "I am interested in other things". - I made a decision to always put my career ahead of everything, including my family. I was absolutely determined to make it work. - After graduation I had a vision: I wanted global responsibilities, a chance to travel the world and a chance to make a difference. - Women's choices can't be accidental, they have to be carefully connected with inner-self.	- I would characterise my career as generally didn't move as quickly as I wanted to or as I was capable of doing. - I am sure if I'd been born later in the years of my children, my career would have been very different to the one I eventually had. - I have not looked at the roles that have come up because of the family impact. - Almost every job a man he worked with previously would call him into this next role (networks) - So I get called about jobs every so often. (Not a single female mentioned that...) - Deciding factors: it's the individuals and teams you work with; it's the organisation and its values and then it's the hygiene factors around the rewards and status. When asked: impact on family is the deciding factor, the deal breaker. - A big decision here would be: if I am asked to be a Chief Executive here? don't think I'd want all the pressures that go with that job. Def more boldness and confidence Vs woman - People are happier at work if they are happier elsewhere in their lives. - How did you balance your career and family life? My ex-wife would say I didn't. - I pursued the opportunities myself - I realised at the end of the day, when they didn't announce it, I thought: 'well, I definitely got the job' - Should have, would have, could have – no, it does not work career wise. - I don't think you have to worry about your career until you are 30. Get as many different experiences as possible until then. - Increasingly as they grew older they thought it was 'fantastic that dad was somewhere in the world and able to afford to fly them to see him.

Category	What women think	What men think
	- of extra-aggressivity, so they are almost embodiment of men. - Most of the men plan their careers by identifying what additional exposure/skills will they need to get the next job. Men's careers are much more structured and fixed: this is my next step, this is what I need to do, this is how I am going to do it. A woman just takes what comes her way. - If you are a man who is not ambitious, you still have got the chance that the opportunity will be offered by the organisation. When you are a woman, you have to ask for it. - Once a woman refuses an opportunity, she is 'burnt'. - A woman will find all the reasons why she could not do the role; while a man automatically thinks he can do more than he can. - Women are not ambitious immediately but become more ambitious as they gain seniority. - Women who break through that level/prejudice are totally performance wise on par with their male colleagues. - The hurdle to be in charge for the men is lower than for women. - Women are traditionally bad at looking at the role: most women would look at the job description and say: "Oh, I can't do this, this, this and this." While men would think: "Yes, I can do most of that." - Women are generally more collaborative. Women would generally look for a win-win solution. Their egos are smaller. - She was fighting to be there with the blokes, trying to be like them. - Men move on quicker. Women internalise a lot, they soul-search. - Men and women network differently. For men it's round of golf or a drink in a pub, and women find their own, even more informal ways. Women find reasons and excuses to hold back the networking. Men are more focused on getting it done. - I have been in meetings where I thought yes, I could have said that, but it is the voice of the man who said it. - We often hear the voices of men round the table because they will always have something to say, but often it lags	- who are more shy asking yet have more family responsibilities - I actually find that women are generally more team playing than men and I found them having a broader set of values and perspectives. - Females managers that I have come across almost tried to demonstrate a behaviour to reinforce that they are a manager almost because they are a female. I've come across a disappointing high percentage of female managers who have been bullies. - I don't like to show weakness. I always internally work it out. - First generation of women that came through in their profession were women in physiognomy, but they behaved like men, because that's how they perceived they had to behave in order to be successful. They didn't create role models that encouraged the majority of women below them to want to aspire to that role. - Not modest at all: And so someone picked up the phone and said: Jeremy, can you get on the plane to India because you know exactly what the problems are and you did a great job in Japan. - Jeremy, you are always going to be successful in this firm because you are different. - Women more often happen to be near the opportunity; men follow their bosses. Do male bosses have a bigger tendency of taking their team with them? - Networking doors are more open for females than males today. - Describes the responsibilities in every role - Making proper money for him is having fun - Straight shooter: they did not want me and I did not want them - Sees himself as a fixer, someone who is called upon in businesses under pressure, that seek dynamic for change and need to move forward quickly - In his mid-20 was assisting the office for the FSA MD and Chairman. Huge exposure and acceleration to his career. Would a woman PA use this to progress her career? Influential yes, but not as a boost - Changing people's thinking on gender differences is like campaigns against smoking or wearing a seat belt in a car

APPENDIX 13: EXAMPLE OF IDENTIFIED CONTRADICTIONS

Said by	Point made	Contradiction
Woman	I happened to be in the right place at the right time	I was looking for change – I like change
Woman	I was interviewed, wrote articles, participating in round tables and working groups.	I kind of got known <u>a little bit</u> in the market.
Woman	I don't know what the gender diversity outlook is, you tell me...	Then goes on to say that gender diversity situation has improved and continues to improve
Woman	For a long time I have not been supportive of quotas	Targets and KPIs is the only way to get things to happen.
Man	How did opportunities come about? I've been very lucky.	Then goes on to say: I'd say it is a combination of hard work and building good personal relationships and being at the right place at the right time. And then also taking a risk on an opportunity.
Man	It was a necessity.	It was very rewarding (so necessity or attractiveness of reward?)
Man	I have not never looked at the roles that have come up because of the family impact.	Would I take a role in London? And the key deciding factor in that would be: would that work for the family and me in the context of the family?
Man	When talking of the deciding factors when evaluating a new opportunity: it's the individuals and teams you work with; it's the organisation and its values and then it's the hygiene factors around the rewards and status.	When asked: impact on family is the deciding factor, the deal breaker.
Man	I see no gender-based differences: my daughters are as assertive as any man.	Then later one: men are more talkative, women are less assertive.
Man	You have to chose your bosses wisely.	I was lucky, I chose two. (Luck or determined choice?)
Man	I was very ambitious and very targeted in my career.	In the end through <u>patience</u> I actually had a great career.
Man	Dad had a good and successful career himself.	We weren't rich or wealthy as a family.
Man	I regret to have missed a lot of my children growing up.	Would I do anything differently? No.
Both men and women	When asked at the end of the interview: "Any final thoughts?" No.	Then go on adding a final thought.
Man	Jeremy, you are always going to be successful in this firm because you are different.	Earlier in the interview he spoke about how traditional that company was; everyone stayed for 5 years in a role.
Woman	Opportunities came along and I quickly grabbed them.	But then says: It is true to say that most of the time me moving at the beginning of my career was driven by my husband's career.
Woman	I really have determined my own career...	... but it has been quite opportunistic.
Woman	I admit that I actively hunt out good capable women, rather than good capable men	Earlier in the interview she stated: "I always hire the best person for the job, irrespective of gender."

APPENDIX 14: EXAMPLE OF RECURRING STATEMENTS

Recurring Statements:

1.	Best person for the job	Have the best person for the job, regardless of gender.
2.	Price to pay	If you want the big jobs and you want the big salary to go with it, there is a price to pay for that.
3.	Positive action is not useful	It is designed for the hypothetical scenario of two equal candidates. Inevitably there are always differences. We can't lose sight of meritocracy and positive discrimination is just wrong.
4.	Advice is gender blind	What advice would I give a young aspiring woman entering the corporate world? Same as to a young man.
5.	Can't do without a support system	I couldn't possibly have the career we have without having wife/her husband at home providing the continuity, the love, the support to the children.
6.	Men often follow bosses	Three interviewed men followed the boss on several occasions for their next job. None of the women did.
7.	One of the partners has to sacrifice	With men and women both, a partner gives up his/her career to raise kids and there is live-in help available at home
8.	Divorces	Quite often: How did you balance your career and family life? My ex-wife would say I didn't.
9.	Like your job	When giving advice most say: make sure what you've chosen to do is what you want to do.
10.	Topical and visible	Over the last 25 to 30 years gender diversity has gone straight up the agenda and it is important to all types of companies.
11.	Matter of time	It is just a matter of time that gender diversity reaches where it should be.
12.	Pulling the ladder behind them	Senior women are not held accountable to bring others behind them. Several quoted jealousy, competitiveness, bullying.
13.	What is balance?	Who is to say that 50-50 is the right balance? There is a natural balance the gender diversity will come to.
14.	Opportunity	I have been at the right place at the right time.
15.	Targets	Gender diversity is taking a long time to get there but we are making progress thanks to targets.
16.	Visibility, exposure	Just doing a good job for a woman is not enough. You have to be seen, you have to make an impact by talking about yourself.
17.	Difficult to work-life balance	One of the reasons my marriage failed: I must have been here quite a lot of time and not home quite a lot of time.