

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of the award of Professional
Doctorate in Coaching and Mentoring
at Oxford Brookes University**

**Exploring the role of a reciprocal
mentoring
scheme in a
multinational
engineering company.**

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Abstract

Developing a shared understanding of women's career equality challenges: exploring the role of a reciprocal mentoring scheme in a multinational engineering company.

The issue of women's progression into senior management positions continues to challenge organisations as progress remains stubbornly slow despite targeted focus and activity. There is a large body of literature exploring why this might be the case which includes themes such as the gendered organisation, second generation bias and women's career equality. A review of the significant part of this literature indicates that the answers to the question "is it the women or the organisations that need to adapt" tend to be skewed to the latter. Similarly, coaching and mentoring have been widely deployed as mechanisms to support women's transition into more senior roles, however, there is a view that rather than being used as progressive tools, in their traditional form, these interventions could be perpetuating the status quo by encouraging women to adapt.

Reciprocal mentoring is a new and emerging form of mentoring which arguably has the potential to disrupt the traditional patterns of hierarchical mentoring relationships by creating a mutual exchange of perspectives. There is however little research into this approach. This qualitative case study sought to address this gap through exploring if the experience of participating in a reciprocal mentoring programme between mixed gender pairs could influence shared understanding of women's career equality challenges within the case study organisation.

Findings indicate that the reciprocal nature of the dialogue led to new understanding which includes themes that challenge some long held organisational assumptions. There are six main themes: a shift in the nature of mentoring, women's congruence in the workplace, agentic leadership bias, organisational readiness for equality, flexibility stigma and diversity as a business, not just a Human Resources issue.

Further research into the themes above would be of value to those seeking to understand career equality and reciprocal mentoring as a progressive intervention

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Chapter One

Introduction

This thesis explores the experiences of the participants of a reciprocal mentoring programme, which was introduced in a traditional engineering multinational organisation headquartered in the UK with a view to influencing women's career equality. The study seeks to contribute to knowledge firstly in relation to issues affecting career equality and in relation to reciprocal mentoring as a relatively unexplored form of mentoring practice.

1.1 Background

Significant progress has been made regarding women's participation in the workplace in recent history. Since the Sex Discrimination Act (1975), the percentage of eligible (age 16 - 64) women working has increased from 55% to 71% (Office for National Statistics, 2013). Legislation in areas such as maternity/ parental leave and flexible working has had a transformational effect, enabling women to continue working after having a family (Office for National Statistics, 2017). However, whilst women are participating much more in the workplace overall, this increase is not evenly distributed across all industries, with some, (e.g. engineering and financial services) continuing to find it difficult to attract and retain female staff (Office for National Statistics, 2013); (Perpetual Partnerships, 2015); (WISE Campaign, 2017); (Oliver Wyman, 2016). In addition, female progression to executive positions remains challenging across most industries (Wallace, 2008); (Wittenberg-Cox, 2013); (Yee et al, 2016). This imbalance has been the subject of much recent publicity following publications such as The Davies Report (2014), The Hampton Alexander Review (2016) and the UK Gender Pay Gap (2018).

These publications have made uncomfortable reading for many organisations, one high-profile case in point being the BBC, one of the first to go public due to their obligations as a Public Service Broadcaster (BBC, 2017). The status of many of their

employees provoked extensive media coverage, causing them embarrassment whilst they made some systemic reward interventions in an effort to narrow their pay gap. Similarly, Easy Jet found themselves a source of unwanted attention as their gender pay gap revealed that due to a lack of female pilots the majority of their high earners were men (UK Gender Pay Gap, 2018). Financial Services organisations such as HSBC also revealed large gender pay gaps, reinforcing the impact of a paucity of women in the senior ranks. (UK Gender Pay Gap, 2018)

Amongst many others these organisations are pursuing multiple strategies to accelerate progress including sponsorship programmes, diversity training, women-only leadership programmes, women's networks. However, there is evidence to suggest that the expansion of such initiatives is having limited impact. In the Female FTSE Board Report (2018, p. 24), Hathorn reflects that "corporate UK needs to do more to change its underlying culture to ensure companies are more inclusive and collaborative in order to accelerate progress". In June 2018, as the Hampton-Alexander Review reached its halfway point the Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) released the "top 10 excuses" that they had reported to them for justifying not appointing women to Board and senior executive positions. These included remarks such as "I don't think women fit comfortably into the board environment" or "Most women don't want the hassle or pressure of sitting on a board" and "There aren't any vacancies at the moment - if there were, I would think about appointing a woman" (Business Energy and Industrial Strategy, 2018, p. 1). The tone of these comments' points to an underlying reluctance, is congruent with slow progression, and suggests that there is scope for undertaking some empirical study to understand this situation and the ways to address it. Indeed, the latest reported gender pay gap (UK Gender Pay Gap, 2019) reveals an increase of 2% amongst the high-paid managers, professionals and senior officials occupation group (from 13.9% to 15.9%) further highlighting the need for a more progressive approach.

I work for a multinational engineering-based organisation which is largely typical in its makeup, being male-dominated and thus making slow progress with gender balance at all levels and functions, but particularly within the technical disciplines. The

organisation, which acknowledges this position, has been making sincere efforts to accelerate progress, much of which provide minimal returns as each quarterly review of the data reveals disappointing progress. In my role as Human Resources Vice President for Talent and Learning and Diversity and Inclusion, I have been involved in much of this effort, pulling together and reporting data, creating Diversity and Inclusion plans and development programmes focussed on areas such as unconscious bias and inclusive leadership. I have worked with several well-respected external consultancies who have engaged whole-heartedly in the quest for a solution, producing a wide range of strategies and frameworks, many of which are seductive to my organisation and others all searching for a rapid solution.

As each effort had limited tangible impact, it became clearer to me that something was missing; this was a complex and multifaceted problem that I really wanted to explore in depth, to understand more, and to bring a fresh perspective to. As a lifelong feminist and a full-time working mother of three, I feel deeply invested in the subject of women's careers to the extent perhaps that I had been drawing my own limited conclusions from a narrow perspective.

In addition, perhaps as a result of the multiple initiatives described above, I have begun to observe some organisational fatigue around the issue of gender balance and even something of a backlash from men who may have been feeling marginalised or even blamed for the current position. I was therefore well motivated from a personal and professional perspective to investigate this in more depth. I began by exploring the literature.

1.2 Overview of the literature

The literature on this topic can be grouped in three broad categories: Academic; Commercial Publications; and Government Reports.

There is a vast array of commercial publications emerging regularly from consultancy firms e.g. *Women in the Workplace*, McKinsey (2018); *Measuring what matters in Diversity*, Boston Consulting Group, (2018). These are relevant to this review given their

broad readership and influence across industry. Whilst these publications keep the debate alive, they often lack the depth of their academic counterparts and arguably divert organisations from understanding or focussing on the inherent complexity of the issue.

Government reports generally have an “official” feel. They are often led by respected establishment figures (e.g. Lord Davies of Abersoch and Sir Philip Hampton), and are sponsored by industry leaders who are arguably motivated to associate themselves with supporting progress. The core of this work is fact-based and focussed on percentages and trajectories that provide evidence of improvement, though the resulting recommendations are often accompanied by hypotheses about underlying complexity without detailed explanations of what sits behind it. Whilst arguably not providing new thinking, these publications have highlighted slow progress and clarified expectations of organisations in the 21st Century, providing a platform for re-energising the debate. (Women on Boards, 2011); (Female FTSE Board Report, 2018); (The Global Gender Gap Report, 2017).

In contrast, the academic literature, whilst using data as a starting point, goes much deeper, is questioning and challenging of itself and in so doing explores the barriers to change.

The process of reviewing the academic literature was iterative; I worked through the layers, aiming to understand the underlying issues, my findings began to converge on three key themes: The gendered organisation, (Moss Kanter, 1977); (Acker, 1990); (Hearn and Collinson, 1997); (Stern, 2001); (Ely, Ibarra and Kolb, 2011, p. 4); and women’s career equality (Kossek *et al*, 2016).

As I embarked on my studies, I knew I wanted to explore the impact coaching or mentoring could have on the progression of women to senior positions. I had imagined that I would focus in on the benefits of one to one coaching for women, as I held a view that this could be a productive intervention to help women overcome barriers to

progression and navigate their way to the top. My exploration of the literature therefore extended to coaching and mentoring in the context of female progression with the aim of understanding their impact. Coaching practice in relation to women appeared to continue to focus on supporting adapting to a prevailing traditional style and circumstance rather than be leveraged as a progressive tool. (Leimon, Moscovici and Goodier, 2010).

I discovered more of an evolution occurring in terms of mentoring, as several studies challenged the effectiveness and implied that it is becoming part of the problem by maintaining the status quo; (Ely and Meyerson, 2000); (McKeen and Bujaki, 2007); (De Vries, 2011); (Harvey et al, 2009). (Chandler and Kram, 2005); (De Vries et al, 2006). (McKeen and Bujaki, 2007, p. 218) specifically reviewed gender and mentoring research and concluded that mentoring can be a very powerful process but that currently it 'seems intended to assimilate women into the dominant masculine corporate culture'. This is dubbed "the godfather approach" (Ragions and Verbos, 2009, p. 92). Hackney and Bock (2000), argue that currently mentoring appears not to address entrenched relationships between male advantage and female disadvantage. Such studies suggest that whilst well intentioned, mentoring in its traditional form can be a contributing factor to the perpetuation of inequality by encouraging women mentees to learn and replicate 'what it takes to get on around here'.

I found the above observations provocative as they suggested that a lot of traditional mentoring practice, was having the unintended consequence of reinforcing the culture that arguably needed to change for meaningful progress to be made.

Meanwhile, informal mentoring and networking which are shaped by masculinity and reinforce male advantage, (Bushell, 2015), remain in place and unscrutinised, as do the usual ways of progressing through organisational hierarchies. New mentoring methods (reversed and reciprocal) are appearing in the literature (Harvey, et al, 2009). These new methods, it is suggested, change the traditional dynamic and enhance the dialogue however, this emerging theory appears worthy of deeper exploration.

On reflection I observed a gender divergence in the sponsors and authors of the literature. The majority of the official publications were fronted by men (Women on Boards, 2011 and 2015); (Hampton Alexander Review, 2017/2018) and that with some notable exceptions, e.g. Hearn and Collison, (1997) the academic literature and the research exploring the barriers was predominately written by women. This observation seems significant to me as rather than men simply showing commitment, I am interested to explore if men also engaging in researching and understanding the barriers could contribute to an acceleration of progress.

Whilst the literature made fascinating reading, weaving together a web of interconnecting influences and resonating strongly with my personal experience, it appeared to be sparse in terms of examples of empirical research into interventions that had resulted in change. Much of the literature was focussed on describing the problem and rationalising or debating the causes. (Vinnecome *et al* , 2013) stood out in that they attempted to bring forward some solutions based on causal investigation. Their examples were framed around the dichotomy of fixing the women or creating organisations fit for women. (Wittenberg-Cox, 2013); (Ely *et al* , 2011).

While exploring my epistemology, I began to recognise that I believe that new knowledge is created through experiences and that people construct their understanding of the world between them, through interactions (Burr, 2015). Applying a social constructionist approach to my research, I concluded that I wanted to explore understanding of women's career equality from both a male and female perspective to open up the opportunity for new thinking to emerge. The organisation I work for had taken a decision to introduce reciprocal mentoring, which presented me with a vehicle for a case study.

Reciprocal Mentoring offers an alternative ethos, and, through mutual exchange, seeks to counter some of the limitations of traditional mentoring. There is little empirical research on its influence, and I have not been able to identify any specific research studies on reciprocal mentoring between men and women.

1.3 Research Objectives

The aim of this research is to explore how the experience of participating in reciprocal mentoring influences the understanding of the issues facing women's career equality. To achieve the aim four objectives have been identified:

- Firstly, to critically review the literature on workplace gender issues, women's career equality challenges and what is known about the impact and processes of relevant development interventions, specifically the role of reciprocal mentoring in supporting an understanding and progression of women's career equality issues in organisations.
- Secondly, to explore mentors' and mentees' experiences of reciprocal mentoring as an approach for creating shared understanding of women's career equality challenges within the hosting organisation.
- Thirdly to analyse evidence from participants and those within their work environment of a reciprocal mentoring scheme to uncover insights related to the role of mentoring in understanding of women's' career equality issues.
- Finally, to evaluate findings and identify the opportunities for reciprocal mentoring as a catalyst for change that makes an original contribution to theoretical knowledge and practice.

1.4 Organisational Context

The case study research took place in the organisation in which I work, the company has a global presence from Asia Pacific to Alaska and has about 60K permanent employees as well as a large contingent workforce. It is responsible for a diverse portfolio of activity, from exploration and production of oil and gas, to retail outlets, commodity trading and shipping as well as an emerging alternative energy business. It operates a system of matrix management due to the complexities of regional and functional constructs and is highly networked; relationships are hugely important.

The organisation has a strong bias towards technical expertise and experience, particularly in the operational parts of the business which continue to have primacy. It is typical within the industry in terms of gender representation in that it is male dominated, particularly at senior levels, with a standard negative correlation between the level of seniority and the percentage of women.

In 2010 the business set itself an ambition to improve gender balance at all levels, including specific goals to be achieved by 2020. There is evidence of progress, although it is slow. This lack of pace has become the source of an emerging sense of frustration and a recognition that this is a complex and challenging problem. Increasing external pressure and high-profile media activity resulting from the publication of The Davies Report, (2011/2015) the Hampton Alexander Review, (2017/ 2018) and the Gender Pay Gap, (2017/2018) have further increased the organisation's resolve to make sustained headway. A recent review of the talent pipeline has led to the realisation that there is much to do to meet stretching internal and external goals and there is a growing appetite to understand what needs to happen to effect sustained change. Whilst gender goals have been a helpful insight and source of focus, it was argued that the emphasis needed to shift from numbers and reporting to investigating and seeking to understand what is getting in the way of progress.

In response to this new perspective, some exploration of the career paths of successful individuals was undertaken through semi-structured interviews with senior men and women. Several interesting themes emerged. Figure 1.1 below highlights these:

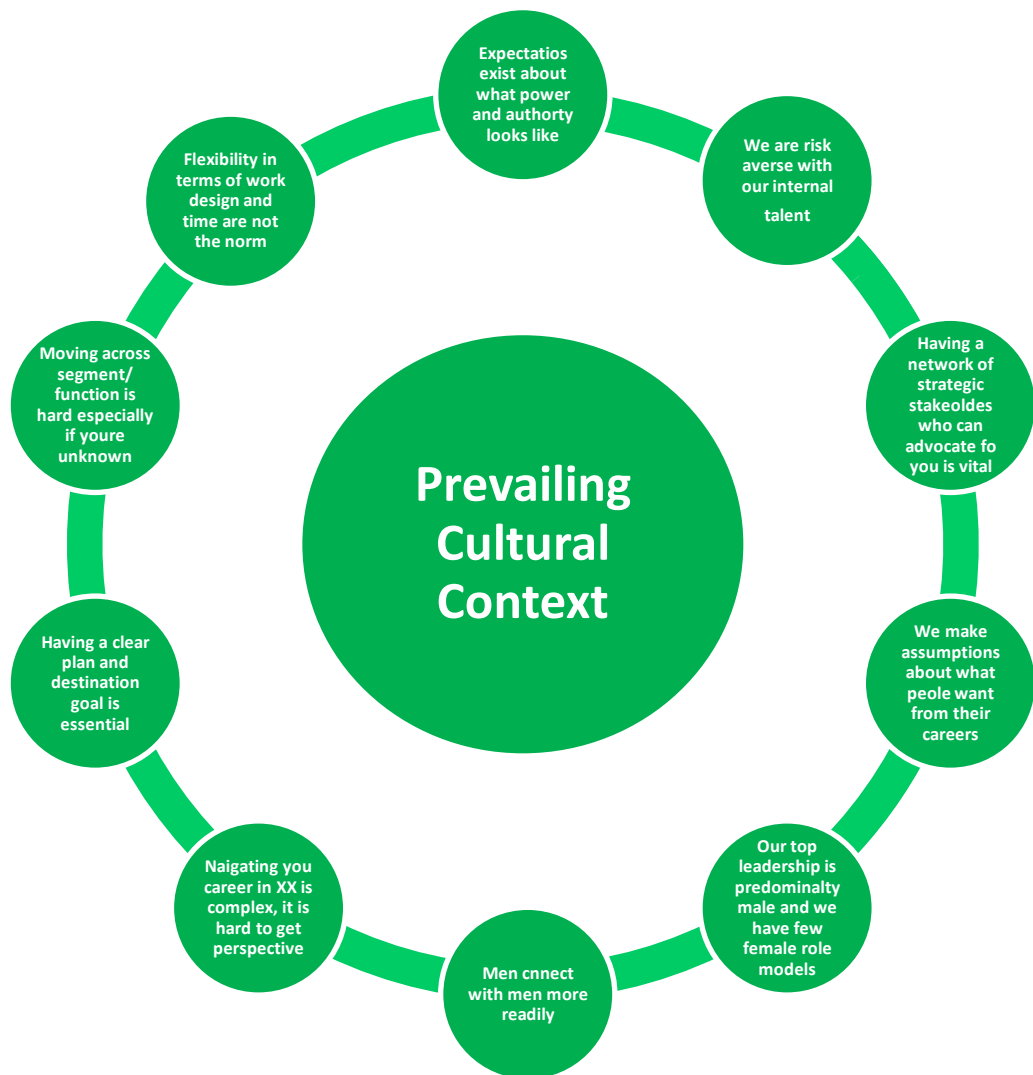


Figure 1.1: cross segment cultural themes emerging within the case study organisation (2017)

The observations in figure 1.1 above seemed to resonate with the organisation and, they highlighted the personality and the culture of the company and pointed to some of the perceived barriers to change. The process of sharing this research through presentations with several senior stakeholders seemed to awaken organisational curiosity about what else could be learned. Reciprocal Mentoring emerged as an opportunity for further exploration and has gained growing support. It was launched as a pilot in June 2018 and my research is a case study on how participating in this programme has influenced understanding of the issues facing women's career equality within the case study organisation.

1.5 Methodology

The research is based on a social constructionist paradigm, which encourages its supporters “to be ever suspicious of our assumptions about how the world appears to be” (Burr, 2015, p. 3) , and to believe that people create understanding of the world through their interaction with it and with each other. I believe our experiences help to shape our perspective, which in turn creates new understanding and knowledge. Taking a qualitative approach, this research explores the participants’ felt experiences of the mentoring programme and any shifts in levels of empathy between mentors and mentees that occurred as an outcome. This manifests as what is described as “the affect in social constructionism” (Burr, 2015, p. 225). Adopting Burr’s position, this study creates the opportunity to understand the gendered nature of the organisation in question through the perspectives of actors within the organisation.

This case study explores what happens when men and women are deliberately included in a structured reciprocal mentoring programme, and how this experience influenced their understanding of the career equality challenges experienced by women within their own organisation. Yin (2012, p.5) articulates three situations in which case study is an appropriate research method; firstly, when research addresses a descriptive (what has or is happening) or exploratory (how or why something happened) question; secondly, when studying “a phenomenon within its real-world context” and thirdly in conducting evaluations, all of these situations apply in this instance.

The programme runs over a nine-month period and consists of five to six mentoring sessions that can be face-to-face or conducted over Skype. Inevitably due to the organisational construct, some of the pairings were across continents and so this flexibility was essential. All those participating had a one-to-one briefing in advance of the programme, during which the nature of reciprocal mentoring was explained, and they were given the opportunity to ask questions and share their own learning objectives, which were factored into the construction of the pairings. To support these

briefings full guidelines were published and shared, these included information about suggested topics for discussion and those that were considered off limits. A code of conduct for the programme was included, as well as contact details of the individual designated to provide individual support if it was required.

The participants of nine mixed gender pairs, drawn from those on the reciprocal mentoring programme, were invited to, and agreed to take part in, the research. Semi-structured hour-long interviews were conducted with each of the research participants before and after the programme to gauge their individual perspectives and experiences. The male mentors were asked questions relating to navigating a successful career in the organisation, what they see as the barriers, their experiences of managing employees' careers, and their perceptions of career equality issues for women. The questions put to the women were similar though nuanced, inquiring about their experiences of developing their careers in a male-dominated environment. Post the reciprocal mentoring sessions, all participants were interviewed individually again, specifically to identify any shift in their understanding of women's career equality issues created through participating in the reciprocal mentoring programme. A colleague joined me and typed verbatim notes, which enabled me to stay very present in the interviews. I drew on my coaching experience to really focus, listen and respond to each individual and I probed when I sensed someone had more to say. The interview notes were all password protected, marked as confidential and stored in separate files.

As part of pre-programme analysis of the organisational culture the perspective of a cross section of 10 of the HR team was explored using an audio-recorded moderated focus group. This incorporated their understanding of career progression dynamics and how that was affecting career equality. I also reviewed the documentation provided by the HR department in relation to the reciprocal mentoring programme. (appendix 1 (Reciprocal mentoring at a glance) and appendix 2 (Reciprocal mentoring agreement)).

The transcription of the interviews and the moderated HR focus group was then analysed using Thematic Analysis. This methodology is described by Braun and Clarke (2013, p.175) as “a method for identifying themes and patterns of meaning across a data set.”

As an insider researcher (Floyd and Linet, 2012), I was sensitive to the moral and ethical issues associated with my perceived sphere of influence within the case study organisation. Throughout this case study I was positioned clearly as a researcher and I also recognise that I am part of the group I was studying (Greene, 2014) and hold a pre-existing view of the environment, which in some way has encouraged me to undertake this research. To mitigate the threat to objectivity (Van Haugten, 2004) I frequently revisited my research notes to deliberately and consciously calibrate my reaction to the research outcomes that were emerging. I kept records of my personal reflections in a research diary. I was part of the scheme design team, moderated the HR focus group, conducted the one to one interview with both sets of mentors and completed all the thematic analysis.

1.6 Mentoring Definitions

Reciprocal Mentoring through non-hierarchical pairings aims to create the conditions for a mutual exchange of learning, enabling each participant to stand in the shoes of the other and see the world from their perspective. The significant characteristic of Reciprocal Mentoring is that the pairs of mentors are constructed with the objective of mutual exchange without hierarchy, rather than the one-way learning or guidance constructs of traditional mentoring schemes. This shift felt aligned to my ontological perspective of social constructionism in that meaning is made through social interaction. This also played into an emerging realisation that men needed to be part of the conversation and engaged in creating the solution. Within my own organisation I had observed a willingness to make change, however divergence between genders had

created an anxiety about the issue that perhaps impedes open dialogue. Arguably those in positions of seniority have the greatest power to bring about change, however, as a result of their current view of the world they weren't necessarily aware of what was needed. I wanted to explore if opening communication channels in a defined, non-hierarchical safe space influenced understanding. Table 1.1 below summarises the positioning of Reciprocal Mentoring in relation to Reverse and Traditional approaches highlighting the intended focus of each.

Table 1.1 has been removed from this version
of the thesis due to copyright restrictions

Table 1.1: *adapted from Comparison of types of mentoring summarised from (Harvey, et al, 2009).*

1.7 Thesis overview

This thesis is presented in eight chapters.

Chapter 1 - The introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the study, establishes the research in context, and provides background to the case study organisation. It lays out the objectives and highlights the gaps in knowledge the study aims to address. It also introduces the methodology, the ontological perspective of the researcher and the range of literature explored.

Chapter 2- Literature Review

This chapter reviews the existing literature, examining what is known about women's progression in organisations, career equality, the gendered organisation and the role of coaching and mentoring as progressive tools. This chapter sets the research context within the framework of current knowledge and pulls relevant issues together to ensure a solid foundation for framing and analysing the research data.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

This chapter frames the research question from a social constructionist perspective. It introduces my qualitative case study methodology, outlining other options that were considered. The chapter details the research participants and their context. It also outlines the data collection methods and the use of thematic analysis. It considers insider researcher status and the challenges that can bring. Finally, it assesses the criteria of quality.

Chapter 4 - Presentation and Analysis of Results from HR Focus Group

This chapter focuses on data gathered from the HR Focus Group participants which was completed prior to the programme to provide a baseline insight into the organisational culture. It presents the outcomes of the thematic analysis undertaken at this stage.

Chapter 5- Presentation and Analysis of Results from pre-programme interviews for both genders

This chapter focuses on interview data gathered from the pre-mentoring programme interviews from both the male and female participants. It presents the outcomes of the thematic analysis undertaken at this stage. The chapter seeks to highlight any key differences that emerged between the two groups, and to draw meaning from their perspectives as they embarked on the programme.

Chapter 6 - Presentation and Analysis of Results from post-programme interviews for both genders

This chapter focuses on interview data gathered from the post-mentoring programme interviews from both the male and female participants. It presents the outcomes of the thematic analysis undertaken at this stage. The chapter seeks to highlight any key differences that emerged between the two groups and to draw meaning from their perspectives at this stage.

Chapter 7 – Discussion of findings

This chapter discusses the findings of the research against the original aims and themes of the literature, and, explores major themes/findings, highlighting any contribution to theory and practice.

Chapter 8 - Conclusion and recommendations

This final chapter reviews the implications of the findings of the study and makes recommendations for further research. The chapter concludes with my final personal reflection on my learning throughout this project.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

In this chapter the literature on women's advancement to senior executive positions, including what can get in the way and what has enabled progression, will be reviewed. The purpose of this review is to explore and summarise the key debates, themes and insights in the relevant literature and to position my research within the wider context of what is known and what is left to be explored.

My review encompasses academic journal articles, government publications and some practitioner publications from established Human Resources and Talent Management consultancies. I used a number of databases to access relevant literature including Brookes Virtual Library, Open Athens and Shibboleth.

Search terms included "progression of women to senior executive positions", "barriers to progression", "the gendered organisation", "women's career equality", "coaching and mentoring women" and "reverse and reciprocal mentoring". As I became familiar with some of the significant contributors, I also searched using authors names. Sources date back to the 1970s in order to represent both an historical perspective on women's representation and progression in organisations and a view of how the literature has developed over time. There were a number of publications that featured regularly in searches including: Human Resource Development Review, Handbook of Mentoring at Work, Gender and Society, The International Journal of Human Resource Management and the Handbook of Research on Promoting Women's Careers. Harvard Business Review was a key source of both academic and consultancy originating material and UK Government Publications provided data reporting.

Figure 2.1 below articulates the framework that emerged during the research.

The review begins by describing the literature relating to progress to date in terms of female representation at the most senior levels (what I will define as Women's Career

Equality). It then moves on to review the explanations for the current position, which emerge through the literature as complex and multi-layered women's career equality challenges. The review then explores the concept of the gendered organisation and the role of organisational culture, including second generation bias. The focus of the review then moves to explore the role of coaching and mentoring in supporting women navigating the landscape of the workplace and what impact that has had on both women and organisations. The chapter concludes with a summary of the key themes and insights, gaps in the literature and implications for this research project. The progression of women into senior executive positions is used as a means of assessing women's career equality.

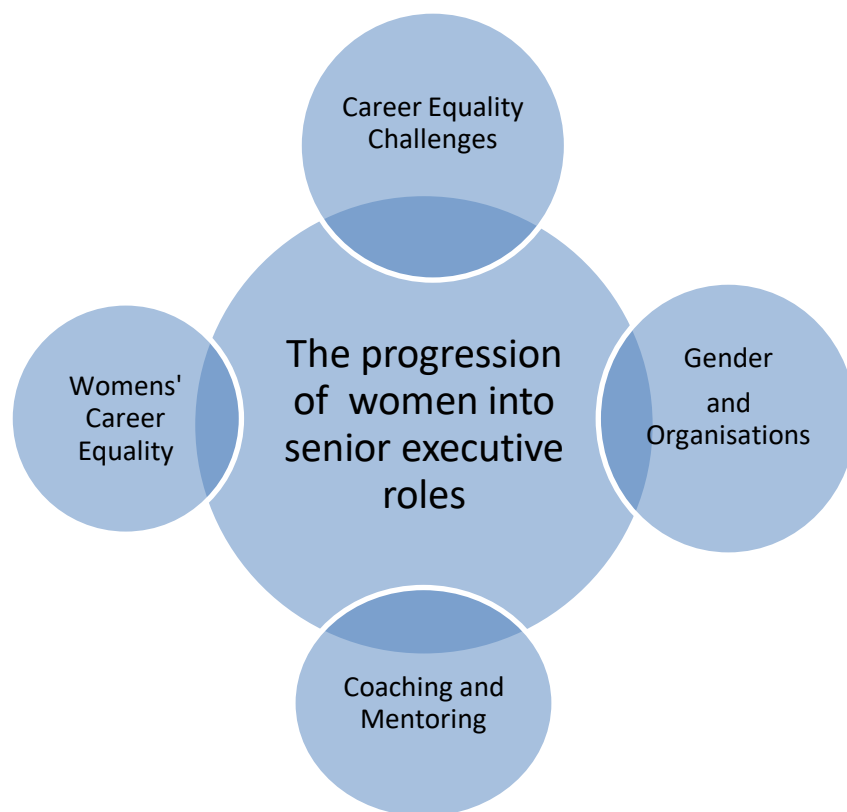


Figure 2.1: Literature Review Framework

2.1 Women's Career Equality

The first theme that emerges through the literature review is Women's Career Equality. According to Kossek, Su and Wu (2016, p.229) one of the structural indicators of

women's career equality is "the equal representation of women and men in leadership across hierarchical levels", which appears to be a logical working definition. Progress across this indicator has been a longstanding challenge: The Equal Opportunities Act became law in 1975 and despite there now being 50/50 gender split among UK University Graduates, there still appears to be a negative correlation between women and seniority in the workplace. (Wallace, 2008); (Wittenberg-Cox, 2013); (Yee et al, 2016). The issue of female representation at executive level in the UK has moved up the political, societal and corporate agenda in recent years. However, progress towards increasing female representation at executive level remains stubbornly slow, with 19.4% at operating board level in 2016, (Sealy, Doldor and Vinnicombe, 2016); (Alexander Hampton, 2016).

This is not just a case of promoting a fairer and more equal society. There have been multiple studies into the economic and societal benefits of gender diversity at senior levels in organisations, demonstrating that businesses with gender diverse Boards outperform their less balanced rivals. For example, Catalyst's Bottom Line (2004) report discovered that increasing the number of women on a board impacted positively on the return on investment for an organisation. McKinsey, (2015) analysed 336 firms and found that companies in the top quartile for gender diversity are 15% more likely to have financial returns above industry norms. Dezso and Ross, (2008) studied the female impact on company market value over 14 years. Desvaux, Devillard-Hoellinger and Meaney, (2008) used nine dimensions and Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation, and Amortization. Both studies concluded a positive correlation between female representation and company performance.

Whilst the case for increasing gender diversity at the top of organisations has been made strongly from multiple sources (both academic and by governments and consultancies), progress remains slow. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (Spencer, 2008) reported that at the rate of change in 2008 it would take more than 70 years to achieve gender-balanced boardrooms in the UK's FTSE 100 companies. This appears to have been a catalyst for the Government to invite Lord Davies of Abersoch

to undertake a review of the number of women on FTSE 100 boards. Lord Davies was supported by a steering group of experts drawn from business and academia, which consulted a wide range of stakeholders. The resulting publication *Women on Boards*, (2011) clearly laid out the facts in terms of the numbers, outlined the case for change, made some recommendations for accelerating progress, and set out a clear expectation of improvement by 2015 (25% on PLC Boards), supported by transparent reporting. The recommendations fell short of mandating quotas, though there were hints that if voluntary improvements didn't materialise then quotas would follow. This high-profile activity appeared to galvanise business into action. The follow up report in 2015 pointed to significant progress (an increase in female FTSE 100 Board representation from 12.5 % in 2011 to 26.1% in 2015), demonstrating either the impact scrutiny and transparency can have, or that this was an easily achievable target, potentially, highlighting a missed opportunity to be bolder.

It is perhaps unsurprising that the Davies Report, (2011) was the output of a consultation completed by trusted establishment figures, supported by civil servants. It seems reasonable to challenge the guidance they were given by the Government – the recommendations did not include mandatory board level quotas which would have been an unpopular output for many participating in the steering group. The consultation was mostly completed online, 88% of the respondents were women, and it seems reasonable to conclude that involving more men in the discussion would have added more meaning to the findings. The Davies Report was widely publicised and deemed a success, which could be accused of creating the illusion of activity over the impetus and urgency for real change. In fact, there is some evidence of stalling. (Egon Zender, 2017); (Terjesen, Sealy and Singh , 2009) suggest that three is the cultural tipping point of women required to enable performance improvement, and that below this number on boards women are regarded as “tokens” and there is a danger that teams can fracture around gender lines, creating a backlash that negatively impacts performance. Scwab, Werbel, Hofmann and Henriques, (2015) also concluded through their research that moving beyond low levels of Managerial Gender Diversity enabled organisations to reap the benefits in terms of performance. A bolder target from the Davies Review in 2011 could perhaps have built valuable momentum earlier.

In 2015 Lord Davies did set a new target of 33% representation on the FTSE100 executive teams by 2020, highlighting that in 2015 it languished at 18.7%. According to Davies this low percentage not only represents a lack of diversity in the daily running of the business world but also acts as a pipeline bottleneck to the achievement of the board-level target. The Government subsequently commissioned Sir Phillip Hampton and Dame Helen Alexander to investigate this further. The resulting Hampton-Alexander Review, (2016) reported on the representation of women on the combined Executive committees in the FTSE 350 and direct reports pipeline and recommended that this should be at 33% by 2020. This continued focus, alongside other high-profile initiatives such as gender pay gap reporting, appears to have prompted organisations who are concerned about the potential reputational damage of such transparency to challenge their thinking and assumptions. In my own organisation, a recent review of the pipeline has led to the realisation that there is much to do to meet the Hampton-Alexander goal and there is a real appetite to understand what needs to happen to effect change.

This strand of literature lays out the current position in terms of female representation in senior executive positions, reflecting on the rate of progress in recent history. It includes a lot of empirical reporting, in particular from Government-sponsored reviews, articulating the business case for diversity and the case for improvement. With that as a backdrop, the next section of the review explores the literature investigating why progress has seemed to be slow for women's progression, with an inquiry focussed on what could be getting in the way.

2.2 Career Equality Challenges

Whilst the focus on data and reporting has left the business world in little doubt as to the paucity of women executives, the literature reveals a distinct lack of agreement as to what is getting in the way. Theories include: lack of role models (Hobbler, Lemmon and Wayne, 2011); organisational culture (James *et al*, 2008); the desire for greater

work life balance, (Hakim, 2005)); lower levels of ambition amongst women (McCarty *et al*, 2014); lack of social capital (Bushell, 2015); and unconscious bias (Frith, 2001) Kossek, Su and Wu, (2016, p. 229) point to the multi-layered complexity of the issue, highlighting the phenomenon of women's career equality which they describe as "the degree that women, compared to men, (a) have equal access to and participation in career opportunities and (b) experience equal work and non-work outcomes: intrinsic (job, life, family satisfaction) and extrinsic (pay, promotions). They explore the concept that women either reject or are rejected by the workplace; describing complex pushes and pulls that they argue need to be connected to understand the full picture affecting women's career equality challenges. Sturm (2001, p.460) argues that now-illegal first-generation employment discrimination has been replaced by second generation bias, which is much more subtle and calls for deeper cultural response "Second generation" claims she explains involve social practices and patterns of interaction among groups within the work place that, over time, exclude non-dominant groups "

Ely, Ibarra and Kolb (2011, p.4) explain how designing and developing leadership programmes over 10 years led them to conclude that women needed to overcome second-generation bias. They describe this as "powerful yet often invisible barriers to women's advancement that arise from cultural beliefs about gender as well as workplace structures, practices, and patterns of interaction that inadvertently favour men", whilst defining their leadership identity and leadership purpose to progress. Arguably this suggests that, rather than organisations recognising and tackling second generation bias, women need to work around it. Wittenberg-Cox, (2013) recommends that instead of just focusing on changing women to adapt to organisations' needs, organisations should consider how they could change to maximise the potential of female talent. She highlights the well-intentioned initiatives rolled out in organisations to "help" women communicate to women that they are missing some cultural trait or behaviour.

Ibarra, Ely and Kolb, (2013) note the unseen barriers for women specifically referencing the lack of senior role models which sends a strong signal that reaching the top is only

for an exceptional few. This in turn creating a vicious circle. They assert, that work practices still favour men, describing organisational structures and practices that reflect gendered career paths as well as women's lack of access to networks and sponsors. Similarly, Bushell, (2015) presents the findings of a PHD research project that investigated the role of social capital and networking in career progression. She conducted semi-structured interviews with Chairmen, head-hunters and aspiring male and female directors and concluded that, despite progression towards transparent recruitment processes for board positions much of the selection process continued to be based on leveraging existing relationships. Bushell argues that this puts women at a disadvantage as her research showed a distinct gender difference in networking habits. For example, women gravitated towards larger networking events as opposed to the intimate dinners favoured by their male counterparts. A lot of the networking the women surveyed did was in support of their organisation rather than in service of making or maintaining useful connections, which the men interviewed were much more comfortable with. The greatest difference emerging through the research was that women remained largely oblivious to the significance of developing and leveraging networks, and therefore were at a disadvantage.

Ely, Stone and Ammerman, (2014) researched Harvard Business School graduates, concluding that the aspirations of the men and women in their survey group barely differed by gender, and that the assumption that high potential women are "riskier" hires than their male peers, because they are likely to give up their career after having children, has become another bias that women must deal with. They discovered that the clear majority leave reluctantly and as a last resort, because they find themselves in unfulfilling roles with dim prospects for advancement. The message that they are no longer considered "players" is communicated in various, sometimes subtle ways: they may have been stigmatized for taking advantage of workplace flexibility or reduced schedules, passed over for high-profile assignments, or removed from projects they once led. One alumna, now in her late fifties, recalled: "I left my first job after being

‘mommy-tracked’ when I came back from maternity leave.” (Ely, Stone and Ammerman, 2014, p. 7)

Whilst academics continue to research this topic, recognising the complexity and seeking to understand the underlying issues, many consultancy firms have also been conducting their own investigations into this field. The result has been a plethora of advice for organisations seeking to make progress. KPMG/YSC/The 30% Club, (2014) sought to challenge conventional thinking as to what gets in the way by dispelling what they called the 10 myths (the received wisdom of the barriers to progression for women).

- Myth 1 – Women don’t aspire to senior leadership roles
- Myth 2 – Women don’t stick it out to make it to the very top
- Myth 3 – Childrearing stops women getting to the top
- Myth 4 – Women don’t get to the top because they lack confidence
- Myth 5 – Women lack the leadership qualities needed at the top
- Myth 6 – Women don’t have the networks that open doors to the top
- Myth 7 – Senior women leaders pull up the career ladder behind them
- Myth 8 – High potential programmes are fast-tracking women
- Myth 9 – Formal flexible working arrangements ease women’s route to the top
- Myth 10 – The business case for gender diversity is working.

The majority of these myths seemed to focus on the women themselves rather than the organisation. Many organisations had propagated their diversity strategies based on these assumptions and so the publication of this report represented the opportunity to reflect and challenge conventional thinking.

McKinsey and Lean-in, (2016) followed a study at 132 companies involving 34,000 employees discovering two main themes: that on average women are promoted at lower rates than men, and that at senior levels women tend to move from line (profit and loss accountability) roles to staff (support) roles while the percentage of men in line roles remains more or less the same. By the time women reach the Senior Vice President, they hold only 20 percent of line roles, which in turn limits their potential.

This creates a dearth of role models. The study points to several tangible explanations for this disparity, touching on lack of access to senior sponsors, fewer stretching opportunities and negative perceptions of ambitious women.

A report entitled “Spot the Difference”, (2017) investigated the similarities and differences between men and women in the workplace in terms of definitions of personal success and fulfilment, confidence in taking on new roles, motivators for career aspirations and reasons for leaving roles. The investigation concluded that the current approach to diversity in organisations was worthy of a refresh and rethink, and that there was evidence of fatigue in the system and arguably a danger of a backlash. The commercial nature of some of these publications should not be underestimated as the discovery of a magic formula could prove to be very lucrative, (however in my experience they are widely read in large organisations and do prick corporate consciences providing a call to arms, they are therefore included in this review).

This review of the literature relating to why the progression of women into senior executive positions is disappointingly slow reveals a range of findings, highlighting the complexity of the issue as identified by Kossek, Su and Wu, (2017). Whilst this investigation has proved inconclusive, much of the reviewed literature raises the question of the influence of the context in which women work. Therefore, this review will now explore the literature relating to the role of organisational culture on the progression of women, with a focus on the gendered organisation.

2.3 Gender and Organisations

As society has evolved and more women have joined the workforce, the concept of the gendered organisation and the implications for the advancement of women have been debated in the literature. Moss-Kanter, (1977) highlighted the paradox of organisations being perceived as gender neutral machines, while masculine principles are dominating authority structures. Acker, (1990) argues that the power in organisations is held mostly by men, and that those women who have progressed have adopted prevailing

male ways of operating to succeed. She argues that gender is deeply embedded in organisations and that unless we recognise this, we will not tackle the real issues and make progress. Acker, (1990, p.146) describes gendering as “meaning that advantage, disadvantage, exploitation and control, action, emotion, meaning and identity are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between masculine and feminine”. She goes on to analyse the five ways in which gendering manifests itself in the workplace. Hearn and Collinson, (1997, p. 212-3) explored what they claim are the four main conceptual and theoretical ways of linking ‘men’ and ‘masculinities’ to debates on ‘managerial and organisational culture’ They point to it being taken for granted that managerial and organisational cultures being male, the explicit domination of particular managerial and organisational cultures by men, the significance of men in the construction of subtexts of managerial and organisational culture, and the positioning of culture as a feminine construct and marginal, thus subtly perpetuating a gendered environment. Connell, (2005) explores the concept of hegemonic masculinity – a definition of masculinity that prevails and perhaps excludes all those that don’t conform to the stereotype. The caricature hegemonic masculinity may be described as the alpha male – white, sporty, academically gifted, technically skilled, assertive and dominating over women, cool calm and has multiple children to prove his potency, likes to dominate other types of masculinity and shows up often and succeeds in large corporate environments.

Some of these cultural themes appear to resonate more recently. For example, Business in the Community/PWC, (2015) argue that workplaces are still reflections of male culture and needs, and that this needs to shift rather than focus on fixing the women. According to Burke and Vinnicombe, (2013, p.28) “Men in management will need to change their behaviour if women are to be represented at executive levels”. Ibarra, Ely and Kolb (2013, p.6) suggest that there is a double bind for women in that the ideal leader is expected to exhibit male behaviours but that women are still expected to be “nice, caretaking and unselfish”. The implications of this, they argue are that women either are too conventionally feminine and therefore deemed not up to the job or, by displaying male behaviours, risk being judged as competent but

unlikeable. Similarly, Schuh (2014, p. 366) distinguishes between the “agentic” attributes mostly associated with men and “communal” attributes that are associated with women and describes how role incongruent behaviour can lead to social sanctions. Sheridan, (2012) argues that stereotyping is still a major factor for women leaders, including what she calls “sex of voice” (i.e. the tone of the female voice), which she describes as a primal trigger that activates prejudice against women leaders.

Arguably this conflation of masculinity and competence creates a barrier for women’s progression, which leads one to inquire if it is possible to shift these perceptions. Western society appears to be evolving, whereas large corporates seem to find it more difficult to let go of gender stereotypes. For example, Ely and Meyerson’s, (2010, p.5) case study of off shore oil platforms poses the question “how does an organisation equip men to undo gender?” They argue that it is possible to disrupt the gender status quo through practices that encourage men to let go of conventional masculine scripts through creating the right conditions. In this instance, the shift occurred because of a focus on improving safety performance in a high hazard environment during which it was highlighted that macho behaviour was unsafe and therefore unacceptable. In essence the men were released of the requirement to be “manly” in a good cause. They conclude that if gender can be undone in such a masculine setting, it should be possible anywhere. It appears that a clear incentive was present in this example that is arguably absent in the day to day running of businesses. Despite the prevalence of “business case for diversity” messages, the slow rate of change indicates these are not resonating meaningfully within some organisations.

Arguably it is time for organisations to evolve from assimilation of masculinity towards being gender agnostic and thereby creating a level playing field that enables women to thrive.

The inaugural publication of the UK Gender Pay Gap, (2018) has created heightened interest in the structure and culture of organisations. This inaugural report revealed that more than three out of four in-scope UK organisations (those with more than 250 employees) pay their male staff more on average than their female staff, that more

than half give higher bonuses to men, on average, than women, and over 80% have more women in their lowest paid positions than in their highest paid positions. One of the explanations offered for this disparity was that there are fewer women in senior roles, thus skewing the data. The ensuing debate provoked open public dialogue about how organisations continue to operate and what is needed to bring about material change. In response to this discussion, The Government Equalities Office, (2018) published a summary of research aimed at reducing the gender pay gap and improving equality in organisations and makes some recommendations for both systemic and cultural interventions, whilst referencing well-subscribed activity that has had limited success.

I have reviewed the literature pertaining to the status of women in senior executive positions, which indicates that progress is slow. I have then explored women's career challenges, including the gendered nature of organisations and the research on second generation bias, noting the emerging dilemma of whether women or the organisations they work in need to change. I have concluded with a reflection of the heightened profile of the challenge and the opportunity for business engagement. This provides a pertinent backdrop from which to explore the literature relating to the role of coaching and mentoring in tackling these barriers including their impact as progressive tools for creating leadership parity.

2.4 The Role of Coaching and Mentoring in large multinational organisations

Coaching and Mentoring are deployed extensively within large international businesses in multiple ways, from expensive one-to-one executive coaching to self-starting, team-facilitated mentoring circles. According to the latest ICF figures (ICF, 2016)\$2.365BN is spent on coaching annually. The international element creates cultural complexity for most employees which is accentuated by the needs of expatriates for whom coaching, and mentoring are often deployed to support. It is frequently a requirement for talent be moved overseas, in fact the international

assignment is often seen as a career accelerator (Bolino, 2007). Garvey, Stokes and Megginson (2019) highlight the issue of cultural crossvergence or divergence as a consequence of globalisation and how coaching and mentoring approaches can contribute to exporting a dominant organisational culture. Clutterbuck (2007, p. 634) highlights the importance of internal mentors in “adapting to geocultural factors” and the challenges associated with both the “culturally adaptable” and the “thousand fires approach” in relation to the level of centralised design and control of mentoring programmes in large international companies.

Specifically coaching and mentoring have both been positioned and deployed as tools to support women’s development in the workplace. However, given that my review of academic and commercial literature reveals representation at senior levels for women remains low, it seems reasonable to explore their effectiveness in this regard.

According to the CIPD, (2018), coaching and mentoring are development techniques based on the use of one-to-one discussions to enhance an individual’s skills, knowledge or work performance. It’s possible to draw distinctions between coaching and mentoring, although in practice the two terms are often used interchangeably. I will position both techniques below in the context of women’s career equality.

Coaching has been presented as a useful mechanism for supporting the progression of women’s careers, and it is deployed regularly within organisations as part of diversity strategies. It therefore seems relevant to review the literature in relation to its effectiveness. Arguably its deployment has been focussed on providing support and coping mechanisms rather than acting as a culturally transformational tool. (Wallace, 2008); (De-Valle, 2014); (Leimon *et al* , 2011); (Wittenberg-Cox, 2013). For example, Worth, (2012) examined the role coaching can have in supporting women’s congruence in senior roles and identified five emerging themes (environment, masks, visibility, voice and self) that women found challenging and that coaching could support. De-Valle, (2014) examined the impact that coaching can have across different career stages for women discovering that the women in her research had needed to adapt

their style and fit in to the organisation in order to succeed and that coaching had been a helpful coping mechanism in their career journeys. Vinnicombe, Moore and Anderson (2013, p. 413) describe the importance of coaching in developing leadership self-efficacy as part of a women only leadership development programme, arguing that coaching provides “invaluable psychological support” for women. Leimon, Moscovici and Goodier, (2011) raised the question of whether it is most effective to coach women to fit in or to work with them to be authentic and successful in their own way? Their research concluded that, whilst organisations remain designed and run by men, coaching was an important mechanism for supporting women develop confidence and navigate their way through complex career and life changes. They observed that this was a global challenge but that coaches needed to adapt to take cultural contexts into consideration. Ely, Ibarra and Kolb, (2011) describe using coaching as a supportive mechanism for women when receiving 360 feedback. Male bosses were described as reticent to provide constructive feedback to women for fear of upsetting them, and this combination of 360 and coaching was valuable for women, enabling them to see how they were perceived and then plan strategies for responding.

Mentoring programmes are popular means in organisations to create motivation and support career progression (Ragins and Kram, 2007), particularly for diverse groups (abundant in large multinationals) that may not have easy access to powerful informal networks. Bushell, (2015) and Gibson, (2004) suggest that a mentor is helpful to give women feelings of self-worth and enable them to feel less isolated. Mentoring has been described as a method of helping women to shatter the glass ceiling (Merrick and Stokes, 2008).

There is a view however that mentoring, in its traditional form, could be part of the problem. McKeen and Bujaki, (2007, p.218) conclude that formal mentoring ‘seems intended to assimilate women into the dominant masculine corporate culture’. Meanwhile, informal mentoring and networking, which are shaped by the masculine nature of the hierarchy continue to reinforce male advantage. De-Valle, (2014, p.173) observed that “although the women value and personally gain a lot from the “insider” support of a mentor, it could be the case that mentoring women in the early stages of

their career may ultimately be perpetuating the gender inequality it seeks to address.” Kossek et al, (2017) suggest that women-focussed mentoring can create the impression that women need more career help than men, perpetuating the stereotype that they are not up to senior management. Ely and Meyerson, (2000, p.104) argue that traditional mentoring models perpetuate “deeply entrenched divisions and disparities between men and women; often in subtle and insidious ways”. Ragins and Verbos, (2007, p.95) describe the Godfather approach in which “a patriarchal mentor doles out favours, protects the protégé and expects allegiance in return for these favours”. Traditional mentoring typically involves a hierarchical relationship in which a senior leader mentors a more junior person (Harvey *et al*, 2009), while reverse mentoring inverts the hierarchy, providing a mechanism for the transfer of technology skills and knowledge from Millennials to senior management. Reciprocal mentoring involves “two-way dyadic pairings for the sharing and creation of knowledge in the organisation” (Harvey *et al*, 2009, p. 1352). The focus aims to create a developmental relationship that involves mutual learning and social exchange. Reciprocal mentoring provides the opportunity for the exchange of perspectives and the creation of understanding between those in power and that remaining dependant on patronage, in effect creating a co-learning experience (Chandler and Kram , 2005). The reciprocal nature is designed to create a non-hierarchical dynamic between pairings to enable an open dialogue. This concept arguably creates an opportunity for organisations to gain understanding of the reality women are experiencing in their day to day working lives and to open a productive debate between genders. Merrick and Stokes (2008) reference the concept of a mentee challenging a mentor’s mindset and creating learning for their organisation. De Vries, Webb and Eveline, (2006, p.580) discovered the impact of traditional mentoring on mentors rather than mentees. Their work revealed the unexpected consequences of mentoring on men, when 6 out of 7 male mentors of women articulated “greater awareness and understanding of the barriers” and recognised “it’s been tough going for women”. Catalyst, (2009) argues that male supporters of gender diversity typically have a personal perspective through wives and daughters, and those without that perspective often don’t realise there is a problem for women.

Whilst I have not been able to find any specific academic studies on reciprocal mentoring between men and women, Brook and Graham, (2012), describe the objectives and benefits for mentors and for the organisation emerging from a reciprocal mentoring programme they ran with Sodexo. This whilst highlighting some promising outcomes, it did not include the detailed analysis of the experience for the participants or attempt to quantify any shift in understanding. My research is focused on the potential for shared understanding between mentors.

2.5 Summary

The literature I have reviewed maintains that progress in relation to the advancement of women into senior executive positions remains slow, despite significant efforts to highlight this shortfall and clarify the expectations on organisations. The literature reveals multiple perspectives on why this is the case, but does not coalesce around a singular solution, suggesting that this is a multi-layered and complex issue. I have summarised some of these hypotheses, many of which are interlinked and build on each other. Through the literature emerges a question of where change should happen; at an organisational level or from individual women. I have then conducted an exploration of the literature relating to the role of coaching and mentoring women which suggests that these tools have been deployed most often as mechanisms for helping women to integrate rather than as progressively. Mentoring, according to the literature does appear to be evolving from its traditional roots and is being deployed in a variety of new ways. Reverse and reciprocal mentoring aim to utilise the power of dialogue to share knowledge and experiences without the usual hierarchical constraints. Arguably in the case of reciprocal mentoring creating the environment for a mutual exchange of perspective. My investigation will seek to explore how participation in reciprocal mentoring between men and women could create shared understanding and recognition of the challenges facing women's career equality within a traditional engineering based multinational. Figure 2.2 below summarises the conceptual framework for my research based on my review of the literature. A point to note is that the depicted causal relationship between shared understanding and enhanced women's career equality is an informed assumption for the purposes of my research.

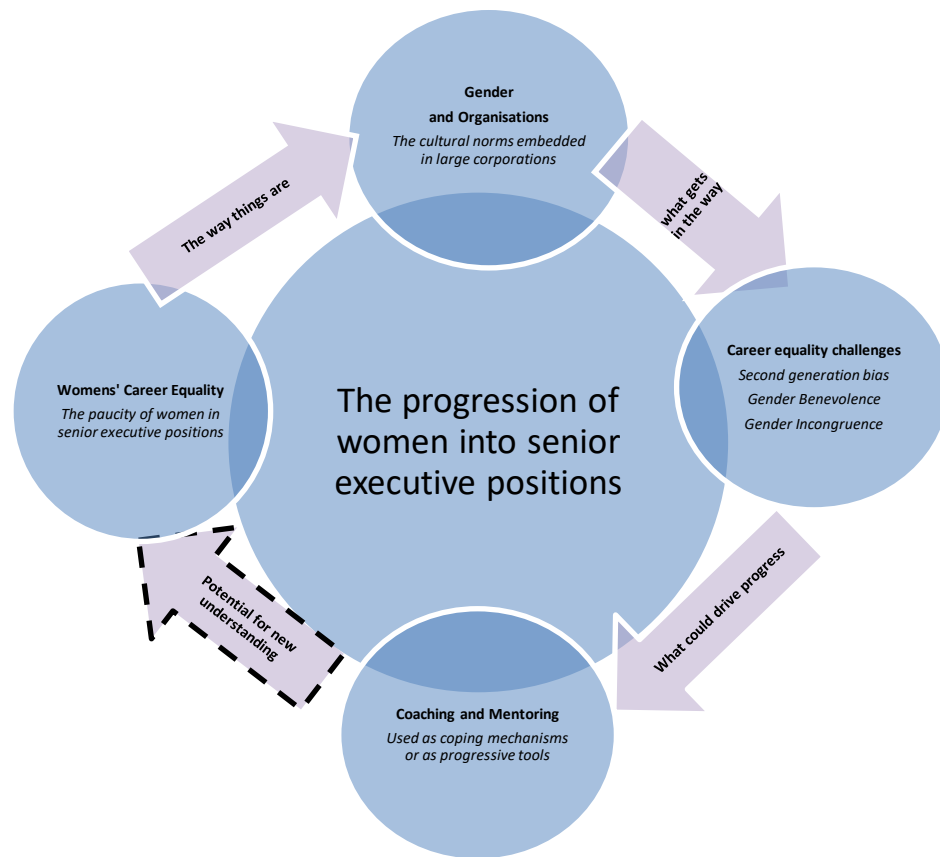


Figure 2.2 *Conceptual framework*

----- = informed causal assumption

Chapter 3

Methodology

The aim of this study is to explore the role of reciprocal mentoring in enhancing shared understanding of women's career equality within a traditional engineering multinational. This chapter describes how the research was designed and conducted. The theoretical perspective and methodological approach are articulated in relation to the research question. The chapter then moves on to explain the participants' recruitment strategy, the rationale for the data collection and the analysis model utilised. This is followed by a discussion of validity, reflexivity and ethical issues including the challenges of being an insider researcher and the criteria of quality.

3.1 Theoretical Perspective

According to "The way we think about the world (ontology), influences: what we think can be known about it (epistemology); and how we think it can be investigated (methodology and research techniques)". In other words, how we think about what we know influences how we go about discovering new knowledge. As a social constructionist I believe that our experiences create our perspectives. Burr's, (2015, p.5) observation that "the goings on between people in the course of their everyday lives are seen as the practices during which our shared versions of knowledge are constructed" resonates with me. In the context of my study the paucity of women at senior levels within the organisation is I believe influenced by the perspectives held within a strong organisational culture.

Similarly, Crotty, (1998, p.42) asserts that "all knowledge and meaningful reality as such is contingent upon human practices being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context."

I believe discourse with a dialogic mindset (Lawrence et al, 2019) between individuals opens minds. My views have often been shaped by listening to and understanding how others experience the world. Whilst working in the retail industry I found that the time spent out of Head Office working alongside store staff offered invaluable insight into what was really needed to upskill staff. Similarly, a recent trip out to a gas pipeline in Azerbaijan enabled me to understand the world from the perspective of a field technician and adjust my plans based on their “reality” rather than on my assumptions.

According to Burr, (2015, p.3) “social constructionism cautions us to be ever suspicious of our assumptions about how the world appears to be” which I interpret as meaning there is always new information that could change your perspective.

My research aims to explore how the experience of participating in Reciprocal Mentoring (exchanging in dialogue and standing in each other’s shoes) influences understanding and perspectives of the world surrounding career equality between men and women, within a specific organisational context. The current context, in my view, is a result of both societal and the organisational perspectives in relation to the role and aspirations of women.

I am using qualitative research as I am interested in “meaning making”. According to Braun and Clarke, (2013, p. 20) qualitative research “records the messiness of real life, puts an organising framework around it, and interprets it in some way”.

3.2 Research Design

This qualitative research was undertaken using a case study approach. I had considered other methods for example grounded theory, which was rejected because of the difference to the main intention of my project. I was aiming to understand what emerged from the perspective of each of the mentors as individuals within a specific context (the case study organisation) and how the experience of participating as reciprocal mentors had influenced their view of the world. I was not aiming to build a

theory through reaching saturation or arriving at a cause-effect explanation of the participants' experiences. At this stage it was important to understand what was happening during reciprocal mentoring and if a shared understanding in matched pairs was possible within this specific context. Similarly, phenomenology was not the right fit, as the focus for this research was on shared understanding of career equality not inherently on the experience of reciprocal mentoring and how that made the participants feel.

Yin (2012, p.5) articulates three situations in which a case study is an appropriate research method: Firstly, when research addresses a descriptive (what has happened or is happening) or exploratory (how or why something happened) question; secondly, when studying "a phenomenon within its real-world context" and thirdly, in conducting evaluations, all of these situations apply in this instance.

According to Willig, (2008), a case study is not strictly a research method; it is a flexible approach that can be deployed using a range of methods of data collection and analysis, with the focus being on the subject of the analysis described, i.e. the case. Yin, (2012, p.5) highlights the importance of studying "a phenomenon within its real-world context". According to Stake, (1995, p.16) we study a case to "appreciate the uniqueness and complexity of its embeddedness and interaction with its context". The case itself can take many forms, from an individual to a nation state, though despite that flexibility of scope, Willig, (2013, p.101) identifies five defining features that should be present in any case study. The table below is built on her recommendations, highlighting how this research specifically meets these criteria and is therefore appropriate for a case study.

Recommendation	This case Study
Researchers should be concerned with the particular rather than the general; the aim is to understand an individual case	I am exploring the role of reciprocal mentoring in developing shared understanding of women's career equality issues in a specific organisation over a defined period.
Researchers should pay attention to contextual data for example how does the case interact with its environment	This research is situated in a traditional engineering multinational which has diversity challenges. There are many long-serving employees, turnover is very low, and the majority of senior roles are held by men. There is evidence of fatigue in relation to diversity initiatives. The role of this context is fundamental in the introduction of reciprocal mentoring.
Case studies should integrate information from diverse sources to gain an in depth understanding from multiple perspectives	I have used literature from multiple sources to gain a diverse perspective on the issue of female progression, career equality and the role of coaching and mentoring. I have also incorporated evidence from internal gender reporting statistics, the reciprocal mentoring participants are from diverse backgrounds and are spread globally across the organisation. I have also incorporated the perspectives of a subsection of the HR team from a range of disciplines via a focus group. This will help provide a baseline of the cultural context in which the case study takes place.
Case Studies are temporal, they research occurrences over a period to define any change and development	I have taken a before and after approach to data collection, looking at the role of reciprocal mentoring over a six-month period and at whether there is any influence on the shared understanding of career equality between participants.
Case Studies facilitate theory generation through the generation of insights into social or psychological processes.	Through data collection and thematic analysis, insights will be generated on how participating in a reciprocal mentoring programme influences understanding of career equality within the case study organisation.

Table 3.1: features of this case study adapted from Willig, (2013, p.101)

I am defining this case as a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2013). In this instance, the bounded context is the organisation, which is a traditional global multinational engineering company, operated around regional, technical and functional dimensions, which at its core has a deep Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) bias in terms of valued expertise. My unit of analysis is the reciprocal mentoring scheme, which is designed to create an open and safe space for dialogue between two individuals who are positioned as equal partners for the mentoring sessions. In line with my social

constructionist paradigm, I want to gain insight into the evolving understanding of the individuals involved. This research aims to explore what new understanding, if any, emerges through this process.

3.3 Selection of Research Participants.

There are two distinct participant groups included in this research:

1. Members of the HR team

In advance of interviewing the reciprocal mentoring participants, I explored the cultural context of the case study organisation, using a focus group of HR professionals. These individuals have an informed perspective on the culture based on their own experiences and the interactions they observe. They come from across the HR function within the case study organisation, and were from multiple HR disciplines (Resourcing, Learning etc) and segments e.g. Upstream and Downstream. They have a very broad view working right across the organisation and are often present in the behind the scenes dialogue giving them valuable insight

FG1	Diversity and Inclusion	Senior male
FG2	Resourcing	Junior male
FG3	Diversity and Inclusion	Junior female
FG4	Talent and Learning	Senior male
FG5	Talent and Learning	Middle management female
FG6	HR Business Partner	Middle management female
FG7	HR Business Partner	Junior female
FG8	Talent and Learning	Middle management male
FG9	Talent and Learning	Senior male

Table 3.2: Focus Group Participants

2. Reciprocal Mentoring case study participants

- Female Mentors who are all in middle management roles within the organisation and all participating in a reciprocal mentoring programme, they are aged between 30 and 45, and occupy a variety of roles across support functions and technical disciplines.

- Male Mentors who are in senior management roles (VP and above) and all participating in the same reciprocal mentoring programme. They are aged between 40 and 55 and typically occupy a head of function role.

The pairings were set up through the reciprocal mentoring programme management team using the criteria designed to create dyads without existing relationships (which resulted in pairings generally across segments) and within manageable time zones.

All potential mentor participants in the research were sent an email inviting them to be part of the research, (Appendix 3). This gave them a clear overview of the research project and outlined the process involved should they agree to take part. Figure 3.3 below summarises those who agreed to be research participants. I needed to complete the interviews before the programme started and so I had limited time for recruitment of research participants. I achieved a total of 18 which according to Braun and Clarke (2013) is a suitable sample size for meaningful Thematic Analysis. The breadth of their geographical and technical disciplines provided diverse organisational representation.

Mentor	Comments	Mentor	Comments
FM1	Department Head, Age 40-45	MM1	Head of Function, Age 50 -55
FM2	Senior Manager, Age 40-45	MM2	Head of Function, Age 50-55
FM3	Senior Manager, Age 35-40	MM3	Head of Function, Age 45-50
FM4	Senior Manager, Age 35-40	MM4	Head of Function, Age 45-50
FM5	Senior Manager, Age 35-40	MM5	Business Leader, Age 45-50
FM6	Senior Manager, Age 35-40	MM6	Business Leader, Age 45-50
FM7	Senior Manager. Age 35-40	MM7	Segment Leader, Age 50-55
FM8	Senior Manager, Age 40-45,	MM8	Business Leader, Age 45-50,
FM9	Department Head, Age 35-40	MM9	Segment Leader, Age 45-50

Table 3.3: Mentor Research Participants (all participants were mentors there were no mentees):

3.4 Data collection methods

According to Braun and Clarke, (2013 p,3.) the most basic definition of qualitative research is that “it uses words as data collected and analysed.” They go on to explain that it “seeks to understand and interpret local meanings; recognises data as gathered in context”. This logic resonated with what I was trying to achieve through my data collection. I used separate methods of data collection for the two groups. I moderated a focus group for the HR cohort and used semi-structured interviews for the reciprocal mentors both before and after the programme. In approaching the data collection in this way, I sought to gain insight how the HR team were experiencing the organisational culture as observers in the machine as well as receivers of it. This provided a baseline and context for my semi structured interviews with the mentors participating in the reciprocal mentoring programme and helped to inform the questions I used before the programme started. The Focus Group method enable me to capture a broad perspective at a moment in time. The interaction between the group anchored the dialogue in culture, though personal reflection also emerged. The focus group members were not participating in the programme and therefore a single interaction delivered that benchmark. The mentors were undergoing a personal experience and so a more in depth, 121 pre and post approach was required.

I also reviewed the documentation supporting the launch of the programme which prepared participants and positioned reciprocal mentoring. All these sources of data were then subject to thematic analysis, as explained below.

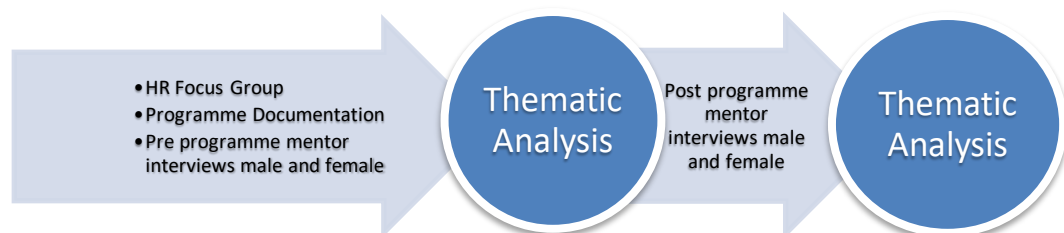


Figure 3.1: Data collection and analysis flow

1. Focus Group with members of the case study HR team

The focus group was relatively straightforward to set up. The participants were invited to join by email (appendix 3) and then those who agreed to take part were brought together for a 90-minute session, there was a blend of face to face participants and a small group on skype. I took the role of moderator, and the conversation was recorded with everyone's permission. According to Krueger and Casey, (2015, p 4), "focus groups work when participants feel comfortable, respected and free to give their opinions without being judged", and Willig, (2013) points out the importance of the setting of ground rules. Accordingly, I was careful with the positioning, setting the tone and ensuring confidentiality. I was thoughtful about my role as moderator, ensuring that I created the space for all voices to be heard whilst letting the conversation flow, appropriately drawing the participants on skype into the conversation. As highlighted by Braun and Clarke, (2013, p. 103), "a lack of visual clues" makes it more challenging to gauge engagement of participants. As my research has a social constructionist aim, "to trace the ways meaning is made within a group and how consensus may be achieved through discussion" running a focus group created an opportunity to gather some important data on the organisation.

Krueger and Casey, (2015) highlight some of the limitations of focus groups, which I was mindful of as set off on this path. In table 3. 4 below I reflect on my experience in relation to these challenges.

Possible Limitation	This focus group
Focus Groups participants tend to intellectualise	The discussion was very quickly very practical and real examples were used to illustrate perspectives. I observed individuals describing an organisational behaviour, practice or cultural habit and then reflecting on how it related to their own circumstances.
Focus Groups don't tap into emotions-	There was emotion expressed by both men and women in relation to personal frustration, a sense of helplessness and professional guilt.

Focus Group participants may make up answers	There was some predictable dialogue at the start, but the group soon warmed up to authentic dialogue, reflected and pushed itself forward. I felt a sense of professional responsibility displayed by the participants to take this seriously and explore what could really make a difference.
Focus Groups produce trivial results	The discussion was taken seriously and whilst familiar ground was covered, there were a couple of significance breakthrough ideas that emerged
Dominant Individuals can influence results	The group was very balanced and listened well to each other (calm debate is an organisational norm) The boundaries were stretched by a couple of individuals who encouraged others to also be open, which made the conversation more meaningful.
You can't depend on the results of focus groups	I wasn't looking for a definitive result but a different perspective, so this was not an issue.
Employees from within the same organisation think in a homogeneous way	Though from the same organisation, the group was multi-disciplinary and from across segments and converged on some issues and diverged on others.
An internal moderator is not objective	I took this role very seriously and tried very hard not to react, reinforce or encourage, being aware of my obligation to be the voice of the participants.

Table 3.4: Focus Group Limitation Matrix adapted from Krueger and Casey, (2015, p. 14- 223)

2. Mentoring programme documentation

All participants in the reciprocal mentoring programme across the organisation were sent guidelines in advance of their first mentoring session as well as a mentoring agreement plus a document entitled “making reciprocal mentoring work” as illustrated in appendix 1 and 2. I reviewed these documents to understand how the programme had been positioned, the expectations that were set for those participating, and the impact these factors could have on the way they were approaching the relationship. My observations in relation to these documents and their possible influence on the reciprocal mentors are summarised in table 3.5 below:

Observation	Possible Impact
The reciprocal mentoring programme is positioned in a positive light	This could encourage a predisposition to participate and create learning expectations
Gives a strong steer on possible outcomes	Narrows the focus of the conversation
Instructions laid out on gender lines	This could limit the reciprocal feel
Provides a structure for the programme	Creates the impression that this is well thought through
Provides boundaries of engagement	Creates a safe space
Mentoring agreement formalises relationship	Creates commitment and accountability
Provides a menu of suggested topics	Whilst arguably a helpful framework in the organisational culture this could stifle a free-flowing conversation
Provides guidance on behaviours	Intends to support maximising the value of the experience, through approaching this relationship in a specific way
Positions the male mentors as giving advice	Creates a traditional dynamic as the starting point

Table 3.5: observations in relation to reciprocal mentoring programme documentation

3. Semi-Structured Interviews with Mentors

I used semi-structured interviews to collect data from the reciprocal mentors who had agreed to participate in the research. According to Thomas, (2009) semi structured interviews offer the “best of both worlds - in other words freedom within a framework. Taking that into consideration, I decided to focus at a high-level. I converged on four open questions, (table 3.6) which I used consistently as the framework from which I probed as the conversation evolved. These questions were a guide, “not a recipe to be followed to the last gram” (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 95) I also wanted to create space for the interviewees to form their thoughts as the interview progressed, rather than rush them through a process.

The initial interviews were conducted at the beginning of the reciprocal mentoring programme, before any dialogue between the pairings had taken place. The objective at this stage was to gauge perspective in advance of the mentoring programme.

I had originally planned to record the interviews, but the HR Director was uncomfortable with this strategy and verbally requested that I use a notetaker instead. I identified a notetaker from within the HR team who agreed to accompany me to all the interviews and with whom I had an agreement that all data would be kept confidential and password protected. The issue of not being able to record the first interviews created some limitations, (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 92); Willig, (2013, p52.) as I was not able to revisit the conversation in its entirety, including pauses and shifts in tone of voice.

I completed a full briefing at the start of the interview explaining my role as a researcher and introducing the notetaker. I confirmed that our conversation was confidential, meaning that their comments, which were recorded verbatim on a laptop, would be anonymous. I touched briefly on the purpose of the mentoring programme to set the scene, and then talked through how the interviews would be conducted. I explained that after the interview, I would be analysing their responses alongside those of all the other participants to identify any themes, I also noted that I intended to repeat this process at the end of the mentoring programme.

Most of the interviews were held face to face, though some, due to the geographical constraints of the participants who were based in the US and Far East were conducted over Skype. Whilst I believe face to face is optimal in order to gauge body language, I have become adept at listening intently over skype, and find it an effective way of connecting. Virtual interviews are now much more commonplace and seen as on a par with face to face interviews (Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004). The technology has significantly improved, and it is now possible to use a camera which I was able to in some instances. The presence of a notetaker enabled me to concentrate on building rapport with the interviewee, asking the questions, focusing on their responses, and pinpointing where it felt appropriate to probe. I found that some of the richest insights came towards the end of the session as both I and the interviewee relaxed into the

subject matter, and they gained confidence in their perspective and safe in the interview. The time available with the participants was limited and subject to change, particularly with the senior male mentors. Nevertheless, as we were approaching this research from a before and after perspective, we managed to complete the first interviews before the mentoring programme started.

Interview Questions		Purpose
1.	What does it take to get on around here?	To get their view of the organisational culture. To hear some of their personal experiences and what they viewed as the mechanisms and criteria for progression within the case study organisation
2.	Why are there so few female Group Leaders? (the most senior roles in the organisation)	To explore their perspective in response to the data regarding women in senior roles, and to explore their rationale for this reality. To hear from them what they thought was preventing the progression of women
3.	Do you think men and women are equally ambitious?	To canvass views as to how men and women hold their relationships with achievement and ambition, as seen from both a male and female perspective
4.	Is there anything you think women could do differently to help themselves more?	To open an opportunity to delve into specific examples of the way women interact with the organisation and to establish whether the mentors thought that women created barriers for progression themselves

Table 3.6: *Interview questions and their purpose.*

I used the same questions for both groups of mentors, but I adopted Braun and Clarke's, (2013, p.95) recommendation that "the ordering of questions should be responsive to the participants' developing account." Throughout the interviews I concentrated on remaining open, non-judgemental and objective, which I found

challenging at times, I am very aware that I have more natural affinity with the women, and I had to work hard not to empathetically nod and encourage a response.

The issue of the insider researcher will be reflected on later in this chapter. However, one of the limitations of the data collection is that the person conducting the interviews (me) could be viewed by participants with caution, due to my position in the organisation. This issue of power relations was highlighted by Mercer, (2007). I did notice some hesitation at the beginning of the interview. However, without exception as the interview progressed the interviewees relaxed, and the conversation flowed much more freely. All of the participants were from the same organisation and therefore have a shared context. There were arguably some shared organisational “truths” at play; some of the ways that diversity is explained and rationalised within the business played out in the opening stages of the interview. However, as everyone relaxed some more personal perspectives emerged.

4. Post programme Interviews with Mentors

Waiting for the reciprocal mentoring programmes to complete created some anxiety for me, as whilst the pairings had set out with the objective of completing in six months some had found this an unrealistic timeframe and they extended to nine months. This and the challenge of scheduling the follow- up interviews, impacted my ability to complete my research within the time period I had set myself. I reflected on how to frame the interviews and settled on the following 3 questions (table 3.7) in order to tease out what, if any, shift in understanding had occurred as a result of the reciprocal mentoring programme:

Interview Questions		Purpose
1.	What do you regard as the your top 3 'takeaways' from this programme? What have you learned, experienced or understood that is important to you as a result of working with your partner on this programme?	To hear from the participants about their experience: how it felt to be in this relationship, what new, if any, understanding have they gained, whether they see things differently and whether any of their views have changed. Has anything that had occurred been significant and mattered to them?
2.	What actions or changes in behaviour have you initiated as a result of this programme?	To understand the depth of learning that has taken place i.e. has this been translated into any tangible actions.
3.	Have you identified any issues, opportunities or potential areas for action for the case study organisation in terms of its talent development, career progression or diversity agendas?	To capture any learnings that could be scalable for this or other organisations and to explore any potential learning that could be applicable in a wider context.

Table 3.7: *post programme interview questions and their purpose.*

The interviews followed a similar format to the pre-programme sessions, in that the majority were face to face and a few were on skype, I conducted a briefing at the beginning of the interview, thanking them for their participation and reinforcing the commitment to confidentiality. In general, the interviews were more relaxed and flowed easily, most of the participants seemed eager to talk about their experiences.

3.5 Data analysis

Yin, (2012, p.15) highlights "the absence of any cookbook for analysing case study evidence." This created the option for me to choose which analysis method felt most appropriate in the context of this research. I elected to adopt one of the pattern-based analytical methods- Thematic Analysis, which, according to Braun and Clarke, (2006) is an important method for qualitative analysis and deserves a higher profile as a method of analysing data to create themes and meaning. Willig, (2013, p. 57) describes it as "a method for recognising and organising patterns in content and meaning in qualitative data". Thematic Analysis has also been criticised as a research method due to its

flexibility, and the perceived lack of an underpinning theory. It is important that I reflect on how this method of analysis is aligned to my theoretical perspective. According to Braun and Clarke, (2013, p.81). Thematic Analysis supports the social constructionist perspective as it “examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses within society” In the context of this research, the society in question is the organisation, and the practice of discourse is embedded in the reciprocal mentoring programme through mutual dialogue, the effects of which I am aiming to understand through thematic analysis of the semi structured interviews and the focus group. Table 3.8 below summarises my judgement in relation to using Thematic Analysis.

Strengths	Weaknesses	Impact on this Research
Flexibility to be used across multiple data points.	Can be perceived as lacking the substance and depth of other approaches e.g. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.	I was able to use this across both interviews and the focus group.
Accessible to new researcher.	Has limited interpretative power if not used within a theoretical framework.	Has been positioned in the social constructionist framework, in the context of meaning making.
Easy to perform, low labour intensity.	Lack of concrete guidance.	Low level of intervention in the organisational system.
The results can be accessible to a wide audience.	Because of the focus on patterns across data sets the voices of the individual participants can get lost when working with larger data sets.	The data set in this case is not large; however, I was mindful of overgeneralising and ensuring an authentic representation of participants views.

Table 3.8: Evaluation of strengths and weakness of Thematic Analysis adapted from Braun and Clarke (2013, p. 180)

Having decided on my method of analysis, I spent several weeks immersed in the data. The interviews and the focus groups produced hundreds of pages of data which I began to summarise and organise using colour coded post- it notes.

Whilst completing the process, I followed the guidance on the weight or emphasis to attribute to comments given by Krueger and Casey, (2015, p.154) who advise researchers to consider:

1. *Frequency* – It is easy to assume that the amount of times something is said represents a level of significance. However, this may not be the case particularly in a group that is used to a consensual environment. It is therefore important to pay close attention to the standout comments that offer the key insights.
2. *Specificity* - Give emphasis to comments that are very specific rather than general observations, these specific comments provide rich data.
3. *Emotion* - Can bring to light the depth of feeling and significance attached to a comment.
4. *Extensiveness* - This relates to how widely a perspective or issue is spread across the participants.

I then followed the steps of thematic analysis as recommended by Braun and Clarke, (2006, p. 87) as laid out in Table 3.9 below:

Phase	Description of process	Application in this study
1. Familiarising yourself with your data.	Transcribing the data (if necessary) reading and rereading the data and noting down initial ideas.	Reading and re-reading through the verbatim notes from the interviews and focus group, firstly without a process in mind. I did this in order to immerse myself in the data and absorb the tone and spirit of the dialogue. During a second read through I started to highlight key words and phrases and then I read all the notes for a third time breaking down initial observations and reflections under the headings of the four questions, using different coloured sets of post-it notes to differentiate between the questions. Throughout this process I reflected on the conversations and how they had felt at the time. Whilst the identity of the individuals participating remains confidential, my knowledge of them enabled me to recall some of the emotion expressed in response to some of the questions, and to use this as an additional lens.
2. Generating initial codes.	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.	I searched for repeated words or phrases and in some cases the interpretation of words and began to create codes of what appeared interesting. I reflected on what was said and any associated meaning that emerged. In addition, it seemed appropriate to explore commonality, firstly amongst the participating women and secondly amongst the participating men noting what, if anything, flowed across genders and the focus group. I then created some initial codes (interesting features of the data). This was a slow and painstaking process which I found very thought provoking and helpful; it felt like mind mapping; the combination of working systematically through the data and giving each item equal attention. Being conscious and careful not to skim over comments and ensure that I absorbed the full richness was challenging. Whilst I was organising and coding the data, I wanted to minimise the loss of context (Bryman, 2001).

3. Searching for themes.	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each individual theme.	I then looked across all the codes to identify any emerging themes. I created theme maps and moved codes between them, with the aim of capturing anything important in relation to the overall research question.
4. Reviewing themes.	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (level 1) and the entire data set (level 2) generating a thematic of the analysis.	I then identified themes and assessed which had enough data to justify being a theme. This led to some refinement of themes. During this phase, whilst the initial codes had created the foundations for themes, I re-read the transcripts and reflected again on the tone of the conversations to ensure I incorporated anything that may have got lost in the process.
5. Defining and naming themes.	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each them, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.	I then interrogated each draft theme to ensure I had extracted the meaning within it. Having satisfied myself that I had found the essence of each theme I was able to name them. According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p.82) “a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set.”
6. Producing the report.	Selecting compelling extract examples relating the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.	Telling the story of my research, bringing it all together using analysis of the themes as the architecture.

Table 3.9: The Phases of Thematic Analysis applied to this case study augmented from Braun and Clarke, (2006, p. 87)

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The research was approved by the Oxford Brookes Ethics Committee (UREC) which required me to follow the processes that I had laid out in my application. The process particularly highlighted the importance of ensuring that all participants were protected from harm throughout the research. All procedural ethics were observed, the approved consent forms and participant information sheets (appendices 4 -8) were used, and all data was anonymised, password-protected and locked away to maintain confidentiality. I also had approval from the case study organisation to complete the research (appendices 5 and 6). I felt great responsibility to honour the commitment shown by those willing to take part and protect their identities. It was made very clear to participants that there was no obligation to participate in the research, and that they could opt out at any point and that support was provided for them in the event of any concerns through the provision of a named independent individual to contact in the event of any concerns.

In addition to the obligation to follow the approved procedures, there were two other ethical considerations that weighed on me throughout this research. Firstly, it was important that I managed my own personal biases and preconceptions. Secondly, I needed to consider the challenges of being an insider researcher. I would suggest that these two are connected, as highlighted by Harding (2009, p. 15) “the researcher’s ‘pre-understanding’ of the institution both theoretically and as a lived experience means that she is familiar with the history, the culture and many of the people who work there. “This was inevitably deemed to influence some of my perceptions and something I worked hard to factor into my thinking.

Being conscious of my strong personal views around the progression of women in general, it seemed likely that, as a woman, I would naturally empathise with the female mentors’ perspective. My awareness of this risk, whilst not neutralising it, did provide mitigation. My social constructionist ontology allowed me to recognise that my views have been shaped by my experiences and interactions and will continue to be. This

reflection created a sense of excitement and the possibility of discovery which I strove to translate into adopting an open mind throughout the research process.

Operating as an insider researcher brings both benefits and challenges. The obvious benefits include access to the organisation and participants; my organisation is suspicious of outsiders, and so being behind the curtain gave me an advantage. Clearly that is accompanied by responsibility; I was conscious of not wanting to abuse my position as an insider and the trust that is implicit in that status. The organisation is publicity shy and the subject matter being researched was arguably sensitive and controversial, and whilst I didn't want to paint the organisation in a bad light, I wanted to be able to accurately reflect the outcomes of the research, whatever that may be. Coghlan, (2009, p. 338) describes this dilemma as building on "the closeness you have with the setting, while at the same time creating distance from which to see things critically."

Another important consideration was my role as a senior HR professional, and the potential impact that could have on the participants. I made it clear that I was operating independently as a researcher throughout. Nonetheless, in the early stages of my interaction I felt the presence of these dynamics. I was conscious of the organisational desire to say the right thing, which seemed particularly present amongst the male mentors. However, as trust built the dialogue flowed and became more open.

3.7 Criteria of quality

According to Lincoln and Guba, (1981) the trustworthiness of a research study is an important factor in evaluating its worth. Trustworthiness involves establishing:

- *Credibility* - confidence in the 'truth' of the findings
- *Transferability* - showing that the findings have applicability in other contexts
- *Dependability* - showing that the findings are consistent and could be repeated

- *Confirmability* - a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest.

Table 3.10 below assesses the criteria of quality as applied to this study

Criteria	This study
Credibility	I have done my best to ensure that the voices of the participants were accurately represented, sending transcripts for checking and striving to use quotations in the spirit in which they were intended.
Transferability	Whilst the context is important here, I have attempted where possible to pull out generic findings that could be transferable to other contexts, without losing the organisation's specific relevance.
Dependability	Questions were used consistently for the semi structured interviews. The researcher was present at all the interviews and moderated the focus group.
Confirmability	I was very aware of my own lens as a feminist, and I prepared myself for the interviews and the focus group ensuring that I had an open mind. I read and reread the transcripts many times to minimise the risk of jumping to conclusions and remained open to new ideas during my analysis. My note taker was present to provide rigour and accuracy of the record of responses. I was taking supervision throughout and subject to challenge from my supervisors.

Table 3.10: Validity and reliability framework for this study, using Guba and Lincoln's (1981) criteria of quality.

3.8 Summary

In this chapter I have set my research in the context of a social constructionist ontology. I have justified my use of a case study as opposed to other methods and have explained the selection of participants as well as my process for data collection. I have then gone on to reflect on the challenges of operating as an insider researcher and the management of my personal bias through reflexivity. Finally, I have made an assessment of the criteria of quality. In the next four chapters I will present the findings in key themes that have emerged through the focus group, the interviews, and the analysis of documentation. This will enable me to discuss in depth the role of Reciprocal Mentoring in enhancing women's career equality within a traditional engineering multinational organisation.

Chapter 4

Focus Group perspective of career equality within the case study organisation

4.1 Introduction

There are three chapters describing the findings of this case study. As described in chapter 3, I conducted a focus group comprised of members of the HR team, who were not involved in the reciprocal mentoring programme but were immersed in the organisational culture because of their close interaction with the business through relationships and their enactment of people processes. In this chapter the data from the focus group is analysed to uncover the ways in which the participants perceive and in some cases experience women's career equality within the case study organisation. Quotations are used from the participants to help illustrate the emerging themes. Those taking part were invited from a cross-section of HR disciplines (D&I/Talent/Resourcing /Learning and Generalist) and were an equal mix of genders and seniority as outlined in figure 5.1 below.

FG1	Diversity &Inclusion	Senior male
FG2	Resourcing	Junior male
FG3	Diversity & Inclusion	Junior female
FG4	Talent and Learning	Senior female
FG5	Talent and Learning	Middle management female
FG6	HR Business Partner	Middle management female
FG7	HR Business Partner	Junior female
FG8	Learning	Middle management male
FG9	Talent and Learning	Senior male

Table 5.1: Table of focus Group participants

In addition, I have included my observations and reflections on what was discovered, at times referencing any relationship with the relevant literature explored in chapter 2. Whilst the purpose of the focus group was to gain a baseline perspective from the participants, the chapter concludes with a reflection of how the findings from the focus group align or differ from the mentor's perspective and any associated implications.

According to Krueger and Casey, (2015, p. 4), “focus groups work when participants feel comfortable, respected and free to give their opinions without being judged.” Bearing that in mind I was careful with the positioning, the purpose and the tone, emphasising confidentiality of the discussion. I was thoughtful about my role as a facilitator or moderator, letting others speak and build off each other, listening well and creating an open environment. I also selected two very broad questions to avoid leading or constraining the conversation:

1. What are the enablers and barriers to women’s’ career equality within the case study organisation?
2. What is the role of HR in creating women’s career equality within the case study organisation?

The first 3 stages of the thematic analysis process, data familiarisation, generating initial codes and searching for themes as described in Chapter 3, resulted in the initial thematic maps. These were organised according to the two questions and can be seen in Appendix 4.1. Stage 4 resulted in figure 4.1 below. Through this stage, 6 themes were identified: cultural beliefs, women’s self-concept, behavioural style, the quality of HR, organisational processes and policies, and support mechanisms.



Figure 4.1: Final Thematic Map of focus-group member’ perceptions of career equality within the case study organisation.

The focus group ran for 90 minutes and produced 26 pages of transcript. What follows is an analysis of themes, structured sequentially according to the final thematic map above. Through this process I aimed to “identify the repeated patterns of meaning” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 86) and “to refine the specifics of each theme and the overall story the analysis tells” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 8) I aspire through this analysis to bring the dialogue amongst the participants to life.

4.2 Theme 1: Organisational Processes and Policies

Internal organisational Human Resources policies and processes were viewed as having a significant impact on career equality by most of the group. Those highlighted included the maternity policy; flexible working policy; work patterns; and talent and recruitment processes. Whilst there was broad recognition of the positive intent and benefits of these policies and processes, there was also an awareness of some of their unintended consequences and in some cases a negative reaction.

The opportunity for flexible working was generally accepted as a positive step forward. As FG6 pointed out: *“I see great examples of when it is working and when it does work well; I think that’s a real enabler.”* FG2 One participant reflected on personal experience: *“once my boss agreed to me working one day a week from home, that pressure was instantly taken from my shoulders.”* However, there was also a lot of discussion about how, whilst a positive step in principle, the way that flexible working was being held and operationalised within the organisation could be holding women back. One identified explanation was, a lack of senior role models as referenced by FG1: *“we don’t really see senior women working part time in a dual career partnership and making it work”* and another was a sense of a negative perception of part time working within the organisation FG3 explained: *“part time or flexible working can be seen as an indication that you are not so ambitious.”* this was reinforced FG2: *“I think we want to be proactive in the flexible working field but there is still a stigma.”* The conversation revealed evidence that flexible working was very much associated with women and that many men wanted to ask for it but were afraid to because of the associated perception that part time working was incongruent with commitment, as mentioned

above. They did not then request flexible working and consequently it remained the preserve of women, meaning it did not become normalised and the negative connotations perpetuated. This was brought to life by FG5: *“a male with a two-year-old and a nine-year-old told me he has no intention of asking for flexible working because he feels as though it would go against him; he didn’t feel it was as acceptable for him to request it as it was for a woman”*. The desire for greater work life balance has been held in the literature as a female issue (Hakim, 2005) and so this felt like an interesting and fresh perspective.

Alongside the issue of flexibility, core ways of working were also raised. The organisation maintains some work patterns that are commonplace in the industry, for example in the offshore operation and these were raised as potentially contributing towards career inequality. For instance, FG1 said: *“in Shipping you have to work 3 months on and three months off”* inferring that that is more difficult for women than men. FG8 added: *“we need to milk the opportunity for remote operations to make the job no longer so hard core where you are away from your family for about 3 weeks, for everybody, but obviously for the female engineers”* they went on to explain that the mental model of hands on remote engineering perpetuated the problem. *“we seem to value people who get their hands dirty in the middle of nowhere, we keep on creating more of the same people.”*

Parental leave was highlighted as an area that could be unintentionally perpetuating the status quo; in that leave was directed towards supporting the mother to take time off, reinforcing a division between genders. FG7 shared this view: *“if you look at the maternity and paternity leave policies, they are widely different and as a female you are immediately pushed into the caring, nurturing role, meaning that you are the one that takes half a year off, which is where the career slump happens.”* The positive impact of non-gendered parental leave policies in other countries was highlighted by FG4: *“I think some of the Scandi aspects are very positive, 2 and 3-year shared parental leave is the norm, but that is a huge societal shift.”*

Mechanisms for promotion, including internal recruitment and talent management processes, were highlighted as progressive in principle and yet often disabling in practice. In terms of internal recruitment, FG2 raised a concern that the requirement to have a diverse candidate slate and panel for all internally advertised roles was creating a lack of transparency and cynicism: *"I think there are people out there who see our processes as a box ticking exercise and I worry that some of the applicants don't apply because they are not sure they would be getting an interview for the right reasons"* and FG7 reflected: *"I've heard of people being tapped on the shoulder and told they have to apply for a role because we need a diverse candidate."*

The slow nature of talent processes combined with a lack of strategic focus were also criticised by FG9 who said : *"having a two-year talent cycle means that if we start to identify women now, it is two years before we do anything about it"* they went on to explain that the scale and scope was in their view also too narrow: *"We imagine that if we focus on senior level and group level leaders that will fix the problem, whereas actually we need to look systematically at the whole organisation."*

Through the conversation I observed that the group were coalescing around the idea that creating a policy, or a process is not enough, and that continuously paying attention to the impact created is as important. They recognised that a new policy could be a catalyst for change but noted that unintended consequences could create barriers to real progress and negativity. This was a concern expressed by FG1: *"I worry things start to go underground; people aren't going to disagree with the process publicly, but they're clever enough to work it behind the scenes and play the game."* This resonated with the concept of second-generation bias (Sturm, 2001) which operates quietly behind the scenes, as explained in the literature review. There was also talk of a backlash in response from FG9: *"you can see it coming from the men who are starting to feel I am not getting the same chances as women"* This had emerged in the literature (Terjesen, Sealy and Singh , 2009) with reference to the need to normalise women's presence through substantive representation to avoid a negative reaction. Concerns about organisational diversity burn-out were raised, FG3: *"I think some of the*

things we have done have fatigued the organisation” GG3 expanded the point to say: *“it is no longer acceptable to talk openly in a biased and discriminatory way, and so now we are hearing people attacking the policies.”* The organisation has put a lot of effort in recent years into creating HR policies designed to create a more inclusive and diverse working environment and improve career equality, with some success. This focus group dialogue created a shared understanding of some of their limitations and of the opportunity to refocus efforts.

4.3 Theme 2: Cultural Beliefs

Whilst practicalities in terms of policy and process were viewed as important factors, the culture beliefs of the organisation within which policies were enacted were cited as having a significant impact on women’s career equality. FG3 explained: *“In an engineering environment competence looks male, I was at a meeting recently when a female engineer introduced herself and even, I thought– you don’t look like an engineer.”* This point was reinforced by FG2: *“we find we really have to push managers to look for diverse candidates, they really want to recruit their preferred candidate in their own image.”* The heavy meeting culture and the way the meetings operated, were also seen as a barrier for females as described by FG: *“you see the bullish male traits dominating and succeeding in meetings.”* This according to FG5: could have wider implications. *“how you showed up at the last meeting (the recency effect) is a judgement that is often used in talent discussions.”* The traditional management of career paths along gender lines meaning that men and women end up on different tracks, was cited by FG3: *“when it came to a certain point in engineering, females were going into commercial engineering roles and the males were going into the operational roles and then when it came to promotion, operational experience was seen as a key criteria.”* The group did not determine whether or not that this divergence was through choice. There were signs of change emerging according to FG9: *“it is still an ingrained male orientated culture, however there are more and more women coming into the workplace and so it is starting to change things because it is no longer exceptional.”*

Another feature of the culture that was discussed was how it was acceptable and common practice to work around internal process FG9: *“people aren’t going to disagree publicly with our D&I policy- however they are clever enough to work it behind the scenes and play the game, but not change any of their decisions in reality.”* This resonated with the concept of second-generation bias as mentioned in theme one.

The predominance of the “red insights” culture was an enlightening topic which took us beyond gender, exploring whether the angle of more diversity of style and approach regardless of gender would be a progressive way to move female representation forward as part of a more inclusive culture. FG2 commented: *“the organisation is not set up for many different people at the moment.”* This was a sentiment echoed by FG4: *“how do we help people to be themselves and not be disadvantaged; that could be powerful for the organisation.”* One participant talked about the concept of wholeness – FG9: *“very future focussed organisations encourage employees to be whoever they are, which is a very inclusive concept.”* This resonated with the research of Leimon, Moscovici and Goodier, (2011), who highlighted the power of congruence for women in leadership. There was a sense through this part of the dialogue that the internal organisational conversation about Diversity & Inclusion had got stuck in process and data, and that culture was not being openly discussed. This was arguably unsurprising in such a data driven engineering-based organisational context.

4.4 Theme 3: Behavioural Style of Senior Leaders

A key factor that seemed to the group to be having a significant impact on career equality was the predominant behavioural style that was expected, particularly at senior levels. This was seen to disadvantage women, except for those with more masculine characteristics. FG7 shared their thoughts: *“I think a barrier is our highly masculinised leadership style and the language that is used about what good looks like, e.g. that person will really go after it in a very assertive way.”* FG5 added: *“I think it is just that female traits are not as valued as male traits”* and FG3 argued: *“men are seen*

as more competent, they are viewed as strong and tough, which is valued, whereas women are caring and nurturing." This was reinforced by FG9: *"I think that it becomes a barrier if you don't demonstrate that predominant type of behaviour; it's a style and expectation of how you show up for meetings: be brief, be bold, be gone"*. As the conversation evolved, it emerged that this predominant, preferred style was seen as getting in the way of congruence for both men and women, and thereby impacting diversity more generally. Insights profiling has real currency within the case study organisation, and the behaviour described as 'Insights Red' dominates amongst senior leadership with some notable exceptions. This arguably creates a perception that being red is best. Whilst gender was seen as an important factor and differentiator, the concept of behavioural style went beyond gender into the realms of agentic and communal behaviours, as described in the literature Schuh, (2014). There was an emerging view that being male, or female, was less relevant than your behavioural style. A sentiment summed up by FG9 was that *"if you're not tough enough, you're not good enough."*

There was also a sense of an emerging shift partly generational and partly societal. For example, the daughters of senior men who were entering the workplace were having a positive influence in changing perceptions, and some male role models were open to challenging the status quo and making things happen. FG8 said: *"Having male leaders such as X and Y who are visibly committed and set clear expectations really makes a difference, Y just moved the dial on flexible working because he said we are just going to do it and did."* Senior women were also seen to be playing their part and having a positive impact. FG1 reflected: *"There are more female leaders in certain areas who are a lot more vocal and can quote facts, so the volume has gone up in a constructive way and the tide is starting to turn."* The organisation did not appear to be immune from societal influences FG7 explained: *"the organisation doesn't want to be an outlier, there is peer pressure."* This debate about behavioural style was very interesting as the concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005) had emerged in the literature and it appeared to be playing out in the minds of the people in this focus group.

4.5 Theme 4: Women's self-concept

Arguably influenced by the predominance of certain behavioural styles as noted above, the way that women view themselves and their abilities was seen as significant, and was the subject of a lot of discussion, some of which related to what the group had noticed happening within the organisation, and some of which was based on personal reflections as to how the female focus group participants were thinking about themselves. FG3 observed a tendency for self-doubt amongst women: *"Self-belief is an enabler – many women are mentoring other females in terms of having confidence in their abilities, and yet when it comes to thinking about their own development that self-belief is not there."* The implications of this were highlighted by FG2: *"we have some really good female candidates, but if they don't have some of the technical skills, they disregard themselves straight away."* There was an observation, which resonated with the group, that women's confidence may be more influenced by the environment in which they worked than men. FG5 highlighted the impact of line management: *"micromanagement particularly knocks women's confidence as they need time and space to flourish to build their self-belief"* implying that this does not come naturally to women. And from FG4 who was looking below the obvious: *"whilst the internal environment has shifted on the surface overall the mental models are the same – from a 1980s or early 90s paradigm"* and from FG9: *"it's not that the women lack the confidence, it's that the system doesn't allow them to have the confidence, so the sort of problem isn't the individual; the problem is the system in which they operate."* One of the focus group participants (FG3) brought this to life, introducing a personal perspective of self-confidence, they explained: *"I am the complete opposite of what a leader looks like, so I've had to learn to accept that unless I do something that compromises the whole of my personal life, I either stay at this level or leave, one or the other."* This left me questioning if women's perceived lack of self-confidence and self-belief actually emanates from their drawing comparisons between what they consider the organisations mental model of good looks like and their sense of self. The literature

refers to the concept of women being communicated to in a way that makes them feel that they are missing something (Wittenberg-Cox, 2013) if they don't fit the stereotype.

There was also a perception of an emerging societal shift that could impact the organisation positively. FG1 observed that: *"The tide is starting to turn; the volume has turned up in a constructive way. *"There has been a shift in consciousness, and I think it is societal rather than organisational, that has drifted in and is a shift in a positive way for the next generation of women."**

This optimism was reinforced by FG3: *"the next generation of female students are so confident, which I think is changing perceptions, I am hoping as they come through, they are bringing their confidence with them and we will see a massive shift."*

This concept of societal shifts gained broad recognition as a possible catalyst that was necessary to shift the culture and create further space for women's confidence to thrive.

4.6 Theme 5: Support Mechanisms

Whilst there were policies and process in place designed to create more career equality, as discussed above, according to this group these were having a mixed impact against the cultural and leadership backdrop of the case study organisation. The Focus Group participants therefore recognised that women who, in their view, often lacked self-confidence, needed further help, both formal and informal, to successfully navigate the organisational system and support their careers. Line managers were seen as a key influence. For example, FG6 argued: *"management support is a real enabler; it might seem obvious, but it is sometimes lacking, never quite intentionally but I think that can be really key."* This was reinforced by FG7: *"Line managers who build self-belief and sort of push women on are really important."* FG2 added: *"line managers who push back on rules of the road exceptions really drive that diversity piece into our interview process."* (This refers to internal recruitment process designed to ensure a diverse

candidate slate.) On the other hand, line managers could get in the way by not taking a progressive approach. FG2 again:

"I think managers could be more creative when it comes to skill sets and demonstrate they are willing to develop potential rather than look for a qualified technical candidate, meaning women don't naturally make their way onto candidate slates."

Line managers overt and more subtle lack of support for flexible working was raised for example, FG5 said: *"it's a risky thing to ask for flexible working; it depends on the line manager but what if it is remembered and then held against you forever more."* Moving into a new job was seen as a critical transition point at which women needed extra support, FG7 reflected: *"the women I have spoken to feel things are so finally balanced that a new job may push them over the edge and a supportive line manager could make all the difference."*

Sponsorship was seen as being really helpful, FG4 shared:

"having a senior sponsor within the organisation that you can just talk to openly and you know, share your thoughts and views with and talk about how things are going, but also get some advice, informal advice, but also for that person to kind of have your back, as it were, I think is really important."

A supportive network and role models were also highlighted as enablers. Interestingly it was felt that role models didn't need to be female, according to FG7 who said: *"I think men who are inclusive and embracing of difference are really important."* There was also a view that targeting development could be a helpful way forward. FG4 suggested: *"knowing the differences between females and males and targeting development specifically, how can you actually in a sense bring something different into their head."* Whilst the culture, as described above, prevailed the formal and particularly informal support mechanisms were seen as productive ways of navigating around the system.

4.7 Theme 6: The Quality of HR

HR arguably is positioned as a support mechanism for career equality and the effectiveness of processes and policies, according to the focus group, has been discussed in theme 1. The role that the HR team did and could play was also the subject of much interest and discussion. There was a recognition that HR had the potential to influence the agenda, as they were involved at many critical moments in the employee lifecycle, and previously the group had identified where things had been going wrong, or policies had been worked around. There was a realisation amongst the group that they were not consistently leaning into the opportunity. From FG4: *“how do we challenge more around decisions that are happening in the moment, the sort of microinequities that we are seeing all the time?”* It was suggested that hierarchy could be getting in the way, according to FG1: *“we are not necessarily always as senior as the leaders that we are working with.”* There was also a counter view that seniority didn’t matter but courage to challenge did. FG3: *“I know, I just reflect on my own total lack of courage at times, and some of the conversations I’m in, but it does feel completely career threatening actually, but I’m going to say it, wow, so and often I choose not to, I could have exactly the right conversations but lack the courage.”*

This resonated with FG5 who said: *“And it’s permission to do that as well, because I think actually the culture within HR has been so far, you will be rewarded if you’ve, helped your senior manager deliver their agenda, not, have we helped the general population.”* FG3 reflected: *“Sometimes we let ourselves down; we had a meeting with a very senior person last week and were told your data is brilliant, the way you present it was awful, and so they didn’t believe it.”*

Through the conversation there was a significant realisation that HR could step more powerfully into this space rather than be the custodian of the process or indeed colluding with the business, helping them to navigate around the “inconvenience” of some of the policies and processes, FG1 shared: *“if you break it down the question here*

is are we the guard dogs of the organisation or are we here, you know, on the side of the employee and to do what's right for the culture?". This was reinforced by FG3: "I wasn't particularly supportive when either men or women talked to me about flexible working, or part time working."

The conversation then moved into the possibility of a more progressive role for HR. FG7 stated: *"the question for me regardless of your gender, sexuality, ethnicity, whatever it might be, you know, is how we help people be themselves, and it sounds incredibly simple but to me that's so at the heart of it."*

This professionally reflective dialogue felt both disappointing and empowering for the participants, as having identified many barriers to career equality (including themselves), I noticed a sense of possibility emerging. Whilst recognising the challenges the culture presented, they saw the opportunity to make a difference, realising how HR could be more strategic and lead.

4.8 Reflections on the focus group in comparison to the mentor interviews

The focus group moderation felt harder to manage than the interviews, and I was conscious of the imperative to moderate the conversation and not lead it. It was an open discussion and people were prepared to challenge each other, whilst being well behaved, and giving each other space to talk. They enjoyed taking a collective review of the organisation from a joined-up perspective across all HR disciplines. I was surprised at how much people were prepared to provide personal, organisational and functional reflections.

Arguably working with a group runs the risk of creating "group think" as referenced by Braun and Clarke, (2014, p. 114): "you don't want participants to just keep saying yeah" and "I agree" However, as they also point out, focus groups can provide the

opportunity for meaning making, which I found to be the case in this instance. This was less obvious in the mentor interviews.

Through this meaning making, emerged a recognition that this group was at times part of the problem and could be part of the solution, that their role in the culture could be very powerful, and that creating policies and processes would not be enough. I sensed an emerging sense of possibility, which they found motivating.

A second powerful reflection created through the discussion was that the issue of career equality appeared to transcend gender and be more about style, which had come up in the literature (Acker, 1990); (Ely and Meyerson, 2010) Linked to this was the impact of the lack of authenticity when individuals tried to align themselves to a personally incongruent style.

This led me to question whether the concept of the gendered organisation as described by Moss Kanter, (1977); Acker, (1990); Hearn and Collinson, (1997) has been narrowing the debate and there is an argument for taking a less binary approach, particularly against the backdrop of backlashes and organisational fatigue as mentioned above.

By definition the focus group had built-in dialogue and followed a social constructionist process. The interviews with the mentors whilst built around open questions do not naturally lend themselves to social sense making. The reciprocal mentoring programme is designed to provide that framework.

Chapter 5

Findings from the participants before the Reciprocal Mentoring programme

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the reciprocal mentors' perspectives before embarking on the programme are presented. The objective of the pre-programme interviews was to gain an understanding of how the concept of women's career equality was understood by those participating within the case study organisation.

The mentors were drawn from pairs of participants in a reciprocal mentoring programme between senior executive males identified as MM1- MM9, and middle management females identified as FM1 – FM9. (Table 5.1 below)

Mentor	Comments	Mentor	Comments
FM1	Department Head Age 40-45	MM1	Head of Function Age 50 -55
FM2	Senior Manager Age 35-40	MM2	Head of Function Age 50-55
FM3	Senior Manager Age 35-40	MM3	Head of Function Age 45-50
FM4	Senior Manager Age 40-45	MM4	Head of Function Age 45-50
FM5	Senior Manager Age 35-40	MM5	Business Leader Age 45-50
FM6	Senior Manager Age 35-40	MM6	Business Leader Age 45-50
FM7	Senior Manager Age 35-40	MM7	Segment Leader Age 50-55
FM8	Senior Manager Age 40-45	MM8	Business Leader Age 45-50
FM9	Department Head Age 35-40	MM9	Segment Leader Age 45-50

Table 5.1: Participants roles in the organisation

This chapter is broken down into three sections which contain themes that have emerged from the data:

- In section 1, the data from the female mentor pre-programme interviews is analysed to uncover the ways in which they perceive and experience career equality within the case study organisation. Quotations are used from participants to help illustrate the emerging themes. In addition, I have included my observations and reflections on the findings, and where possible articulated links with the relevant literature explored in chapter 2.
- In Section 2, the data from the male mentor pre-programme interviews is analysed in the same way to reveal their perspectives, again illustrated by direct quotations and my own observations.
- Section 3 discusses any points related to similarities or differences of perspective on career equality between the genders as established through the pre-programme interviews and then summarises my interpretations and reflections.

5.2: Female mentors' perceptions of career equality before Reciprocal Mentoring programme

Having completed the process of thematic analysis, as described in the methodology chapter, four overarching and interconnecting themes were identified: Organisational Success Factors, Cultural Barriers, Gender Differences and Disabling Beliefs and Behaviours. What follows is an analysis of these themes (illustrated in figure 5.1.) and an exploration of each of the sub themes that underpin them. Through this process I define and further refine the themes by "identifying the essence of what each theme is about" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 92). Through this analysis both the themes and the participants are brought to life.

The first three stages of the thematic analysis process, (data familiarisation; generating initial codes and searching for themes) as described in Chapter 3, resulted in the initial

thematic maps organised according to the four questions used in the interviews. These appear in Appendix 5.1. The male mentor responses appear in Appendix 5.2.

The final thematic map resulting from this process is below:

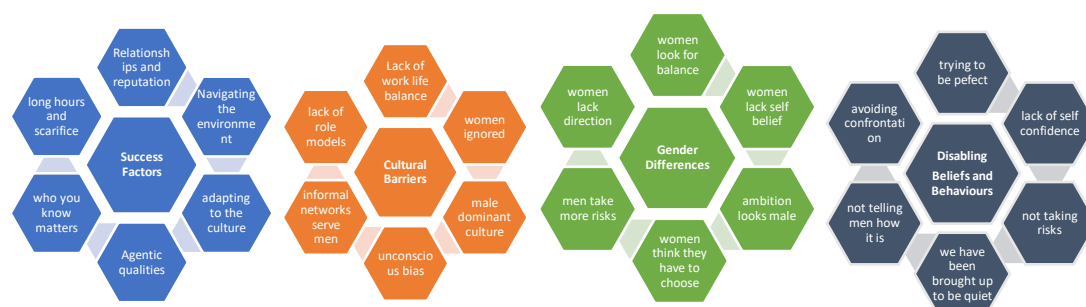


Figure 5.1 Final Thematic Map of female mentors' perceptions of career equality before Reciprocal Mentoring programme

The following analysis of themes is structured sequentially according to the final thematic map above

Theme 1: Organisational Success Factors

This theme explores the factors that the female mentors considered to be important for success within the case study organisation.



The data suggests that the women felt that they were aware of what was needed to be successful, but this knowledge and awareness did not necessary help them; they seemed to sense being on the outside looking in rather than part of the in crowd. Many of them described the struggle, of needing to be resilient and cope, putting up with things and succeeding despite the feeling that the environment was conspiring against them.

FM2 talked about how she had to be “twice as good as a man to be considered good enough”, and FM8 recalled how she had wanted to “weep and rock in the corner” because of the environment, but knew she had to keep going to survive. FM4 observed that she has seen “people go crazy, have breakdowns and disappear because of the very harsh environment and industry”. Working long hours was seen as a badge of honour and is discussed in more detail in Theme 2.

All the women recognised that having a great network was critical. However, the majority felt that that this need worked against them as it was much more natural for men to connect (with each other) informally and meaningfully and the informal networks were the ones that really mattered. FM9 described how “going for a curry or to the gym” was where the most powerful connections were made. FM4 recalled that “in the beginning no one wanted to talk to me as a woman. FM2 felt that “building networks with men may not be viewed as appropriate or expected coming from women.” This sentiment resonated with the observations made by Bushell (2015) about women’s lack of social capital acting as a barrier to progression.

Some of the female mentors felt that simply being a woman was an impediment to progress, for example, FM2 mentioned that “women’s’ ideas are ignored.” This was supported by FM 6 who reflected that “men still pay more attention to men.” Others had observed that only a certain type of women were successful; those that displayed agentic (masculine, dominant, assertive confident) behaviours. In this vein, FM9 referenced women behaving as “men in skirts.” FM6 observed that the most senior women in the organisations appeared to be “manly women” One mentor (FM5) felt

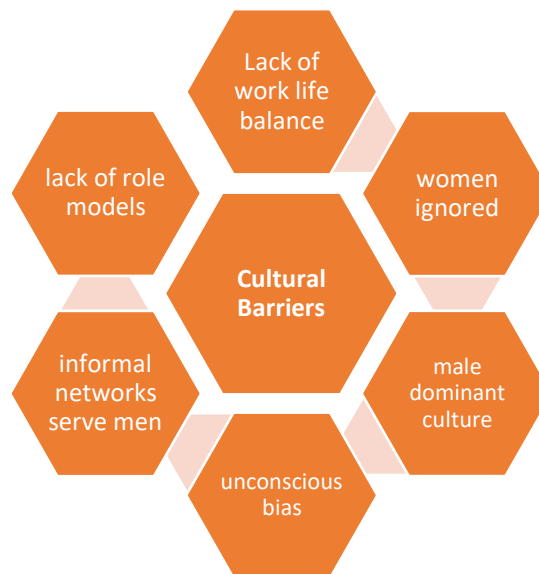
that this was an issue of style rather than gender and that the organisational style preference was “ Insights red” - an agentic, driven, extrovert, results focussed personality profile and that as a consequence it was difficult to be authentically female.

During my research into the literature, the issue of women feeling pressure to fit into the prevailing organisation culture in order to be successful had emerged, (Wittenberg-Cox, 2013). It appears the women involved in the programme were experiencing this challenge.

The organisational success factors appeared to be well understood but hard to attain for the majority of these women. In other words, they were clear on what they felt they had to do but were not sure that they wanted to or could do what they thought was required. There was, perhaps surprisingly, very little sense of anything changing, or indeed that they could exert any influence to change things. This seemed to have engendered a sense of learned helplessness.

Theme 2: Cultural Barriers

Culture barriers, appeared to have a clear relationship with organisational success factors among participants as whilst the women had a clear view of what they thought is needed to be successful, they were also acutely aware of what they thought got in the way for them in terms of the way the organisation currently operates.



Whilst topics such as informal networks and women being ignored have been touched on above, concerns about a perceived lack of work-life balance at senior levels also emerged. FM 5 observed that “a lot of women look up and see it is lots of travel and hard work and decide it is not what they want.” FM4 went further, saying that “to survive in the industry as a female is quite a tough life; you have to work 24/7.” FM7 highlighted the sense that “working 7 to 7 and bragging about it” was a common practice, and that this disadvantaged women as “most males don’t have to consider what it would look like with all the balls up in the air.” FM6 referenced that “the jobs are so stressful and require long hours which can be harder for women to balance.” FM3 observed that “you might try and balance work and life by leaving work to collect the kids, but then at 9 pm you need to log on to deal with the issues and so you end up working very long hours.” She went on to say that “sometimes females get to the point where they believe that work life balance is difficult to manage so it gets to a point where you may not be willing, for family reasons, to continue and sacrifice your family, and so they decide to stay at the same level and not progress.”

Lack of role models was deemed an important factor with FM1 observing that the “industry we are in is very male dominated and therefore there are more men in the pool.” Others though referenced that whilst there were women at senior levels, they generally weren’t women that they could relate to or aspire to emulate, as they

displayed male leadership characteristics. These were described by FM8 as “confrontational, aggressive, very forthright with not a lot of empathy.” FM6 explained that the senior women she worked with “have lots of male traits and attributes: e.g. They are extremely crisp in how they speak and the way they ask to receive information is very similar to men.”

The male dominated culture seemed to be a thread that ran through all the interviews, and the association with unconscious bias seemed to create a sense of injustice and frustration for the women, as illustrated by FM7 “People, when looking at a female candidate for an international assignment, will question their suitability if they have children, this has a knock- on effect later in their careers when they do not have relevant field experience.” FM6 referenced her observation in meetings that “woman raises point; man raises same point; man gets the credit.” FM3 talked about the prevalence of “Boys Clubs” who support each other’s career progression. FM8 shared her view that this was a reflection of how “society treats people differently due to gender and that men do not face the same assumptions, cultural beliefs and bias as women in the workplace.” In summary, the women seemed to feel undervalued by the culture, as though they could not bring their strengths to bear within the environment. It felt as though there was a narrative the women held that circumstances were outside of their control and therefore someone else’s responsibility to resolve.

Theme 3: Gender differences

There was broad recognition of the difference between men and women and a realisation that this was a factor in women’s career equality.



What emerged strongly through the data from the women was a strong desire that this difference should not be apologised for but celebrated. The women came across very clearly as wanting to be able to be themselves and be successful. However, currently they were finding that difficult. This was illustrated in several ways: Lack of self-belief and confidence emerged very strongly as a factor. FM7 shared that “For me it is a massive struggle around self-belief – it stunts ambition. I have the ability to go home at the evening and worry about how I perform and how much better I could have been. It is draining – having squirrels in your head saying you could be better. How can I move confidently through the next grades if I do not get rid of this self-talk?”

FM4 stated “I think women have less confidence than men to go for these roles. I remember xxx saying a man would say yes to the job even if he does not have all the skills; a woman will pick up on the parts of the job that they do not have experience in. Females tend to think I cannot do this because I do not know this”. FM3 “We are also self-limiting – it is how we think about ourselves and also don’t let others limit you - Keep a positive self-focus.”

Men were perceived to be more confident and willing to take more risks. FM1, for example, describes it in this way:

“We know men just put themselves forwards and have to sink or swim. I think for women we are not as daring to jump” and “boys are just bolder in how they engage. As a female I see guys do things to put themselves out there – if I did this, I would wonder how it would come across. It is inherent cultural behavioural differences in gender.” (FM1).

FM4 asserted that “men are more successful because they take risks in their own career. The ownership of their own career is stronger and more passionate.” FM9 observes that “men are more bullish to go and ask for a role - who knew that you need to make up your own roles and ask for them – I assumed you would just apply”. It seemed to me that the women participants were caught in a vicious circle of not feeling confident because they were not like men and the cultural response to their style was further eroding their self-belief.

As far as levels of ambition, most of the female mentors shared a view that men and women had equal levels of ambition but that the understanding of success did vary between the genders. For example, FM8 explained:

“I do not think there are differences in ambition. Lot of my female friends have left corporate jobs to set up their own companies, which is massively ambitious. They have successfully run their own businesses. I do not believe there is any difference in ambition. The difference in the grade is not necessarily seen as a measure of success for everyone everywhere.” (FM8)

FM3 shared her perspective: “Generally, women are as ambitious, but it comes down to the level of sacrifice that women make – they will look at the whole life situation and make the decision to stop at that level to avoid making broader life sacrifices.”

FM2 stated that:

“I think they are just as driven and ambitious. Often women are both taught and are sent signals that they cannot share those ambitions as openly as men

can. Not just a XX thing – it is society. Women need to feel comfortable to deploy their ambition and men need to be comfortable to accept it. Men and women have been conditioned.”

This was accompanied by a sense of the organisation as a reflection of society- being set up to facilitate a traditional approach to ambition- that was frustrating these women. To them, the overt manifestation of ambition seemed a requirement and yet uncomfortable to them, even those women without children.

The sense of conflict between family and work responsibilities came through strongly, as many of the women felt the pressure keenly to choose between the two at some point in their career. The issue of sacrifice was a concern for many of the women, highlighted by FM6: “I would love to be the head of xx function but if my family said they wanted me back 100% then I would now give up on my ambitions. I do not want to grow old alone. A company will not sit with you when I am 70 but my family will.” FM7 explained from her perspective “Something has got to give. In my case when you are faced with real tough decisions at work or workloads and you are balancing dual careers and children, I think something has to give.”

There was also a recognition that women could be less planful about the direction they wanted their career to take. This was highlighted by FM9 who stated: “I am ambitious, but it feels directionless; I talk to men and they all have a really clear career path. I was really surprised to hear about how men get on and approach their career and progression, I shared this with other women, and they were all really surprised.” FM4 reflected that in her view: “I do not have the time or the room to map my own career” which was perhaps getting in her way, as she recognised that “men’s ownership of their own career is stronger and more passionate.”

Whilst recognising the challenges they felt from a societal and organisational perspective, the female mentors also reflected how some of the circumstances they were grappling with appeared to be of their own making. Throughout the interviews I observed that, when this mindset emerged, it was empowering to the female mentors,

the realisation that perhaps some of this was in their own gift was both liberating and motivating. This observation is connected to the fourth theme.

Theme 4: Disabling Beliefs and Behaviours

The final theme in this section captures reflections from the female mentors on how they could be getting in their own way in terms of how they behave and what they hold to be true.



Some of these elements have been explored above. However, the self-reflection and shift in ownership throughout the conversations was of interest. The issue of women avoiding confrontation was held as significant; FM8 suggested: “we avoid confrontation to be a team player; what we do enables behaviour which perpetuates the culture we live in as opposed to having the courage to do something about it.” The drive for perfection was also seen as a disabling belief that was getting in the way of progress. Some of the women observed that they were setting themselves up to fail through some of the exacting standards they set themselves. For example, FM3 said: “Women want everything around them to work well – so their ambition is balanced by family, workplace and broader life. Everything needs to be delivered at 100% - perfection is a driver.” FM8 pointed out “we do this to ourselves, wanting perfection as opposed to good enough.” FM6 agreed, saying: “women have a desire to do a great

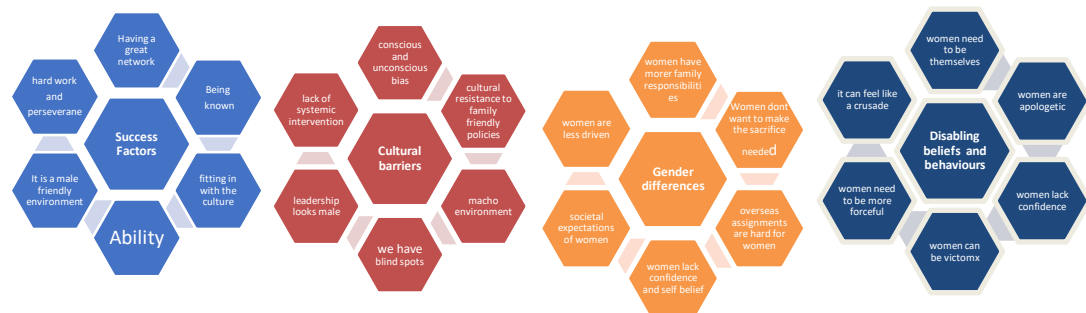
job at home as well as at work.” This was a perspective that I had not observed in any of the literature. An additional observation was that, perhaps as a result of lack of confidence or societal expectations, there was a view that women were not speaking up or facing into the difficult conversations that could be a catalyst for progress, and therefore were perpetuating the culture. FM4 stated that: “we have to have guts and take responsibility- the confident conversation is the key to the door.” FM1 observed “women do not lift their heads up and manage their careers; we are often quiet, letting things just happen to us”. and she went on to say: “I think this is quite deep – how we have been brought up – as a female I see guys do things to put themselves out there. If I did this, I wonder how it would come across.” This was reinforced by FM3 “you need to showcase your ambition and be a bit bolder, I think there is a fear of rejection - perceptions of being “too aggressive” – women suffer from that term a lot”. FM2 brought this to life “I have heard it said, I really like X but she is too aggressive about asking for her next role – I challenge we would have the same view if this were a male.”

A lack of self-confidence seemed to play into a concern about risk-taking as articulated by FM1 in the context of career progression, who observed: “we know men just put themselves forward and have to sink or swim. I think as women we are not as daring to jump”. This was supported by FM4 who stated, “men are more successful because they take risks in their own career; the ownership of their own career is stronger and more passionate, I am shy about saying I want to progress.” This seemed to be underpinned by a fear of failure. FM7 reflected: “I have the ability to go home in the evening and worry about how I perform and how much better I could have been, how can I move confidently through the grades if I can’t get rid of this self-talk?”

Throughout these conversations I felt a sense of possibility emerging about creating a new narrative, crystallised through the recognition of some disabling patterns and beliefs. Some of the women were starting to believe that a different interpretation was in their gift. FM5, for example, suggested: “We can be confident that our female traits are powerful, and that we can proudly demonstrate and show what can be different. The glass ceiling is of our own making to some extent.”

5.3: Male mentors' perceptions of career equality before Reciprocal Mentoring programme

Figure 5.2 Final Thematic Map of pre-programme men's responses



The findings in this section are structured sequentially according to the final thematic map above

Theme 1: Success Factors

This theme explores the elements that the male mentors considered to be important for success within the case study organisation.



One element that stood out from the data in terms of success factors was that, unanimously, the men initially spoke of having a great network, and noted that being known by the right people was critical. They were all unequivocal about this. I was struck by how it felt as though they were all reading from a script as the way they

described this was so similar- they were all on message. MM1 observed “you do need to build a network, you have to know the right people” MM2 went further, saying “senior connections are essential- this helps you to spot where opportunities could be coming from ahead of when they have been advertised.” One revealed how his network had actively helped him: “x dropped a note to y to explain what had happened in Anchorage, which resulted in me being promoted with no application.” The male mentors were very accepting and comfortable with the concept of networking, some observing that this was more difficult for women, MM6 commented that “networking in the evenings can cause pressure on family life and this is a harder thing for women to do.” Whilst this was observed, there was an acknowledgement that there was little likelihood that this would change or indeed any sense that it should.

Hard work and perseverance were highlighted as significant factors by many of the men accompanied again by an acceptance that that is just the way it is. As an example, MM8 reflected “there is an intensity in the way we work – work hard. I am comfortable putting in the long hours – not an unusual occurrence in my week.” This was reinforced by MM2 who stated: “I have had to fight for everything I have got – it has been a tough battle to progress.” I was left feeling a sense of justification from some of the men that they therefore deserved everything they had achieved.

All of the male mentors recognised that the environment was male friendly, and most were aware of the disparity that resulted from this. However, whilst acknowledging this intellectually, I did not sense any real determination to change it. I found this interesting, particularly as these were very senior men who I had assumed felt empowered to bring about change. It was almost as though they were casual observers of the environment rather than architects of it. For example, MM3 stated: “I have had a number of female bosses and my experience is that they all struggled to have an impact in meetings and decision-making because their style was different.” He went on to say: “we are not good at embracing the spectrum of leadership styles “ There was no acknowledgement of the loss of diverse thinking to the organisation, which left me reflecting that the business case for diversity was not resonating in this organisation, despite data as referenced in the literature depicting a clear positive correlation with

performance (Catalyst, 2004); (McKinsey, 2015); (Dezso and Ross, 2008); (Desvaux, Devillard-Hoellinger and Meaney , 2008).

Theme 2: Cultural Barriers

There was also broad recognition among the male mentors that there were cultural barriers in place, impacting on career equality. This theme highlighted an awareness of what was happening within the organisation that was congruent with the observations of the female mentors



MM3 remarked: “I think there is a cultural overlay that to be an effective leader you need gravitas- which has male connotations - and you need to be tough and uncompromising.” MM1 agreed, saying: “without intervention women will not naturally rise to the top.”

In terms of family- friendly policies, one male mentor MM5 observed: “in our plants in particular, we have men who serve in the military for the national guard, and they have to go off at short notice. We do not have any real problem with this as they have to go off for 6 months – we have to work this out and we do.” The inference here was that the organisation can take military service in its stride and yet finds the concept of

maternity leave more problematic. MM4 reflected that: “we still frown on part time working.” The recognition of the presence of bias was quite common. For example, MM4 was unequivocal, stating: “Unconscious bias without shadow of doubt. I am sure there is some conscious bias – people like to work with people like themselves.” MM5 pointed out “women are guilty until proven innocent.” MM2 agreed, saying “there is bias- we recruit in our own image.”

The concept of blind spots emerged, with MM2 admitting that he was “surprised by the depth of feeling amongst women,” and MM3 stating that he was not “aware of how his views landed, and that there was not enough ‘challenge and conversation’.”

The macho environment was felt to be an ongoing issue, with MM4 stating that: “we still find ourselves getting into conversations that are quite male – testosterone led” and he could see that “women do not want to be in that testosterone- led environment.” MM7 reflected “we have an agentic style – male or female, which predominates.” MM3 shared “if someone is not banging the table asking for a promotion it is so easy to think they are OK and do not want to progress.” MM2 describes one scenario where “people were throwing chairs at each other- it was very tough.” Some felt that systematic intervention was required to bring about any change, which again interested me as arguably male mentors represented the system. MM7 stated “individuals’ careers are not facilitated by the Group process” inferring that the free market reinforced the status quo. Reinforced by MM1 who said, “I do think we need some structure and intervention to nurture and develop the future talent of the organisation.” The male mentors seemed to be aware of the cultural barriers to career equality and yet I didn’t hear of any concrete plans to enable change. I wondered if these conversations were a process of realisation for them and that change will follow.

Theme 3: Gender Differences

In line with the female mentors there was a view common among the male mentors that men and women approach work and life differently.



There was a broad view that women lack confidence and self-belief. For example, MM4 pointed out: “some women have a tendency to be apologetic when they put a view in the room, so they give the men a reason to ignore it.” MM5 reflected “women (as a general rule) are less confident in their abilities than men.” MM6 went further to say: “time and time again I see the stereotype of women opting not to apply for roles because of things they cannot do and men going for it anyway.” MM1 reflected: “there is lots of self-questioning in women.” The issue of family responsibilities seemed significant in the minds of the male mentors. MM2 reflected: “the family thing gets in the way; women are less likely to make the sacrifices.” MM3 alluded to associated progression challenges: “I do not think there is a coincidence that there is a cliff edge for grade x to grade y which coincides with family responsibilities.” MM7 shared his view that: “I remain concerned that maternity leave return is difficult; a lot of recent mothers take voluntary redundancy as people face the torment of getting the right balance, cash makes the decision.”

In a global organisation, the ability to participate in international assignments is seen as significant, and many of the male mentors recognised the impact this had on women. MM5 reflected: “the concept of the trailing spouse does not work well for women, as generally men earn more than women.” MM6 shared that: X was told 20 times or more that people were putting her on the mommy track and making assumptions about her not wanting international assignments because she had kids.”

The concept of the “mommy track” had emerged in the literature (Ely, Stone and Ammerman, 2014).

There was recognition that the company is a reflection of society, and that society still has different expectations of men and women. For example, MM3 stated: “societal construct in the west has taught women to be more modest about expressing ambitions.” MM7: shared that in his view “society is still relatively traditional – even if you demonstrate you want to operate in a certain way it is difficult.” The issues of drive and sacrifice were interconnected for many for example from MM5, who stated: “I guess the degree of ambition is important – it is a code for sacrifice – you are prepared to sacrifice to realise the ambition. It might be true for men the burden of sacrifice is lighter than for women.” MM7 felt that: “men and women have equal ambition, but it is expressed in different ways- women have more altruistic ambition.” MM2 shared his view: “Boy do you sacrifice your life out of work- I think females are less likely to make the sacrifices.” Whilst expressing their views on how men and women approached and experienced work, the male mentors appeared to be tuning in to the dilemma articulated by Wittenberg-Cox (2013,): fix the women or make organisations fit for women.

Theme 4: Disabling Beliefs and Behaviours

The final theme explores the disabling beliefs and behaviours that the male mentors recognised in women in the case study organisation.



The perceived lack of confidence displayed by women was viewed as getting in their way, MM5 reflected: “men have a degree of aggressiveness – more than women who self-attenuate more - and this does not help.” MM7 shared his perspective: “when interviewed men say I did, women say we did – the process compliments the I and disadvantages a type of person, typically women.”

There was some discomfort expressed around women displaying crusading behaviour. MM2 shared: “around certain subjects there was a gang culture which got negative.” MM1 advised: “do not wear it on your sleeve too much - don’t make it feel like crusade - it is not.” An interesting dilemma emerged as I reflected on the comments related to authenticity in that whilst there were many examples describing how women need to be more forceful there was also a discomfort expressed about women who acted like men. MM4 pointed to this dilemma: “women have a tendency to be apologetic when they put a view into the room, so they give men a reason to ignore it. They could be more forceful – but is that what we want?” MM6 shared: “I am disappointed that they (women) are behaving like a man-not true to themselves.” MM1 advised “be authentic – do not be afraid of that – do not be something else.” MM6 brought this to life describing an individual “I look at X - she has transformed, and her confidence has come on leaps and bounds, and she is a different person- we joke she is a bit scary now.” He

was invoking the double bind, as referenced by Ibarra, Ely and Kolb, (2013, p.6). What seemed to be being expressed here was a recognition of the complexity of the challenge; that things were not straightforward and yet that there was opportunity.

5.4: Comparing Gender perceptions of career equality before reciprocal mentoring programme

Figure 5.3: Comparative Thematic Map View of career equality by gender



Having completed the analysis in sections one and two, I observed an interesting convergence of the overall themes. However, the underpinning sub- themes diverged as did the relationship the participants held with what they were observing and experiencing. Both gender groups of participants seemed to have a clear and shared view of what was occurring in the organisation in relation to career equality. There were, however, important differences in the way that each group described their response to this shared reality; for the women this was a visceral experience, expressed emotionally in many cases, and for the men this came across as a cognitive observation. The women really felt the impact and the men thought about it, arguably unsurprisingly as a consequence of their different experiences.

As an insider researcher I am aware of the organisational narrative on the much-debated issue of gender diversity, and most of the male responses were “on message.” For some of the male mentors, however, the conversations that flowed through the interview process did seem to provoke a degree of reflection and curiosity as to why

things are the way they are. Many of the women expressed anger and frustration at the status quo and indeed with themselves; they felt that the organisation conspired against them. However, there was also a nagging self-doubt for many that was very difficult to shake off. As they reflected, whilst answering the questions, some women seemed to shift towards making some adjustments.

In contrast, the men mostly seemed to express regret, underpinned by an acceptance that this is just the way it is. I got a sense from some of them that they felt that women don't have what it takes to succeed in the environment, but that they couldn't say that out loud, though it was touched on as the conversation evolved. In other male mentors, I noticed an emerging curiosity and openness to a new way of thinking about the subject.

I noticed that when women answered the questions, they were often hesitant, though thoughtful and slightly apologetic. The men, however, came across as clear and confident. This was congruent with many of the observations from the men, that had emerged throughout the interviews. It is worth noting that the men I spoke to were considerably more senior than the women.

I did reflect on whether being interviewed by a woman had influenced the way the mentors responded; arguably women are more open with "one of their own" and men less so. In some cases, some of the men appeared defensive, though I did notice some moments of letting go across both genders. I reflected that the way the organisation holds what good looks like casts a shadow over both genders. This is an organisation that manages risk as a core competence, and reframing capability and potential is a real challenge. I ended up fascinated to see if the sharing of perspectives through the reciprocal mentoring programme would influence understanding.

5.5 Summary

The process of analysing themes and reflections was very thought-provoking, I became acutely aware of my biases as I went through the process of pulling out key points from the verbatim notes and tried to be conscious of when I was looking for reinforcement of my views. As I went through the coding, I found some of the words were quite hard to write down as they conflicted with some of my personal perspectives. I fought hard against rationalising and misinterpreting comments and I felt a duty to wholly represent what was said, and the spirit in which it was meant, as much as I was able. According to Crotty, (2015, p. 43): “Constructivism claims that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting.” I was working with meaning as constructed by the individual mentors I had interviewed in the case study organisation, and I had to be careful not to distort their reflections with my own bias and experience of the organisation in which we all worked. I felt a responsibility be true to their perspective as they had expressed it.

Chapter 6

Findings after the Reciprocal Mentoring programme

6.1 Introduction

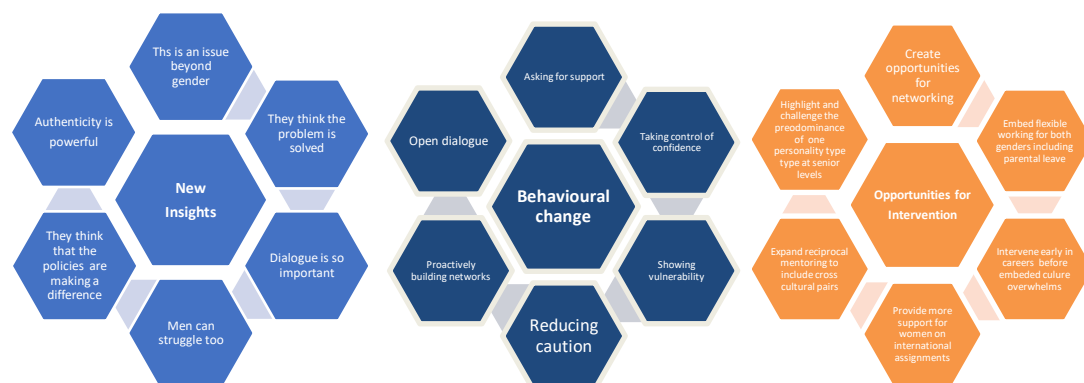
This chapter is structured according to the themes that have emerged from the data. In Section 1 the data from the female mentor post-programme interviews is analysed to uncover the ways in which they have acquired new understanding in relation to career equality within the case study organisation having participated in a reciprocal mentoring programme. Quotations are used from participants to help illustrate the emerging themes. In addition, I have included my observations and reflections on the findings, and where possible - articulation with the relevant literature explored in chapter 2. Then, in Section 2, the data from the male mentor post-programme interviews is analysed in the same way to reveal any shift in their perspectives, again illustrated by direct quotations and my own observations. Section 3 discusses reflections on the similarity or difference in terms of perspective between the genders. The chapter concludes with the summary including my interpretation and reflections.

6.2: Female mentors' perceptions of career equality post reciprocal mentoring programme

Following thematic analysis of the data, three themes were identified: New Insights, Changes in Behaviour and Opportunities for Organisational Intervention. What follows is an analysis of these themes (illustrated in figure 6.1.) and an exploration of each of the sub themes. Through this process I define and further refine the themes by "identifying the essence of what each theme is about" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 92) in order to bring both the themes and the participants to life.

The first three stages of the thematic analysis process, data familiarisation, generating initial codes and searching for themes as described in Chapter 3, resulted in the initial thematic maps organised according to the three questions used in the interviews. These appear in Appendix 6.1. The male mentor responses appear in Appendix 6.2

Figure 6.1 Final Thematic Map of post -programme women's responses



The findings in this section are structured sequentially according to the final thematic map above

Theme 1: New Insights

This theme explores the new insights gained by the female mentors through the reciprocal mentoring programme. Figure 6.2 below describes the sub themes from which it is comprised.



Figure 6.2: New Insights gained post reciprocal mentoring programme, as described by female mentors

Sub theme – They think the problem is solved

The female mentors expressed a variety of insights resulting from the mentoring experience. There was surprise and indeed shock expressed by some at how little their male mentors were aware of what they as women were experiencing. Arguably this is to be expected based on the level of seniority of the participating males, who are perhaps more used to being presented with packaged positive news rather than hearing unfiltered perspectives. FM8 brought this to life, describing her mentor as:

“wearing rose tinted specs and being blinkered to what others experiences of XX might be”

She went on to explain that she thought this at first made him resistant to really listening to her and that she felt he blamed her for her experience illustrated by her comment *“he was saying you are not reacting in the right way, I think you should be behaving differently.”* It took until the third session for her to feel heard and she shared his breakthrough reflection *“he said I don’t recognise what you are telling me, but I feel like I’ve not been listening to you and I feel like I’ve been putting it back on you”*

This lack of awareness was reinforced by FM7 who shared how her male mentor reacted *“he was completely shocked when I told him what was happening, he said I can’t believe this is still going on”* And again, from FM9: I was surprised that he was surprised that comments are still made to women that they only got the job because of their gender. FM1 *“He was horrified when I said that sometimes in meetings, I’ll set up a bloke to say what I want to say in meeting because I know it will be better received coming from the man than it will be from me”*

I wondered if this seeming lack of awareness was what had led to the sense of organisational fatigue that is described in the literature review. Arguably if the men in the organisation believe the problem is solved it is understandable that they are questioning why it continues to be part of the organisational dialogue.

Sub theme: Men can struggle too

The female mentors expressed surprise that men also struggle with work life balance and feeling guilty about getting it wrong. FM3 explained: *“we think they don’t feel guilt, we think they are just happy go lucky and don’t worry about not being available for their families”* a realisation also expressed by FM5 who reflected: *“we forget there are men who need support managing work and life too”* this came across as a liberating realisation from the female mentors who seemed to enjoy learning that the struggle was shared and perhaps they could learn something from the way men processed things.

Sub theme: They think the policies are enough

The female mentors were buoyed by the realisation of some of their male mentors that company policies were symbolic of progress but were having limited impact. This seemed to appear to provide the opportunity for positive change:

FM8 explained how her mentor reacted to her views on the flexible working policy : *“he was like, we’ve got these policies but we don’t put them in place we just put them on the intranet, I’ve just kind of let this all go haven’t I, I’ve never dug any deeper to see if its working, like health and safety if you don’t dig down and look and just accept the surface, you’re going to end up in trouble.”*

FM9 spoke about how her mentor had reacted to her being able to share her felt perspective:

“there are a lot of guys in our company who see what our experience is, but they don’t feel it and I don’t think until you feel it that you really start to understand the impact of the structures and policies we have in our company. I spoke about the difficulty of international assignments and he said he would go and review roles that could be managed on short term rotations”

Sub theme: Dialogue is so important and not easy

The opportunity simply to engage in dialogue in this way was appreciated by all of the female mentors FM1: *"Sharing and connecting on a human level is so important"* though unsurprisingly the level of insight was correlated to the openness of the dialogue. Most of the pairs found it awkward at the start and then there were breakthroughs for example FM5 explained: *"We settled down to a really good relationship now and it was down to a lot of work on both sides."* FM2 was disappointed by the reluctance from her mentor to open up: *"I tried to talk to him about the struggle I have managing maternity leave returners and how it must be even more difficult for male line managers – I received no response to this- he is really playing it safe."*

Some pairs seemed to have really learned through the experience. FM7 described being able to utilise the insight: *"If I had not had the openness with X I wonder if I could have been as confident with Y."* FM8: was also very positive *"Having a different conversation really enlightened me."*

Sub theme: Authenticity is powerful

During the pre-programme interviews many of the women had expressed their concern that they felt they needed to adopt a certain persona to fit in and so for some gaining a different perspective on this was meaningful as described by FM5: *"having the confidence to learn that being authentic is very powerful"* and FM6 was surprised having got to know her mentor that his style demonstrated to her that *"you can work in a nice relationship environment and deliver. Previously I thought success = masculinized behaviours – really good to see that is not always the case"* this point was reinforced by FM4 who reflected: *"I think often we try to mimic men and XX shared that this really didn't work for him it felt awkward and unnatural, in his view women being themselves was more impactful."*

Sub theme: this is an issue beyond gender

Interestingly through the mentors dialogue it emerged that career equality may not be an issue exclusively-related to gender. Their thinking was framed through the lens of the perceived organisational preference for a certain personality type at the senior levels of the organisation. The case study organisation widely uses a personality profiling tool called Insights Discovery (Benton et al, 2008) which is based on Jungian psychology. Through the completion of a questionnaire individuals are allocated a preferred colour

This model has deep traction and currency in the business and organisational data analysis shows us that the Red (Director type) is dominant at senior levels. My observation as an insider researcher is that holding “red credentials” is often talked about with pride and it can seem as though there is a bias in favour of this profile. This type translates comfortably across to the agentic type behaviours described as hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005) which arguably excludes many other groups not just women. Through the discussion between the mentors there was a realisation that a binary gender debate was simplifying the issue. FM5 shared “so *X is in the space of focussing on white men and diversity, he talked about how the majority feel excluded when the focus is on the minority*” she went on to say “*I would like to see more understanding of the difference of Asian culture.*” FM1: took this further when she said “*in Asia diversity is less about gender, more about religion and culture*” for her the learning was “*I am not striving for one gender based answer we need to be more flexible*” her reflection was “*we all have biases – this is not wrong – it is the environment we have been brought up in – we just have to be aware and strive for a better outcome, we need to be open to difference*” and from FM7: “*only in the last session did we talk about something that was gender specific. Our conversations were never about gender. It was all about coaching, being a good leader etc. It was beyond gender.*”

I was left reflecting that whilst the broadening of the diversity debate seemed healthy it could be argued that it provided the opportunity for a more comfortable debate rather than the potentially more challenging and binary gender focus.

Whilst it was fascinating to hear about the insights the female mentors had gained, I was also keen to understand what, if any, new understanding had been translated into tangible action for the female mentors which is explored in the second theme below:

Theme 2: behavioural change

The analysis below explores the new behaviours the female mentors reported they were engaging in as a result of the reciprocal mentoring programme. Figure 6.3 below describes the sub themes from which it is comprised.



Figure 6.3: New behaviours the female mentors reported they were engaged in post the reciprocal mentoring programme, as described by female mentors

Sub theme: More open dialogue

As mentioned in theme 1 above not all the pairs were able to get into meaningful dialogue quickly, for some it took quite some time. I got the impression that a couple were overawed by the seniority of their mentors but felt rewarded when they stepped into the space

FM9 explained: *“slowly I have had the confidence to have more honest conversations and it really makes a difference, I am experimenting with doing this more quickly now”*.

FM8 felt the same: *"It took until the third conversation for us to really listen to each other, now I am bringing more depth into the conversation because I felt like I wasn't bringing enough"* she went on to say. *"I am determined now to have different conversations with the unenlightened as I know now you can't assume that they have an instant recognition with the experiences that you have had."*

Sub theme: Asking for support

In terms of asking for support one of the mentors FM3 shared her reflection that her male mentor was very comfortable asking for support and that she was not and that could be getting in her way

"he knows he doesn't have to do everything he surrounds himself with people to support him at home and in the office and makes sure he utilises it" she went on to say how this insight had helped her feel comfortable about accepting an upcoming international assignment. *"my discussion with him made me realise I could put things in place to enable me to accept the opportunity, and I have."*

FM7 made a more general point on the subject *"I learnt about the benefit of asking for help"*, she explained, *"Because of my relationship, I have asked for his help on how to deal with my boss, we got to the roots very quickly – this was never a surface level conversation."*

The female mentors described how the experience had encouraged them to take control of their personal levels of confidence which had emerged as a disabling theme in the pre-programme interviews. FM6: described her new strategy *"I am using data to underpin my argument to create confidence in me and to make me feel confident and rather than what just accepting what they want I am coming up with ideas about that they should do"*. FM5 also reflected on the progress she was making, *"I feel more confident when I understand the players and when I have a better feel of the audience or the team I am in, I find some instances where I am more confident now."*

Sub theme: Taking control of confidence

FM7 talked about the impact her mentor has had *“he has helped me build my confidence a bit more – he has helped me feel good about having a view and saying what I need to say.”*

FM4 shared that the programme had given her the confidence to ask her boss for a coach as she stepped into a new role. *“we had a conversation about how he has had a coach to help him and that made me realise it wasn’t a sign of weakness, but a pragmatic strategy.”*

Sub theme: Showing vulnerability

Going into the programme many of the female mentors were holding a view that it is not acceptable to show vulnerability in the work place by asking for help, that they needed to be able to cope come what may and were surprised to learn that that position could be challenged.

FM3 shared her learning *“we don’t as women in an office environment necessarily want to show that level of vulnerability, because it can be seen as a weakness, we don’t like to ask for what we need, - we feel it is a special consideration, but he shared that men don’t think that way they are not afraid to ask and so I thought why shouldn’t I?”*

Sub theme: Proactively building networks

Through the pre-programme analysis it was clear that for both genders networking was seen as an important success factor and through the dialogue it emerged that rather than seeing this as unfair the women were prepared to step in proactively.

FM1 explained: *“networking is happening, but it takes a lot of time courage and commitment, I know I need to advocate myself; it will not happen if I am not networked.”* FM5 had a similar view: *“I struggle with the networking and political savviness that is needed in XX but now I am stepping in more.”*

Sub theme: Courage

In a similar vein the women seemed to have gained some useful insight on how they needed to be more courageous to tackle some of the challenges they were experiencing and were prepared to take action. FM7 shared her experience: *“we had some conversations on wilful blindness– being courageous is OK he has helped me to see that you can be courageous, and it is OK, I try to practice that now.”*

FM6 was very clear: *“Courage is important – speak up, defend yourself and don’t let others kill your ideas and steal from you.”* We need to encourage people to be braver to point out inequities e.g. I experiment with: *“thank you for repeating my idea, I always thought it was a good one!”* and from FM6: *“You need to be confident and brave and not afraid of the consequences.”*

Through the dialogue and exchange of perspectives whilst the women had recognised ways in which they could shift their behaviour for more positive outcome they also identified opportunities for systemic organisational intervention that could impact career equality. These are discussed in the next section.

Theme 3: Opportunities for Intervention The analysis below explores the opportunities for organisational intervention the female mentors identified as a result of the reciprocal mentoring programme. Figure 6.4 below describes the underpinning sub themes

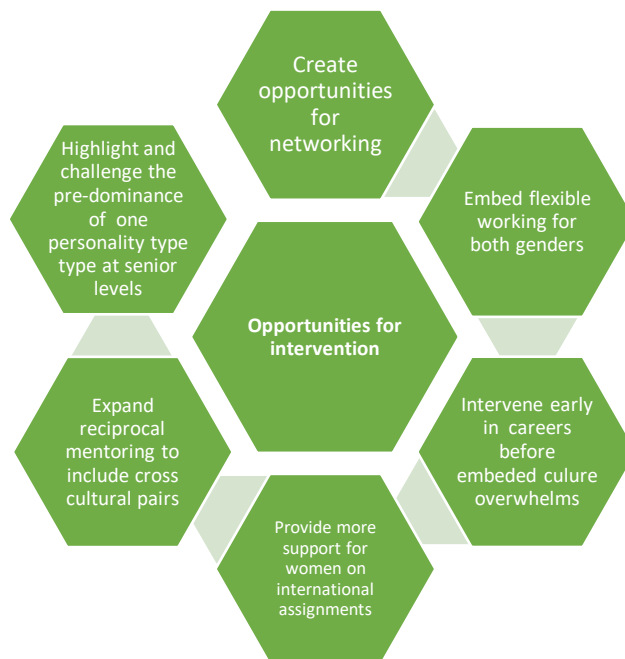


Figure 6.4: Opportunities for intervention identified by the female mentors post the reciprocal mentoring programme.

Sub theme: Create opportunities for networking

Whilst there was recognition that individuals could take responsibility for building their networks, there was also an appetite for something more systemic. FM3 felt that the organisation could do more to create opportunities for networking which will not happen naturally without intervention: *“it was an excellent opportunity building the network, so I think it would really be a benefit to provide more of it across the Group.”*

FM8 shared her view: *“through this I learnt how helpful it is to expand your network, in the future I will make sure I have a wider network, but I think we need more structure around it to force connections.”* FM9 had a very specific point related to the

programme: *“It would be great to get all of the reciprocal mentors together to create a network and some contagion, it is so powerful and really opens eyes.”*

FM1 went further: *“XX is an organisation that depends on networking, impossible to know everyone but it is always good to have a different perspective from different parts of the world – sharing experiences – telling stories – I think it is very powerful and I don’t see it happening in the XX space, it would be great to introduce it.”*

Sub theme: Embed flexible working for both genders

Flexible working was the subject of much discussion and it was considered as an opportunity to normalise the practice for both genders which would positively impact career equality FM3 explained : *“we all have special considerations, not just women, this mentoring brought that out, he shared that he wanted flexibility too, this doesn’t get talked about and I think it should.”*

FM7 highlighted that it was something she practiced herself and was trying to expand further she explained *“I work really flexibly, and I always reinforce it is OK with my team, I am trying to make this happen across the UK as I think it is so important for broad inclusion I want the business to embrace it fully.”*

However, for some it was more complicated; XX is a company with a broad geographical footprint some of the cultural differences of across regions emerged as illustrated by FM2 *“in Cairo there are underlying acceptances that women are going to be the main care givers, promoting the opportunity of flexibility for men is culturally difficult.”*

Sub theme: Early career intervention

Early career support was also seen as an opportunity to prevent cultural norms embedding in new starters and perpetuating the status quo. FM1 highlighted the perspectives of the younger generation *“my daughter is 16 and goes to 6th form next year – in her year group of 200 students there are four transgender kids – for them this*

is normal- to us it is a new thing. How do we ensure we don't let our biases get in the way of their diversity- as leaders we need to be more flexible"?

FM7 also felt that suggested *"getting people early in their careers to understand the benefits of coaching – really listening and asking question this would enable more open conversations and understanding."* FM9 shared an example of early biases emerging *"I am hearing male graduates making comments about someone getting the job because she was going out with the manager."* She attributed this to strong cultural norms in her part of the business and the need for new starters to integrate to succeed.

Sub theme: Provide more support for women on international assignments

In a global business the ability to participate in international assignments is recognised as an important enabler of career success. One of the female mentors FM3 was offered an assignment during the programme and nearly turned it down as she was concerned about the impact on her family, having discussed this with her mentor she gained the confidence to ask for the support she needed to make her life work. She explained *"he encouraged me to ask for what I wanted in terms of regular trips home, he said that is what he would do, which surprised me - I gave it a go and it seems to have worked!"*

FM9 reflected that through her conversations she was able to express her views of needing to move internationally to progress.

"I shared how it feels like you have to have global job moves to get along, to really make that leap in your career in the company and how hard that is if you're in a dual income, you know, family, kids at school to say right I'm going to now move to Houston for 3 years because I know that's going to give me so many opportunities, he really listened and said actually we could also look at where we can get some global experience that's short term, like 2 or 3 months, so you get that flavour but you don't have to uproot the whole family." This particular male mentor is very senior and therefore in a position to influence in this area.

Sub theme: Highlight and challenge the predominance of one personality type at senior levels

The issue of a predominant preferred 'red': style of operating has already been highlighted as influencing career equality in the Insight section of this chapter, as the organisation seems to hold a bias towards one operating style particularly in senior roles. Several of the female mentors felt that highlighting this and the impact of that bias on diversity generally, not just from a gender perspective could have a positive impact on career equality.

FM6 shared her observations *"what I see is that most successful people tend to be a bit selfish and masculinized, outspoken and delivery focussed, we need more balance, it is less about gender more about behaviour, promoting this idea would really help."*

FM9 agreed: *"I think at the very senior levels there is a requirement to be red, this transcends gender, so when you say the women that succeed tend to be like men, they're not, they're red. We need to talk about the benefits of have different colours in our mix."*

FM5 observed: *"we were very different personalities I am very blue/ yellow, and he is very red, it was difficult at the start to communicate well but we made it work after a lot of effort on both sides. I think he started to understand the value of difference as we spoke about this, though he would encourage me to be redder at first. In an Asian culture I am very red but in the broader XX context, I am not."*

The broadening of the discussion beyond gender appeared to present an opportunity to create a more positive debate within the case study organisation.

Sub theme: Expand reciprocal mentoring to include cross cultural pairs

The cultural theme continued as some of the mentors felt that the principle of reciprocity worked well and should be extended beyond gender pairs to include cultural diversity.

FM1 explained: *“This initiative is good for everyone, success in the future will be based on how much diversity we have, I live in Singapore, it has been great to have a different perspective from a different part of the world.”* If you want to shift the culture what it is about working better with different parts of the business? I see the dots are not well connected, talking like this really helps”.

FM2 agreed: *“every country and region have their own diversity issues, in my region in the middle east, I think we should approach this from a cultural perceptive first, gender is not the place to start. This programme has made me think more about it.”*

FM 5 *“I learned a lot through this programme about how the Asian culture is seen from the US and the perceptions this creates and he has an understanding of what it feels like for me being so far away”*. I hope this could be helpful for others”

These female mentors were all based outside of the US or UK and they appeared energised about a cross cultural conversation that they felt had been missing. This left me reflecting that a narrow corporate focus on gender was excluding an important factor of the debate, particularly in a global organisation operating in global markets.

6.3: Male mentors' perceptions of career equality post Reciprocal Mentoring programme

Following thematic analysis of the data from the male mentors' post programme interviews, three themes were identified: New Insights, Changes in Behaviour and Opportunities for Organisational Intervention. What follows is an analysis of these themes (illustrated in figure 6.5.) and an exploration of each of the sub themes.

Figure 6.5 Final Thematic Map of post -programme men's responses



The findings in this section are structured sequentially according to the final thematic map above

Theme 1: This theme explores the new insights gained by the male mentors through the reciprocal mentoring programme. Figure 6.6 below describes the sub themes from which it is comprised.

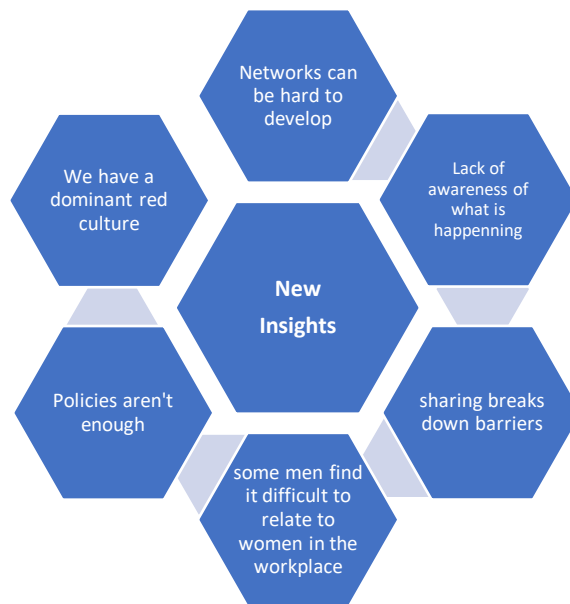


Figure 6.6: New Insights gained post reciprocal mentoring programme, as described by male mentors

Sub theme: Lack of awareness of what is happening

The male mentors did seem to gain new insight from participating in the reciprocal mentoring programme; for some they described these as quite profound whilst for others it came across more as affirming some of the assumptions that they held. Most striking was the shock and surprise expressed by some as to what some of the female mentors were experiencing that they were unaware of. MM6 shared his dismay at this discovery of the reality his female mentor had shared:

"There is just a whole new world outside of my peripheral vision that I was not aware of, that she shockingly brought in through the front door. That on the one hand was great but on the other really depressing because it has made me realise the road ahead of us is much longer than the road behind."

MM4 had a similar reflection: *"I was shocked as to how things are, really shocked by the struggles she was having. I got a lot out of that around what is like for X and women like her in the organisation. I thought we had moved on."*

This group of male mentors was very senior and when I spoke to them their surprise at what they discovered was so visceral, I was left reflecting if there are hierarchical filters in place that shelter them from some of the reality of the organisational culture.

Sub theme: Sharing breaks down barriers

This issue of hierarchy did also come up for MM3 who observed *“no matter how well these things are set up it is really hard to get away from the hierarchy, x was looking to me for advice and guidance as the more senior person, the dynamic exists and it is hard to get away from it.”* For some these barriers did seem to diminish as the relationships developed and people opened up, as articulated by MM1

“There was a lot of sharing – more than I had expected. Personal history, experiences and challenges – myself as well opening about things that affected me. We opened up and it really surprised me. She is very engaging, but I just did not think we would be that open. I think this happened partly because we let our guards down – we kept saying it was a safe environment.”

MM2 appreciated the opportunity to be more open than usual *“it was helpful having someone outside my function to have a private conversation with.”*

MM3 also reflected:

“At the beginning I was not talking very much, I was listening. Two or three conversations later realised I was not sharing very much so we then structured it slightly differently to help us take different roles in the conversation. There is also the cultural overlay – Asia to UK British and what people feel comfortable sharing across a hierarchy or not. There is learning for me about how I interact with those conversations knowing that this dynamic is there – I would probably have shared some things sooner to demonstrate that I am looking forward to some feedback.”

MM4 was also pleasantly surprised about the level of openness and meaningful dialogue: *“My mentor very quickly got into some meaty issues. She was very open, and I was very open, I don’t know why it worked but it really did, and it meant we got working deeply, quickly.”*

Sub theme: Networks can be hard to develop

Whilst networking emerged as a success factor during the pre-programme interviews for some of the mentors hearing how difficult some of these women have found it to access the benefits was thought provoking. MM4 reflected again: *“So if I think of the old boys club, I don’t think women have the same support networks as men. In the boys’ network there is a way for men to raise issues to senior people. It must be harder for women when they don’t have that network”*. For one of the mentors, MM8, paired across a large cultural and geographical divide there was a recognition through the dialogue that the inability to network naturally was an impediment, *“you need to establish networks as we are a relationship driven organisation which I think has got a lot of benefits, but when you talk to someone who is new to XX and different e.g. an Asian female you hear about how hard it is.”*

Sub theme: Policies aren’t enough

Another area that emerged was that the introduction of policies which whilst welcome could have had the effect of lulling the organisation into a false sense of security about how much progress was being made in support of career equality. MM1 reflected *“she reminded me that people have a lot on and have to manage their families and their kids –that people have complex lives and need to deal with them, and they are big issues. We rarely talk about these things – I am not sure what we have in place does enough to support this.”*

MM6 recalled a conversation he had with his mentor as she planned her return to work from maternity leave:

“the assumption in her head was that as she came back to work that if she asked to go part time it was a fact and inevitability that she would be

downgraded and the only way that she could come back to work part time was on that basis.” He went on to say “when I sent her the flexible working policy she was stunned, that this was a corporate document said that it hadn’t been communicated or distributed and it’s all on the internet so it’s available to all of the employees, but it had no visibility, no support or leadership. This really horrified me and set me back in terms of my understanding of how this topic was being managed in the corporation.”

MM3 also felt he had been educated in this area, *“she provoked me to think in a more expansive way about flexibility (she is a single parent) we talked about how people want to work in ways that suit them more, there is more melding of social and work life, we are not set up for this we need to create an ecosystem”.*

Sub theme: Dominant red culture

The issue of the organisational personality preference emerged from the male mentors as influencing career equality not just from a gender perspective, this had come up through the mentoring conversations. MM8 observed the reality as he saw it and recognised the potential downsides:

“I think we are a company in which the average group leader probably is more in the red/blue space than the green/yellow space we need to recognise who are the individuals in your organisation, if they’re not geared towards that, the red/yellow expressive energy we need to recognise that and help and support them. But you can also find that that red energy for lack of a better term could be hiding stuff. I also think that’s a healthier way to have an inclusion and diversity discussion, that’s more inclusive than making it about gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, rights.”

This view was echoed by MM6:

“Most of us who have progressed in the company have the blue / red gene in us and you want to drive and push to do things faster. Talking to X has made me reflect. “I think we need to tone it down a bit and not see “red” as the secret to success in the company. You would be surprised if you did not have red. We

need to be more tolerant and accepting of others – green etc. Very hard to change when we have dominant red – we all have to bite our tongues many times not to interject and intervene – let people figure it out. We need to create space for diversity”

This recognition of bias at an organisational level seemed to sit comfortably with these senior men, much more so than any suggestion of gender bias, which can be really emotive. I was left reflective about the opportunity this presents.

Sub theme: Some men find it difficult to relate to women the workplace

Men’s interaction with women in the workplace has been included as though whilst not widely mentioned it was a deep reflection from one of the mentors who said:

“One of the things was that people seem to view women through a different lens – they expect different things than what they expect and tolerate from men. I like to think I am ambivalent but clearly parts of the organization are not ambivalent. There is a piece where some men will try and explain things away because it is coming from a woman – it is you – you are emotional. It can make women move away from who they are, so they are not badged as saying it because they are a woman. If you think about it differently people expect higher standards from women or expect women to be more empathetic so if she is not, then it is not right. With F the organization she is in is male dominated, these men are used to a very male environment, so they do not know how to interact with a woman at work – the professional relationship. The men are not bad people they just don’t have the tools to help the women fit in and be themselves in the organization.”

My reflection is that arguably men in an engineering-based organisation are still adapting to working with women and as such are behind other sectors. Most senior men in the case study organisation have come from an operational background and bring that learned experience into the corporate environment.

The male mentors were very thoughtful about the insights they had gained and, in many cases, still processing how they could respond.

Theme 2: Behavioural Change

The analysis below explores the new behaviours the male mentors reported they were engaging in as a result of the reciprocal mentoring programme. Figure 6.7 below describes the sub themes from which it is comprised.

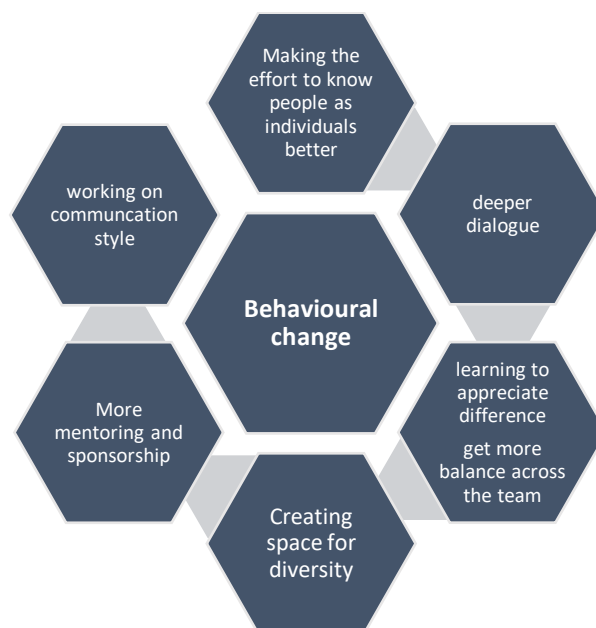


Figure 6.7: New behaviours the male mentors reported they were engaged in post the reciprocal mentoring programme.

Sub theme: Deeper dialogue

In my view the male mentors all recognised the positive benefit of deeper dialogue helping to break down assumptions. I would also suggest that they intended to engage in this more deliberately and consciously as a result of the mentoring experience. Whilst this might not appear a very radical step as an insider researcher, I am aware that this is a very logical, rational organisation which values IQ highly and is less comfortable with emotionally based interactions. Experimenting with sharing more openly at work was for some a new frontier and quite a progressive outcome. Some of their experiences are highlighted below:

Sub theme: Working on communication style

From MM5 *"it was interesting through the process I heard things I didn't expect to, I now intend to ask more questions and make less assumptions."* MM3 reflected *"conversations can boost people's learning to share diversity of different pathways, it has caused me to have conversations in a different way and try to rid myself of the assumptions I have about people."* MM1 revealed *"there was lots of sharing much more than I expected, I was quite open and shared things that I would not share with my colleagues, I got a lot out of it and will try and do more."* Coupled with this was the realisation that getting to know people better enabled them to support people and make better judgements about their abilities and aspirations.

Sub theme: getting to know people better

Through dialogue the male mentors could see the benefits of getting to know people better MM1 explained what this meant to him: *"I think we just need to get to know our people better. This kind of conversation with x meant I get to know her and understand her. Do we know our people properly? Do our leaders know our people really well? I worry about this and it might be the root cause of not pulling through people"* and MM4 felt that creating the opportunity to get to know people outside of his day to day sphere was helpful in terms of getting being made aware of that was going on in other parts of the business: *"the teams I interact with are not like XX. It shows that once you go deeper into an organization you can uncover issues. I feel I have really helped Y – I wonder what would have happened if we did not run this programme."* For one of the mentors this was liberating and created an appetite for more MM5: *"We talked about stuff I wouldn't normally talk about with other people at work – I've enjoyed it, I've learned a lot, I would like to do this again."*

It appears there was a general opening of minds for some of the mentors, though for one he seemed to use the experience more as an opportunity to test and validate his approach to managing diversity within his function.

MM2: *"I was able to use her as a very useful sounding board to help me deal with issues that I was very sensitive about, for example in town halls there were questions that we were only promoting females and she advised me how to respond, to stick to the facts have the numbers and the data to hand and emphasise that we were running a meritocratic process."*

It was as though he used the programme to test with a woman that he was right, having said that I did observe that he came across as more reflective during the post programme interview than he had done during our first interaction.

Sub theme: More mentoring and sponsorship

In terms of tangible other actions, the male mentors said they were committed to taking forward, acting more as mentors and sponsor was a common theme. MM3 shared: *"it has caused me to act more as a sponsor — it helped me make connections to get an interview that she probably would not have got. It reminded me of how difficult it is for people outside UK to get seen and heard and therefore they do not compete fairly."* MM4 committed: *"I will continue to work with X and I will sponsor her because I want to, I want to back the people I want to which means I need to know them."*

Sub themes: Creating space for diversity and balancing teams

There appeared to be a re-engagement with the benefits of diversity and some of the male mentors talked about interventions they could make to create more diverse teams, being more mindful of the benefits of balance across the insights wheel and more aware of and manage the assumptions they held. MM1 reflected on the insights wheel

"I need to tone it down a bit and not see "red" as the secret to success in the company. I need to be more tolerant and accepting of others – green etc. Part of empowerment you do not have to drive and push people you don't have to

be all over them. You can let them get on with it- it is very hard though to change when we have so much dominant red."

MM3 commented: *"the whole thing has enriched my thinking around diversity – there are no shortcuts to categorising people you have to understand them as individuals."*

In terms of holding assumptions, MM6 had a lot to say:

"I need to have bigger eyes and ears for it and not assume that it's all okay because it's not, it feels to me like this stuff must be happening everywhere now, that's what's shifted in my mindset. So, I will be assuming that it exists now, where I might have assumed that it was processed out through all the systems that we have."

In terms of actions that have been taken as a result of what was learned, I observed that there were fewer identified from the men, there was reflection and *intention* by most, though less actual change in behaviour identified as a result of the programme. I felt that some were more motivated than others and would expect them to act on what they have learned. I did also reflect perhaps the women feel the need to change more than the men as they arguably have more to gain.

Theme 3: Opportunities for intervention

The analysis below explores the opportunities for organisational intervention the male mentors identified as a result of the reciprocal mentoring programme. Figure 6.8 below describes the underpinning sub themes



Figure 6.8: Opportunities for intervention identified by the male mentors post the reciprocal mentoring programme.

The male mentors felt that there were a number of areas that organisational interventions could be made to enhance career equality.

Sub theme: Create more formal opportunities for connecting

As mentioned previously many of the mentors had appreciated the opportunity to talk to someone they would not have otherwise come across and felt that further structured mechanisms for connecting would be helpful. MM4: *"we should scale this enough to be successful, not for everyone but we should aim to persuade the persuadable, there is no point in picking the entrenched ones."* MM1 recognised that without deliberate focus this would not naturally happen, *"we need to spend more time on these sorts of conversations we must free up some of our time and prioritise these conversations, the structure encourages it, we won't change progress on people if we follow the same process."*

Sub theme: Rethink talent management processes

They felt that getting to know people better could help to break down some of the biases in the Talent Review processes. MM4 shared his view: *"I see people having views on people based on nothing – based on a 3 minutes conversation or rumour."* This was

reinforced by MM7 who reflected *“we are not taking “calculated risks” and pulling through talent quickly enough, we need to give more people opportunity rather than choosing the same people every time.”*

Sub theme: Creating mechanisms for feedback and balancing teams

Balancing diversity of style has been a key theme throughout, and the male mentors were reflective on the Organisational Development tools that could be deployed to enhance career equality from a broad diversity perspective. As an example, the use of 360 to gain feedback on individuals was viewed as having potential to make a difference. MM4: shared his perspective *“the more we can do to understand how people lead and how they are with other people the better, using 360 to inform decisions more powerfully would be very useful.”* MM6 *“I think we need to use 360 more to flush out poor leadership.”* Which was a surprising take on the purpose of 360 feedback, whilst indicative of the prevailing leadership style.

There was a sense that the Insights profiling tool (Benton *et al*, 2008) could be used more thoughtfully to create more balanced teams as articulated by MM8: *“We need to more deliberately construct our teams, balancing the colours would help and I think that is a healthier way to have an inclusion and diversity discussion rather than making it about gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation.”* MM4 added – *“diversity of thought and experience is not there, we are too homogenous. Often people end up thinking what people think they should think”.*

Sub theme: Use external assessment more effectively

Opportunities for both HR and our external assessment partners to add more value were identified. The HR focus group had revealed that they themselves felt they could do more to support diversity generally and call out inequity, MM4 agreed *“we need to create a safe space for dialogue If they feel the outlet is to chat to HR they won’t do it”* reinforced strongly by MM6: *“HR are described as useless, by X, no point talking to them, because they are always standing on the side-lines.”*

MM7 highlighted a lack of objectivity from the external leadership assessment partners which was perpetuating the status quo: XX are colluding in the system, they just give us what we ask for and are too influenced by the line manager.

Sub theme: Embed progressive policies effectively

Organisational policies have been referenced throughout as progressive levers that are underutilised. MM6 suggested a review of parental leave as well as reinvigorating and embedding flexible working. *“at a corporate level we could take a brave decision, to demonstrate a piece of renewed thinking re family friendly policies.”* MM1 recognised the balance people were looking for: *“People have a lot on and have to manage their families and their kids – you get a reminder that people have lives and need to deal with them, and they are big issues which we need to accommodate.”* MM3 also shared that from a societal perspective *“autonomy and flexibility is more important than ever before; people want to work in ways that suit them more and we need to respond.”*

This theme produces some interesting opportunities for the organisation to intervene systemically in the service of career equality.

6.4: Comparing Gender perceptions of career equality after Reciprocal Mentoring programme

This section explores the similarities and differences of the of career equality following their participation in the reciprocal mentoring programme. I have broken this down according to the same three themes that appeared in the analysis above: Insights, Behavioural Change and Opportunities for Intervention.

Insights

This section explores insights gained through the reciprocal mentoring programme, which I am defining as knowledge the mentors acquired; or something that they were not consciously aware of before, that had surfaced. All the mentors reported learning something new or a different perspective on a previously held view. It was a significant

realisation from some of the mentors that they were holding assumptions and there was an alternative way of looking at the same problem.

The thematic maps below are and are laid out side by side to illustrate the comparison between the genders. I have highlighted in orange where the insights were shared across both groups and shaded over two areas in light blue where there are connected concepts.

The hexagons in blue illustrate where insights were diverged between genders. The detailed findings follow below organised by category.

Male Insights



Female Insights



Figure 6.9: Gender Comparative Thematic map- New Insights

Shared by both genders

There were three areas where both groups aligned on insights gained through the programme, which while presented here separately, intertwine: Firstly, the need to proactively embed organisational policies that appeared to be being diluted by the culture. This insight was drawn from the female mentors' appreciation through the dialogue that their male mentors assumed that policies that were in place were making a difference, in contrast with their own experience. This was confirmed to me by the male mentors who expressed surprise that the availability of flexible working was still a challenge and seen as a barrier for women. I reflected that this divergence of

perspective could be as a symptom of the male mentors' remoteness from the issue. Based on the assumption that those at very senior levels are not asking for flexible working nor are their direct reports, they would have limited awareness. Arguably understandably, they are assuming that because the organisation has formally launched a flexible working policy, that this has been fully embraced and is meeting everyone's needs. The female mentors however were experiencing a very different reality.

The act of discussing this appeared to move the mentors towards a shared understanding which they found to be very powerful and will be discussed later as a recommendation for the organisation.

Secondly a wider realisation from the male mentors that they were not perhaps as aware as they might be of the lived experience, for some, working within their teams. Through the dialogue with the female mentors, some of whom came from very different cultures and segments, they were made aware. There was genuine shock expressed and anger by some at what was learned. This, from what they told me, provoked them to question what they really knew. The female mentors were surprised that the men were surprised by what they heard. Whilst this was disappointing for them, they also expressed some relief that this lack of awareness of the continuing issue of women's career equality, could explain the lack of change and set the scene for further improvement.

Thirdly, the first two insights created a recognition of the value of open dialogue and an appetite for more. As highlighted above, open dialogue is not a cultural norm for this organisation. This programme seemed to demonstrate, for those participating, the insights that can be gained through engaging with others in this way.

Connected concepts

There was one shared realisation, though approached from slightly different angles by the gender groups; Whilst women's career equality was imbalanced, a working hypothesis was emerging that the organisational bias towards a certain personality

type at senior levels was having a bigger impact on diversity than a bias against women. For the male mentors this was expressed as the predominance of the “red” culture in senior ranks and how this was playing out for diversity in the organisation. This red preference is congruent with the with the agentic behaviours described in the literature (Schuh, 2014), and the concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005). There was a recognition amongst the group of male mentors that this predominance could be having a limiting impact on the diversity of the organisation. The female mentors developed the view that the concept of career equality could usefully be applied across other areas of difference besides gender, for example geographies and associated cultures.

The remaining insights which were unique to each gender are discussed below:

Female Mentors

Firstly, the point about authenticity seemed significant for the women – they reported to have learned through the dialogue that they could be themselves and be valued. These female mentors had talked about how they had to create a “work version” of themselves to fit in and succeed. They had found this in the past to be both awkward and tiring and the possibility that this was not necessary, in fact probably not appreciated, was liberating for them. This seemed to challenge the concept of the double-bind as articulated by, Ely and Kolb, (2013) which suggest women are either too “female” (incompetent) or too male (unlikeable and incongruent). I am left reflecting maybe it is the lack of congruence that is getting in the way for some women, the adoption of a persona born out of a misconception of what was required.

Secondly, discovering that men in the organisation did at times find working life difficult was also eye opening. The female mentors had arguably got themselves into a negative frame of mind in relation to gender bias and binary lines between men and women in the organisation. The dialogue had revealed a different perspective that they found helpful. Not only in that they were not entirely victims of their gender, but that some of the men had coping strategies that they could learn from. Having made that

connection and shift in mindset I found the female mentors were energised to adopt a different approach and move to a more productive dialogue.

Male mentors

As explained in Chapter 1, the case study organisation is highly relational; networks are important conductors of progression. Whilst this was clear to both groups from the start, the male mentors seemed not to appreciate how hard the women found networking as a practice and how difficult it was for them to break into the networks that really matter and that they took for granted. This phenomenon had been referenced in the literature (Bushell, 2015) in terms of informal networks and social capital.

The interaction between men and women in the workplace was thought provoking for the men, they referred to their wives/ sisters / daughters and mothers through the post programme interviews in particular. This seemed to provide a useful reference point for their reflections. “How to be” with professional woman was expressed by one mentor as an adjustment that could be described as work in progress. This was interesting to me as it was arguably a relatively sophisticated observation, demonstrating the depth of reflection occurring. One of the male mentors talked to me about how his mentor was experiencing some of the same challenges as his sister, but that this was the first time, he had connected the dots, i.e. thought about his sister in the same context as someone in the case study organisation.

Behavioural Changes

This section now explores what each group of mentors has said they intend to translate into action following the programme on an individual basis. Again, I have highlighted in orange where the insights were shared across both groups and shaded over two areas in light blue where there are connected concepts. The hexagons in blue illustrate where insights were diverged between genders. The detailed findings follow below organised by category.

Male behavioural changes



Female behavioural changes



Figure 6.10 Gender Comparative Thematic map- Behavioural Changes

Both mentor groups

There was only one area of overlap, highlighted in orange, between the genders (commitment to open dialogue). This appeared to validate the process of structured mentoring, I am not sure if the reciprocal nature was significant, however I think the set up around equal two-way dialogue and removing the hierarchy did have an impact. The male mentors certainly seem to have heard that they should not just be giving advice but should be seeking to understand, though at times through their own admission this was something they struggled with. The women seemed to really appreciate the opportunity to share their perspective and reported as feeling heard. Both groups recognised that this level of dialogue between levels and genders was not a cultural norm within the organisation and reflected that this was a missed opportunity for both connection and learning.

Male specific

The male mentor's commitment to behavioural change seemed to coalesce under two broad headings: one around developing more effective communication channels, e.g. generally getting to know people, opening up more, engaging in formal sponsorship and mentoring. This seemed to be underpinned by desire to understand more, realising that currently there was a lot going on that they were not privy to. This realisation seemed to have made them feel uncomfortable and aware that if they knew more,

they could have more impact. There was some concern expressed that things under their leadership were not as they should be and that worried them. The other broad heading was a commitment to proactively work on creating more diverse teams. This seemed to be propagated on the realisation that the lack of balance of personality within the organisation was having a negative impact for some groups, and that the organisation could be missing out on diversity of thought arguably increasingly desirable as the organisation grappled with the need to change.

Female specific

The female mentors appeared to be focussed on managing their internal state, using the insights they had gained and applying them to their approach to the world. They talked about being less cautious, managing their own confidence, asking for help, showing vulnerability and proactively building networks. They appeared to be moving away from assumptions they had held about how they needed to be. Whilst realising that it was going to be uncomfortable, they felt it was possible for them to positively change their experience of the organisation. Some of them were already in action.

As I compare the commitment to behavioural change between the genders, I conclude that the women were more focussed on personal change; how they were going to think differently and manage themselves differently and that the men were more focussed on new ways of operating. This does suggest to me that the women were more intent on fixing themselves and that the men more intent on fixing the environment for which they were responsible. If I were to rationalise this, I would suggest that the men were more in a position to change the environment as a consequence of their seniority and the women feel less able to but were prepared to work on what is possible; themselves. Wittenberg- Cox (2013) had presented a binary dichotomy (fix the women, or, create an organisation fit for women) in this instance it appears we have the potential for a productive combination of both. It is pleasing to see that the mentors seemed to be prepared to turn insight into action.

Opportunities for Intervention

The final section explores what each group of mentors identified as opportunities for intervention at an organisational level. I have highlighted in orange where the insights were shared across both groups and shaded over one area in pale green where there was a connected concept. The hexagons in green illustrate where recommendations diverged between genders. The detailed findings follow below organised by category.

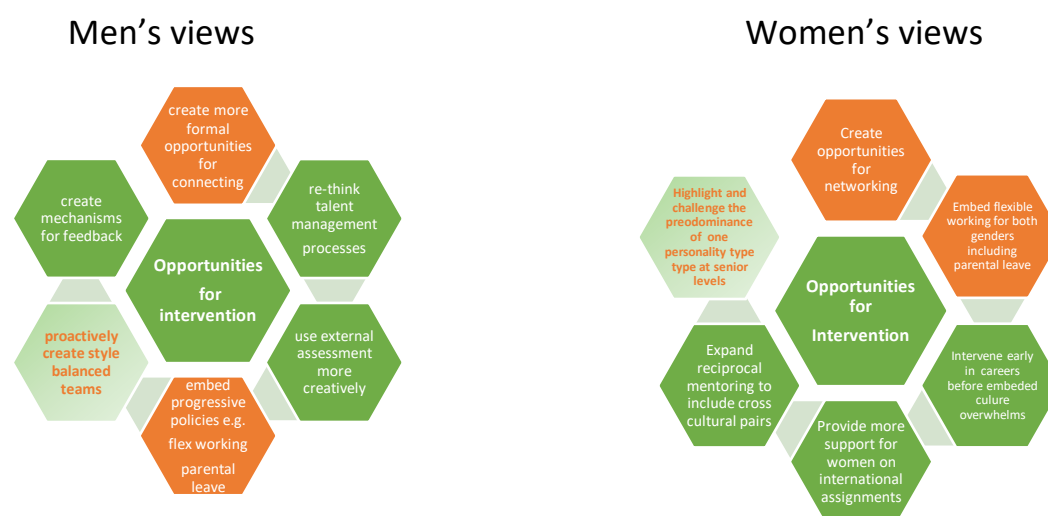


Figure 6.11: Gender Comparative Thematic map- Opportunities for intervention

Both Mentor Groups

There were two areas on which both groups of mentors agreed and one connected concept:

1. Opportunities for Networking – the importance of networking had come out strongly in the pre-programme interviews and this view remained undiluted following the mentoring sessions. What had emerged was the shared realisation that without intervention this won't meaningfully happen naturally for women, and habitual patterns of connection need to be broken to level the landscape. It was recommended therefore that there was some organisational intervention.
2. Flexible working policies emerged strongly from both groups as an enabler of women's career equality. Through the dialogue between the mentors however,

understanding had evolved about the effectiveness of what, in principle, was already in place and some of the associated negative perceptions. Kossek, Su and Wu, (2017) cite the stigmatisation of those who take advantage of family friendly policies. The focus group reinforced the unintended consequences that they observed. Both genders recognised that there is a significant opportunity to advance thinking and practice in this area. Work is already underway to understand this further and there is a proposal to deploy an organisation-wide flexible working survey to gather more data.

Connected Concept

The issue of the lack of diversity of style, using Insights Discovery as a reference point resonated strongly with both groups of mentors, though with a slight nuance between genders. There was recognition from many of the participants, particularly but not exclusively, the female mentors, that the organisational bias for one personality type at senior levels, was getting in the way of diversity. From the male mentors in particular, there was an appetite for some organisational support for redressing this lack of balance and more proactively constructing more diverse teams. Whilst listening to these suggestions I was reminded of The Nine Belbin Team Roles, Belbin M. (2012) which were constructed around the principles of diversity and don't seem to have as much profile in modern organisations as they did. The case study organisation is very invested in Insights Discovery and so it seems possible to leverage the opportunity to utilise this model more strategically. The fact there is agreement between the groups bodes well for possible enactment of these recommendations.

Male specific

1. The male mentors were supportive of further strategic interventions to provoke feedback and open communication channels; for many the mentoring experience had made them realise how little awareness they had of the reality of the experience of women. Whilst most of the men had concluded that they personally could do more, they were also suggesting a systemic intervention to formalise the process of feedback without which they felt that impact could be limited.

2. There was an appetite for more objective talent management processes to minimise what was described as the subjective promotion of “people like us.” This came across as an awareness from the mentors of their own biases, which they also recognised they found difficult to manage.
3. Use external assessment to drive greater diversity. This is linked to the previous point. External assessment is widely used to validate appointments and promotions within the case study organisation, though according to the male mentors and the HR focus group it has become largely a rubber-stamping process rather than a meaningful reference point. Work is already underway to create greater insight into the process and rebalance the elements of decision making.

Female specific

1. Rollout Reciprocal Mentoring further to include cross cultural pairs. The female mentors had found the programme helpful as a mechanism for recognising and valuing difference generally, not solely in relation to gender. They felt therefore that the approach had broader potential. This resonated with the view referenced in the literature review section that reciprocal mentoring could be a tool to develop understanding outside of organisational cultural norms (Desai, Rao and Jabeen, 2018).
2. Adopt a more supportive and flexible approach to international assignments to make the experience more accessible to women. The female mentors recognised the value of working outside of their home location; in an international business deeply understanding the global context is a key success factor. Currently within the case study organisation the commitment required can lead to long term disruption to family life and the suggestion from the female mentors is that a range of less intense options is introduced to encourage more female participation. This is congruent with a view that emerged through the literature review (Kumra, 2013).
3. Intervene early in careers to prevent cultural norms embedding. Some of the female mentors recognised new joiners were quickly absorbing the cultural norms and warned against assuming just because they are young that they will

not be influenced by the prevailing culture driven by a desire to integrate. They suggested interventions in graduate programmes to highlight diversity challenges.

Having completed the interviews before and after the reciprocal mentoring programme, I was able to reflect on my observations on how the mentors appeared to be relating to the issue of women's career equality. These are summarised by gender below:

Female Mentors before the reciprocal mentoring programme	Female Mentors after the reciprocal mentoring programme
Feeling like victims	Better informed braver
Sense of helplessness- they could not control their circumstances	More ownership for their own issues and empowerment
Cornered – there was no way out	More in control and more supported
Lacking Choice- and that they should be grateful for opportunities	Prepared to be more demanding
Ignored – as though their views and opinions didn't matter	Better understood and listened to
Limited – the amount of influence they had was finite	More confident about speaking up
Incongruent – as though they didn't belong	Less different, less isolated

Table 6.1 Women's Mindset during reciprocal mentoring programme

Male Mentors before the reciprocal mentoring programme	Male Mentors after the reciprocal mentoring programme
On message - with a clear, collective view of the world	Reflective and less sure of their position
Guarded and wary of saying the wrong thing. Slightly defensive	Empathetic and motivated to understand more
Indulgent – duty bound to engage as part of their senior responsibilities	Attentive and interested

Confident that all the right things were happening	Embarrassed at how little they knew and slightly guilty at the part they are playing unwittingly
Polished and professional (informed and in control)	less certain and more human
Slightly fatigued by the topic	Opened minded and inquisitive

Table 6.2 Men's Mindset during reciprocal mentoring programme

During the second interviews both groups of mentors appeared to approach the subject of women's career equality more thoughtfully than before the programme, I observed greater levels of reflection and less certainty than expressed previously. They didn't seem to be as sure of their positions and in general, presented as comfortable with the more fluid nature of their thinking.

Before the programme both genders seem to have embraced some patterns of thinking that were challenged through their mentoring dialogue. Following the programme, they seemed to be more comfortable knowing less and more open to exploring solutions. This shift arguably provides fertile ground for learning. From my observations both groups of mentors seemed to have moved towards each other's perspective. They were starting to take a "critical stance of their taken for granted ways" (Burr, 2015, p. 2) in relation to women's career equality. Most of the male mentors moved towards recognising that there was an issue that needed to be dealt with and the women moved towards a sense of possibility that things could improve and that they could take some ownership. Both groups appeared to have been energised about a topic that felt as though it had been wearing them down previously.

As an insider researcher my observation is that the organisational culture seems to require politeness and difficult conversations often do not happen – this programme appeared to give the mentors permission to explore some controversial territory in what seemed like a safe space. The men reported to have particularly enjoyed a conversation without an agenda; they weren't being asked to produce anything, a

contact or a job etc and the women reflected that they had appreciated the opportunity to be heard positively.

Both groups also seemed more relaxed post the programme, less corporate and more human, this surprised me and left me reflecting on the power of dialogue and thoughtful about why this is not a more regular occurrence in organisations.

The reciprocal mentoring process was unfamiliar within the case study organisation, though mentoring is widely practiced generally within a traditional frame of guidance and assimilation. There has been a recent emergence of reverse mentoring designed specifically to support adoption of technology amongst the senior population. There appeared to be some initial confusion and discomfort in relation to the Reciprocal Mentoring process despite some clear guidelines (appendices 1 and 2) The organisation is very hierarchical, and it seemed this was a factor in the early stages as described by MM3, who observed:

“no matter how well these things are set up it is really hard to get away from the hierarchy, x was looking to me for advice and guidance as the more senior person, the dynamic exists, and it is hard to get away from it.”

This reflection demonstrates the quality of the mutual exchange that occurred and how barriers diminished as relationships developed and people opened up, as articulated by MM1:

“There was a lot of sharing – more than I had expected. Personal history, experiences and challenges – myself as well opening about things that affected me. We opened up and it really surprised me. She is very engaging, but I just did not think we would be that open. I think this happened partly because we let our guards down – we kept saying it was a safe environment.”

In terms of holding assumptions, MM6 had a lot to say:

"I need to have bigger eyes and ears for it and not assume that it's all okay because it's not, it feels to me like this stuff must be happening everywhere now, that's what's shifted in my mindset. So, I will be assuming that it exists now, where I might have assumed that it was processed out through all the systems that we have."

MM3 also reflected:

"At the beginning I was not talking very much, I was listening. Two or three conversations later realised I was not sharing very much so we then structured it slightly differently to help us take different roles in the conversation. There is also the cultural overlay – Asia to UK British and what people feel comfortable sharing across a hierarchy or not. There is learning for me about how I interact with those conversations knowing that this dynamic is there – I would probably have shared some things sooner to demonstrate that

MM4 was also pleasantly surprised about the level of openness and meaningful dialogue: *"My mentor very quickly got into some meaty issues. She was very open, and I was very open, I don't know why it worked but it really did, and it meant we got working deeply, quickly."*

This surprise at the productive nature of the process was also expressed by the female mentors as they discovered how little the male mentors were tuned in to what they as women were experiencing within the case study organisation. The reciprocal nature of the mentoring was arguably able to shift the traditional dynamic of mentoring and create a different level of insight, FM8 described her frustration of not being listened to and in fact blamed for her experience : *"he was saying you are not reacting in the right way, I think you should be behaving differently."* Through the mutual dialogue he moved to: *"I don't recognise what you are telling me, but I feel like I've not been listening to you and I feel like I've been putting it back on you"*

This awareness raising was also experienced by FM7 who shared how her male mentor reacted *"he was completely shocked when I told him what was happening, he said I can't believe this is still going on"* And again, from FM9: *"I was surprised that he was*

surprised that comments are still made to women that they only got the job because of their gender.”

I would argue that these articulations of the unexpected in an organisation in which traditional mentoring is widely practiced demonstrate the potential reciprocal mentoring has to create a more progressive dialogue.

Areas for improvement

1. **Matching.** Whilst some work had been done on the matching of mentoring pairs, I think this could be improved. The main area of difficulty seemed to be in respect of geography. Some of the pairs were across continents which created logistical challenges, meaning they were slower to get off the ground and didn't get to spend much if any time face to face. Whilst that is the nature of the organisation there was no doubt that got in the way of the relationships developing for some. As described by MM8: *“the one challenge was building a mentoring relationship with someone when you can never be in the same room with them.”*
2. **Structured framework for Reciprocal Mentoring.** Some of the men at first found the concept of the reciprocal nature of the mentoring challenging, and admitted they defaulted to giving advice. Some of them requested more structure to guide them through how to be more “reciprocal” and less directive. Though reference materials were provided (appendices 1 and 2) some of the male mentors requested more guidance on questions to ask, how to structure the sessions, how the time should be spent, mid- programme check ins and even training in advance. MM3 shared that: *“x was looking for guidance at first despite the set up and in the end we structured the conversation into two halves stricter handrails would have been helpful.”* This arguably is indicative of the challenge of operating against organisational norms and an indication of the self-awareness of some of the male mentors.
3. **The seniority of the male mentors.** Based on the principle of involving those with the most power in the organisation to make a change, this programme had ambitiously targeted very senior men as mentors. Undoubtably this brought some

benefits as the organisational filters surrounding some of the men (or as articulated by one of the male mentors – the rose-tinted spectacles) were removed. There were challenges around setting up mentoring sessions which caused frustration and delay, which leads me to reflect on whether targeting less-senior men might be more productive.

6.5 Summary

In my view all the participants, gained insight into the perspective of their mentoring partners in terms of the issues surrounding female progression to the most senior roles within their context. I would describe the continuum of the depth of the insight as from interesting to profound. I observed a difference in the way in which the challenges surround women's progression in the case study organisation were articulated by members of both mentor groups following the programme, importantly it seemed that everyone's minds had been opened. Significantly for some, the challenging of long held assumptions was uncomfortable and meaningful.

Chapter 7

Discussion

This chapter summarises the outcomes of the research against the original objectives, (table 7.1 below) evaluates the approach, and discusses the six major findings in relation to career equality identified through this case study which are: A shift in the nature of mentoring, women's congruence in the workplace, agentic leadership bias, organisational readiness for equality, flexibility stigma and diversity is a business not just an HR issue.

7.1 Summary of outcomes against original research objectives

Research Objectives	Summary of Outcomes
1. Critically review the literature on workplace gender issues, women's career equality challenges and what is known about the impact and processes of relevant development interventions, specifically the role of reciprocal mentoring in supporting an understanding and progression of women's career equality issues in organisations	• The literature supported the view that women have not entirely achieved career equality despite legislation and progressive social policies particularly at senior levels. • Coaching and mentoring were generally used as coping mechanisms. • Reciprocal mentoring emerged as a variation worth exploring further as a progressive tool
2. Explore mentors' and mentees' experiences of reciprocal mentoring as an approach for creating shared understanding of women's career equality challenges within the hosting organisation	• The experience was enlightening as described by most participants. • All involved learned something in relation to career equality though it was not solely in respect of gender. • The issue of diversity of style and a bias towards agentic behaviours emerged as significant
3. Analyse evidence from participants and those within their work environment of a reciprocal mentoring scheme to uncover	The following themes/ findings have been identified:

themes related to the role of mentoring in understanding of women's' career equality issues	• A shift in the nature of mentoring, • Women's congruence in the workplace, • Agentic leadership bias, • Organisational readiness for equality, • Flexibility stigma • Diversity and inclusion is a business not just an H.R. issue These are discussed in detail below
4. Evaluate findings and identify the opportunities for reciprocal mentoring as a catalyst for change which make an original contribution to theoretical knowledge and practice.	Contribution to knowledge has been indicated in relation to each identified theme and practical implications are discussed with relevance to the following stakeholders: • Mentors and designers of mentoring programmes • HR teams • Organisations • Students of mentoring literature • Leaders • Students of career equality • Diversity and Inclusion professionals

Table 7.1: Summary of outcomes against original research objectives

I will now present a detailed discussion of the six major findings that were identified within this research which I believe can add to our understanding of the gender equality issues at work and more specifically the role of reciprocal mentoring. These are summarised in figure 7.2 below

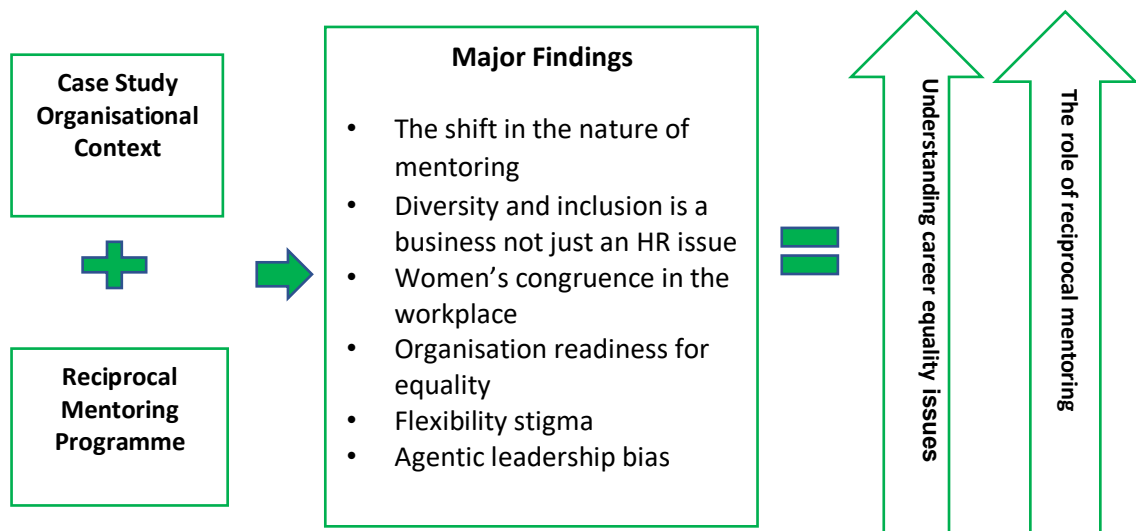


Figure 7.2: summary of major findings.

Major Finding 1: A shift in the nature of mentoring

Results of this study indicate that reciprocal mentoring might have broader application in other contexts where there is a desire to create shared understanding between diverse groups. There are many areas where difference is held as a barrier, rather than an opportunity to learn, including age, nationality, race, gender, sexuality, etc. The female mentors developed the view that the concept of career equality and reciprocal mentoring could usefully be applied across other areas of difference besides gender, for example geographies and associated cultures. The experience of the mentors suggests that creating the space for structured listening, sharing and understanding is beneficial.

This contributes to the body of knowledge of mentoring as it evolves. Traditional mentoring is widely practiced, but the results of this study suggest that reverse mentoring is a progressive step with an opportunity to shift the flow of learning. Reciprocal Mentoring could provide the next stage of evolution as it strives for mutuality of the dialogue and the associated benefit. Lawrence (2019) articulates the difference between monologue and dialogue highlighting the need to suspend one's position and adopt a dialogic, as opposed to a monologic, mindset. In Table 7.3 based

on the experiences of the mentors I have extended this concept to describe the mindset that appears to be best suited to reciprocal mentoring:

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of the thesis due to copyright restrictions

Table 7.3: adapted from Lawrence (2019, p.14)

According to Lawrence (2019, p.14) adopting a dialogic mindset means “I notice that everyone has different experiences, beliefs and values. I can see my perspective is not the only perspective and I am curious to understand the world through other’s eyes”. Arguably the participants in this case study were predisposed to a reciprocal mentoring mindset as they had firstly agreed to take part in the pilot programme and secondly to be part of this case study. This is unlikely to be the case in many contexts and is an important factor to be taken into consideration in any future programmes. I would argue though that for some of this group of mentors participating in the reciprocal mentoring programme created a shift towards a more dialogic mindset as described by the participants. From MM5 *“it was interesting through the process I heard things I didn’t expect to, I now intend to ask more questions and make less assumptions.”* And from FM8: *“I am determined now to have different conversations with the unenlightened as I know now you can’t assume that they have an instant recognition with the experiences that you have had.”*

Major Finding 2: Women's Congruence in the workplace

The concept of congruence seemed significant for both groups of mentors. The female mentors reported to have been really surprised to have learned through the dialogue that they could be themselves and be valued. Throughout the pre-programme interviews these women had described how they felt under pressure to create a “work version” of themselves to fit in and succeed. This experience was both uncomfortable and tiring for them and the possibility that this was not necessary, in fact probably not appreciated, was both enlightening and liberating for them. This seemed to challenge the concept of the double-bind as articulated by Ely and Kolb (2013) which suggest women are either too “female” (incompetent) or too “male” (unlikeable and incongruent) and potentially offers a way through the dilemma they expressed. I am left questioning if it is perhaps the lack of congruence that is getting in the way for some women, which manifests as the adoption of a persona born out of a misconception of what was required. This seemed to resonate with the male mentors some of whom expressed a discomfort with a style adopted by women in the workplace which seemed incongruent with their experience of women outside of the workplace. They often referred to their wives/sisters/ daughters and mothers; through the post programme interviews in particular. This seemed to provide a useful reference point for their reflections.

The creation of a professional image or impression management applies to many diversity contexts. In relation to women Roberts (2005, pg. 26), references gender congruence theory, suggesting that “women who employ upward influence and or impression management tactics that are consistent with gender stereotypes are more likely to gain acceptance from and access to organisational members who wield more power.” She goes on to explain that as a result some women adopt flirtatious or mothering strategies for relating to colleagues. This stereotypical role-playing is arguably contributing to the incongruence and confusion as identified by the male and female mentors within the case study organisation. There are negative consequences to both the individual and the organisation of such a dynamic; from an individual perspective, the emotional labour of acting out a persona can produce tension and

stress and cognitive distraction. According to Roberts (2005, pg.33) this identity conflict can be described as – the act of “betraying one’s personal identity for the sake of one’s professional identity.” I would suggest that if this conflict is present, this impacts an individual’s ability to form meaningful relationships at work. I certainly heard this expressed by the female mentors; some felt on the outside and not able to break through despite working quite hard on their persona. As discussed in previous chapters the case study organisation is highly relational and I am persuaded that identity conflict could be an impediment to some of the women in this research making the connections they need to help them to progress.

The degree to which someone feels comfortable being themselves is influenced by organisational culture: Hewlin (2003, pg.633) Identifies “facades of conformity” in organisational settings which she describes as “suppressing one’s own values and pretending to embrace organisational values” which may be based on fear of concern. She argues that minorities are more likely to feel pressure to display facades and conform through fear of not fitting in.

Canadian research of women’s experiences in an engineering school, Dryburgh, (1999) highlighted that firstly, women were adjusting all the way through engineering school and once successfully graduated, needed to continue to adapt to deal with the engineering culture in the workplace, due to the profession’s enduring masculinity. She describes the “first-year / work hard year” rite of passage and a required demonstration of your commitment to the profession which extends to a requirement to allying with male engineers by labelling sexism as an exception. Although this research is 20 years old, the associated could explain in part why engineering remains such a difficult industry for women to progress to senior levels.

Wearing of emotional masks as a coping mechanism for some women was highlighted by Jackson (2012, pg.75/76) as part of her research into women working in higher education “The demands of working in a male-dominated environment were evident where being a woman in isolation rendered the ability to display congruence difficult. The creation of masks to protect vulnerability appeared to be common practice and was deemed to be a legitimate and authentic device.” The dialogue exchanged in the

reciprocal mentoring programme led me to conclude that the creation of masks was indeed having quite the opposite effect and impeding the development of productive relationships.

The risk of compromising to fit in, then losing congruence and the ability to build relationships in the process was identified by Leimon, Moscovici Goodier, (2013, pg. 74/5 who suggested classic self-doubt as the cause. For some of the female mentors the issue of self-doubt was raised particularly in the pre-programme interviews and I would suggest talking about this with a male mentor evolved both theirs and the mentors' thinking towards the realisation that it is more than good enough to be themselves. This arguably presents an opportunity for coaching as a progressive tool supporting the development of women's congruent "work" selves rather than being used as a supportive, coping mechanism.

The findings have revealed that the female mentors in this study are struggling with being themselves and feeling as though they need to be adopting a persona, which they find tiring and unrewarding. The male mentors were experiencing an uncomfortable incongruence which was not based on women not being "womanly" but on them not being themselves.

It would be interesting to explore this in other contexts to understand if there is a correlation between the ability to be congruent and progression for women.

Major Finding 3: Agentic leadership bias

During the research a shared realisation across the mentor groups began to emerge: whilst women's career equality seemed imbalanced within the case study organisation, a preference for a certain personality type at senior levels, was having a bigger impact on diversity than gender bias. The Insights Discovery model (Benton *et al*, 2008) has been mentioned frequently in my analysis and as discussed, has deep currency within the case study organisation and significantly influences the culture. The model uses colours to differentiate personality styles, and red dominates within the senior executive

leadership cadre. The underpinning characteristics of the red profile align well with the concept of agentic behaviours identified by Schuh, (2014); Eagly and Karau (2002) and hegemonic masculinity as described by Connell, (2005). Through their reflections some of the mentors were able to recognise underrepresentation of other types and thus the opportunity for proactively constructing more diverse teams based on style and the positive impact that could have on performance.

These suggestions reminded me of The Nine Belbin Team Roles (Belbin, 2012). His research demonstrated that the most successful teams were constructed of diverse individuals; with a balance of skills, intellect and personality. The “flaws of the Apollo team” identified during his research at Henley highlighted the risks associated with team homogeneity. This approach to diversity seems to have fallen out of favour in modern organisations, as the conversation has shifted towards the outward symbols of difference e.g. gender and ethnicity. During this research it was encouraging to observe a wider recognition of the impact the preference for agentic leadership behaviours was having on diversity, and on the business.

Major Finding 4: Organisational readiness for career equality

As I reflected on the above theme, I became curious as to why one such personality would be so highly regarded and almost exclusively present and thriving at senior levels in the case study organisation. The connection with colours expressing human development led me to explore Spiral Dynamics, which was initiated by Professor Clare Graves in the 1960s and developed into its current form by two of his students: Don Beck and Chris Cowan. Their work resulted in a hierarchical model of eight levels (Appendix 7.1) each describing a world view or meme, these world views can manifest themselves on an individual or a societal (organisational) level.

The process of moving between the memes or up the hierarchy are called awakenings which could be described stages of evolution. In this instance I am considering the maturity of the case study organisation, which I would position within the 5th (Orange) meme, characterised as an achievist, playing the game to win. According to Beck and

Cowan, (2006, p.46) the underpinning beliefs and actions at this level are: “Change and advancement are inherent in the scheme of things, progress by learning nature’s secrets and seeking out the best solutions, manipulate earth’s resources to create and spread the abundant good life, optimistic, risk taking, and self-reliant people deserve their success, societies prosper through strategy, technology and competitiveness.” This resonates with me as an insider researcher and arguably provides the environment in which the red agentic personality is likely to thrive and diversity less likely to flourish.

The next level up the 6th, Green Meme is arguably where equality and diversity are more likely to find a natural home. Beck and Cowan, (2006, p.46) describe the underpinning beliefs and actions as: “1. The human spirit must be freed from dogma, greed and divisiveness. 2. Feelings, sensitivity and caring supersede cold rationality. 3. Spread the earth’s resources and opportunities equally among all. 4. Reach decisions through reconciliation and consensus processes. 5. Refresh spirituality, bring harmony and enrich human development.” The case study organisation is entering a significant phase of change as its industry grapples with the energy transition to a low carbon future and complex and changing world views. There are signs of shifting from the orange to the green meme which arguably will provide a catalyst for diversifying leadership style as there is a recognition that new thinking is urgently needed.

According to Beck and Cowan, (2006, p. 264) “as organisations shift between orange and green cold engineers may rediscover their humanity; gender equality becomes fact not feminist rhetoric.” Whilst perhaps an exaggerated description, this statement does ring true in terms of some of the cultural elements of the case study organisation and I believe for others. This reflection emerging from the reciprocal mentoring programme provides a developing theoretical perspective of the conditions required for career equality to thrive and perhaps goes some way to explain why some industries are frustrated in their progress.

Major Finding 5: Flexibility stigma

Through the reciprocal dialogue the significance of flexible working policies emerged strongly from both groups as a potential enabler of women's career equality. This emerged however, not in the most obvious sense of simply providing the opportunity for women to work flexibly or part time in order to enable them to manage work and family life. Between the mentors, understanding had evolved about the effectiveness of the current policy within the case study organisation and through the focus group (as highlighted in Chapter 5) and some of the associated negative perceptions became clear. The stigmatisation of those who take advantage of family friendly policies and how that negatively impacts women was cited by Kossek, Su and Wu, (2017, p. 229) as a "pushed-out factor or an opting out pressure."

The fear of negative career consequences as an explanation for low usage of flexible working policies are also highlighted by Williams, Blair and Bergdahl, (2013) who reference lower performance evaluations and fewer promotions of flexible workers as evidence of this. They go on to describe the flexibility stigma as an inherently gendered phenomenon underpinned by the perception that working long hours is still seen as masculine and heroic, particularly among professional men. They go further to argue that women are conforming to a gender stereotype by shouldering the majority of flexible working – doing what is expected of them - a point made by Kossek, Su and Wu (2017, p.229) who refer to the perceived choice made by women to work flexibly as being "shaped by social factors." This societal expectation was referenced by some of the female mentors who described feeling under pressure to be perfect home makers and professionals.

The female mentors referenced the significance of the consequences of flexibility stigma in that working part time didn't seem an acceptable option for the organisation. Stone and Hernandez (2013) suggest that this can lead to the point at which many women opt out and leave their organisation. Their research describes the all or nothing workplace which remains a reality for many, where long hours are a proxy for commitment and

working part time thereof demonstrates a lack of real dedication. She argues that as a consequence that women feel marginalised by their choices causing them to disengage from the organisation. It emerged from the case study focus group that men have noticed these negative perceptions and are distancing themselves from part time or flexible working for fear of how their levels of commitment could be perceived. There is however evidence that this is changing and in conversation with male members of my team they have expressed a desire to flex parental leave to balance the impact of their partners taking maternity leave. This evolving perspective could begin to overcome the fear of stigma.

Whilst family friendly policies are popular with women according to Hakim, (2006) there is however doubt over whether they contribute to equality in the workplace and in fact a suggestion that these might make things worse by contributing to the problem. She argues that there are some roles that cannot realistically be family friendly; they require long hours and extensive travel and have unpredictable demands which are hard to plan for. (She describes these as hegemonic occupations.) This had certainly emerged particularly through the pre-programme interviews from both sets of mentors as they described the success factors required for progression within the case study organisation. Hakim (2006, Pg. 291) discusses the difference between horizontal and vertical occupational segregation where men are concentrated in higher graded and higher paid positions in the same industry than women in lower graded and lower paid occupations. She introduces preference theory and suggest that it means that men will remain dominant in the workplace as only a minority of (work centred) women are prepared to make the sacrifice required in hegemonic occupations. This resonates with the context of the case study organisation as it stands currently. She does go on to observe: “work centred men are in the majority but are not the only type” suggesting a hidden diversity which seems to be emerging in my data. She also recommends that unisex policies are required and for them to truly be effective we need to remove the stigma. Within the case study organisation unisex policies exist however, so it seems, does the stigma. The reciprocal mentoring dialogue has brought this conflict to the fore, creating an opportunity for a productive strategic conversation about how to create

truly transformational policies. The first step, in my view, is to raise awareness of what has been learned through the reciprocal mentoring programme i.e. that the current policies are not supporting career equality and are in fact reinforcing difference through stigma. Secondly, I would recommend the confidential surveying of the whole organisation on the effectiveness of the current policy and a strategic response. Finally, I would advocate for the full adoption of enhanced shared parental leave.

Major Finding 6: Diversity and inclusion is a Business not just an HR issue

Through the research there also emerged a clear message about the role of the case study HR team. Their own view (expressed in the HR focus group) that they were not challenging the business over areas such as bias and application of organisational policies was reinforced by the view of some of the mentors that HR were “sitting on the side-lines” and not intervening enough. This raises some questions about the efficacy of HR and who should be driving the diversity agenda within organisations. This point is raised by Wittenberg-Cox (2013, pg. 109) who argues that one of the consequences of ‘diversity’ typically being the responsibility of HR departments and not seen as a business priority, impedes progress. I would also suggest that if HR teams were more business focussed and confident in their position this would not be a necessary distinction to make. In my conversations with the male mentors, I did observe a sense from some, that even though they were very senior leaders they had an expectation that HR were predominately responsible for creating the environment for career equality. Through their dialogue for some there was an emerging recognition of the role they as senior leaders had to play. This concept of dual responsibility was discussed by Childs (2005, pg. 73) who references that “Workforce diversity cannot be delegated; it must be a partnership. Although the HR team plays the key staff role, total delegation from the top, without active involvement, is a recipe for failure.”

This research suggests that the approach HR are taking could also be a contributing factor. The HR department in the case study organisation, not untypically, is largely populated by women and I think it is not unreasonable to suggest that this has an

impact. The struggle for HR strategic impact is well documented, Ulrich (1996, p,8) urges HR professionals “to go beyond being the policy police and regulatory watchdogs to become partners, players and pioneers in delivering value.” The seeming lack of traction in diversity initiatives is indicative of the opportunity for HR to create more meaningful partnerships with the business in pursuit of career equality. This research suggests that the HR department within the case study organisation is struggling with this evolution. I would recommend that deeper understanding of the complexities of the issues would create greater confidence amongst the HR team to partner meaningfully with the business and engage leaders to play their part more fully.

In this chapter, I have discussed the six major themes emerging from the research: A shift in the nature of mentoring, women’s congruence in the workplace, agentic leadership bias, organisational readiness for equality, flexibility stigma and diversity is a business not just an HR issue and how these themes add to the understanding of gender equality issues at work and the role of reciprocal mentoring . The implications of these themes will be discussed in the final chapter.

Chapter 8

Conclusion and recommendations

The original aim of this research was to explore the effect of reciprocal mentoring as a potentially progressive tool to influence the perceptions of women's career equality within a traditional engineering multinational organisation. In undertaking the research, I explored the literature relating to gender and organisations, career equality challenges, women's career equality and the role of coaching and mentoring in supporting the progression of women. The research was positioned within a social constructionist paradigm using case study methodology. Qualitative data was collected using semi structured interviews with reciprocal mentoring participants and an HR focus group and documentation in relation to the reciprocal mentoring programme, which was then analysed using thematic analysis.

This chapter draws the conclusions from the study. The implications of each of the findings in Chapter 7 are offered, Whilst the case study organisation is unique, the major themes that emerged in here contribute to the debate surrounding women's career equality beyond the case study organisation.

Limitations of this project are included, and the chapter concludes with my final personal reflection on my learning throughout this project.

8.1 Implications of findings

1: A shift in the nature of mentoring

The literature review identified a gap in knowledge in relation to reciprocal mentoring. As discussed in Chapter 7 this study produced the findings that contribute to addressing this gap. This demonstrates that reciprocal, as a relatively unexplored form of mentoring practice, may have promise as a progressive tool that could be deployed in organisational contexts aiming to create shared understanding; differentiating this

from other types of mentoring. As mentoring practice evolves, highlighting the purpose, desired mindset, process involved and application of different types of mentoring would, I believe, enable more effective targeting of mentoring interventions. This in turn could enhance the value gained for those participating. Table 8.1 below provides a framework for differentiating between modes of mentoring, suggesting the process undertaken and how to target mentoring to meet specific objectives.

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of the thesis due to copyright restrictions

Table 8.1: Distinctive mentoring definitions, extended from Harvey, McIntyre, Heames, & Moeller, (2009).

Adopting this framework when devising mentoring programmes including the selection of participants according to their needs and attributes could help to elevate mentoring further as a professional discipline and practice. Further research into the desired

attributes of mentors and how to assess them, e.g. for a dialogic mindset would also be of value.

2: Women's congruence in the workplace

The female mentors were finding it difficult to embody a congruent leadership style: they felt pressure to behave in way that seemed unnatural to them and yet was unappreciated by the male mentors. The case study organisation is a traditional engineering company which struggles with a small STEM qualified female pipeline which arguably impacts on the concept of congruence as there are few senior female role models. Comparative research into other sectors could be insightful to understand if female leadership congruence influences women's career equality in other contexts. Within the case study organisation, in response to the findings, I am proposing the development of a structured approach for building congruent leadership confidence for women, which is not about women fitting in, but about being comfortable enough to be themselves in leadership roles. This approach I think could be of value to organisations in other sectors which have been slow to build a female senior leadership pipeline. A lot of generic leadership programmes are focussed on developing against a frame of organisational leadership behaviours or models that arguably have been rooted in traditionally masculine characteristics and could trigger the incongruent path. According to Vinnicombe, Moore and Anderson, (2013) women only leadership programmes can be shunned by women who feel they are stigmatised. Positioning a programme carefully around congruence has the potential to resonate and breakthrough the deadlock.

3. Agentic leadership bias

The preference for a certain style of leadership unrelated to gender, but rather towards a specific personality type was a key and unexpected finding from this study. The bias towards an agentic leadership style was keenly felt in the case study organisation, but not only by women. Some of the men I encountered through the research reflected on the personality required to succeed and how that was uncomfortable at times, not only personally, but also as they made hiring and promotion decisions. The impact of this

appeared to be a lack of diversity of style at the top of the organisation which was arguably reinforcing the status quo. The traditional focus on gender seemed to have been distracting the organisation from reflecting on diversity in its broader sense. As highlighted in the introduction, initiatives designed to make progress on female representation were falling short of expectations and this reflection could be a helpful route into an approach which could prove more productive. The concept of agentic versus communal behaviour has been written about extensively, (Schuh, 2014); (Eagly and Karau, 2002) however the focus is targeted along gender lines. This research would suggest that there is value in broadening that debate beyond gender.

4. Organisational readiness for equality

Major theme four revealed that the prevailing culture of the case study organisation is a bi product of the organisational meme level from which it currently operates. According to Beck and Cowan's (2006) explanation of Spiral Dynamics, unless an organisation moves beyond orange (enterprise) level and into the green (communitarian) level it is difficult for the concept of equality to gain traction. Arguably the business case for diversity would need to be compelling and unambiguous to mitigate for such underpinning drivers. I suggest understanding organisational readiness to embrace equality through an assessment of meme level would be useful for other organisations. This could enable organisations to better develop their diversity strategies, and effectively target their interventions, which this study explains can result in limited progress. Targeted mentoring as described in table 8.1 could be deployed strategically. Reciprocal Mentoring could be used to open dialogue and create shared understanding across diverse groups whilst Reverse Mentoring could be targeted at educating senior executives keen to understand more about emerging societal issues.

5. Flexibility stigma

A stigma attached to flexible working was identified within the case study organisation with the consequence that men avoided participating and the practice remained associated with women.

This research suggests that it might be helpful for other organisations finding it challenging to progress women to senior roles, to review their flexible working policies in relation to the stigma attached to non-core working practices and the consequence for male participation. The literature on this is quite comprehensive (Kossek, Su and Wu, 2017);, (Williams, Blair and Bergdahl, 2013); (Stone and Hernandez, 2013);(Hakim, 2006) however I have not observed a public debate along these lines. The received wisdom within organisations appears to be that flexible working is a key driver of progress. The study challenges that view and specifically offers a new perspective to the senior male mentors who appeared to have a narrow view of the issue. They had assumed that the policy as communicated was being implemented as intended. It would be interesting to survey populations across other organisations and sectors confidentially to inquire how flexible working was being experienced, including uptake, breakdown between genders, any associated stigma and consequences. This information could then be analysed against the female representation at senior levels within the same population to understand if there is any correlation between well implemented flexible working and female progression. This could encourage organisations to review their approach.

6. Diversity and Inclusion is a Business not just an HR issue

The findings reveal that, Diversity and Inclusion is very much seen as the responsibility of HR to drive. This appears in this case study organisation to be getting in the way of progress for two reasons: Firstly that diversity was viewed as a moral rather than a business issue and secondly that the HR teams, by their own and their clients admission, were lacking the confidence or permission to hold the business to account in the discharge of organisational HR policies and processes. This suggests that more work needs to be done to clearly articulate the business case for diversity which the HR teams need to deeply understand if they are going to continue to be accountable. I would further argue that dual accountability between HR and with business leaders would be a more effective approach, underpinned by a solid business case, linked to reward.

The six findings and implications above are summarised in figure 8.2 below. The red arrow indicates the findings from the research that are impeding career equality within the case study organisation and the green arrow summarises the recommendation the flow from these findings to improve career equality.



Figure 8.2: Summary of findings and recommendations

8.2 Limitations of the study

Participants in the focus group were drawn exclusively from the HR team and whilst their experiences cover a broad range of the population, including others beyond of the HR function could have added a wider perspective. It would have been interesting to have included front line workers in retail sites or operational assets to add more richness and diversity to the baseline.

The reciprocal mentors were volunteers drawn from a programme running within the case study organisation which arguably meant that they were predisposed to contributing, with some underlying curiosity. The male mentors were drawn from a very senior population arguably shielded from some of the experiences of more junior colleagues because of their seniority. The organisation is hierarchical and polite

and challenging open dialogue between levels is unusual. It is therefore probably to be expected that senior executives were surprised by what they heard. In a different organisational context arguably or with more junior male mentors it could have been that would have been learned through such a process.

As I worked through the thematic analysis it was clear that several common themes in relation to the influences on women's career equality were emerging, these have been explored in detail in the finding's chapters. Reviewing the shifts that had occurred during the mentoring programme has led me to conclude that this is evidence of shared understanding being created. This observation needs to be balanced by a recognition that the exchange of perspective was contained within the dyads and not shared more broadly across the organisation. I will be writing a report for the case study organisation summarising my findings, including recommendations for changes to internal policies and practice. This will provide valuable feedback on the organisation's initiative and I believe reinforce the continuing commitment to reciprocal mentoring within the case study organisation.

I would also suggest that this feedback mechanism can contribute to shared "organisational" understanding of women's career equality, a subject that the case study organisation was ready to explore as part of their Diversity and Inclusion strategy due to slow progress against gender goals despite a wide range of initiatives. It is possible that my intervention in terms of pre and post interviews contributed to the quality of the understanding, in that it forced reflection. This is not part of the reciprocal mentoring programme, as a matter of course, and I would recommend therefore that, whilst labour intensive, to maximise the impact of the exchange, reflection of learning is built into future programmes. My suggestion is that the addition of a group feedback session could fill that gap and more, providing an opportunity for collective sense making that I believe could accelerate shared understanding. As mentioned above those who participated in this research may have had a predisposition to a dialogic mindset by virtue of the fact that they volunteered. I

may have been able to quantify this further if I had anonymously surveyed all the reciprocal mentors in the pilot programme.

This research was obviously limited to one organisational context and so conclusions drawn should be viewed in this light with the need for further research. In this and previous chapters I suggest a number of topics for further research that could be conducted in other organisations and contexts. This would enable some further insight into the benefits of reciprocal mentoring beyond the “one off” I have described here.

8.3 Final Reflection

This study has given me the opportunity to grow and develop as a researcher. Having not followed a more traditional study path of going to University at 18, my only previous experience of carrying out research was at Master’s Level in 2002. I therefore embarked on the doctoral journey with a certain lack of confidence. However, I was and still am passionate about the subject matter; and feel privileged to have been able to undertake this work.

I am an insider researcher, (Greene, 2014); (Coghlan, 2007) and whilst that was beneficial in many ways, in that it gave me access to participants of my research and a context in which to place it, it also created several ethical dilemmas. I had to be careful to create boundaries between my role as a researcher and my role as a senior leader within the HR department to ensure that the data gathered was uncontaminated by my position, and to be working hard to maintain objectivity, which was challenging due to my prior knowledge of the organisation gained through working within it for 6 years.

I am a senior female within the case study organisation and whilst I explained my role as a researcher to the participants in the context of the focus group and interviews, I think it is important to recognise the potential shadow of my perceived influence in this study. I was very conscious of this and thoughtful about the way I interacted with the research participants to create a professional non-judgemental environment underpinned by the formal commitment to confidentiality. I work as a coach was able

to draw on the skills of creating a safe space throughout this process. My observation was that any initial wariness or desire for approval from the majority participants was quickly dispelled as they became more confident and relaxed.

As a feminist I was acutely aware of my biases and worked hard to mitigate them throughout the whole research project. My social constructionist view of the world encouraged me to remain open; my feminist principles are underpinned by my discomfort at the assumptions made about women. Unexpected findings were sometimes challenging, and others were thrilling, I wanted to be careful not to fan the flames to prove a point that I wanted to, or resistant to something unexpected and at odds with my biases.

I work full time and travel extensively making creating the mental space for this study, tough. I have found myself exhausted at times, though what was emerging through the research motivated me to keep going.

The data gathering process was frustrating as meetings were moved around which delayed my analysis. One male mentor was not able to fully engage (due to his seniority and travel schedule) which meant that his female mentor had a suboptimal experience, though she was semi adopted by another who became a passionate advocate for the concept of reciprocal mentoring. In the context of my research I felt grateful to them for their participation and that I couldn't push the point. I didn't want to be unethical and step into my corporate role which was of course always there in the background, I needed to be accommodating and understanding, though I didn't always feel like it as the pressure mounted. The process of thematic analysis looked relatively straightforward, however it was complex to really get inside the data which was necessary to truly understand it and get underneath it, to pay attention to meaning making. I have learned the value of navigating my way through the complexity rather than avoiding it or converging my thinking too soon.

As a non-academic, I really wrestled with expressing my ontology and spent a lot of time agonising over it. I find myself conflicted by my philosophical view on the creation of knowledge and understanding through power of social interaction and the culture of an engineering-based organisation that prefers to deal in facts and the desire for definitive outcomes. I think this tension was adding to the confusion as I went through this process.

I now feel much more comfortable with my position and the inevitable tension. This experience has reinforced my perspective that social interaction and dialogue creates new knowledge. I observed that both genders seemed to have got themselves into thinking patterns, I would suggest, influenced by paradigms that the case study organisation holds. These were challenged through the mentoring sessions and as different perspectives were shared new thinking emerged.

8.4 Summary

In the introduction I laid out the aims and objectives of the study, set the scene in terms of female progression into senior roles, and introduced definitions of mentoring. Chapter two explored the literature in relation to female progression, women's career equality and the use of coaching and mentoring in this field, setting up the research question. The research paradigm, the use of case study and thematic analysis is then explained in the methodology chapter. The outcomes and findings of the thematic analysis completed before and after the reciprocal mentoring programme are presented in chapters four, five and six. The final two chapters have explored the major findings in relation to contribution to knowledge and practice and implications that have emerged through the findings.

As I set out on this research it became clear that women's career equality is a complex and multi-layered issue which underpins some of the challenges large corporations are experiencing in terms of female progression and not widely understood or even recognized. Reciprocal mentoring is a relatively new form of mentoring and there is little research into its effectiveness. Traditional mentoring is widely practiced within

the case study organisation and reverse mentoring is gaining traction, the concept of mutual exchange was very new and counter intuitive, the culture of the “all knowing expert leader” is well embedded. Creating a framework for dyadic non-hierarchical dialogue in this traditional and hierarchical organisation, in this instance, has proved thought provoking for those taking part. Whether or not this has any lasting impact remains to be seen. I believe this case study indicates that reciprocal mentoring has the potential to become a powerful tool for creating shared understanding of women’s career equality (and other challenging areas of perspective) if positioned and set up well. This is of course a single case study and more research is required to validate or not what has been experienced here and to understand further what are the qualities of reciprocal mentoring that could make the difference. I hope to see reciprocal mentoring coming out of the shadows into the mainstream as a result.

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Appendix 1

Reciprocal Mentoring at A Glance

Overview

Xx recognizes the important role our talented female leaders play in making the company successful and is striving to build an inclusive culture which is equally conducive to the progression of men and women.

As part of our commitment to accelerating female leaders with Group Leader potential, we have conducted comprehensive research into the factors that influence female career progression at XX. This research highlights the need for an integrated approach with interventions at the individual, organisational and cultural level to accelerate progress.

To intervene at the cultural level, we are launching a **reciprocal mentoring program**. Research and practice show that this can act as a catalyst for change by accelerating the diversity and inclusion learning of our most senior leaders resulting in greater awareness and commitment to act.

Objectives

Unlike traditional mentoring programmes, reciprocal mentoring is designed to foster a developmental relationship that involves mutual learning and social exchange in relation to topics such as diversity and inclusion. The benefits for both mentors are outlined below:

Male mentor gives:

- Insights into operating at a senior level
- Career advice and guidance
- Unwritten rules of success
- Visibility and access

Female mentor gives:

- Personal insights of career progression, including any difficulties and challenges being a woman in the corporate culture
- Business understanding at an operational level
- Potential “thinking partner” for considering talent / D&I challenges

Male mentor gets:

- Opportunities to see through a different lens
- Learn about invisible barriers faced by women
- Explore what can be done about these barriers to diversify leadership level
- Effect change at individual and strategic level
- Time to think

Female mentor gets:

- Guidance on career / overcoming barriers
- Increased self-confidence
- Heightened feeling of commitment
- Opportunity to effect change
- Time to think

What we expect from you

The recommendation is to have up to 6 x 1:1 meetings every 4-6 weeks for a period of 8 months. For many it is likely that this relationship will build via a combination of face-to-face meetings, video conference and telephone calls. We suggest each meeting is 60-90 minutes.

In order to ensure mentoring is conducted in the best possible manner both mentors should consider the following statements to guarantee they are engaging with each other ethically and appropriately.

- Seek to create an environment in which all parties are focused on and have the opportunity to learn.
- Be aware of the potential for conflicts of interest that arise in the mentoring relationship and deal with them quickly and effectively to ensure there is no detrimental impact on both mentors.
- Maintain the level of confidentiality which is appropriate and is agreed at the start of the relationship, and disclose information only where explicitly agreed between the mentors.
- Act within the xx Code of Conduct, V&B, and all applicable laws and not encourage, assist or collude with others engaged in conduct which is dishonest, unlawful, unprofessional, unsafe or discriminatory.
- Be sensitive to issues of culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation and race.
- Recognise the boundaries of their own competence, recognise where that competence has the potential to be exceeded and where necessary refer the mentee either to a more experienced person or support them in seeking the help of another professional.

Programme structure

The mentoring 'contract'

We recommend that you take time at the outset to establish a clear “contract” to underpin your mentoring relationship. Depending on your personal styles, mentoring experience and preferences, you may choose to do this in an informal or a more formal way.

You may wish to set some boundaries for what you will / won't do or discuss with your mentor. Some examples are as follows:

- You will only enquire into each other's personal life by invitation.
- You will not make excessive demands on each other's time.
- You will prioritise meetings and only change/ cancel in extreme circumstances.

What are the boundaries you would like to set with your mentor?

Some questions to think about to help you plan your meetings

- *Reflect on the purpose of each meeting. What are my expectations? What are the desired outcomes?*
- *What are the key topics and questions I would like to address?*

Some questions to think about following your meetings

- *How successful was the meeting? Did I manage to focus on key concerns/topics? Was there a good outcome? What could have been covered differently/more effectively?*
- *What did I pick up about the other person's requirements from the meeting?*
- *What did I appreciate about the way the other person worked with me?*
- *Did I pick up anything that is of relevance for XX and our D&I, talent development or leadership agendas, that might need following up?*
- *New ideas that came from the meeting?*
- *Actions I plan to take before the next meeting?*
- *Information or contacts I need to make before the next meeting that might be of help?*
- *Logistics/arrangements for next meeting?*

Some questions to think about as the programme nears completion

- *What have I achieved during my mentoring relationship?*
- *What would I particularly like to thank my mentor for?*
- *What useful learning am I taking into my career management approach?*

- *What “messages” do I have for the organisation as a result of this process? What do I intend to say or do differently? Who will I say it to?*

Suggested menu of discussion topics

One of the reasons for mentoring not working well is when discussions “dry up”. In order to avoid this situation and to stimulate your thinking you will find a series of topics that you might like to consider covering in your mentoring meetings.

Getting to know each other

- What makes me who I am? What are my core values, my drivers?
- What has shaped my thinking, my perspectives, my ambitions and goals?
- What achievements am I most proud of? What experiences in life have I learned most from?

Career Strategy

- What have our respective career paths been, to date? How would we describe our personal career strategies? Have they changed over time?
- What “pivotal” career choices have we made so far, which have significantly shaped future opportunities and career paths? What were the outcomes? What risks have we taken?
- How clear am I about my future career and life goals? What future options do I have? What might it be helpful to consider in terms of current and future career growth?
- What’s our respective view and experience of xx’s career development process? (Both formal and informal)
- How well am I managing my networks? How “visible”/known am I? Are there additional steps I could take?

Different Genders

- What’s our respective experience and perspective of being a man/woman in the xx culture?
- Are there any barriers for women versus men? If so, what are our respective views about them and what would need to change to dismantle or overcome them?
- What are the issues/implications for the individual, and for xx of getting the best mix of gender talent throughout the organisation, including at the top?

Work-Life Balance

- What are our respective experiences and personal strategies in respect of work-life balance? What choices and trade-offs have we each made?
- What are our current challenges and dilemmas for managing a good work-life balance? Are there changes/improvements we could make?
- What are the issues and implications for us as individuals and for the organisation?
- Work-life balance at different stages in career and life. Can you negotiate win-win outcomes?

xx Organisational Culture

- How would we each describe xx culture as a place to work, based on our experiences and observations? What's very positive? What could be improved?
- Who gets included and valued? Who are the organisational "heroes" and "role models"?
- Who is unintentionally excluded or overlooked?
- How inclusive of different people (especially those who are not in the mainstream majority) is xx, day to day?
- What more can we do be inclusive of others? What "small actions" can help?

What more can xx leaders do...

- To nurture and actively include diverse talent, in all its rich variety?
- To communicate, engage, energise people in the organisation?
- To make xx a consistently great place?

Ongoing support

The program manager **XXXXXXXXX** (xxxxxx@xxx.com) is here to provide additional support either by phone or e-mail if you experience challenges (in terms of style or content) with your mentoring that you're not sure how to deal with – this will be a confidential service.

Appendix 2

Mentoring Agreement

As you start your mentoring relationship it is important to establish a clear “agreement”. Unlike traditional mentoring, this programme is designed to foster a developmental relationship and social exchange in which both mentors benefit from learning. Typical benefits that can emerge include:

Senior leader gives:

- Insights into operating at a senior level
- Career advice and guidance
- Unwritten rules of success
- Visibility and access

Senior leader gets:

- Opportunities to see through a different lens
- Learn about invisible barriers faced by women
- Explore what can be done about these barriers to diversify leadership level
- Effect change at individual and strategic level
- Time to think

Female talent gives:

- Personal insights of career progression, including any difficulties and challenges being a women in the corporate culture
- Business understanding at an operational level
- “Thinking partner” for considering talent / D&I challenges

Female talent gets:

- Guidance on career / overcoming barriers
- Increased self-confidence
- Heightened feeling of commitment
- Opportunity to effect change
- Time to think

For this reason, you should both think about what you want from the mentoring and share that with each other at the outset. The agreement will differ for each mentoring partnership. A recommended template is shown on the next page.

Mentoring Agreement

Purpose and objectives

Male Mentor - I would like to gain the following from the mentoring relationship:

•

•

Female Mentor - I would like to gain the following from the mentoring relationship:

•

•

How we work together

In order to ensure mentoring is conducted in the best possible manner it is expected that mentors will act in accordance with the following principles to ensure they are engaging ethically and appropriately.

- Maintain the level of confidentiality which is appropriate and is agreed at the start of the relationship, and disclose information only where explicitly agreed.
- Act within the xx Code of Conduct, V&B, and all applicable laws and not encourage, assist or collude with others engaged in conduct which is dishonest, unlawful, unprofessional, unsafe or discriminatory.
- Be sensitive to issues of culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation and race.
- Do not make excessive demands on each other's time and ensure meetings take place during normal working hours, ensuring face to face meetings take place in xx premises if possible.
- Only enquire into each other's personal life by invitation.
- Prioritise meetings and only change/cancel in extreme circumstances.

Over and above these principles, please add any further conditions that will be important for how you will work together.

Boundaries (e.g. anything you will / will not discuss)

--

Practicalities (e.g. who will take responsibility for scheduling meetings?)

--

Engagement with others (e.g. female leader's line manager. Others?)

--

--

Any other considerations? (e.g. agreeing to check in with each other to ensure the agreement is still being honoured and to assess whether anything in the agreement should be changed)

--

Signed	Signed
Date	Date

Making reciprocal mentoring work: Useful skills and behaviours

Apart from sticking to the practicalities of the agreement you have made with each other, there are some useful skills and behaviours you can each adopt which will help you make the most of the opportunity.

It is particularly important not to let hierarchy get in the way and to realise that at some points in the meetings the male mentor will be in ‘learner mode’ and at other times it will be the female who is the learner. Success is best achieved through **generative dialogue**, that is, where discussion is influenced by each other, co-creating new insights and understanding. A different conversation emerges when you move from talking to someone **about** a topic (which is needed to get to know each other), towards engaging in a conversation of shared experience i.e. “what it’s like for me is and I imagine for you it is” Talking **to** someone is a monologue, and two monologues do not make a dialogue. Talking **with** someone is a dialogue that can then become generative.

The following skills and behaviours offer further guidance and are interchangeable.

FEMALE MENTOR	MALE MENTOR
• Prepare for each meeting by reviewing how you have progressed since your last meeting and reflecting on how you would like to use the time in your next meeting • Speak spontaneously: be prepared to think aloud and shift your ideas during the meeting. A session with your male mentor is not a presentation or an appraisal	• Ask open-ended questions e.g. How? Why? How do you feel about? How did that come about? What outcome do you want? Who have you discussed this with so far? What have you already tried? • Summarise: “So what you’re saying is...” This will give you the opportunity to check that you have heard accurately, and your female mentor the opportunity to see the situation more clearly

• Take some initiative during the meeting, as well as listening to what your male mentor has to say. Do not let seniority or hierarchy get in the way; be prepared to challenge and question in order to maximise your own learning • View these as working sessions. Do not feel you need to have all the answers when exploring aspects of gender diversity and inclusion with your male mentor. • Be specific in how you talk. Avoid generalisations; focus on your personal development – do not feel as if you are representing all women in XX • You may want to discuss short term issues but remember that the male mentor is primarily interested in your long-term development. Use your line manager as your coach for on-the-job performance issues	• Or, ask your female mentor to summarise: this will help to clarify for both of you and may clear the way for future action. It will also check that you understand each other • Separate issues out: “It seems to me that there are two issues here...shall we take them one at a time” • Notice differences between verbal and non-verbal behaviour: “I notice that although you say you have decided what you want to do, you are still looking a bit uncertain” • Encourage your female mentor to think about action: “So what do you think you could do about that?” “What might make a difference?” • Challenge your female mentor to think about different options: “Another possibility is....” • Be prepared to share your own examples and anecdotes where relevant to show how you dealt with a similar situation; be careful not to imply your way is right, just be factual about what you did and what the outcome was • Always ask if there is anything else your female mentor wants to say or ask at the end of a meeting, whilst maintaining the mutually agreed timeframe • Be prepared to ask when you do not understand something; do not worry about how you talk about diversity – do not let “political correctness” get in the way of having a meaningful discussion
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Appendix 3

E mail invitations to research participants (mentors)

Reciprocal mentoring participants

Thank you very much for agreeing to take part in our group-wide reciprocal mentoring pilot programme.

- The pilot will kick off in mid-July 2018 and we will be in touch shortly to arrange a 1.1 briefing session with you.*
- The purpose of the briefing is to discuss the expectations of reciprocal mentoring and understand what you would like to get from it.*
- In addition, Sue Round, as part of her Doctoral studies is looking for volunteers to participate in her research of the effectiveness of this sort of mentoring methodology. All responses will be confidential and anonymised, and only emerging themes will be shared with the organisation.*
- She will follow up by email, please respond directly to her if you are willing to participate and we will co-ordinate the extra time in the briefing session.*

Dear Reciprocal Mentoring Programme participant,

As a participant in the reciprocal mentoring programme I would like to invite you to take part in in some research designed to understand the influence reciprocal mentoring has on shared understanding of the issues surrounding women's career equality.

The research comprises two interviews, one before the programme starts and one on its completion. Your involvement is entirely voluntary and confidential.

If you are interested, please let me know by return email and I will send you more details to help inform your decision.

Kind regards

Sue Round

Appendix 4

Focus Group Invite

All,

Some of you know that I am in the middle of a programme of academic research on female progression. As part of this I am planning to evaluate the Reciprocal Mentoring Programme which will be piloting soon and is being run by Mel Long; we are both interested to understand if this type of mentoring can create a real shift in understanding and perspective.

I am very keen to incorporate the view of HR professionals into my research and would like to invite you to participate in a focus group during which we will have an open and unattributable confidential discussion. I think this could add real value to the organisational debate on gender.

I would be very grateful for 90 minutes of your time.

Please let me know if you have any immediate questions.

Please let Sarah know if you are willing to participate, she will then work with your calendars to find a workable date.

Best wishes,

Sue

Appendix 5

Email to HR Directors requesting permission to research programme

Both,

As you know Mel is leading the charge, ably assisted by Vanessa, with the Reciprocal Mentoring pilot. It is looking brilliant and I think has the potential to make a real difference as I think it is getting to the heart of some of the challenges we face in this space.

You both know my passion for the topic, to the extent that as part of my Doctoral studies I am planning to research the RM programme as part of a case study. This essentially means that I will be completing thematic analysis on the before and after evaluation of the programme and writing it up as part of my thesis. (The participants will all be anonymised as will the organisation.) I have undergone ethical approval with the University and documented all the confidentiality commitments. Participants will be aware and have the option to decline inclusion in the study.

I wanted to let you both know this in the interests of transparency and also to ensure you are comfortable.

Please let me know if you have any questions about what is involved.

Best wishes

Sue

Appendix 6

Permission to Conduct Research



XXXX, HRVP Corporate and Functions, xx Plc

Dear xxx,

I am writing to invite xx Plc to participate in a doctoral research study that I am undertaking to explore the influence of reciprocal mentoring.

Research Title

The role of Reciprocal Mentoring in enhancing women's' career equality.

The research aims to explore how the experience of participating in the reciprocal mentoring programme influences the understanding of the issues facing women's career equality.

Participants of mixed gender pairs will be drawn from a selection of those on the reciprocal mentoring programme, who will have been invited to, and agreed to take part in the research. Audio recorded semi structured hour-long interviews will be conducted with each of the research participants at the beginning and after the programme to gauge their individual perspectives and experiences. As part of the study the perspective of a cross section of 10 of the HR team will be explored using an audio recorded moderated focus group. The interviews and the focus group will take place on xx premises in booked meeting rooms and in work time and I am seeking your permission for this research to take place.

A specific page of participant information will be sent to interested mentors and members of the HR team, to help them make the decision if they wish to participate.

Confidentiality

The process of capturing, maintaining and evaluating information will remain completely confidential (subject to legal limitations). At no time will the information of a participant involved in the research process be shared with other employees of xx Plc or external agencies.

Anonymity and privacy will be ensured, and data will be retained in accordance with the University policy on academic integrity. Publication of research will refer to participants by either coded name or change of name. Any data generated in hard or soft copy will be kept securely for 10 years after completion of the research.

Both the participants and xx Plc will remain anonymous in the thesis and consequent publications.

The results of the data analysis will form part of a thesis for the Professional Doctorate in Coaching and Mentoring Practice with Oxford Brookes University. It is hoped that the data will subsequently be used in publication but under no circumstances will your name or any identifying characteristics be included in any written report. Names of all participants will be kept confidential. However, it must be recognised that with small samples it is impossible sometimes to guarantee total anonymity. All precautions will be taken to avoid this.

A summary of research findings will be available for all participants. If you wish to receive a copy of this '*Summary of Findings*', please request this on completion of the primary research.

Who is organising and funding the research?

The study is a part of a professional doctorate at Oxford Brookes University in Coaching and Mentoring and is self-funded by the researcher.

Who has reviewed the study?

The Oxford Brookes University Research Ethics Committee has approved the research project.

Contact for Further Information

If further information is needed, please contact:

- Sue Round: 16021470@brookes.ac.uk

In addition, if you would like to contact the research programme supervisors please contact:

- Prof Tatiana Bachkirova: tbachkirova@brookes.ac.uk
- Dr Elaine Cox: ecox@brookes.ac.uk

If you have any questions regarding the ethics of the research, please also contact:

- The Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee: ethics@brookes.ac.uk

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider this invitation, I attach a copy of the participant information sheets for your information.

Appendix 7

PIS Focus Group



Participant Information for focus groups

Study Title

The role of Reciprocal Mentoring in enhancing women's career equality: A case study of an innovative programme in a traditional engineering multinational

Invitation

As a member of the HR team, you are being invited to take part in this research project. Before you decide whether to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

Please note: The researcher is both a Doctoral Student at Brookes University and an employee at xx PLC, where she is HRVP Talent and Learning for the Upstream Business.

What is the purpose of the study?

Mentoring typically involves a hierarchical relationship in which a senior leader acts as a mentor to a more junior person (mentee). In Reciprocal Mentoring the focus is on fostering a developmental relationship that involves mutual learning and social exchange in relation to specific topics, in this case, framed around the issue of women's career equality.

The purpose of the study is to understand how this form of mentoring influences women's career equality and identify themes that could be shared to broaden thinking in organisations in general.

Why have I been invited to participate?

As a member of the HR team your perspective and insight on women's experience of working and progressing in xx, leading to the introduction of the Reciprocal Mentoring Scheme is of interest to this case study.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

Taking part or declining to do so will have no impact whatsoever on your employment experience at xx.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be asked to participate in an hour-long focus group which will be facilitated by the researcher and audio recorded. A focus group is simply a group discussion focussed on the topic of this study: women's career equality. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions you will be asked to discuss. You will be given a copy of the transcript after the session for your records.

Your anonymity will be preserved: no names, or quotes which signpost a participant's identity, will be used in the final thesis. If anyone participates in the focus group via skype the video recording functionality will be disabled.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

This study aims to increase knowledge in a currently limited field, of how reciprocal mentoring contributes towards the mutual learning and social exchange between senior mentees and junior mentors. By participating in this study, you are supporting the furthering of knowledge in this area.

In addition, the experience of participating in the focus group may provide you with interesting insight on your colleagues' perceptions on the issue.

Will what I say in this study be kept confidential?

All information collected about participants within this research (and people that they speak about during the interview) will be kept strictly confidential (subject to legal limitations). Confidentiality, privacy and anonymity will be ensured in the collection, storage and publication of research material.

Coding will be used in data analysis to ensure that names are removed from this process. Any quotes used to illustrate themes will not contain names or information that could clearly pinpoint an individual.

Data will be password protected when in soft copy and locked in a secure filing cabinet when in hard copy. Data generated by the study will be retained in accordance with the University's policy on Academic Integrity. Therefore, data generated during this

research will be kept securely in electronic form for a period of ten years after the completion of a research project.

Participants will have the option to withdraw from the study at any point, either during or after the interview, up until the point the thesis is submitted.

What should I do if I want to take part?

Please respond to me by email indicating that you are happy to be involved (16021470@brookes.ac.uk) I will then contact you to arrange a meeting time and place to conduct the semi-structured interview. The timeframe for conducting interviews is between March 2018 and August 2018.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

Research from this study will form part of my Doctor of Coaching and Mentoring thesis. It will be submitted to Oxford Brookes University in the autumn of 2019. A copy of the thesis will be available in Oxford Brookes University Library. If requested, you can be provided with a summary of the findings. You can also request an electronic copy of the thesis from me if you wish to do so. A non-attributed summary of findings of this research study will also be available to xx.

Who is organising and funding the research?

I am conducting this research as a student at Oxford Brookes University Business School. This research is self-funded.

Who has reviewed the study?

Prior to approaching you to commence this research, the research has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee, Oxford Brookes University.

Contact for Further Information

Sue Round

Tel: [number has been removed]

16021470@brookes.ac.uk

If you have any concerns about the way in which this study is being or has been conducted, you are advised to contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee on ethics@brookes.ac.uk.

In addition, if you would like to contact the research programme supervisors please contact:

- Prof Tatiana Bachkirova: tbachkirova@brookes.ac.uk
- Dr Elaine Cox: ecox@brookes.ac.uk

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Date XX/XX/18

Appendix 8

PIS mentors



Participant Information - Interviews

Study Title

The role of Reciprocal Mentoring in influencing understanding of the issues facing women's career equality: A case study of an innovative programme in a traditional engineering multinational

Invitation

As an active participant of the Reciprocal Mentoring Programme, you are being invited to take part in this research project. Before you decide whether to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

Please note: The researcher is both a Doctoral Student at Brookes University and an employee at xx PLC, where she is HRVP Talent and Learning for the Upstream Business.

What is the purpose of the study?

Mentoring typically involves a hierarchical relationship in which a senior leader acts as a mentor to a more junior person (mentee). In reciprocal mentoring the focus is on fostering a developmental relationship that involves mutual learning and social exchange in relation to specific topics, in this case framed around the issue of, women's career equality.

The purpose of the study is to understand how this form of mentoring influences women's career equality and identify themes that could be shared to broaden thinking in organisations in general.

Why have I been invited to participate?

As a participant in a reciprocal mentoring programme you have been invited to take part.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

Taking part or declining to do so will have no impact whatsoever on both your participation in the mentoring program and your employment experience at XX.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be asked to participate in two semi-structured interviews of approximately 1 hour each in length. These interviews will consist of 8-10 questions about your experience prior to joining the Reciprocal Mentoring programme and your experience of the mentoring so far. With your permission, this interview will be audio recorded. You will be given a copy of the transcript after the interview for your records.

The total time required of participants in the study is 2 hours for the research interviews.

Your anonymity will be preserved: no names, or quotes which signpost a participant's identity, will be used in the final thesis.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

This study aims to increase knowledge in a currently limited field, of how if at all reciprocal mentoring contributes towards the mutual learning and social exchange between senior and junior mentors. By participating in this study, you are supporting the furthering of knowledge in this area.

In addition, taking the time to reflect upon your experiences of your mentoring experience so far, may enhance your awareness of what you are experiencing and what you may like to change, improve or focus more on, during the remainder of your mentoring relationship.

Will what I say in this study be kept confidential?

All information collected about participants within this research (and people that they speak about during the interview) will be kept strictly confidential (subject to legal limitations). Confidentiality, privacy and anonymity will be ensured in the collection, storage and publication of research material.

Pseudonyms will be used in data analysis to ensure that names are removed from this process. Any quotes used to illustrate themes will not contain names or information that could clearly pinpoint an individual.

Data will be password protected when in soft copy, and locked in a secure filing cabinet when in hard copy. Data generated by the study will be retained in accordance with the University's policy on Academic Integrity. Therefore, data generated during this

research will be kept securely in electronic form for a period of ten years after the completion of a research project.

Participants will have the option to withdraw from the study at any point, but the data can only be withdrawn up to the point of analysis. If distress is caused at any point, independent confidential support will be support will be made available please see participant flyer for more details.

What should I do if I want to take part?

Please respond to me by email indicating that you are happy to be involved (16021470@brookes.ac.uk) I will then contact you to arrange a meeting time and place to conduct the semi-structured interview. The timeframe for conducting interviews is between March 2018 and August 2018.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

Research from this study will form part of my Doctor of Coaching and Mentoring thesis. It will be submitted to Oxford Brookes University in the autumn of 2019. A copy of the thesis will be available in Oxford Brookes University Library. If requested, you can be provided with a summary of the findings. You can also request an electronic copy of the thesis from me if you wish to do so. A non- attributed summary of findings of this research study will also be available to XX.

Who is organising and funding the research?

I am conducting this research as a student at Oxford Brookes University Business School. This research is self-funded.

Who has reviewed the study?

Prior to approaching you to commence this research, the research has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee, Oxford Brookes University.

Contact for Further Information

Sue Round

Tel: [number has been removed]

16021470@brookes.ac.uk

In addition, if you would like to contact the research programme supervisors please contact:

- Prof Tatiana Bachkirova: tbachkirova@brookes.ac.uk
- Dr Elaine Cox: ecox@brookes.ac.uk

If you have any concerns about the way in which this study is being or has been conducted, you are advised to contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee on ethics@brookes.ac.uk.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Date XX/XX/18

Appendix 9

CONSENT FORM Focus Group

Full title of Project: The role of Reciprocal Mentoring in enhancing women's career equality: A case study of an innovative programme in a traditional engineering multinational

Name, position and contact address of Researcher

Sue Round, Doctoral Student

Tel: [number has been removed]

16021470@brookes.ac.uk

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.
3. I agree to take part in the above study.

☐☐☐

**Please
initial box**

4. I agree to the focus group / being audio recorded
5. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications
6. I agree that my data gathered in this study may be stored (after it has been anonymised) in a specialist data centre and may be used for future research.

Yes

No

☐☐☐☐☐☐

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

Appendix 10

CONSENT FORM Interview

Full title of Project: The role of Reciprocal Mentoring in enhancing women's career equality: A case study of an innovative programme in a traditional engineering multinational

Name, position and contact address of Researcher

Sue Round, Doctoral Student

Tel: [number has been removed]

16021470@brookes.ac.uk

Please initial box

2. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

☐

3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.

☐

3. I agree to take part in the above study.

☐

**Please
initial box**

4. I agree to the interview notes / being recorded

Yes

No

☐☐

6. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications

☐☐

7. I agree that my data gathered in this study may be stored (after it has been anonymised) in a specialist data centre and may be used for future research.

☐☐

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

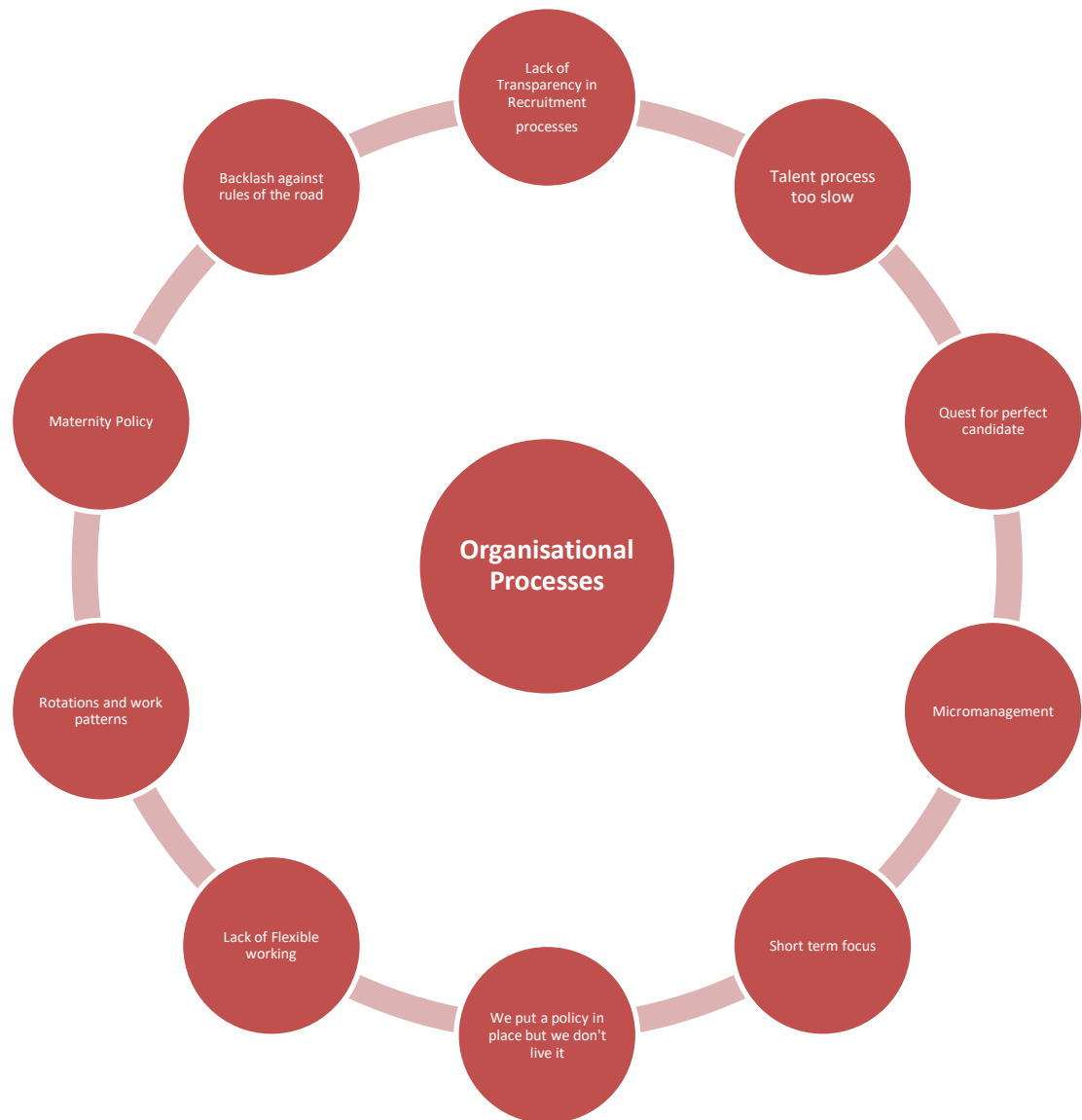
Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

Appendix 4.1

Enablers and Barriers to Career Equality- over view of sub themes







Appendix 4.2

The Role of HR - overview of sub themes

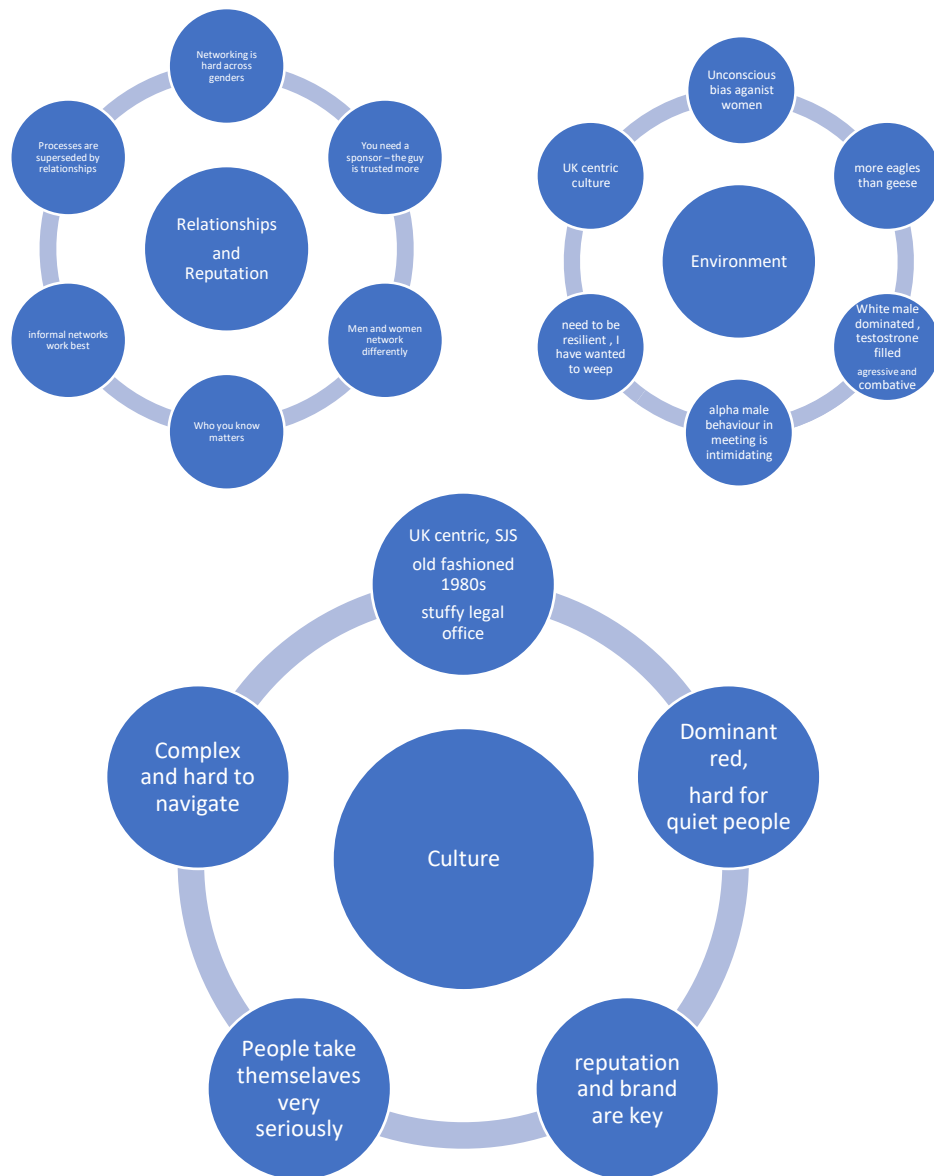


Appendix 5.1

Stages 1-3 of thematic analysis of women's responses to interview questions

Overview of sub themes

Question 1 "What does it take to get on around here?"

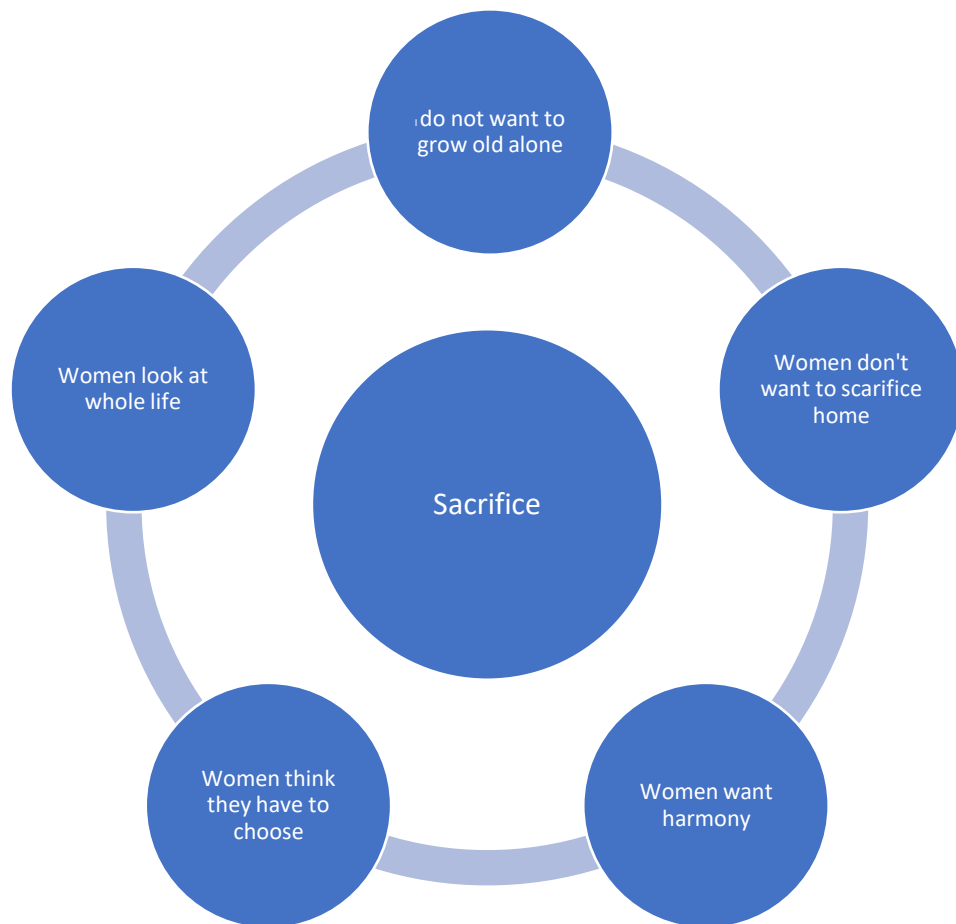


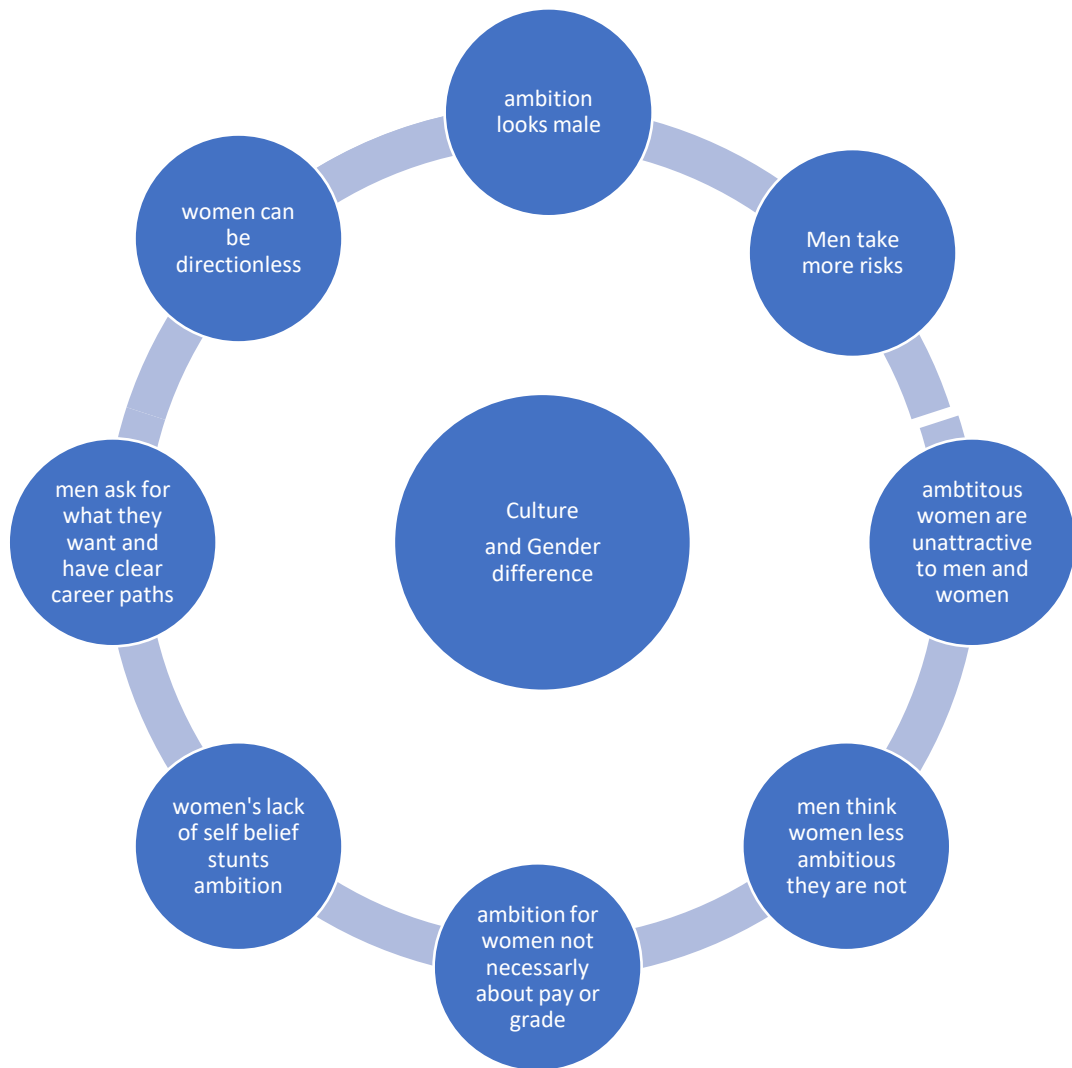
Question 2: "Why are there fewer female group leaders than male?"



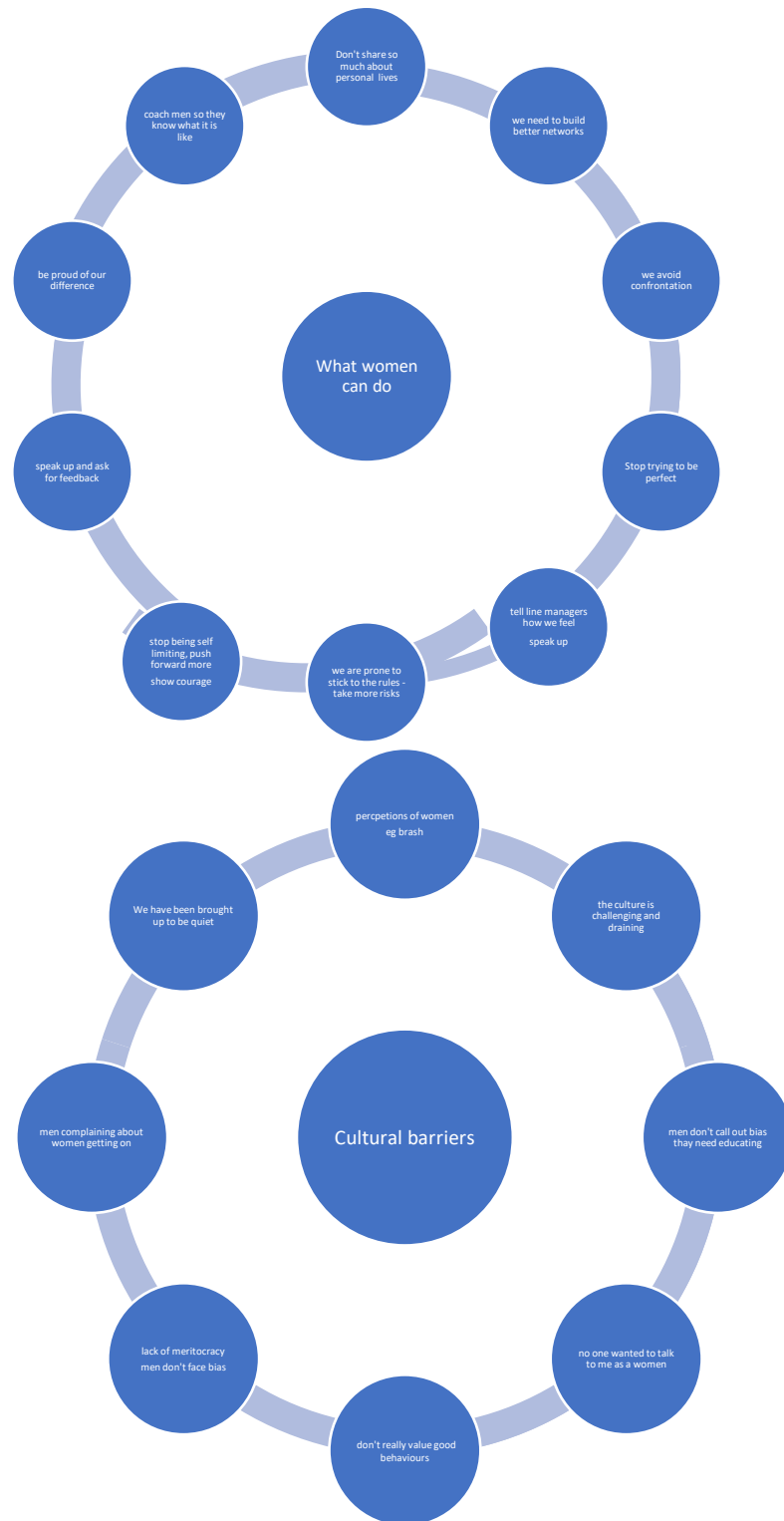


Question 3: "Do you think men and women are equally ambitious?"





Question 4: "Is there anything you think women could do differently to help themselves more?"

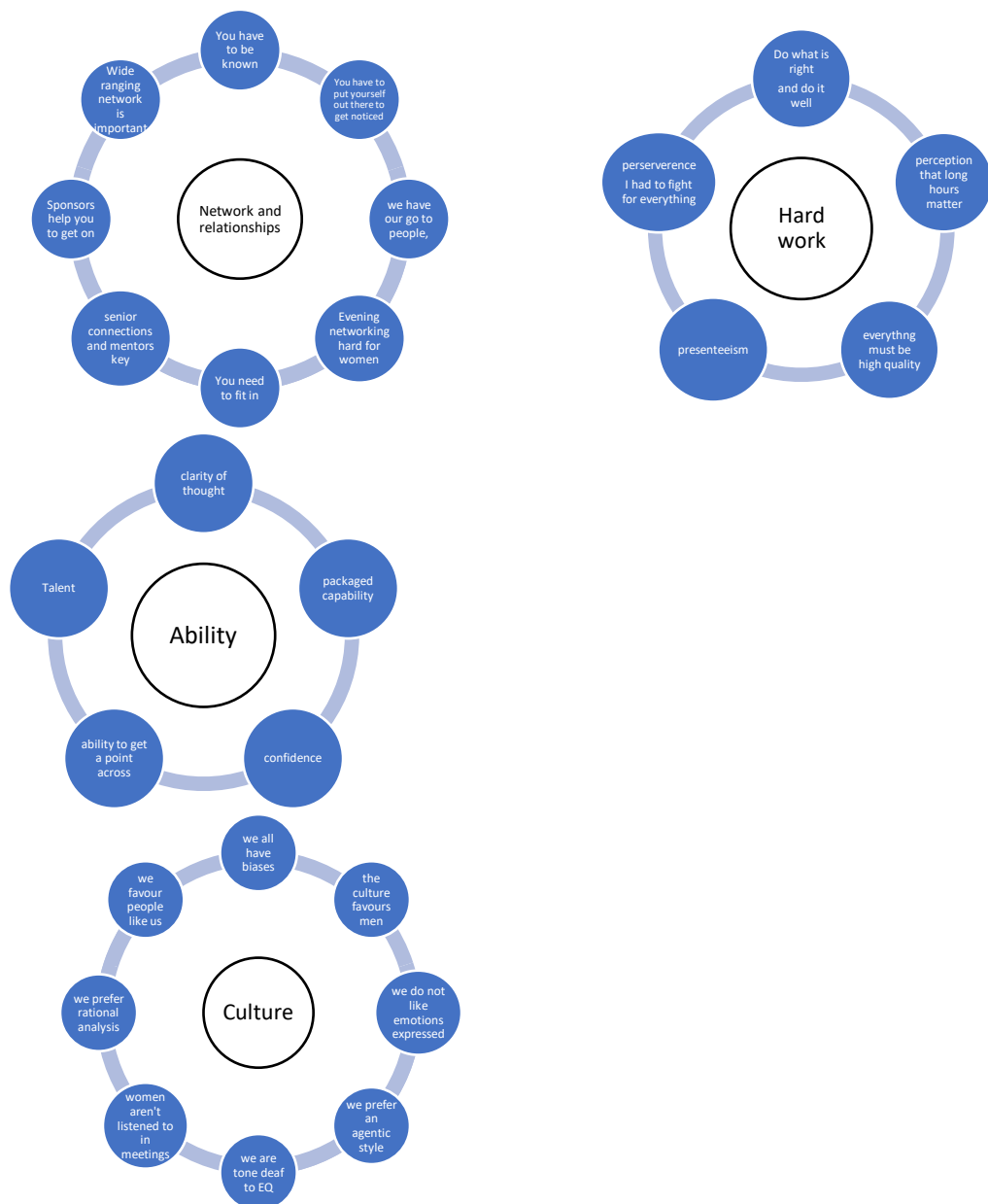


Appendix 5.2

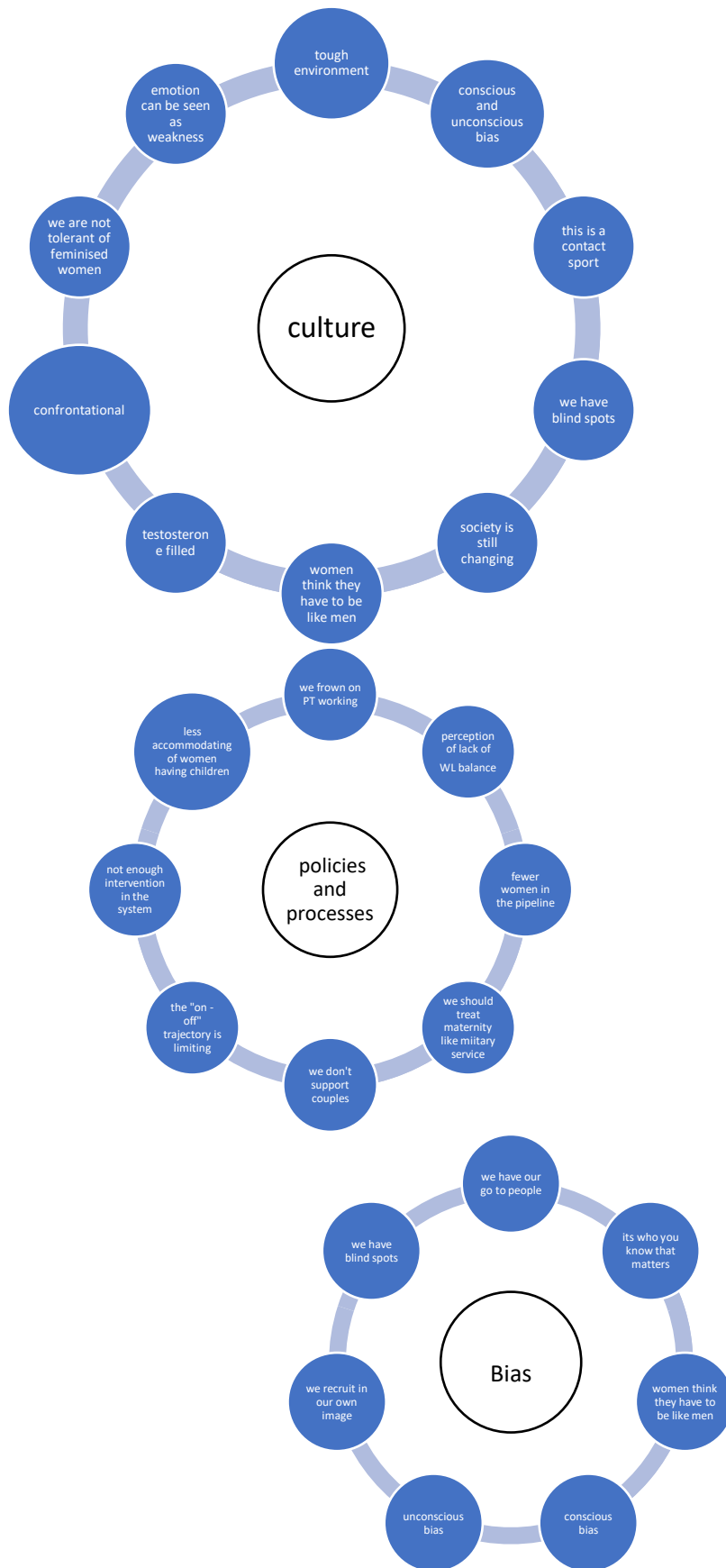
Stages 1-3 of thematic analysis of men's responses to interview questions pre programme

Overview of sub themes

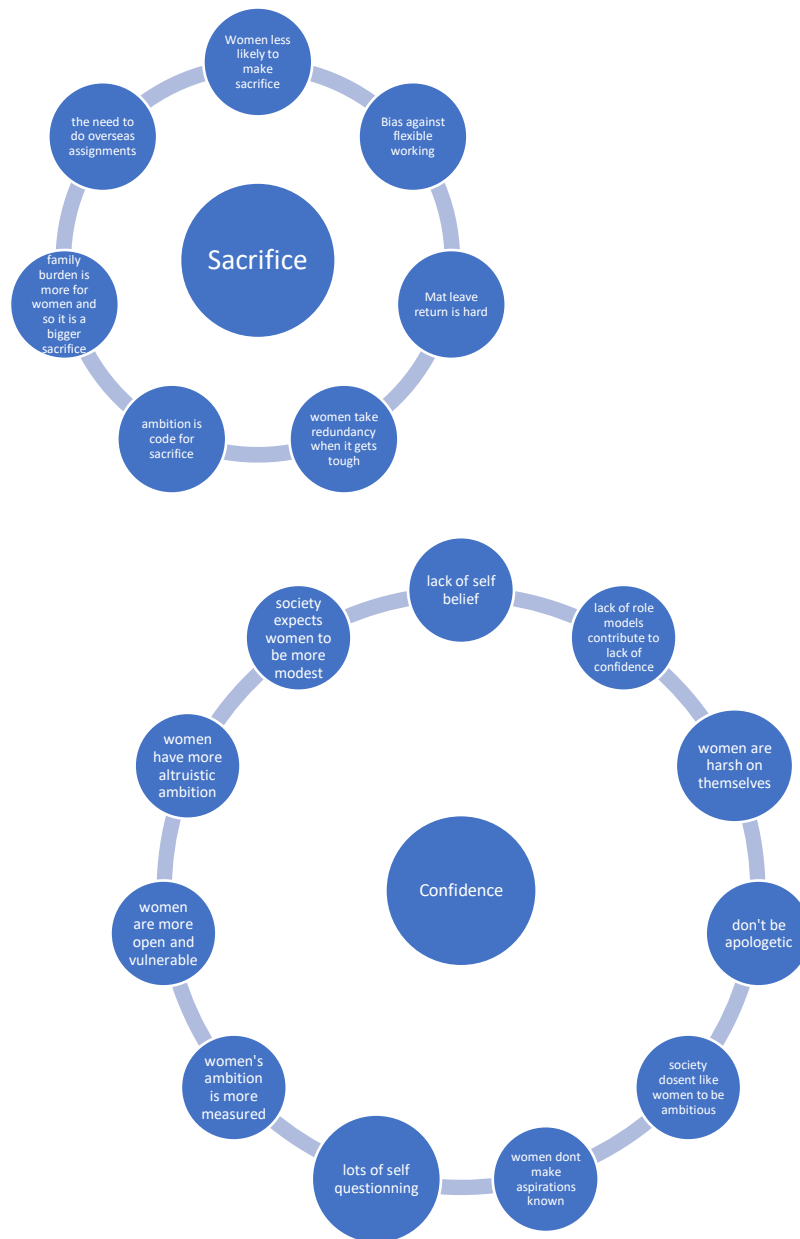
Question 1 "What does it take to get on around here?"



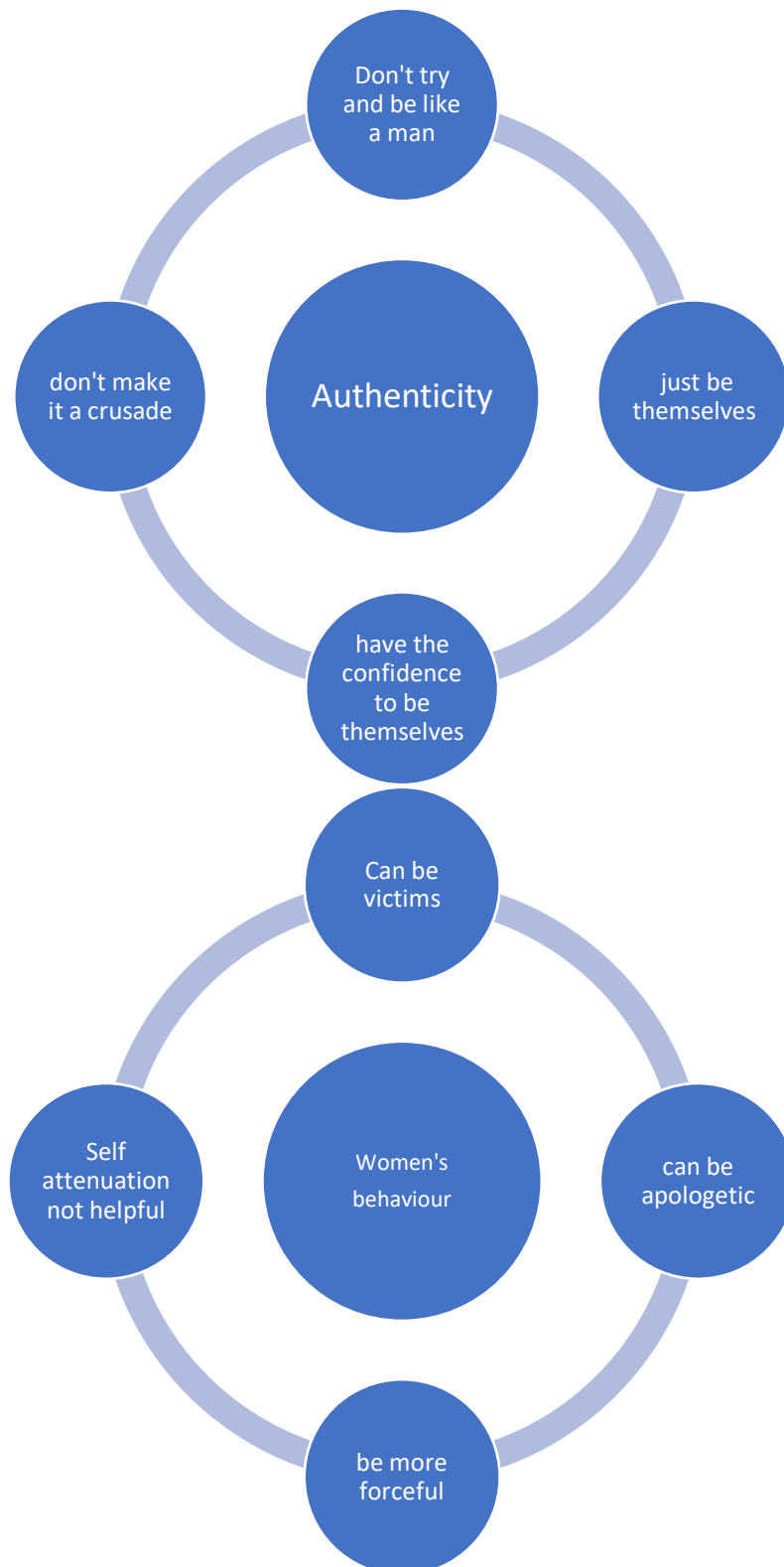
Question 2: "Why are there fewer female group leaders than male?"



Question 3: "Do you think men and women are equally ambitious?"



Question 4: "Is there anything you think women could do differently to help themselves more?"



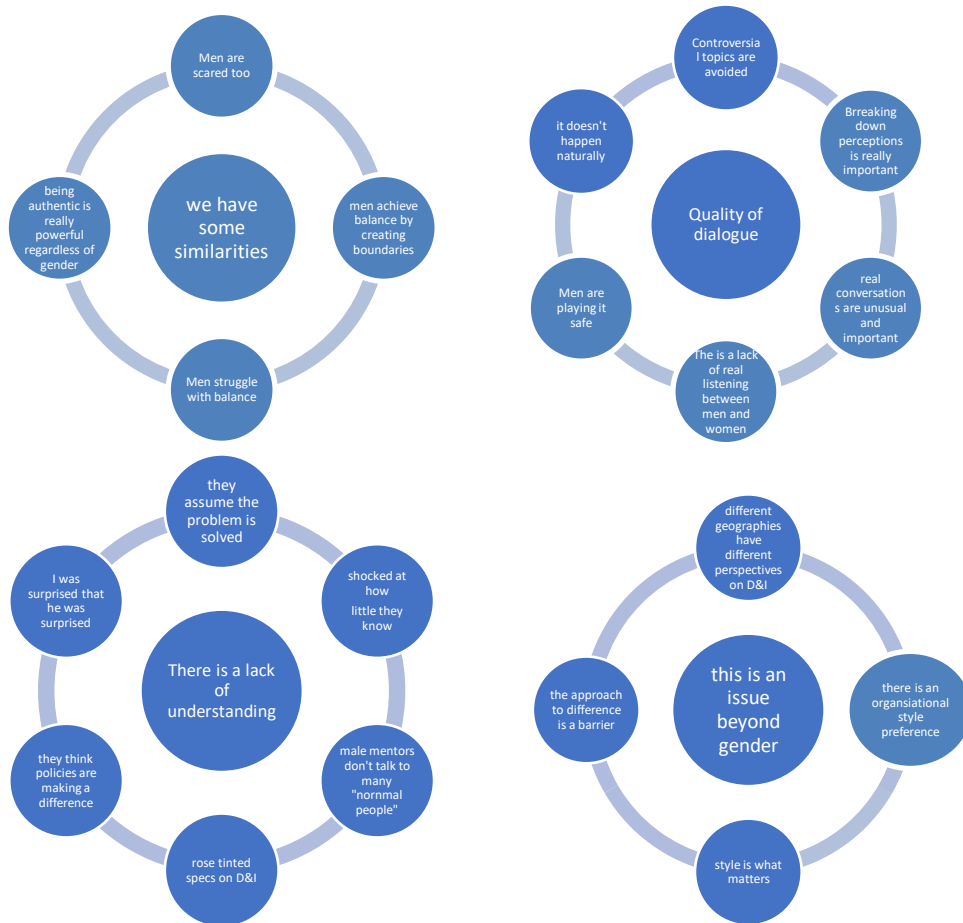
Appendix 6.1

Stages 1-3 of thematic analysis of women's responses to interview questions

Overview of sub themes

Question 1:

What have you learned or understood that is important to you as a result of working with your mentoring partner?



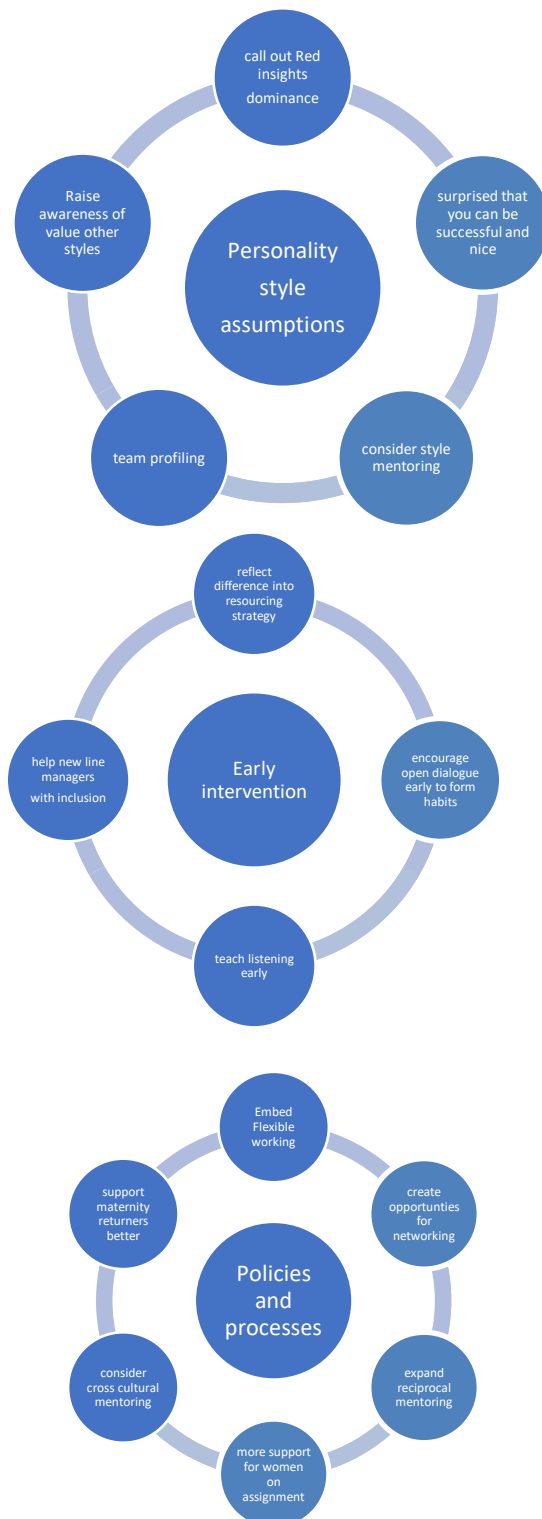
Question 2:

What actions or changes have you taken as a result of working with your partner in the mentoring relationship?



Question 3:

Have you identified issues, opportunities or potential areas for action in terms of the talent development, career progression or diversity agenda that could influence career equality?



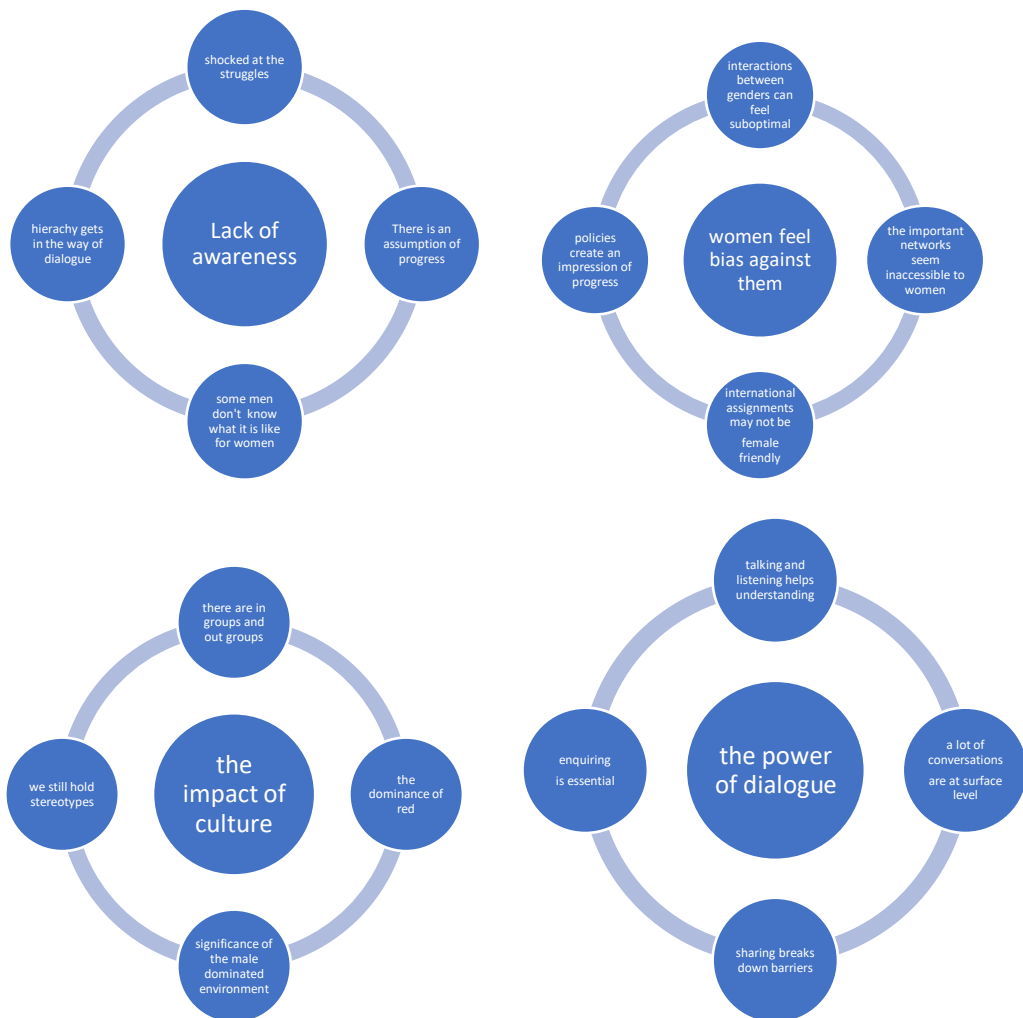
Appendix 6.2

Stages 1-3 of thematic analysis of men's responses to interview questions post programme

Overview of sub themes

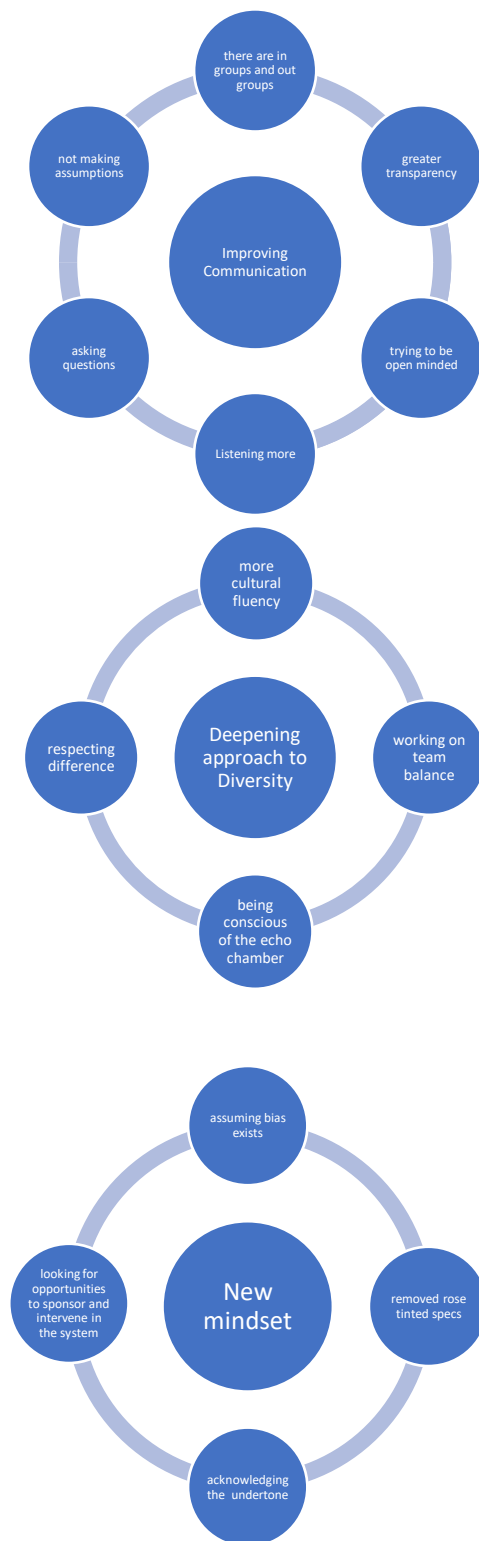
Question 1:

What have you learned or understood that is important to you as a result of working with your mentoring partner?



Question 2:

What actions or changes have you taken as a result of working with your partner in the mentoring relationship?



Question 3:

Have you identified issues, opportunities or potential areas for action in terms of the talent development, career progression or diversity agenda that could influence career equality?



Appendix 7.1

The Spiral Dynamics Hierarchy of Memes

Appendix 7.1 has been removed from this version of the thesis due to copyright restrictions

Adapted from Beck and Cowan (2006)