
Encouraging Women into Senior Management Positions: How Coaching Can Help

An international comparative review and research

A Broughton, L Miller



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INSTITUTE FOR EMPLOYMENT STUDIES

Mantell Building

University of Sussex Campus

Brighton BN1 9RF

UK

Tel. +44 (0) 1273 686751

Fax +44 (0) 1273 690430

www.employment-studies.co.uk

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The IES HR Network

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The Foundation of Coaching

Since 2006, The Foundation of Coaching has been dedicated to the development of coaching as a profession, and as a way of making a positive difference in the world through the lives of individuals. The IES grant is one of the last awards made by The Foundation of Coaching, a project of the Harnisch Foundation. In 2009, the grants program moves to a teaching facility of Harvard Medical School, McLean Hospital.

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Contents

Executive Summary	vii
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Selecting the focal countries	2
1.2 Comparative studies	3
1.3 The report	3
2 Literature Review	4
2.2 Research covering individual countries	25
2.3 Summary	31
3 The IES Research	33
3.1 Research context and methodology	33
3.2 Legislation and socio-cultural background	35
3.3 Summary	42
4 Factors Affecting Women's Progression into Senior Posts	43
4.1 Management style	43
4.2 Organisational culture	49
4.3 Recruitment practices	52
4.4 Experiences of discrimination	53
4.5 Gaining the right experience	57
4.6 International experience	58
4.7 Stepping up to a role	60
4.8 Tokens or pioneers?	62
4.9 Appearance	67
4.10 The importance of building networks	68
4.11 The impact of childcare issues	74
4.12 Career routes	84
4.13 Self-confidence	86
4.14 The decision to seek a board-level position	88

4.15	Occupational segregation and gender stereotyping	92
4.16	Quotas	95
4.17	Summary	99
5	The Contribution of Coaching	100
5.1	The role and impact of coaching	100
5.2	How coaching can help	104
5.3	Summary: key points for coaching development	112
6	Conclusions	115
6.1	The main perceived barriers	115
6.2	The types of coaching currently offered to women	116
6.3	The role of national culture	117
	References and Bibliography	119
	Appendix: Discussion Guides	124

Executive Summary

Introduction

Despite long-standing anti-discrimination legislation in the US, UK and across Europe, women still remain under-represented in many occupations, most noticeably in high-level posts. This phenomenon is seen at its most extreme when the composition of company boards is considered. In the USA, women constitute on average 14.7 per cent of board members on Fortune 500 companies; in the UK, women hold 11 per cent of FTSE 100 directorships, according to the 2008 Sex and Power report published by the UK Equality and Human Rights Commission.

Encouraging women who hold senior management positions to move into board-level positions is viewed as a crucial part of the global drive to improve equality between men and women. There is likely to be a range of reasons why women in senior jobs fail to progress up to board level and issues connected with discrimination and the 'glass ceiling' have been well characterised. However, in some cases there may be an element of choice: some women may simply decide not to progress to board level despite being coached for and offered such positions.

An understanding of the full range of factors that underlie women's decisions to accept promotion to board level or not, as well as of the factors already known to hold some aspiring women back, may provide valuable insights into the dynamics at play within the workplace. This issue is not just of academic interest: ensuring that a greater number of women ascend to the level of board member is a key current issue in terms of executive coaching. If a greater understanding can be gained of the reasons why eligible female senior management members do, or do not, attempt the move up to board level, then this will inform the development of better – or different – coaching strategies to help support women managers' career progression.

For this reason, the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) requested grant funding from the Foundation of Coaching in New York to examine the factors

underlying women's progress through organisational structures and the reasons why women in senior management positions in the USA and in Europe decide to accept or decline board-level jobs. The research would explore these issues by interviewing women about the factors that encouraged and/or slowed their career progression, along with the reasons for their decisions regarding whether or not to take up board-level positions. The aim of the work was to inform the debate in the US and worldwide and to support the development of further coaching topics and strategies to help greater numbers of women progress into senior and board-level positions, and thereby improve female representation on company boards.

This study found that although the legislative and socio-cultural background differs between countries, and some issues are more prominent in some countries than in others, there was nonetheless a large degree of consensus among and between interviewees in the different countries regarding the factors that impinge upon women's career progression.

It must be recognised that some national structural factors and legislative decisions are supra-ordinate to organisational functioning and coaching – such as decisions on whether to introduce quotas for women on boards – and these are less amenable to resolution through coaching. Although such issues fall outside the specified research focus – on factors with which coaches can engage to improve the position of women – they are nonetheless important components of the employment landscape as a whole, and are therefore included.

Management style

There are repeated reports in the literature of differences between the management style of women and men, although some believe this reflects perceptions and interpretations of behaviour more than reality. The majority of women felt that there were some differences in style, and that this could lead to women being better, rather than worse, managers. However, men were allowed more behavioural latitude than were women, while women can find themselves in a double-bind situation: there is pressure to adopt a more masculine management style at board level, but women who do so can find that this is judged as inappropriate for a woman and counts against them.

Organisational culture

Policies and practices in many organisations have been developed on the assumption that senior, male, officers will have a wife at home to support their lifestyle and this can play against women. Executive roles are gendered masculine roles, which can lead some companies to develop 'boorish' cultures and some interviewees had taken a conscious decision to avoid organisations or sectors in which this was more likely to be the case. In different organisations, macho

posturing could increase or decrease in the higher echelons; dependent upon this change, women could find that their position was made easier or more difficult as they rose through the ranks. Some women had found that assertive behaviour from women was viewed increasingly unfavourably at the higher organisational levels, which places them in something of a 'double bind': if they are unassertive they do not gain development or progression, but if they are assertive then they are perceived negatively (and less likely to progress).

Recruitment

There is a tendency for senior managers to recruit 'in their own image', that is, to recruit individuals who are as similar as possible to the present job incumbents. This serves to make organisations resistant to change and to make it difficult for women to be seen as appropriate potential employees. Selection criteria that include overly-rigid requirements (such as specific experience) can make it difficult for women to be seen as appropriate candidates. Evidence shows that women recruited to boards are typically far more highly qualified than male board members.

Discrimination

Although women in all of the countries except Greece reported having experienced discrimination, it was not this so much as the assumptions made by senior colleagues that damaged women's career progression opportunities. Where there was discrimination it was more likely to be covert rather than overt. In particular, the discriminatory attitudes of males who currently hold board posts can often mean they overlook highly qualified and competent women when posts become vacant.

Development opportunities

Women were less likely to be given the types of development opportunity that were viewed as necessary to support progression into higher levels of management and ultimately into board positions. Those women who had received the necessary development often reported having sought out and/or created the opportunities themselves.

Occupational segregation

The fact that many occupations are strongly segregated along gender lines is well known. What is less recognised is the fact that moving into a gender-segregated area can have a lasting and profound effect on career progression opportunities. Interviewees believed there is a tendency for board members to be drawn

predominantly from male-dominated backgrounds such as finance and engineering. Senior managers from areas such as human resources are viewed as lacking the appropriate experience and knowledge to fit them for service at board level. Given that more females than males move into areas such as HR, this view can severely curtail the opportunities for women to be selected for board membership.

Pioneers or tokens?

The women interviewed were, to some extent, pioneers. In many cases, however, they also felt that they were tokens, used by their companies to present a more positive public image than might in reality be justified. In some cases employers were 'insultingly blatant' about choosing specific individuals to be a token 'presence'. Whatever the rights or wrongs of such tokenism, women did concede that such appointments did allow them to gain experience that might otherwise not have been offered. Whether women arrive at senior positions through their own pioneering spirit or by being a token appointee, it is typically a lonely experience and the fact that such women are very much in the spotlight means that the position can be particularly stressful.

Appearance

The interviewees believed that women were judged far more on their appearance than were men. The pressure to adopt an 'appropriate' appearance that would not prompt stereotypical judgements from colleagues had led some women to take a strategic decision to radically alter their appearance. Although such actions made women feel as if they were wearing a 'costume', they can be effective. However, again, it can be difficult for women to attain the correct balance – although business suits may increase credibility, they may also make a woman appear unfeminine and unapproachable and lead to less, rather than more, approval.

Quotas

Influenced by developments in Norway, policy makers in Sweden had formally considered the potential to introduce a specified national quota for the proportion of boardroom positions that should be held by women, although they had subsequently decided against doing so. Nonetheless, the possibility of introducing a quota remains a topic for debate in the USA and UK as well as in Sweden, and was therefore explored as part of this work. While many interviewees believed that quotas were a good idea in theory, they have the disadvantage of effectively being a positive discrimination policy, with the potential for appointments to be seen as being made solely or primarily on grounds of gender rather than merit. Women believed that they themselves would feel insulted if they had been appointed as a 'quota woman' rather than on grounds of ability.

Networks

Formal and informal networks can help men gain influence and access to high-ranking positions. Women find it difficult to break into male networks and there are few women's networks. Furthermore, the scarcity of women in senior positions means that any networks which are formed are unlikely to be as effective as those of men. Interviewees questioned whether it was worth trying to build up networks of women given that the majority of decision-makers are male. It was suggested that it would be more useful to help women develop the skills that would allow them to break into male networks.

Childcare

Childcare remains a major barrier to women's ability to participate in full at work. Although availability of childcare is an issue in many countries, attitudes can constitute a barrier too: in Sweden, although there are more progressive childcare policies and provision than that available in the other study countries, social attitudes lag behind the legislative environment and opinions about women who return to work soon after having a child are often negative. In the other countries, the social attitudes and cultural norms regarding childcare were even more deeply ingrained. Women in the five countries spoke of the sacrifices they had been forced to make, either in terms of their career or their family life. Many women with children were faced with the option of returning to work on a part-time basis only or not at all, and those who move to part-time working may find they are subsequently overlooked for promotion.

International experience

International experience was considered essential by many of the women interviewees to aid career progression. While the increasing numbers of dual-career couples makes it difficult for both women and men to move to take up international placements, nonetheless the view amongst interviewees was that international moves were significantly more difficult for women than for men. Whatever the practical difficulties, women were far less likely than men to be awarded such plum development opportunities.

Self-confidence

More women suffer from a lack of self-confidence than do men. Low self-confidence can hamper women's career progression in several ways. Women are less likely than men to make speculative job applications for posts for which they do not consider themselves fully qualified; self-confidence is also a factor in the significantly lower salaries negotiated, on average, by women compared to men. Women are more likely than men to be averse to self-promotion, which also impacts negatively on progression and rewards.

The decision to seek board-level positions

It was clear that not all the women who were interviewed as part of this work were interested in attaining board membership. It is reasonable to assume that this is as true for men as for women. However, while for some women the decision not to seek board-level positions was linked to their own personal goals in life, for others, this decision was more to do with perceptions of the likely impact that taking up such a role would have.

Conclusions and recommendations

The research suggested there are several areas upon which coaching for executive women could usefully be focused. The areas in which coaches could help women to progress included:

- confidence building
- providing a sounding board for ideas
- dealing with organisational cultures
- networking
- identifying values and goals
- identifying and obtaining access to development opportunity
- making the right impression
- coping with a new role
- achieving specific goals
- achieving work-life balance
- focusing on what is personally important.

In addition it was recommended that coaching be offered as early as possible as well as at key career transition points, and that coaching for men – as key gatekeepers to board-level positions – should focus on what they can do to help move more women into senior positions.

1 Introduction

Legislation enacted in the USA in 1963 and in the UK in 1975 rendered sex discrimination in the workplace illegal. Across Europe, the EEC Equal Treatment Directive 1976 established the principle of equal treatment in employment and training. However, despite such long-standing legislation, women still remain under-represented in many occupations, most noticeably in high-level positions in organisations.

This phenomenon is seen at its most extreme when the composition of company boards is considered. In the USA, women constitute on average 14.7 per cent of board members on Fortune 500 companies; in the UK 11.4 per cent of board members were women (O'Neil, Hopkins and Bilimoria, 2007). This is backed up by the latest figures on female executives, from the UK Equality and Human Rights Commission¹ published in 2008, which note that women hold just 11 per cent of FTSE 100 directorships. Encouraging women who hold senior management positions to move into board-level positions is viewed as a crucial part of the global drive to improve equality between men and women.

There is likely to be a range of reasons why women in senior jobs fail to progress up to board level. Issues connected with discrimination and the 'glass ceiling' have been well characterised. However, in some cases there may be an element of choice: some women may simply decide not to progress to board level despite being coached for and offered such positions. An understanding of the full range of factors that underlie women's decisions to accept promotion to board level or not, as well as of the factors already known to hold back some aspiring women, may provide valuable insights into the dynamics at play within the workplace.

¹ UK Equality and Human Rights Commission (2008), *Sex and Power 2008*
www.equalityhumanrights.com/Documents/EHRC/SexandPower/Sex_and_Power_2008.pdf

This issue is not just of academic interest: ensuring that a greater number of women ascend to the level of board member is a key current issue in terms of executive coaching. If a greater understanding can be gained of the reasons why eligible female senior management members do, or do not, attempt the move up to board level, then this will inform the development of better – or different – coaching strategies to help support women managers' career progression.

For this reason, the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) submitted a proposal to the Foundation of Coaching requesting grant funding to examine the factors underlying women's progress through organisational structures and the reasons why women in senior management positions in the USA and in Europe decide to accept or decline board-level jobs. IES suggested to the Foundation that exploring this issue further by talking to women about the factors that encouraged and/or slowed their career progression, along with the reasons for their decisions regarding whether or not to take up board-level positions. The research would inform the debate in the US and worldwide and illuminate the development of further coaching topics and strategies that might be needed to help greater numbers of women progress into board positions.

Our proposal was to undertake a programme of research consisting of a literature review followed by face-to-face and/or telephone interviews with women in three categories: those who had received coaching and had considered a board position (and either accepted or declined the offer); women who could comment on the factors affecting the progress of women within their country at a national level; and women who were involved in the provision of coaching for senior/executive-level women and men. In 2007 the Foundation approved funding for the work and the research commenced in November 2007.

1.1 Selecting the focal countries

National contexts and labour markets differ significantly between the US and Europe, as do the labour markets within the various European countries. The attempts that have been made by various governments (or other interested parties) to address the issue of women in business also vary widely between countries (although it should be noted that equal participation by women in the labour market is one of the central tenets of European employment policy). It was of interest therefore to gain a range of viewpoints from countries at different stages of progress in facilitating the entry of women into senior management and with different degrees of success in doing so.

Sweden, Germany, the UK and Greece were selected as the focal countries for this work because they provide a range of examples of national contexts, cultures and systems that are currently performing well, averagely and not so well in

comparison with other European countries. Research was also proposed in the USA in order to provide up-to-date information that could then be compared with the European countries.

1.2 Comparative studies

While there has been considerable research focused on the position of women in management in the USA and the UK, there has been relatively little cross-cultural comparative research across EU countries on the position of female managers, and even less on the ways in which coaching can help them to progress. Thus, the research was viewed as being of value in contributing to this wider debate and would make more information on this topic available within the public domain. It was agreed with the Foundation that the research would focus primarily on high-level managers and directors, as it is on the position of women at these levels that the least information is available.

1.3 The report

In the chapters that follow, we explore, through the voices of our interviewees, their views and experiences of the factors that constrain – or alternately, assist – women’s ability to progress into board and executive positions at work, and with which coaching can assist.

The report is structured in the following way: Chapter 2 presents the literature review that was undertaken before commencing the fieldwork. Chapter 3 gives details of the research method used in the fieldwork and provides a brief description of the features of the legislation and socio-cultural backdrop in each of the study countries. Chapter 4 reports the research findings relating to the barriers and supports for women in senior positions. Chapter 5 sets out the research findings relating to the contribution of coaching to women’s advancement at work. Chapter 6 reports the conclusions and recommendations for coaching arising from the work.

2 Literature Review

We begin by considering the literature that has sought to describe and account for the career patterns of women and men. Until the 1980s, the majority of careers research focused on men's careers; when women's careers were considered it was often assumed that they followed – or should follow – the same trajectory as those of men. Since the late 1980s, however, there has been increasing awareness that women's careers differ from those of men in many ways. As a result, there is now a growing body of research in career, management and psychology journals looking at the trajectory of women's careers, both in general and looking in detail at specific factors that have an impact upon that trajectory.

Particular attention has been paid since the early 1990s to factors that inhibit women's progress or prevent their progression beyond a certain level in organisations: the phenomenon usually referred to as the 'glass ceiling'. That research has identified a range of factors that can inhibit women's progress: restricted access to development opportunities, exclusion from key groups and networks within organisations, components of the selection processes for senior positions. As a result, many organisations have sought to provide support for women to encourage their progression. Key amongst these has been the development of coaching initiatives for senior women to help them progress to directorial and executive positions.

However, despite the existence of such support, some women decide against applying for very senior positions or simply fail to progress to these positions. There is also evidence that some women choose to decline such positions when they are offered. It is therefore of interest to discover the reasons for this situation and in particular to determine whether it is possible to further customise the coaching offered to women to increase the numbers progressing to senior levels.

This chapter therefore reviews the literature that has been written to date on the subject: it begins with an overview of recent articles on the trajectory and context of women's careers, considers the barriers to progression, and reports on what is

known about the reasons for women leaving very senior positions. A section then follows that reports on research that has been undertaken in various different countries, drawing out the common international themes and identifying issues that appear to be either specific to, or to have more impact within, certain countries. This section concludes by identifying issues that will need to be addressed within forthcoming research.

2.1.1 Women's careers

A recent paper by O'Neil et al. (2007) has assessed the literature on women's careers that has appeared since 1990. The authors identified four themes that differentiate women's career patterns from men:

- Women's careers are embedded in women's larger-life contexts. For example, they quote White (1995), who found that a majority of women in her sample of 48 worked continuously and either accommodated their family responsibilities to their work lives or remained childless in order to succeed in their organisations.
- Both families *and* careers are central to women's lives. They note that there is a significant body of literature on work-family conflict and work-life balance, which falls into two streams: identifying the antecedents and consequences of work-family conflict; and utilisation of, and attitudes towards work-life balance policies in organisations.
- There is a wide range and variety of career paths amongst women. The authors note that the architecture of women's careers is constructed 'uniquely and differently' from men's, and are more likely to reflect a range of paths and patterns than men's careers.
- Human and social capital are critical factors for women's careers. However, women often find themselves excluded from informal networks and the gender-segregated nature of organisations networks often leaves women out of important connections and conversations.

The overall conclusion of O'Neil et al. is that male-defined constructions of work and career success continue to dominate organisational research and practice, thus hampering research into the career progress of women and impeding women's careers. For example, they note that many studies use organisational advancement as if it were a synonym for career development, which may not accurately reflect the way that women conceptualise or construct their careers. They also note that there appears to be widespread agreement that women's careers are complex and multi-dimensional, yet work practices appear to exist in a single dimension, which is the male-defined organisational dimension. They believe that the reasons for

this are: that the traditional organisation model works for the people employed in the top leadership ranks of organisations and therefore supports the status-quo; that data is not systematically collected and reviewed for issues of role complexity and multiple responsibilities in organisations, particularly at lower or middle management levels, where many women may be faced with choices concerning work-life balance; and that although organisational structures and systems may change, organisational cultures and individual attitudes and perceptions do not keep pace.

2.1.2 International mapping of women board members

Work to 'map' the position of women on company boards provides an overview of the progress that individual countries have made in encouraging the progression of women in organisational structures. For example, research published by the European Professional Women's Network in 2006² grouped European countries into those who were considered 'trailblazers', 'middle of the roaders' and 'slow going' with regard to women attaining board representation. The leading country at that time (in terms of the percentage of board-level seats accounted for by women) was Norway (28.8 per cent), followed by Sweden (22.8 per cent) and Finland (20.0 per cent). The UK was the head of the middle group, with 11.4 per cent of board seats accounted for by women. In Germany, 7.2 per cent of seats were accounted for by women, and in Greece, which is in the 'slow going' group, the figure was 4.4 per cent. The average for this third group, which encompasses Switzerland, Greece, Spain, Belgium, Italy and Portugal, was 3.8 per cent. The Network report suggested that Europe's top companies were 'lagging well behind their American counterparts', quoting studies that estimated that women account for an average of 14.7 per cent of board seats on Fortune 500 companies.

At the end of 2007, further figures were released by Norway, which had introduced legislation requiring public limited companies to have boards made up of at least 40 per cent women from 1 January 2008 or close. The law was passed in 2003, when women accounted for just 15.5 per cent (averaged across organisations) of board members. The estimated average as of 1 January 2008 was 35 per cent.

² European PWN BoardWomen Monitor 2006, Internet posting www.europeanpwn.net/index.php?article_id=8

2.1.3 Obstacles and barriers to women's progression

Given that women remain a minority of board members even in those countries considered to be 'trailblazers', it is perhaps unsurprising that much of the literature in this area has focused on factors that constitute obstacles and barriers to women's progression. In the next section the various barriers that have been identified in previous research are reviewed.

The glass ceiling

Much has been written about the phenomenon that is termed the 'glass ceiling'. This term refers to the idea that there is an invisible barrier to progression for some groups within an organisation. In 1992 a Federal Glass Ceiling Commission was set up in the USA to identify barriers that have blocked the advancement of minorities and women. The Commission described the 'glass ceiling' phenomenon as:

'... invisible, artificial barriers that prevent qualified individuals from advancing within their organisation and reaching their full potential. The term originally described the point beyond which women managers and executives, particularly white women, were not promoted. Today it is evident that ceilings and walls exist throughout most workplaces for minorities and women ... [and] result from institutional and psychological practices.'

The Glass Ceiling Commission found that while most companies recognised the need to address the glass ceiling, the glass ceiling nonetheless remains intact in many organisations, excluding women and other minority groups from top-level management.

The idea that there are psychological factors that act as barriers within the workplace has been explored by the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The ILO (1997) has suggested that the following factors play a part in inhibiting the career development of women:

'Cultural biases, gender stereotypes and attitudes against women coupled with their not being viewed as primary income-earners are major obstacles for women's advancement.'

It also suggests that there is an additional issue arising from the lone position of women in high-level posts. If a man chose not to accept promotion to a high-level post, this would be attributed to them as an individual. However, if a woman chooses not to accept a high-level post, it is often assumed that her decision is emblematic of *all* women's potential choice, rather than just being attributed to her own personal choice: in other words, all women in that position would make the same choice. As there are so few women in high-level posts, the actions of

individual women, who can therefore be seen as some form of symbol for all women, are taken as being representative of all women employees.

In addition, the ILO has suggested that higher performance standards are often expected of women. Furthermore, the absence of clear job descriptions for higher echelon jobs and, in some instances, the lack of formal systems for recruitment also tends to create obstacles. Moreover, the existence of informal male networks, sometimes referred to as 'old boys' networks', also tends to exclude women from top jobs (ILO, 1997).

The processes that underpin the glass ceiling can impact on women's perceptions of the organisation and influence the decisions they make about the desirability (or otherwise) of further progression. In work reviewing the progress that has been made since the Glass Ceiling Commission was set up Cooper Jackson (2001) found that women still were not rising to the top of organisations in the numbers that they should be, and identified a number of individual barriers to progression within organisations. Many of these barriers focused on the working environment for senior managers and for women in particular:

'Women today are able to peek through the glass ceiling, and some question whether the executive floor is right for them. What they often see is the need to work long and hard hours, often without equitable pay, and in an atmosphere that is not always friendly towards them.'

Cooper Jackson carried out a questionnaire-based survey of women middle managers to explore their perceptions of the glass ceiling. She found that while women believed that the men in their organisations largely respected women and held favourable perceptions of them as potential leaders, nonetheless in their organisations there was the perception that men are better suited for upper-level management positions. Although survey participants had moderate access to highly visible committees and task forces, they often did not have the opportunity to rotate job assignments to enable them to widen their experience. In terms of management style, Cooper Jackson found that:

'... women who display a dominant and autocratic management style are negatively perceived by both men and women, while a feminine management style (ie cooperative, interactive) is seen as fairly weak and ineffective when used by men and women. While these women reported feeling comfortable with adapting their management style according to the situation, they do perceive they are expected to conform to the norms and rules of the majority males.'

Cooper Jackson also found that many of the women believed that they would be penalised at work if they were to request a more flexible work schedule to assist them with fitting around their family commitments. However, in reality, little conflict was actually experienced, probably because the women in the sample

tended to be older, with mostly teenage or adult children and therefore had fewer childcare commitments.

More recently Weyer (2007) has examined the persistence of the glass ceiling, and has grouped the obstacles to women's advancement into top management positions into three categories: biological explanations; socialisation explanations; and structural/cultural explanations. She notes that the most accepted explanations for gender differences are social roles and expectations; at the core of both is the idea that men and women are allocated different roles in society based on their gender. Such explanations are based on the idea that women and men are assumed by society to possess different qualities (Bem, 1993) and that these different qualities ideally predispose them to carry out the different roles they are historically found occupying (Deaux and Lewis, 1984). These assumptions then bias the evaluation of women leaders due to the expectation that they will lack certain essential qualities. Weyer (2007) quotes Ridgeway (2001), who suggests that the status element of gender stereotypes can act as a particular barrier to women's achievement of positions of authority and leadership. Thus, 'it is not that leaders are mostly men because men are preferred as leaders. Rather, most leaders are men because leadership is described as a task that requires behaviours deemed masculine'. Conversely, 'when female leaders are evaluated, they may be perceived somewhat less favourably than male leaders because their assigned gender role and the leadership role do not match' (Ridgeway, 2001).

Weyer comments that although there has been widespread social change over the past 50 years, this change has not been followed by a concomitant change in people's beliefs about the appropriate roles for women and men, which largely remain rooted in traditional gender stereotypes. In other words, the beliefs we hold about individuals take a long time to change, even when there is evidence to the contrary. Weyer concludes that elements of the social structure are the main reasons for the continued existence of the glass ceiling and comments: 'In order for the glass ceiling to be shattered, it is necessary for social structures to change. In particular, women have to be assigned greater social significance and general competence. The difference in status and power between male and female employees and leaders has to be reduced, if more women are to take on top leadership positions in corporations and the public sector' (Weyer, 2007, p. 494).

Alongside the notion of the glass ceiling is that of the 'glass border', whereby women do not get promoted to senior positions due to their lack of international experience. Van der Boon (2003) has commented that women hold a very low percentage of all international management positions and cites a survey conducted by Linehan et al. (2001) which found (perhaps unsurprisingly) that, where senior management assumes that married women do not want international careers, they rarely invest in the development of their women

managers by providing assignments with power and opportunity. However, Van der Boon notes that many of the empathetic skills possessed by women can help them succeed in international assignments. She notes that: 'Female managers have reported the biggest barriers coming from within the corporation, rather than from situations actually encountered during foreign assignments' (Van der Boon, 2003).

This view is reinforced by Tung (2004), who sets out the barriers preventing women from gaining international assignment experience, but notes that in reality, women are very willing to take on international assignments, even when this may mean personal hardship if or when their families object to it. Further, Tung found that there is a range of typically 'female' characteristics that can mean that women actually perform better than men in international assignments. For example, they may be better able to cope with the isolation of living abroad, as they are more used to being 'outsiders' in their home country. Further, the listening element of the management style of many women can facilitate interaction with host-country nationals, leading to better mutual understanding and relationships. In addition, Tung argues that women are adept at balancing the need to cultivate good relationships with people in the host country, while not estranging their company headquarters. She notes: 'Contrary to popular opinion, it appears that women are indeed able to succeed in international assignments. In fact, certain co-called feminine characteristics and traits might render them particularly suitable for relocations to particular countries' (Tung 2004, p.243).

Earlier research looking at the glass border attributed the shortage of women managers overseas to three main reasons: first, the assumptions made by senior managers that women do not want international postings because of work-family conflicts; second, fears about women's competence or their physical safety should they be sent abroad, leading some companies to refuse to send women abroad at all; and, lastly, the belief that foreigners may be prejudiced against women managers (Alder and Izraeli, 1994). A mixture of paternalism and fear led companies to restrict the opportunities of their women employees to gain the types of experience necessary for managers who sought progression into senior posts. Almost ten years after Alder and Izraeli's study, Van der Boon (2003) commented that credibility could still be an issue for women operating in the international area:

'For men, credibility is often derived from their gender and their status in the company. For women, credibility is more often derived from their individual skills. Women report that they often have to work extra hard to establish credibility because of their gender.'

Burke and Vinnicombe (2005) have examined the progress that has been made in removing the glass ceiling in the UK since the early 1980s. They report slow

progress, and warn that the situation could in fact worsen in the future, due to disillusionment amongst women with corporate life:

'The slow progress made by talented, educated, ambitious women is now having some negative effects on women's views of management and the professions as a career. Fewer women are entering MBA programs, thus reducing the pipeline for career advancement . . . in addition, more women in mid-career are leaving their corporate jobs, opting for a career in small business or full-time investment in family.'

Such findings suggest that action is required, and, if anything, more urgently than previously, to find ways to remedy the situation that leads to the loss of talented women from organisations.

2.1.4 Identifying the barriers to women's progression

Those writing on the glass ceiling have noted the various different components of organisational culture, the perceptions and actions of senior managers and indeed the perception and decisions of women themselves which interact to hold women back from moving into senior positions. We now consider work that has identified the various barriers that contribute to the impeding of women's progress.

A review of research looking specifically at the barriers that women face when trying to move into senior management roles was conducted by Oakley in 2000. Her work was prompted by the fact that, although the number of women in middle management has grown quite rapidly in the past two decades, the number of female CEOs in large corporations remains extremely low. Her review examined the many explanations for why women have not risen to the top of corporate hierarchies, which include: gender stereotyping of leadership; women's access to line management positions; operational and budgetary experiences; hidden promotion and reward systems; gendered power relationships and corporate culture, particularly exclusion from the old boys' networks at top level; and tokenism. Oakley concludes that many of the forces at work, such as gender stereotyping and the old boys' network, will be slow to change.

Sheridan (2001) has considered the way in which the 'old boys' network' has impacted on women's representation on public boards in Australia and continues to constrain women senior managers in their career progress. She found that the majority of public boards comprised men only and that, where there were women on public boards, they are likely to be the lone woman amongst many men. She explored women's own reports of how they accessed, and their experience of, membership of public boards. Sheridan found that many women suggested that in accessing boards, it is often the case that it is 'who you know not what you know',

that is, networks and contacts rather than knowledge or qualifications gain individuals a place on the board.

Her work backs up the earlier findings of Simpson (1995), who had looked at how far the MBA qualification can help women overcome the barriers to progression in the labour market. She found that over half of the women MBA graduates in her survey sample reported having experienced a 'men's club' as a barrier and 28 per cent identified this as the largest single barrier to their progression. They also identified colleagues' attitudes and other external factors as primary barriers to career progression rather than any personal lack of skills, experience or qualifications.

A survey seeking the opinions of 66 male CEOs in Canada on the qualifications of women and the difficulties associated with finding women with appropriate qualifications to sit on boards was conducted by Burke (1994a). The work was undertaken in response to relatively low numbers of women board members at the time the research was conducted (around five per cent of directors). It found that CEOs believed there was a shortage of suitably qualified women and indicated that they did not know where to find them. It also found that many women were excluded from board appointments by requirements such as previous board experience and having high visibility. On a more positive note, however, almost half the respondents said they believed that women board members had positive effects on board sensitivity and the utilisation and retention of managerial women in the organisation.

Höpfl and Matlal (2007) note that there are some notable areas in which women have been able to achieve board-level jobs, in particular in specialisms such as finance and accountancy. However, they also state that it is difficult to assess success in the broader sense, as this is usually defined in male terms, involving linear progression through an organisation. They believe that the careers of women are not as formulaic of this.

Burke and Collins (2001) have explored the impact of gender stereotyping on progression. They noted that:

'Male managers, who often make decisions affecting the upward mobility of women, have been found to perceive the characteristics needed for managerial success as being associated with those generally attributed to men. The fact that male managers may not consider 'female' characteristics important for managerial success can negatively impact decisions made by males concerning women's careers, including job placement, promotion, and access to developmental and training opportunities.'

In the USA, work by Marshall (1994) found that organisational cultures were still largely dominated by male values and norms of behaviour, and their resistance to

change goes some way towards helping explain the scarcity of women at senior levels. She explored how cultures operate to marginalise and exclude women, particularly when women near the organisational level which has most influence in shaping the shared culture, and found that some aspects of male-dominated organisational culture may have an influence.

The above may in part account for the findings reported by Bradshaw in 1990 (cited in Burke, 1994b), who interviewed a highly educated, older group of twenty women serving on boards of directors in Canada. Bradshaw reported that, where women have succeeded in joining the board of an organisation, their behaviour often appears more similar to that traditionally associated with men than with women. On a more personal level, Bradshaw offered two alternative interpretations of the experiences of these women. The first interpretation by the author was of a highly competitive, ambitious and successful group of women who were participating as equals with men at the highest levels of corporate governance. The other interpretation was of a group of seemingly successful women who functioned and spoke in ways similar to men in board deliberations but who have lost their voice as women: instead of representing a potential force for change, these women have instead embraced the male model of organizing.

In the same year Andrew et al. (1990) reviewed the potential barriers and obstacles to management careers for women in Canada. Their review explored the reasons for the relatively small number of women managers and in particular the extremely small number of very senior women managers. They interviewed a sample of intermediate and senior women managers in the public and private sectors in Ontario and Québec, and explored their views regarding the factors which block or facilitate management careers for women in general, and which of these obstacles had been encountered by the women interviewees themselves.

The interviews revealed that the factor most often seen as an obstacle was the small number of female managers in their organisation (identified as an obstacle by 123 out of 214 respondents). Other obstacles identified by a significant number of respondents included the small number of women in training programmes (identified by 80 respondents), and a lack of relevant life experience (64 respondents). Interestingly, only 10 respondents mentioned family responsibilities as an obstacle, although it should be noted that only 18 per cent of the sample had dependent children. Overall, the authors note that the interviewees commented in particular on the impact which the attitudes of others, particularly senior managers, could have on their opportunities, commenting that other people 'are not used to managerial women'. Structural explanations relating to the structures of the organisation (such as recruitment and evaluation procedures) were also seen as contributing to the difficulties women encountered in gaining advancement. However, perhaps more interestingly, interviewees identified

interactions between organisational structures and the various roles occupied by women as being a major cause for concern. This emphasises the fact that, at present, women's careers, more so than those of men, need to be considered within the larger context of the various roles they play in life – manager, mother, carer, etc.

More recent work by Vinnicombe and Singh (2003) has explored the obstacles facing women who wish to progress to the top of organisations in the UK. They interviewed 12 directors (six male and six female) to ascertain whether there were gender differences in the career facilitators and barriers to the top of organisations. They used Kirchmeyer's (1998) classification of barriers in four categories:

- human capital (lack of qualifications and languages in a globalised world)
- individual characteristics (being female, having traits deemed unattractive in a woman, such as being aggressive, and lack of confidence³)
- interpersonal (difficulties in gaining entry to organisational cliques and networks)
- family determinants.

Their work revealed that these barriers do not serve solely to exclude women – they can be factors that hold back male managers too. However, the barriers that were more of a problem for women were more likely to be things over which they had less control, or were more likely to be permanent barriers for women but just a temporary barrier for men.

In terms of Kirchmeyer's first category, *human capital*, three directors (one female and two male) told Vinnicombe and Singh that lack of academic qualifications had influenced their careers. Although more men identified this as an issue it should be noted that this is a barrier it is possible to address fairly readily. In terms of the second category, *individual characteristics*, the authors focus in particular on 'imposter syndrome' (De Vries, 1990). This syndrome, the feeling of being phoney and not really up to the job, is thought to be common amongst high-achieving women, although Vinnicombe and Singh reported that they also found this among some of the male directors they interviewed. There was also some discussion of style, with some of the women saying that they thought they were too aggressive and although this would not necessarily be seen as a trait that would hold men back it could impact on their own prospects:

³ In particular, Vinnicombe and Singh explored the impact of 'imposter syndrome' (De Vries, 1990), often referred to as 'feeling phoney': the belief that one is not really qualified to undertake one's role.

'Probably I'm too forthright. I think I frighten people. I don't think I'm terribly aggressive and assertive, although I have a reputation for being terribly aggressive. You become almost a legend in your own time, but when people meet you they say, 'You're really nice!' Frightening other people, being too much of a threat. Whereas in a man, I think that would have been positive, for a woman it isn't.'

(De Vries, 1990, p.329).

The authors note that: 'as these were pioneer women with no female role models ahead of them, finding the right style would be more difficult and female assertiveness would be seen negatively by males as aggressiveness' (p.329).

Although Vinnicombe and Singh do not explicitly comment on this point, it can be seen that this is something of a 'lose-lose' situation: if women behave in a similar way to male colleagues, they are labelled negatively, as having traits (such as 'aggressiveness') which are deemed inappropriate in a woman. However, if they behaved in a way deemed more appropriate to a woman (ie, in a more 'feminine' style), then this would be deemed inappropriate in a manager. This double bind puts women in an invidious position.

Regarding interpersonal issues, the authors found that exclusion from cliques and the old boys' network can be a problem for men as well as women. However, they noted that whereas for men, this is often just a temporary situation (while they are new and until they are accepted by the other managers), for women, the exclusion may be permanent, on grounds of their gender. There is little that women can do to address this issue under these circumstances. There is a second issue arising from this point. Women isolated from networks and with few other women for company 'at the top' may feel quite lonely; senior women interviewed in earlier research by Seth et al (1981) talked of the loneliness of being the only woman on a board.

Early research (eg, Ibarra 1992, 1997; Pfeffer 1981; Reif et al. 1975) has suggested that female managers do not have their social contact needs satisfied through work networks to the same extent as their male colleagues, nor regard their colleagues as friends to the same extent as male managers. Waldstrøm and Madsen (2007) have recently attempted to test the theory, examining in some depth the relative importance of networks to women and men managers in organisations. They undertook a large-scale survey of managers in Denmark, finding that gender differences were strongly influenced by age, marital status, and children living at home. While male managers tend to see their colleagues more as friends, the older they are, the reverse is true of female managers. The more recent work revealed that the picture is not as clear-cut as suggested by the earlier studies.

Lastly, considering Kirchmeyer's fourth category, *family determinants*, the women interviewed in the Vinnicombe and Singh study confirmed that there were

problems with combining work and family responsibilities, but this was not the main issue for them. The main issue was that of having the energy to cope with both:

'It's lack of energy. Lack of physical stamina which is the biggest problem and I cannot do it like I used to. I was reading an article the other day about women not being able to manage very easily a job plus the family and it was saying that something like 60 per cent of women feel really exhausted. Really exhausted most of the time and I think in the end it will be that, obviously I can't take conscious decisions but in the end I will get so tired that it will make me give it up.'

Following on from the notion of the 'glass ceiling', Ryan and Haslam (2005) discuss the idea of a 'glass cliff', which refers to the observation that that while more women are now achieving high profile positions, they are more likely than men to find themselves in a risky or precarious situation in their role at work. They looked at what happens when women achieve leadership roles and examined the sorts of positions that women typically are given. Ryan and Haslam examined the performance of FTSE 100 companies before and after the appointment of a male or female board member and discovered that during a period of overall stock-market decline, those companies who appointed women to their boards were more likely to have experienced consistently bad performance in the preceding five months than those who had appointed men.

Ryan and Haslam believe that these results expose an additional, largely invisible, hurdle that women need to overcome in the workplace: namely that their leadership positions are relatively risky or precarious since they are more likely to involve management of organisational units that are in crisis. Ryan and Haslam (2007) went on to explore the reasons why women may be brought in to manage organisations during times of crisis. Their research revealed that the predominant view among survey participants was that women are particularly suited to a leadership role during times of crisis: '... indeed, one woman told us that the glass cliff phenomenon reminded her of a quote from Eleanor Roosevelt: 'Women are like teabags: you don't know how strong they are until you put them in hot water.' Participants in the survey were asked about the leadership abilities of candidates for a financial directorship of a large company. They perceived the female candidate to have particularly good leadership ability when the position was described in the context of an ongoing decline in company performance, as opposed to a company where all was going well.

A number of women in Ryan and Haslam's research reported feeling that they were in something of a lose-lose situation. If they didn't succeed in their glass cliff role, the consequences were quite straightforward: they were penalised for their apparent failure. However, if they succeeded in turning around a troubled situation, rewards were not necessarily forthcoming:

'I was personally promoted into a difficult management role (where a previous male manager had failed) with the hope that I would turn it around. When I did, the 'reward' was to be moved to another turnaround role – without any additional financial reward or kudos. Meanwhile, male peers appear to work less hard (fewer hours), in maintenance roles – and with greater reward. I often wonder if I'm just a fool to accept such challenges. I doubt that the men would.'

One possibility, which Ryan and Haslem do not appear to have considered, is what we might call the 'poisoned chalice' hypothesis: that men are not willing to accept senior posts in companies which appear to be in difficulties, leaving the company with little choice other than to invite women to take up the vacancies.⁴

2.1.4 Reasons for leaving senior jobs

The previous section examines some of the reasons that have been proposed to explain why women do not progress as well as might be expected within organisations. The reasons for women choosing to leave senior jobs are considered next.

Marshall (1994) reviewed the reasons identified by earlier researchers to account for why female managers decide to leave senior management jobs. Sekaran and Hall (1989) observed that many women are leaving jobs to concentrate on motherhood, but speculate that this may be a medium-term rather than a long-term trend. At around the same time Schwartz (1989) suggested that organisations should introduce a 'mommy track' designed to help women achieve senior levels by allowing them some flexibility in terms of their jobs and their working hours: 'The majority of women ... are what I call career-and-family women Most of them are willing to trade some career growth and compensation for freedom from the constant pressure to work long hours and weekends.'

Following this review Marshall then undertook her own research, aiming to find out why women decide not to progress to senior or board level (Marshall, 1995). She interviewed women who had reached middle and senior-level management positions and then had either left, or contemplated leaving, employment. Overall, she interviewed 12 people (male and female) who had worked at chief executive or director level, as part of senior management teams or as senior managers. She identified four main themes emerging from the experiences of female senior managers. First is the issue of bullying and hostility, which was experienced by all

⁴ There are grounds for believing this to be a possible explanation. If the numbers of women in science are compared across Europe, one country emerges as having (apparently) succeeded in attracting women into the sector. In fact, women moved into the sector once men started to leave it due to deteriorating pay rates (Thewlis, Miller and Neathey, 2003).

employees, but which was perceived by the women to be more undermining than it was by their male colleagues.

Isolation was a major theme for these women, who reported 'considerable evidence of men banding together in reacting to individual women' and a general male-dominated environment: 'Several reported how entering executive dining rooms, which until their appearance had been men-only, had seemed a testing out of the culture. In one case permission had been sought to allow the woman to enter, in others conversation had stopped or become stilted. These women felt they had interrupted 'normal life' for the men involved and that there was no willingness to develop a culture in which they could be included more equally' (p. 23). Some expressed disappointment with the behaviour they witnessed: '... senior managers seemed to them inadequate, ordinary men in big jobs, or childish (acting like young teenage boys); this had undermined their aspirations to advance further' (p.22).

Marshall also reports that senior women's relationships with other women were sometimes strained, with occasional hostility from lower down the organisation. Some reported tensions with the other women at their organisational level, each of whom had developed individual ways of managing themselves in male-dominated cultures.

The third theme identified by Marshall's research was the existence of networks. Unlike men's networks, women's supportive networks tended to be mostly outside of their employing organisations, such as networks of friends. Most of the women in Marshall's interviews had been appointed as change agents and, while most had been successful, some had reported difficulties, such as receiving limited support from their chief executives or colleagues: 'Typically they would be supported in private, but not in public, despite their requests for more backing'. One woman talked about repeatedly feeling that she was 'being hung out to dry' in public meetings: 'I had a lot of support, but always covert. They would never openly come up front.'

The stresses and strains of operating in what was perceived to be a hostile environment were difficult to manage for many of the survey participants. Marshall observed that many of them experienced tiredness and stress, but noted that 'These [symptoms] resulted less from their demanding senior roles and more from managing themselves and the images they presented as women in male-dominated environments, and from avoiding the minefield of negative stereotypes available to them. Some felt their senses of self and integrity were threatened as a consequence'.

A range of characteristics that might have an impact upon the incidence of female board members is explored by Hillman et al. (2007). This research used panel data

from the 1,000 US firms that were largest in terms of sales between 1990 and 2003. They looked at factors such as organisation size, industry type, firm diversification strategy, and network effects (linkages to other boards with women directors) and tested whether these have an impact upon the likelihood of female representation on boards of directors. They found a positive association between organisational size and female board representation, with larger organisations being more likely to respond to societal pressures for greater gender diversity on their boards. They also found that firms operating in industries with greater numbers of female employees are more likely to have female representation on their boards, and that the extent to which a firm is linked to other firms with female directors is positively associated with female representation on its board. However, they found no association between the level of diversification and female representation on the board.

2.1.5 Tokenism

Singh and Vinnicombe (2003) note that women senior managers in the UK are moving from token to minority representation as directors. Looking at the 2002 FTSE 100 survey, the 'female FTSE index', they note that the stagnation seen over the previous two years in the position of female directorships in the UK's FTSE 100 companies appeared to be changing, albeit very slowly. The number of FTSE 100 companies in the UK with women directors was 61 in 2002, an increase from 57 in 2001 and 58 in 2000. The number of FTSE 100 companies with women executive directors was 12 in 2002, compared with 8 in 2001 and 10 in 2000. However, when looking at companies with more than one female director, the numbers are considerably lower, although again increasing over time: 17 with two or more in 2002 (15 in 2001 and 12 in 2000) and only six with three in 2002 (three in 2001 and one in 2000).

Despite these increasing numbers, Singh and Vinnicombe believe that women may be 'on trial', certainly at the beginning. There is also a suggestion that women have to be better than males – or at the very least, more qualified – in order to be selected for board positions: 'We can see from the fact that almost half (44 per cent) of all women directors are on remuneration committees and a third are on audit and nomination committees that women are increasingly having a voice on the board. There is also evidence of meritocratic appointments, although the fact that so many more women than men have titles indicates continuing senior male doubts about whether women can do these jobs until evidence is clear that they are qualified'.

2.1.6 Behaviours and characteristics of senior managers

The particular characteristics of female top managers, compared with those of white male managers, has been discussed by Hillman et al. (2002), along with a consideration of those of managers from racial minorities. Their paper examined how the experience and background of female and racial minority directors differed from those of white males. Using a sample of white male, white female, African-American female and African-American male directors who served on Fortune 1000 boards, the researchers found a range of differences in occupational background, education, and patterns of board affiliation. They found that female and African-American directors were more likely to come from non-business backgrounds. In keeping with the findings from Singh and Vinnicombe (2003) above, Hillman et al. also found that female and African-American directors were more likely to hold advanced degrees than white male directors. Their research suggests that developing specialist expertise – and in particular, higher qualifications – relevant to the board is a way of compensating for lack of relevant business background and hence helps women and people from ethnic minorities progress into directorial roles.

The issue of behavioural attributes has recently been examined by Westphal and Stern (2007a, 2007b), who looked at how people gain appointments to boards in the US. In particular they looked at the strategy of ‘ingratiation’, analysing responses from 760 directors. They found that ingratiation behaviours towards the CEO and other existing directors increased their chances of appointment to the board. However, the effect is much greater for white males than for employees in other categories, and they also found that the same behaviours in women (and people from ethnic minorities) may be seen as a negative attribute by those with the power to appoint. This is another example of the ‘lose-lose’ situation that women can find themselves in if they seek to emulate male behaviours as a strategy to facilitate progression.

The notion of adopting specific strategies in order to succeed as a female senior manager is also discussed by Davies-Netzley (1998), who looked at women’s perceptions of corporate mobility and their strategies for success in elite positions. Davies-Netzley conducted interviews with 16 male and female corporate presidents and CEOs in Southern California and found that, while white men promote the dominant ideology of individualism and patriarchal gender ideology as explanations of corporate mobility and success, women confirm the importance of social networks and peer similarities for succeeding in elite positions. These women had strategically sought to increase their human capital to negotiate male-dominated networks and maintain their high-status positions through such measures as obtaining advanced educational degrees or modifying speech and behaviour.

Some research has also been carried out on management style and the differences between men and women. Cames, Vinnicombe and Singh (2001) examined what constitutes a successful manager, looking at male and female managers working in 10 European banks operating in Luxembourg. They found that gender differences were important in determining perceptions of what constitutes a successful manager, irrespective of the nationality of the bank. Thus, regardless of the country of origin of the bank, the female managers in the survey perceived that those who displayed a more masculine leadership style were more likely to be viewed as successful than those who did not.

Earlier research, such as that by Rosener (1990), has also reported gender differences in leadership styles. Rosener reported that male managers had more 'transactional' leadership styles, which exchange rewards or punishments with employees in return for their performance, while female managers had a more 'transformational' leadership system, grounded in their personal characteristics, such as hard work and interpersonal skills, rather than in their formal status as managers. This style is also described as interactive, valuing diversity and encouraging participation and involvement. Despite, or perhaps because of, such work identifying gender differences in leadership styles, Höpfl and Matlal (2007) have noted that there are frequent calls for managers to display a range and balance of skills, including those deemed to be 'feminine' managerial skills, even though, as we have seen, these do not seem to help women to rise within organisations. Höpfl and Matlal observe that, whatever the intention of such calls for a more diverse range of skills amongst managers, the fact remains that 'traditional masculine values are routinely privileged in assessments of what makes an effective leader'.

Cortis and Cassar (2004) examine perceptions of and about women and managers, based on a survey of 200 male and female middle managers in Malta. They reported that their findings indicate a significant difference between attitudes of males and females regarding women managers, concluding that 'men are less likely to accept women as managers, while being more likely to stereotype the managerial role as a male occupation'. They also quote previous studies that have cited the 'queen bee syndrome', whereby female subordinates perceive their female bosses as being either dominant or bossy, noting that 'such labels are given particularly to females who adopt a 'male-oriented' managerial style by using direct and aggressive behaviour.' These authors too have noted that, perhaps ironically, these same behaviours are considered to be prerequisites for male leaders.

Lastly in this section, it is clear that invidious stereotypes of the nature of male and female traits and management styles do not act to inhibit women's progress only through their impact on senior managers who recruit and promote managers.

Vinnicombe and Singh (2002) examined the congruence between individuals' views of their own attributes and preferred management style and that of the top management team. In their study Vinnicombe and Singh surveyed 363 male and female managers on their perceptions of management style. They found that, where there was a lack of congruence, this could lead to women not putting themselves forward for promotion. They also found that women managers were not taken seriously by some males, and that line managers in particular were a stumbling block. Their conclusions included the fact that 'women managers in this study do not see themselves as similar to the successful manager who makes it to the top ... this is likely to have an impact on the women's career aspirations as they seek progression.' (Vinnicombe and Singh, 2002, p.129). In other words, stereotypes can have a secondary impact through women's own incorporation of stereotypes of successful managers and their subsequent weighing-up of their own attributes against the prevailing stereotype.

More recent work supports this idea. Although gendered role expectations have diminished, Powell and Butterfield (2003) found that women still report incongruity between their managerial role and their gender identity. Litzky and Greenhaus (2007) attempted to assess the extent to which incongruity between self and senior management (SM) characteristics impacted on women's career decisions. They surveyed employed students and found (using hierarchical multiple regression to analyse the data) that women perceived lower self-SM congruence. In addition they found that women also saw themselves as having lower career advancement prospects than did men. The authors' conclusions were that women hold lower desired aspirations than men for SM positions in part because they are less likely than men to see themselves as fitting into positions in senior management, and also in part because they perceive less favourable career advancement prospects than men – the implication being that individuals are less likely to strive for a goal which is perceived as unattainable.

2.1.7 Alternatives to corporate life

Given the many barriers to the advancement of women illustrated above, many women make the decision that, rather than try to break through the glass ceiling, they would prefer to leave corporate life and become entrepreneurs. Mattis (2004) notes that during the mid-1990s to mid-2000s, the incidence of women starting their own business increased dramatically in the US. She conducted a telephone survey of male and female business owners, looking at the reasons behind their decision to become an entrepreneur. For the women interviewed, familiar issues emerged, such as coming up against the glass ceiling, a lack of flexibility, a dearth of challenges in their corporate roles, a lack of role models and mentors and a lack of access to line positions that would help them to progress within the organisation. Half of the women in the sample who had left the private sector to

start their own business and 44 per cent of the women from other employment backgrounds reported that their primary reason for leaving their companies was that they wanted more flexibility, in terms of childcare obligations, participation in community affairs, personal health concerns, elder care and other family obligations: 'Women business owners are not so much seeking reduced hours, although that may come later, when they can afford to hire more employees to manage the business on a daily basis. Rather, they are seeking more control over the hours they work'.

She found almost around one-third of women in the study who were previously employed in the private sector cited the glass ceiling (28%) and dissatisfaction with their work (29%) as the reason why they left: 'I worked for a corporation in the area and I just got tired of people coming in, especially male counterparts, who were being promoted above me'. Overall, survey respondents gave the following glass ceiling-related reasons for leaving their organisations:

- My contributions were not recognised or valued (47 per cent).
- I was not taken seriously (34 per cent).
- I felt isolated as one of few women or minorities (29 per cent).
- I saw others being promoted ahead of me (27 per cent).
- I was excluded from informal networks/communications (21 per cent).
- I was excluded from training opportunities (21 per cent).

When asked what would attract them back into corporate life, 58 per cent of respondents said that nothing would. Of those who did offer reasons why they might return, 24 per cent cited more money and 11 per cent cited more flexibility: 'I think that if I was in an environment where it was a given, not a token but a given, that I had autonomy, made decisions, and my talents were part of the company, I could be a team member' (p.160).

Mattis concludes by stating that 'barriers to women's advancement in corporations are persistent, preventing companies from retaining valuable female talent at great cost to their current operations and to the talent pool for future leadership of their organisations. Lack of flexibility continues to be a feature of the corporate culture that leads to the attrition of high-potential women and is contributing to the dramatic increase in entrepreneurship among women in the US.'

2.1.8 Encouraging diversity

It is often argued that increasing the diversity in corporate boardrooms will enhance organisational performance. Research by Francoeur et al. (2007) indicates that firms operating in complex environments do generate positive returns when they have a high proportion of women officers. They argue that these findings tend to support the policies currently being discussed or implemented in some countries and organisations to foster the advancement of women in business.

Burgess and Tharenou (2002) reviewed the state of women's representation on boards of directors and examined the actions that organisations and women could take to help increase the representation of women on boards. These include: targeted training and development in relevant areas, such as upper management experience in marketing and operations; encouraging women to build and maintain contacts with CEOs and other board-level members; encouraging women to create a higher profile both within an organisation and publicly; encouraging women to take a more proactive approach to achieving board membership; encouraging women to develop networks and alliances that will support their promotion to board level; and ensuring that women have the necessary media management and public relations skills in order to promote their own profile satisfactorily.

Vinnicombe and Singh (2003), who conducted interviews with 12 directors (six male and six female – see above for more details), found three main factors that they believed helped women to climb corporate ladders successfully:

- getting a mentor
- taking on challenge
- becoming more 'visible'.

In the case of the first, this was easier for men than women, as there are a lack of senior women who can act as mentors for younger women and 'the male-male relationships had the advantage of informal, locker-room camaraderie, which women could not achieve with male mentors'.

In the case of the second, it was thought by the survey participants that being exposed to a challenge early in a career was a real boost and led to increased confidence. However, the males in this study said that they had unquestioningly accepted the chances to prove themselves, while the females said that, on occasion, they had had to be persuaded by their mentors: 'He said, "I want you to do the job. I really want you to do the job". I said, "I can't do it" and he said, "You can, you know". I thought, he must know better than I did'.

In the case of the third, having an opportunity early on in a career to work close to senior people was cited as crucial, in that it gave an individual access to a network of influential contacts and gave valuable information about how an organisation works on both a formal and an informal basis: 'They borrowed me to be secretary of a committee – everybody who was sitting round the table was either a director or a senior director. I learned a lot by just watching senior management at play' (male participant).

In terms of making long-lasting changes, Cortis and Cassar (2004) have suggested that the only way to influence stereotyping and attitudes is to change the culture of management: 'If [organisations'] policies do succeed in increasing the number of female managers, such increase in itself can have an influence on the shift in attitudes. This is because frequent direct contact with women as superiors may challenge the traditional female role stereotypes'.

2.2 Research covering individual countries

In this chapter, we examine research that looks specifically at issues and developments concerning the development of female managers' careers in the individual countries of Germany, Greece, Sweden, the USA and the UK, in order to provide some background on the issues that are specific to these countries.

2.2.1 Germany

Holst (2005) has examined the position of female board managers in Germany. In comparison with their counterparts in other countries, Holst found that the number of women on company boards in Germany was largely attributable to the German industrial relations system and in particular its system of co-determination, under which employee representatives are elected onto the boards of organisations falling within the scope of the legislation governing co-determination (the Works Constitution Act of 1952 (*Betriebsverfassungsgesetz*), and the 1976 Co-Determination Act (*Mitbestimmungsgesetz*)).

Lepperhoff and Scheele (2003, 2005) conducted research into the position of women at the workplace, carrying out empirical research at the administrative offices of the town of Hanover, north Germany (Stadtverwaltung Hannover). Gender equality policies have been operating in German public service organisations since the 1980s and the public service sector is viewed as a more 'female-friendly' place to work than the German private sector. Nevertheless, at Stadtverwaltung Hannover, only 1 per cent of the female workforce was ranked as senior management, compared with 6 per cent of the male workforce (2001 figures). Lepperhoff and Scheele looked at a range of issues, including the reasons why relatively small numbers of women progress into management and senior

management positions in the organisation. Opinions of female and male staff members were gathered through targeted workshops. A range of issues was discussed, including an overview of the barriers to professional development, perceptions of the glass ceiling, professional development in the organisation, career progression, gender stereotyping and work-life balance issues. Specific areas where women felt that they needed more input from their employer included: more transparency in the process surrounding career development for all employees; more access to management development programmes; more extensive mentoring from superiors; a commitment to consider informal learning and experience of employees, in addition to formal qualifications, when setting out promotion and advancement criteria; and more emphasis on work-life balance measures, part-time working and working time flexibility. Workshop participants (of both sexes) also spoke of the need for better communication and better networks to aid professional development (Lepperhoff, 2005).

Bischoff has conducted regular studies on the views of men and women in management positions in Germany. Her fourth and most recent study was published in 2004, with data relating to 2003, and asked men and women in management positions a range of questions relating to their working life, their terms and conditions, their family situation and their plans for the future. She found that general discrimination against women was perceived to be a key factor holding women back – 11 per cent of women felt this to be the case in the recruitment and early phase of a career, rising to 23 per cent in the development phase of a career. However, these figures are lower than those recorded in the previous survey, which dates from 1998. In terms of difficulties of achieving a work-life balance, only 6 per cent of women in the early stages of their career complained of difficulties in combining family and working life, rising to 8 per cent for those in the developmental stage of their career. Bischoff notes:

'The price that women pay for being able to have a career is now no longer having to live alone: 83 per cent of the women in this survey were married or living with a partner. However, 37 per cent of the men in the study had a stay at home partner, whereas this was the case in only 1 per cent of the women in the study.'

Bischoff makes some interesting observations in terms of pay, concluding from her research that average management pay levels are lower in organisations with a high proportion of female managers. She notes that this also means that a high number of female managers in an organisation will lower average pay levels for managers, including those of male managers, although she adds the proviso that this is an observation based on average data and would not be the case in all organisations. She therefore advises that women should ensure that their starting pay is as high as possible when they join an organisation.

This study also looked at the future career intentions of women in management positions, and found that fewer women were prepared to advance any further in their careers, based on their experiences so far at work. Some 32 per cent of the women in the 2003 study said that they were looking to advance their careers further, which is a drop when compared with the 39 per cent recorded in the 1991 study. By comparison, 44 per cent of the men in the 2003 survey said that they wanted to advance their future careers.

While recognising the many factors that inhibit women in their career progression, Bischoff states that women also limit their own career advancement. She concludes that:

'Without doubt, the talent pool of women has not been fully exploited. Women limit their career advancement more often than do men, and women want to work part-time more often than men. Why is this? Women prioritise their family over their work more often than men. One can either accept this or try to influence these choices from within an organisation.'

2.2.2 Greece

In Greece, research into the position of female managers has largely examined stereotyping and attitudes towards female managers. For example, Mihail (2006) notes that women are 'vastly underrepresented in corporate Greece' and says that one 'widely accepted' explanation for this is the existence of negative stereotypes about women as managers. Mihail's research looked at the views of business students on women in management, through a survey of 323 undergraduate students at the University of Macedonia, Greece. It found that the students' attitudes towards women in management were primarily shaped by their own gender: male business students hold relatively negative stereotypical attitudes, compared with their female counterparts. The research also found that gender was the most influential factor in accounting for the difference in attitudes.

Kottis (1996) has carried out empirical work into the participation of women in management in Greece. She found 'minimal presence' of women in the most senior positions of the companies she surveyed and that women's participation at the middle and lower levels of management was also relatively small: 'In Greece the corporate doors have not opened to women as much as in other countries and only an extremely small number of the women who have managed to pass through them have advanced to the upper levels of the managerial ladder' (p.30). The worst situation in Greece appears to be in the case of the subsidiaries of multinational firms – Kottis notes that family firms had a greater presence of women in their senior management teams. Nevertheless, she found that even where women do participate in the management of firms, 'in the majority of cases they are a minority, often 'the token woman' (p.32).

Kottis' survey identified a range of barriers that were hindering the progression of women into top management positions, based on responses made by men to a questionnaire. The comments made reflected all of the stereotypes reported in the earlier sections of this review: the belief that women do not show the commitment needed for a managerial career because of family responsibilities 'or other reasons related to their nature or upbringing'; the perception that there are not enough women with the required level of education (although Kottis notes that over the past two decades a large number of women have graduated from business schools and entered the labour market); the belief that women do not have the characteristics required to undertake positions of high responsibility; and that their appointment to a senior position would be problematic for male subordinates.

Overall, Kottis points to a 'prevalence of many old-fashioned ideas and negative preconceptions and stereotypes about women at the top levels of organisations. Typical responses included: 'Motherhood is the most important job for women. For this reason women spend their strength and energy primarily for their children and secondarily for the work. Therefore, they cannot be promoted to higher positions', and 'Women have inferior performance relative to men because of insufficient previous experience, insufficient training and their nature which obliges them to spend more time for their homes and children'. Kottis argues that the greatest barrier that Greek women face is not their family responsibilities but male managers' preconceptions about them, which reinforce the notion of women's traditional role and older gender stereotypes.

2.2.3 Sweden

In Sweden the government has considered introducing legislation obliging companies to introduce quotas for female board members, although to date it has refrained from doing so. In 2003, the Swedish government set up a commission to examine women's participation at management and board level in private sector companies, following on from work carried out a decade previously. The 2003 study, undertaken by Anna Wahl⁵, looked at 500 large Swedish organisations and found that women constituted an average of 17 per cent of board members in all organisations, falling to 13 per cent among private companies. Further, a large proportion of the female board members were trade union representatives appointed due to Swedish legislation governing board representatives. Women constituted 18 per cent of all top managers and 16 per cent in privately-owned companies.

⁵ 'Male dominance during times of change in management groups and company boards' (*Mansdominans i förändring - om ledningsgrupper och styrelser*, SOU 2003:16).

Research published by the European Professional Women's Network in 2006⁶ found that 22.8 per cent of board seats in Sweden were filled by women, putting it in second place, behind Norway (28.8 per cent). Nevertheless, despite the fact that Swedish companies have more female board members than their counterparts in many other countries, there would appear to be room for improvement. European Pensions and Investment News reported that the rate at which women are being recruited to the boards of Swedish publicly listed companies is slowing, according to data from the Swedish pensions buffer fund AP2⁷.

2.2.4 USA

The research organisation Catalyst has carried out a range of research looking at the issue of women in senior management and leadership positions. In its 2004 report *Women and men in US Corporate Leadership: Same Workplace, Different Realities?* the perceptions and views of senior male and female managers (vice president level and above) were gathered using a survey questionnaire and 33 face-to-face interviews. Respondents and interviewees were asked about issues such as job satisfaction, their strategies for advancement, their aspirations to senior leadership, barriers to advancement and what they did to balance work and family life. This study concludes that men and women have largely the same desires about advancement and more or less equally desire to use flexible work arrangements. Nevertheless, the study found that women have faced barriers along the way that men have not, and see their female colleagues continuing to face these barriers. These barriers include exclusion from informal networks, stereotyping, a lack of role models and an inhospitable corporate culture, all of which were found to be experienced by very few men. It concludes:

'While women and men have overcome many barriers to achieve success, women report facing a host of stereotypes and environmental challenges that their male colleagues do not. In addition, they have made more trade-offs and adopted more strategies to achieve balance in their lives than men have.'

A further Catalyst report, *Women 'Take Care', Men 'Take Charge': Stereotyping of US Business Leaders Exposed*, (Welbourne, 2005) looks at the behaviours required of corporate leaders, and examines the areas where women leaders are vulnerable to stereotyping. The study surveyed 296 corporate leaders, 34 per cent of whom were CEOs, and asked them to rate how effective men and women were at 10 essential leadership behaviours. The study found evidence of gender-based stereotyping among both women and men. Findings included a harsher rating for women

⁶ European PWN BoardWomen Monitor 2006. http://www.europeanpwn.net/index.php?article_id=8

⁷ The capital assets invested in Sweden's publicly financed national pensions system are managed by five 'buffer funds', which invest these assets in the capital markets.

leaders at stereotypically male 'take charge' behaviours, such as problem solving, which could, the study notes, lead to their power to motivate being seriously undermined. It also notes that it may be difficult for women leaders to prove the stereotypes about their leadership wrong, as people pay more attention to information that confirms stereotypes. This study concludes:

'Just hiring more women into management positions won't eliminate stereotypes. Exposure to women leaders isn't enough. Organisations must take proactive steps to eradicate stereotypic bias.'

A further Catalyst report looks at the issues facing women in leadership roles. *The Double-Bind Dilemma for Women in Leadership: Damned if you do, doomed if you don't* report looks at gender stereotyping, noting that despite the numerous business contributions of women leaders, men are still largely seen as the leaders by default. It goes on:

'As "atypical leaders," women are often perceived as going against the norms of leadership or those of femininity. Caught between impossible choices, those who try to conform to traditional — ie, masculine — leadership behaviors are damned if they do, doomed if they don't.'

Using secondary analysis of responses to two previous surveys of senior executives' perceptions of men and women, and 13 qualitative interviews, this study found that women leaders face three main dilemmas:

- extreme perceptions: too soft, too tough, and never just right
- the high competence threshold: women leaders face higher standards and lower rewards than men leaders
- competent but disliked: women leaders are perceived as competent or likeable, but rarely both.

The study notes that:

'Ultimately, it is not women's leadership styles that need to change but the structures and perceptions that must keep up with today's changing times. Companies versed in negotiating complex social and financial interactions must help employees see that stereotypes, like first impressions, are mutable—and not truths cast in stone.'

2.2.5 The UK

Specific UK-related work has analysed and updated the situation regarding female board members and encouraged organisations to recruit more women. In 2004 the UK Department of Trade and Industry published advice for companies on how to improve company board composition (DTI 2004). It quotes the 2003

Tyson report, which focused on the need for companies to improve selection processes for board appointments and to embrace a greater diversity of skills, experience, background and gender.

Two years after the DTI advice, and three years after the Tyson report, Singh and Vinnicombe (2006) looked at the incidence of female directors in FTSE 100 companies in the UK and found that only 77 of these had female directors and just 13 had female executive directors. Although this was a large increase since 2005, when just 11 companies had a female director, the researchers noted that this was 'a major under-development of female talent after more than three decades of mandatory equal opportunities policies'. Findings from repeat research conducted in 2008 painted a mixed picture: although the total number of women executive directors had risen to 17 and the female share of FTSE 100 company directorships is now 11.7 per cent, nonetheless there remain 22 companies in the FTSE 100 with exclusively all-male boards; and, of the 149 new appointees to the FTSE 100, just 17 (10.7 per cent) were women (Sealy, Vinnicombe and Singh, 2008).

Discussion of legislation to increase the number of female board members has been stimulated by the Norwegian government's decision to require organisations to ensure that women make up at least 40 per cent of their boards. Fouché (2005) considered the possible impact that this move could have in other countries, specifically the UK. She looked at issues such as flexibility of board composition in the context of quotas, noting the protests that this legislation had caused among the business community in Norway when it was first discussed.

In keeping with the majority of findings reported by Sealy et al. (2008) the *Sex and Power 2008* report by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC, 2008) noted that there had been little progress in the numbers of women in positions of power, and indeed in some areas of public life female representation has declined in the year since their last report was published. The EHRC reported that the numbers of women had declined in 12 of the 25 areas of public life for which they reviewed figures: MPs, Cabinet members, Members of the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly government; editors of national newspapers; people in public appointments; senior police officers and judges; health service chief executives; local authority chief executives; trade union general secretaries; and heads of professional bodies. The EHRC commented that the changes are often small, and due to just one or two females leaving such senior positions; nonetheless, any loss of progress is regrettable.

2.3 Summary

This literature review has touched upon a wide variety of issues that are pertinent to the career advancement of women. The main obstacles and barriers to career

progression include issues surrounding the glass ceiling, behaviours and perceptions of senior management, issues connected with tokenism and stereotyping, and the fact that many women choose to leave corporate life altogether and set up independently as entrepreneurs. The short review of country-specific literature has highlighted the main issues and concerns that are current in the individual countries in our research, including the latest reporting and statistics on the number of women in senior and board-level positions, the specific role of employee representation on company boards in Germany, and the debate concerning quotas for female board members in Sweden.

Given the existence of this body of literature, we wanted to use our own research to:

- test whether these issues are still pertinent to senior female managers
- find out whether there are any other issues that are affecting senior female managers and that will affect the younger generation of tomorrow's senior female managers
- find out whether the same issues affect women across the range of countries we have chosen to study.

3 The IES Research

3.1 Research context and methodology

In November 2007 the Foundation of Coaching commissioned the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) to undertake an international comparative study on the experiences of senior women in a range of countries. The study was co-funded by the IES HR Network of member companies.

The study looked at factors affecting women's progression to the boards of companies and the factors affecting women's decisions regarding whether or not to take proffered board positions. Specifically, the research was designed to explore the factors which hinder women in their attempts to rise to board-level positions and the factors or actions that are helpful in furthering women's careers. The aim in undertaking this work was to identify information that could be used to design coaching that would better help women to progress into senior and board-level positions and thereby improve female representation on company boards. The main questions addressed in the research were:

- What are the main perceived barriers to moving into corporate board-level management, from the point of view of women managers?
- What types of interventions and coaching are currently offered to women managers to enable them to move into board-level positions, and could be offered to them in the future?
- Are there any differences or similarities between the situation and approach in the countries examined; if there are differences, what are the lessons that can be learned; and could best practice be transferred across national boundaries?

In order to answer these questions, semi-structured interviews were conducted either face-to-face or by telephone with experts and with senior women in the following countries:

- Germany

- Greece
- Sweden
- the USA
- the United Kingdom.

Fieldwork on the project was carried out between May 2008 and October 2008. The expert interviews were conducted with representatives from a range of organisations in each country, including research bodies, lobby organisations, employer representative bodies, employee representative bodies, academics and independent researchers, in order to gain an overview of the issues that are relevant to the situation in each country.

The interviews with individual senior women in each country were conducted in parallel with those with the national experts. The original intention had been to interview six women in each country, three of whom had a board-level position and three who had decided against acceptance of such a position. The end result, however, was a more nuanced mixture of senior women, all of whom had received coaching or mentoring in some form. Some of these women held board-level positions and some did not. The interviews were carried out in English in all countries apart from Germany, where the discussion guides were translated into German and the interviews were carried out in German. The discussion guides are in the appendix.

Gaining access to individual women was, as predicted, problematic in many cases. A mixture of techniques was adopted to obtain the sample, including gaining contact through women's network organisations and academic institutions, 'snowballing' and through further contacts made when carrying out interviews of expert representatives. In total, 32 interviews were carried out, as follows:

- In Germany, ten interviews were carried out in total, of which five were with experts and researchers, including a researcher from a trade union, and academic researchers, and five were with individual senior women, including a senior trade union official, a senior academic and a senior manager in a communications company.
- In Greece, four women were interviewed. The sample comprised an employment researcher (working mainly on behalf of trade unions), the Director of Operations and Technology in a multinational financial services organisation the Head of HR for an international communications company and a divisional manager at a leading bank.
- In Sweden, seven interviews were carried out in total, of which one was a board member, two were in senior positions and who had received coaching, one was

a trainer/researcher, one was a lecturer/researcher, one was a legal expert and one was a representative of JämO, the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman for Sweden.

- In the USA, eight interviews were carried out in total, of which six were with individual senior women and two were with members of an expert research organisation. The senior women interviewed worked for organisations in a range of sectors, including energy, public administration, consultancy and the airline sector.
- In the UK, three interviews of senior women were carried out. It should be noted that in the initial proposal the UK was not included as a study country, but it was subsequently decided to include a selection of UK senior women as comparators. Of these senior women, one worked in the energy sector, one was a senior trade union official and one worked in a non-departmental public body.

3.2 Legislation and socio-cultural background

In the rest of this chapter we describe some of the key features of each country's legislation and the socio-cultural background. These descriptions are based on a combination of literature relating to legislative developments and current national debates, and information gained from the interviews with the national experts.

Each country in this study has a unique background in terms of the legislative framework, cultural and traditional norms and economic context. This section sets out a brief overview of these different backgrounds in order to provide a contextual framework.

3.2.1 Sweden

Sweden has perhaps gone furthest amongst the study countries in introducing legislation to facilitate the entry of women into the workplace. This country's parental leave and childcare policies are arguably the most progressive of the five countries studied. At present, half of childcare leave ('parental insurance') is allocated to the mother and half to the father (or partner), but either can donate their days to the other. At the time the interviews were conducted there was some discussion under way regarding the introduction of non-transferable parental leave which would serve to bring parity of parental responsibility across the partners and (it is hoped) serve to decrease discrimination in working life.

A report considering the potential for introducing quotas for women on boards was commissioned by the Swedish government in 2002. However, the government decided against accepting its recommendations. Shortly thereafter the government

changed and it is now virtually unanimously accepted that quotas are unlikely to be introduced in Sweden. However, (and particularly relevant to this study), Sweden does now require companies to report the numbers of women on company boards:

'There is a law – it requires that Annual Reports have to state how many women there are on the board, how many women managers. That came in five years ago, that was something.'

Swedish interviewee

However, although Swedish legislation and society in general may be more progressive, nonetheless the notion of women working in senior positions – and doing so after having children – is still not entirely accepted. Even women themselves may question what they should do for the best.

'Senior positions are always more demanding – and women always do think more about the issues involved – and it is not easy, but it is doable, perhaps with coaching, support etc. As women, society, people, comment on you and they comment more on women than on men taking up a similar [senior] position. But when I speak at universities, speaking to female engineers, I say it is up to the woman and her children to comment, not society. We need to be tougher.'

Swedish interviewee

Although the ramifications of the 'Nordic welfare state model' (Esping-Andersen, 1990) leads many commentators to view Sweden as one of the most egalitarian societies, nonetheless some Swedish researchers point to persistent inequalities and segregation between women and men in organisations and conclude that asymmetrical power relations in the country remain much the norm (Tienari et al., 2008).

3.2.2 Germany

Germany is in the lower middle part of the table in terms of the numbers of women in senior management and board-level positions (7.2 per cent of board-level seats were accounted for by women in Germany, as reported by the European Professional Women's Network study in 2006). As an EU Member State, Germany is covered by all EU Equality Directives, which have been transposed into German legislation. Germany is arguably in a unique position as, over the best part of the past two decades, it has been trying to merge the two distinct cultures of eastern and western Germany. Some of the German interviewees in this study point to the fact that the culture of the former German Democratic Republic was very different to that of the Federal Republic of Germany, in terms of the higher overall number of women working and more all-encompassing state provision for childcare. In the former GDR, women were all expected to work and

the childcare available was excellent. Commentators initially had high hopes when Germany was unified in 1990 that some of the east German model – in terms of women in the workplace and the support that they received – would be taken up across the whole country. Instead, it was the western model that was rolled out.

'It was different in the GDR – there, it was more normal for women to be at work and to have careers, even if there was discrimination. In West Germany, it was not so normal for women to work and there was always the view that if a woman had a child, she should stay at home and look after it.'

German interviewee

The most recent figures from Eurostat, relating to 2007⁸, show a female participation rate of 64 per cent for Germany. While this is above the average of 58 per cent for the euro area (and the average of 58.3 per cent for the EU27), it is lower than the average for the Netherlands (69.6 per cent), Austria (64.4 per cent), Finland (68.5 per cent), Sweden (71.8 per cent), the UK (65.5 per cent) and Norway (74 per cent). German women have been hampered by factors such as school hours – schools do not operate in the afternoons, although this is now under review – and structural inflexibility in the labour market. This can mean that it can be difficult for women to plan their careers flexibly or take breaks to have children and return to the labour market on a gradual basis.

History and tradition seem to play a particular role in defining the general role of women in Germany. One commentator thought that the present attitude to women in German society harked back to the days of the Third Reich, which polarised the genders and emphasised the ideal of women as stay at home mothers ('Kinder, Küche, Kirche').

'You can see it in some of the right-wing parties here still, the fact that women are portrayed as different, with different tasks to do. They are seen as being in the background and serving men. They have their work to do, of course, but it is basically the man whose work is most important and who sets the rules about how things are going to be.'

German interviewee

This commentator thought that Germany was actually quite a way behind countries such as the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries in terms of how women are seen and treated in public life, maybe more akin to Poland and Italy.

⁸ http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/pls/portal/docs/PAGE/PGP_PRD_CAT_PREREL/PGE_CAT_PREREL_YEAR_2008/PGE_CAT_PREREL_YEAR_2008_MONTH_11/3-13112008-EN-AP.PDF

There is a debate in Germany about government policy in giving women relatively long periods of maternity and parental leave. While this may be welcomed by parents, it can work against women, as they then spend long periods of time outside the labour market. Related to this, on the face of it, many commentators believe that part-time working is a good idea, but the difficulty is that women earn considerably less in part-time work than in full-time work, as they are working fewer hours, which can then have an impact upon their pensions and their general financial independence if they have worked on a part-time basis for a long time. The answer, according to one German commentator, was 'full-time work, but with much more flexibility in the whole notion of how work is carried out'.

Nevertheless, many commentators in Germany argued that although childcare and the problem of how to forge ahead in a career while having a young family was a significant barrier to women's advancement in Germany, solving this issue would not solve the whole problem of women's advancement.

'The debate here has been concentrating on the problem of childcare, to the tune of: 'if we can solve that, we've cracked it'. I believe that is totally the wrong approach. Obviously it's great that there are initiatives in this area, but it's also problematic as it gives the impression that equality is just a matter of improving the childcare infrastructure, which is really not the case.'

German interviewee

Finally, one area of industrial relations that is specific to Germany, among the countries studied here, is the existence by law of employee representatives on the supervisory boards of certain companies. These are usually nominated trade union representatives. There is a view that this legislation has helped women to gain experience of serving on boards, and without it, the figures on female board members in Germany would be much worse. Women are in general more likely to sit on boards as employee representatives than as employer representatives. One commentator noted that this legislation had indeed given more women chances to sit on company boards. However, she also noted that among trade unions the male delegates would tend to keep the positions seen as most important and influential for themselves.

'Of course, it's a great honour for an employee representative to sit on a company board. But generally, the positions on the very important boards, such as those of VW or BMW, are always taken by the general secretaries or senior officials of trade unions. If there is a less important company, perhaps some steel sector organisation, then they might let somebody else sit on the board, and if it's an insurance company, maybe a woman can have the job.'

German interviewee

3.2.3 Greece

As an EU Member State, Greece is covered by all equality directives. However, Greece is one of the countries in Europe that has made relatively slow progress towards gender equality. Evidence suggests that women are under-represented in all areas of management, not just senior management. The number of women in board-level positions is towards the lower end of comparative tables of EU countries, and this was one of the reasons for selecting it for study. One explanation for this situation that has been put forward in much of the literature on this subject is the negative stereotypes about women as managers. A recent study found that male business students in Greece held relatively negative stereotypical attitudes towards female managers compared to their female counterparts. Further, gender was by far the most influential factor in accounting for the difference in attitudes.

However, the interviewees indicated there had been a recent surge in gender equality that stood in contrast with the situation at the time when they had begun their careers:

'When I started 12 years ago it was quite bad because it was male dominated, my supervisor was a man, [there were] very, very few women. Now it's becoming better and better.'

'Well yes, I think that [we] have improved the ratio. I mean twenty years ago it was just five, six women managers in the branches of the bank, now the women managers in the branches are about 40 per cent or more so some of them, they will improve their position to general management.'

Greek interviewees

At the same time, there was a general acknowledgement that continual change in this direction would most likely be slow and arduous. In addition, it was suggested that such change might be due more to financial necessity than because people's perceptions were actually shifting:

'I think it will change [only with] difficulty and very slowly, of course we have made steps but I think we have a long way to go still because it's about the whole mentality, it's a whole approach about the role of women and men in society as a whole, this reflects also in the business life, to business world.'

'Things will change every day but there is a long way still. It's a long way.'

'I think that ... in Greece the role of women is changing not because the society becomes more tolerant or understands that women have the same rights as men but because things are become more difficult especially financially. So I think this breadwinner model for man it is still there but cannot be in practice. I think the society now the family needs women because they need women to bring money to

the family so I think that if they become more tolerant it's because of this, not because things are really changing.'

Greek interviewees

According to one of the interviewees, measures to tackle this issue were already being introduced in some companies:

'You have specific measures in order to tackle the problems of equality between men and women in the labour market and part of this measures the conciliation of family and work. So, for example, they have more kindergartens or public school or elementary school but they have a better timetable. For example, if you work in the private sector you work mainly between 9 and 5, ok most people work more until 6 and 7pm. [Now], imagine that in Greece up till very recently the elementary school was open only until 1pm or 2pm, so women had a big problem where to leave their children after that. Now in different areas you have schools that stay open until 4 or 5 o'clock – the children have other activities but [they are] in the school.'

Greek interviewee

3.2.4 The United Kingdom

The UK, as an EU Member State, has transposed all relevant EU equality directives into national legislation. Equal pay legislation in the UK dates from 1975 and maternity legislation gives the right to paid maternity leave. This right is often topped up in practice by employers, meaning that women can take a break of up to a year, with a significant element of pay. As a result many women take between six months and one year before returning to work after having had a baby. Return to work rates after having had a child are generally high in the UK, although many women subsequently return on a part-time basis.

The labour market in the UK is possibly more flexible than in many other EU Member States in that it allows individuals to undergo a general level of training and education, such as a general arts degree at university, before moving into a company and on into a management role. This can work in the favour of women, who may often, as identified in the literature, take non-linear career paths.

3.2.5 The USA

The employment relations model in the USA differs from that of EU Member States in that it is covered by a different legal framework governing employment rights. For example, there is no US-wide right to paid maternity leave in the USA (although this right exists in some states, and some companies offer it as a benefit), which means that women tend to come back to work very quickly after having had a child (anecdotally after a week in some cases), or not at all. It is not common for women to take six or 12 months off work after having a baby and then to return to work, as would be common in the UK, for example.

Nevertheless, the USA has a highly developed legislative framework aimed at preventing discrimination on grounds such as race and gender, and workers tend to use this framework to exercise individual employment rights in the area of non-discrimination. This is a key area of compliance for organisations in the USA. This was the view of one US interviewee of her career so far as a senior manager:

'I have been working for 25 years and I am a different generation than the people who get out of school today for example. I would say, and I don't know if that will surprise you, I have never been negatively discriminated or felt it but again keep in mind that I have been with the same firm, this firm is highly respectful of race, gender etc.'

US interviewee

This interviewee felt, as a result of travelling for her work and mixing with executives from Europe, that women in the USA were generally in a better position in terms of not having to fight so hard to be a senior woman in the workplace.

'My women colleagues [in Europe], they need to fight more, they don't feel as included. I would share with some of them about that, it is a feeling that I cannot say I have ever experienced in North America.'

US interviewee

It should also be noted that the USA also operates a different model of organisational boards from many EU countries. In the USA, boards have a large proportion of external, non-executive, part-time directors, in contrast to other countries in which boards are predominantly made up of full-time executives.

Finally, working hours culture was cited by some women in our research as being more 'unfriendly' to women in the USA than in other countries. One interviewee, who had worked abroad, felt that the 24/7 culture that appeared to predominate in many US organisations was very unhelpful to women.

'I would say there is this very strong culture that the more hours you put in, the more valuable you should be to the company rather than the quality of the work, and they work crazy hours. The dedication to being available 24/7, to working on the weekends with a smile, to be on the Blackberry answering it on vacation, this whole culture of your work has to be omnipresent in your life 365 days a year, which is absolutely not present in Europe, which is much more sane towards work-life balance. Even the very senior leadership people, I mean, my boss is in London and he is overseeing all of Europe and when he is on vacation he is on vacation, he just makes sure that so and so is in charge, and if there is a crisis, that ultimately we can reach him but he doesn't check [his] Blackberry and send emails as if he is still sitting in the office. My other boss is here in the US and he is an American. I have a data reporting line to him and he holds conference calls while he is on vacation and he says, "The nice thing about it is I am looking at the ocean as I am talking to you".'

US interviewee

3.3 Summary

This research was carried out on an international basis, examining views and perceptions of senior female managers in five countries with differing legislative, employment relations and cultural traditions. The EU member states have a common legislative framework by dint of their transposition of relevant EU Directives. The USA has a different legislative framework, which does not provide any federal rights to paid maternity leave, but does have a strong equality framework in place. There are a range of cultural factors that underpin developments and perceptions in the different countries studied, including female labour market participation rates, rates of return after having had a baby and perceptions of the role of women, all of which play a role in shaping the experiences of female managers in these countries. In the next chapter, we look in more detail at the experiences of the women interviewed for this research and try to identify the factors affecting their career progression.

4 Factors Affecting Women's Progression into Senior Posts

In this chapter we describe the main factors affecting the career progression of women in the five focal countries. Although the socio-cultural background differs across countries, and some issues are more prominent in some countries than in others, there is nonetheless a large – and perhaps surprising – degree of consensus amongst and between interviewees. We report the research findings on the factors that are viewed as impinging on women's progression under a series of broad headings. It should be noted though that the boundaries between these various topics are to be viewed as fluid rather than rigid, and there are many overlaps between the issues identified.

It should also be recognised that there are some structural factors and legislative decisions that are supra-ordinate to organisational functioning and coaching – such as decisions on whether to introduce quotas for women on boards – and these are less amenable to resolution through coaching. Although such issues fall outside our specified focus – on factors with which coaches can engage to improve the position of women – they nonetheless are important components of the employment landscape as a whole, and it would be remiss to exclude them from the discussion. Therefore, this chapter also includes our research findings relating to issues such as gender segregation in employment, education and training, and on the debate around quotas.

4.1 Management style

A recurring theme in the management literature is the differences – real or claimed – in the management styles of women and men. This issue preoccupied commentators and individual women in all the countries in this study. In keeping with the previous research, the current interviews indicated that the perception remains that there are differences in both the actual style of men and women and in expectations of the way that men and women were supposed to behave, with

this leading on occasion to double standards for male and female managers. In the US, one interviewee believed that more leniency was shown to men – women were expected to be tougher, whereas men were commended if they showed an amount of emotion.

'There are some differences where women tend to be more intuitive and sometimes that's just not accepted at all. If a woman brings emotion, not sobbing uncontrollably, emotional or family stuff in it it's not nearly as acceptable as a man's. I worked for a boss who occasionally brought his kids into work when his wife was someplace else and he didn't have childcare. He was a fairly senior guy and everyone thought that was great. A senior woman who did that would be considered unorganised and breaking the rules. I think there is a double standard.'

US interviewee

One US interviewee talked about the 'double standard' that women come up against in senior positions (in line with the 'double bind' identified in the US literature). In order to operate in senior roles, women need to adopt masculine leadership styles, but that can play to the woman's disadvantage, as men expect women to behave in a certain, stereotypical way.

'When you are in that role as a woman you have a stereotypically masculine leadership style – directive, assertive, so on and so forth – because you have to be able to achieve that level of success, physically run an organisation. That then counts against you, because men are looking for stereotypically feminine women and when you're operating in a mode that they don't feel comfortable with then that's another point against you. Women have all these variables working against them and that makes it very difficult for them to succeed at senior levels in organisations.'

US interviewee

Another US interviewee thought that there were differences between the management styles of men and women, and that women had many good qualities, but could also doubt themselves more.

'I find I need support or comforting and I have seen other women do that as well, we are not as assertive and to some extent it is a quality that we see two sides of the coin, the other perspective and we balance opinions more. But at the same time I think the flipside of this is we tend to doubt ourselves more and to take a decision but then agonise over what the effect [is] on people, was that the right decision, did I think it through long enough?'

(US interviewee)

In Germany there is also a debate about male and female management style, with most commentators believing that there is a difference between the two. However, individual women interviewees in Germany tended to deny that there was any difference that was down to gender.

'I always reject any suggestion that my management style is a particularly female style. It's just made up of things that I have learnt along the way on how to manage.'

German interviewee

For another interviewee in Germany, style was something that she thought differed between men and women, and more concretely, between her and her male colleagues.

'In traditional male-structured organisations, power struggles are part and parcel of daily life. My approach is that I want to solve problems and I want to achieve goals. Power struggles often hinder this process significantly. Of course, there are situations where I need to exercise power, and I do. However, in general, I believe that it is much more productive to work collaboratively to solve problems and to achieve goals. For me, that's the most significant difference – men think in terms of structures, whereas women are more concerned with processes.'

German interviewee

Similarly, one of the UK interviewees felt that her style was probably more consensual than that of many of the men she knew in similar positions

'I think that probably my management style is to make sure that I have people on board and that is not to say that I just accept any old thing that they do, but I think that my management style is not confrontational and I do expect people to be collaborative and to work together. One of the things that we have recently done in completing a review of our headquarters is to promote our take on matrix management – it is clearly not matrix management in the kind of way that you can read about on the Internet and all the complicated stuff but it is actually about saying we don't want a very hierarchical way of operating, we don't want everything to have to go up through the chain to our most senior person and then across and down again, we actually do want everybody at different levels to be able to work together.'

UK interviewee

However, another interviewee in Germany thought that there was very little difference in the actual behaviour of women and men, but the problem lay in the fact that they are perceived and therefore judged differently.

'What is male, and what is female? There probably are differences in behaviour, but I don't believe that these play a significant role. The most significant thing is the way that they are perceived – women are perceived as women and men are perceived as men – that therefore judgements are made that are hard to pin down. Can that ever be changed? I don't know.'

German interviewee

A similar debate is taking place in the UK, with a range of views on whether the style of men and women differed and whether this was a positive thing. One interviewee believed that management style did differ between men and women, as, however, did expectations of how men and women should behave.

'It is unfortunate when women are described as being "the witch from hell" when they are just trying to be assertive. It can be difficult to tread that middle line and it can be depressing when women are attacked for being assertive as you sometimes need to get your point across.'

UK interviewee

This interviewee's advice for women was:

'Never try to be a man. You are a woman and you do things in the way a woman does.'

One interviewee in the UK felt that there were double standards in play concerning expectations of male and female behaviour. For example, male discursive behaviour is tolerated to a far greater extent than talkative behaviour in women.

'I think actually if you start to say quite a lot, there I have noticed a few raised eyebrows from men which is sort of a "Oh she's going on a bit". If a man is going on and there's a lot of discursive stuff, well it might be boring, but you don't sort of just write them off. But if a woman starts to go on, and it might be something to do with tone of voice apart from anything else, there is a bit of, "She's one of those women who just talks a lot". I actually have had quite senior people say, "Is she one of those women who talks a lot?" That is a classic phrase. Now I don't hear that so much about, "Oh he's a man who talks a lot".'

UK interviewee

This double standard was echoed by a US interviewee:

'When I put my foot down I am aggressive and I am sure my predecessor, when he was putting his foot down, it was just "He is decisive".'

US interviewee

In Sweden, despite its more liberal culture there remains an expectation that, for women to get on, they need to emulate masculine behaviours and attitudes:

'There is no shortage of women who are qualified and interested but the culture prevents them progressing. And it is amongst the people who were born in the 50s and 60s [that you see this most] and it's a tendency, if you're up there and you're a woman and you've reached the top and you want to stay there, you have to have their ... you have to have the attitudes of a man for them to keep supporting you. To be able to cope with being there you have to be like a man.'

Swedish interviewee

The Greek interviewees believed that women had high abilities and brought a unique and valuable contribution to senior positions. They felt that women were more broad-minded, pragmatic and empathic than their male counterparts.

'Women are more structured, more organised, they have methods, they can plan, they can sort things in more quick and practical way. I don't know if you share the same opinion, but I think sometimes we're more efficient.'

'What I believe is that the woman has very high I.Q. emotional intelligence than the man ... they are very good in organising things ... [better] than the man who just has ideas and the man has to come and support the ideas.'

'[Women] have a more human and more emotional and more balanced way to judge and take decisions than the men.'

Greek interviewees

They also pointed more generally to the benefits of achieving a balanced workforce and to the wider impact of this at a societal level.

'I think men and women, we are different and I think ... you need both elements and I think women can be more efficient in doing some things and men more [in others], but I think that most of the benefit is that you acquire more balance. It's about a more equal society at the end of the day and I think that this can only bring positive things not negative things.'

'I don't necessarily think women could bring something more to a board-level job. But I think women can bring something different to a board-level job, based on their experiences, what they've done, what they've seen, where they've been. Again, I don't think it's about women. I think it's about any person from a diverse background, that when you bring in 12 people, 12 different people, but I mean different. Male, female. Black, white. Different sexual orientations. Different cultures. Different religions. Different educational backgrounds. I think all of those people bring something different to the table and as long as they approach it in a constructive, I want to bring a different perspective, but I'm not going to impose my views on you, kind of attitude, that's where the value comes in.'

Greek interviewees

One of our Greek interviewees was of the view that, ultimately, Greek cultural attitudes had indirectly worked in women's favour by strengthening and sharpening their skills for high level roles.

'I believe definitely that the woman can be great managers because from their first day in their life they have to fight in order to survive in a world that belongs to the men – from the house, to the school, everywhere.'

However, they also felt that, in order to progress to or take on more senior professional roles, women are obliged – or at least subconsciously start – to adopt what might be thought of as ‘male’ characteristics. There was a clear sense of the top positions in the organisation being inherently ‘gendered’, with women having to shape themselves into these roles.

‘I still think in countries like Greece, in order to be in board-level positions, [these are] male positions so you have to acquire or develop male skills.’

‘I think women behave differently in senior positions and I think this is a defence mechanism because otherwise you cannot survive. I think that’s what I wanted to say from the beginning, that ... when you see women in board-level positions they actually are like being in men’s positions so actually they behave like men.’

Greek interviewees

One interviewee believed that this could represent a deterrent for women who might otherwise aspire to senior level jobs.

‘I know that for many women this is a motive not to accept positions like this because they know they should not need to change their behaviour in order to be able to keep the position or to be respected in that position.’

However, another suggested that senior level women might accept the situation as ‘par for the course’. Tied into this was the notion that some women who are promoted into senior roles might feel that they are indebted to the organisation for having allowed them this opportunity, and therefore be willing to do whatever seemed necessary in order to keep themselves in the organisation’s favour.

I think that [women] do it consciously because if I say that they do it without even realising it’s like underestimating them and I think they’re very smart women. I think they know what is happening and they accept it. You’re given more money so you have to do more things for the company – it’s like paying back a favour. I can tell you that some women underestimate themselves and actually when they are in a board level position they think that [the company] are doing a favour to them so then they are willing to do everything in order to keep this position.

Greek interviewee

In summary then, the majority of women felt that there were some differences in style, but that this could lead to women being better, rather than worse, managers. However, men were allowed more behavioural latitude than were women, while women can sometimes find themselves in a double-blind situation: there can be pressure to adopt a more masculine management style at board level, but those women who do so can find this is judged as inappropriate for a woman and counts against them.

4.2 Organisational culture

The review revealed the importance of organisational culture in shaping attitudes towards women. The women who were interviewed for this study mostly felt that the organisation and the environment in which they worked was supportive to women and had helped them personally. Some felt that their organisation reflected their values, and that this was important. One interviewee in the UK said that she had been careful to choose an organisation with values that fit with her own. Overall, she felt that while there may have been opportunities in many other organisations that could have been more financially attractive, she did not wish to pursue such opportunities because those organisations did not fit with her own value set because, for example, she saw them as being a more 'ruthless' organisation than her current employer. This sentiment was echoed by another interviewee in the UK.

'When I see other organisations where [a macho culture] is prevalent and you can tell, (ie in the City) I know I would never apply for a jobs in places like that. I've self-selected to go to places that aren't like that, I don't like that whole thing instinctively – it's not even conscious. That sort of slightly boorish behaviour, it's just not me and therefore it wouldn't be something I would go for.'

UK interviewee

The view from one US interviewee was that, although the organisation in which she was working, in the energy sector, could have a macho side, she herself had experienced little macho behaviour, particularly at more senior levels. In essence, macho cultures were perceived to be less of a problem the higher up a hierarchy a woman climbs.

'I think the more senior you are, the less you have to struggle with that. They may not like that you're a women but they will accept it. At the end of the day you're senior to them. At the levels I'm in there's very little – they [the men] have screened all that behaviour out of themselves by then.'

US interviewee

Another US interviewee thought that the ruthlessness that she had experienced was the product of intensive competition among peers for the same job. However, this is nevertheless something that would have been tolerated or not openly challenged by organisational cultures.

'The competition that I have found is with men of my own age who are competing with me for maybe the same job or the same projects, and they can be pretty ruthless and they don't treat you any differently because you are a female, if they want something from you or that you have got they will definitely try and take it from you. I have learnt to anticipate that and stay one step ahead of it. I have had a male

come in at two in the morning before the launch of a national project and wipe out all the computer hard drives in the section (we had put software on to track log-ins so we knew it was him). I had a man my age go behind my back and renegotiate with my study group two weeks before the project was due so they voted me off and voted him in. So the competition and the nastiness I have ever found has been from men my own age because we are directly competing for the same thing.'

US interviewee

However, in contrast to this, one US interviewee said that she had worked in middle management for some time without encountering any difficulties. It was only when she moved into a more senior role that she began to encounter differences and difficulties. She also noticed that there were fewer women at those levels and the ones that were there did not stay long.

'As I myself moved from the mid level to the higher levels, I truly noticed the difference. I noticed that women at senior levels would come and not stay as long. Also myself I noticed the difference ... my own personal style is a more direct, assertive style and as I started to move up the pipe and work a lot with male counterparts I noticed that that is not necessarily well received, not by all but by some, and I would actually have my bosses getting feedback from an executive saying, "She came in and told me what to do." Well no, I didn't tell him what to do but, you know, I also didn't just mess around either.'

US interviewee

Also in the US, one interviewee talked about the fact that women often, possibly naively, expect that if they work hard and do what is expected, it will be adequately rewarded, whereas men may more often play a political game in an organisation.

'... [I] have always been a good student, a good citizen abiding by the rules, thinking that everybody will be motivated by doing the right thing and assuming all others are motivated by doing the right thing, so I am undermined by people who have more of a "What's in it for me?" attitude or don't see the greater good and I think one of my road blocks is to assume that and then to see that they just don't behave that way. They see the world a little bit differently, and if they could get a shortcut to get a good grade they would take it and I would never have taken it. I like it the hard way.'

US interviewee

Another US interviewee observed that organisations are basically formed by and for men, because women were not in the labour market (and in particular, not in senior positions) when they were formed, and so the structures in place are geared towards traditional male lifestyles.

'These companies were created by men for men, with policies and practices and structures that support men who had a wife at home to do everything else, and so all of those factors play against women. Executive roles are gendered masculine roles, so that plays against women as well, so you get to that senior level and you are usually in a company that has been formed and has all of its policies and practices in place to support men and you are in a role that is not acceptable for a woman to be in.'

US interviewee

One UK interviewee recounted her experiences of working in a section of an organisation that was very male-dominated. She had applied for a particular promotion and soon realised that she was the only female candidate. She questioned this and was told that it was simply the case that women were not applying, even though there were no obvious barriers preventing them from doing so. She described not feeling satisfied with the organisation's reasons given.

'I think there were 15 candidates for this post and I was the only female that went for this job. At that point I thought, "What's going on here?", that felt it was a bit odd that I was the only woman and I also found [when going for] some other jobs, I was the only female going for promotion. And so I raised this with the one female who was on the board at the [organisation] and her view was that it was self selection, that it wasn't ability of anything like that but [the women] actually didn't want the hassle of doing all those extra hours, all those extra things and taking those things on, and it wasn't seen that it was putting women off but somehow they weren't applying.'

UK interviewee

Policies and practices and structures in many organisations have been developed on the assumption that senior officers will have a wife at home to support their lifestyle and this can play against women. Executive roles are gendered masculine roles, which can lead some companies to develop 'boorish' cultures and some interviewees had taken a conscious decision to avoid organisations or sectors in which this was more likely to be the case. In different organisations macho posturing could increase or decrease in the higher echelons; dependent upon this change, women could find that their position was made easier or more difficult as they rose through the ranks. Some women had found that assertive behaviour from women was viewed increasingly unfavourably at higher organisational levels, which places them in something of a 'double bind': if they are unassertive they do not gain development or progression, but if they are assertive then they are perceived negatively (and less likely to progress).

4.3 Recruitment practices

There is a view that organisations are set up by men and for men, and this issue permeates many issues in organisational life, such as the general culture, working time, ways of behaving and ways of ensuring advancement. This can cause problems for women, who may face particular dilemmas if they want to advance – do they conform to the cultural norms of organisations or do they try to find their own way through the minefield? Further, working time issues can cause significant problems for women with domestic responsibilities and no stay-at-home partner.

Furthermore, one of the factors that makes organisations resistant to change is the tendency for senior managers to recruit ‘in their own image’, that is, to try to recruit individuals who are as similar as possible to the present job incumbents. This, of course, can make it difficult for women to be seen as appropriate potential employees. This was the view of one German interviewee.

‘The ideal manager, or the prototype, if you will, is male. And when this is applied to recruitment, selection and appraisal, you can imagine what the results will be.’

German interviewee

In some cases it is apparent that selection criteria are aimed more at men than at women, describing the types of experience and qualification that are more likely to be held by men. The issue of whether women have the right qualifications for a job was discussed by some commentators, with one noting that this issue can make it more likely that men will be chosen than women for senior roles.

‘Women sometimes don’t fit into the mainstream and so of course they don’t gain entry into organisations. So, might it not be possible to change the criteria on which people are admitted? I’m not saying that my cleaning woman should be appointed to the board – qualifications are obviously very important – but there is something to be said for looking at selection criteria and possibly making small adjustments to allow for the fact that women might not have had as much formal experience as men. Maybe putting more weight on other types of experience.’

German interviewee

There was also a view that because women do not seem to fit the default model (of a white, middle-aged male) in an organisation, they need to work harder than their male colleagues and be at least as competent if they want to get on in the organisation. Even then, some women may find themselves out of the mainstream in the organisation.

‘I’ve seen a lot of this and I have the feeling that very highly qualified women work incredibly hard, are highly skilled and try to do everything right. They have to prove themselves to a greater extent than their male counterparts and it is still as if

they are on a parallel track in the organisation. The men have their networks and don't seem to have to try as hard, whereas that's not the case with women.'

German interviewee

Swedish interviewees felt that the situation was the same in Sweden.

'Research shows that women on boards have much higher education levels and much higher qualifications than the men; it implies that they find it harder to get those positions, as in working life elsewhere.'

'Women are judged more negatively than men: they have to be perfect for the job to be picked, in contrast to men, who can get in if they are not 100 per cent.'

Swedish interviewees

4.4 Experiences of discrimination

Many women, even those in senior positions in organisations, could point to instances where they felt that they had been treated differently than their male colleagues, and attributed this to plain discrimination against women in the workplace. One interviewee in Germany spoke of being refused certain management responsibilities, and was told that the reason for this was because these responsibilities were too much to be combined with her existing duties; however, she was certain that these responsibilities would have been given to a man, as she knew quite a few men in the same position as herself.

'I have nothing against being told that it wouldn't have worked in terms of the content of the job, but I was told that it would be "too much work" – I really think that it's up to me to determine whether it's too much work or not.'

German interviewee

Women in the UK spoke of a range of strategies they had deployed to deal with low-level discrimination or assumptions. One interviewee spoke of colleagues assuming that she was the secretary, when in fact she was a graduate trainee. As a result, on one occasion she had been left sitting in a corner for 45 minutes until the people in the meeting realised their mistake. She maintained, however, that she had not experienced what she would term serious discrimination.

'I've got to be honest, I haven't experienced any serious discrimination of any sort. I have felt conscious of it and I've always felt that if you treat those sorts of things with a bit of humour and a bit of a sleight of hand somehow and hit it head on, you know your stuff and you can contribute, you're polite to people [it will be ok].'

UK interviewee

This interviewee also felt that such issues tend to resolve with age and experience. She had become more able to relax with experience and feel comfortable in her

role, without having to continuously make a point of avoiding doing anything likely to be viewed as counter-stereotypical.

'You're a bit more at ease with yourself when you're a bit older so you can talk about nuclear physics and take the top off the biscuits at the same time, you can multi-task.'

UK interviewee

However, in contrast to this, in Greece the attitudes of male colleagues could often be barriers to progress.

'[Men] don't trust women because for example they are afraid that they will leave the job – they will stop working so much – they will have family etc. Also the woman has to manage male employees who – they are not against women but they don't feel that they're equal. So the experience that a woman has after many years of work is mixed – is clear professional experience but also has a very social experience because you have to learn how to overcome all these obstructions, how to handle different attributes – you know, behaviours – you have to improve skills to recognise the real support from someone who – he doesn't like you but he has to – a lot of things like that.'

Sometimes this was at the level of overt sexist behaviour which was intimidating and uncomfortable.

'All this stereotype of men which is, you know, macho – he can have any woman he want, etc ... One of my ex-managers, he was a very, this type of man – he thought many times that he could have [an] affair with me or something like that but never, you know, this didn't have any impact on my career. But it was very uncomfortable – I had to handle this.'

'You get that in a lot of places. Sometimes you get a challenge like that. Sometimes people might try to intimidate is too strong a word, but try to get the upper hand in some way. But as long as you hold your ground and set them straight and be firm, but maintain your composure, that last part is where I lose it once in a while, but OK. But if you're firm and you can hold your ground you're OK.'

Greek interviewees

Discrimination can also take the form of pay discrimination, which can be something that can go unnoticed for many years in environments in which employees do not talk openly about their pay. The pay gap can grow larger as people move into senior positions. One US interviewee spoke about one of her earlier jobs, in which she was, as a woman, in the minority. After a while she found out that she was being paid significantly less than male colleagues.

'I came to find out that I was paid a fraction, not a fraction but significantly less, you know. All of a sudden we are getting a new guy coming in as president of the institutional division and the guy just loves me and we get along great and then I get a promotion and it is a 30 per cent increase. Why did I get a 30 per cent increase? It was because there was a huge disparity. I am like, ok, obviously this is a bigger disparity than I was aware of, [because] people didn't talk about what they got paid.'

US interviewee

There was a view, mainly from the US, that although progress had been made in terms of women's career advancement and many people think that the battle has been won, there remains a lot to do. Most interviewees were able to quote statistics relating to the number of women at different levels of their respective companies. One Greek interviewee commented.

'Even in women-dominated areas, for example in social services, both in public and private sector the majority are women, but still you can see the chief executive or managers they are men and I think it's important to make sacrifices in order to be able to break this glass ceiling.'

In the US one interviewee thought that the terms of reference had changed and that what women were facing was, instead of a glass ceiling, a more complicated 'glass labyrinth'.

'There are a lot of issues still because it is no longer 'in your face', it is not discrimination or sexual harassment or whatever that is right in your face, it is more hidden and under the table, and so women are feeling comfortable, but they shouldn't be feeling that things are okay at this point.'

US interviewee

Again, surprisingly in light of their progressive national policies, Swedish interviewees spoke of how there remains a hard core of men with discriminatory attitudes high up in industry.

'If you listen to the CEO of the [name of leading bank], if you listen to him it is amazing to still hear someone with that point of view in these days, [that] 'Who's going to take care of the children?' attitude. And he is not alone – if you look at the group of men who've written the Corporate government code there's no point in starting a discussion with them. It's incredible that so many of them can have that point of view and they are very influential in industry still.'

'There are quite a few critical voices that say there is gender discrimination and it is just nonsense to say there is a lack of competent women, it is the men who sit on these boards who can't see the women. It is the old boy's network. There will always be some voices in between, who can't see the women and say that women have to make the effort.'

Swedish interviewees

In contrast, none of the interviewees in Greece reported any knowledge or experience of organisations exercising overt sexual discrimination with regard to selection or career development, at least not in the case of their own companies.

'We might not score high in having equal men to women in management positions but nobody will not choose you because you are a woman. No, never.'

'The one thing I have to say [is] I am pleasantly, positively surprised, this might be my ignorance though, that being a woman, I'm not aware, I'm not sensitive to any limitations that professional women feel here, that are kind of structural limitations ... I don't feel like being a woman has any kind of boundaries attached to it. Here ... progression to board level is based on what you do. It is very much a meritocracy.'

Greek interviewees

One German interviewee described an example of a woman who had been on the board of German Rail, and who had dealt with a strike during 2008. Once the strike was over, she had been dismissed by the company.

'I keep thinking to myself, that's typical. She did all the dirty work [in terms of negotiating with the union and handling the media], and it didn't make her look good. As soon as it was over, they dismissed her. Her job has gone to a man.'

German interviewee

Another German interviewee noted that simple prejudice against women remains the main barrier to women's career advancement in Germany.

'Discrimination, and not children, is the main reason cited by women since 1986: 20 per cent of women say that they have encountered prejudice against them and that this has hindered their careers. This figure has not changed since 1986.'

German interviewee

Overall then, although women in all of the countries except Greece reported having experienced discrimination, it was not this so much as the assumptions made by senior colleagues that damaged women's career progression opportunities. Where there is discrimination, nowadays it is more likely to be covert rather than overt. In particular, the discriminatory attitudes of males who currently hold board posts can often mean they overlook highly qualified and competent women when posts become vacant.

4.5 Gaining the right experience

Trying to gain general management experience in order to progress through an organisation is something that is identified in the literature as fundamental to progression and something that men appear to be better at than women. This was confirmed by one UK interviewee, who spoke of many women that she knew who had become subject specialists rather than gaining general management experience. She thought that this reluctance might be connected with a lack of willingness on the part of women to engage with the 'cut and thrust' of general management, even though there was no evidence that they could not perform to a high standard.

'I know a lot of women tend to gravitate towards functional roles. [What] we are trying to encourage at [my organisation] is for as many women who would like to or who are capable of doing general management to go into it. I think sometimes women are a little reluctant to go into the cut and thrust of a general management type role ... if you have more general management experience, both men and women, then you are likely to get to the top of your field. If you are too functionally driven, you're unlikely to become chief executive of a company. You might if you're a finance director, but if you're a company secretary not a chance unless you've gone out and run another business.'

UK interviewee

Many of the women interviewed, in all countries in this study, said that they had not waited around to be offered opportunities – they had taken them or created them themselves.

'I have never expected to be offered anything – I have always gone after what I wanted, and that is what I say to younger women: 'Don't stand around like a wallflower, waiting for a fairy prince to arrive and offer you a job – be active and go out and get it yourself, be open to development'. I've never really planned things carefully – I've just always wanted to do everything as well as I possibly could, and then development opportunities came along and I took them. Then I looked around to find out where I could get support from.'

German interviewee

Likewise, other interviewees stated that they had always gone out and found development opportunities.

'I was only ever offered development opportunities twice in my whole career.'

'Every single thing I've sought out myself. Nobody's ever offered anything. I will research something and then put in for it. I will do that without asking first. That has been the approach I've always taken. I'm going to get what I need and then we're going to talk about it. I'm not going to wait for somebody to die or retire or

bestow on me ... I think that's why people get frustrated. They're waiting for someone to give them something. The fact is you're not going to be. You need to go and create your own wins, find your own opportunities and then present those. Your boss is too busy, jealous, controlling to go out there and be your fairy godmother.'

'I have got a lot of development over the years through organisations, both formal and informal but it is never because anyone has handed it to me. I mean I have always searched it out and I have always found it, I have always made it happen, but when I do that no one is telling me "No" but there is also no one just taking you by the hand and saying "Here is what you need.'

(US interviewees)

4.6 International experience

International experience was deemed to be vital to women who wanted to progress in organisations, in all the countries in which women were interviewed for this study.

'[International experience] has helped me enormously, in many different ways. For example, I was subsequently able to join in discussions about organisational development in Germany and could talk about my experiences in the USA and tell people what was really the case, in terms of what went on there, and what was just not true.'

German interviewee

One US interviewee had a definite career path in mind and international experience was a strong element of this. She had deliberately set out to gain as much international experience as possible in order to further her career.

'I spent the last two and a half years in the UK. I'm in Canada now. One of the reasons I joined this company was because I did think one of the things that was missing from my experience was international experience. I thought joining [this organisation] would be a way to get that. I expressed that interest early in my career and it was always on the career path. It happened sooner than we had planned but it was part of the plan.'

Is that crucial if you want to progress through organisations or your career generally?

'I do think so. It gives you a different perspective and there's no way any large company is not going to be international. My assignment in the UK I had 2,500 people that reported to me who were residing in India. That was an extremely valuable part of the experience, I travelled to India fairly frequently and got a new perspective on that.'

US interviewee

However, it can often be difficult for women to gain overseas experience in contrast to men. While the great majority of working women have working husbands or partners, a far greater proportion of men have non-working spouses. Where both partners in a marriage are mobile and have high-flying careers the sacrifices can be significant.

'There was a time about eight years ago, where I didn't move because of the family situation and for a year and a half I ended up commuting. I lived in [one town] and worked in [another], 679 miles away. The biggest issue for both men and women is the mobility question. In any large multinational company it's very unrealistic to think you can get all the experiences you need in one location. Typically for women more than men mobility is a huge issue – where they should move to get a certain experience – and there's some framework of time where they're not able to do that, and sometimes that can limit their career. It's a big issue for women and companies as they seek to get people those experiences under the constraints of dual incomes and family life.'

'The year 2000 was the last year where we actually both physically both got up and went to work in the same city. It's very difficult. Most people aren't willing to do that on a protracted basis. That flexibility and willingness to move around – I moved to marry him and he's moved the last three times to accommodate my job.'

US interviewee

In the UK, the interviewees agreed that international experience was a key element of management training. However, they acknowledged that it was difficult, for many reasons, but largely to do with family obligations. Increasingly, this was becoming as much the case for men as it was for women, as the number of dual career couples is increasing and men are now finding it increasingly difficult to move abroad due to family commitments.

'We've had a couple of our senior women in America who have been across here, working in the UK for a couple of years, and have gone back again. There are challenges, the husbands have to try and find a job. I've had the same with men I've seconded to North America. Not everybody goes with their wife and family. I've had some very successful secondments where guys have said, "No, I'm not putting my wife and four kids [through that], they're going to stay here and be happy. I'm going to go on single status and I'm going to organise my life to cope without impinging on my family". It takes special kinds of people to do that and it does work for some people. For other people it is out of the question, they would be totally miserable, you'd be wasting your time. I have one lady in North America who is commuting either to Toronto to Pittsburgh every week from her home in [another town] because her husband [works] there, he's not going to move so she's prepared to do the travelling. That's okay, it works for her and she's very happy with the arrangement.'

'A lot [of men] now have wives who have very good jobs and do not want to give them up to go and work in the sticks. Some [of our jobs are] more remote locations around the world where it's not easy for a partner to find another job. We're finding it increasingly difficult to get people to just up [root] and go. We do have some people who have no problem in going to the next assignment, it's how they are. We've as many women as men who are in that category. I have a lot of women who work for me who are the main breadwinner and have a househusband looking after kids and the other stuff they do. The world is a very different place to what it was.'

UK interviewee

As the previous interviewees confirmed, international experience is seen as vital to career development. It is therefore important for women who want to progress to senior levels to obtain international experience. However, it is often the male employees who obtain this experience, partly due to home circumstances, but partly because they are considered first when any important development opportunities arise. This is especially likely to be the case if an organisation does not have an objective succession process in place.

'It comes down to who gets the assignments and if a company doesn't have a really objective succession process [in place], then once again who gets the assignments are the men, it is just the way it works. Where I have seen it be successful is where you have really got a true succession process where you evaluate your high potentials and you fairly rotate through those assignments, then that works. Otherwise, you are going to end up with the same situation and the woman is not going to get the development – and I include assignments or job rotations in that development bucket, and the woman is not going to get that.'

US interviewee

4.7 Stepping up to a role

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the difficulties identified above for women in gaining development experience, some women reported that they had experienced difficulties when they were suddenly required to 'step up' to a role. There can be particular challenges where the woman has not been on a 'management track' and so has not been groomed for the role in the same way as many men might have been. Nonetheless, the interviewees who had been placed in such situations had coped well, although at the time they had found the situation stressful.

There can be particular difficulties where this also means that they are suddenly more senior than the colleagues with whom they had recently been working on an equal basis. Many of the interviewees in this study felt that this was the case.

'When I stepped up to my present senior role, it was difficult at first – I felt very lonely as I suddenly had a role that separated me from colleagues that I had previously worked with directly. I felt a bit like a horse refusing at a jump. I didn't want to be elevated and to put my whole heart into this role, and so I really had difficulties in differentiating this role from me as a person ... it took a long time for me to get used to it.'

German interviewee

This was also the experience of one UK interviewee, who had suddenly had to step into the role of head of her organisation following unforeseen circumstances. She had not expected to have to take on this role, but in the event, she was the only person to do it.

'Well, the timing was such, it was so sudden that really there was no choice and I just had to step up and that was it. There was no time to stop and think, I had to be there being the face of the [organisation] and I think there is an interesting thing about how people get on with roles and to some extent if people treat you as the [head], you can be the [head] and obviously I have had a lot of that because lots of [people] I have talked to have been really great about saying, "You are doing a really good job" and so on. The thing is, somebody had to be it and I was the person who had to be it, so a lot of it is conferred upon you by other people saying, "That is the role, do it." There have been some fantastic things about it and most of it has been brilliant. I have had some days where I am like, "I am responsible for all of this" kind of thing. I kind of imagine that probably all [heads of organisations] have some days like that, whether they are women or men.'

UK interviewee

Other women in the study recounted a range of reasons for having to step up to a role suddenly, including not having followed a linear path and not having been groomed for a role, and so being thrust suddenly into the limelight. One interviewee from the UK said that this had happened to her, but as a result of a perception in the organisation that she was a 'safe pair of hands'. This individual suddenly found herself in a role that she was not entirely expecting, which was stressful for her, although in fact she was entirely capable.

'I've found myself in situations where you've just had to hoof it really because someone's not there, but in this particular job I do find I'm relied on quite a lot in terms of running the whole organisation. That is something I hadn't expected when I applied here – I'm pretty much deputy here and that wasn't quite the job description, and it's weighed very heavily on me to be honest. And it's taken up a lot more time, and it does keep me awake at night because I'm actually thinking of the whole organisation, the strategy for the whole place, whereas I thought I was applying for a director's job that was in a nice little neat area ... It's quite scary actually and the responsibility of it is huge, and I take it very seriously as well. And again without generalising too much, some chaps don't seem to think that hard about it, they just sort of do it, well I certainly am thinking about the ramifications of pretty much everything and trying to absorb it all, which means. I say about sleepless nights – it's not because I'm actually worried about it or unhappy, it's because I'm still thinking, working it through – it's just total absorption for me. I don't know whether it's just me not coping very well, but either I'm doing this job or I'm not – I can't half do it.'

UK interviewee

There may also be an element of putting women into roles in which it is expected that they will fail, in line with the 'glass cliff' scenario identified above in the literature review (Ryan and Haslam, 2005).

'There is also a lot of discussion here in the States too about women at [senior] level often being put in, whether it is intentionally or not, put in roles without the right development and not maybe so much concern of whether they can be successful or not and what it takes to be successful, so it is kind of that scapegoat concept. Especially like if a business isn't doing well or if it is failing or whatever, that a woman might be put in that kind of role because there is less concern: "It is going down the tubes anyway, let's put her in the role".'

US interviewee

4.8 Tokens or pioneers?

The literature review revealed that tokenism remains an issue, even with rising numbers of women in senior positions. In each of the study countries except Greece the women interviewed for this study confirmed that this remains an issue, relating a range of types of experiences related to this issue.

In Germany, some women talked about the experience of being the only women in senior organisational structures, and how lonely this can be. One woman described how she was one of the few senior women at her university. She believed that she was there as a 'token', which weighed heavily on her.

'It's a terrible burden ... always this feeling of, "do I belong here or not?". You are also between a rock and a hard place as a token woman – you might not want to join in with the men, but you don't want to be left out either. So it's a constant feeling of being pulled back and forth.'

German interviewee

As well as the sense of isolation and loneliness, the interviewees gave accounts of their employers being quite blatant – some might say, insultingly so – about choosing specific individuals to be a token 'presence' to improve the company's image. One of the UK interviewees described how she had been invited to an event as a token woman, and was then dropped unceremoniously because another, 'better', token woman had been found.

'I actually remember one occasion, about the only occasion, where I was chosen to go to an event purely because I was female and they wanted to make it look as though there were some females in the organisation, and then they discovered there was actually another female coming and I was dropped. Now, that one I didn't like much and there was no finesse to it, they could have dressed it up slightly better, but that's the worst example of a token isn't it, being picked, and then, "Actually we don't need you thank you, there is someone else coming?" Not 'If you don't mind, you don't need to come', that was it.'

UK interviewee

In the USA, the women interviewed either had opinions on tokenism or could describe the direct experiences of either they themselves, or their colleagues, being used as tokens. One senior woman recognised that this tends to happen, but believed that it might not always be a bad thing, in that it does help [the selected] women gain experience that they might not otherwise have been offered.

'You pretty much look at a panel or group that's invited and some people just don't fit but they're there for eye candy reasons. I'm not sure whether it's good or bad. We're running a general manager programme in [my organisation] and there are no women on the programme and I think that's a huge problem both in terms of morale and other things. I'm not sure it wouldn't have been better to force a woman onto the programme even if she was a little junior because she'd get some development. I've seen it and I'm not sure it's all bad.'

US interviewee

Another took the view that she was generally in the minority as a senior woman, but did not know whether that was because there were no other women applying for and obtaining jobs at her level, or because there was only 'room' for one woman at that level.

'In my first position as a fixed income portfolio manager I was the only one in that group initially but then other women joined as portfolio managers so I think

initially I was the token but other women followed. Hopefully, I set a good example. So am I the token woman because they don't want other women or because other women aren't applying for the position or they are finding men who are more qualified? I don't think I have ever felt that I am the token woman just because I am a token woman. I don't think I have ever felt like, ok, we can only have one woman now so that is it.'

US interviewee

Being a token can place a significant burden on a woman, as there is a tendency for such women to be scrutinised and viewed as representing the whole of womankind in that role, in a way that men will not be, as there are more of them. Any errors made are not attributed to them as an individual, but attributed to the fact that it is a woman performing an activity they are unsuited to: in other words, their actions and behaviours are seen as typifying women as a whole, rather than reflecting the failure of just one individual. This can add significantly to the pressure that a woman is under as the only woman in a particular role or at a particular level.

'You have got not only everyone in the organisation, everyone in the world looking at you as that token and you are 24/7 in the spotlight and everyone is looking at how you do, what you do. You have not only got the pressure of being in that job you have got all that additional pressure of being a token.'

US interviewee

Another interviewee, from Germany, agreed that, with so few women in leading roles in organisations, the few that occupy these roles tend to be looked upon as typical of all women.

'People are very quick to observe these women and classify their behaviour as 'typically female', which is not necessarily the case. It might be the case that for many women, their management style is a product of their education and experience, rather than the result of their gender.'

German interviewee

Another interviewee, in the US, spoke about being the only woman in senior meetings, and having to deal with men's hostile attitudes towards her. She recounted one experience that she had had while still young, to which she gave a response that was effective, even though, she admits, was born out of naivety.

'I remember a man saying to me, "I can't stand having you in these meetings because your voice is so high". I said, "If you don't want be here you should feel free to excuse yourself." It never occurred to me to leave, it never occurred to me that he wanted me to go. I just thought if it was that irritating then you shouldn't be here.'

US interviewee

This woman went on to talk about the role models she had encountered and whom she had tried to emulate. She explained that she had found one effective way of coping with such situations was to act the part until you finally inhabit the role.

'I had a woman boss when I was an executive and we were the only two female executives in technology. She always, when she walked into a room, intended to be in that room and she knew that what she had to say needed to be heard, and I acted as if I felt that way until I did. I think owning your professional achievement, your experience and knowledge, owning it strongly is really important.'

US interviewee

Even in the absence of outright hostility it can be difficult to maintain one's independence when you are the single woman on a board.

'It is hard for a single woman on a board, it is easier to just melt in and seem similar and prove yourself by using similar arguments as the others. The most important point is that you are confident of yourself as a human being, then you can act professionally and securely.'

Swedish interviewee

For women who feel unable to act up to the role, another US interviewee suggested the following strategy for dealing with being the only woman in a room full of older men. She would ask them for advice and mentoring, which seemed to work.

'If you take [the approach] that "I am here and this is so exciting and you know so much, what can you teach me?" people love to talk about themselves and if you play to that, not in a negative way but in a positive way, they can be your biggest supporters and that is what I have always found.'

US interviewee

There was a general consensus among interviewees that things often improve with age. It can be very intimidating for a young woman to find herself in a room full of men, but this tends to improve with age, experience and increasing confidence. This was the view from one US interviewee.

'It was harder in my twenties to walk into a smoke-filled room of guys in Chicago who were all 25 years older than I am and had no time for me. By now if I'm not used to being the only woman in the room I don't think about it, except when I sit back and reflect on it. At the senior woman level you're kind of used to it. When you change companies or cultures it's more glaring, otherwise you probably comment more on the obverse. If you walked into a room and there were eight women and two men, that would be a surprise.'

US interviewee

There are signs, however, that this is starting to improve.

'I haven't made a big deal about being a woman and haven't really felt the odd one out. It's no longer the case that I'm the only person who doesn't play golf – some of the men don't play golf either. There are other interests and other ways of connecting with people. The world is now not the same as it was before, when it seemed to be helpful if you could hunt, shoot and fish with colleagues.'

(UK interviewee)

Reflecting on this situation led one Swedish interviewee to reflect on how women can use coaches to help them overcome the loneliness and develop confidence in their own decisions.

'What coaching can contribute to is, we know that having a senior position is lonesome and being a female manager is even more lonely and you need to be aware of this. This is how coaching can be helpful – not as a friend but as a sounding board.'

However, in contrast to the American, UK, German and Swedish interviewees, none of the Greek interviewees believed that their organisations had employed 'tokenist' tactics.

'Here in Greece, we don't have something like we would have in the States, like quotas, a quota system. ... There isn't anything like that here in Greece, or at least not that I'm aware of.'

'No, I don't think that they [promoted me] for that reason – no. I was the first Assistant Manager in the Bank and the first Manager in the Bank, but they were pushed to do it – they don't do it as a – you know – to prove that they are good – no. They didn't even think about that. It was a situation that they had to do it.'

The women interviewed were, to some extent, pioneers. In many cases, however, they also felt that they were tokens, used by their companies to present a more positive public image than might in reality be justified. In some cases employers were 'insultingly blatant' about choosing specific individuals to be a token 'presence'. Whatever the rights or wrongs of such tokenism, women did concede that such appointments did allow them to gain experience that might otherwise not have been offered. Whether women arrive at senior positions through their own pioneering spirit or by being a token appointee, it is typically a lonely experience, and the fact that such women are very much in the spotlight means that the position can be particularly stressful.

4.9 Appearance

There is a general acceptance that women are judged to a greater extent on their appearance than men. This was generally acknowledged to be the case by the women interviewed for this study, many of whom had developed strategies for dealing with this. Experiences appear to be common across countries in this regard, although appearance seemed to be a particularly significant issue in the US – all our interviewees in the US had a view on appearance, either from personal experience, or from what they had seen over the years.

'I think there's a lot more focus on how women dress, what their appearance looks like, whether they're over or under weight. I think there's a lot narrower range for acceptable styles for women than there are for men. Too timid is bad but too aggressive is bad. There's a wider range for men than women in that style.'

US interviewee

Another interviewee felt that she had now been able to adopt her own style, but that it took her a while to feel comfortable with that, and acknowledged that it was difficult to strike the right note as a woman in a senior position.

'When I first started out I dressed in a grey suit with white shirt, with a bow tie. That's what was expected in the Eighties. I found it stifling. Very quickly I thought, I need to be who I am and dress professionally. Today I have on a fuschia suit that's very stylish, with maroon pumps and a gold necklace. I can be stylish and still appropriate. I'm not a man. It's always very feminine. I find that it takes the edge off and makes me more approachable. People want to see someone approachable. When you march around in a little suit you're not approachable. I want to show other women that it's okay to be feminine. I'm not competing with men as a male ... I've been able to find a different way to fit in and present myself. It's very important to be non-threatening when you're trying to move up. If somebody thinks you want their job they're going to cut you off at the knees.'

US interviewee

However, addressing men's perceptions about women's appearance can be akin to walking a tightrope at times. This was the solution that one US interviewee had found.

'I'm actually a blonde. I started dying my hair red 20 years ago because with my body style, as a blonde, I got treated very differently, like I was stupid. The minute I dyed my hair red my credibility factor went up exponentially. It's like a costume I'm wearing every day.'

US interviewee

Nevertheless, one German interviewee who had carried out studies over the past 20 years on the experiences of women in management positions noted that there

has been increasing emphasis on external appearance over the years, both for women and for men. In the latest study (Bischoff, 2004), 45 per cent of men said that external appearance was a factor in their career progression, which was the second most important factor cited, behind specialist knowledge.

'For women, it's taken for granted that they have to take care over their appearance, whereas for men, this is a relatively new phenomenon ... or there is also the view that appearance is a way of fitting into a group.'

German interviewee

In general, then, the interviewees believed that women were judged far more on their appearance than were men. The pressure to adopt an 'appropriate' appearance that would not prompt stereotypical judgements from colleagues had led some women to take a strategic decision to radically alter their appearance. Although such actions made women feel as if they were wearing a 'costume', they can be effective. However, again, it can be difficult for women to attain the correct balance – although business suits may increase credibility, they may also make a woman appear unfeminine and unapproachable and lead to less, rather than more, approval.

4.10 The importance of building networks

It is generally recognised that it is important for all individuals in senior management positions to have good networks to support them in their work. These can be either formal or informal networks. However, the literature suggests that it is more difficult for women to build up these networks than men. Experience in this study shows that women were coming up against all the issues identified in the literature. One interesting finding is that many women felt that they were not good at networking, but some then went on to say what they had achieved through networks, suggesting that the perception of women is that they are not confident in forming networks, when in fact they do seem to be perfectly capable. Other points also emerged, such as not having time to do the out of hours socialising necessary to form networks, particularly if women had family responsibility.

The commentators interviewed in Germany agreed that for many senior women, access to predominantly male networks was closed and there were often simply no female networks in place.

'These networks are for the elite in the business world and [for women], there is often simply no way in. Some women might be able to get in if their family owns the business. But basically, as long as you don't have women in important positions, they won't have their own networks, which means that they have to break into male networks, and it's really very difficult.'

German interviewee

The individual women interviewed in Germany all had an opinion on networks. Many found it relatively difficult to build up proper and effective networks that would help them to advance in their careers. One of the basic problems is the lack of women to network with.

'Networks and social contact points are different for men and for women. This has less to do with being male or female and more to do with the fact that there is an extremely small number of women in very senior positions in Germany. For example, I don't have a network at all – there are a couple of other women in senior positions in similar organisations to mine, and that's about it. There are so few women around that any networks are de facto male networks.'

German interviewee

In Greece, the idea of networks for professional women has barely begun to be discussed, and the interviewees felt that networks were unlikely to develop.

'We don't even have women's networks, so if they have women's professional networks tell me about it. I can imagine women fighting with each other because, you know, competition is very big as well, because if you have a limited number of women they compete for these positions.'

Another stated that she could not personally envisage the benefits of being part of a women's network, preferring to enlist support and help from those known personally to her.

'I have a lot of women friends that I prefer to discuss my problems with – I mean people that I have chosen to be my friends, so I prefer their assistance if I have things to discuss than a woman that is also manager but [with whom] I don't have many things in common.'

However, the interviewee in Greece with an international background had had contact with what she described as a professional managers' group.

'I had met the president of the group at a social event with my husband and she was a business colleague of his. And when I moved into this role she's one of our vendors, one of our suppliers. So I had the opportunity to meet her better. I can say we've become friends. We've gone out for coffee together and had lunch. Little bit of business, little bit of personal understanding each other. Networking opportunities exist.'

She did not support the view put forward by the other interviewees regarding the potential for competition and conflict between professional women.

'How cooperative are women with one another? As cooperative as they are anywhere in the world, which [means] there are some good experiences, some not so good experiences. It's good with women who are confident and comfortable where

they are in their life, in their role, in their world etc. And they're a little bit past just the very basic competition. All the women that have figured out that there's enough room for all of us here – "I don't have to knock you off your pedestal because there's five pedestals right next to yours. So instead of knocking you off why don't I get up on the one next to you!" If that kind of mentality exists, then everyone's OK. It's where you're still in a very basic competitive level where it doesn't work.'

Greek interviewee

One interviewee in the US saw that there were no networks for women, and decided to create one, partly to be able to network with the increasing number of female clients. However, she felt a little uncomfortable at the thought that this might be seen a gendered network, even though men's golfing networks also were, on a de facto basis.

'We saw more and more women taking positions as the client, so I thought, "Okay, men go golfing – go and do something." I created activities (business/social) similar to golfing and we met four or five times a year and it was a little bit more formal than just asking a client to go golfing but we would go and listen to a very interesting speaker and then afterwards have a very nice dinner or some activities, women's activities, and we had so much fun. There was some type of discomfort around this to some extent because it was gender-related – but although golfing is not gender-related, at the end of the day, it is mostly men who do it and it is not stigmatised as being gender-related.'

US interviewee

In Sweden, the interviewees also noted that the scarcity of women makes it difficult to form effective networks.

'I have networks but they are more of a personal nature rather than professional. [In organisations] males are more likely to be 'buddies' and protect each other and help each other. And as there are fewer females in senior positions they are not so strong in bringing up other females.'

Swedish interviewee

Furthermore, one Swedish interviewee observed that the scarcity of women in senior positions means that any networks which do form are unlikely to be as effective as those of men. Therefore, one senior woman recommended that, rather than forming separate networks, women should be encouraged to find ways to network with men.

'We have lots more [female networks] than male networks but the problem is they [women] are networking with each other, and the thing is you have to be in the position to be able to 'pull someone up' [through the system] and it's still the males that can pull people up, the females in those positions are still so few. And so a big

mistake is in not networking with men. And more and more they realise that they do have to take initiatives to network with men.'

Swedish interviewee

Some of the Swedish interviews felt that networks were not just a major contribution to the promotion of men, but constituted an active barrier to women's progression.

'We have hundreds of women who would be in general more qualified than the average board member, they [men] have just been sitting there slapping each others' backs and so it's a matter of finding each other on the golf course and in the hunting team, and it is all very tight, in the sauna and so forth, and the males have a tendency – not the ones born in the '70s but the older ones – to stick together and they have their clubs and so on and they stick together. I know one woman who went [to a certain university] and has not stuck with any of her schoolmates but I do not know a single male who has not [they are very] good at keeping in touch over the years and remembering each other when they are looking for someone for the board, [it's:] "Oh I remember this one, he was very good", but he wouldn't remember a girl, and he would be reluctant to be seen as one who was picking a girl, it is very rare and very few brave men who actually suggest women.'

Swedish interviewee

Conversely, one interviewee believed that the most important way in which management development programmes helped women progress was by helping them join women's networks.

'Coaching organisations and organisations that develop management development programmes ... what women value from these initiatives is not really the content but the network of contacts with other women. Suddenly they are not 'women' they are the norm, they can be themselves. They value this very much. We do have all-women initiatives here and it is the network[ing] that is incredibly powerful.'

Swedish interviewee

Women in Germany feel that they are able to join the networks, but often feel at a disadvantage, surrounded by men.

'On sensitive issues, such as how to negotiate one's own salary, I am at a disadvantage in these male networks. It's ok if you are friends with the people in the network, but it's so much more difficult for a woman to become friends with men than it is with women. Due to this structural reason, I really believe that men have considerably more insider information than me, which gives them an advantage when it comes to issues such as pay.'

German interviewee

One interviewee pointed to potential difficulties in working with women, believing that women can often mistrust each other in management positions.

'Women in management positions are twice as likely to have negative feelings about women superiors than they do about male superiors, if they have had experiences of either gender as a manager. I've experienced it myself.'

German interviewee

This German interviewee wondered whether it was worth trying to build up networks of women: 'given that around 80 per cent of all decision-makers in Germany are male, maybe it's a waste of time for us to try to build up networks with women.' However, there was also the view from this interviewee that networks were vital in order to get women to relate to each other as managers, rather than rivals.

The same types of sentiments were apparent in the UK interviews. One interviewee in the UK felt that she was not particularly good at building up networks, even though she was good at building strong friendships. She felt uncomfortable with up-front networking and wondered whether this was a mixture of character, gender and nationality.

'I don't think I'm very good at it. I'm not really a natural joiner actually. I've discovered that right through, I tend to have good close friendships with certain people and some that have stuck quite a long time, but I don't really deliberately go out and court people and I don't feel very comfortable when I walk in and have to go to a networking event and I go to quite a lot. I will do it but I tend to be one of those ones that has better conversations with individuals for a length of time in a meeting than these brilliant people who can work a whole room. It really doesn't appeal to me doing that, which is a bit of a pity because I suppose as a director I should be doing that ... I think it's quite an English thing. "Steady on" kind of attitude.'

UK interviewee

Another UK interviewee said that she had not actively gone out to form networks, but had taken up offers from women to act as informal sounding boards, as she had suddenly found herself at the head of a large organisation, which was a difficult thing to deal with, particularly at the outset.

'I became [head of my organisation] under slightly unusual circumstances and a number of women who have got reasonably senior positions have said to me, "If you want to talk things over ..." because clearly being the leader of an organisation, a very big organisation, can be quite isolating in some ways. So there are one or two people with whom I have had a quiet drink and a chat.'

UK interviewee

Feelings of not being very good at networking were echoed by the US participants in this survey. One participant felt that networking was a weakness, but blamed this partially on the fact that she moved around geographically so much and so it was difficult for her to form and maintain contacts and networks. Nevertheless, although she had highlighted networking as a weakness, it is clear that she has a good network inside her actual workplace.

'I'm not a great networker, which is a weakness. I have some networks externally which haven't been helped by the fact that I do typically move every 18-24 months. This class I'm going to in Chicago, I look at some of the people who are in Chicago and they have huge networks but that's because they've been in Chicago for 10 years. Inside the business I have a pretty extensive network and I do work on building it and making sure it's really there.'

US interviewee

Another US interviewee talked about how vital it was to have the right contacts if women were to move into senior and board-level jobs. She made the point that the generation of women who first had to break through the glass ceiling are essentially, in her view, loners, (and indeed we have previously in this report referred to them as pioneers) and therefore there are just not the networks that there should be among senior women.

'I am a generation X, the generation of baby boomers, and those who really broke the glass ceiling. Those women have a 'take no prisoner' mentality, which I'm sure they had to have to compete. They are not willing to help others, to share information, mentor or coach or take [others] under their wing, to groom anyone else. They are interested in results, they lack people skills. That's where you don't get the connections. Men have traditionally had those relationships, clubs, inside/outside work relationships that for whatever reason that first generation of glass ceiling breakers felt it unnecessary or even a sign of weakness to associate with other females and they're not in the boys' club. They never created a girls' club.'

US interviewee

Time was cited as another factor that inhibits women from building effective networks. Whereas men, if they have a partner at home, can spend extra hours socialising and building networks, women either cannot or do not want to put in the extra hours that this might entail.

'I am gone five days a week; do you think I am going to go play golf all day Saturday, all day Sunday when I have these little kids at home? Definitely not. A lot of it is not just the opportunity it is also time. I get invited to do stuff like that and, quite frankly, I don't want to do it. I'm gone from home 12 hours a day and I still have one kid at home – even when this kid is gone the last thing I want – I still have responsibilities to the older members of the family etc. I really need my time at

home. I don't want to always be gone. I certainly could not do a lot of that when the kids were younger because I had too much guilt, you know, I really needed to be home. They needed me.'

US interviewee

Formal and informal networks can help men gain influence and access to high-ranking positions. Women find it difficult to break into male networks and there are few women's networks. Furthermore, the scarcity of women in senior positions means that any networks which do form are unlikely to be as effective as male networks. Interviewees questioned whether it was worth trying to build up networks of women given that the majority of decision-makers are male. It was suggested that it would be more useful to help women develop the skills that would allow them to break into male networks.

4.11 The impact of childcare issues

Childcare issues are identified in the literature as a significant barrier to the advancement of women, both in terms of practicalities and perceptions of capabilities. A range of experiences regarding domestic and family commitments was recounted by the interviewees in this study. These ranged from disbelief from colleagues that a senior woman could be contemplating having a child, to the methods used to combine early years child-rearing with a continuing and advancing career, and trying to combat perceptions that a woman with children was not fully committed to her work. Although the practical difficulties eased with age, some interviewees also spoke of the difficulties of keeping their mind fully on their jobs, and feeling torn between their work and their families, even when children were older, and the fact that men with partners at home were not in the same position.

Here, there were notable differences between the countries in this study, with traditional attitudes more apparent in Germany and Greece, while there was more flexibility for women in the UK.

There is general acknowledgement that it is difficult for women in Germany to pursue a career if they have children. One of the things hindering women from combining work and family would seem to be the lack of whole-day school, although this may change in the near future. The commentators interviewed confirmed that the lack of good and affordable childcare was a real problem for working women in Germany, particularly for children between three and 11. This, combined with the general assumption that the bulk of childcare responsibilities will fall on women, means that women in Germany find it extremely difficult to balance work and family if they have children.

Some commentators in Germany also expressed the view that women often had to choose between a family and a career, in a way that men did not, as the key years for building a career – between the ages of 30 and 45 – were also key years in terms of having a family. Those women who do have children subsequently tend to return to work on a part-time basis, or not at all.

'There is a career wobble for many women between the ages of 30 and 45. Before that age, the figures are quite encouraging. However, it's clear that during these years, children harm the careers of women, including causing them to switch to part-time working. From my experience and what I see, it's always the same – as soon as a woman gets pregnant, she is sidelined.'

'Even today, having a child is still a huge career obstacle for women in Germany. Women here know that and sometimes decide just not to have any ... one of the few concrete statistics about women in managerial positions is that they have fewer children than men in management positions and fewer than women on average in our society. I believe that this is due to the fact that it is not seen as usual for women with children to work. This, coupled with childcare difficulties, represents a significant barrier for women in Germany.'

German interviewees

In Germany, the way that society is structured was highlighted by commentators as a factor that made it difficult for women to juggle home life with a meaningful career.

'It's still the case that over half of men in management positions live in a traditional family situation where the wife does not work, or works very little, whereas women in management positions are usually single or live with their partner without children.'

German interviewee

There was also a feeling in Germany that women who want to pursue a career are not looked upon favourably by society in general, which is something that is very difficult for individuals to address.

'The idea of women and careers is not loaded positively in Germany. In general, the phrase "career woman" is usually seen as an insult. So, rather than, "Wow, a career woman!" it would be, "Hmm, a career woman" – hard, unfeminine etc. Whereas the phrase "career man" is more positively loaded. I think that it's quite complicated and not just to do with childcare, but more a kind of confusion about the role of women in the economic hierarchy in general.'

German interviewee

The women interviewed in Germany had managed to have children and combine this successfully with work, but they had needed to be extremely organised in

order to do so. In one case, a woman went back to work three weeks after the birth of her baby, taking the baby with her to work, which was possible in her job. She recognised that she was lucky to be able to do so. She also said that she had not wanted to take a break at all from work.

Some spoke of the importance of being established before having a child.

'I was very established by that stage ... I knew how things worked, I was well known and I had networks in place.'

German interviewee

Another interviewee recounted that she was upfront about her plans to have a child.

I was in my mid-30s and decided that I should really think seriously about the issue ... I changed my role within the organisation and told my new colleagues that they should know that I planned to have a baby. They just asked me how long I planned to take out of work and I told them six months. They said that was ok, that if I was ill or broke a leg, I would also be off for many weeks, and having a baby is a much nicer reason to be off work. I became pregnant, went off on maternity leave and while I was on maternity leave I was elected to the board.'

German interviewee

One woman talked about colleagues' assumptions that she would not continue in her job once she had had her baby.

'Germany is a very traditional country, with traditional ideas about women still, and these ideas are very powerful. When I was pregnant, I'd just got my PhD and it was clear that I wanted to pursue an academic career. But the secretaries at the university all said, "What, you want to come back straight away and carry on?" I took half a year as I did not want to be away for too long, and you can't afford to be either, in career terms. But there is so much social pressure on you to not return.'

German interviewee

The practical issues linked with childcare were also acknowledged to be problematic – one interviewee noted that she would rather have had access to a crèche at the workplace than having to pay privately for childcare. Another spoke of the difficulties of finding appropriate childcare in Germany, stating that she had to be creative and engage a nanny along with three other families. This worked well.

'I thought, well, that's great – I can go to work without feeling guilty, knowing that my child is being well looked after. The nanny was also flexible and could help if I needed to work longer, as could the other parents, and my partner. You need good childcare networks to cover all the bases.'

German interviewee

Problems were envisaged with staying away from work too long for childcare reasons, even though women might have the right to stay away longer.

'I would never advise any mother or father to stay away from work for longer than a year.'

German interviewee

According to a study carried out among managerial employees in Germany (Bischoff, 2004), the percentage of women in Germany stating that their children are an obstacle to their careers is relatively small, at between 6 – 8 per cent. However, this study included women entrepreneurs, who had more flexibility over their working hours and their place of work (ie they could also work at home).

There is also the difficulty of needing to be seen at work as a senior manager, rather than being judged on results (what is sometimes referred to as 'presenteeism' – that is, not just working, but seen to be visible in the workplace). This can be a disadvantage for women trying to juggle work and childcare and therefore more likely to need to spend some time working from home. This also has an impact on women's ability to build up informal networks.

'The less time women spend at the place of work, the harder it is for them to build up informal contacts. This is a real dilemma for women with children.'

German interviewee

One theme that surfaced in many interviews was the fact that the women who were relatively senior and either already in board-level positions or considering moving into a board-level position were likely to be older and so had their childcare difficulties and decisions behind them. Furthermore, at that level, they earned enough to be able to pay for childcare, leaving them free to pursue their careers. However, in order for women to get to the stage where they were able to get into senior positions in the first place, they needed to resolve their childcare problems. Therefore, actions aimed at dealing with this issue needed to be targeted at younger, more junior women, in order to ensure the supply of women into more senior posts.

'At senior levels, childcare problems and the reconciliation of work and family life are no longer issues. These women earn so much that they can afford whatever they want in terms of childcare. The question is more about which women can get into these senior positions, and how open the system is. I believe that the German system is very closed.'

German interviewee

Women in the UK are not, by and large, wrestling with these issues to the same extent as women in Germany. The UK labour market is more flexible than the

German labour market, and it would seem that women find it easier to go back to work after having had a child, and can more easily combine a career with a family. However, that is not to say that the same types of issues do not arise.

There would appear to be more evidence of men being involved in the childcare arrangements in the UK, enabling both mothers and fathers to progress in their careers. Further, general work-life balance issues appear to be a genuine preoccupation for both sexes in the UK.

'I've got guys who are part time. There's an increasing number of men who are asking to work four days a week (a) because they want to do something outside of work on that one day or [(b)] they want to be the child carer for one day week. I've one lady who works four days a week and her husband works four days a week – between them they have two days at home with their son and the other three days he's in a nursery. [So] he's not in a nursery [all week], that's a career choice or personal choice they've made, and fortunately both his and her company have been able to accommodate that.'

'I think companies are moving out of the dark ages. I know there are companies, and maybe if you work in the City as a banker you've got to be there 24/7 or you work for one of the City legal firms. A lot of the rest of the world doesn't operate like that. Women are respected in our company. It's not even a case of making allowances for people. It's good business sense. You've invested all this money in recruiting and developing these women, you're not going to see them off because they can only work four days a week. There are occasions with some jobs that we have to say this is a job that requires somebody five days a week, but most jobs can be accommodated. You find a way of doing it.'

UK interviewee

However, another UK interviewee, who was working part-time following the birth of her child, spoke of being told that she did not have a chance of promotion as a part-time worker.

'When I came back from maternity leave I was told by my male manager that there wouldn't be a chance of me getting promoted to the [senior grade] ... it would be very unlikely to get onto that rung on three days a week, despite the fact that legally you have to [not discriminate against part-time workers] and actually within [the organisation] they're very hot on diversity and flexible working, but I was told practically it wouldn't really happen. I was also told that I couldn't possibly go on any sort of main leadership-type activity.'

UK interviewee

In terms of general career progression, this interviewee thought that having had a child had maybe held her back around a year in total, although this was not seen

as particularly problematic, and there were in fact other life events that had meant that she had had to tread water for some time in terms of her career.

In terms of being able to combine senior management with having a family, having a partner who is involved and having an employer that is flexible were cited by a UK interviewee as the two main enablers.

'I'm very lucky in that I've got a husband who works longer hours than I do but he's still part-time so we literally share [the childcare]. If he wasn't, I would find it very tricky. I think it's having a partner who's doing at least half, if not more sometimes, that's really what's helped it, otherwise I think it would be a massive problem. I can't say I find it easy all the time – you do miss out on certain things that are very important, but again I'm very fortunate here in that it's a very family-oriented place here and my boss here, he's got a family himself – he completely understands if there's that school play or whatever that you've got to get to, but the odd thing that comes up he positively encourages me to go and we do work very flexibly, working at home, all sorts of things. But I do find it hard, I find it hard when I have to do a lot of work at weekends which I think is [my daughter's] time and also I miss it, I want to be with her – it's not just a guilt thing, it's me feeling I want to make the most of this little one who's getting bigger all the time and who's good to be around.'

UK interviewee

This was reinforced by another UK interviewee, who described taking young children in to work and 'just getting on with it', although she spoke of the emotional difficulties of juggling work and family life. She also emphasised how important it was to have a supportive partner.

'I do remember going to a meeting with, I guess it must have been with [my youngest child] and actually breastfeeding during the meeting, which was a slightly odd experience for everybody but everybody just kind of put up with it and we got on with it. So, on the one hand I was reasonably no nonsense about it and just thought, I am going to get on with doing the things that I want to do, but sometimes there have been things that I think I did miss. One of my children will hold a grudge for years and years about the fact that I missed her birthday because I was off doing an international trip, but I think her grudge-holding is kind of less serious now and she does it to wind me up. I think it can be a difficult choice. I mean, I am very fortunate that my partner is an extremely good parent and not everybody has that, so I don't think those career breaks have made any difference to me.'

UK interviewee

Many of these issues do, of course, become less relevant as women become older and their children do not need as much hands-on childcare. In addition, the point

that senior women were in a position to be able to afford childcare was made forcefully by one UK interviewee.

'I think any woman who is attempting to do a senior job without proper childcare is completely insane. For her own sanity she must have that. A senior person is earning enough money that they should be putting in place proper childcare for their children. That's the priority for the children but it's secondly for the woman's own health and wellbeing.'

UK interviewee

Other UK interviewees spoke of the fact that sometimes women have an inability to focus completely and utterly on their careers, due to other things happening in their life. It may also be that women decide that they want a balance rather than an utter focus on career.

'I think it's about being able to focus completely and utterly 100 per cent on your work – if you've got the luxury of literally being able to devote yourself to your career, then I think there's nothing stopping you, quite frankly. But if you do have any sort of other considerations in your life, dependents of one sort or another, other considerations, then you're always going to be doing a balancing act one way or another, and I always admire women who've got to the top then you find that they've got four children and [these women] do exist and I've met a lot of them. I think there's exceptionally people [who] always will do very well, but I think for the vast majority of people who might not be quite on that planet I think it's actually quite hard and I think that you can almost self-select yourself down a notch or two so that it's manageable, and I think women are very sensible ... I think it's actually being quite sensible to think that there are other things in life – work isn't everything, is it?'

UK interviewee

In the USA, many of the women interviewed for this research had had children, but recognised that it was problematic, for a variety of reasons, to hold down a senior job and focus on a career, while having a family. One woman spoke of how differences in the treatment of women can begin as soon as a female executive is pregnant – attitudes towards the woman change and she starts to feel insecure at work.

'I see women who become pregnant and are excited about their new family and I watch what happens to them as I coach them, I watch their workload double, I watch them become insecure about their jobs, I watch people move into their arena and I see what happens as the corporations protect themselves but still try to hold the legal line.'

US interviewee

Nevertheless, this interviewee also commented that it does not have to happen this way, that if companies are careful, stay in communication with a woman who is on maternity leave and prepare the ground properly for her return, it can work well.

'There was a woman who had been in her job for many, many years and she was on bed rest with twins, had her twins, and nobody touched that job and she was completely communicated in the whole entire time and it was done by the people in her department, and she came back and she integrated into it as though she hadn't missed a beat. It was amazing and it can happen. It is just that the people in the company have to want to make it happen.'

US interviewee

Focus and the ability to concentrate fully on the job was something raised by another US interviewee, who had children and knew that her mind was never fully on her job, in contrast to some of her male colleagues.

'I know from day one that my mind is not 100 per cent [on the job], when I am at the office it is not because you have got the sitter calling, you have got issues with the kids, you have got to take this one to the doctor, blah, blah, blah. I have got a lot of family issues, whether they are solely mine or not mine it required my attention ... [a lot of men] are not having to drop the kid off at day care by a certain time and they don't have to pick them up at a certain time. Their energies are not nearly as fragmented as mine. I think that that is the reality of being a working mother.'

US interviewee

This interviewee went on to talk about how having children had lead to direct discrimination from colleagues on occasion.

'There was one senior guy in my department who later gave me the boot when he became head of the department. He was actually incensed that I had a third child. I cannot tell you how incensed he was and he said it too. He thought it was totally irresponsible of me to do that ... combining it with work.'

US interviewee

In Greece, all four interviewees believed that one of the greatest barriers to female career progression was the deeply ingrained cultural norms and social attitudes that projected particular roles and expectations onto women. The interviewees believed that, in Greece women are regarded primarily as home-makers and child-rearers, something that is reinforced in both sexes from the early years of education.

'It's not that we're not educated, it's segregation, it starts from school ... from school you are oriented not to go to technical education, if you're going to the university [there are] other things, they are going to fit better to women's

psychology or to the role women will acquire in the future as mothers, the women in the house etc, so I think it starts from school, it starts in the families. It's that the system itself does not push women, does not show women alternative ways to go, women are good for this and this and this, so as you grow up you believe you are better to do this job rather than the other job.'

Greek interviewee

One interviewee with a more international background did not regard the cultural emphasis on traditional female roles as necessarily being a barrier to employment or career progression; she was acquainted with many women who held senior positions in her line of work. However, she made the point that women who reach these positions will still be expected to juggle full responsibility for the traditional 'mother' and 'wife' roles alongside their career.

'There are amazing women in this country. I have an enormous amount of respect for Greek women, because it is a very traditional culture and ... there are certain cultural expectations that people have about roles in a family. Women do the cooking. Women do the shopping. Women take care of the children. OK. It's a fact. In the States men mow the lawn. OK. It is what it is. So to the extent that I've met a lot of very capable, professional, accomplished, successful Greek women, who not only achieve that success, but [who] continue to maintain their home, their family, the shopping, the children, the washing, the ironing etc.'

Greek interviewee

Another of the women spoke of the lack of organisational support for women to manage the balance between these roles. She also highlighted the fact that Greek women's domestic responsibilities often extend beyond their husbands and children to the wider family and community.

'I don't think there is any particular effort from enterprise businesses in Greece in order for women to develop or for women to try to consolidate personal life with business life. So bear in mind that women in Greece are burdened with all those responsibilities, don't have [support with] children, many women make the choice not to be married and not to have children, I don't have children, up to here it was a very personal choice, but at the same time women have all dependent persons to look after in Greece – the older parents, a disabled relative, the other housewives. OK, things are getting better and are starting to change but you cannot find many couples where the roles are not very well defined. The women mostly do the housekeeping and the cooking no matter if they bring more money home.'

Greek interviewee

Thus, to be a 'career woman' in Greece may involve conflicts of interest and the need to make sacrifices in one or more areas of life, as another interviewee explained.

'It's very difficult for a woman to choose to have a career because she has to sacrifice things and a lot of women they don't choose it. A lot of men also they don't like their women to be focused in their career or in the job – they prefer to have them more in the home and house and I think the bottom line is that when you're a mother you have the whole responsibility for the children. This means that you have to choose between career and children. Most of the women will choose their children.'

Greek interviewee

Indeed, as indicated in the earlier account, one of the women interviewed had chosen, for purely personal reasons, not to have children and believed this had been a key factor in her subsequent career progression.

In Sweden the statutory and societal background is quite different to that in Germany, Greece and the UK, with generous maternity leave and childcare provision. However, social attitudes lag behind the legislative environment and individuals' opinions are still often negative towards women who do return to work soon after having a child.

'Our system is fantastic – in terms of the childcare and the maternity leave – but [it is still questionable] how it will affect you, being away for 12 months, it can be difficult, all of us need to think through how we want the system to work for us. It is not a case of one size fits all. [A very high profile, powerful women] was criticised in the media when she had a baby and only stayed at home for three months.'

'In Germany, there is an expression "Rabensmutter" – it means women who don't stay home with the children, they are referred to as "Rabensmütter". In Germany it is not well seen – and it is not much different in Sweden. My friends who are in their 30s tell me it is really difficult, "If I do not work I am not intelligent, but if I do work ... whichever I do is the wrong thing", and women blame each other, they are [seen as] wrong whatever they do, and all over the world, and not least in Sweden, they do not get help from their friends.'

Swedish interviewee

Such attitudes prevail despite some of the leading Swedish companies having extremely positive policies.

'We have a genuine interest in and will to allow all people, men and women, to get to good positions. But when you are inside a system you always think it is slow, but it is the intention of top management. We are doing parental leave, encouraging men to be at home [take parental leave]. I was previously Head of Corporate Strategy and when I told the Chief I was pregnant he said, "Okay, you tell us how you want this to be organised". I could tell them I wanted to work for 10 per cent from day one to enable me to keep track, or whatever.'

Swedish interviewee

However, even in Sweden, extended maternity leave is not entirely unproblematic. One senior woman noted that if companies can manage quite easily while women are on maternity leave then this may not bode well in the longer term.

'I have been discussing this recently with [a friend who] has hundreds of employees and she said, "I can cope with someone leaving for three months' maternity leave but I can't cope with six months and have to replace them, so their job will not be there when they come back, but we can arrange something else. But I can't just lose a person for six months" and I said, "That's pretty obvious because if you could that would mean she was filling a job that did not have any function". So those are questions we have to deal with In law firms it's obviously difficult for a lawyer to be away for three months – if a client can't get in touch they will choose another ... so it's not an easy question to solve.'

Swedish interviewee

Childcare remains a major barrier to women's ability to participate in full at work. Although availability of childcare is an issue in many countries, attitudes can constitute a barrier too: in Sweden, although there are more progressive childcare policies and provision than that available in the other study countries, social attitudes lag behind the legislative environment, and opinions about women who return to work soon after having a child are often negative. In the other countries the social attitudes and cultural norms regarding childcare were even more deeply ingrained. Women in the five countries spoke of the sacrifices they had been forced to make, either in terms of their career or their family life. Many women with children were faced with the option of returning to work on a part-time basis only or not at all, and those who move to part-time working may find they are subsequently overlooked for promotion.

4.12 Career routes

Many of the interviewees for this study said that they had not followed a linear career pattern and had often arrived at where they were by chance rather than design. In many cases, women spoke of having made 'lateral' rather than direct career moves, sometimes by chance or interest, and sometimes by design in order to get on. There were, however, differences between countries. For example, the UK's flexible labour market allows women to take more circuitous routes to senior positions; while in Germany, employees can still find it difficult to change career.

One UK interviewee described the rather circuitous route to her present position. She had not entered the labour market until her mid-20s and had worked for a time as a teacher. When asked about her career plan, she said that it was task-focused rather than following a planned route.

'I've never been one of these people that thinks, I'll get to a certain grade by a certain point, [although I] accept that I do get frustrated if I don't have enough influence over something and so without deliberately thinking "I want to be a certain grade" after a couple of years in a job I'm certainly sort of thinking "What's the next challenge?". It's actually the challenge of the work more than the grade but I've got to be honest, I think a lot of it with me is a bit of boredom, actually. I do like new challenges, I like picking problems and fixing things, and I've discovered there's a pattern with that I usually go somewhere where there's some sort of challenge.'

UK interviewee

This view was echoed by one of the other UK interviewees, who spoke of wanting to perform well in her job and to undertake tasks effectively, rather than wanting to map out a career path.

'I did want to be able to do the job as well as I possibly could, so certainly in that respect I sought things out, not necessarily because they would give me career advancement but because they would make the job I did very much better.'

UK interviewee

Many of the women interviewed in Germany also did not follow a set career plan. As a consequence, often they were not routinely offered assignments or posts that would add to their experience and thus further their career. Rather, they had to think for themselves about what they wanted and then set out to create the chances and opportunities themselves. One interviewee talked about the need to learn about organisational leadership.

'I basically went and read a lot of books about it, which helped me to understand this area. I don't like the fact that you seem to have to do all this yourself, but that seems to be how it is in Germany – you either have to find your own way, or act in accordance with structures that have been in place for decades.'

German interviewee

In the US, there was a mixture of experiences. One interviewee, who, when outlining her career, appeared to be very targeted in her career path, later admitted that she had gone into the finance sector (where she currently worked) 'purely by mistake'.

Although we have noted that the inflexible nature of work in Germany can restrict women's opportunities to change careers, in fact many of the women interviewed in Germany did seem to have non-linear careers. This meant that they had rather more diverse backgrounds than many senior men. This can impact on confidence, with women feeling that they are imposters, as they do not have the 'right' background. One woman spoke of a survey that she had conducted among

colleagues at her place of work, in which many women spoke of feeling like imposters.

'I was explaining to one older male colleague that, according to this survey, women more often than men feel that they don't belong, that they are in the wrong job. He thought a bit about it and then he realised who he was talking to, so he said to me, "Do you feel like that too?". You could see that he suddenly realised – gosh, Frau X is a woman too – and I said to him, "Yes, sometimes I do". As he'd asked me outright, I gave him an honest answer. This was in 2005, ie relatively recently.'

German interviewee

As in Sweden, in Germany a majority of the senior management positions – around 80 per cent – are filled by people with economics, engineering or science backgrounds: areas in which women tend to be underrepresented. Although the number of women in these professions is increasing, women are still at a disadvantage. This is particularly problematic in Germany, which has a relatively rigid system of professional qualifications and experience, and therefore career changes are not as easy as in some other countries.

4.13 Self-confidence

While lack of self-confidence is an issue that can compromise individuals' general ability to function, it can be a particular issue when women need to negotiate over pay. Women appear to have less confidence in their self-worth than men have. The result of this can be lower pay for female managers (Bischoff, 2004), and even, on occasions, bring down the pay levels for all managers in an organisation or sector. This would appear to be the case in all countries in the study. One interviewee, a lecturer in Germany, advised her students to go into companies where the management structure was predominantly male.

'In companies where the management structure is full of women, the pay level of managers is falling for all managers, men and women. The men are complaining about it. I say to my students, "Go to companies where there are relatively few women in the management team – you'll be able to earn more in those companies".'

German interviewee

Another commentator in Germany talked about the strategies that women tend to employ when taking a job.

'Women tend to under-sell themselves when they enter an organisation, worrying whether they are going to be recruited at all. They think that, later on, when the organisation realises how great they are, they will get more money. However, that doesn't happen.'

German interviewee

This view was echoed by an interviewee in the UK who had reached a very senior position in her career. She believed that women needed to be taught more self-confidence, but recognised that this was extremely difficult and that it probably needed tackling at a very early age.

'I think a woman will always look at a job description and she'll say, "Well you know I can only do maybe, 75/80 per cent of this job. I'm not sure if I should apply for it". A man will look at a job description and he'll say "Oh I can do 50 per cent of this. I'll put my application in". It's having much more courage to apply and put yourself forward. Making sure you are known to people in the organisation.'

UK interviewee

Another UK interviewee spoke of not wanting to put herself forward, assuming that if she could do certain things, then anybody could do them. She had already reached a high level in her organisation and only went forward for a more prestigious role when she was directly approached.

'I thought [my previous role] was the pinnacle of my career in the [organisation] but unless I had been approached to stand [for another role] by colleagues who said, "We think you can do this". I wouldn't have stood ... I was entirely happy to come back and do the local work that I was doing and then people said to me, "No, we think you can do this". I was kind of surprised really, I mean I was very gratified but I was kind of surprised because I tend to assume that if it is something I can do there are lots of other people who can do it as well, so when people said to me, "We really want you to stand" I thought, well this is what I must do then.'

UK interviewee

Another interviewee, in the US, spoke similarly about being nominated for a board-level position, which she subsequently took.

'The board nomination came to me as a total surprise. I have never promoted myself up to be, I have not done any. It was not in my goal and I never put that as something I wanted to do necessarily and work towards.'

US interviewee

The issue of whether women are doing the right things to get themselves noticed by the right people in organisations seemed to be one that resonated with some of the interviewees. In the UK, one interviewee described not wanting to push herself forward, in meetings and elsewhere in her organisation. She knew that this was something that she needed to work on, although she did also believe that it was something that was common to many women.

'I actually almost go the opposite way, which doesn't do me any favours and this has been picked up with me before, which is this old 'hiding the light under the bushel' issue. I'll probably not say something in a meeting but I'll get it through in

a different way, or I will say something or I'll throw it away rather than make a big statement about it. Not brilliant at that, it's something I should work on. It's definitely a development area for me. I just find it slightly embarrassing when people are being obvious and so I steer away from it which means I just let them get on with it, which I think is a bit of a female thing as well.'

UK interviewee

Visibility and self-confidence were highlighted by another UK interviewee as the main barriers to the progression of women into senior jobs.

'I think it is partly the visibility and the fact that if they are not there then there isn't anyone to [be a] role model. Women are generally speaking less pushy, generally speaking don't come at things from a point of view that "of course I can do that". They come at things from a point of view that if someone says to me, "I think you can do that" they think it over and think "yes I could do that" and that is very, very hard to break down because you can have a go at doing it in school, you can have a go at doing it at home but it is actually so embedded in terms of society that I think that is the major barrier – women just assuming that maybe they could do it but perhaps that [there] is a man who will do it better.'

UK interviewee

More women suffer from a lack of self-confidence than do men. Low self-confidence can hamper women's career progression in several ways. Women are less likely than men to make speculative job applications for posts for which they do not consider themselves fully qualified; self-confidence is also a factor in the significantly lower salaries negotiated (on average) by women compared to men. Women are more likely than men to be averse to self-promotion, which also impacts negatively on progression and rewards.

4.14 The decision to seek a board-level position

The research aimed to identify ways in which women can be helped to move into senior positions. As part of this process, the reasons why women decide against further progression needed to be explored. The reasons why women might decide to refuse a board-level position, leave an organisation or simply decide not to advance their career to a higher level were many and varied and were linked to many of the themes explored above: masculine and/or exclusive/excluding organisational cultures; perceptions of the loneliness of single females in senior positions; comments on token women and their appearance; or even experience of outright discrimination.

However, for a woman to reach the point at which such issues can become relevant, she has to have an aspiration to move into board-level positions. One of the interviewees in Greece explained her motivations for seeking such a position.

She viewed this as the natural next career step for herself, but because it was the 'natural' next progression per se, rather than because she was seeking the particular responsibilities of a board level post.

'For me, I don't know if it's so much the board-level position as such, as opposed to, I want to do something that I can be proud of doing. And the reason I say that is because I had a working mother, who was a manager at that time, and that was a while ago. And the fact that I had a mother who was a manager was a big thing, even though she didn't make a whole lot of money and she wasn't particularly well educated, she was very much self-made. And I think that had a very positive influence on me. I have a small daughter and I want to be a role model for her. So that's one of my motivators'

Greek interviewee

One German interviewee felt that women's decisions to continue progressing in many cases were linked to perceptions of fair treatment and recognition within the organisation.

'I can say that when women get into high-paying positions, just like men, they want to go further in the organisation. Basically, when women feel that they are being treated fairly, that our contribution is being recognised and that we are being paid fairly, we want to progress, just like the men.'

German interviewee

However, other German interviewees believed that many women decide that a board-level position is simply not worth it in terms of the price they would have to pay, how hard they would have to fight to get there and to stay there, and what they would have to give of themselves in order to make it a success. Such issues need to be confronted and resolved by those women who do determine to progress.

'I didn't want to be one of those board-level women who is more of a man than the actual men. But I did learn that you need to understand and use the instruments that men have at their disposal. You can't just behave as a woman if you want to survive in male-dominated management structures. You need to show that you can adapt.'

German interviewee

It is true that women's opportunities to advance may be shackled by some management structures, and indeed, as the literature review indicated, some women themselves feel that they do not match the profile of a typical senior manager.

Some reflections on this subject were also given by women in the UK. One interviewee, who was a board member, pondered on her overall ambition and

wondered whether she really wanted to get right to the top. She put this down to a number of things, including upbringing and a general fear that a top job might entail more stress than she was prepared to cope with.

'I've always felt slightly happier as a number 2 than a number 1 and I'm still not sure about that one, I was quite a well respected number 2 [and maybe that's better] than going for the top job.'

Do you think it's too stressful or too much pressure?

'I think there's that, I think it's almost a bit deeper than that as well. I think it's down to your own personality, I think it's almost the way you've been brought up really. I think I come from a family where you were always taught to put people first – the minute you started to get a bit too sure of yourself it was a bit of, "Who do you think you are?" sort of attitude. I think there is a bit of a female thing in that, you don't want to be the one saying, "I am", "I want this", the word "I" isn't sort of a natural word really ... but I got better at it and funnily enough, being out in quite a stressful job in the last year here I discovered that I actually can be quite tough when I need to be and that's because I can see where we're trying to get to. Because I'm in a strategic role I find that I am a little bit more directional than I was, but I'm still not 100 per cent sure – do I want the responsibility? And when you're young you think, I'll get to the top. If you do think like that, I've never thought like that, but you'd probably think you could do it if you wanted to, whereas now I actually think, be careful of what you wish for because I've got a four year old, soon to be five – there is more to life than just work, and it's quite tricky balancing stuff now. And if I was literally number 1 here I do think that I'd miss out on a lot more of home life than I do now, I miss out quite a lot now.'

UK interviewee

Another interviewee suggested that the demands made of women by family life might lead them to be less focused than men on their careers, or alternatively that this may mean that women have more choices available to them than are available to men. This interviewee from the US felt that, as a result, fewer women than men really strove for very senior positions, and this was a 'fact of life' which quotas and initiatives would not be able to tackle.

'I don't think that juggling the numbers is going to make that any better because women have other choices, if you can't get the childcare thing under control or you go through a divorce or several divorces or whatever you are just not going to be available to moving up as a personal choice and I see a lot of women here that are in good technical positions but they no more want my job than fly because it is not worth it to them and they have other demands from children.'

US interviewee

Another view was that when women reach their mid to late-40s, an age when they have the experience to start thinking about moving into board positions, their family lives reach a point where they feel that the sacrifices are not worth it – maybe they have been working flat-out for a number of years and suddenly realise that their children are growing up without them. Women can then start to take a long, hard look at their lives and think about what is most important to them.

'The woman will say "I am getting to a point where I am 45, 48, 50 years old and life is changing and I feel it is important to me now, and I am getting ready to look at my retirement and financial independence, and this isn't what I want to do anymore".'

US interviewee

Similarly, women might be poised to progress, but feel genuinely pulled in two directions by work and family. One interviewee spoke of a senior woman whom she had coached, who could not assuage the guilt she felt about not being there for her children.

'She has two children who are seven and 10 and she is tortured by the fact that her little girl is always upset with her because she is never there, and it never leaves her mind.'

US interviewee

However, it could be argued that such suggestions – that women are less interested in board-level positions because they care more about their families – are simply further evidence of the extent to which women, as well as men, hold stereotyped notions regarding what women are, or should be, interested in. Two of the Swedish interviewees commented on this point.

'Preconceived opinions about the competence and commitment of women is a big issue, stereotyped notions. And there is a view that women do not want these very high positions.'

Swedish interviewee

Although women may have to undertake more of a balancing act than men, this does not mean that women are not interested in having a career. Women are aware of the hurdles they may have to confront if they are to have a career, including the potential criticisms they may face.

'Most studies you read, and some I've done myself, show that women are just as much interested in pursuing careers, although they are more aware of the different conditions they will encounter (for example, despite provision of childcare, women still have more responsibility for this), and the expectations/judgements that are made of women at work. So women are more aware of the challenges – they do not

want a career irrespective of the conditions they will have to put up with and the implications of these for their families and friends.'

Swedish interviewee

One of the Greek interviewees had in fact once been offered a board-level position with a company, for whom she would have acted as a senior personnel manager. She was 'scouted' by a consultancy operating on this firm's behalf, after delivering a management seminar on recruitment and selection. Although (at their strong request) she had consented to an interview, she made her intention to decline the position clear from the outset and never swayed from this decision. She felt that taking up this job offer would negate her true vocation, which was to improve people's working lives through research and campaigning.

'I didn't even have second thoughts, I declined it right from the beginning because working for a multi-functional company, for me, it was like going against my – it was purely for ideological reasons. Sometimes some people they cannot manage to conciliate things like ideology in work, I don't know how to put it. Imagine myself responsible for a personnel department, your ability to control things or to make things in your own way I think is very difficult in profit making, so for me my mission in life is to do research and in order to help people, labour, working people to have better working conditions and to have more rights and I was thinking that I would be on the other side.'

This particular woman clearly had a strong idea of the motivations that drove her work. Many people will not have such a clear idea of their motivations and needs, and this is perhaps one area in which coaches can be of particular value to individuals.

It was clear that not all the women who were interviewed as part of this work were interested in attaining board membership. It is reasonable to assume that this is as true for men as for women. However, while for some women the decision not to seek board-level positions was linked to their own personal goals in life; for others, this decision was more to do with perceptions of the likely impact that taking up such a role would have.

4.15 Occupational segregation and gender stereotyping

Women tend to be employed in a small cluster of occupations and sectors. Such occupational gender segregation is seen across virtually all countries (it is particularly prominent in Sweden) and the jobs in which women are mostly found are those which are relatively low paying. This occupational (or 'vertical') segregation is further exacerbated by 'horizontal' segregation, the tendency for women to be found in lower-ranking, often non-managerial, positions. Taken together, this means that women are excluded not just from higher paying jobs in

general, but are far less likely to be found in higher paying jobs in better-remunerated sectors, such as engineering, banking and finance. Coaching to help women progress within sectors that are strongly male-dominated may therefore be of particular value.

One of our interviewees in the UK worked in an energy company. She commented that the energy sector was not seen by young women to be particularly attractive as a sector in which to work in the UK, and that it was therefore problematic to encourage women to go into it. A particular difficulty for women who worked in the sector was that they may often be denied access to the more senior jobs because they did not have the technical background.

'In technology companies, you can either become an engineer or take a general job, and if women haven't gone down the career route of technology, [then] that may well cut them off from the top jobs in the company. We do have an incredible dearth of women coming into engineering, science and technology. The universities aren't attracting them in the numbers that we as a company would like them to do. It goes right back to 12, 13, 14-year olds [not] being encouraged to study maths, physics and chemistry.'

UK interviewee

There was, however, a range of experiences reported among our interviewees. One US interviewee had an engineering background and she said that she had never felt stereotyped in the types of organisation she had worked for.

'I have an engineering degree so I think that was helpful in not getting these stereotypes and getting me into more technical positions. Working with a straight retailer, I enjoy things that are slightly more technical. In [my previous employer] there weren't classic 'girl' jobs. There was a fair amount of hiring a lot of women engineers and putting them into technical jobs. I don't think I really suffered from it from that perspective.'

US interviewee

In Sweden, occupational segregation is a significant issue, and this extends to education and training. As in the other study countries, far smaller percentages of women take science, technology and engineering subjects at university. When organisations seek board members, they often prefer those with a background either in areas more likely to be studied by males: science, technology and engineering is one cluster; another is finance and law. These education and career choices have an additional impact when women seek promotion into board positions.

'It is not just the glass ceiling but glass walls too, the impact of occupational segregation. When women become managers, it is in areas such as information

services, administrative functions. Men are more likely to be heads of finance departments, and most of the CEOs come from a finance background.'

'Sweden is one of the most equal countries but girls are still training as nurses and as teachers, very little happens. One of the things is that women are now 55 per cent of the people taking degrees. Men stay doing the same things, they still go to the technical universities, and when universities look to recruit senior people they still look for engineers. It is still homosociality – they recruit like themselves [‘recruit in their own image’] ... I myself once called to one of these [organisations] and said I would like to take the training to get onto the board. And they said, “Oh, that’s nice”. But then they asked me, “What’s your company background?”, and I said, “I’m a human resource manager” and they said, “Nobody wants any of them ... no, it’s no use for you to do it!”

'[Some people] say there are not enough competent women to fill these positions and that is in part because women choose the “wrong type” of positions, women choose careers within staff positions, not within line management. And many people on boards think that to get on the board you need to have been a managing director. I would not say women lack the experience. There are plenty of women in suitable positions. However, I can see men defining these positions as not suitable, they will say it is essential to have line management experience. But if you are head of HR for a big company wouldn’t that be enough? Do we really need people with experience as MDs on the board, is that a relevant criteria? [Requiring] experience as a MD excludes women and many men as well.'

Swedish interviewees

A similar view was expressed in Germany.

'Then suddenly the women notice that they’re not in the mainstream in the organisation, usually when they try for a senior management job, and can’t get into the mainstream because they’ve been on this parallel track all the time.'

German interviewee

The fact that many occupations are strongly segregated along gender lines is well known. What is less recognised is the fact that moving into a gender-segregated area can have a lasting and profound effect on career progression opportunities. Interviewees believed there is a tendency for board members to be drawn predominantly from male-dominated backgrounds such as finance and engineering. Senior managers from areas such as human resources are viewed as lacking the appropriate experience and knowledge to fit them for service at board level. Given that more females than males move into areas such as HR this view can severely curtail the opportunities for women to be selected for board membership.

4.16 Quotas

The issue of whether it would be helpful to introduce quota for women senior managers and board-level members has been a subject for discussion in all the countries examined in this study, to a greater or lesser extent. In Sweden, there has been much debate on this issue, due to the influence of the legislation on quotas for public sector female board members in neighbouring Norway. The debate has been more theoretical in other countries, and in the US, commentators were in general not in favour, preferring to let the market regulate itself.

There were diverging views on the issue of quotas for women senior managers and board-level posts in Germany. A draft of antidiscrimination legislation for private sector organisations, which could have possibly included quotas, had been prepared by SPD ministers, but the draft fell and was not passed. Commentators spoken to in this study feel that there is now little chance of this legislation being resurrected and some felt that this was a shame, as legislation was needed if things were really to change across the board.

'We can [be] quite happy to look at individual cases and offer mentoring etc. where it's needed. That's not a bad thing. However, if you want to change the power relations between men and women, you need something else – without any kind of legal intervention, it will probably take around 70 years, and I don't want to wait that long. So, mentoring, coaching – that's all great, but essentially it's about power and for women to gain that, they need to be supported in a different way.'

German interviewee

Some women interviewed thought that introducing quotas for female board members was a good idea, on the grounds that it is a pragmatic means to an end – if women can be placed in these senior positions, they then start functioning as senior managers and gender is forgotten. However, one interviewee admitted that it was a difficult issue, especially if (essentially) very capable men were being excluded from the top jobs simply on grounds of gender (in other words, a reversal in many respects of the current situation); nonetheless she still thought that this was a worthwhile approach to try. Another interviewee also agreed that this could be a good idea in theory, in order to get things moving, but pointed to the main disadvantage of what would effectively be a positive discrimination policy: it would carry the same sticking point as do all positive discrimination policies, in that appointments would not be made (or seen to be made) solely on grounds of merit. This is not just seen as inequitable, but potentially could damage the image of women in management, if they are seen as being appointed primarily on grounds of gender and in preference to a better candidate. One of the Swedish interviewees also made this point.

'[The public] are broadly in favour [of the further promotion of women to senior positions] but are against quotas or positive discrimination. They are against quotas because they feel if they are going to make quotas then we will lose competences, it's as if increasing the number of women would lead to decreasing competence.'

Do you mean because if the women were any good they would have got in anyway, without the quota, and if they need a quota to get in they can't be so good?

'Yes.'

A similar point of view was expressed by one of the Greek interviewees.

'If you were in a very progressive organisation, that was really trying to promote women and there were two people that were equally qualified, and the woman got the job, she would always be walking around with the 'she got it because she was a woman' stigma. To the extent that we don't want to have that, it's not nice. I would be very upset. I would be hurt and offended and insulted if someone felt that I got where I am because I'm a woman. I would find that very offensive. So as long as I have that feeling, I can't expect to benefit from the other side.'

One commentator made the point that although some women did not want to be a 'quota woman' – ie one who had gained her position through a quota system, it could be looked at in a different way, namely that quotas are a way of reserving positions.

'The way I look at it is that quotas can simply be an instrument for reserving positions rather than explicitly for furthering women. Previously, men were in these positions exclusively and so they were positions for males. Now we have two genders [in work] and so we can divide up the positions and say: here are the male positions and here are the female positions, and that is how they will be filled. If you look at it that way, it cannot be seen as discriminatory.'

German interviewee

An interviewee in Sweden believed that the small numbers of women in senior positions in many sectors did constitute a structural impediment to the use of quotas.

'We also have companies owned by the City; we have 55 in Sweden, big ones, and there are no women on the boards and there is no way you can make a quota there because the women are, if they are there, they are in the care industry and the hospitals, not the electricity industry.'

Swedish interviewee

However, another believed that if this argument – that a shortage of women at appropriate levels in some sectors – was accepted then there would never be any progress.

'It might be true but it has been the case for decades. So if we don't fix that we will just go on complaining, so no, more women in senior positions means women recruiting more women, looking at the situation when they seek to recruit to an empty position, recognising that we don't necessarily need a "copy", we look at what is really needed. I would obviously like more women to apply to the technical universities and to promote more women internally, but [also] when women consider such issues we are sometimes more careful, we say, "Should we offer her this group manager position, it will be tougher on her than on a man?". So we hesitate in making her the offer, when in reality the decision needs to be just with that person herself. We should ask how we can help her to overcome those challenges.'

Swedish interviewee

Although there have been debates over the years in the UK about the utility of positive discrimination (currently against the law in the UK) and quota systems, there has not been so much of a public discussion of quotas there as elsewhere, particularly in the context of women in board-level jobs. As a result the subject was not at the forefront of people's minds in quite the same way as in other countries. However, there were some views on this. One interviewee felt unsure about quotas, although could see the merit of increasing the visibility of women in senior positions.

'I don't automatically feel drawn to the idea of reserved places but I do think if you don't create the expectation that women will be there and will be visible and will have opportunities, then there will be some women who will never avail themselves of opportunities that they actually could rise to the occasion very well.'

UK interviewee

The view from the US interviewees was generally that quotas were not a particularly good idea and did not fit with how they saw things developing or wanted things to develop.

'I believe in 'the least government is the best government' and I think anytime they try and regulate anything I would prefer they put their efforts into regulating welfare and education reform and some of those things, not try to count beans about how many women or men or whatever we have. I think that would be a huge mistake.'

US interviewee

However, another US interviewee said that she was coming round to the idea that some type of government intervention and even quotas might not be a bad thing,

although it conflicted with her general beliefs about how people should run their lives.

'I am always so torn on that because I so believe in creating your own life yourself. I do however see the slow growth in boards with women – I mean it is still only 14 per cent and that is such a small percentage and I believe because networks service up the referrals it will be so long until we have a representative percentage. Yes, I think as much as I would hate to say so because I don't believe in that in general, yes, I think that it might be important for the government to take some steps in that regard.'

US interviewee

One of the Swedish interviewees thought that, in many ways, the debate about quotas effectively stifled any real discussion about what can or should be done to improve the representation of women in the workplace.

*'In Sweden there has been the debate about setting the numbers on boards [quotas] and the establishment says, "We don't need quotas because we can solve the problem ourselves" and the government says, "But you haven't so far" ... in discussions of quotas or not it is easy for us as women to say no ... people say, "You're not in favour of quotas, are you?" ... but I think I should be saying what I **am** for, I am for diversity, I am for mixed groups, I am for thinking about what competences you actually need. It is very easy to be driven into a corner where you say 'no'. But the threat to have quotas made companies look closer and see how they can behave better, but the clever women who have taken positions have not taken them because of quotas.'*

Swedish interviewee

Another US interviewee had a pragmatic view – she thought that quotas were not desirable, but also not needed because there was a shortage of good people to fill senior positions and this would lead employers naturally to employ more members of minority groups.

'You have to hire minorities; you have to hire women because you can't just limit yourself to white males because there aren't enough to go around.'

US interviewee

Sweden had formally considered the potential to introduce a specified national quota for the proportion of boardroom positions that should be held by women, although they had subsequently decided against doing so. Nonetheless, the possibility of introducing a quota remains a topic for debate in the USA and UK as well as in Sweden, and was therefore explored as part of this work. While many interviewees believed that quotas were a good idea in theory, they have the disadvantage of effectively being a positive discrimination policy, with the potential for appointments to be seen as being made solely or primarily on

grounds of gender rather than merit. Women believed that they themselves would feel insulted if they had been appointed as a 'quota woman' rather than on grounds of ability.

4.17 Summary

This chapter has highlighted the main barriers to progression into senior management and board-level positions, as perceived by the women interviewed for this research. These include perceptions about women's management style, difficulties with male organisational culture, general experiences of discrimination and difficulties in gaining the right experience and gaining access to the right people in an organisation in order to be able to advance.

Other issues discussed included problems in suddenly having to step up to a role, overall confidence problems, the difficulties caused by having non-linear careers, and the problems of family commitments. Views on country-specific issues such as occupational segregation and legislative initiatives such as quotas for female board members are also summarised.

In the next chapter, we examine the contribution of coaching to women seeking to obtain a senior management or board-level position, how it has helped them to overcome the barriers cited in this chapter, and how it might be developed to help further.

5 The Contribution of Coaching

In this chapter, we examine the general role and impact of coaching, based on the experiences of the women interviewed. We then look at how coaching can help in specific areas, before going on to discuss key points for coaching development.

5.1 The role and impact of coaching

All the women interviewed in the USA for this study had experience of coaching and in some cases mentoring. Often, coaching or mentoring was linked to a specific event, such as trying to gain a promotion or trying to obtain a board-level position. For example, one interviewee wanted to find a board-level position and entered a mentoring relationship with a former CEO, which she found to be useful.

'I had a mentoring relationship with a former CEO and chairman of a board to talk about how people might get themselves positioned for boards. I met with him frequently, 3-4 times a year. He introduced me to some head-hunters in the UK, which was helpful. I ended up taking a class on how to get on boards.'

So it's raising your profile with the right people?

'Exactly. I didn't know anyone in the UK before I went over and he was helpful in introducing me to some of the good headhunting groups. I ended up coming back here before that led to fruition but I thought it was helpful.'

US interviewee

By contrast, formal coaching does not appear to be as widespread in Germany. However, a great deal of informal coaching and mentoring takes place, between women and people the next level up. One interviewee who has spent some time in the USA talked of the differences, describing academics almost fighting over the job of being able to look after mentees.

'This kind of career placement activity is not really in evidence here in Germany, but very much part of the role of professors in the USA.'

German interviewee

There was little experience of coaching amongst the women interviewed in Greece – only one of the four interviewees had undergone a defined period of coaching. This had taken place around six years earlier.

'I was assigned a coach who was the global head of HR at that moment. We were participating in [a leadership programme] as we were calling it but specifically designed for [this company]. That was a one-week intensive, after that we were assigned to [a coach], to find our inner strength and what we need to change and that kind of stuff. No, it was more on addressing and finding the right reasons why you do something. That was for the next three months, one hour per week. Then after the first three months it was once per month, one hour per month and at the end we had to submit a presentation on what we had discovered about ourselves. It was ok but it was not specific for women, it was for people who were at that level. Again we were the minority.'

Greek interviewee

One of the interviewees in Greece who had not received coaching was involved in mentoring, and she was enthusiastic about the mutual benefits to be derived from this.

'I am a mentor to two ladies, one in Italy and one in Sweden, right now. As a mentor I've probably got more out of it myself, than what I've given to them, frankly. Because when someone talks to you about their questions, their problems, their issues, their concerns etc., and you have to think about how you would deal with those circumstances, you answer in a way that intellectually is the right answer. But then you stop and think, in practice, I haven't always done the right thing. So what would I do differently? Or what should I have done? Or even acknowledging to them, "Here are my shortcomings, don't you make those mistakes as well".'

Greek interviewee

In the UK, coaching was relatively widespread, although the women interviewed in the UK had tended to have informal coaching and mentoring. In the case of one woman, who had a senior role and had had a lot of career experience, she described the approach of her organisation, was which to identify people of high potential and place them onto a senior management track, which included offering mentoring.

'I haven't bought executive coaching for myself but I've had a couple of mentors during my working life. One was a former boss of mine in [my organisation] who I still keep in touch with. The other was the chairman of a company that I was a non-

exec in. [The mentoring] was more informal at the time – I don't think [the organisation] was into formal mentoring or coaching but we did, as a company, put in place ... people had a paternalistic approach. High-potential people were generally mentored by somebody in the senior management team.'

Was that helpful?

'Very. There are times when I still talk to [the person who mentored me] about next stage career down through the years. Not so much now because I'm far into my career now. It was useful to have an independent voice to talk things through and I have found that very helpful.'

'You were assessed to be high potential which was predicated on an assessment which was done when you joined the company and continuous assessment during your performance. Your performance and potential was constantly looked at in [the organisation] and here in [the parent organisation]. Everybody's performance is reviewed every year in [this organisation] and we review everybody's potential: it goes up and down on an annual basis and we don't discriminate between men or women.'

UK interviewee

Another interviewee in the UK spoke about the positive effects of the coaching she had received, saying that it had helped her to focus on where her career was going and what she wanted from her professional life. She felt that it was important for the coach and coachee to have certain things in common, as that helped to establish a rapport. The right mixture of encouragement and stretching was also felt to be vital.

'Yes I found it very useful. She had that lovely quality of being able to let you set the pace in conversation, she's very careful about how she coached, she really did let you, like any good counsellor, let you set the agenda rather than her inflicting it ... also, a lot of backup, a lot of encouragement and a lot of praise, so she was very encouraging and so much so that even though I don't have to see her now we want to see each other. A positive influence, but also made you think hard, if she thought you weren't challenging yourself or you weren't thinking things through she'd give you different angles on things, so I did find it useful.'

UK interviewee

Having a mentor who is external to the organisation in which the mentee was working was highlighted as key by interviewees in the UK. Somebody who can offer an external view and encourage the mentee to take a step back and consider issues strategically is seen as very valuable.

'You need an external breather, an external perspective on things. It's quite intense here because we're a small organisation. I think you definitely need someone

external who you can talk to intermittently and take stock a bit and think about stress issues going forward.'

UK interviewee

In contrast to interviewees in other countries, those in Greece were not enthusiastic about coaching to assist with progression to executive-level positions. The idea that women could perhaps be coached with the specific aim of progressing to a board-level position did not seem to sit comfortably with these women. Their views indicated that they believed that the issues ran far deeper than the simple need for women to obtain more skills or confidence.

'I don't really think that there can be an organisation that can help coach women to be board members, I think it's a bit naïve to think like that. I mean an organisation like this can change the culture of society by doing things – publishing things, making, you know, events, talk to the management, to the high management about these problems, pushing the governments to change policy to support the women but there is no way an organisation [can] do coaching to a woman to be a member of the board.'

Greek interviewee

One of the interviewees in Sweden was involved in the delivery of coaching programmes to women and to men. She described the sorts of issues that coaching programmes for women ideally should cover.

'Regarding the coaching, the sorts of things I cover are, we would talk about gender issues such as the glass ceiling, you need to be conscious of these things, you don't need to go too deep but just enough to help you make decisions about the strategies you should adopt and help you make the right decisions about things such as how long you should stay in one company or in one position, what to do if you don't get any support from your own manager, why do I not do this thing or that thing'

Swedish interviewee

Another of the Swedish interviewees described what she had wanted from the coaching programme she had undertaken:

'It is about meeting the person where he/she is (in terms of intellect and professional position) – this is what was attractive to me, that you agree on what you want to achieve. I had my plan and my wish list, regarding what I wanted to get out of the coaching, I think it's important not only to keep it to the professional context you're in, women are more hesitant to include the softer aspects of their professional life within the coaching process – eg, they are reluctant to discuss how to approach their role so that they can achieve work-life balance, they need to understand that it is ok for this to be covered by the coaching contract.'

Swedish interviewee

5.2 How coaching can help

Having identified the main experiences of coaching from the point of view of our interviewees, we now pinpoint the areas where coaching can make a difference to the careers of female managers.

5.2.1 Increasing confidence

As lack of self-confidence was highlighted as a key barrier to women progressing up through organisations, coaching can play a significant role in helping women to build their confidence. This was the view of a German interviewee, who believed strongly that coaching could be well placed to increase the confidence of women.

'I would offer coaching to women with the question that I believe all women ask themselves: "Am I good enough?" It is important to have faith in your own abilities and to develop and strengthen your competencies, in order to be able to stand with both feet on the ground and not always feel destabilised by doubts that maybe you're not good enough.'

German interviewee

This view was echoed by one of the UK interviewees.

'If women come at things from the point of view that they can't necessarily do them and part of coaching is to say "If you can do this you can certainly do this, or have you thought about doing that", then I am sure it can help.'

UK interviewee

Coaching can also help with self-confidence for women coming back to work after having had a baby, particularly if the woman has been out of the labour force for a while and is feeling like she has lost some confidence and has maybe missed out on developments that have taken place during the time that she was away.

'You don't look the way you did before you left, and you're tired and [you ask yourself] what have you forgotten?'

US interviewee

The issue of the gender of the coach was addressed by one US interviewee, who felt that having a female coach was helpful to women.

'With the woman coach, I find that sharing of experiences or the fact that we are going through the same challenges or doubt is really helpful, and it sounds silly but it is comforting and it gives you confidence to say, "I am not alone".'

US interviewee

5.2.2 Gaining more political awareness

Knowing exactly how to behave in an organisation and gaining a good grasp of organisational politics may be a key factor in helping women to advance in that organisation. One US interviewee noted that many women, usually for reasons connected to upbringing, think that doing a good job is enough to be rewarded fairly, which, she argued, is not always the case.

'Women have the perception "that if I do a good job I am going to be fairly and equitably rewarded" [but this] is not the case.'

US interviewee

Coaching may be able to help with this, by taking women through potential pitfalls such as the risk of making such (erroneous) assumptions and encouraging them to develop a public profile within the organisation. A coach can also assist by helping women negotiate the minefield of organisational politics.

Coaching can also help a woman to negotiate the tricky territory between remaining true to her own nature as a woman whilst having to work within male structures.

'Much of the coaching I have had has centred on the issue of how to remain true to myself and how to develop myself further, but without taking on and internalising [male structures and processes]. How do I remain a woman?'

German interviewee

Commentators agreed that many of the problems faced by women are linked to structures and systems that have been in place for some time and which it would be difficult for any individual woman to change. However, recognising that these structures exist and helping women to recognise that, if they face such difficulties that neither is it their fault, nor are they alone in experiencing such situations, can be one particular type of help that it would be useful for coaches to offer.

'All people tend to blame themselves and put failures down to their own lack of ability, and this is especially true in the case of women. However, I would say that if these things can be talked about and recognised, that this can really help.'

German interviewee

5.2.3 Obtaining development and gaining focus

The vast majority of women in this study said that they had not been given development opportunities but had had to go and seek them out for themselves. It would therefore appear to be the case that this is a vital part of career development and one in which women must be self-starters. Coaching can help women to consider what opportunities they want to seek out to advance their

careers and then think about how they are going to realise those development opportunities. This links with issues such as self-confidence and focus.

Coaching can also help women to decide what they want from their career and allow them to test out ideas. This was cited as something that could be of particular help to women who were living on their own or with unsupportive partners. External coaching in particular can give women a place to think about their careers and provide a sounding board for ideas.

'I think it's enormously helpful – someone you can touch base with, who can give you a bit of encouragement and give you some ideas, strategies for different things, push you a little bit beyond your comfort zone. I think having encouragement from outside is very, very important. I also think for women who don't have people at home, and I have noticed this, I think it's extra important as well or you might have someone at home who's completely unsupportive. You need somebody as a bit of a sounding board and I have noticed that the people who are very single and live on their own, that's tough if you haven't got somebody outside who you can just sound ideas out with, and all that sort of thing that's not a part of your work.'

UK interviewee

'Seeing how they would react to various situations you are in – I think it gives you a range of possibilities and you make your way through that. You don't necessarily adopt it as your own, you need to keep your own personality and approach to things but it gives you a richness of possibilities that I find useful.'

US interviewee

Coaching can also help women to decide whether they are really in the right organisation for them or not. One interviewee recounted an instance where she was having difficulties succeeding in an organisation, and sought coaching to help her progress. The result was that she found that she was not the 'right fit' for the job and recognised that she needed to move to something different.

'Actually the process of going through the coaching, because it is such a personal thing, really helped me get my arms around what I really needed to do in order to be successful. I just wasn't asking to be successful doing what I was doing; I was not the right fit.'

US interviewee

5.2.4 Help with finding the right direction

The coaching of women by female coaches can be a significant help to women, in that it can be helpful to talk things through with a person who has had a similar experience and has wrestled with similar problems. This can be particularly useful

where women are hampered from progressing by lack of confidence and fears about their own limitations.

'[Coaching] allows her to challenge herself with regard to her limitations because once again I think that so many of us limit ourselves for [a range of reasons]. So I think validation and challenging the woman to her limitations, to her self-imposed limitations and then providing the tools to help her move herself – that is inherently what coaching does.'

US interviewee

5.2.5 Presentation

Women have often got all the necessary technical skills required to carry out senior and board-level jobs, but what they often seem to lack is the ability to present themselves in the right way and to make themselves visible to the right people. This goes hand in hand with confidence issues. Coaching can help women to think about how best to present themselves and who best to put themselves before in order to secure what they want in terms of career development.

'You can be technically proficient but if you do not know how to present yourself then you are not going to go anywhere. What people forget is that every day is an interview and when they come in to apply for a job in an organisation the next level up, they bring with them all of the history of what all the interviewers remember of what they have done for the last ten years.'

US interviewee

It is important to acknowledge that a 'one size fits all' approach is unlikely to be appropriate, and therefore coaching can play an important role in helping women to explore and fine-tune what works well in a particular organisation. One US interviewee thought that this would be a better focus for coaching than merely concentrating on the technical aspects of a job.

'It's coaching about image, presentation, what style fits within your organisation, what do other people dress like in your organisation and what do people above you dress like – those are new answers that I haven't seen any coaching focus on.'

US interviewee

Coaching can also help women to steer through the minefield that is personal appearance. One interviewee in the US, who was a former executive and is now a coach, felt that coaching could help women to find the middle course and strike the right balance at work, while also acknowledging that this was not an issue that was, on the whole, particularly relevant for men.

'If a woman is good-looking or attractive, she will get the attention much more quickly. However, if that woman plays it up and uses that and makes that a

leverage point, that woman begins to lose credibility as a colleague. So a lot of the coaching around external appearances is it is not a plus or a minus, it is "How do you keep your credibility no matter what the external appearances may be?" However, if you show up looking anything like a bimbo, that is the impression that people will have of you and I think you instantly lose credibility in the executive ranks.'

US interviewee

5.2.6 Giving an honest and objective opinion

Coaching can also help women (and men) to address issues that are too difficult to be raised in normal conversations. Sometimes, a brutally honest, but essentially supportive, view from an outsider can really pinpoint issues that colleagues or friends would not be able to raise. This experience was recounted by one US interviewee.

'Someone who is brutally honest about things like dress or speech. We've got a guy in our company who's really gifted but he's got the world's worst teeth. Obviously, someone has had a conversation with him because he's got braces and is trying to do something about it. It's a conversation you never want to have, "You're not getting to the next level with those teeth".'

US interviewee

5.2.7 Help with specifics

Coaching can be extremely effective in helping women through particular events, such as changing jobs, going for a promotion or finding a board-level position. One interviewee in the US had just heard that her boss was leaving and so wanted to apply for the job. Her first port of call was to an executive coach who she had used before. She believed that this was the best way to help her to get this promotion.

'What I do have is an executive coach that I used to help me put my profile together when I was competing for that board position and although she doesn't know this industry or know these people she does know packaging and marketing, so I have already contacted her this morning and told her as soon as the posting is out I want to send that to her with my materials and I want to blow everybody's mind when I compete for this. I don't have a network but I have found other ways by finding someone who I pay to help me and I am not getting anything for free.'

US interviewee

This was the experience of another US interviewee who had sought coaching prior to being interviewed for a board-level job. She found that coaching had helped her

in a great many ways, and in this instance she was successful in gaining a board-level position.

'They helped me get through the entire interview process. So putting together the right type of CV. What are the appropriate books to read so I understand what it is really like to be on a board? What is the behaviour? You have all these 'type A' people on a board, how do you get all these 'type A' people to work together? You need to read about that because it is very important how you conduct yourself not just the interview process but how you conduct yourself when you are on the board.'

US interviewee

This was echoed by another US interviewee who had been involved in coaching. She thought that coaching could probably not help if a situation had got very negative, but could play an important part in guiding women in a new role and help to stop situations developing into negative scenarios.

'A transition type of coach, I think, is very helpful because you encounter things that having that coach to guide you, an objective party to bounce things off, which you are experiencing, I think is very helpful. And the women I talk to agree and thought so as well, that in their situation they don't necessarily feel maybe that their situations were so negative, they weren't really sure a coach could have helped them change that because there is just so much working against them, but that a coach in general could certainly provide [help] as you move forward, maybe walk into a role before it gets very negative or you walk into a company before it gets very negative, a coach might be able to help with those transitions and keep it from getting into that situation.'

US interviewee

5.2.8 Helping women to achieve work-life balance

As the issue of balancing work and family seems to be so much more pertinent for female executives than it is for men, this is an issue that coaching can really help women to address. By working through exactly what the individual wants and how they can achieve it, coaching can help them to find the right balance in their lives to enable them to move forward. One US interviewee who had been an executive and is now a coach talked of the problems that older women can face, when their children are almost grown.

'The teenage years seem to be the most difficult for female executives because that is when they feel they need to be there the most and that is when bulimia, drugs, friends or prep for university entrance or going to the colleges with their child, these things become much more overt in their demands. And then the empty nest will approach, which is, "Oh my gosh, this is my only daughter and I want to spend all my time with her before she goes off to college and here I am working in a full time executive level position".'

US interviewee

5.2.9 Timing issues

From the experiences recounted above, it appears that, ideally, coaching needs to be put into place earlier in women's careers to help guide them from a relatively early stage. However, at present, many women only have access to coaching when they are already quite senior and have already learnt through experience how to deal with challenging situations.

This is especially true in the USA, where one interviewee stressed the importance of getting board-level experience as early as possible, so that women will be able to work their way up from small company boards to the bigger boards. She recommended using coaching as early as possible to address the issue of how to get onto boards.

'It's still a man's world at board level. That's a big issue for women. Senior women would be a lot better if they had board experience earlier in their life. I had a woman who works for me who is on a board, which is great, it really helps her. I now start to have a conversation with women younger than me about, "See if you can get on [this or that board]". I don't even suggest a non-profit. I think women are the only people to which people say, get on a non-profit board first, then you can be on a for-profit board. I don't know any man in the world who's gone through that path. I say, try to find a smaller company that you can start on. Don't start on the Fortune 50 or any of that.'

US interviewee

5.2.10 Coaching needs to target men too

As many of the obstacles outlined above are products of structures in place and interactions between men and women, it would seem vital to target male behaviour as much as female behaviour. The point was raised by two commentators that coaching needs to target men as well as women as, if the aim is to change the culture and overall behaviours, men need to be made aware of the changes that are needed, rather than simply helping women to cope with the situation as they find it.

'We have to try to alter this male-dominated culture. Men are actually the problem, not women.'

German interviewee

'I would suggest coaching for men, because that is where the problem is. You can't do any more for women as they are very qualified already, and past the age of 45 they no longer have any childcare responsibilities and they can work hard, whereas men, they are very tired by the time they reach the age of 50. So you don't need to improve coaching for women, you need to work on the attitudes of men so that then they help women with their careers. I do a training programme for men, men from the leadership groups of the top companies, the aim is for the men to be more open to diversity and to their own development and to recruit more women to top positions We teach them to lead with courage and insight. We have put them in touch with other senior men. This is a very important way to address the issue and we think they do recruit more women as a result, and they coach other men, this is why we go for the very senior men. I think this is the only way, to focus on men, we have done so much for women and they don't get the jobs.'

Swedish interviewee

One US coach also talked about the challenges of coaching men and trying to change what she described as their 'hard-wired' approach to needing to be the provider. She believed that changing this was a major challenge for coaching, but an essential one if attitudes and society were to be changed sufficiently to allow more women to rise to senior executive and board-level positions.

'It appears from what men tell me that they believe that they have hard-wired areas of their life. If there was anything that I would do differently it would be the way that I approach their feeling of being hard-wired: "I must be the provider and I must provide all the things that my wife needs, even if she says she doesn't want them because that is hard-wired into me".'

US interviewee

This view was echoed by another US interviewee, who said that she very much enjoyed working with men.

'Personally, I feel very comfortable working with men but as I said I have found that men's acceptance of women and women in senior roles is not as easy, and once again I don't know any more if the things that they do are intentional but it is just engrained. What they are expecting, how they are wanting you to behave and when you don't that upsets their apple cart and then so that creates a variety of issues.'

US interviewee

This section has examined the range of ways in which coaching can help individual female managers to progress their careers and overcome the barriers

that they are likely to face along the way. In the next section, we elaborate the key points for coaching development to emerge from this.

5.3 Summary: key points for coaching development

From the debate outlined above, it is clear that coaching can make a key contribution to helping women to advance their careers into senior management and board-level positions.

- **Confidence** has been identified as a key issue for women who want to progress in organisations. Coaching can play a vital role in helping women to build up their confidence, both in general terms, and, more specifically, prior to and following a move to a senior position, and also after career breaks.
- **A sounding board for ideas.** Moving into a senior position can be a far more lonely and isolated experience for women than for men. Coaches can help women to cope in the early days by acting as a sounding board to help them develop confidence in their ideas.
- **Dealing with organisational cultures** is a key issue for women managers. Coaching can help them to find their way through this minefield, while also helping to reassure them that cultural change can take a long time. However, recognising that certain organisational structures and issues exist and helping women to recognise that, if they face such difficulties, that neither is it their fault, nor are they alone in experiencing such situations, can be one particular type of help that it would be useful for coaches to offer.
- **Networks** remain important components of organisational functioning. Although there are attempts being made to establish networks for women, it was acknowledged that these nascent networks do not have so much success in helping women to progress as do the more established networks of men. Coaches can play a valuable role in helping women to adopt strategies to allow them to begin networking with men.
- **Values and goals.** Women can benefit from the opportunity to reflect on what it is that they want from their career, what are the most important aspects of their role to them (and to be focused on in any further development opportunities sought) and identifying their personal value set. Coaching can also help women to decide what they want from their career and allow them to test out ideas. In helping women to explore their own priorities and goals coaches can place women in a better starting point from which to set out to create the right chances and opportunities for their career needs.
- **Identifying and obtaining access to the right types of development opportunity.** Women are less likely than men to be offered the types of

development opportunity that are most likely to bring promotion opportunities. This was cited as a key barrier to progression. Coaching can help in several ways: by helping women to consider and identify the development opportunities they require in order to advance their careers, and then to consider the strategies they will need to adopt to realise those development opportunities. It will also be useful if coaches subsequently work with their coachees to help them maximise the benefits of any development opportunities obtained.

- **Making the right impression.** It can be difficult even for extremely capable women to present themselves in the right way within their organisational culture. Looking professional and remaining approachable can be a challenge. Coaching can help women to steer through the minefield that is personal appearance, by testing out ideas and obtaining an external opinion. Coaching can also be valuable in giving an honest opinion on issues that colleagues may not feel they can address.
- **Coping with the new role.** Some women who moved into senior roles found that this could be a difficult situation with which to cope. Coaches can help women to take full ownership of their professional achievement, and to find effective ways of coping until such time as they felt fully at ease in their new role.
- **Help with specific goals.** Many of the interviewees in this study used targeted coaching to help them attain a specific goal, such as a promotion, a new job, or a board-level position. This type of focused and targeted coaching can be extremely effective for women.
- **Achieving work-life balance.** The issue of how to balance work and family commitments affects women much more than men, and can have a real impact on career advancement, due in part to practical issues and in part to the assumptions and views of colleagues. By working through exactly what an individual wants and how they can achieve it, coaching can help them to find the right balance in their lives to enable them to move forward.
- **Focus on what is personally important.** Although achieving work-life balance is important, it is of equal importance for women to feel that they can focus on and prioritise their careers and create chances and opportunities for themselves. Coaches can help women develop the confidence to focus on their own needs and focus on achieving the goals they have identified for themselves.
- **Offering coaching as early as possible as well as at key transition points.** A key issue to emerge from this research is that, ideally, coaching needs to be put into place as early as possible in women's careers to help guide them from a relatively early stage. However, at present, many women only have access to

coaching when they are already quite senior and have already learnt through experience how to deal with challenging situations. In order to significantly increase the chances of women moving into senior and board-level positions in organisations, coaching should be offered as early as possible in women's careers.

- **Coaching men too.** Finally, as many of the obstacles outlined in this research are products of the organisational structures in place, and interactions between men and women, it is vital to use coaching to target male behaviour as much as female behaviour. This needs to be targeted primarily at those men who oversee recruitment and promotion policies and procedures and who serve as gatekeepers to development opportunities within organisations.

6 Conclusions

This research set out to answer three research questions:

- What are the main perceived barriers to moving into corporate board-level management, from the point of view of women managers?
- What types of interventions and coaching are currently offered to women managers to enable them to move into board-level positions, and could be offered to them in the future?
- Are there any differences or similarities between the situation and approach in the countries examined; and if there are differences, what are the lessons that can be learned and could best practice be transferred across national boundaries?

6.1 The main perceived barriers

The research has highlighted a number of perceived barriers that are hindering women from advancing in their careers. These are broadly similar across countries, and encompass issues such as occupational segregation, gender stereotyping, and the perception of how women should behave in terms of management style. Many of the women in this study had experienced various types of discriminatory behaviour although most had, by the stage in their careers in which they now found themselves, learnt to deal with it effectively.

Being the only women in a roomful of men can be a challenging experience and was one that many of the women interviewed for this research had had to deal with, particularly at earlier stages of their careers. Coupled with the challenge of trying to find their way in organisational structures created for the most part by and for men, this proved difficult in many cases.

Confidence issues came out strongly during the research – many of the women interviewed talked about how important it was for women to have the confidence and belief in their own abilities to seek out and take advantage of the development

opportunities they needed in order to advance their careers. Confidence also played a more general role in how women behaved in an organisation and how they dealt with the difficulty of negotiating issues to do with appearance and being, essentially, a woman in a man's world. Linked to this was the fact that some women had experienced non-linear careers and therefore felt unsure as to whether they had the right background. Some recounted having to step up to a role suddenly, which they experienced as difficult, although all performed well.

Childcare issues and the problems of how to balance work and family life were highlighted as a major factor in women's career progression. Practical arrangements linked to childcare can hamper women in the early or mid-parts of their career, which then has an impact on whether and how soon they can reach more senior levels in their organisations. Later on in their careers, some women expressed doubts about whether they wanted to progress any further, as they were now wondering whether they had spent too much time at work, to the detriment of their families.

Networking was also experienced as a difficulty by many of the women interviewed. Although formal and informal networking were perceived as vital to career development, the women interviewed found that there was a lack of other senior women with whom to network, it was difficult to penetrate all-male networks, and often it was practically difficult to attend networking events, both formal and informal, as they were usually held during out of office hours and at weekends.

6.2 The types of coaching currently offered to women

Those women interviewees who had experienced coaching spoke of it in an overwhelmingly positive light. Coaching had been offered to help with a range of situations and issues. For example, some of the coaching targeted specific events, such as changing jobs, going for a promotion or trying for a board-level post. In these instances, the coaching was perceived to have worked well. More generally, coaching was also used to help the coachees to focus on their careers and what they wanted out of them.

The importance of having a coach, or a mentor, who is outside of the coachee or mentee's organisation was thought to be extremely useful, as it gave the coachee or mentee an opportunity to talk things through with an impartial listener, and to use the coach or mentor more generally as a sounding board for ideas.

It should be noted that formal coaching appears to be most widespread in the USA and, to some extent, the UK. In Germany and Greece, formal coaching was not as widespread, although many of the interviewees in these countries expressed the view that it was a valuable exercise and that they would like to see more of it.

As identified in the previous chapter, key areas where coaching can help women to develop their managerial careers include:

- Confidence building
- Providing a sounding board for ideas
- Dealing with organisational cultures
- Networking
- Identifying values and goals
- Identifying and obtaining access to development opportunity
- Making the right impression
- Coping with a new role
- Achieving specific goals
- Achieving work-life balance
- Focusing on what is personally important

In addition it was recommended that coaching be offered as early as possible as well as at key career transition points and that coaching for men – as key gatekeepers to board-level positions – should focus on what they can do to help move more women into senior positions.

6.3 The role of national culture

One of the aims of this research was to find out whether there were significant differences in the experiences of women in the different countries studied. As has been shown, there are differences between the countries in terms of the cultural context, the employment relations system and general attitudes towards women, and these factors do have some impact on the experiences of the women in those countries. For example, Germany has an industrial relations system that requires statutory employee representation on the supervisory boards of certain companies, a factor that has increased the number of female board members in Germany. National culture can play a significant role in shaping the experiences of women managers; in countries such as Germany and Greece, there remains a traditional view about the role of women, which can hamper the progress of women in organisational life. Views on the role of women in Sweden, the UK and the USA are less traditional in some respects, although the USA does not give women the legislative support in terms of childcare that is found in the UK and, in particular, in Sweden.

Nevertheless, despite these different national contexts, we found that, overall, the experiences recounted by the women in the five countries studied were remarkably similar in terms of the barriers they had come up against in their careers and the ways in which they had tried to deal with them. The interviewees all had experiences to relate in terms of barriers, such as perceptions of management style, difficulties with organisational culture, fighting to gain the right experience to progress, the problems associated with being a token or a pioneer in their particular field, issues around how to combine work and family life, how to network effectively, and how to plan their career overall. This leads us to the conclusion that although national cultures and contexts play a role in the experiences of female managers, the issues they face in their careers tend to transcend these national contexts and there are therefore extremely similar messages for coaches across these five countries. The findings also indicate that there is useful work for coaches to undertake in bringing about change in male managers' attitudes and behaviours as well.

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Appendix: Discussion Guides

Discussion guide for experts

Introduction to research, confidentiality, permission to record.

I'd like to start by asking you some questions about your own background, followed by some general questions about the situation regarding women at board level or other very senior posts in [USA/Sweden/Greece/ Germany/UK]. After that I'm going to run through some of the issues that have been identified in the literature as either impacting on women's opportunities to progress to board level, or are issues it is suggested arise from either having women on the board or not. At the end I will ask you your views on any implications of the issues we have been discussing for the further development of coaching services for women.

Country in which interviewee is based:

Organisation the interviewee works in:

What is her/his role?

Do you hold a board-level position?

Have you ever received any coaching? If so, was it to support progression into a board-level position? [details] Can you tell me about this coaching (provider, length, overview of content)?

Did you have any formal mentoring? If yes, who mentored you? Who arranged it? Was it useful in helping you advance to a senior position?

Are you yourself involved in providing any coaching services to women, or are you associated with any organisation that is directly involved in providing coaching services? Do you have any views regarding how successful it is?

Is the issue of women in senior positions a subject for debate in US/Sweden/Greece/ Germany/UK? What are the main issues?

What do you believe are the main barriers to the progression of women into board-level or other senior positions in US/Sweden/Greece/Germany/UK?

(Barriers to progression, continued) If not mentioned, prompt for:

- general discrimination
- tokenism
- management culture that can be hostile to women
- childcare or career break issues [in Germany, ask about school hours]
- women's management style
- lack of appropriate training and experience open to women.

Has the Government of US/Sweden/Greece/Germany/UK undertaken any recent initiatives to encourage the progression of women into board-level or other senior positions? If yes, what was this?

Do you think any additional actions should be taken by government to encourage more women into board-level positions? If so, what is this?

This question only for employer representatives: Has your company taken any actions to try to encourage more women into senior positions?

Do you believe there is any shortage of qualified women in US/Sweden/Greece/Germany/UK who could progress into board positions?

Do you believe that fewer women than men in US/Sweden/Greece/Germany/UK are interested in progressing into board positions?

Do you believe there is much coaching available to support women's progression into board-level positions? If so, what organisations provide this (or is it provided internally by employers)? Do you have any views regarding how successful it is? Are there any organisations we should speak to (who provide coaching)?

I'm now going to go through a series of points that have been made in the literature, and I'd like to seek your views on how valid these comments are and whether you believe these statements to apply in US/Sweden/Germany/Greece/UK:

- It's been suggested that having more women at board level makes a difference to everyday functioning and decisions that impact on corporate responsibility and profitability. Do you think this is actually the case? If yes, in what ways do you think women's particular contributions differ from those of males?

- A further suggestion is that having more women at board level impacts on the reputation of the company. Do you believe this is the case? If yes, why is this?
- The literature suggests that having women on the board provides useful strategic input on women's products and/or marketing issues and company direction. Do you believe this is the case? If yes, can you provide any examples?
- It's been suggested that having more women on the board improves the constructiveness of board processes and deliberations. Do you believe this to be the case/has this been your experience? If yes, can you give any examples?
- The literature suggests that women directors feel it is their responsibility to address issues relating to women (recruitment, retention, development and advancement). Do you think women directors are any more likely to raise these as topics at board meetings than are male directors? Are men any less likely to see these topics as appropriate business issues for board discussion?
- It's been suggested that increasing board diversity would make board deliberations and decision-making more cumbersome. Do you believe this is the case? If yes, why is that?
- Having reflected on these various issues to do with the progression of women into board-level and other higher-level positions in your country, is there any way you can think of that coaching could be improved to help women progress through organisations to senior level? Are there any particular areas that coaching for women needs to focus on to better support the progression of women?
- Do you personally know any women who have received coaching for boardroom positions? If yes, do you know if they were subsequently offered a place on a board? Did they take up that offer? Would it be possible for you to provide their contact details?
- Are there any other issues that you believe coaches should take into account in coaching women for senior positions that you would like to mention?

Thank you very much indeed for your time.

Discussion guide for female manager interviewees

Explain about the project.

GENERAL

Sector in which interviewee works

Size of company (rough number of employees, because generally more senior women found in retail and in larger organisations)

Also need some information on gender density at different levels of the organisations in which our interviewees are based; in Sweden there are nearly equal numbers of women and men directors.

What is your role?

What level is your job in your organisation? Do you hold a board-level position?

Can you give me a general overview of your career to date?

For those who are on the board:

How were you identified/recruited to the board? Do you know if this is any different from the way in which most men in your country are recruited?

For those who are not on the board:

Are you hoping to rise to board-level position?

COACHING

Have you ever received any coaching? If so, was it to support progression into a board-level position? Can you tell me about this coaching (provider, length, overview of content)?

Did you have any formal mentoring? If yes, who mentored you? Who arranged it? Was it useful in helping you advance to a senior position?

YOUR EXPERIENCE

Do you feel that you have had access to a full range of career development experiences? This could include experience of a range of different functions in your organisation.

Do you feel that, compared to male colleagues, you have had the same type of experience in line management positions or do you think that you have had a relative lack of experience? Why is this? (Line manager failed to sponsor, less able to relocate to take up new posts etc. etc.) Has this impacted on your ability to progress?

Have you sought out or been given assignments to strengthen your leadership and critical thinking skills and/or help with networking outside the organisation? If yes, what were these? Did you receive as many of these types of assignment as your male colleagues did?

Have you been given international assignments by your organisation? Have you been able to take them up? If not, why not? How does your experience compare with that of your male colleagues? Have your decisions had an impact on your career progression?

Have you had any difficulties in assuming a leadership role, in terms of suddenly having to assume that role (in the context of women often being members of groups rather than leaders, so find it difficult to make the transition)?

Have you had any career interruptions (ie for childcare or other types of care)? Do you feel that these have impacted on your ability to progress within the organisation?

For those who have children Have your childcare responsibilities impacted on your ability to take advantage of development opportunities and progress within the organisation?

Do you think that sex-stereotyping has had any impact on your opportunities to advance? What happened?

Do you believe there has been any bias in the treatment of yourself, compared to male managers?

Do you think that there is a specific perception of how women are expected to behave in terms of management style, compared to men (for example, are assertive women perceived to be too aggressive, whereas the same behaviour would be accepted in male colleagues)?

Do you feel that you've encountered any difficulties with what might be described as 'masculine' or 'macho' organisational cultures? How did this affect you? For example, has being one of very few women at senior level been difficult for you? Or has the culture of the organisation been supportive to you?

Do you feel that you have been affected by 'tokenism' – being the token senior woman in the organisation?

Have you built up networks within your organisation, or more widely professionally? Have they been effective – would you like to build them up more? Do you think that men have better professional support networks?

WIDER CONTEXT

Has the government of your country undertaken any recent initiatives to encourage the progression of women into board-level or other senior positions? If yes, what was this?

Do you think any additional actions should be taken by government to encourage more women into board-level positions? If so, what is this?

Do you believe there is any shortage of qualified women in your country who could progress into board positions?

Overall, what do you believe are the main barriers to the progression of women into board-level or other senior positions in your country?

Do you believe there is much coaching available to support women's progression into board-level positions? If so, what organisations provide this (or is it provided internally by employers)? Do you have any views regarding how successful it is? Are there any organisations we should speak to (who provide coaching)?

Are you yourself involved in providing any coaching services to women, or are you associated with any organisation that is directly involved in providing coaching services?

Is there any way you can think of that coaching could be improved to help women progress through organisations to senior level?

It's been suggested that having more women at board level makes a difference to everyday functioning and decisions that impact on corporate responsibility and profitability. Do you think this is actually the case? Did you believe this would be the case when you joined the board? In what ways do women's particular contributions differ from those of males?

Do you have any other comments or observations you'd like to make?

Thank you very much indeed for your time.