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A road to success

A Strategic plan for young female leaders

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Abstract

The main intention with this essay is to conduct a study that can be used as a guide for women with high potentials who want to become top managers within the private sector. This study, which has a qualitative approach, investigates reasons behind the fact that there are so few women at the top management positions within the Swedish private sector. The results are then organized in a strategic plan which can be used as an informative tool for the young enthusiastic women.

The research was conducted by interviewing four female executives and performance of a small survey answered by both manager and non-manager female employees. After a deep study of the subject, it was decided to base the research on four pillars: Culture, organizations, family and the internal factors. According to the existing theory, these factors are four of the numerous facts that partially contribute to the low ratio of women in the top senior positions. This study proves once again that women's career is directly influenced by these aspects. The awareness of the preventions that are caused within these four categories can help women plan solutions and avoid making mistakes in their careers. They can consequently experience major developments and get to the top positions of the organizations more than before.

The product of this essay is a strategic plan that provides guidelines on how young and motivated women should act in order to achieve career success. This plan covers elements such as: educational level, equality at home, the importance of a supportive boss that gives the right feedback and helps you with professional development, building a contact network, skills to promote yourself within the organizations and the necessity of finding a suitable job. We hope that this essay can assist women in achieving their career goals.

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1. Introduction

This chapter will start by giving a broad background to the subject of the essay. It will then describe the purpose and objectives of the study to the readers. This is followed by a discussion of limitations to the studied area. Finally, an outline of thesis is presented.

1.1. Background

“Gender equality” has been an international focus during the past decades and there has been a raise in the awareness of this topic all over the world. Sweden has been no exception and it has also been dealing with the equality between the sexes in numerous different ways. According to the Swedish Ministry of Industrial, Communication and Employment, a country can only develop and grow if its entire nation’s knowledge and competence are utilized; Women and men shall have the same opportunities, rights and responsibilities in all significant areas of life.¹

Sweden is among one of countries that has the most gender equality in many aspects of the society. This does not mean that we can relax with the thought that everything will be directed toward the best without any further attempts. The attainment of an equal distribution of power and influence between women and men has been an important goal of Swedish policy for equality. There are also extensive law legislations that encourage gender equality efforts in different areas of the society.

As a result, from an international perspective, Sweden has come a long way with regards to the distribution and redistribution of power between women and men. However, there are still a lot of work to be done to achieve the ideal equality between men and women.

In this essay we will limit our discussion and draw our focus of attention to the topic of gender equality within the labour force. We will exclusively look at why there are so few women in the top positions of private sector organisations of the Swedish job market in order to find ways to help women that are interested of achieving those positions.

1.2. Problem discussion

As it was mentioned in the first chapter, one of the problems that exist in Swedish organisations is the low ratio of women holding the top management positions. From the total number of managers in the private sector, only about 30% are women² and men continue to dominate leading positions in large organisations. It’s still rare to find women in the key decision making roles such as chief executives or presidents of the companies in the private sector.

¹ www.regering.se , authors’ translation

² European Commission, DG EMPL, Database on women and men in decision-making 2004

A research on 150 countries reveals that in spite of the fact that Sweden is the second best country in the category of “gender empowerment measure” but ranks twenty fourth in the category of “top female leaders”, surprisingly after some of the new EU countries³.

Since gender equality is a big success factor for both women and men, we decided to conduct a research in this area and find out the factors contributing to this problem and the ways to overcome those obstacles.

There have been numerous discussions and studies about the extent and possible causes and solutions to gender differences in access to managerial and entrepreneurial positions and why women are still holding a very small section of the managerial roles in the workforce. A large number of extensive projects such as Women to top⁴ have also been carried out as an attempt to minimize the gender gaps that exist in different organisations of the Swedish society.

Many of Swedish organisations actively engage in efforts to increase the number of women in power and decision making; aiming to create a more even representation of the sexes at the top level; but continued efforts are required in order to increase women's power and influence in all areas of society, within both the private and the public sectors. Even though, the representation of women in managerial and professional positions is now larger than it was before but we are still far from the fair equal distribution of power between the genders. So, the glass ceiling⁵ is still firmly in place for women to reach to the top.

1.3. Purpose

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the reasons behind the low ratio of women among the top managers. It also aims to find out the actions that women should try to take in the society to overcome the obstacles to achieve the top managerial positions in the Swedish private sector.

In order to come up with such solution, difficulties that women experience in their path to the top are first examined. We have then worked on how to deal with these difficulties. The guidance and suggestions that successful women recommend to women who strive after a higher position have helped us come up with some guidelines.

So, the ultimate goal of this essay is to provide a strategic business plan and guidelines to women. A plan that shows women how to promote themselves in the job market and to guide them on what steps they should take in order to become successful in their leading goals.

³ UNDP (UN organisation), annual human development report 2004

⁴ A project funded by European Commission to bring more women to the leading position (2001-2005)

⁵ A term used to explain the strong transparent barrier that prevent women to move upward to the higher positions

1.4. Limitations

The discussion of equality between the sexes is a rather broad area with many different factors that contribute and influence this issue. Different books, research and other information resources provide so many different explanations and factors. These factors can be social, personal, psychological, etc. Men can also be part of this discussion and why there are more men at the top level than women.

There is obviously not an easy solution or a miracle cure to resolve such a complicated issue that has existed for decades. Therefore the examination and treatment of all these factors involved is beyond the scope of this essay.

To avoid an information overload and probable complications of our assessment, this project tends to study only the main causes surrounding this problem. Also the study looks at this problem only from women's point of view. After inspecting the main possible barriers that prevent women to get to the top, we will suggest the steps necessary to solve and to avoid these barriers.

1.5. Outline of the study

As shown in figure 1.1 below, this essay consists of seven chapters. Chapter one gives the reader an overall view to the whole subject of the essay. It also contains a short discussion of the restraints of conduction of this study. Chapter two presents the relevant theory, including previous studies and research on this issue. All the theory information is then narrowed down into the conceptual framework in chapter three. Chapter four describes how the research is done and which methods were used. This is followed by collected empirical data in chapter five. The comparison of the collected data with the relevant theory is outlined in chapter six. Finally, the conclusion of the research is presented in chapter seven.

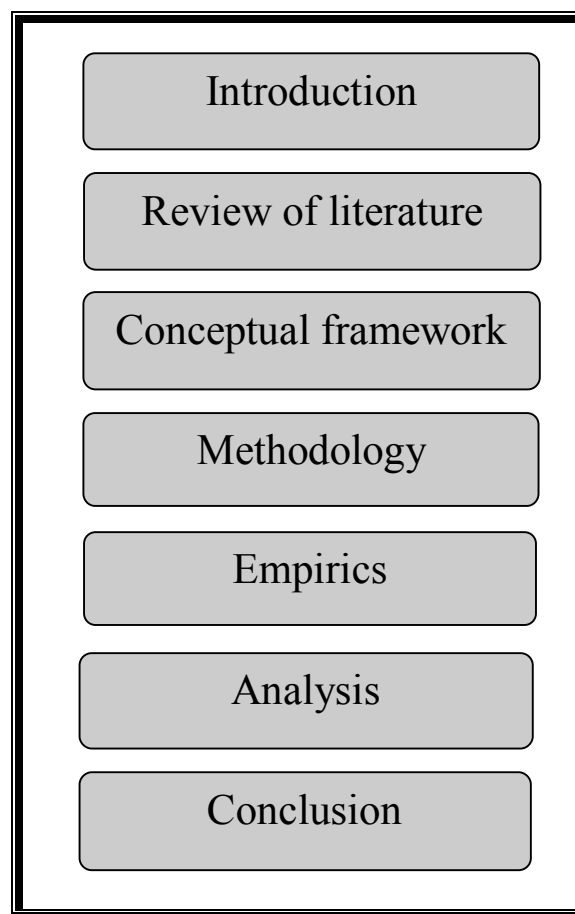


Figure 1.1 The outline of the study
Source: authors' graph

2. Review of the literature

This chapter will present the studies relevant to the subject of the essay that was outlined in chapter 1. First, problems and barriers contributing the low ratio of women in top management positions are described. Then, it's followed by solutions to these problems from some professional women's perspective.

2.1. Overview

There are extensive amount of literature containing all different aspects of women in leadership roles. We read and discussed many different books, old essays, various projects, articles and all sorts of newspaper debates, etc. to get an in depth understanding of issues concerning women's situation in the society. As we read more and more theory about the contributing factors to the low number of women in high decision-making roles, we developed a sharp critical thinking about the subject. We realized that this subject is a complex phenomenon. Based on the theory materials that were used factors that can cause the small proportion of women in senior positions are countless. Many explanations can be responsible for this problem.

The majority of the studies that are available are individual-oriented. It means that it describes how women should be and how they should not be in managerial positions without considering the social or scientific factors. However, there are some studies that focus more on the situation-oriented explanations when researching on the gender distribution of managerial positions⁶.

Dual career (family life), existing perceptions in the society, psychological factors, organizational recruitment procedure, women's abilities and qualifications, leadership style, and many more are all examples of possible factors involved in preventing women from rising to the top.

It is often hard to keep a sharp focus on a specific subject when there is so much information available in different forms. In order to avoid this problem and to be able to concentrate on the subject of the essay, in this study we have chosen several books and previous studies to use as the foundation of our theory material.

The following sections will present the suggestions of our selected literature that we have based our research on.

2.2. The current situation

Despite the fact that share of women in the work sector has increased sharply in the last decades mostly by married women and women with small children – women and men are still divided unequally between the different professions and between the public and private sectors.

⁶ SOU 1994:3 *Mäns föreställningar om kvinnor och chefskap.*

Studies have shown that many professional women with higher education would like to get leadership responsibilities but they don't succeed in getting it. This happens, although organizations would gain by using all their human resources and the competence level of this group.

At the same time, statistics shows that most of the women who do become leaders are achieving lower management positions in hierarchic organizations and when they want to climb higher up they meet limitations that constrain them.

This phenomenon is called glass ceiling and is used to explain the strong transparent barrier that prevent women in achieving top management positions due to cultural and professional ballast that women and men take with them to the organizations in the form of their different sex-specified socialization such as different norms, values, behaviors and way of thinking⁷.

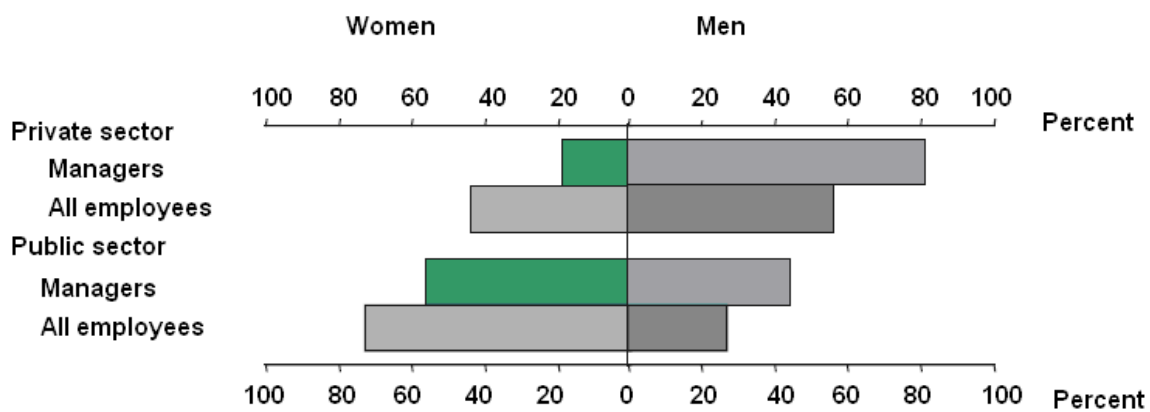


Figure 2.1 Gender distributions in private and public sector
Source: SCB, "på tal om kvinnor och män"2004

2.3. Why give women access to leadership?

Due to the necessity of quick adjustments to today's changes that many organizations need to adapt, it is very important to give women access to positions with bigger influence and decision making inside those systems. This is due to the following advantages that women in the western world have:

- High education and competence level that is unfortunately not being used enough.
- Women can bring new ideas and thoughts into the organizations – different brains think better than same ones.

⁷ Drake Irmelin & Solberge Anne Greth, *Kvinnor och Ledarskap, student litteratur 1996*

- Since women consume at least equally as men; If women could influence the process, customers would get better and more suitable products that are produced according to their demands and needs.
- Women's social capabilities are needed all over the organizations; this could strengthen the company's survival and efficiency. Employees would feel more motivated and enjoy working and consequently the human turnover would decrease⁸.

2.4. Reasons behind the problem/ Does gender matter?

It was already proven that the biological differences between women and men don't influence their abilities or capacity in the work life.

According to 24 female managers that were interviewed by Ruter dam, a feminine leader is quite similar to a masculine leader and she should act as following:

- She should be business oriented, reach the defined goals and show results in money.
- Should look at the whole picture.
- Should have good skills in human relations.

According to them she must like people, be able to motivate them, care for them, should be honest, should listen to her co-workers and her intuitions and have courage to stand for what she believes in⁹.

The interviewed women described their strong sides as following:

- 51% chose human relations and communications – they explained that they like people, they are flexible and down to earth, they see the importance in supporting and motivating their employees, they have a strong commitment and are good in communication.
- 31% chose efficiency and result orientation – characters as goal orientation, strong will and persistency were mentioned.
- 18% chose good capabilities and ability to look at the whole picture- they explained that they are very skilled, experienced and think logically and that they try to find the possibilities even in a problematic situation¹⁰.

The interviewed women described their weak sides as following:

- 50% chose efficiently – most of them think that sometimes they are too quick and impulsive and then their employees are not catching up in time or feel too pressed.

⁸ Drake Irmelin & Solberge Anne Greth, *Kvinnor och Ledarskap, student litteratur 1996*

⁹ Eva Molin, 2000, *Kvinnlig ledarskap: mina erfarenheter som chef*

¹⁰ Arhén, Gunnilla, Svenska Förlaget liv & ledarskap 1996, *Dagens kvinnliga chefer: Varken änglar eller häxor*

- 50% chose uncertainty in some situations – some can be uncertain when they need to handle an important decision and some feel like that when they need to integrate alone in a new group (Arhén 96).

However, there are still many that believe women don't have the right biological prerequisite to become leaders. These prejudices could remain standing until being proven wrong by increasing the share of female managers.

It is believed that women have fewer expectations in their possibilities to achieve their career goals than men with equal qualifications. From a study that was made in Norway by Asplund (1984) it was shown that women and men had the same amount of interest in career development but only 8% of the women believed that it was possible to do so while 70 % of the men thought about the possibilities.

Researches show that women have a tendency to explain their success with external circumstances rather than internal factors. They explain their good performance with the right circumstances rather than their own abilities. On the other hand, they explain their failures with their lack of abilities or efforts¹¹.

There are also differences in communication between the two sexes, and those can sometimes lead to misunderstandings or to see women as less determined:

- Men often decide the topic and the time of the discussion.
- Women ask 3 times more questions than men in a conversation.
- When women speak they often use question intonation as if they are waiting for an acceptance from their public.
- They often use question words at the end of a sentence.
- They often start a conversation with a question.
- Women use more filling words.
- Men seldom use encouraging questions.
- Men are consistently worse in listening and talk much more than women (Drake & Solberg 1996).

Another mistake that women, according to Gunilla Arhén make is to work too individually or ignore the unwritten rules of their organizations. When motivated, capable and educated women have problems at work, it's quite common for others to judge them as too goal-oriented and efficient because they try to show their abilities rather than to be part of the group and sometimes they even go beyond their managers and in that way break very important rules in their internal hierarchy (Arhén 1996).

2.5. Breaking through the glass ceiling

In this section a list of advice and suggestions given by different successful women is given. According to these professional female managers, these are some of the important actions that make the climbing easier for women.

¹¹Drake Irmelin & Solberge Anne Greth, *Kvinnor och Ledarskap, student litteratur 1996*

2.4.1. Self-confidence

Women normally undervalue their abilities and competence while men overvalue them. This could give less competent but highly confident men better opportunities to achieve top positions than the highly competent women. That's why it is very important that women strengthen their self-confidence in their abilities (Drake & Solberg 1996).

2.4.2. Clear visions

Since women normally underestimate their abilities and possibilities to be leaders, Drake and Solberg see visions as very important aspects in increasing motivation and chances of achieving leadership goals. When people have clearer visions, goals and expectations for the future they get motivated and have an internal driving-force and then their chances to turn it into action increase (Drake & Solberg 1996).

2.4.3. Equality at home

The way a partner takes part in the responsibilities and tasks at home is going hand in hand with the chances of his wife having a career combined with childcare and household tasks. It is much easier for women that have equality at home to succeed in their careers. And equality at home is easier to achieve when both the woman and the man have the same status, education level and positions in the work life (Drake & Solberg 1996).

All the ladies that were interviewed by Ruter Dam combine family and work. They chose secure partners who balance the responsibilities evenly. They live in stable relationships and have supporting networks that can help with the children when needed. Some use external cleaning services and some use a nanny (Arhén1996).

2.4.4. Presenting leadership characters:

In many cases character is the main selection aspect in management staffing. The following qualifications are often being searched for in leadership positions:

- Self-confidence
- Power-orientation
- Control-orientation
- Maturity
- Integrity
- Willingness for changes(Drake & Solberg 1996)

Women should work on developing their leadership characteristics and show them in their work or when applying for management positions.

2.4.5. Finding a suitable job

Studies show that women don't use informal recruitment channels to get a new job as much as men do. At the same time it was proven that this form of recruitment is the most effective way to look for employment. These informal channels are for example employers, colleagues, friends, family and other contacts. This situation could be caused by lack of a contact-network, low self-esteem, unawareness of the possibilities of the informal ways etc.

The solutions for a successful job-search according to Drake and Solberg are usage of the following 3 strategies:

- Shoot and miss strategy: This is the most common job-strategy of the three, you respond to the job ads or you contact the employment service agencies. This is quite a limited and passive way to choose as up to 50% of the recruitments are done informally and many of the best jobs are never advertised.
- Sender- strategy: you send your CV to potential employers with a hope that this would interest them in you or you inform your friends and family on your quest for a new job.
- Laser strategy: This is the most focused strategy. You aim your efforts to selected companies. First you choose the organizations were you could really see yourself working in and then you give your complete energy, patience and creativity for these chosen companies. In this way you take the full control of the job-process and here you have the chance to find a job were you really going to fit in and enjoy working in.(Drake & Solberg 1996)

When asking about how they got their first job, the Ruter Dam interviewees answered as following:

- 15 of 24 answered that they searched actively and purposefully for a job without any help of contacts – normally by answering the job ads. They were very persistent and didn't give up even when the job market was at its down side.
- 9 of 24 answered that they got help from their contacts and references –some got their first job through their practice companies, others consciously built their own network of contacts at their universities or the companies where they worked in the summers (Arhén1996).

2.4.6. Choosing the right education

The education choices of the 24 female managers that were interviewed by Ruter dam were quite unconventional; they all studied Mathematics, science or technique in high school. Afterwards 18 studied at technical or computer-science universities or colleges, 3 studied Business Administration and Economics, 1 studied law and 1 Personal administration. Only 1 started working directly after high school graduations (Arhén1996). Although almost all of the 24 women got married early and many were pregnant during their studies, they graduated as planned even if they didn't get the best grades in the finals. This shows that this group of women are talented, motivated and goal oriented.

2.4.7. Having the right manager

Most of the interviewed women in (20 of 24) in Gunilla Arhén's book stated that they were supported by their managers and most of them felt freedom at their work. Many of them had managers that gave good feedback on their performance in front of upper managers and co-workers.

15 of them explained that their bosses were their mentors and helped them develop themselves both personally and professionally.

The other 4 women stated that they didn't have good managers but they got along fine in their working place since they got the freedom to develop themselves, as they wanted (Arhén1996).

3. Conceptual Framework

In this chapter we have focused on the information that we think are most relevant to our main goal of this essay. We have chosen and organised the information from the literature that were presented in chapter 2 in order to fulfil the primary objective of our essay.

3.1. Introduction to our Conceptual Framework

The Conceptual Framework is something that explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied¹². We will start by presenting a version of the map of those parts from the reviewed literature that is being investigated. This way we specifically point out what will be studied.

In order to be able to analyze the problems that cause the low proportion of women in senior positions, we will start by outlining the main categories that directly contribute to this issue. As it was mentioned earlier the number of factors responsible for the problem are countless, but we have chosen the most important ones to examine. Based on the reviewed literature, obstacles that exist on women's way to top can be categorized into four groups: Family, Culture, Organisations, and Internal factors. We will be using this model to organize our plan to research and come up with the cure to resolve or minimize these barriers.

3.2. Family

Based on the reviewed literature, family can be a huge factor on women's success. Being married and having children can be seen as an asset for a male manager but can be seen as a disadvantage for a woman¹³. The complications of family life, and responsibilities that childcare consist all play a big role in preventing women to go further along their career road. We will be examining the existence of this issue by looking at the life of both the female managers as well as working women who have difficulty getting to the top.

3.3. Culture

Culture plays an important role in forming a social problem. Cultural obstacles influence how women and men feel, think and what their thoughts contain. The perceptions and stereotyped roles that exist in the society can be partially blamed for the problem. For example if there are women in the senior position's offices, it is automatically assumed that they are either the secretary or the president's girl friends¹⁴. Another example it is often assumed that men are better leaders than women.

3.4. Organizations

In the discussion of gender distribution in top level, the organizational effects cannot be ignored. Factors such as organisations structure, culture, and power relation can distribute to the lack of women's presence in leading titles. The situation in the organisations is not usually judged and questioned and many researchers look for answers to the uneven gender

¹² Miles, M.B. & Huberman, M.A 1994, Qualitative Data Analysis: An expanded source book.

¹³ SOU 1994:3 *Mäns föreställningar om kvinnor och chefskap*

¹⁴ SOU 1994:3

distribution only in women themselves and how they should function¹⁵. In this study we want to see if organisational barriers are experienced by different women: barriers such as: discriminating issues, organisational glass ceiling, etc.

3.5. Internal factors

Many suggest that the women themselves can cause the low representation in the senior positions. Reasons such as: lack of interest, improper education, not enough experience, lack of confidence, etc. can all be examples of this area of focus. As a result the solutions that these theory materials often recommend is how women should prepare themselves before entering to the leadership roles and to correct their deficiencies.

We would also like to find out how women themselves explain and understand their abilities and how they look at their capabilities. And also the solutions that they think can be applied to these issues are examined.

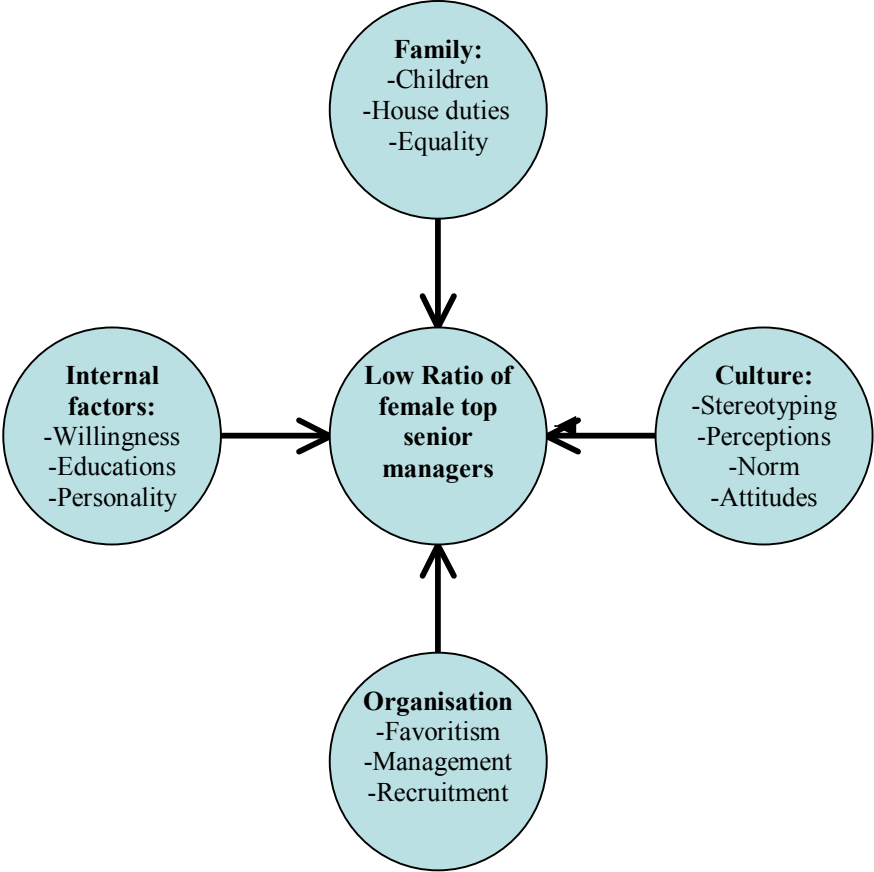


Figure 3.1 Contributing factors diagram

Source: author's own graph

¹⁵ SOU 1994:3

4. Methodology

This chapter we will describe how we have collected data in order to find the answers to the research questions and to fulfil the goal of the essay. This part starts with a review of methods of research. It moves on by a quick explanation of our selection of the research method. This is followed by the assessment of the data collection and sample collection respectively. In the last part the analytical strategy is presented.

4.1. Methods of research

Studies can be categorized into two main groups: qualitative and quantitative research.

In qualitative research, the results are based on non-quantifiable data. The qualitative research is also characterised by closeness to the studied object. The researcher wants to get massive information from a limited number of research items. The researchers are therefore not aiming to generalise. They tend to get a deeper understanding of the studied area. Similar to all other methods, qualitative approach has benefits and constrains and it has been subject to many critics compared to quantitative approach. Researchers who use the qualitative approach often have to legitimate their choice of method; and this can disturb and overshadow the discussion of the result from the research.¹⁶

Questions that start with: who, how, why and in what way, assume the use of qualitative approach. Answers to these questions are expressed in words and sentences and not in numbers. Gender, marital status, education and type of work are examples of different variables of this approach. The data collection that should be use to find out answers to these types of questions are; interviews, questionnaires with optional answer possibilities and also active observation.¹⁷

In quantitative research, the conclusions are based on data that can be quantified. This type of research is characterised by distance and selection. It means that a limited amount of information is gathered from many research units using systematic and structured observations (Holm & Solvang 1997).

Quantitative questions often start with: how much, how many, how often.

Some of the questions on our questionnaires are quantitative and some are qualitative. But the majority of the questions are of a qualitative kind.

¹⁶ Holm, I., & Solvang, B., 1997, *Forskningsmetodik, om kvantitativa och kvalitativa metoder*

¹⁷ Nyberg, R. (1999) *skriv vetenskapliga uppsatser och avhandlingar*

4.2. Selection of the research approach

The selection of approach should be based on the purpose of the study. We wanted to get a closer contact with the subject of our study in order to obtain an in-depth understanding of the studied area. In addition, the questions that we intended to ask were more of a qualitative kind. However, there are some questions like age and length of employment that are answered in numbers and are quantitative. But the majority of the questions on our questionnaires as well as our interviews are more of the qualitative nature.

We were also interested to assess the respondents' personal understanding and opinion about the low ratio of women in top positions that are based on the previous discussion a qualitative approach. So, we chose the qualitative approach to conduct our study.

4.3. Deductive vs. Inductive reasoning

There are two methods of logic used to arrive at a conclusion based on information assumed to be true: Deductive reasoning and Inductive reasoning.

Deductive reasoning is reasoning that involves a hierarchy of statements or truths. Starting with a limited number of simple statements or assumptions, more complex statements can be built up from the more basic ones. Deduction is in some sense the direct application of knowledge in the production of new knowledge.

Inductive reasoning progresses from observations of individual cases to the development of a generality. It is the process by which a general conclusion is reached from evaluating specific observations or situations. This is the kind of reasoning used if you have gradually built up an understanding of how something works. Rather than starting with laws and principles and making deductions, most people collect relevant experience and try to construct principles from it¹⁸.

In this essay our argument is based on some existing theory and by examination of the previous experiences and observations we aim to improve the information about the subject of the essay. Therefore our study is considered to be an inductive research.

4.4. Data collection

In order to collect data for our study we have chosen to use interviews and questionnaires.

4.4.1. Interviews

Performing interviews are not as simple as they might seem. They require proper preparation and planning. Examples of the preparations are: creating questions, choosing the right source and arranging the place to conduct the interview. The notes should be written down during the course of the interview or right after. Voice recording is a standard method for capturing the

¹⁸ <http://www.nakedscience.org/skyline/Deductive%20and%20Inductive%20Reasoning.htm> 2005-12-19

data and it provides a permanent and complete documentation of what was said during the interview¹⁹.

The purpose with the qualitative interviews should be to increase the value of the information and also to create a deeper and a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon that is being studied (Holm & Solvang 1997). So the personal interviews are the appropriate choice of data collection when you need to get detailed information from a limited number of people. We wanted to attempt to look at the topic of our study from the viewpoints of the interviewed individuals. We were interested in attaining a picture of the situation based on real successful women's life experiences.

There are many advantages to use personal interviews as well. You can ask detailed questions and follow up on that. It is also possible to take advantage of the body language for a much clearer answer. You can get spontaneous answers to your questions. These spontaneous answers are valuable for questions that concern attitudes and personalities.

There are disadvantages as well. It can sometimes be difficult to ask questions about sensitive issues if the interviewee will not be anonymous. It is important for an interviewer to be aware that his/her presence can have a diverse affect on the interviewee. It means that some kind of cooperation happens between the interviewer and the interviewee and this can influence the results of the interview in an unwanted way²⁰. The interviewee often gives the answer that the interviewer wants to hear. Another problem that should be considered when creating the questions is that the results of the interview can be biased if the questions are poorly constructed.

Having in mind all the positives and negatives that there are to performing personal interviews, we decided to possibly arrange interviews with a few top female managers. After lots of efforts and countless requests by emails and telephones all over the Swedish business world we managed to get interviews with four senior managers from different Swedish organisations that were interested in helping us since the first contact.

4.4.2. Questionnaires

Another useful method that is used to collect the necessary information is questionnaires. This kind of data collection is especially helpful when you want to reach a large number of respondents.

In order to get a wide range of results, we decided to create two different kinds of questionnaires. Both the successful career women and the regular female employees of different Swedish organisations will be answering the questionnaire. This will help us cross examine our theory information to come up with concrete results. The questionnaires are basically identical to each other; the questions ask about similar issues and topics, however they are worded differently since they are directed toward different groups of respondents. In addition to sending some of the forms to different people, we have given the option of filling out an electronic questionnaires that can be exchanged on the Internet. The electronic exchange of material is a great tool to expand the number of respondents since it's much

¹⁹ Denscombe, M., 2000, *Forskningshandboken*

²⁰ Eriksson, L-T, & Wiederheim, P., 1999, *Att utreda, forska och rapportera*

easier to answer the questions and it's faster to both send and receive information on the Internet.

4.5. Sample selection

Two questions often arise when deciding on sample selection in different studies: what size should a proper sample be? And how the sample should be selected?

It's hard to decide how many people should be considered when conducting an empirical research. Statistically, the larger the sample is, the less likely it is that the results would deviate from the reality. Therefore, by increasing the number of respondents the risk for errors can be lowered. Capturing information from large population is both money and time consuming and it is beyond our abilities in this research. Since we have restricted resources and limited amount of time, a good question for us can be that how big of a sample is good enough to reach some reasonable results. After a discussion with our essay advisor, we came to the conclusion to perform interview with 4 to 5 female top managers, and to have around 40 respondents answering the questionnaires.

How the samples are selected is directly related to our research goals and objectives. We want to find out why there are so few top female leaders in Swedish organisations; therefore, our primary target group is women. To gain a sharper view on the issue, we decided to perform interview with random selection of the top managers.

As it was mentioned in section 4.3.2 we sent the survey two categories of women: Those who already achieved their role as managers and those who have none-managerial positions.

4.6. Creating a strategic plan

Since the goal of this essay is to provide a strategic plan as guidelines for young women to climb the stairs of success, a short presentation of the structure of a business plan is reviewed in the following discussion.

4.6.1. Vision

The first step to building a strategic plan is creating a vision. A vision is the optimal future image of the organization or the individual. It should contain how we would like to portray the development. Visions are a way to formulize our goals and make us motivated in achieving them – to get active and creative, to change our daily routines and find new solutions that would help us achieve our dream picture of the future²¹.

To shape our vision we should review our current position or situation and we should also look at our values and principles and to use them in order to form a clear picture of where we would like to see ourselves in the future (Strategi 2004)

²¹ Göran Roos, Georg Von Krogh, Johan Roos 2004, *Strategi- en introduktion*

4.6.2. Goals

The Specifications and operation of the vision - should be formulated in order to help us choose which directions to take.

The formulated goals should be as concrete as possible so that they could be used as the initial steps for a real evaluation of the strategic decision alternatives. We could use both short-term and long-term goals.

We need also to define the milestones and the time-plan for those goals to be reached (Strategi 2004).

4.6.3. SWOT analysis

In order to build an effective strategic plan we would need to examine our current situation and position. This could be done with a help of a SWOT analysis.

We should examine the internal factors of us individuals: our strengths and weaknesses. What we are good in and should retain and what are our weak sides that we should develop.

Afterwards, we would need to consider the external factors that could help us or constrain us in achieving our goals. This could be done by considering the opportunities and threats that we are facing or going to face while following our strategic plan (strategi 2004).

5. Empirics

In this chapter the collected empirical data will be presented. Our empirical study contains four personal interviews and a survey study of X number of female managers and Y number of non-manager employed females. The result of each part of the study is outlined in separate sections.

5.1. Interview with Madeleine Ruakas (SAS Ground Services)

Madeleine Ruakas is a pleasant 38 year old manager who has been the CEO of the SAS ground services since April 2001. We had a long and informative meeting with her on December 12, 2005 at 14:00. The meeting took place in a meeting room in her work place. During the interview we had no interruptions and it continued for one hour. She willingly talked about her past experiences and provided us with her valuable advice. As soon as we started asking the questions we noticed her strong communication and social skills. The meeting was conducted in Swedish and the following parts present our own understanding of different issues that we discussed with her. Therefore the sentences might not be the exact translations of her answers.

a) Family aspects

Our respondent is married with no children. She described her husband as very helpful and supportive at home. Based on her answers she felt no pressure or additional stress that caused blockage on her career from household responsibilities.

She mentioned that she works long hours, from early in the morning until late afternoon. According to our respondent, issues within families can create complications for women to be successful at work; She thought that it can be hard for women to combine the responsibility of children and being a top manager. She thought that the structure of family and the partners' area of rights and responsibilities should be clearly outlined between couples in order for them to be supportive and helpful to each other.

b) Cultural aspect

In answering to few questions, the respondent mentioned cultural values and norms as problematic for women. She said that women are still subject to some stereotyped roles. She said that men often feel awkward about staying at home for a long time to be their children's caregivers due to the cultural pressures from male colleagues. And also women are the ones taking the mother role automatically, even if it means less income for the family. Based on our understanding of the respondent she felt that the age as problem for young female leaders. She said that it is assumed in the society as a norm that women in their twenties or thirties are supposed to be "mothers" and it's somehow an unusual role for a woman to be a successful manager at this age.

c) Organisational barriers

The respondent did not think that organisational barriers have ever been an issue for her during her career. She said that she, personally, has never experienced any kind of discriminations in her workplace due to her gender. She said that even though the statistics say that there are difficulties for women in the organisations, the awareness of the issue has helped to resolve the problem slowly.

“...the glass ceiling exists but it’s moving upward slowly but surely. There are now many women in the board of directors in the organisations...”

The respondent also felt that since organisation are now aware of the existing gender issues, they consciously make decisions and attempts to equally distribute power between men and women.

d) Internal factors

Madeleine described herself as quick thinker and spontaneous. She also said that she has a passion for running a business. She said that being fast and spontaneous in her thoughts have been both good and bad. Good in a way that she is initiative and responds quickly but bad in a way that her decisions are not always thoroughly analyzed. She also considers herself a self-confident and highly communicative leader. Her monthly performance evaluations with her employees have helped her to improve the overall performance of the organisations. The fact that she could both give and get feedbacks from her employees has strengthened her coaching abilities in her leadership role. She thinks it is very important for women to have a clear communication with those who work with them.

e) Madeleine’s advice

Madeleine repeatedly used stairs to describe the path to a successful career. She said the women should have feasible goals and dare to take small steps toward reaching their ultimate goals. She feels that every step of the way gives motivation, experience and courage to take on further responsibilities and larger goals. If you don’t succeed at once you take another step and you try again. It would also create and strengthen the level of one’s confidence. But taking huge steps at the beginning would cause big disappointments and total loss of confidence in case of a fall.

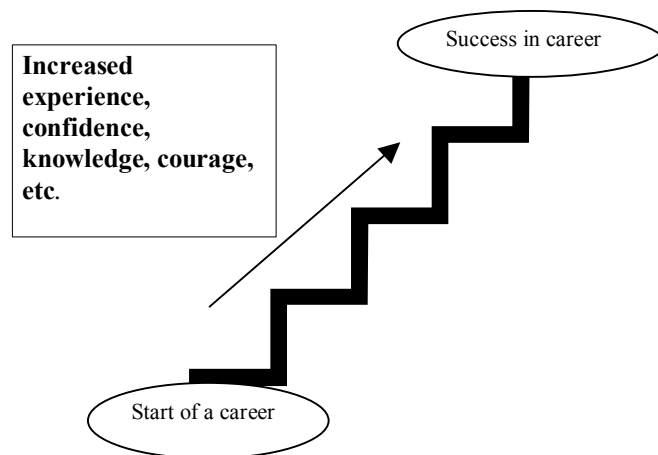


Figure 5.1 Madeleine's career model
 Source: authors' own graph based on the interview
 2005-12-05

Our respondent thinks that women should first try to enter the job market and take the best available employment to get their feet inside the work force. As they go further along the career path, they should then try to find what exactly suits them and make sure that they are surrounded with the right people. They should keep a strong network of friends and contacts as having a good chain of contacts is essential for finding the right job. Women should dare to take new challenges and always push themselves to the limit. This way they would gain valuable knowledge and experience. To achieve the best work opportunities in the job market, women should work on their marketing abilities. In other words, they should be able to present themselves in the best way they could in this competitive world. Women are often hardworking and ambitious, but if they are not visible in the job market, then nobody would notice their presence and therefore their qualifications get lost.

5.2. Interview with Marianne Hamilton (Atlas Copco AB)

Marianne Hamilton is a professional 58 manager who has been the senior vice president of Atlas Copco AB for 14 years. She holds a bachelor of science and got promoted as a manger only after a year of working in Atlas Copco. We had a half an hour interview with her in the Atlas Copco AB's building in a meeting room on December 12, at 10:00. There were no interruptions during the conduction of the interview. We went through all the interview questions²² and she gave us some straightforward answers that will be presented in the following discussion. As it was mentioned earlier, the answers are our own understanding of her words and they are not her exact sentences.

²² See appendix C, Interview guide

a) Family aspects

Our respondent is divorced and has a 28-year-old son. She lives alone at the moment and she has cleaning services at home. She did not mention the family or household responsibilities as an obvious obstacle in any of her answers. Our respondent took six months of maternity leave at the time she had her son and returned to work after that.

b) Cultural aspects

Our respondent thought that men could be better suited to the leadership positions theoretically. According to her answers, men tend to be interested in moving forward in their career and women tend to spend time to understand and to identify with their surroundings. Marianne's answers could be interpreted in a way that she thinks that men can be better leaders. She thinks that men don't need to be paid attention to or noticed as much as women do. That is the reasons why women tend to be less interested in managerial position where focused and performance-oriented individuals are needed.

c) Organizational barriers

Our respondent explained that she never felt any barriers on her way because of her gender. However she mentioned feeling like the minority group as a woman but she also said that not having so many female colleagues has not been bothersome in her career.

"...you feel more alone as a woman..."

Our respondent's reply to our feed back question was that she never got enough feed back from her managers in her employment and it has often been her co-workers who have provided her with feed backs on her performance. She has not had a good counselor who has helped her through her career. She has always been the one who has taken the initiative to search her way toward her goals.

d) Internal factors

Marianne thinks that it's mainly the internal factors that cause women to get lost somewhere in their way to the top. She explained the women's characteristics from her point of view. She thinks that leadership positions often require a person to willingly contribute and have a sense of moving forward. Women often miss these qualifications, which lead them to have fewer jobs in the top managerial positions. She describes her own personality as "*visionary*" and "*good as a leader*" and "*friendly*". She said that she goes after what she believes in and she does not doubt her abilities. This quality makes her self confident, she knows what she does is within her area of capabilities.

Marianne also talked about her interests in philosophical writing and her ideas about life.

e) Marianne's advice

According to our respondent, women should start at a young age to follow their dreams. Women should be honest to themselves and know what they want out of life. Our respondent also thinks that not being successful in career does not necessarily mean that you are not a winner. If you are successful at what your passion is in life you are a winner.

Our respondent thinks that women should be fully responsible for outcomes in life. They should not focus on blaming the surroundings, but instead they should do what they can to resolve the problems.

“...the only thing that you really can manage is yourself..”

She thinks that relying too much on external support would result in loss of self confidence.

5.3. Interview with Karin Pihlgren (Lernia AB)

Karin Pihlgren is an experienced 47-year-old manager who has been the director of education in Lernia AB for three months. In spite of her short stay in Lernia she has a lot of valuable knowledge and expertise in leadership. We visited her on December 19, 2005 in her office and had a 45-minute informative and interesting talk with her.

Karin's career background is very diverse and broad. She has worked in many different branches and this has helped her gain great experience on her career path. She has started her career in daycare centers for 12 years where she has been in many different positions. Karin's passion for taking new roles and new challenges resulted in changing a career from day care to retail stores and IT section and educational organizations. She has worked for Åhlen's, H&M, Oracle University and other places where she has been holding managerial roles in different departments.

Karin thinks that her work within the daycare sector has been her best leadership training and a good platform for her to gather valuable experience in management and problem solving techniques.

a) Family aspects

Karin is married and has two children grown up children. She said that it has often been her who has been responsible for taking care of the household and the children.

Based on our respondent, taking care of family life and being a top manager can be difficult to handle in today's society. She explained that having children could create complications for women in a sense that most top leadership roles unfortunately require full dedication with no room for absence from the job. She also mentioned that it is even difficult for male top managers to have time to spend with their families. Based on our respondent, however, being a mother and managing a family is the best training that a woman can get. Motherhood provides women tasks and skills that are valuable and very useful for leading roles. In order to utilize these skills, the importance of family life and children should be integrated with top managerial positions in organizations to make it easier for women to get to higher level.

b) Cultural factors

Our respondent thinks that culture surrounding women as top managers should change. As it was mentioned in 5.3.1, it has been accepted in today's society that being a top manager means a total dedication to the job with no possibilities for other priorities in life. According to her, it's a *“take it or leave it”* condition in the society as far as the senior positions are concerned.

Our respondent also believes that another cultural factor is that women do not bother to look after each other in the organizations.

“... when women get to the top they close the doors after them.. ”

She thinks that her hard work and willingness have contributed to her success and not many of her managers helped her during her career. Karin believes that a secure and professional manager should help her employees to grow and to expand their abilities. Karin's passion in her work is to see others learn and develop.

c) Organizational barriers

According to our respondent, she has worked harder to get to the top because of her gender. She thinks it's often harder for women to show what they are capable of doing and no one takes them for granted.

“You have to prove yourself more than once!”

Karin feels that the glass ceiling does exist in organizations and those few female leaders that do exist have had to adopt manly characteristics in order to survive in the male dominated culture of the senior positions.

Our respondent does not think that men are better than women in leadership. She thinks that women have split visions and men are more focused and good in project leadership. Therefore a combination of diverse skills of men and women provides the best achievement.

Our respondent mentioned the importance of feedback for those in start of a career, but also explained that it should not be expected in managerial roles to get “clap on a shoulder” for every little result. The higher the position, the less feed back that an employee receives. She feels that the most appreciative feed back for a manager is from the employees and how they feel about her.

d) Internal factors

Our respondent describes her personality as “*self driven*”, “*not after prestige*”, “*passionate to see others grow*” and “*a bit stubborn so I don't give up*”. She also considers herself, confident and goal oriented.

Karin's forgiving side and her common sense are qualities that she has learned from her strong grandmother who has been her adviser from early childhood.

Another important ability in Karin's leadership is her experience in different cultures. During her years of working in international assignments she has familiarized herself with different management styles and how different cultures affect the leadership in organizations.

Karin also mentioned that in a managerial profession you should be fully aware of what you should do and what you should not do. A manager cannot be a friend with everyone in the organization and a good manager must also do what it takes to show good results.

e) Karin's advice

Karin thinks that women should follow their intuitions. They should have an interest and a passion for being a leader as well as the content of the work itself in order to be successful. They also have to have courage to do new things.

She also emphasized the importance of having a good network of both male and female contacts. Being with other females can help women to overcome their problems by learning and discussing issues. Our respondent feels that it's important that women mirror themselves

in others. By talking to others in the same situation women often take down their guards and can see possibilities.

5.4 Interview with Ulla Engström (Lernia AB)

Ulla Engström is a 61-year-old manager and a director of Lernia AB's development division. Her positive energy along with her great sense of humour made our interview a pleasant experience. We visited her on December 19, 2005 in a meeting room in her company. She told us about her career and past experiences as a woman who have been in the work force for a long time. Ulla has been married for over 30 years and has a 25 years old son. She has been working in Lernia in two occasions for a total of 28 years.

a) Family aspect

The respondent thinks that due to the responsibilities of taking care of a family, women have less time to build a strong network of friends and contacts. A good chain of contacts is an absolute must for women to get promotions and find suitable jobs.

Ulla feels that her husband has been really helpful and supportive in helping her raising their son during her early years of career.

b) Organizational barriers

According to the respondent's answer there is definitely a glass ceiling in organizations. The higher the position the harder it is for women to get to the top. She even pointed out that there have been 3 women verses 5 men in their top management team in her organization. She believes that it's often seen as a problem if there are groups of women responsible for an assignment whereas it's completely natural for men to work in groups without any female colleagues.

Ulla feels that women must be unbelievably smart to be able to climb the ladder of success in the organizations. According to her answers she did not have a helping manager or any adviser who helped her early in her career. But in the last 10 years of her work she has had good and secure colleagues who have given her valuable feedbacks.

c) Cultural aspects

Our respondent feels that one of the reasons men can be considered better leaders is that they are more direct and clear in what they say. Men often send clear messages that is heard and seen by others and it's often easy to grasp their ideas. In contrast women tend to go around the bush and say too many words and as a result an unclear direction. That is why men are better understood by surroundings than women. Men don't involve emotions with their work and try to keep a distance from the employees. They often don't get too close with employees and this is a positive quality for a senior top managers. For instance, it's often best for the objective of the whole company to layoff certain employees and women have a hard time making these decisions because of the bond they form with employees.

Ulla also thinks that it's important for female managers to keep their femininity. She said that female managers often tend to act like men to be accepted in the senior positions. She feels

that it's a wrong norm that has to be changed. Women should be women in their leadership roles.

d) Internal factors

Ulla describes herself as very initiative with a strong motive and passion for trying new and creative ideas. She says that honesty and professionalism are two of her great qualities. The respondent feels that one of the weak sides of women is that they make unnecessary comments on everything in an organisation instead of focusing on the job and trying to be professional.

As a manager, Ulla thinks that it's vital for managers to share their experience and knowledge with others and let them grow. She feels totally secure and does not feel threatened by letting others learn and expand.

e) Ulla's advice

Ulla believes that women should be themselves, they should be professional and they should dare to have their own opinions and believe that they are capable of doing things. They should not be scared to challenge innovative ideas. She said that women have a lot to offer in the organizations and some of the best people that she has met in her life are actually women. A strong contact network is also necessary to find suitable jobs, according to Ulla. The respondent's last comment was that women should not forget their home and family. They should separate work and family and have adequate attention to both of them in order to have balance in life.

5.5. Results of the survey

As it was mentioned earlier our questionnaires were answered by two groups of women: 15 female managers, 25 non-manager female employees.

The result of the survey is presented in following two sections.

5.5.1. Female managers' survey

The following list is the statistical data of the survey (our sample size was 15)

- 1 60% of them work in companies that have more than 500 employees, 27% work in companies with 100-500 employees and the rest 13% work in organisations with 11-50 employees.
- 2 The positions of the female leaders that answered on our questioner are as following: 34% are unit managers, 33% are department managers, 13% are country managers or vice presidents and 20% are CEOs.
- 3 Most of women (53%) that answered on our questioner are in their 40s, 27% are in their 30s, 7% are in their 20s and the rest (13%) are in their 50s.
- 4 73% of the respondents have a Bachelor of Art degree (BA), 13% have a Bachelor of Science degree, 7% have high school education and 7% other qualified higher education.

a) Family

All of our respondents who live with a partner said that they have equality at home and their partners take a big share of responsibility at home. In addition, 53% of the women that answered on the questioner mentioned that they use external cleaning services or have a nanny.

80% of the respondents have children. 50% of them have 1 child, 33% have 2 children and 17% have 3 children. The ages of the children vary:

- 33% of the children are between 12-15 years old.
- 17% are over than 20 years old.
- 11% are at the ages 16-20.
- 17% are at the ages 0-2.
- 11% of the children are 6-10 year old.
- 11% are at the ages of 3-5.

In addition, most of the female managers that answered our questioner are married (60%), 13% are divorced, 20% are in common-law relations and 7% are single.

b) Culture

Only 11% answered that they think that men can be better leaders in some aspects:

- They have a better contact-net
- They are more supportive with each other
- There are more male roll-models that they can refer to
- They are less emotional
- They have fewer responsibilities in their families than women do

c) Organisations

- 80% of them women said that they had supportive bosses that pep them up in their careers.
- 47% had a mentor that helped them with their career goals.
- 69% used their contact net in order to get better jobs. 8% used their contacts in some cases and 23% didn't have a contact net that helped them progress in their careers.
- 40% wrote that they got good feedbacks from their managers, 33% got good feedbacks in some cases and 27% didn't get good feedbacks from their bosses.

d) Internal factors

When asking about their personalities:

- 87% wrote that they have a good self-confidence
- 87% wrote that they are goal-oriented, initiative, communicative and social.
- 67% wrote that they are willing.
- 7% wrote that they are positive.

Concerning further career ambitions:

- 47% would definitely like to get a higher position
- 38% could consider getting a higher position
- 15% are not interested in a higher position.

In responding to career obstacles, 45% felt that the obstacles in their careers were due to resistance at work, 33% explained them with internal factors and 11% saw age as an important factor and the rest 11% had other explanations.

e) Recommendations

We good many good advices that could help young motivated women to succeed in their careers, the main ones are as following:

- Avoid bad managers and stick to good ones.
- Choose a supportive and equal partner
- Ask for help when needed both at work and at home.
- Women should deliver results and make them shown
- Believe in yourself.
- Do what that interests you
- Be Goal oriented
- Work hard
- Get a mentor
- Build a contact net
- Don't forget to have children
- Take chances
- Ask for feedback
- Get a good balance in life.

5.5.2. Female employees' survey

The following list is the statistical data of the survey:

1. 8% of respondents work in companies with more than 500 employees, 40% work in companies with 100-500 employees and 32% work in organisations with 11-50 employees and 16% work in companies with 1-10 employees.
2. 20% of respondents are in their 20s, 52% are in their 30s and 24% are in their 40s and 4% in their 50s.
3. 36% of the respondents have a Bachelor of Art degree (BA), 24% have a Bachelor of Science degree, 20% have Master of Art degree and 20% other qualified higher education.

a) Family

58% of our respondents who live with a partner said that they have equality at home and that their partners take a big share of responsibility at home. In addition, only 12% of the women that answered on the questioner mentioned that they use external cleaning services or have a nanny.

79% of the respondents have children. 26% of them have 1 child, 58% have 2 children and 11% have 3 children and 5% have 4 children. The ages of the children vary:

- 15% are from 0-2 years of age
- 15% are from 3-5 years of age
- 47% are from 6-10 years of age
- 10% are from 12-15 years of age
- 13% are from 16-20 years of age

In addition, most of the respondents (74%) are married, 16% are single, 10% are in common-law relations.

b) Culture

A surprising 56% thinks that men can be better leaders in some aspects:

- They have a better contact-net
- They are less emotional
- They have fewer responsibilities in their families than women do
- They are more supportive of each other

c) Organisations

- 24% of women said that they have supportive bosses that pep them up in their careers.
- 32% had a mentor that helped them with their career goals.
- 36% used their contact net in order to get better jobs. The remaining portion (64%) do not have a contact network that helps them progress in their careers.
- 44% wrote that they get good feedbacks from their managers, 4% get good feedbacks in some cases and 40% do not get good feedbacks from their bosses.

d) Internal factors

When asking about their personalities:

- 56% wrote that they have a good self-confidence
- 28% wrote that they are goal-oriented.
- 36% wrote that they are initiative.
- 76% wrote that they are social.
- 40% wrote that they are willing.
- 52% wrote that they are communicative.

Concerning further career ambitions:

- 44% would definitely like to get a higher position

- 36% are not sure if they want to get a higher position
- 20% are not interested in a higher position.

In responding to career obstacles, 28% chose education as the main obstacle, 18% felt that resistance at work prevent them from improving, 21% explained complications with internal factors, 4% chose lack of interest and age as reasons, and 18% felt that there are other obstacles that contribute to the problem and 7 % of the 18% wrote that they give their family and children priority.

6 Analysis

In this chapter the collected empirical data will be compared to the theory that was previously outlined in chapter 2 and summarized in our conceptual framework in chapter 3. We will look at the results from our interviews and survey to approve or to disapprove the existing theory about the subject of this essay.

6.1 The effect of family and culture on career?

Our interviews and questionnaires' answers revealed that family and culture go hand in hand and influence the possibilities that young women have in achieving top-management positions.

According to our research, building a good contact network and the ability to promote yourself in the job market are two vital tools to get to the top and ideal jobs. These two factors require a strong social life where you can form a network with friends, co-workers and relatives. Women, in many cases, still take the core responsibilities at home and are still subject to stereotypes regarding their roles at home and at work. As a result they often do not have enough time to spend on their social life and to interact with people. They often miss a good contact network and are unable to show to the outside world what they are capable of.

However, an interesting point is the way family and career can go in parallel ways- although there may be a common stereotype in our western culture that claims that most of the female managers don't have children, we were surprised to find out that 80% of the managers that answered our questionnaires had indeed children and this result does not noticeably deviate from the regular employees results (79%). However, all the managers who live with a partner have equality at home. It means that all the work surrounding household and children is divided evenly between the partners. This was obviously different from the result of regular employees with 63% equality in their relationships. Therefore, it can be said that a helpful partner plays an important role in going further along the career.

Based on the research, women often have fewer expectations in their career and lower self-esteem in achieving their career goals and this makes it even more difficult for them to get to management positions. In our study we saw that 44% of the female employees would certainly like to get higher positions but they feel that internal and external obstacles make it difficult to accomplish. In addition, it was quite surprising to see the differences between the regular employees and the female managers concerning their opinions on gender and leadership- 56% of the female employees thinks that men can be better leaders in some aspects but only 11% of the managers answered yes to the same question. These results show that there is still a wrong myth among women that "men are better leaders than women" and only those who have achieved success in their career know that it's not true. Therefore, there is still a lot to be done to change existing norms within the leadership culture.

6.2 How can organizational factor play role in women's success?

From our study we learned that there is definitely a glass ceiling that is preventing many high educated and motivated women in climbing up to the top in the career ladder, although this barrier is moving upwards with the time. Most of our respondents felt that it is more challenging for females to fight their way through the organizational obstacles compared to the male colleagues.

One of the important elements for success, according to our study, is having a good manager that supports your ambitions, gives good feedback and advice on your current situation and motivates you to move forward towards your goals and dreams. 80% of the female managers answered that they had supportive bosses who encouraged them in their careers, in a contrary to 21% of the other working women. In addition, much of the advice that we got both through the interviews and questionnaires implicate that, women should avoid bad managers and stick to supportive managers or coaches who could advise her along the way.

As it was mentioned earlier a key factor in career development is the implementation of a strong contact network. This act is indeed very efficient in getting interesting and suitable positions and developing inside the organisation hierarchy. In our study we saw that about 69% of the managers used contacts to achieve their career goals, that comparing to 36% of the regular female employees.

6.3 How important are internal factors in achieving success?

We noticed that a University degree with main working-related majors is very important in getting a career and it can increase your chances of promotions– although it is absolutely wrong to think that a good educational level is a grantee to success. Our survey revealed that there are many educated females that do not work in high positions in spite of their interest in becoming managers.

Concerning personality aspects, according to our study, the main distinguishing qualifications that are important to have and/or to develop if you would like to become a leader are: goal-orientation, initiation and self-confidence.

According to our respondents, having clear goals, believing in yourself and your abilities, taking challenges and promoting and marketing your abilities and results are very important steps that young women should take if they have career goals.

6.4 The strategic plan

As it was mentioned in an earlier chapter (chapter 4.6.), a strategic plan is created through the recognition of “Vision” and “SWOT analysis”. In the following discussion a strategic plan is formed based on these pointed foundations.

6.4.1 Vision

Our vision is “To be a top manager”. This vision should be developed individually and should include elements as what branch, what company and what kind of a professional manager each individual is interested in becoming.

For example – you could have a vision of becoming the HR director of a telecommunication company or a financial director for an international medical concern.

6.4.2 SWOT analysis

The general strengths of women are:

- Good Education
- Effective performance
- Social and friendly personality
- Good Skills in handling conflict, negotiations and creative solutions as a result of family training

The general weaknesses of women are:

- Lack of a contact network
- Lack of equality at home
- weak marketing skills of their capabilities
- Low self-confidence
- Mixing emotions with the job

Opportunities are:

- Improving working environment for women makes it easier to achieve success.
- Better policies regarding work and family life which can result in more female managers.
- Changing pattern of the norms in both men and women.
- Active involvement of employers for recruitment of women in top positions

Threats are:

- Gender-role stereotypes
- Organizational discriminations due to norms and culture
- Uneven balance at home can cause career set backs

6.4.3 Strategic plan

- A. Broaden your education and experience** - Most of managers have a broad educational background with experience in variety of employments. A University degree preferably with working related majors (for example Business Administration and Economics, Law, Engineering etc.) and an experience of many different fields are in demand. The time frame for the academic training step should usually take about 3-4 years and this step should be taken as early as possible when you have a career plan.
- B. Build and keep a strong contact network** – You should start building your chain of contacts while still studying in the university or in the first working years. You should get into forums that have already been established and you should keep contact with your old friends from the university, using or creating contact groups for women

and/or managers – that could be done using specific forums for those groups all over the Internet. (For example www.ledarna.se, www.executivewomen.se, etc.) The time frame for this step should be continually.

- C. **Find the right job** – this could be done by using your network or contacts, answering on job announcements and/or writing directly to companies that you are interested in working at. Try to find a job for a company with a fair gender distribution in all its levels. A company that offers female employees an equal working environment and opportunities for professional development. This should be done as soon as possible after getting your degree so that you could use fresh knowledge from your studies and get the experience needed to get more advanced promotions. We think that a trainee program in a company that you are interested in working at could be a good start for your career.

- D. **Choose the right boss** – from early on in your career, make sure you have the right managers who would support you, give you good feedback and advise you on your way to success – if you see that this is the case, do your best to work on your professional growth by his/her help. If your manager is not supportive and doesn't help you to develop yourself – do your best to find a new job using your contact network and your contacts within the organization. This step is the most important to take at the beginning of your career but could be used continually.

- E. **Be smart in promoting yourself-**
 - a. As soon as you got your first step into the job market you should work on advertising yourself and your results- you need to show your success and results to your managers and the people that you work with and inform them that you are interested in becoming a manager and ready to work hard in order to achieve this.
 - b. Don't hesitate to take challenges and to apply for higher positions even if you're not completely sure that you are suitable for them – as everybody needs to get into a new job and to learn how to perform it in the right way anyway.
 - c. You should continually try educating yourself during your career. Knowledge development is very important and you should work on that by using internal courses inside the organization, asking for external leadership and professional courses from your company and self studying using professional and leadership literature.

- F. **Have the right partner** – it is very important to build the infrastructure and the rules of the game at the beginning of a relationship. If you are interested in becoming a top manager you need to be honest with your partner about this and to make sure that your partner is going to support you and to take at least an equal share of the responsibilities for your home and future children.

G. Work on the internal factors –

- a. As young women, you should work on developing your self-confidence and believing in yourselves and your abilities to fulfill your dreams.
- b. You should draw clear goals concerning your future and work hard to plan your way in a strategic and goal-oriented way.
- c. Women should be initiative and dare – they should not be afraid to take challenges, if it's an advanced job, asking a contact for help in finding a job or contacting companies that they would like to work in.

H. Be aware of the cultural bias – you should be aware of the fact that men and women grow up with many different values and norms that are later brought into the society. There are still conditions and rules in the organizations that prevent women from succeeding. It's still common in many companies to completely exclude family needs from a managers working life. This can cause women to back up on their interest in becoming a manager. By being aware of the cultural and structural obstacles you can refuse to live up to the stereotypes that exist about how women should act. You can take charge of your actions in career and decide for yourself what is best for your success.

7 Conclusions

In this chapter we will answer to the essay's question. We will fulfill the purpose of the essay by clearly outlining our conclusion of this study and a strategic plan for women who seek leadership roles in their career will be presented at the end of this chapter.

Women are approximately fifty percent of the population in every country, so it's reasonable to seek an equal distribution of men and women in different sections of the society and it's quite logical to expect that women are represented fairly in different aspects of a country. In order to achieve the maximum possible outcome and to get the total benefits, the resources of the society must be fully utilized.

The subject of this essay seemed very appealing because the proportion of women in the senior positions in the private section of Swedish organizations have not increased in the same pace as the number of women in other parts of the society. We wanted to search for answers behind this phenomenon and see what is it that really makes women get stuck as soon as they are on their way to these top positions.

To get a better grasp of the available literature we talked to different successful top directors and also conducted a survey among different female individuals. More or less, the results of the research agreed to the factors that we had previously studied in our early phases of our research. The responsibility of running a family, organizational difficulties and how they are structured, cultural understandings and old norms and values and last but not the least, internal factors such as lack of interest, etc. are all main categories of reasons affecting the women's success in career. None of the factors named in our conceptual frame work seemed unrelated to the fact that females have it much harder than the male colleagues to achieve good promotions to the better and higher managerial positions in the organizations.

However it is not wrong to say that all the mentioned factors are correlated and cannot be separated from one another. For instance, the culture of the people would definitely affect the way a family unit functions; men and women take their norms and values into their relationships, which can influence the family structure and the equality at, home. This in turn, could affect how a woman feels about herself and her capabilities and her optimism in achieving larger goals. Consequently, these qualifications are taken to the organizations where the structures are influenced by the existing norms and all of this can create issues such as the low number of women in the executive roles.

Having all these different variables and complicated factors in our mind, a list of guidelines for women was created. This list was presented in the previous chapter. It provides guidance on what women should be aware of and what they should do at the beginning of their career to win the game. Even though the solutions to some of the issues are not that simple, but being aware of the existing problems can often help women face them better prepared.

We would also like to point out that during the course of this research we were fully aware of the limitations that exist on our way. A limited number of interviews and a survey answered by a relatively small sample cannot accurately prove or disapprove any existing theory on this subject. A more precise study would have been sampling a large group of female employees from different parts of Sweden with different ethnical backgrounds, different educational levels, and different family structure and with considering many other relevant variables. We

were also well aware of the fact that men have a big influence on this matter. Many other factors can also contribute the subject of our essay; but having them all in the picture would have made this research technically impossible for us to conclude.

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Enkät om kvinnors karriär i Sverige

1. Antal anställda i ditt företag: 0-10 11-50 51-100 101-500 500+
2. Befattning:
3. Ålder:
4. Civilstånd: Singel Gift Sambo Skild Änka
5. Utbildning:
6. Har du barn? Ja Nej
7. Om ja- hur många, hur gamla är de?
8. Vem tar mest ansvar för barnen och hushållsarbete hemma hos er? Är ni jämställda hemma?
9. Har ni städhjälp? Ja Nej
10. Hur länge har du jobbat på detta företag? Och på denna befattning?
11. När fick du ditt första jobb? Hur gick det till?
12. Har du haft en bra chef som peppade dig genom ditt arbetsliv?
13. Hade du en coach eller mentor som hjälpte dig i ditt yrkesliv?
14. Hade du bra kontakter/nätverk som hjälpte dig hitta bra jobb och utvecklas?

15. Hur kan du beskriva din personlighet? Hur kan du beskriva din personlighet? Har du de följande egenskaper?

Målinriktad? Ja Nej
Själsäker? Ja Nej
Initiativtagare? Ja Nej
Trevlig och social? Ja Nej
Beredvillig? Ja Nej
Kommunikative? Ja Nej
Annat?

16. Känner du att du har fått bra feedback från dina chefer? Behövde du be för att få det eller fick du feedback ändå?

17. Vilka är de största anledningar för att du lyckades/misslyckades uppnå dina mål i arbetslivet, enligt din uppfattning?

18. Vill du få en högre befattning?

Ja
Nej
Kanske
Vet ej

19. Vilket är/var de främsta hinder i karriären för dig personligen?

Motstånd i arbetslivet
 Inre hinder (som bristande självförtroende, skuld känslor m.m.)
 Bristande utbildning
 Ålder
 Min partner
 Ointresse
 annat

20. På vilket sätt tycker du att män kan vara bättre ledare än kvinnor i en organisation?

Enkät om kvinnliga chefer i Svenska företag

21. Antal anställda i ditt företag: 0-10 11-50 51-100 101-500 500+

22. Befattning:

23. Ålder:

24. Civilstillstånd: Singel Gift Sambo Skild Änka

25. Utbildning:

26. Har du barn? Ja Nej

27. Om ja- hur många, hur gamla är de?

28. Vem tar mest ansvar för barnen och hushållsarbete hemma hos er? Är ni jämställda hemma?

29. Har ni städhjälp? Ja Nej

30. Hur länge har du jobbat på detta företag? Och på denna befattning?

31. När fick du din första chefs jobb? Hur gick det till?

32. Har du haft en bra chef som peppade dig i början av din karriär?

33. Hade du en coach eller mentor som hjälpte dig uppnå framgång?

34. Hade du bra kontakter/nätverk som hjälpte dig hitta bra jobb och utvecklas?

35. Hur kan du beskriva din personlighet? Har du de följande egenskaper?

- Målinriktad? Ja Nej
Självssäker? Ja Nej
Initiativtagare? Ja Nej
Trevlig och social? Ja Nej
Beredvillig? Ja Nej
Kommunikative? Ja Nej
Annat?

36. Känner du att du har fått bra feedback från dina chefer? Behövde du be för att få det eller fick du feedback ändå?

37. Vilka är de största anledningar för att du lyckades med din karriär, enligt din uppfattning?

38. Vill du få en även högre befattning?

- Ja
Nej
Kanske
Vet ej

39. Vilket är/var de främsta hinder i karriären för dig personligen?

- Motstånd i arbetslivet
 Inre hinder (som bristande självförtroende, skuldkänslor m.m.)
 Bristande utbildning
 Ålder
 Min partner
 Ointresse
 annat

40. På vilket sätt tycker du att män kan vara bättre ledare än kvinnor i en organisation?

41. Har du några råd som du vill ge till en ung kvinna som vill bli chef?

Intervju om kvinnliga chefer i Svenska företag

42. Namn:

43. Företag:

44. Antal anställda i ditt företag:

45. Befattning:

46. Ålder:

47. Civilstånd: Singel Gift Sambo Skild Änka

48. Utbildning: _____

49. Har du barn? Ja Nej

50. Om ja- hur många, hur gamla är de? _____

51. Hur gammal var du när du fick ditt första barn? _____

52. Vad gjorde du innan? (jobbade, studerade) _____

53. Hur stor del av föräldradighet har du tagit? Och din man? _____

54. Vem tar mest ansvar för barnen och hushållsarbete hemma hos er? Är ni jämställda hemma? _____

55. Har ni städhjälp? Ja Nej

56. Hur länge har du jobbat på detta företag? Och på denna befattning?

57. Hur fick du ditt första jobb?

58. När fick du din första chefs jobb? Hur gick det till?

59. Har du haft en bra chef som peppade dig i början av din karriär? På vilket sätt?

60. Hade du en coach eller mentor som hjälpte dig uppnå framgång? På vilka sätt?

61. Hade du bra kontakter/nätverk som hjälpte dig hitta bra jobb och utvecklas?

62. Hur kan du beskriva din personlighet?

63. Har du de följande egenskaper?

- Målinriktad? Ja Nej
- Själsäker? Ja Nej
- Initiativtagare? Ja Nej
- Trevlig och social? Ja Nej
- Beredvillig? Ja Nej
- Kommunikative? Ja Nej

64. Känner du att du har fått bra feedback från dina chefer? Behövde du be för att få det eller fick du feedback ändå?

65. Vilka är de största anledningar för att du lyckades med din karriär, enligt din uppfattning?

66. Vart vill du vara om 5-10 år?

67. Har du känt att du behövde kämpa även hårdare för att uppnå framgång bara därför att du är en kvinna?

68. Tycker du att det finns ett glastak för kvinnor i arbetslivet?

69. Vilket är/var de främsta hinder i karriären för dig personligen?

- Motstånd i arbetslivet
- Inre hinder (som bristande självförtroende, skuldkänslor m.m.)
- Bristande utbildning
- Ålder
- Min partner
- Ointresse
- annat

70. På vilket sätt tycker du att män kan vara bättre ledare än kvinnor i en organisation? Och tvärtom?

71. Har du några råd som du vill ge till en ung kvinna som vill bli chef? Hur bör hon börja sin karriär?
