

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

**Women in Management: Identifying Constraints on Progression into
Senior Management in the Public Sector in Saudi Arabia**

Being a Thesis Submitted for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Hull

By

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Abstract

Within a global context of huge social, political and economic changes, this research explores the phenomenon of female under-representation in senior management in the public sector in Saudi Arabia. In recent years, the participation of women in the labour force worldwide has increased and women generally are continuing to gain professional recognition. Nevertheless, they remain under-represented in management, particularly at senior level. This study investigates the perceptions and experiences of a group of female managers in an attempt to identify those factors that either constrain or facilitate their careers. The women are also invited to offer suggestions about how their career opportunities can be improved. The study is qualitative and it is based on a phenomenological/interpretive approach. Data were gathered using in-depth semi-structured interviews with 28 female managers drawn from three organizations in the Saudi public sector in which there is a high concentration of female employees.

The study findings reveal that women in Saudi public sector organizations are marginalized and excluded from key senior management positions. This situation is due to the fact that the women face a number of inter-related constraints, beginning with socialization in the religion-influenced family and education systems, which in turn, generates rigidly stereotyped gender role behaviours and expectations. This gender stereotyping is reflected in the structure and culture of organizations and it shapes the personalities and attitudes of the women themselves. Yet in spite of these constraints, the participants also reported a number of positive factors, namely, access to education, strong family networks, including support from male family members, the women's own competencies, aspirations and improved access to the global world. It emerged that a complex and intertwined relation existed between the constraints and the facilitating factors. In order to illustrate this complexity and to create a greater understanding of the way in which these factors affect women's access to management level positions, I have proposed a new framework: the social-institutional system, organization and gender. This study also makes a number of suggestions to improve women's career opportunities. For example, political actions to overcome gender stereotypes and traditional attitudes, which can be achieved through the education system, the media and 'joined-up thinking' between various institutions; professional training and development programmes; family-friendly work policies, and proactivity on women's part to build networks and demonstrate competence.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my children Rayyan, Norah, Beesan and Aram. I hope they will benefit from living in a society that will provide them with equal opportunity and justice, which will allow them to achieve their goals.

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Abbreviations

AA	Affirmative Action
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
EEO	Equal Employment Opportunities
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FTSE	Financial Times Stock Exchange
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPA	Institute of Public Administration
KACND	King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue
KFH	King Faisal Hospital
KSU	King Saud University
MCS	Ministry of Civil Services
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MEP	Ministry of Economy and Planning
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
SA	Saudi Arabia
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNPF	United Nations Population Fund
USA	United States of America
WB	World Bank
WLB	Work-Life Balance
WTO	World Trade Organization

PART I: OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

Chapter One: Setting the Research Context

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a background to justify why this study is needed in the field of women in management and why it is important in the Saudi context. In order to identify the gap in knowledge and to present the research problem the study begins with an overview of the position of women in management worldwide, with a focus on women in Saudi Arabia. It then explains the motivation for this research and identifies the research aims. On the basis of these aims, the research questions are defined and the process by which they are addressed is outlined. Finally, this chapter explains the significance of this research and it outlines the structure of the thesis.

1.2 Background of Women in Management

In many countries during the past two decades there has been a major change in the traditional roles of women and they continue to enter the workplace in ever increasing numbers (Davidson & Burke, 2011; UNDP, 2011). Across the world women are gaining greater visibility and recognition as professionals in organizations (Davidson & Burke, 2011; Powell, 1999). For example, in 2008 the proportion of women employed in a full-time job in the United States of America (USA) and in the United Kingdom (UK) reached 46% (UNDP, 2011). Similar trends are found in other developed countries such as in Norway with 48%, and Canada and Sweden with 47% (UNDP, 2011).

This trend has been observed not only in developed countries, but also in developing countries. In developing countries the participation of women in the labour force has changed considerably between the 1980s and the 21st century, although the numbers remain very low when compared with Western countries (World Bank, 2009). For example, in 2008 the percentages of women joining the labour market in the Arab world were 23% in Egypt, 25% in Kuwait, 16 % in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and 17% in Saudi Arabia (UNDP, 2011). Yet women's participation as a percentage of the total employment figure varies between Arab countries and this is related to the availability of labour and natural resources (UNDP, 2006).

The significant increase in the number of women who are joining the labour force internationally may be attributed to various factors. In many countries, economic growth has helped to expand both the service sectors and the public sector. This growth has created more job opportunities for women, including an increase in part-time jobs (Davidson & Burke, 2011). Also, there have been changes in societal attitudes towards working women who are married and have children, along with political and legal changes (Broadbridge, 2009; EOWA, 2011; Mathe et al., 2011; Wilson, 2011). In addition, family patterns have changed. For example, women are delaying marriage and delaying having children (Powell, 1999). Moreover there has been a shift from extended to nuclear families and an increase in single-parent families (Alsharekh, 2007; Powell, 2010).

Nevertheless, despite the increase in women's participation in the labour force in all countries, there are still fewer women employed than men (UNDP, 2011; World Economic Forum, 2011). The Global Gender Gap Index (introduced by the World Economic Forum in 2011) shows that in the 134 countries covered in the Report, the gap between women and men remains wide in relation to economic participation and political empowerment. And "only 59% of the economic outcomes gap and only 19% of the political outcomes gap has been closed" (World Economic Forum, 2011: 17). In the majority of countries the unemployment rates for women are far higher than they are for men. In Arab countries the percentage is even higher (UNDP, 2011). In all countries women's participation in the labour force is lower than men's or their unemployment rate is higher. Hence they are more disadvantaged with regards to earning and occupational representation (World Economic Forum, 2011). This under-representation includes management and administration where women are concentrated in 'traditionally female jobs' (Davidson & Burke, 2011; Powell, 2010).

There is evidence that the position of women in management has improved in the last two decades, particularly their representation in middle management (Broadbridge, 2010; Vinnicombe et al., 2010). This can be attributed to legislation, namely the Affirmative Action Policies that have been introduced in several countries (Davidson & Burke, 2011). Also, organizations can play an important role as a driving force for change because they acknowledge women's capabilities, and this type of acknowledgement could bring more changes to organizations in a competitive global

economy (Catalyst, 2007). In addition, by increasing their human capital women have taken important steps towards gaining managerial positions at levels comparable to those of their male colleagues (UNDP, 2011). As a result, in some countries the percentage of women in higher education exceeds that of men (Davidson & Burke, 2011; Wirth, 2004). However, in many countries and in different cultures the pace of change with regard to women in top management has often been slow. This observation holds true across nations, even though women are gaining the necessary experience and paying their dues (e.g. Acker, 2009, Bagilhole & White, 2011; Broadbridge, 2008; Davidson & Burke, 2011; Ford, 2006; Powell, 2010; Schein, 2007; Stead & Elitott, 2009; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011).

1.3 Statement of the Research Problem

In the last three decades, there has been a worldwide increase in studies on women and gender in management, which include both empirical research and more general theoretical analyses (Broadbridge & Hearn, 2008). During the late 1970s the issue of women in management was opened up significantly by the work of Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977). Kanter's book *Men and Women of the Corporation* has been broadly recognised as a seminal work and it has provided the platform for many organizational studies, particularly in the field of women and management. Since the late 1980s increasing numbers of studies have focused on issues such as gendered divisions of labour and the power and managerial styles of males and females (e.g. Marshall, 1984; Vinnicombe, 1987).

In the 1990s most of the research revolved around describing and explaining the under-representation of women in top management as well as women's career advancement (e.g. Fagenson, 1990; Morrison, 1992; Powell, 1999; Tharenou et al., 1994). This particular interest in research among women in top positions in organizations has resulted from the significantly low numbers of women in top positions, which are male dominated. For example, in 1974 the proportion of women managers in the UK was only 2% (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2006); in 2011, it reached 35% (UNDP, 2011). The same is true across most European countries. In 2008, the proportion ranged from 31% to 35% (UNDP, 2011). In the USA, the current proportion of women managers is 43% (UNDP, 2011). In China, the share of women in the labour force is 45%, although only 17% of managers are women (UNDP, 2011). Within Arab

countries, the percentage of women managers is very low when compared with Western countries, for example 14% in Kuwait, 11% in Egypt and 8% in Saudi Arabia (UNDP, 2011).

Acker (2009: 204) states that “many women who are classified as ‘managers’ never get close to the upward paths that lead to top positions”. This is what has been described by the metaphor of the ‘glass ceiling’ (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986). It is a phenomenon that can be found in many countries, Western as well as Arab and Muslim (e.g. Acker, 2009; Bagilhole & White, 2011; Broadbridge, 2010; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Fagenson, 1993; Mihail, 2006; Powell, 2010; Schein, 2007; Singh & Vinnicombe, 2004; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011; Wirth, 2004). These extensive cross-cultural studies on women in management report that women’s rise to senior positions is impeded by a plethora of barriers, for example stereotyping, discrimination, a lack of mentors and networks, conflicts over work-life balance, power structures and perceptions of gender roles in the wider society. Accordingly, a number of explanations have been offered to explain the ‘glass ceiling’ phenomenon, namely gender- or person-centred theories, organizational structure theories, social and institutional systems theories and gendered-organization-system theory. Whilst each theory makes a distinct contribution to understanding the phenomenon, they all have their limitations (see Chapter 3).

Such barriers may be particularly strong in Saudi Arabia, which is a relatively conservative country, even by Arab standards. Saudi Arabia is the cradle of Islam because it contains the holiest of sites within Islam and it is the location of the world’s largest pilgrimage (the *hajj*) (Pharaon, 2004). Therefore, the country views itself as the guardian of pure authentic Islam and it is governed according to Islamic law (*Sharia* law). At the same time it is a country in transition: a country in which successful economic growth has certainly changed its demographic and social structure. Since the 1970s, aided by its oil revenues, the Kingdom has undergone rapid development in many areas such as industry, education, transportation, health, social services, and business. This rapid advancement of Saudi Arabia has provided more employment opportunities for men and women (Al-Khateeb, 2007; MEP, 2005). This trend has gained further impetus by the government’s commitment to ensuring that the kingdom takes its place amongst the developed nations of the world; the desire to reduce

dependence on foreign workers; and accession to the World Trade Organization (Budhwar & Mellahi, 2006).

In this situation, the government has recognised that the key to the nation's further development lies in its human resources, and that women constitute a source of untapped potential. One goal of the last three Development Plans was to integrate women by providing educational and employment opportunities in the Kingdom. For example, the first of the three major themes of the Sixth Development Plan, 1996–2000, was the development of national human resources, and its seventh strategic principle was aimed at increasing women's participation in the labour force in conformity with *Sharia* law. Similarly, the Seventh Development Plan 2000–2004 emphasised the development of national human resources as a priority and its ninth strategic principle called for expanding the fields of employment for women, without contradicting *Sharia* law. The Eighth Development Plan 2005–2009 includes a special chapter on women in development (MEP, 2005). What these plans show is that attention is being given to enhancing the status of women and ensuring their participation in economic and social development within the framework of Islamic values and teachings. Education is one mechanism for achieving these changes. The education of women has undergone enormous and rapid expansion at all stages as a result of the Saudi government's generous public spending on education (World Economic Forum, 2011). The gender gap in education is narrowing at all levels: primary (85% female and 88% male); secondary (76% female and 70% male) and tertiary (36% female and 29% male) (World Economic Forum, 2011). One noteworthy achievement in this respect is that the gender ratio for enrolment in higher education institutions has shifted in favour of females, to the tune of 1:1.4 in 2002. Hence this shift could mean that between 2004 and 2020 there may be up to twice as many female college graduates as male graduates (World Bank, 2005). Thus a growing number of educated women are seeking professional careers.

Women's participation in the labour force has marked a major change in their traditional role in Saudi society. Increased economic resources and the availability of free education along with the continuous processes of urbanisation and modernisation have helped to create more job opportunities for women in both the private and public sectors (Al-Khateeb, 2007; AlMunajjed, 1997; Al-Rasheed, 2010). However, Saudi women work predominantly in the public sector (96%). The public sector has been the

best option available to Saudi women because it offers them job opportunities in the fields in which women specialize: mainly in education (85.8%), health (6.1%) and social work (4.4%) (MEP, 2005). Women are estimated to constitute about 17% of the total labour force whereas men constitute 83% (World Economic Forum, 2011 & UNDP, 2011). Additionally, there are high unemployment rates among men and women in the Kingdom. In 2010 the rate was estimated at 16% for women and at 4% for men and, when compared with other Arab countries, these are considered to be the highest (World Economic Forum, 2011).

Saudi Arabia is a country in transition because it is caught between traditional values and the forces of modernisation. Therefore, it is of particular interest to see how women, as the traditionally subordinated sex, are affected. However, it seems that in general there is very limited research on women in management in the Arab World and this is specifically the case in relation to Saudi Arabia. Given the absence of longitudinal data on women as managers it is difficult to find out about women's progress in management in the Arab context. Even statistics on women from the UNDP or the World Bank can be confusing, due to different definitions of 'manager' in different countries (Powell, 1999; Vinnicombe, 2000). Nevertheless, the occupational structure statistics in the Arab countries show that women are making slow progress into managerial jobs such as legislators, senior officials and managers when they are compared with other women globally (UNDP, 2011; Wirth, 2004; World Bank, 2009), and there is not much variation among Arab countries. However, when compared with the multitude of studies that have been conducted in the West, i.e. Europe or North America, it appears that few empirical investigations have been conducted in Saudi Arabia, or in other Arab States, although a few reliable studies on women in management in the Arab context have recently emerged. These studies reveal that working women in the Arab context face similar obstacles to other women in the rest of the world. These obstacles include cultural attitudes towards working women and structural constraints (e.g. Singh, 2008; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011). Arab women do encounter very specific constraints that are the result of religious and culturally defined attitudes and practices which, in turn, prevent them from gaining access to leadership positions in organizations (Jamali, et al., 2005; Mostafa, 2005). Consequently, the position of women in management and the factors that influence their career advancement in the Saudi context, as indeed in other Arab countries, need to be understood within the context of the country's cultural and social

values and with an acknowledgement that the Islamic religion plays a significant role in every aspect of life.

The management literature and studies on women are intriguing to read, particularly as they were conducted in different contexts. As such, they provide the numerous and valuable insights which form the background to this study. Existing studies reveal that concerted efforts have been made in order to identify and understand the factors that prevent women from accessing senior leadership positions in organizations. However, it remains the case that most of these studies have been conducted in North American and Western European contexts. Hence their findings should be considered as contextually specific. Jackie Ford (2005: 242), in 'Examining leadership through Critical Feminist Readings', suggested that "We need to look at the social and cultural context into which we assume theories are inserted ... pay attention to situations, events, institutions, ideas, social practices and processes", when studying a social phenomenon. Therefore, such studies cannot be generalized to other cultures such as Saudi Arabia. The few studies which do discuss women managers in the Arab context tend to give an overall picture of women managers which has less depth and which does not attempt to give a voice to women managers. The current body of literature reveals that the experiences of Saudi women have seldom been brought forth in discussions. Also, there is no acknowledgement of the factors that influence women managers who are employed in the public sector. This leaves a gap in research that is specifically concerned with why women are not selected for top positions within the Saudi public sector.

Certainly, there have been studies on Saudi women regarding issues such as the position of women in the labour market (e.g. Alajmi, 2001; Norris, 2009; Ross, 2008); studies on women and education (e.g. AlMunajjed, 1997; Hamdan, 2005); and studies on the socio-economic status of women in society (e.g. Al-Khateeb, 2007; Altorki, 2000; Pharaon, 2004). These studies have revealed that the status of Saudi women has undergone a profound change due to their increased access to education and their greater visibility in the public sphere. And yet, they have not addressed the question of why Saudi women continue to be under-represented in top management. Consequently, there is a definite need for a study on women's experience in management positions in the context of a conservative society like Saudi Arabia. This type of study requires a deep understanding of Islamic values and their immense impact on the societal structure

and it requires sensitivity to cultural characteristics, combined with knowledge of the historical tradition of women in management. Thus the present research aims to address this problem by investigating which factors influence the career advancement of women. How do women attain senior positions in Saudi public sector organizations? This study will identify and create an understanding of the constraints that hinder women's access to top positions. Based on these findings this study will suggest strategies to help women to overcome such constraints. In so doing, this study will address the research gap that presently exists in the literature on women and management in the Saudi context.

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is based on a multi-dimensional perspective which includes the gendered-organization-system perspective (Fagenson, 1990) and gender organizational theory (Acker, 1990). The gendered-organization-system perspective will provide an organizing framework and an overarching guide. Gendered organizational theory will be used to examine the ways in which organizational structures and cultures are permeated with gendered values. This approach will explain the limited progression of women within the Saudi organizational context and it will encompass the scope of the research questions. For example, a multi-dimensional perspective is required because the issue of women in management is very complex with multi-faceted issues (Fagenson, 1993; Omar & Davidson, 2001; Powell, 1999). Also, there is no single explanation for understanding the dearth of women in top management (Terjesen et al., 2009). Additionally, a multi-dimensional perspective agrees with the basic assumption of this study, namely, that cultural ideology is embedded in organizational structures and cultures, and that the established norms are closer to men's than to women's roles. As a result women are doubly disadvantaged and they are barred from ever reaching top positions in the public sphere (Acker, 1990; Fagenson, 1990).

It should be noted that, as the meanings of leadership and management are intertwined (Eagly & Carli, 2007), the terms 'leadership' and 'management', and 'manager' and 'leader', will be used interchangeably throughout this study. For the purpose of this research 'senior management' refers to individuals at the top one or two levels in an organization who hold titles such as Chief Executive Officer (CEO), President, and Vice President.

1.4 Research Motivation

The intellectual beginnings of this thesis lie in my personal interest in understanding the constraints that have prevented working women in Saudi society from gaining leadership positions. This interest was generated by various factors. First was my educational background, particularly the knowledge I gained during my MA. Secondly it was encouraged by both previous and current experience in the workplace. I have worked as a lecturer in Management and Organizational Behaviour at the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) in Saudi and I have occupied the position of Head of Department. The initial idea for this study came as the result of teaching students and training government employees on topics including communication, leadership, conflict management, stress management and team building. Among these it was the 'Administrative Leadership and Creativity' workshop that was the most interesting of all. This is a course designed for women in middle and senior management and it runs for three days with approximately eighteen hours in total. The workshop aims to develop leadership and innovation management skills in its participants. The preparations for this course led me towards engaging with my colleagues and with the female managers who attended these workshops. We debated a range of questions such as 'why was this course on the IPA training course list if women were almost absent from leadership positions?' Another question that was raised was 'what reasons do women in middle management give for registering on this course if their chances of achieving leadership positions are so very low?' Were the women attending this course aiming for promotion? Was their absence from leadership positions the result of personal choice or were there other factors that stopped them from holding such positions? These discussions with colleagues and trainees are what stimulated my growing interest and my concern with understanding the various forces – personal, social, economic, organizational and cultural – that were impacting on women and shaping their careers.

I started thinking about my own career and the difficulties that I had faced in my professional advancement. I was puzzled about the source of these difficulties. I asked myself questions about my work and where it was going to lead me. Do I view my work as a 'career' or merely as a 'job'? Is my time spent in management just a temporary position that rotates among employees? Will my career one day allow me to hold a

senior leadership position in the government sector? My work experience was unique, or so I thought, but my career path was not one I had chosen, since it was determined by the decision-makers in my organization, who were male. Thinking about my own career path led me to consider the career paths of other women, not only in Western and European nations, but also in neighbouring Arab countries. I found Omani, Kuwaiti and Jordanian women working in government as ministers and ambassadors, or as presidents and directors of public universities (World Bank, 2005).

Having grown up in Saudi society, I have observed the tremendous social, economic and political changes that have occurred over the last twenty years. I have seen how the Saudi government has actively supported the education and employment of women. This is evidenced in the thousands of female professors throughout the kingdom. These women have earned doctorates either locally or from Western universities and this reflects the generally high level of female education in the country (World Bank, 2009; World Economic Forum, 2011). I have witnessed examples of Saudi women who are beginning to carve out careers for themselves and in so doing are beginning to change the traditional perceptions of women. These women hold different managerial positions, either in the private or public sector including executive directors, CEOs, or university deans, although these are very few when compared with the numbers of men in these positions. For example, in the year 2000, two women were appointed to the highest positions ever held by women in Saudi Arabia: Princess Al-Jawhara Al-Saud was appointed Assistant Undersecretary for Education Affairs in the public sector for seven years before becoming president of Riyadh University for Women in April 2007 (World Bank, 2009). The second woman is Lubna Al-Oyalan, a businesswoman, who was elected to a board of directors in the banking sector. This appointment makes her the first woman in the Kingdom to occupy such a position within the private sector (World Bank, 2005). In 2009, a landmark step forward in Saudi Arabia was the appointment of Nora Al-Fayez, the first woman to hold the high post of the Deputy Minister of Education in the Kingdom (Abdul-Aziz, 2009). However, when women are appointed to posts in the public sector their appointments are made within education. Education is socially regarded as a female sphere because it is about the education and care of children. Therefore, although there have been changes in Saudi Arabia which are oriented towards the development of a modern state, including the Saudi Government's

willing support of women's rights issues, the number of women in higher posts remains very low.

My strong motivation to research female managers within the context of Saudi's social, cultural and political ideology has a number of causal factors. It arises from my educational background in Sociology and Management, which includes my professional experiences in teaching, training and managing. It is also rooted in my personal beliefs in gender equality and my conviction that Saudi women are competent to hold leadership positions in every sector. They are highly motivated and determined; enthusiastic and focused; tolerant and hard working. This research presented quite a challenge to a woman coming from a conservative culture, like that of Saudi Arabia, not least because my aim was to reveal the hidden stories behind the lives of female managers in the Saudi public sector. I wanted to uncover what are the factors most influential on women's career paths, and what obstacles and opportunities they encountered on their way towards senior leadership positions. Additionally, my intention is to suggest different strategies to help women navigate the career labyrinth and ultimately to gain access to leading positions.

1.5 Research Questions and Process

Watson (1994: 579) indicated that "as a piece of research proceeds in its crafting through planning, fieldwork and writing up, the 'what?' 'why?' and 'how?' questions are asked and re-asked until the answers are expressed in their final form of a thesis... together with the 'findings', analyses and conclusions which emerge from them". With this in mind, and after identifying a gap in the literature on women in management and based on my personal motivation to carry out this study, I have realised the importance of addressing the puzzling question 'what', which is 'What I wanted to know about women's experiences in management and why there are fewer women than men at the top management level'. Therefore, the central research question that is addressed by this thesis is: 'Why are there not more women in senior management, in the public sector, in Saudi Arabia?'

From this question the following questions are derived:

- ❖ What are the constraints that inhibit women's access to senior management positions in the Saudi public sector?

- ❖ What factors have assisted the career advancement of women in management in the Saudi public sector?
- ❖ How can the career paths of women be improved to enable them to achieve senior management positions in the Saudi public sector in such a way that it will facilitate wider political, social and economic development?

The next issues that I had to address were: ‘How did I conceptualize my research and how could I gain access to information resources?’ This study is subjective and humanistic in nature and as such, it uses a phenomenological-interpretive paradigm. This is because I believe that social realities and meanings are filtered through individuals’ experiences and context, which indirectly shapes our understanding. Accordingly, my research epistemology is reflected in my practice because I am emphasising the importance of understanding the views of women managers in a way that is also sensitive to their unique social, cultural and religious context.

The nature of this study is exploratory, descriptive and interpretivist, and therefore it utilised a qualitative strategy to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing the career advancement of women to top management. The qualitative data in this study was obtained by means of in-depth semi-structured interviews with a group of 28 women in the Saudi public sector. An interview protocol was developed to obtain detailed information. This method was utilised because it allows for rich data, thorough responses, probing, and clarification of meanings (Saunders et al., 2012). Also, I aimed to allow women to tell their stories, to reflect on their actions and to express their feelings, attitudes, values and beliefs freely (Saunders et al., 2012). Throughout this study, my presence is apparent in the text and the women’s work experiences are interpreted by me, which mean that I will use the first-person pronoun ‘I’ to tell the story of my women managers and to reflect on the research process.

In the exploratory phase of the research process, I approached the Saudi public sector and asked for its cooperation in conducting a study on its women managers. The public sector organizations were in support of this research but nevertheless, gaining access to the field or to information was not without difficulties (see Chapter 5). By using the Saudi public sector as the case study it has been possible to examine the experience of women across a number of disciplines and at different management levels which only the public sector could offer. Three organizations within the Saudi public sector were

selected for this study: King Saud University (KSU), King Faisal Hospital (KFH) and the Institute of Public Administration (IPA). It is worth mentioning that the identities of women managers working in these three choosing organizations have been protected, since their careers could be adversely affected by what is reported.

The key aim of this study was to give a 'voice' to Saudi women managers and to explain how their experiences are unique to their own context. Without this specific aim in mind, this study would simply be a narrative of results instead of 'evidence' of the Saudi women's lived experiences. Accordingly, the data analysis employed in this study was informed by the use of an interpretivist phenomenological analysis approach (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Willig, 2008). This is in order to examine in detail the lived experiences of the participants as they go about their work as managers. How do they perceive the under-representation of women in top management in the Saudi public sector?

An acknowledgment of the study's limitations is an important aspect of any research project (Willig, 2008). This study does have its limitations, despite the fact that it aims to provide a comprehensive account of the chosen phenomena and also to provide direction to future researchers. One limitation is that concerning the issue of generalization. As such, its representations may be limited to those groups with similar backgrounds. Another limitation is that it focuses only on the female gender. A further limitation of this study concerns how I placed myself as an individual with certain beliefs, values, feeling and biases in relation to the research process. These limitations will be addressed in Chapter 10.

1.6 Significance of the Study

Another important question that I wanted to answer is: why should the research be considered as a contribution to knowledge? This research is distinctive in that it focuses on women managers in a conservative country, Saudi Arabia. I aim to understand the position of women in organizations and why they are under-represented in top management. To do this, I need to understand the ambiguous and contradictory nature of women's experiences in organizations and how they are influenced by social and organizational practices. This means that I need to uncover and to understand the complex intertwining between the private and the public realms. Thus the significance

of this study is that it makes both theoretical and methodological contributions to the existing literature on women and management, and has special significance in the Saudi context. This study makes a number of important contributions which are as follows.

Firstly, as mentioned earlier, the current literature identifies a number of factors affecting women's career advancement to top positions. However, these factors have been identified based on women's experiences in a mainly Western context. This context is very different from that of Saudi Arabia. This study addresses this limited context by situating itself inside the context of Saudi organizational culture. The situated nature of this research enables me to identify the interrelated factors that impede or facilitate women's career advancement. This means that the present study makes a valuable contribution to the women in management literature by providing inside knowledge of women in management within the Saudi context.

Secondly, this study focuses only on women managers. The rationale behind this choice is provided by the lack of such a focus in the existing literature, a lack of gender equality in the workplace along with my personal motivation to contribute to women's career development (Stead & Elliott, 2009). Also, the working experiences of women can be much more complex than those of men. This complexity is due to the fact that women still bear the main responsibility for raising children and for performing household tasks. In addition, women are heavily influenced by cultural attitudes toward them as working women (Broadbridge, 2009; Cooper Jackson, 2001). This study therefore makes a theoretical contribution by investigating the experience of Saudi women managers from a female and culturally appropriate perspective and proposing a framework of managerial advancement that applies to women's complex lives, rather than using a male model for managerial progression (Metz, 2003) or a borrowed model based on women's roles in a different cultural context. It will also suggest specific strategies that will be useful for advancing women's careers: strategies that have been tailored and designed to meet the needs of the Saudi organizational context.

Furthermore, this study will contribute to research methodology by adopting the phenomenological-interpretive paradigm, a qualitative design, and the use of different sources of data. To the best of my knowledge, phenomenological-interpretive and qualitative research is not very common in Saudi Arabia. This is particularly the case in the area of women in management. Most of the research tends to be quantitative or it

will occasionally combine quantitative and qualitative elements whilst retaining an emphasis on the former. Notably, this study will provide a holistic view of social phenomena by providing a rich description and analysis that captures the complexity of the Saudi context. It will look beneath the cultural ideology and religious beliefs in order to gain a greater understanding of women's perceptions and experiences in management.

Moreover, Saudi Arabia provides a unique socio-cultural context for such a study. The Kingdom is classified as a very conservative country in which strong traditional values still persist regarding the roles considered as appropriate for women. Nevertheless, with its various five-year development plans from 1970 to 2009 the Saudi government is aiming to improve the position of women working in the public sector (MEP, 2005). In Saudi Arabia the public sector is considered to be an arena in which key policies are shaped and implemented. Therefore, it is crucially important for the government to help women rise to the top in the public sector. This effort is necessary to the success of their efforts in realising the third of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The third goal is to improve the status of women through expanding opportunities in education, health and employment thereby promoting gender equality and empowering women (UNDP, 2006; UNPF, 2003). This study will provide a clear identification of the factors that are influencing women's career advancement within the Saudi public sector. This will be of great help to policy-makers in Saudi Arabia who are tasked with improving the position of women in organizations. It will also contribute towards policies aimed at empowering women to hold senior leadership positions.

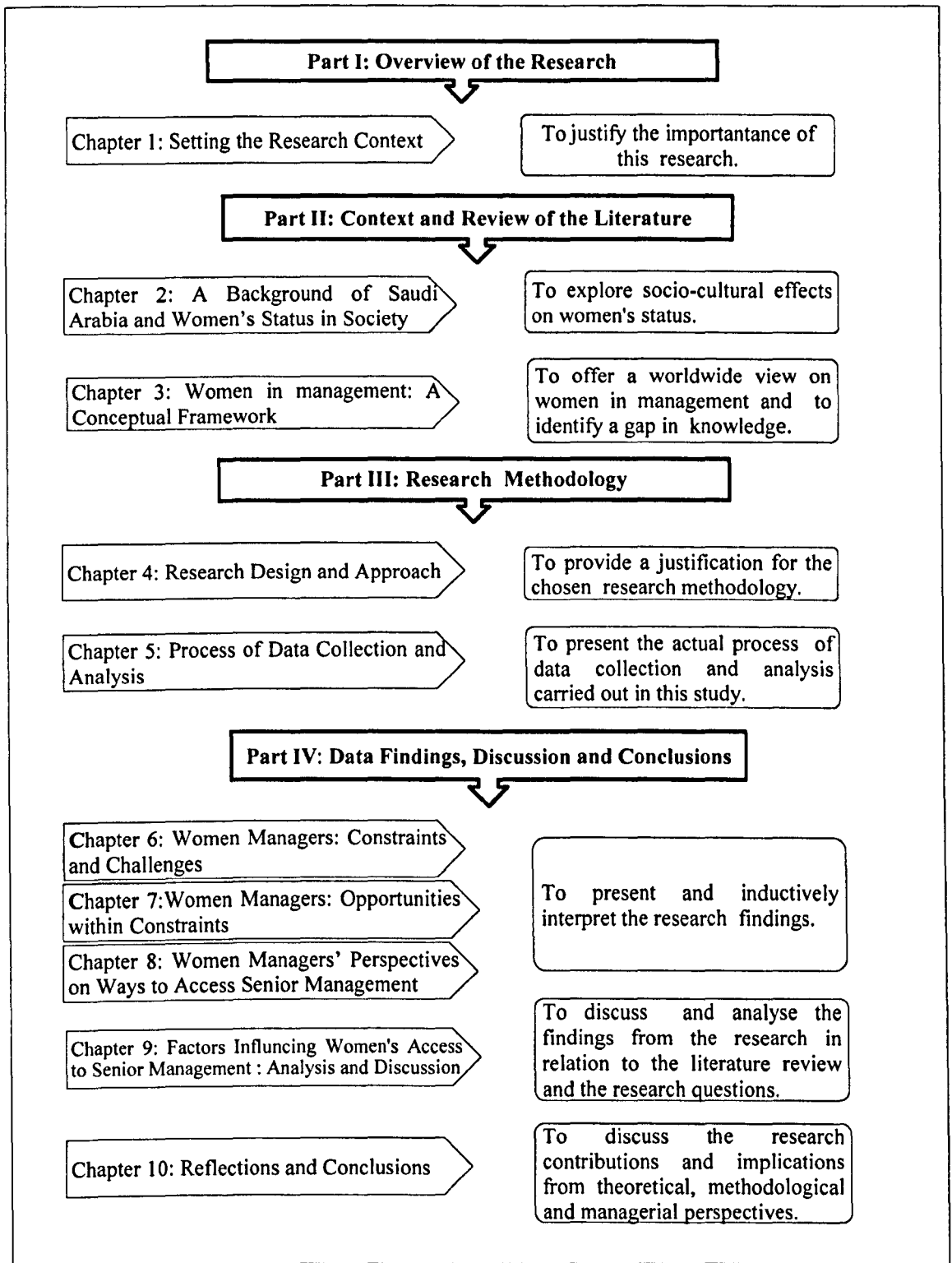
Thus a key strength of this study is that it develops a framework for women's career advancement to top positions. This framework provides knowledge about the complexity of the Saudi context because it examines the interaction between the larger social system, organization and gender or rather the interweaving between the private and the public spheres. This study will address the lacuna in knowledge in the area of women and management and, in so doing it will provide a basis for new scholarship and research and it will be of great benefit to policy-makers and organizations.

1.7 The Structure of the Thesis

This thesis comprises ten chapters and it is divided into four parts as illustrated in Figure 1.1. Part I is the current chapter which provides an overview of the study. Part II comprises two chapters: the research context plus a literature review that focuses on concepts related to this thesis. Chapter 2 outlines the research context by providing a background on Saudi society. This chapter will provide information on Saudi Arabian society which will include its cultural and historical roots, the economy and political structures and the Islamic religion. It will also examine the ways in which all of these different aspects of Saudi society combine to produce the social and cultural values which in turn influence the status of women in Saudi society. Chapter 3 reviews the literature on women in management. The main aim of this chapter is to identify a gap in the current knowledge on women in management. This analysis is used to provide the direction for this research and to help frame the appropriate research questions. Part III comprises two chapters, discussing the research methodology. Chapter 4 explains the research philosophy and strategy; research approach; and design and data collection method. Chapter 5 presents the actual operation of the data collection and analysis carried out by this study.

Part IV comprises five chapters which present the findings, discussion and conclusions of this study. Chapter 6 focuses on the findings in relation to the first research question, concerned with identifying the factors that inhibit women's access to senior leadership positions in Saudi public sector organizations. Chapter 7 discusses the findings related to the second research question, concerned with identifying the factors that promote women's career development in general. Chapter 8 contains the findings related to the third research question, concerned with representing women managers' views on how to overcome the various challenges or obstacles that they encounter along their career paths. Chapter 9 discusses the research findings with reference to the literature review in order to develop a detailed understanding of the phenomenon of under-representation amongst Saudi women. Chapter 10 offers reflections and conclusions on this study. It considers whether this study has achieved its main objectives, and it considers the contributions and implications of the research findings. This chapter also presents the main limitations of this study and suggests further studies to overcome them.

Figure 1.1 The Structure of the Thesis



PART II: CONTEXT AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chapter Two: A Background of Saudi Arabia and Women's Status in Society

“The context is not only important for the likely success of implementation, but also for the sorts of solutions that are proposed” (Flynn, 2002: 74).

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the research context, which is Saudi Arabian culture and society. The background to Saudi culture will be very significant to this study, since as Flynn (2002) indicated it is important to take the context into account when studying organizations to diagnose the problems and find a solution. Also, Tayeb (1996: 53) noted that “Organizations and their employees do not live in a vacuum separated from their cultural surroundings ... the values, attitude and behaviours including also those which are carried into the workplace as part of the employees' cultural baggage”. Therefore, the position of Saudi women in management in public organization cannot be fully understood without some appreciation and acknowledgment of Saudi culture. This approach will enable a deeper understanding of the factors that might hinder the career progression of women.

Thus this chapter will examine the factors that influence the position of women at both a macro and a micro level. It begins with a brief introduction of the country's history with an emphasis on the social and economic-political background. This is followed by a discussion of the social and cultural values within the kinship and family social structure and the Islamic religion. The last section focuses on women's position in the education system, their position in the labour force and the economic opportunities that are available. It will also consider the extent of their managerial participation.

It is worth mentioning that the literature drawn on in this chapter mainly comes from sociology and anthropology, and to a certain extent from management and organizational studies within the Arab and Saudi context.

2.2 Saudi Arabia: Historical, Socio-economic and Political Background

Historically, Saudi Arabia is the cradle of Islam. The Prophet Mohammed was born here in Mecca in 570 A.D. It houses Mecca and Medina, the two holiest mosques in

Islam. Hence the kingdom is a focal point for the millions of pilgrims who visit the holy cities as part of their religious observance (Pharaon, 2004). Islam is the religion of all Saudis in the kingdom (Pharaon, 2004). The country was established in 1930, by King Abdul Aziz Ibn Abdul Rahman Al Saud. It represents the unification of *Al-jazirat Al-arabiy*, the Arabian Peninsula, under the name of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This unification was the result of an alliance between Al Saud and the *Wahhabi* religious sect, as indicated by Madawi Al-Rasheed (2010), an Arab anthropologist of religion. This alliance between Al Saud and *Wahhabi* leaders was essential for the formation and continuity of the state (Al-Rasheed, 2010). It enabled King Abdul Aziz to maintain a delicate political balance between religion and state leadership by adopting Islamic law, known as *Sharia* law, ‘a divine law above him and independent of his will’ (Al-Rasheed, 2010: 49). It is basically “a partnership between the symbolic imam, ‘leader of the community’, and the religious specialists, the former enforcing the religious ruling of the latter” (Al-Rasheed, 2010: 48).

Geographically, Saudi Arabia is located in the south-western part of the Asian Continent. It occupies about four-fifths of the Arabian Peninsula, which is the same size as Western Europe, with an area of 868,730 square miles. It lies at the junction of the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa, and the important sea lanes of the Arabian Gulf, the Horn of Africa, the Red Sea and the Suez Canal (SAMIRAD, 2012). The Kingdom consists of four distinct regions: the Eastern Province, the Southern Province, the Middle Province, which is called Najd, and the Western Province (Al-Rasheed, 2010). In 2009 the huge land of Saudi Arabia had a population estimated at 25.8 million people: 72.9% were Saudi citizens and 27.1% non-Saudi residents, and the population is growing at a rate of 2% annually (SAMIRAD, 2012). The female population constitutes 45% of the total population (World Economic Forum, 2011).

Constitutionally, Saudi Arabia is an Islamic state where law is based on *Sharia* law. Saudi Arabia is ruled under a monarchical system, which is led by the King and senior members of his family. The parliament, or the Consultative Council, *Majlis Al-Shura*, is ratified by royal decree, and acts in accordance with *Sharia* law. It is composed of 150 members appointed by the King, and its function is to advise the King on important local issues (EIU, 2008). The King, however, has the final decision on social, economic

and political issues as indicated by Abbas Ali, a scholar of management, in *Business and Management Environment in Saudi Arabia* (Ali, 2009).

Economically, the Saudi government relies heavily on the production of oil as its main source of income. Al-Rasheed (2010) indicated that with the oil boom in the 1970s, the Saudi government became a 'rentier state' which prospered almost exclusively from the rents received from the extraction and export of petroleum reserves. One of the primary functions of a rentier state is to distribute wealth across the economy and society (Champion, 2003). Saudi Arabia has the largest proven oil reserves in the world, estimated at over 264 bn barrels, or 21% of the world's total reserves (EIU, 2008). The petroleum sector accounts for around 90–95% of Saudi Arabia's exports, 70–80% of state revenues, and about 40% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) (EIU, 2008). The Saudi Arabia Oil Company (ARAMCO), which was fully nationalized in 1988, controls the oil resource, dominates the entire extraction industry, and has a considerable influence and role in overall economic planning and performance (Budhwar & Mellahi, 2006), including administration, technocrats, and civil servants (Al-Rasheed, 2010).

Economic wealth has transformed the social as well as the physical face of Saudi Arabia and it has become a more developed and modern state (Champion, 2003). The five-year development plans, first adopted by the Saudi government during the 1970s, have allowed for increasing levels of social change that are benefitting the whole population (Al-Khateeb, 2007). For example, the focus in the Sixth (1995–2000), Seventh (2000–2004) and Eighth (2005–2009) Development Plans is on the development of national human resources and the Saudization of jobs. Yet the Eighth Development Plan (2005–2009) seems to mark a very significant change in Saudi Arabia, since the country is among the 189 members of the United Nations (UN) that signed the Millennium Declaration at the millennium summit which was held by the UN in September 2000. Their aim is to achieve the eight goals that came to be known collectively as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These are: to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality and empower women; reduce child mortality; improve maternal health; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensure environmental sustainability; and to develop a global partnership for development (MEP, 2005; UNDP, 2006; UNPF, 2003).

The government of Saudi Arabia has been playing a significant role in accelerating social change, not only through the infrastructure of the country (its physical structures, and basic social services such as schools and hospitals) but also through addressing the issues that concern the public in the national dialogue centre or *Al-hiwar al-watani al-Saudi* established by King Abdullah in 2003. The aim of this centre is to bring together different members of society to discuss the various issues that relate directly to the development of the country. For example, there have been several assemblies regarding national unity and extremism (2003), women (2004), 'we and the other' (2005), education (2006), employment (2008) and health issues (2009 & 2010) (KACND, 2012)¹. In 2004 the third National Dialogue focused mainly on women's rights and duties. This marked an important step forward in the government's initiative. It involved 70 well-known participants, half of whom were female, who had reached prominent positions in professional fields such as university professors, physicians, or leaders of social or religious foundations and associations. This showed that the Saudi government is aware of the specific challenges women face in society, which need to be discussed within state institutions (KACND, 2012); and is willing to support women's rights and duties and to encourage their full participation in economic activity, despite the protests of some religious authorities (Ali, 2009). Furthermore, in September 2011 King Abdullah announced that women will be allowed to vote and to run in municipal elections (Al-Hasni & Al-Shaibani, 2011). Thus, under King Abdullah's leadership, the Saudi government has allowed women greater visibility, for example, in education, in economics and in the social domain (Al-Rasheed, 2010) (see section 2.4). Nevertheless, women's presence is still constrained by social and cultural values (see section 2.3).

On an international level, Saudi Arabia is the major partner in the international oil industry association, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) (Champion, 2003). It has taken an active part in the global economy by interacting with other countries through trade relationships, chief among them those with Japan, the USA, China and South Korea (Ali, 2009). In terms of openness to the outside world, it is a member of the Arab League, the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC), the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Budhwar & Mellahi, 2006) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). This liberalization of trade policies has

¹ For more information on the Saudi National Dialogue, see <http://www.kacnd.org/>.

encouraged Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) (Ali, 2009). The growth of FDI and change in the structure of the Saudi economy was the result of the orientation and emphasis of various development plans, particularly the last two (Ali, 2009), for example, the increase in human development, diversifying the economic base and reducing dependence on oil. The Saudi government aims to provide a national economy that will be able to meet future global challenges and changes (Ali, 2009).

The Saudi government, with its economic wealth, is making great efforts to modernize the country economically, politically and socially, as well as supporting women's development. Yet Saudi Arabia is still considered a very traditional and conservative country. The social structure has not changed at the same rate as its economic structure (Champion, 2003). In the following section the focus is on the Saudi social structure. Its underlying values and beliefs will be examined in order to assess how they influence the status of Saudi women, including their education, access to economic opportunities and managerial positions.

2.3 The Social Values and Beliefs System

Culture is a very complex phenomenon and scholars from different disciplines such as anthropology, sociology and organizational behaviour have attempted to define the concept. Hence their definitions reflect very different understandings of what culture is. In the literature, the word 'culture' has been used interchangeably with the words 'tradition' and 'ideology'. According to Merriam-Webster (2012) culture is defined as "the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group and the characteristic features of everyday existence (as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time". Halim Barakat (1993: 41), an Arab sociologist, argued in *The Arab world: society, culture, and state*, that the Arab culture is built on two main assumptions: first, the great majority of the population in the Arab world is "Arabic in language and therefore to great extent in culture" and second, that a common culture is derived from the fact that more than 90% of Arabs are Muslim by faith. Implicitly, then, the common Arab culture is linked by the Arabic language, Islam as a religion and a common cultural identity and heritage. Therefore, 'Arab culture' is used here to mean a complete collection of intellectual tools, comprehensive concepts, systems and values that shapes the behaviours, assumption, beliefs and expectations of people, and in this way represents the complex set of common characteristics that

influence the responses of a group of people to their environment (Barakat, 1993). In the 1960s and 1970s, Hofstede's study of cultural dimensions examined the influence of national culture on organizations (Hofstede, 2001). In discussing his study (which included Saudi Arabia, as part of the Middle East sample), he subsequently reported that "culture determines the uniqueness of a human group in the same way personality determines the uniqueness of an individual" (Hofstede, 2001: 10). Given the importance of culture, this section will discuss, firstly the influence of the cultural value system on the social structure of the kinship and family. Secondly it will discuss the influence of religious beliefs and values.

2.3.1 Kinship and Family System: Values, Customs and Traditions

The social structure of Saudi Arabia is built on notions of tribal affiliation "with tribal solidarity (*alsabiyya alqabaliyya*)² being one of the most cherished axes of social organization" (Al-Rasheed, 2010: 184). This remains the case, despite the fact that Islam brought with it the idea of *umma* (the Islamic community) loyalty to which, and collective identity with which, replaced that to and with the tribe (Al-Rasheed, 2010). The role of tribal (*qabali*), kinship (*qarābah*) and family (*ailah* or *usra*) system ties is basic to understanding the value system of Saudi society (Al-Rasheed, 2010; Barakat, 1993). Suad Joseph (2000), an Arab anthropologist specialising in women and gender studies, argues that the rights and responsibilities of the kinship system have been defined in terms of linkages through patrilineality (the father's line) and the acceptance of a patriarchal structure (the male father/husband's authority). The strength of the kinship relationship is linked to solidarity between its members. Ibn Khaldun (1967), the great Islamic Arab scholar and social philosopher, referred to solidarity between group members or group feeling (*alsabiyya*), which holds tribes together. From birth onwards, individuals are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups which throughout their lifetimes continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty (Hofstede, 2001). Moreover, kinship ideology is strengthened and symbolically expressed through *alsabiyya*, which helps to allow a tribal group to be in a position of

² *Alsabiyya* is a term developed by the Arab scholar, Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) which refers to group feeling and solidarity. The word is derived from the Arabic verbal root *asaba* which means 'to tie'. Here it links to the kinship blood tie and linkages (see e.g. Al-Rasheed (2010); Ibn Khaldun, 1967; Barakat, 1993).

power (Ibn Khaldun, 1967: xi). This solidarity has been captured in many Arab proverbs, for example, “People are for people” (Barakat, 1993: 201).

The solidarity of the kinship system has been grounded on material realities in which kin relations have been sources of security on various levels, including emotional, social, economic and political (Barakat, 1993; Joseph, 2000). Examples include providing loans and different forms of financial support to members in dealing with their difficulties (Al-Tarrah, 2007; Joseph, 1996), or facilitating higher levels of educational attainment, better employment outcomes, and improvement in the effectiveness of institutions of government, or exchanging favours and sharing information (Alsharekh; 2007; Joseph, 2000).

Group relationships between kin are linked to issues of control (Joseph, 2000). The kinship system has certain rules and a code of duty, honour, obligation, expectations and responsibilities that are crucial to discipline and control. For example, patriarchs (e.g. father, brother, husband) exert control over females and juniors, but they also have responsibilities to care for them. Elders have rights over juniors, but these are accompanied by obligations. Obedience to elders is expected of juniors. Modesty is expected of both men and women. In particular, women’s modesty and behaviour are crucial to the kinship system, to the extent that if a woman engages in forms of disapproved behaviour, this may lead to formal sanctions even to the extreme of honour killing, to protect the reputation of a tribe (Abu-Lughod, 1986; Afshar, 1994; Joseph, 2000).

Whilst reliance on kinship networks has a positive dimension, as described above, it has also been the basis for certain practices under the heading of *wasta*³ or mediation that may produce some social problems. It may cause moral problems because it is a form of nepotism and favouritism. For example, members of the kin group who achieve a position of responsibility in the government sector are expected to help their relatives to find jobs (Al-Tarrah, 2007; Joseph, 2000). Of course these types of behaviours are

³ The word *wasta* is derived from the Arabic verbal roots ‘*wast*’ which means something in the middle, but it often refers to using one’s connections- family or friends- to get things done. The phenomenon of *wasta* is found not only in Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries but also in other cultures; for example in Russia it is called *Blat* and in China it is called *Guanxi*. *Wasta* may be equivalent to what known in the West as ‘the old boy network’, or having the right family background (e.g. nobility) to help a person get things done (see e.g. Champion, 2003; Hutchings & Weir, 2006).

against Islamic principles. Islam emphasises the notion of individual responsibility, but places it within the framework of collaboration with others while acknowledging each one's rights; and Islam forbids any behaviour or practices such as discrimination, nepotism or cronyism that threaten the unity of the community and social justice (Ali, 2005). Moreover, kinship networks may produce another social problem by including or excluding certain groups, and promoting or reinforcing negative group identities, which leads to dividing societies rather than uniting them. Al-Tarrah (2007) contrasts kinship in the GCC with kinship in Japan and Southeast Asia, arguing that whereas in the latter it has been conducive to economic growth, in the former it has been an obstacle to sustainable development. In the Gulf States it is customary for people to derive their social identity from their tribe. This practice has resulted in development being impeded by tribal relations, and to abuses of power by élite people who perceive themselves as entitled to power irrespective of government. Tribes command affinity and loyalty from citizens and this renders government weak in comparison to these social forces (Al-Tarrah, 2007).

No less important than the kinship system is the role of the family. The family is the most fundamental social institution in Saudi society (Al-Khateeb, 2007). The structure of the family is generally compatible with the structure of tribal lineage. As a unit of the kinship, family is patrilineal and membership within the family confers collective rights and duties (Barakat, 1993; Joseph, 2000). First, family identity is linked to the father and children are considered to belong to him rather than to the mother. Second, the culture accords the father the role of ruler of the family and he is regarded as the formal authority to whom the wife and children are ultimately subject (Barakat, 1993; Joseph, 2000). The husband's role is authoritarian, and he assumes responsibility for the wife's role in taking care of the family. The wife in turn remains dependent on her husband to protect the family structure (Al-Khateeb, 2007). This is what is referred to as a patriarchal system (Joseph, 1996). Patriarchy within the Arab family context is defined as "the prioritising of the rights of males and elders (including elder women) and the justification of those rights within kinship values which are usually supported by religion" (Joseph, 1996: 14). The centrality of the family in Arab society has implications for patriarchy that can be transported into all spheres of social life, such as the economic, political and religious (Joseph, 1996). This is because the superior status of males and seniors is legitimated in non-kinship terms. For example, men are argued

to be superior to women, as administrators, professionals, politicians, religious leaders, and the like, irrespective of kinship (Joseph, 1996). Joseph argues that in this respect there are different forms of patriarchy in Arab society, such as social patriarchy, economic patriarchy, political patriarchy, and religious patriarchy. Joseph also refers to patriarchy in the self: the notion of a 'sense of self' that is embedded in relationships where individuals are encouraged to see themselves in relation to critical others, particularly in their families (Joseph, 1996).

Moreover, the family is the carrier of cultural values through the process of socialization, a process whereby individuals learn the correct social values, including Islam as the major belief system, and the Arabic language, which is thought to be, as Sati Al-Husari, an Arab scholar and ideologue, indicated "not only an instrument of communication or container of ideas and feelings... but also an embodiment of a whole culture and a set of linkages across time and space" (Al-Husari, 1959 cited in Barakat, 1993: 34). Furthermore, the family is responsible to varying degrees for the well-being and behaviour of its members (Joseph, 1996). Hence the protection of the family's honour or *irdh* relies primarily on women's morality and it is the responsibility of men to protect the honour of their female relatives and, in so doing, their family honour (Abu-Lughod, 1986; Afshar, 1994). This code of modesty is not only tied to family honour but is also held to be a religious obligation (Alajmi, 2001). Therefore, shame or *al aeeb*, the reverse of honour, is considered an unforgivable crime in Islamic law. As a way of protecting women's purity and honour, veiling, the head cover, was introduced. However, the veil has multi-faceted meanings according to Leila Ahmed (2011), a scholar of Women's Studies in Religion, indicated in *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America*. As a cultural marker it can symbolise identity, class, self-positioning, self-respect, social status and cultural difference (Ahmed, 2011). The value of veiling differs from one Arab country to another. For example, in Lebanon, women are not obliged by the state or society to cover their head (Neal, et al., 2005). In Saudi Arabia, like some other countries in the Gulf region (e.g. Qatar) women are more obliged to follow the traditionalist interpretation of clothing by wearing the head scarf or covering the whole body, including the face, a practice that is consistent with the prevailing *Wahhabi* school of thought (Sidani, 2005). In *Women and Gender in Islam*, Leila Ahmed (1992) argued that the differences between Arab

countries in relation to the meaning of the veil can be explained by the fact that the practice of veiling is a cultural value rather than an Islamic one.

It is worth mentioning that although tribalism has weakened recently (Alsharekh, 2007) tribal identification and relationship in Saudi Arabia, as in some other Gulf States, is still very strong and dominates every aspect of socio-economic life (Ali, 2009). Hisham Sharabi (1988), an Arab sociologist, indicated in *Neopatriarchy: Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society*, that modernisation in the Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, has failed to break down patriarchal relations. Thus the Arab world is best described as being neither modern nor traditional.

2.3.2 Religion: Islam as a Belief System

As a religion Islam is “a system of belief, doctrines, rites, texts and practices associated with sacred objects and the ultimate problem and values of human life” (Barakat, 1993: 128). It is perceived by its believers to be a complete way of life and source of moral values and norms (Barakat, 1993). Muslims draw their law from *Sharia law*, which is based on the Qur’an (the Holy book of Islam), the *Haddith* (sayings and behaviour of Prophet Muhammad), and *Fiqh* (scholarly efforts to interpret the Qur’an) (Barakat, 1993; Mernissi, 2011). *Sharia* law contains a guiding framework of rules that govern almost every aspect of the life in the Muslim world, whether at the governmental or the individual level. Islam has many schools of thought and different sects that have adjusted and continue to adjust their law and practices as a reflection of internal and external forces (Joseph, 2000). However, there are four major Schools of thought in Sunni Islam that developed during the Arab-Islamic Empire: Hanafi, Shafi, Maliki and Hanbali⁴ (Mernissi, 2011). The scholars in these Islamic schools play a crucial role in interpreting and extending the application of *Sharia* law which is known as *Fiqh Al Sharia*. Each School follows the same principles of Islam. However, according to Islamic scholar Mohamed Arkoun (1998) in “Rethinking Islam Today”, Islam is not

4 Hanafi: The founder of the school was Abu Hanifa (699-769). The school holds sway mainly in central Asia, Pakistan and China. Shafi: The founder of the school was Abu Abdullah Muhammad al-Shafi'i (770-819). The school holds sway mainly in lower Egypt and Malaya. Maliki: The founder of the school was Malik Ibn Anas (705-7/95). The school holds sway mainly in Africa and Upper Egypt. Hanbali: The founder of the school was Abu Hanbal (780-855). The school holds sway mainly in central Saudi Arabia and it is characterized by strong puritanical tendency (see e.g. Mernissi, 2011).

built on sacred texts of indisputable authority, therefore Islamic scholars differ in their interpretations of the content, substance, forms and views of the multiple writings and sayings that constitute the collective memory of society. Saudi Arabia adopted the Hanbali School, which is known to be very conservative compared to other schools. The thinking of this school was later developed by Mohammed Ibn Abd Al Wahhab (1703–1792); his interpretation, called *Wahhabism*, is now the official sect in Saudi Arabia (Ali, 2009).

Islam sets out the basic and fundamental moral and spiritual equality of women and men that is often claimed to be divine justification for collective action (Ali, 2005). For example, the Qur'an (33: 35) states,

“For Muslim men and women, for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women, for men and women who are patient and constant, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who fast, for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in Allah's praise, for them has Allah prepared forgiveness and great reward”.

Also, the Qur'an instructed believers that not only are men and women equal, but also their works are equally valued. For example Qur'an (3: 195) states, “I do not neglect anyone's work, be he male or female: ye are members, one of another”. The Prophet Mohammed confirmed that there is no difference among people except in their commitment to their faith (Ali, 2009). Thus, Islam rejects any type of discrimination with regard to gender, race and class. This implies that women, like men, have the right to own and inherit property, to receive child support, to seek education and to look for employment (Syed, 2008) such as nursing, teaching, medicine, social work, business, and farming, or to hold any public office and leadership position. Islam gave this right and there is no clear-cut text in the Qur'an that precludes women from any job, including holding high political position (Ahmed, 1992; Syed, 2008). For example, Khadija bint Khuwaylid was a famous businesswoman, who played an important role in the life of Prophet Muhammad. She was his wife and advisor during the early stages of his Prophet-hood, when the Qur'an was revealed (Ahmed, 1992). Another example is Aisha bint Abu Bakr, another wife of Prophet Muhammad who is considered a scholar of Islamic law. Aisha taught people about the life of the Prophet Muhammad and explained Arab history and traditions (Ahmed, 1992). Afshar (2006) indicated that Aisha provides a role model for women's political participation in Muslim society.

Other early Muslim women were also very active in public life, for example, Um-Al-Shifaa bint Abdullah, who was appointed by Prophet Muhammad's caliph, Omar, as a market place supervisor (Ahmed, 1992), and Sukayna bint Husayn Ibn Ali, a great-granddaughter of the Prophet Muhammad, who was interested in political affairs and attended meetings of the *Quraishi* tribal council, the equivalent of today's municipal councils. According to Arab feminist and scholar Fatima Mernissi, Sukayna took part in the negotiation of social and political issues (Mernissi, 2004). Generally, women in Islam are highly valued as a social group, able and expected like men, to participate in the cultural life and production of society (Ahmed, 1992; Mernissi, 2004).

However, whilst there is clearly a general principle of equality between women and men in Islam, gender inequality still exists in Muslim countries. This inequality is due not to Islam as a religion, but rather it results from socio-cultural interpretations of Islam (Afshar, 1994; Ahmed, 1992; Mernissi, 2011) in which Islam is linked to the family and to state institutions (Joseph, 2000). Muslim institutions, like those of some other religions, have supported patriarchy through their support of patrilineality (Joseph, 2000). Islam has assumed that children belong to their father's lineage. This acquisition of religious status by patrilineality underlies many patriarchal rights and privileges (Joseph, 2000). Thus, the structure of the traditional family has been naturalized and legitimized by Muslim scholars to support male authority over women (Joseph, 2000). Also, family law (e.g. marriage, divorce, and inheritance) has been anchored in religious law (Barakat, 1993) which has "sanctified the family in term of rules perceived as absolute and nonnegotiable" (Joseph, 2000: 22). For example, a father or husband is assumed to have authority over women and children as a requirement of religious-family law. Accordingly, a woman has no right over her children or her own body and she needs to seek permission for every move she makes (Joseph, 2000). Thus religion and family are intertwined and have fed into gender inequality (Joseph, 2000; Barakat, 1993). Religion is used to reinforce and legitimate cultural norms and values, and the family in turn reinforces religious rules and values as its own and labels these as dictated by God (Barakat, 1993).

Islam is not only linked to the family institution, but also to the state (Joseph, 2000). In Saudi Arabia, as mentioned earlier, religion is strongly attached to the state's authority, as the major source of law, which is based mainly on *Hanbali-Wahhabism's*

interpretation of Islam (Al-Rasheed, 2010). This means that religion plays a major role in directing the socio-political environment (AlMunajjed, 1997; Champion, 2003). For example, at the core of *Wahhabi* socio-religious teaching is the idea of keeping women separate from men in the public sphere, since women's modesty is defined in terms of the body being entirely private, and thus they should not be seen by unrelated men (Doumato, 2000). Therefore, in contemporary Saudi society, there is a strict separation between men and women in almost all state institutions (Al-Khateeb, 2007) (see section 2.4.3). Hence women's segregation is a mere institutionalization of authoritarianism, which is the result of interpretation of the Qur'anic texts that reinforce male power in Muslim societies, as suggested by Mernissi (1992).

The Saudi cultural value system in combination with Islam has shaped the characteristics of Saudi society. Religion and culture are intimately related to each other and if isolated from each other, they lose their original meanings. Geertz (1993) argues in *The Interpretation of Cultures* that both culture and religion provide a system of symbolisation of life and every time these symbols are reactivated in rituals, they establish certain mental dispositions that give an order to existence and meaning to life.

Moreover, the combination of traditional cultural values within the family and religious belief system and modernity within a state may influence the pace and the degree of changes in society (Sharabi, 1988). House et al. (2004) in their *Global Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness (GLOBE)* research, which included some Arab countries, and Hofstede (2001) assert the importance of the family value system in Arab states, and its great impact on individual behaviour. They claim that this form of socialization, together with Islam's major role in shaping people's beliefs and the male-dominated character of the Arab society, in which rigid gender roles are assigned, are indicators that Arab society does not readily accept change and is very risk-averse (Hofstede, 2001). Here, I argue that there may be a collision between the two forces of modernity and tradition in the context of oil-based dependence in Saudi Arabia. This may influence the pace of social change at a structural level, which in turn, will affect the status of women in the society.

2.4 The Status of Women in Saudi Arabia

The previous section showed how both socio-cultural and religious factors play a significant role in shaping the behaviour of individuals and in determining the appropriate gender roles. This rigid gender determination applies in all areas of women's lives: the family, the wider community and the workplace. This section will focus on women's roles in education, the labour force and the economy and it will examine the extent of their managerial participation. It will show how the Saudi government has been the most powerful social institution in terms of its influence on the position of both women and men, through legal rights and access to opportunities.

2.4.1 Women in Education

As previously discussed, the oil boom of the early 1970s in Saudi Arabia provided the means to develop a broader economic and national infrastructure, which in turn, necessitated and generated desire for improvement in education (AlMunajjed, 1997; Champion, 2003). In Saudi Arabia, formal education for boys began in the 1930s and for girls it began in the 1960s when King Faysal promoted female education (AlMunajjed, 1997). Boys and girls are in separate schools taught by teachers of their own sex, at all levels after kindergarten. Girls' and women's education at all levels – elementary, secondary, high school and some colleges – was under the Department of Religious Guidance until 2002, while the education of boys was supervised by the Ministry of Education (Hamdan, 2005). When it first began, women's education was under a different department in order to ensure that it conformed to its original purpose. The role of education was to make women good wives and mothers, and to prepare them for jobs such as teaching and nursing, which were believed to suit their nature (Hamdan, 2005). However, although education for both girls and boys is overseen by the Ministry of Education at the present time, the school curricula have not changed much (Hamdan, 2005).

The various five-year development plans in Saudi Arabia from 1970-2009 have increased the number of students (boys and girls) at all stages. For example, during the 1950s, there were only three secondary schools for boys in the country and the number of students was 54,000, whereas from 1970 to 1992 the total number of students in all stages rose from 547,000 to 2.9 million (MEP, 2005). In 2003, the number of

government and private schools, apart from kindergartens, stood at 23.5 thousand, covering all geographic regions (MEP, 2005). By 2010, the education system had dramatically improved, as a direct result of the government's generous public spending on education (Al-Rasheed, 2010; World Economic Forum, 2011). The Saudi government has managed almost to close the gender gap in primary (84% female and 85% male) and secondary (76% female and 70% male) education. In tertiary education, female students outnumber males (36% and 29% respectively) (see Table 2.1) (World Economic Forum, 2011). The literacy rate for Saudi women was reported at 81% and for men at 90% in 2009 (World Economic Forum, 2011).

This investment has significantly changed the supply, quality, and profile of the labour force, especially for women (World Bank, 2009). In this sense, when compared with other countries of the Arab World, Saudi Arabia has been far more successful in closing the gender gap in education. Governments of the Arab World spend an average of 5.3% of GDP on education, which is considered the highest in the world; however, gender gaps have been closed only in primary and secondary education in most Arab countries (World Bank, 2005).

Table 2.1 Gender Gap in Education Attainment in Saudi Arabia

Gender Gap in Education Attainment	Female %	Male%	Female – to – male Ratio
Literacy	81	90	0.90
Enrolment in primary education	85	88	0.97
Enrolment in secondary education	76	70	1.08
Enrolment in tertiary education	36	29	1.23

Source: World Economic Forum (2011) - Global Gender Gap Report

The higher education sector comprises twenty-one government universities, three of which were established under the Seventh Development Plan (2000–2004) (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012). The higher education institutions absorb about 57% of all secondary school graduates. The total number of graduates at Bachelor level during the first four years of the Seventh Development Plan stood at more than 199,000 students, of whom 66% were female (MEP, 2005). Hence the enrolment rates of girls and women at all educational levels have increased sharply, despite the relatively late start of females in education. The average annual rate of increase in total female enrolment was 8% during the period 1975–2002, compared to about 4.2% for boys. Thus the gender

gap in enrolment was closed at the primary level in 2003 and at secondary and university levels in 2002 (MEP, 2005: 324–325). One significant achievement in this respect is that the gender ratio in enrolment in higher education institutions has now shifted in favour of females, to the tune of 1:1.4 in 2002 which could mean that between 2004 and 2020, there will be twice as many female college graduates as male (World Bank, 2005: 97–98).

Education has a tremendous impact on both men and women; nevertheless it seems that the impact on women is greater. Mernissi (1993) argued that access to education seems to have an immediate and tremendous impact on women's perception of themselves, their reproductive and sexual roles, and their social mobility expectations. Supporting this argument, Al-Lamki (1999) reported that the primary indicator of women's status in a given society is their access to education and, as a result, it is the root of women's emancipation. For example, Saudi women are now marrying later in order to complete their education and their attitude toward marital relationships has changed to one based on sharing decisions (Al-Khateeb, 2007).

Nevertheless, the education system has faced some difficulties recently. For example, in 2002, the total number of female higher education graduates (diplomas, graduate and post-graduate degrees) was 40,919, of whom 32,201 specialized in education and 3,162 in humanities; i.e., the two groups together accounted for 86% of graduates (MEP, 2005). This is because women are not allowed to study certain disciplines such as political science and engineering. This practice contrasts with countries such as the UK in which law and policy do not prohibit women's entry to any disciplines. Nevertheless, even in countries such as these, in practice education is experienced largely on gendered lines (Holdsworth et al., 2007). For example, engineering faculties are still dominated by men, whereas nursing is still a predominately female discipline. In Saudi Arabia the concentration of women in certain areas of specialization does not help them to participate in economic activity because women are restricted to employment in government institutions, and in the education and health sectors. Thus there is a mismatch between the needs of the labour market and the modern economy and the subject specializations of higher education students, which is particularly acute in the case of women (MEP, 2005). The Saudi government is well aware of this problem and its Eighth Development Plan aimed to increase and widen the scope of women's

specializations in higher education to enable them to play a more effective and diversified role in society and in economic activities (MEP, 2005).

2.4.2 Women in the Labour Force

The participation of Saudi women in the labour force is representative of a major change in women's traditional role in society; therefore it is important to give a very brief history of what contributed to Saudi women's entrance to employment. During the early Islamic era, women were given the right to engage in public life and were very active members of society. Women worked in a variety of fields such as trade, education and politics (Mernissi, 2004) (see section 2.2.2). After political divisions started in the period following Prophet Mohammed's death in 632 A.D., women became less active in public spheres (Mernissi, 2004) such as the battlefield, the mosque and other social activities (Ahmed, 1992). Nevertheless, during the 11th - 15th centuries some elite women took part in politics and were active members in military campaigns and some of them took charge in directing state affairs (Afsher, 2006). Also, even with the existence of a system of segregation between men and women, some women managed to work within a female-only space, for example, reciting the Qur'an, or as midwives, bakers, or female spies (Ahmed, 1992). From the 15th to the early 19th centuries, the lives of women seem to have been similar with respect to the degree and nature of their involvement in economic activities (Ahmed, 1992).

In the early 19th century, Arab societies began to undergo a fundamental social change, although in each country the pace of change differed. The social-economic and political transformations were the result of

“...western economic encroachment and domination in the nineteenth centuries, the response within the Middle Eastern countries societies, and the economic and social changes that occurred were multileveled and intricate, as were the emergence and evaluation of the debate on women” (Ahmed, 1992: 127).

The outcome of these factors was broadly positive because the social institutions and mechanisms that controlled women and kept them secluded and marginalized from the major spheres of activity were gradually dismantled (Ahmed, 1992).

In the early 19th century one development of unusual significance to women was their emergence as a central subject for national debate. This increased visibility was a

consequence of the writing of Muslim male intellectuals, mainly in Egypt. For example, in *Tahrir Al-Mar'a (The Liberation of Woman)* published in 1899, Qasim Amin (1863–1908) called for women to be liberated from tradition, and he insisted on equal civil rights for women and men (Ahmed, 1992 & 2011). His reform programme was a turning point in how the problems of Arab women were perceived. The programme opened up the prospect of addressing women's subordination at all levels of Arab society (Ahmed, 2011). Amin's work has traditionally been regarded as marking the beginning of feminism in Arab culture (Ahmed, 2011). The Arab feminist movement was born in the early twentieth century. The most famous feminist was Huda Sha'rawi, founder of the Egyptian Feminist Union in 1923. Her movement impacted on other women in other Arab countries such as Nawal El-Saadawi and Fatima Mernissi (Ahmed, 1992; UNDP, 2006).

In the second half of 20th century, the role of women in Arab countries underwent an enormous change and transformation. The various state-led legal reforms in many Arab countries recognized the importance of women's development socially and economically. These reforms provided women with a wide range of rights and opportunities that allowed them to enter all fields and most professional work, including politics and business (Moghadam, 2004; Sidani, 2005), though not as judges or heads of state (Ahmed, 1992). In recent times access to education and employment has acquired the status of a fundamental right for all people in the Arab World (Moghadam, 1998; World Bank, 2005).

These significant changes in Arab societies were as important for women as they were for men and they have greatly influenced the Saudi government in its efforts to integrate women into the human resources development plans for the country (Al-Khateeb, 2007; AlMunajjed, 1997). Economic resources combined with the continuous process of urbanization and modernization has enabled the Saudi government to play a major role in encouraging female employment through various initiatives, although the right of women to work was highly debated in Saudi society throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s. Attitudes ranged from extreme conservatism, which views the appropriate role for women as that of wife and mother, and the liberal view that insists on the emancipation of women to play an important role in the economy (AlMunajjed, 1997). The Saudi government has opened new employment opportunities for women and

increased their number in economic activities in the five-year development plans. For example, the Sixth Development Plan (1995–1999) and Seventh Development Plan (2000–2004) aimed to increase participation of women in employment within the framework of Islamic values and teachings (MEP, 2005). Nevertheless, the Eighth Development Plan (2005–2009) seems to be the most important in terms of focusing on improving women's position in society. It has a chapter dedicated to 'Women in Development', which aims to enhance the status of women by ensuring their participation in economic and social development. In addition, the recent development ...plan was intended to increase and diversify job opportunities for Saudi women. On 31st May 2004, the Council of Ministers approved a package of regulations and measures to enhance women's participation in economic activity (MEP, 2005). The implementation of this package will undoubtedly help to achieve the third of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which is to improve the status of women through expanding opportunities in education, health and employment, thereby promoting gender equality and empowering women (MEP, 2005; UNDP, 2006).

Women in Saudi Arabia have been given the opportunity to work in both the public and private sectors. However, they are found predominately in the public sector (96%), and only in certain fields: education (85.8%), health (6.1%), and social work (4.4 %) (MCS, 2012a). The public sector has been the best available option for Saudi women, since it offers job opportunities in the fields of women's educational specialisms, and exercises a sound policy of equal employment opportunities. Saudi labour law protects the rights of every employee, men and women. This is stated in Article 3: 'Work is the right of every citizen. No one else may exercise such right unless the conditions provided for in this Law are fulfilled. All citizens are equal in the right to work ... and when implementing the provisions of this Law', and in Article 4: 'When implementing the provisions of this Law, the employer and the worker shall adhere to the provisions of *Sharia*' (MCS, 2012b). Women employed in the public sector in Saudi Arabia formally enjoy the same benefits as their male counterparts in terms of wages, training, and promotion (MCS, 2012b). Additionally, there is an entire section in the Saudi Labour Law dedicated to the employment of women. For example, Articles 149–160 clearly indicate the rights and working conditions of Saudi women. Articles 149 and 150 state that women can work in all fields which suit their nature in order to protect them from working in certain places or certain time: 'Women shall work in all fields suitable to

their nature. It is prohibited to employ women in hazardous jobs or industries; women's employment shall be prohibited or restricted under certain terms' and 'Women may not work during a period of night the duration of which is not less than eleven consecutive hours, except in cases determined pursuant to a decision by the Minister'. Articles 151-156 in Saudi Labour Law noticeably exhibit special advantages and support granted to working women in areas such as maternity and widowhood leave entitlements, of 6 weeks paid and fifteen days paid, respectively. Working mothers who return to work while continuing to breastfeed are allowed to leave work an hour early each day for six months to feed their babies (MCS, 2012b).

According to the Arab Human Development Report (UNDP, 2009) the participation of women in economic activities in Saudi Arabia is very low, despite the narrowing gender gap in education between men and women and despite the increased level of female participation in employment. Table 2.2 shows that in Saudi Arabia female participation in the labour force is estimated to constitute about 17 per cent and men 83 per cent of the total labour force (World Economic Forum, 2011& UNDP, 2011). In addition, a woman's earned annual income is less than a man's (PPP⁵ US\$ 7,157 and US\$ 36,727 respectively), and the gender pay gap between men's and women's salaries for similar work is 65% (World Economic Forum, 2011), even though Saudi labour law prescribes wage equality for similar work (MCS, 2012b). Moreover, unemployment rates among men and women in Saudi Arabia, as in other Arab countries, are very high. However, the rate of unemployment in Saudi Arabia in 2011 is higher for women (16%) than for men (4%) (World Economic Forum, 2011). Thus the gender gap in economic participation and opportunity in Saudi Arabia is very large. The Global Gender Gap Index in 2011 assessed that Saudi Arabia ranked 131 out of 134 countries in terms of the gender gap in economic participation and opportunity (see Table 2.2) (World Economic Forum, 2011).

⁵ Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) is a measure which is based on relative price levels of different countries (see World Economic Forum, 2011).

Table 2.2 Gender Gap in Economic Participation in Saudi Arabia

Gender Gap in Economic Participation	Female (percent)	Male (percent)	Female-to-male-Ratio
Labour force participation	17	83	0.20
Wage equality for similar work	–	–	65
Estimated annual earned income (PPP US\$)	7,157	36,727	19
Legislators, senior officials, and managers.	7	93	0.08
Professional and technical workers	28	72	0.38
Unemployment rate	16	4	–

Source: World Economic Forum (2011) - Global Gender Gap Report; and UNDP (2011) .

This trend is visible in other countries as well. For example, the Global Gender Gap Index introduced by the World Economic Forum in 2008 shows that of the 134 countries covered in the Report “over 90% of the world’s population have closed almost 96% of the gap on health outcomes between women and men and almost 93% of the gap on educational attainment. However, in economic participation and political empowerment the gap between women and men remains wide: only 59% of the economic outcomes gap and only 18% of the political outcomes gap has been closed” (World Economic Forum, 2011: 17). Women are disadvantaged economically, politically and socially worldwide, but on average, Arab women are more disadvantaged than women in other regions (Moghadam, 2004). The World Economic Forum Report (2011) stated that most countries in the Middle East and North Africa region continue to perform below the global average in terms of economic participation. Some Arab and Western scholars have argued that from an economic or sociological viewpoint the shortage of women in the labour force in the Arab world, including Saudi Arabia, may be explained by a number of factors including the socio-cultural values and belief system and the availability of economic resources.

The socio-cultural values and belief system is the first explanation given for the low proportion of women in employment. Arab social theorists such as Ahmed (1992), Barakat (1993), Joseph (2000) and Sharabi (1988) have long claimed that social structures and traditional values strongly shape perceptions of what constitutes an appropriate division of labour between the sexes in the family and public sphere. Many contemporary studies support this claim. The value system within Arab family institutions emphasises the traditional gender roles of women (e.g. the male

breadwinner/female homemaker) (e.g. Ahmed, 1992; Al-Khateeb, 2007; Joseph, 2000). Also, the social and cultural values encourage women to leave their jobs and care for their families and spouses when they marry (Pharaon, 2004). These fixed traditional gender roles are employed to legitimate gender stereotypes (Mostafa, 2003; World Bank, 2005), which can have a huge effect on the types of work that are considered suitable for women and men (World Bank, 2005).

Another issue that is related to the traditional value system is the idea of gender segregation and gender-based occupations. For example, in Saudi Arabia, despite the legal rhetoric of the labour laws that espouse the need for a greater economic role for women, and measures for equal treatment, the culture and structure of the labour market emphasizes gender segregation and gender-based occupations. The idea of gender-segregation is guided by *urf* (custom and *Sharia* law) which reflects the need to 'protect' women from being subjected to sexual harassment, or being a source of *fitna* (temptation) which may create social disorder such as loss of morals and adultery (Haddad, 1998; Mernissi, 2011; Tayeb, 1997); and hence segregate workplaces to provide a moral work environment (Sonbol, 2003). Thus women work in separate places and they are required to wear the veil when in contact with men (AlMunajjed, 1997; Moghadam, 2004). Furthermore, occupations are typically gender-based. For example, the labour market controls the types of jobs women may undertake; in that women are crowded in 'feminine' sectors (MCS, 2012b), and are not allowed to work as judges, or to hold senior leadership positions (Altorki, 2000). Labour market law also controls the hours women may undertake; for example women are not allowed to work at night (MCS, 2012b). Thus women will find it very difficult to gain access to a predominantly male environment, and their participation, opportunities for job mobility and career advancement to higher levels of management will remain limited, which will influence their socio-economic status, unless the labour market becomes more gender-sensitive and addresses women's specific needs (World Bank, 2005). This study is aiming to investigate such matters (see Chapter 1).

Supporting the Arab studies that argue that the religious and cultural value systems are responsible for gender inequality in the labour market, Pippa Norris (2009) a Western social scientist, has produced a study of countries that have adopted Islam as the foundation of their political institutions. Norris's study draws on the World Values

Surveys which include Islamic states such as Saudi Arabia. She argues that religious traditions influence attitudes and values in many societies. The cultural values have an impact on the way that men and women perceive the appropriate gender division of labour in the home, family and public spheres. She emphasizes that all religions reflect certain distinctive ideas about gender roles which have continued to leave an enduring imprint on the lives of women and men even in increasingly secularized post-industrial societies (Norris, 2009). However, Norris argued that cultural barriers can be overcome by effective implementation of well-designed institutional reforms, which gradually lead to gender equality.

The social and cultural values approach seems to be very persuasive, in that there is a strong linkage between cultural values and the belief system, and women's positions in the labour force. Nevertheless, other scholars argue that the low participation of women in the labour force in the Arab world has relatively little to do with Islam as a religion; rather, it is related mainly to the structure of oil-rich economies that reinforce traditional value systems. For example, Michael Ross (2008), a scholar in political science, suggests in "Oil, Islam and Women", that different types of economic growth can have different effects on women's role in the work force. For example, economic growth based on export-oriented manufacturing and agriculture tends to benefit women and draws them into the labour force, thus bringing changes in gender relations that are associated with modernization. However, income growth that comes from oil extraction is often unsuccessful in producing industrialization and thus hinders more equitable gender relations, which in turn diminishes women's role in the work force and the political sphere. Ross emphasized that oil wealth does not always harm the status of women. Some countries have produced significant quantities of oil and gas, but still made faster progress on gender equality than one would expect based on their source of income, for example, Norway, Mexico and Syria. One explanation is that the commitment of the government can sometimes counteract the perverse effects of oil on the status of women, although it is generally the case that an economic structure that is heavily dependent upon petroleum will be directly responsible for gender inequality in the paid labour force. This gender imbalance will limit female opportunities to participate in political life and this, in turn, has an effect on the identities and perceptions of women; it limits access to formal and informal networks, and it means that governments lose their incentive to consider women's interests or to enhance

women's status. The dynamic interrelation between these factors helps to explain the low number of women in mineral-rich states in the Arab world (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Algeria and Libya).

Ross's idea about the effects of oil production on gender relations, namely, that it reduces the presence of women in the labour force, sheds new light on the link between oil resources and women's representation in economics activities. Nevertheless, he tends to ignore the strong linkage between deep-rooted cultural values and Islam as a belief system that characterized Saudi Arabia before the discovery of oil. The cultural values embedded in the society have an ongoing effect on gender positioning in family and public life. Ross's idea has been subject to a number of criticisms from the traditional sociological standpoint. For example, Norris (2009) argued that the 'resource curse', or petroleum patriarchy, is not the major factor of continuing gender disparity in Arab states that Ross claimed; rather, it is cultural patriarchy that continues to be reflected in the norms and beliefs, attitudes and values of the society.

The socio-cultural perspective and the economic explanation of women's role in the labour force are very useful. Nevertheless, when viewed separately these two explanations do not fully describe or explain contemporary society in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, I would argue that the shortfall of women in the labour force may be explained by both the deep-rooted cultural values and belief system, and the oil wealth, which reinforced traditional values and reduced the status of women.

2.4.3 Women in Management

As shown in the previous section, in the last twenty years, there have been major and significant changes for women in Saudi Arabia. Women are now highly educated; they have entered the work force and gained professional positions. However, research on women in management in the Arab World in general and specifically in Saudi Arabia seems to be very limited. Statistics obtained from the Saudi Ministry of Civil Service (MCS, 2012a) seem to be complicated and confusing at some points, since there are different occupational scales in different organizations within the Saudi public sector. Nevertheless, the general feature of employment distribution is that women are concentrated either at the middle or at the lower end of the occupational scale, whereas men outnumber women on all occupational scales, particularly at the higher levels, and

there are very few women, if any, present at the higher end of the occupational scales (see Chapter 4).

Moreover, other statistics on Saudi women managers that come from different sources such as the UN, WB, or the International Labour Organization (ILO) tend to vary. Hence to find out about women's progress in management in Saudi Arabia is difficult, given the absence of longitudinal data on women as managers, along with the variation in statistics on women that come from different sources. Nevertheless, a common trend in these statistics is that the proportion of women as legislators, senior officials and managers in Saudi Arabia is extremely low when compared with that of other women worldwide (World Economic Forum, 2011) (see Chapter 3).

Apart from labour statistics, very little is known about women in management in Saudi Arabia or in the Arab world generally, as there are few empirical studies. As will be seen in Chapter 3, the issue of women in management has gained considerable attention among Western researchers, but these studies have mostly been limited to Western (North American, Western European or Australian) settings. Hence it is not possible to automatically generalize their results, yet women in different cultural contexts have been given little attention. Nevertheless, recently, a few reliable studies on women in management in Arab contexts have emerged, for example, in Jordan and Tunisia (Singh, 2008), in Lebanon (Jamali et al., 2005; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011), in the GCC (Alajmi, 2001; Al-Lamki 1999, Al-Lamky, 2007; Metcalfe, 2006; Metle, 2002; Mostafa, 2005). These studies will be discussed in Chapter 3.

2.5 Summary

This chapter has presented an overview of the background to this study: Saudi Arabia. It has explained how the political, historical and socio-economic threads are interwoven. This explanation has provided an interesting and complex tapestry that must be unravelled in order to explore Saudi women's status in society. The foregoing discussion has revealed a number of forces that are in play including the family, religion and politics. It has also shown that the Saudi government has been the most powerful social institution to influence the position of both women and men, through granting legal rights and access to opportunities, including education, participation in the labour force and management. The discussion in this chapter has also shown that due to such

government initiatives, the status of women has become one of the most rapidly changing elements of Saudi society, even though the culture still holds on to strong traditional values that make a clear gender distinction between the appropriate roles for women and men.

This chapter has provided an in-depth review of the social and economic-political background of Saudi Arabia. This factor is extremely important to the present study, not only to identify the problems faced by Saudi women managers working in public organizations, but also to assert why there is a need for the adoption of particular policies to facilitate women's access to senior positions.

The next chapter will present a literature review of women in management worldwide. The focal point will be on identifying the gap in knowledge that necessitated this study.

Chapter Three: Women in Management: A Conceptual Framework

“Around the world, a glass ceiling appears to restrict women’s access to top management positions solely because they are women” (Powell, 2010: 3)

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview and discussion of the existing theories and empirical research on women in management worldwide, with a particular focus on the position of women in organizational hierarchies. The dearth of empirical investigations into women in management in Arab countries, particularly in Saudi Arabia, necessitates the use of literature that is drawn mainly from the West. The assumption made in this study is that the career advancement of women is impeded by cultural ideology that is embedded in organizational structures and cultures, and the gendered attitudes and practices that exist within organizations. This claim is borne out by the literature. Based on the existing research (which uses Western frameworks) it appears that in the majority of organizations worldwide, women remain scarce as élite leaders and top executives. Moreover, in most sectors of society, leadership at the highest level remains overwhelmingly a male prerogative (e.g. Acker, 2009; Davidson & Burke, 2011; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Fagenson, 1990; Ford, 2006; Powell, 2010; Stead & Elitott, 2009). Whilst these studies do offer valuable insights into the position of women in management, they do not take account of cultural specificity. This is a major factor in countries such as Saudi Arabia where the pace of change has been relatively slow and older traditions and religious values are still dominant (see Chapter 2).

This chapter will begin with an overview of the position of women in management worldwide. The following section will discuss the various theoretical and empirical approaches that have so far been used to explain the under-representation of women in senior positions. These two sections provide the foundation for this research study. The subsequent sections of this chapter will identify and discuss the gap that exists in the literature on women and management and they will set out the theoretical framework for this study. Also, wherever possible, this chapter will include findings from the little research currently in existence on Arab women managers. This research will show in what areas their experiences are similar to or different from those of women in other contexts. It is worth mentioning that some of the literature in this chapter is drawn from

different disciplines and this is because the issues that face women managers have been addressed to a greater extent in other fields. With reference to the area of women and gender in management, researchers have noted that “the field is still somewhat precarious” (Broadbridge & Hearn, 2008: S38).

3.2 Women in Management: An Overview

During the past two decades, women have become enduring figures in the labour force and in many countries their share of managerial jobs (broadly defined) has increased. Women have become more visible in management and some of them, albeit very few in number, have been moving up through organizational hierarchies towards the top positions (Broadbridge, 2010; Powell, 2010). This development is the result of worldwide social policies that have contributed towards addressing the issue of gender equality in the labour market as dictated by law. For example, Norway introduced the Gender Equality Act in 1978 (Ministry of Children and Equality, 2011); the UK introduced the Equal Pay Act in 1970 and the Sex Discrimination Act in 1975 (Wilson, 2011); Australia introduced the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA) in 1999 (EOWA, 2011); and the USA established the Civil Rights Act in 1964 (Mathe et al., 2011). Also, within the family unit, the roles and responsibilities of women have changed (Davidson & Burke, 2004). In addition, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the ILO have been involved in gender equality measures. These measures have subsequently been integrated into the policies, programmes and resource allocations within organizations (UNDP, 2008). Such efforts have seen an increase in women’s human capital (Powell, 2010). It can be seen from Table 3.1 that the labour force statistics for 2008 showed that the highest proportion of women employed in full-time jobs was in Norway with 48%, compared with 46% in the USA and 46% in the UK. In regions such as the Arab countries, the percentage of women joining the labour market has also increased, although these percentages are very low when compared with Western countries: Egypt 23%, Kuwait 25% and Saudi Arabia 17% (see Chapter 2).

The educational attainment of women has also increased considerably over the past twenty years (UNDP, 2011). As shown in Table 3.1, in 2008 the proportion of women receiving a higher education in all countries was very high, and in some countries the women’s share exceeded the men’s share. For example, in the USA the proportion was

57% and in both Sweden and the UK the proportion was 60%. Interestingly, in some Gulf countries the proportion of women with a higher education is greater than in some developed countries. For example, in Kuwait it is 67%, in the UAE it is 60% and in Saudi Arabia it is 55%. I argue that these statistics can be attributed to the fact that job opportunities for women without higher education are very limited. Also, as their access is funded by the government many women are able to undertake higher education.

However, as acknowledged in a number of studies, the majority of university subjects have remained gender-typed. Women tend to be concentrated in languages and in social science subjects whilst men are predominantly found in subjects such as engineering, mathematics and the sciences (Davidson & Burke, 2011). This is the case in Saudi Arabia (Hamdan, 2005).

Table 3.1 Women’s Share in Higher Education, Labour Force and Management

Country	Higher Education %	Labour Force %	Management %
Australia	55	45	28
Canada	56	47	36
China	49	45	17
Iceland	64	45	33
Egypt	43	23	11
Kuwait	67	25	14
Norway	61	48	31
Saudi Arabia	55	17	8
Sweden	60	47	32
UAE	60	16	10
UK	60	46	35
USA	57	46	43

Source: UNDP (2011)

Notwithstanding various efforts to promote gender equality in the labour market, there is considerable evidence that occupational segregation, along both horizontal and vertical lines according to gender, still exists in many countries. Women are concentrated in ‘traditionally female sectors’ such as education, health services, and personnel services (Davidson & Burke, 2011; Powell, 2010). In Saudi labour force not only occupational segregation exists but also the existence of institutional gender segregation. This requirement means that women work in different places from men in most public sector organizations (see Chapter 2).

Studies have shown that although legislation is in place in most countries and there are policies and programme to support women’s career advancement, such as Norway (Ministry of Children and Equality, 2011), there is still evidence that men and women are being placed in different occupational and managerial areas (Davidson & Burke, 2004). Moreover, it has been demonstrated that women are experiencing vertical segregation, a situation in which men and women both work in the same job categories, but men commonly do the more skilled, responsible or better paid work (Powell, 2010). This is a feature in many countries.

Moreover, “not only do men and women work in different occupations, but they differ in earnings” (Powell, 2010: 30). Disparity in female-to-male earnings exists in all countries. To cite a few examples, as shown in Table 3.2, the ratio of female-to-male wage equality for similar work is 75% in Norway, 75% in Iceland, and 75% in Sweden. These three Nordic countries are considered among the top 10 countries in closing the gender gap and they occupy the highest positions in the Global Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum, 2011).

Table 3.2 Women-to-Men Ratio in Wages for Similar Work and Annual Earned Income

Country	Wage %	Annual earnings (PPP US\$) %
Norway	75	100
Iceland	75	69
Sweden	75	82
Saudi Arabia	65	19
USA	66	88
UK	68	71

Source: World Economic Forum (2011).

In Saudi Arabia, the female-to-male wage ratio for similar work is 65%, which is similar to the USA at 66% and the UK at 68%, and this is due to the equal pay law (MCS, 2012b). However, when Saudi Arabia is compared to other countries with regard to annual earned income, it is very low at 19% (see Chapter 2), whereas in Norway it is 100% and in other countries, women’s share of income is closer to men’s.

The increased employment and human capital of women have contributed to a rise in the number of women entering the management sector in recent years (UNDP, 2011). Nevertheless, it has been revealed that women lag behind men in their career

progression, even if they have an MBA (Simpson et al., 2004) and that women tend to be concentrated at lower level management, in areas associated with people and services rather than in higher paid sectors (Powell, 2010). It can be seen from Table 3.1 that the proportion of women managers in different countries ranges from a low 8% in Saudi Arabia to 43% in the USA. In Western European countries the percentage ranges from 31% in Norway to 35% in the UK. Interestingly, China, with a high percentage of women in full-time work, has only 17% of women working as managers. In the Arab countries, the percentage of women as managers is very low, for example 14% in Kuwait and 11% in Egypt.

It is important to note that the process of statistical comparison is complicated by the fact that there is no agreed definition of 'top managers'. For example, statistics from the ILO define administrative workers in the same way as managers (Vinnicombe, 2000), while statistics from the UNDP have grouped legislators, senior officials and managers into one category instead of three (UNDP, 2011). Additionally, some countries do not record statistics with regard to the percentage of women at different management levels (Davidson & Burke, 2011); and every country defines the concept of 'managers' differently (Powell, 1999; Vinnicombe, 2000).

There is considerable evidence from the UNDP (2011), the World Economic Forum (2011), Female FTSE⁶ Report 2010 (Vinnicombe, et al., 2010), Catalyst (2008) and other statistical sources, as well as evidence from a large number of empirical studies, to show that women's representation in senior positions is very low globally, although legislation is in place in most countries and there are policies and programmes to support women's career advancement. Bagilhole and White (2011: 197) concluded from a multi-country study (including the UK) which examined the dynamics of men and women working together in higher education senior management teams, that "despite the marked differences in political and legal contexts in the various countries ... there is a remarkable similarity in the numerical predominance of men in senior management".

6 Financial Times Stock Exchange (FTSE) is a company that is jointly owned by the London Stock Exchange and the Financial Times and specialises in index calculation. The Female FTSE Board Report was established in 1999 against the backdrop of women's low representation at board level (Vinnicombe, et al., 2010).

Also, Halpern and Cheung (2008: 3), based on a cross-cultural study that involved personal interviews with 62 women leaders, indicated that “few women make it to the ‘O’⁷ level”. This means that women wishing to enter senior management positions and those women already in such roles continue to face challenges.

The phenomenon of women’s under-representation in senior leadership positions has caused many researchers and theorists from different disciplines (in particular women in management) to ask ‘Why are there so few women in top positions?’ and ‘How can women advance to top management?’ Previous researchers have attempted to answer these questions by identifying a number of factors that function as constraints which prevent women from advancing into the top echelons of organizations. This phenomenon, from an organizational perspective, has often been referred to using the metaphorical term the ‘glass ceiling’. The term ‘glass ceiling’ was originally used by Carol Hymowitz and Timothy Schellhardt in 1986, in an article in the *Wall Street Journal*. The authors coined the term to describe situations in which qualified women remain at lower levels within the organization hierarchy and are effectively blocked from advancing to senior leadership roles (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986). Other scholars suggested different metaphors for this phenomenon, for example from a psychology perspective as a ‘labyrinth’ (Eagly & Carli, 2007) and from a sociological perspective as ‘inequality regimes’ (Acker, 2009). However, regardless of the different metaphors, all agree that women managers face many constraints that impede them from reaching leadership positions, as will be seen in the discussion below.

3.3 Theoretical Explanations: Women Managers and Top Positions

This section will review the existing literature on the phenomenon of women’s under-representation in top management. Much of the current research is concerned with finding explanations for this phenomenon. These explanations are drawn from disciplines such as sociology (e.g. Acker, 1990; Smith, 1987; Walby, 1990), psychology (e.g. Eagly & Carli, 2007; Halpern & Cheung, 2008) organization and management (e.g. Broadbridge, 2009; Davidson & Burke, 2011; Elliott & Stead, 2008; Fagenson, 1993; Ford & Collinson, 2011; Kanter, 1993; Powell, 1999, 2010; Schein, 2007; Singh

⁷ The ‘O’ level refers to top positions such as Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Information Officer (CIO) and Chief Technical Officer (CTO).

et al., 2006). There are four main perspectives which will be explored here in detail: gender-centred, organizational context, social and institutional systems, and gendered-organization-system. While recognizing that each of these perspectives provides a comprehensive account, at some points they may overlap and reinforce each other.

3.3.1 Gender-Centred Perspective

The gender or person-centred perspective is one of the frameworks most often used to explain the behaviour and the under-representation of women in upper-level management positions. This perspective attributes the dearth of women in top management to factors specific to women, such as behaviour traits, cognitive factors, personality and attitudes (Fagenson, 1990). Once these factors have been identified they provide the rationale for women's subsequent exclusion from top positions. Gender-centred theorists have offered a number of causal explanations to account for these differences between the sexes and the "common heritages, beliefs and assumptions" (Hennig & Jardim, 1977: 67, cited in Fagenson, 1990: 268) that are seen to occur within each sex. Some theorists cite biological bodily differences as the causal factors whereas others explain differences as social constructions and many theorists attempt to combine the two approaches. Therefore, in this section I will discuss a number of the issues emerging from gender-centred literature: gender-role socialization, gender-based stereotypes, gender-based discrimination and the 'family and career' dilemma.

3.3.1.1 Gender-Role Socialization

A number of explanations have been offered for why there are gender differences in the work place. Gary Powell (2010) in *Women and Men in Management* explained that there are two broad theories which tend to explain the differences between men and women, namely, biological forces and social-environmental forces. Theorists who rely on 'biological essentialism' focus on sex differences between men and women as a way of explaining gender. On this account men and women are born to be masculine or feminine; hence the claim that people will behave in certain ways simply because of their sex - boys or girls (Oakley, 1985; Wharton, 2005). Explanations that focus on social-environmental forces claim that gender differences are not biologically determined; rather they are learned through childhood within a certain social and cultural setting (Powell, 2010; Wharton, 2005). Thus the social-environmental

explanation focuses on gender-role socialization⁸ which is based on the premise that individuals learn prescribed roles, attitudes and orientations culturally and socially through the process of socialization (Oakley, 1985; Wharton, 2005). Powell (2010) argues that many social forces contribute towards socializing children into gender roles; nevertheless, it is parents, school and the mass media who are the main contributors. Through these forces children learn gradually to adopt the social and cultural norms and expectations that match their sex (Powell, 2010). Powell (2010) observes that these different gender role behaviours may then be perpetuated and reinforced in the workplace, which may negatively affect the career development of individuals. This resonates with what Ashcraft and Mumby (2004) indicated that in organization as a means of social context, the concept of gender becomes significant.

Research on women managers within the Arab context showed that family plays an important role in the socializing process, together with religious institutions and schools (Al-Khateeb, 2007; Hamdan, 2005). As discussed in Chapter 2, the collectivist values that characterize most Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, may contribute to the preservation of gender role differences. A study by Tlaiss and Kauser (2011) which involved 85 women managers (at different levels junior, middle and senior) across different industries in Lebanon, found that the socialization process continued to reinforce the differences between male and female, hence strengthen patriarchal values Respondents perceived this as the greatest obstacle to their career progression. Here it can be argued that social-environmental and biological forces contribute to gender differences. Similarly, a number of Arab studies revealed the same conclusion, for example Alajmi (2001) and Al-Khateeb (2007) in Saudi Arabia (see section 2.4.2). As Powell (2010: 54) argues we all learn:

“... to think and act in certain ways, some of which differ for male and female and others of which do not differ. Whether the sex similarities or differences are

⁸ The term socialization refers to “the process through which individuals takes on gendered qualities and characteristics and acquire a sense of self. In addition, through socialization people learn what their society expects of them as males or females. Even if these expectations are not realized fully, people learn that they will at some level be held accountable to them; that is, they will be assessed in part on the basis of whether they are “appropriately” masculine or feminine.” (Wharton, 2005: 31).

learned or exhibited in a particular setting is influenced by the nature of the social environment operating in that setting”.

Powell (2010) asserts that no agreement has been reached as to whether biological forces (nature) or social-environmental forces (nurture) have most influence on the development of children and subsequent behaviour of adults. This resonates with what Amy Wharton (2005) demonstrates in *The Sociology of Gender*, that both biological and the social worlds are so intertwined and mutually influential. Thus it is difficult to draw the line between the realm of sex and that of gender when trying to illustrate any aspect of social life.

The socialization perspective, therefore may be another way of explaining the under-representation of women in top positions (Oakley, 2000). Thus, from a management perspective, because the process of socialization contributes towards producing two specific gender roles: feminine and masculine, women are disadvantaged from top positions (Powell, 2010). For example, Eagly and Carli (2007) in *Through the labyrinth: the truth about how women become leaders*, noted that men are encouraged to be assertive and independent, and therefore they adopt masculine leadership style or ‘transactional’, which tends to be favoured over women’s style. In contrast, women are encouraged to be nurturing and emotionally expressive, and therefore they adopt a feminine leadership style ‘transformational’ (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Rosener, 1990). Hence in contemporary organizations, it seems that the male style of leadership tends to be favoured over women’s style (see section 3.3.1.3)

There is on-going debate on differences and similarities between men’s and women’s leadership style and the advantages and disadvantages of female leadership styles, which has an influence on the organizations’ attitude towards women (e.g. Alvesson & Billing, 2000; Bass, 1985; Eagly et al., 2003; Powell, 1997; Rosener, 1990), but this is beyond the scope of this study. However, one conclusion that literature has agreed on is that the power of the ‘feminine’ stereotype is so strong that even in the face of evidence to the contrary, women’s leadership styles are still devalued.

3.3.1.2 Gender-based Stereotypes

Eagly (1987) says that in social role theory, it is important to note that roles involve two kinds of expectations or norms. Citing Cialdini and Trost (1998) and applying their

terminology, Eagly and Karau (2002) argue that roles include *descriptive norms*, which are expectations about what people actually do and *injunctive norms*, which are expectations about what people ought to do. Whilst descriptive norms are usually synonymous with definitions of stereotypes, Eagly (1987) uses the term 'gender role' to refer to both the descriptive and the injunctive expectations that are associated with women and men. Gender roles encourage sexual stereotyping because they appear to be behaviourally confirmed. Hence people infer a relation of correspondence between the types of actions in which people engage and their inner traits or dispositions (Eagly & Karau, 2002). As such, the subsequent allocation of specific social roles to the sexes is a practice that indirectly supports gender stereotyping because the types of activities women commonly perform in their allotted social roles are not seen to reflect the personal qualities that are necessary for leadership. In turn, this creates and encourages discriminatory attitudes towards women in management.

Virginia Schein, as an organizational psychologist, asserted that gender-based stereotypes have been seen to be "the single most important barrier for women in management in all countries that associate management with being male" (2001: 681). From 1973 to 2007, Schein's work examined the social image of successful middle managers in different countries, including the USA, China, Germany, Japan, and the UK. She found that leadership is predominantly associated either with being male or with task-oriented traits that are also perceived as being more masculine, although there were cultural variations in the views of both women and men. Schein (2001: 680) assumed that such "variations in the degree of managerial sex typing, however, may reflect the females' view of opportunities for and actual participation of women in management in their respective countries". For example, in Japan the women failed to see any association between women and managers. In China, the men showed the strongest degree of managerial sex stereotyping and this was related to a belief in the basic superiority of males. On the other hand, women in the UK perceived a moderate degree of association between women and managers, and this was attributed to the support that women receive in order to advance into management. Interestingly, women in the USA did not sex-type managerial positions (Schein, 2007). The conclusion that Schein draws from her various studies is that similar attitudes about men being managers were prevalent in the majority of countries studied. Thus she concludes that

the 'think-manager-think-male' mind-set is a global phenomenon. Other studies have arrived at the same conclusion as Schein (e.g. Mihail, 2006; Sczesny, et al., 2004).

Research on women managers within the Arab context showed similar findings. For example, Tlaiss and Kauser's (2011) study disclosed that women managers complained about the negative attitude and stereotypes which are embedded in the culture of their organizations. There were similar findings in a study by Jamali et al. (2005) that was conducted with 52 women working in different fields and occupations in Lebanon. The study was focused on identifying the constraints women managers faced, and it revealed that women are perceived as 'submissive', 'emotional' and 'less reliable' and, as such, they are expected to be responsible for taking care of their families and children. By contrast, men are perceived as assertive, aggressive and autonomous and therefore more suited to leadership roles.

The previous studies have tried to show that the socialization of males and females is strongly influenced by the social and cultural norms of society. These social and cultural norms ensure that men and women develop different values and beliefs, which then regulate their behaviour. They are then ascribed roles in the workplace in accordance with what are considered to be their 'natural' characteristics but which are, in fact, the outcome of gender stereotyping. These 'natural' differences are then used as the justification for unequal or discriminatory treatment. The ascription of different values and roles to each gender may affect women in a number of ways. Firstly, it can be argued that women's characteristics may be in conflict with the demands of a leadership role (Schein, 2007). Hence they will be excluded from top positions. Also, the assignment of certain roles may create internal barriers for women managers, which will have an effect on their confidence, commitment and motivation (Powell, 2010). Role assignment may also affect women's self-confidence so they begin to question their abilities. The ensuing self-doubt may subsequently deter them from pursuing a career in top management (Halpern & Cheung, 2008). The question that might be raised here is, if women act in ways that are inconsistent with feminine stereotypes, are they going to hold a leadership position? Ironically, the answer is most probably not, because they will be viewed as 'unfeminine' and 'aggressive'. Thus women managers may face a 'double-bind' situation in which, regardless of whether they act in a 'feminine' way or

a 'masculine' way, often they will be seen as not fitting the male stereotype of leadership (Catalyst, 2007; Oakley, 2000).

3.3.1.3 Gender-based Discrimination

It is clearly the case that gender bias flows from gender stereotyping and stereotyping does affect women's career advancement by discriminating against female managers either overtly or covertly. For example, the gender pay gap in relation to men and women who are doing the same job, together with the benefits and bonuses that are offered to men and not to women is seen as an overt discrimination which is often, but not always, intentional, visible and easy to document. Linda Wirth (2004: 29), in a cross-country survey for the ILO, indicated that:

“The concept of equal remuneration for equal work does not necessarily include the same ‘perks’ that are given to male managers such as ... payments based on performance, bonuses ... and negotiated retirement benefits are not necessarily a standard part of women's remuneration package although they may well be part of the terms of an overall package.”

Often, hidden discrimination is not noticed, as it is embedded in organizational practices such as recruitment and promotion, and has been internalized as 'normal' and 'natural' (Acker, 1990; Wajcman, 1998). Alimo-Metcalf (1995 & 2010) argues that gender bias in assessment processes in organizations is the major reason for the scarcity of women in top management positions. This includes recruitment, performance evaluation and appraisal processes and the processes that operate to identify 'fast-track talent'. Evidence of gender bias was found in two UK studies carried out by Alimo-Metcalf (1995): one among local authority housing managers and the other with the National Health Service. The researcher focused on discovering whether men and women see leadership qualities differently. She concluded that females and males have different leadership styles and that men and women each value different styles of management. However, the style valued by women is not the one that is favoured in organizations. Accordingly, she theorized that the under-representation of women in senior management is due to the way in which decisions in organizations are made about managerial selection and promotion. All or most of these decisions are made by men who value the male or transactional style of leadership more than the female or transformational style of leadership. In 2010, Alimo-Metcalf assessed developments in gender and leadership since 1995, and found that gender bias in assessment still exists

and that the male style of leadership is favoured over the female. This resonates with what Ford (2006 & 2010) demonstrated: that the role of leader was perceived as charismatic and masculine, resulting in men being the dominant figures in organization. However, what are perceived as 'feminine qualities', such as empathy, rationality, ingenuousness and the capacity for listening, are less valued.

Another illustration of gender bias can be found in the work of Kumra and Vinnicombe (2008), who examined how the 'promotion to partner' process worked and whether it disadvantaged women. The research was conducted in a UK international consulting firm, using semi-structured interviews with 19 women and 15 men. They revealed that women experience bias in the process: a process whereby they are not chosen for the traditionally male role. This arises from a combination of firm-based and society-based factors. For example, the self-managed nature of the career development process, an essential requirement within the culture of the firm, was found to pose a certain difficulty for women. Women have been socialized to cooperate with and assist others rather than assert their own self-interest. Thus, and agreeing with Alimo-Metcalfe (2010) and Ford (2006 & 2010), Kumra and Vinnicombe (2008) concluded that organizations practices undervalue the 'feminine' traits, so that women are less favourably perceived when promotion is awarded.

Arab women face similar forms of discrimination in the workplace. For example, two quantitative studies have been carried out, one study in Oman by Al-Lamki (1999) to determine which factors influence women's career progress and the other in Kuwait by Metle (2002) to explore the relationship between Kuwaiti traditional culture and job satisfaction among women employees in the public sector. Both studies revealed that women are not treated equally, particularly in terms of promotion to top positions; men experience preferential treatment and there is both justification and acceptance of men's professional leadership over women. In addition, there is gender segregation in work-based occupations, whereby women are employed mainly in 'feminine fields' and the role of women managers is to act in support of men. Although most Arab states have adopted initiatives to promote gender equality in the labour force (Metcalf, 2011) they continue to foster patriarchal values by reinforcing the 'feminine' nature of women versus the 'guardianship' and economic responsibilities of men (Moghadam, 2004; Sidani, 2005).

The preceding studies have all indicated that systematic discrimination exists before women even enter into a profession (Powell, 2010) and that gender stereotyping may lead to a gender bias that influences the entry of women into top management. Nevertheless, these studies did not make it clear whether all women experience gender bias in the workplace or whether it is only those with children, as women tend to interrupt their careers for childbearing and child rearing. Additionally, these studies did not indicate whether women from different cultural contexts and coming from elite backgrounds experienced the same discriminatory practices in assessment processes.

3.3.1.4 Family-Career Dilemma

Gender-centred theorists have long argued that the perceived behaviour and traits of women are not suited to high-level corporate positions but also that women are viewed as not being as committed to their careers and jobs as men (Fagenson, 1990). For example, it is argued that women have been conditioned to give greater weight to their family lives than to their careers.

Empirical research has shown that it is assumed that women's primary responsibilities are children and housework. As a result, women's career advancement to senior leadership positions is influenced by work-family conflict (Lewis, 2002; Powell, 1999). Broadbridge (2009) examined the difficulties that retail managers face in their careers and in their personal lives by conducting biographical interviews with 22 retail managers in large companies in the UK. She revealed that career women usually face family and career conflict, as they assume the bulk of the domestic responsibilities, while career men have (or have had in the past) a supportive infrastructure at home that better enables them to prioritize their careers. She also indicated that both male and female managers make sacrifices in one domain in order to accommodate the demands of the other. However, women were more likely than men to have been made to experience overload and to feel the need to juggle the demands of their work and home domains (Broadbridge, 2009). Therefore, having children weakened the relationship between working long hours and women's managerial advancement, as found in Spain (Coronel et al., 2010), in the USA (Cooper Jackson, 2001) and in Australia (Metz, 2005).

Arab women face similar conflicts between family and work. For example, Al-Lamky (2007) interviewed ten Omani women leaders in order to shed light on their experiences and challenges in male-dominated work environments and Metcalfe (2006) used mixed methods – quantitative and qualitative – to study the cultural dimensions of gender and management across the Middle East. Both studies indicated that in the light of traditional cultural and social values, women have responsibility for raising children and performing household tasks which does not diminish when they are employed outside the home, even though they may get some support either in the form of paid housemaids or from relatives. Again this is doubly difficult: on a psychological level because women are ‘expected’ to fulfil their ‘natural’ roles. Not doing so can have potentially damaging effects on their self-identity and they become very conflicted about their responsibilities and priorities. And on a practical and logistical level, they are conflicted because their workload is doubled.

These traditional roles and responsibilities of women make it difficult for them to conform to the traditional male model of success. This model assumes that individuals move in a predictable, ordered way from stage to stage in the workplace without interruption, so that each stage provides upward progression (Burke, 2002; Mavin, 2000). It is obvious how this model may exclude some women from some managerial jobs. The career paths and experiences of women are different in some respects from those of men (Mavin, 2000). Women have traditionally followed less linear career paths because they have family and domestic responsibilities and they have been subject to societal and organizational discrimination; plus they lack the appropriate support (see sections 3.2.3 & 3.3.3). Hence it has been suggested that in order to support women and help them to balance their career management and family life there is a need to create different workplace policies, such as a work-life balance (WLB). WLB policy provides flexible work arrangements, which allow employees to set their own times of attendance in order to balance work and family responsibilities (Spinks & Tombari, 2002). A study by Kelliher and Anderson (2010) was carried out in three organizations in the UK in order to examine the implementation of flexible working practices and in particular, to monitor their impact on employee behaviour. The study revealed that flexitime could help workers remain attached to their organizations and that it reduced stress and increased employee satisfaction. In this sense, organizations will not only help women

to keep their careers on track but also benefit by keeping their talented women employees in the workplace (Wirth, 2004).

However, in practice, organizations tend not to be supportive of a work-life balance (Broadbridge, 2009). For example, Straub (2007) compared the involvement of companies with work-life balance practices and policies in 14 European countries. Straub investigated whether these practices actually did enhance the career advancement of women to senior management positions. The study revealed that work-family initiatives have little impact on the career development of women. This may be because WLB is introduced to the workplace with little or no adjustment to organizational structure and culture, which raises the level of pressure on managers to work long hours. For example, a study by Ford and Collinson (2011) examined the underlying assumptions on which WLB exhortations are often based. The research was conducted in a UK public sector using semi-structured interviews with 25 managers (16 men and 9 women). Their findings revealed that WLB policy does not seem to act as an emancipatory device in helping employees to balance their work-family responsibilities. This is because the work demand within the public sector organization is very intensive and it has not been modified to integrate and facilitate such re-balancing. Managers - men and women - in this study reported having difficulties in catching up with their work responsibilities without working longer hours, which was seen as a way to career progression within the organizational culture. Consequently, flexibility was often used to work more hours, not fewer. Moreover, WLB debates themselves added to the pressure on managers as they strove to prove to themselves and others that they would maintain a perfect balance in all areas of their lives. Hence the levels of anxiety among managers increase as they seek to protect their employment status and to handle their workloads and family.

Thus WLB may be a useful element in providing flexible working hours for managers particularly for women; however work-family policies alone will not be effective without addressing the embedded values and assumptions which underpin the culture of the workplace (Lewis, 2010).

3.3.1.5 Assessing the Gender-Centred Perspective

The gender-centred perspective has provided a useful analysis of women in management. It shows that women face many challenges in their labyrinthine journey toward leadership positions, including resistance to feminine qualities as a result of the process of socialization, stereotypes, discrimination and the challenge of balancing work and family responsibilities. Whilst gender theorists offer a variety of different explanations these do not fully explain the phenomenon of women's under-representation in senior positions. First, this perspective suggests that both males and females arrive at work fully socialized, and that organizational life has little influence on the way they behave (Adler & Izraeli, 1994). Thus the focus is on the internal obstacles to career advancement such as traits and behaviours (Fagenson, 1990). Second, it ignores organizational factors such as the systematic disadvantage arising from blocking opportunities and power differences. Lastly, it fails to take into consideration the interplay between the individuals and organizations, in which each plays a part in shaping the other. Consequently, I would argue that the gender-centred perspective may fail to provide a holistic account of the limited progression of women into top positions in organizations.

3.3.2 Organization Context Perspective

The limitations of the gender-centred perspective have led scholars to examine the organizational factors affecting women in management. Thus the organizational structure or the situation-centred perspective provides an alternative approach for explaining the limited progression of women. This perspective is based on the principle that organizational structures can shape the attitudes and behaviours of the individual on the job (Fagenson, 1990). Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977 & 1993) was one of the earliest scholars to examine organizational structure, and to explain its role in constraining women from rising to the top of the organization's hierarchy. In *Men and Women of the Corporation*, Kanter examined women in bureaucratic settings and argued that 'jobs make the person'. She contends that a person's position in the organization is the factor governing their self-perception and career path and not the attitude the person has towards their work or the work behaviour of the person's sex. In this sense Kanter's theory marks a radical shift from a person-centred perspective to a structural perspective. Accordingly, my aim in this section is to discuss the three key variables of

Kanter's organizational structural theory: the structure of opportunity, the structure of power and the proportional distribution of people of different social compositions. Also, I will discuss more recent empirical studies that have lent some support to the organizational structural theory.

3.3.2.1 The Structure of Opportunity

For Kanter, the structure of opportunity is based on mobility and growth. Opportunity is understood as "expectations and future prospects" (Kanter, 1993: 246). The structure of opportunity is influenced by an individual's position within an organization and her/his access to career advancement opportunities such as promotion rates, the steps up the ladder that are associated with a position, career tracks, challenges, job-related training and rewards, as well as informal networks, mentoring and peer support. Kanter identified two types of positions in organizations: advantageous and disadvantageous. Advantageous positions refer to jobs with more opportunity and power, for example, situations in which employees have high career aspirations, high self-esteem and more commitment to the organization. Disadvantageous positions are related to jobs with blocked opportunities in which the career mobility of employees is halted at a certain level of the organization because, for example, their career aspirations are limited and consequently they suffer low self-esteem (Fagenson, 1990). These two types of positions foster certain behaviours and values that influence the career progression of individuals with regard to disadvantageous positions. According to Kanter's (1993) argument, women tend to be placed in the majority of disadvantageous positions in low ceiling occupations; whereas men are to be found in the majority of advantageous positions in organizations, with a higher ceiling.

Recent empirical studies have lent some support to Kanter's argument that men are placed in top ceiling positions while women are placed at lower ceiling positions. This puts women at a disadvantage in terms of benefitting from social network and mentors, which hinders their career advancement to top management. With regard to women being disadvantaged by lack of social capital, a study by Cross and Linehan (2006) examined the experiences of female managers to understand what reasons lie behind the scarcity of senior female managers in the high-tech sector in Ireland. Twenty-eight female managers were selected for their study. The interviewees believed that organizational decisions were made based on the access one had to information: this

information was gained not just through formal networks such as meetings, but also through informal networks within the organization. They also strongly believed that decisions were made and promotion promised through informal networks. Nevertheless, some researchers disagree that lack of social capital is responsible for preventing women from advancing to higher levels and they believe it is lack of human capital. For example, a study on Australian banks by Metz and Tharenou (2001) used a multivariate approach to investigate the relationship between both human capital and social capital with women's advancement to different management levels. Based on data from 138 women representing lower, middle and senior management, they concluded that human capital assists women's career advancement at both low and high levels with regard to type of occupation, years of work experience, training and development, career breaks, and work hours. Thus to some extent, women can assist their own advancement by investing in their human capital. By contrast, the study found that social capital contributes little towards explaining women's careers advancement beyond junior manager level.

Nevertheless, although human capital certainly assists women in many parts of the world, including the Arab world (Metcalf, 2011) to be successful as a result of their undertaking university education in fields such as business at the same level as their male colleagues, women continue to be excluded from top management (Davidson & Burke, 2011). In contrast to Metz and Tharenou (2001) some researchers contend that social capital plays a significant role for women's career advancement to senior management level (Sealy, 2010). Adler and Izraeli (1994) confirmed that it is women's lack of social networks that holds them back from advancing to higher levels, and not their lack of human capital, since "the benefit of one's human capital depends in part on one's social capital or standing in social networks" (O'Neil et al., 2008: 733).

However, women may find it difficult to become members of men's informal networks or the 'men's club' (for example, on the golf course or in pubs), which is crucial to gaining sufficient social capital to access top managerial positions (Bagilhole & White, 2011). Accordingly, some researchers argue that creating women's networks can be a source of support and information and could also enhance women's careers and help them to become more effective in management as in the case of Canada (Sohrab et al., 2011) and the UK (Singh et al., 2006). In the later study, Singh et al. (2006) investigated

women's corporate networks using in-depth interviews and an e-mail survey in large UK companies. This study revealed that women manage to work across boundaries by building strong networks and acquiring resources from a variety of sponsors. These networks can enhance women's human capital in terms of providing more career development, more female role models, more mentoring, more organizational learning, and more talent identification. Thus it can be argued that because of the growing number of women in the private sector, women will be able to network with other women and this will lead to career progression, since networking is seen as a source of information.

Women are also disadvantaged by the lack of mentors, those with advanced experience and knowledge who are committed to contributing to the development of less experienced employees in order to enhance their professional careers (Kram, 1985). This contributes to the exclusion of women from senior management positions. Cross and Linehan's (2006) study revealed that it was self-initiated relationships that helped seventeen out of twenty-eight respondents to find a mentor, which they believed had assisted their careers. However, women are sometimes reluctant to seek a mentor because they may fear such an approach being misconstrued as sexual by either the mentor or other members in the organization. As a result, "women may find it more difficult than men to find and enlist the help of mentors" (Acker, 2008: 292).

This is a serious disadvantage because the role of mentors is a significant factor for employees. Mentors can facilitate access to career opportunities through sponsoring wider opportunities; coaching and providing challenging assignments (Allan et al., 2007; Ragins et al., 1998; Woolnough et al., 2006). They can also provide psychosocial support to women, which may include personal support and counselling (Kram, 1985).

Mentorship theorists have emphasised that as women face more obstacles to their career advancement, mentoring is more crucial for women than it is for men (Ragins, 1999; Tharenou, 2005). Therefore, women need to be coached by female mentors to support their career advancement (Tharenou, 2005). This is partly because it makes sense that they should be coached by someone who has experienced similar difficulties. Another reason why female mentors may be more effective is that women feel more comfortable socially and professionally when they engage with other women as mentors (Allan et al., 2007). Also, female mentors can encourage women and help them to engage in

further training and development. In their study, which included 513 women and 501 men from the public and private sectors in Australia, Tharenou et al. (1994) emphasized that career encouragement increases training and development because it influences individuals to look for or to accept opportunities for training. The impact of career encouragement on training is greater for women than it is for men and this leads women to be more confident and to achieve greater managerial advancement, and it enhances women's knowledge, skills, credibility and credentials (Burke, 2002; Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989).

In other contexts, it is highly influential family members who act as facilitators and supporters to women since there is a lack of mentors, or difficulties in obtaining one. For example, a study by Elliott and Stead (2008) took a narrative approach to data collection that involved interviewing six women leaders with different backgrounds and occupational areas to examine their experiences. They found that family plays a significant role not only in shaping women's ambition and drive to be leaders but also by providing support, networks and advice. Similarly other studies found that women leaders viewed their mothers as facilitators and supporters to their career from an early age, which help them to foster their self-esteem and encourage future career success; fathers on the other hand were less involved, as found in China and Hong Kong (Halpern & Cheung, 2008) and Turkey (Aycan, 2004). By contrast, in Halpern and Cheung's (2008) study, fewer American women leaders talked explicitly about maternal support; they reported instead the importance of traditional mentors at work, in guiding their careers. The differences in response between the USA, China and Hong Kong could be attributable to cultural differences, i.e. China and Hong Kong are more collectivist societies and the USA is an individualistic society. Also, it could be that women in Asia find it difficult to access mentors in the workplace.

Within the Arab context, there is a marked absence of mentoring programmes to facilitate the advancement of women's careers: consequently women managers tend to rely on their families for career support. Al-Lamki (1999) and Tlaiss and Kauser (2011) observe that this situation means that it is vital for women to get support from their male family members (husbands or fathers). Also, women tend to get support from other strong family connections. A study by Singh (2008) focusing on female directors in top companies in Jordan and Tunisia indicated that family connections (*wasta*), helped

women to gain non-executive positions in banking and development. Male family members and their connections play a major role in supporting women by educating them and by helping them to achieve success in organizations. Although it can be argued that there is strong solidarity between Arab women such that their own informal networks play a key role in empowering them in the public domain, nevertheless it is important to acknowledge that women's networks are often tied to men's networks (Metcalf, 2006). Thus, without the support of powerful family members, Arab women may find it difficult to access information and resources. Hence I would suggest that Arab women may face greater barriers to achieving senior positions in organizations than women in different contexts. As pointed out earlier, this is due to institutionalized and legalized gender discrimination/segregation in the workplace and in the wider society.

3.3.2.2 The Structure of Power

Kanter (1993: 247) claims that power is "the capacity to mobilize resources" such as financial resources, human resources, information and support. In Kanter's view, power stems from two major sources: formal and informal. Formal power stems from a particular position that is linked to the ability, performance, and seniority of a manager. Informal power refers to the power that employees acquire through social networks such as sponsors, mentors and peers, as discussed in the previous section. In this situation, only a few people have the capacity to lead, whilst the majority are prevented from acting effectively and treated as unimportant, even though some may possess such capacities (Kanter, 1993). However, when more people are empowered, this allows having control over the situation that make their actions achievable and then more is accomplished (Kanter, 1993). Thus it can be said that power involves autonomy and mastery and not command or control over others. It is interpersonal transactions that mobilise others; but if those others have less power, then their capacities are limited even if they are mobilized. Here, Kanter (1993) argues that since women are placed at the bottom of an organization's hierarchy, they are disempowered and do not have the ability to lead. In this way, the distribution of power can determine the behaviour and attitude of employees in the workplace. Those with power display independence, creativity, and power-sharing behaviours, whereas powerlessness encourages tight control, command and dependence on rules and regulations. Kanter (1993) claimed that the reason why men and women in organizations behave differently is not attributable to

their gender, nor is it the result of patriarchal relations as such. It is a consequence of organizational dynamics. These dynamics encourage different styles of behaviours from low-status and higher-status employees. According to this argument, men's power over others, usually women, stems from their dominance in the organization, and when women move up the organization ladder, they will hold power over men.

As seen in section 3.3.1, the empirical evidence shows that people tend to view men, not women, as more suitable for management (e.g. Ford, 2006 & 2010; Schein, 2007). Also, as discussed in section 3.3.2.1, Kanter (1993) and other researchers pointed out that men have more power than women by obtaining better opportunities, such as organizational positions, job-related training and rewards, as well as informal networks, mentoring and peer support. Male power has received sufficient attention in the literature. A number of researchers have indicated that through the years, male practices in organizations, or in society, have excluded women from positions of power, for example, practices such as segregation and discrimination (e.g. Acker, 1990; Walby, 1990). I will explore further the issue of power in section 3.3.3.

3.3.2.3 The Proportion of Social Composition

The term proportion refers to “the social composition of people in approximately the same situation” (Kanter, 1993: 248). It refers to how many people there are of relevant social types in various parts of the organization (e.g. the proportion of women, men, black, ethnic minorities). In an organization, the social composition of a group is related to its size and its number of members. There are four types of groups that can be identified on the basis of their proportional representation in the organizational hierarchy (Kanter, 1993). At one extreme is the uniform group, where all group members are of the same social type: for example either all males or all females. At the other extreme is the balanced group, consisting of approximately the same number of males and females. Between these points on the spectrum are the skewed group and tilted group. A skewed group has an unbalanced social composition, with one large group that controls the other smaller group (the two types are known as ‘dominants and ‘tokens’ respectively). In gender terms, the ‘tokens’ are women who may be cast in diverse roles, e.g., mother, seductress or iron maiden. A tilted group represents a range of social types, including members from both ‘majority’ and ‘minority’; groups. However, the minority members may join forces to change the dominant culture. Thus

they have a greater effect on the dominant group than do the 'tokens' (Powell, 2010). On this analysis, it is the rarity and scarcity of women and not their femaleness that acts as an impediment when women managers attempt to break into top organizational hierarchies (Kanter, 1993). However, according to Kanter, if women represented a greater proportion of managers (more than 15%) then the difficulties associated with tokenism would disappear because other members of the organization would view them as individuals and not as stereotypical representatives of the group.

There are difficulties with this analysis, not least because token women may have the advantage of being more visible to the rest of the group, although their increased visibility creates other disadvantages. For example, when they are under increased scrutiny this increases the likelihood of workplace stereotyping. Hence women experience intense performance pressure because in order to be noticed, they need to work harder to prove their competence than men in the same group. These social and psychological pressures may have a long-term negative effect on the feelings and attitudes of women (Oakley, 2000; Powell, 2010). However, the most crucial time for women is when they seek promotion to top positions in their organizations. As members of a minority group, women are often more isolated and excluded from networks that are formed by their male colleagues (Oakley, 2000). This prevents women obtaining information from informal sources, and therefore their opportunities for promotion are blocked. To Kanter (2010) the solution to this problem is to utilise open communication and knowledge-sharing in organizations.

There is overwhelming agreement that tokenism undermines the ability of women to participate equally in managerial jobs. Singh and Vinnicombe (2004) examined the position of women directors on top corporate boards. They used evidence from a survey of women directors in the FTSE 100 index of the UK's top 100 companies in 2002. Their research revealed that women still face many barriers on their way into boardrooms even though they are supported by a number of factors. For example, the UK has experienced several consecutive waves of feminism and 30 years of equal opportunities legislation and equal pay legislation. Singh and Vinnicombe's research shows that although there are some very small signs of progress, only 14 companies have 15 per cent or more female representation. The successful women on these boards have strong backgrounds and significant corporate experience, and they do not appear to

be in 'token' positions. Nevertheless, it is important to notice that this study was conducted within the private sector, in which women may have a better opportunity than in the public sector. Also, these women may tend to come from élite privileged backgrounds or be supported by a strong family.

Furthermore, it has been argued that tokenism could lead to a pattern of behaviour called the 'Queen Bee Syndrome'. The 'Queen Bee Syndrome' is a term for the kind of behaviour that arises when there can be only one visible or token woman in the organization. This woman stings other women if her power is threatened (Mavin, 2008) and does not support other women (Davidson & Cooper, 1992). In a study by Terjesen and Singh (2008) using secondary data drawn from a number of sources, including Europe, the USA and other countries, the researchers indicated that female ministers have voiced their support of increased representation of women on corporate boards. However, in contrast to other social issues, this issue is not on the agenda. According to Terjesen and Singh (2008) this is due to the existence of the 'Queen Bee Syndrome'. For example, in the UK the first wave of women who entered government came predominantly from privileged backgrounds, and their focus was on female suffrage rather than on supporting the role of women as business leaders. Hence such women tend to resent their younger colleagues and sometimes deliberately hold them back.

However, Mavin (2008) warns researchers of the negative consequences of using the 'Queen Bee' term. Mavin's conclusion was drawn from the UK media and the worldwide web and she indicated that the 'Queen Bee' phenomenon has been used to reproduce the gendered status quo by constructing senior women as 'bad', or as 'lone token woman bosses' and/or as having 'sold out other women'. Accordingly, she urged researchers to challenge the negative constructions of women as 'best enemies' that are a feature of popular media and research.

To conclude, organizational structure theory includes three variables (opportunity, power and proportion) that interact in a cyclic way. Managers with powerful positions tend to behave in such a way as to generate more opportunities, which in turn is a further inducement for their behaviour. This is described as "power begets power" (Kanter, 1993: 249). The relations between structure and behaviour can produce an upward cycle of advantages or a downward cycle of disadvantages. Once the cycle between structure and behaviour has started it can be hard for an individual to break. To

some extent, “low opportunities, powerlessness, and tokenism constitute a self-perpetuating, self-sealing system, with links that can be broken only from outside” (Kanter, 1993: 249).

Organizational structure theory provides a valuable way of understanding the factors that contribute to the scarcity of women in top managerial positions. However, organizational structure theory does have some weaknesses. For example, the analysis of the proportional representation of social groups in organizations or the situation of the ‘token’ worker can also apply to men if they are a minority in a predominantly female organization (Acker, 1990). Thus tokenism does not account for gender differences. Additionally, Kanter fails to question the power concept within organizations, which is tied to male power in relation to women in wider society (Halford, et al., 1997).

Despite its limitations, nevertheless I acknowledge the value of Kanter’s work, which has been broadly recognized as being the most seminal in its field.

3.3.2.4 Assessing the Organizational Context Perspective

The organizational structure perspective has proved useful in revealing that the career advancement of women in management is blocked by a number of factors related to organizational structures. As such, this perspective has been the cornerstone of much literature on the topic of women in management, gender and organizational theory, such as Acker (1990), Calas and Smircich (1992) and Martin (1996). However, this perspective does have shortcomings when it comes to explaining the phenomenon of the ‘glass ceiling’. First, it fails to address certain essential aspects of organizations, for example, their histories and policies (Fagenson, 1990). These aspects might influence the position of women within the organization. Second, the organizational structure perspective ignores the influence of the larger social system on organizational culture and structure, as well as ignoring how the social system influences the status of women in organizations. Furthermore, organizational perspectives assume that organizations are essentially gender-neutral (Acker, 1990), which means ignoring the cultural baggage that individuals bring with them when they enter the workplace.

Thus the organizational perspective, which claims that the structure of the organization shapes the behaviour of individuals and gives men more opportunity to succeed, may

fail to take into account factors considered by the gender perspective or the effect of the wider social system within which organizations function. So this means that the already existing unequal power relations between men and women go unchallenged. This leads me to pose the obvious question, Can women get into positions of power within the organization without any account being taken of the fact that power inside the organization reflects the relations of power that exist outside in the wider culture and society?

3.3.3 Social System and Institutional Perspective

The third perspective that explains the low numbers of women in senior management goes beyond individual and organizational explanations and is related to both the social and the institutional systems (Omar & Davidson, 2001). 'Institutional systems' refers to "multifaceted systems incorporating symbolic system-cognitive constructions and normative rules and regulative processes carried out thorough and shaping social behaviour" (Scott, 1995: 33), such as family, religion, school, and state. The meaning, process, and actions of institutions are intertwined (Scott, 1995). Therefore, the key theme of this perspective is that the taken-for-granted social beliefs about gender are embedded in organizational life and this factor may explain the under-representation of women at top management level. According to this view, all organizations are located in societies with specific features. These features include cultural values; social and institutional practices; ideologies; history; laws and policies; expectations and stereotypical roles and behaviours for men and women (Martin et al., 1983). Any or all of these features may affect the position of women in management. In this section, the discussion will focus on two main issues, namely: patriarchal social system and gendered organizations.

3.3.3.1 Patriarchal Social System

The idea of patriarchal social systems has been the focal point of many feminist interpretations of gender inequality. Feminist scholars have long argued that subordination of women to men is prevalent in many societies due to the existence of patriarchy (Hartmann, 1979; Marshall, 1984; Smith, 1987; Walby, 1990). As a socialist feminist, for example, Smith (1987) indicted that patriarchal ideology is created largely through ordinary social processes, including role socialization, education, work, and

communication processes, all of which are responsible for the exclusion of women from certain places of power. Smith puts great emphasis on the education system as an important element in the oppression of women because it disseminates certain ideas about patriarchal ideology.

However, and although the concept of patriarchy has been studied by a number of scholars, it is the work of socialist Sylvia Walby (1990) who provides a historical and universalistic account of patriarchy (Giddens, 2006). In *Theorizing Patriarchy*, Walby (1990: 20) defined patriarchy as a “system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women”. Walby identified six main ‘structures’ of patriarchy which interact with one another, but are also relatively independent from each other. Firstly, the patriarchal mode of production, which is related to housework. In housework the labour of women is expropriated by their husbands. Secondly, the paid work in which women are excluded from better forms of work and are placed into the worst jobs, which are deemed to be less skilled. Thirdly, the patriarchal state in which women are blocked from accessing state resources and power. Fourthly, male violence: psychological or physical, hidden or actual. The fifth structure is sexuality in patriarchal relations, in which women are oriented to marriage as desirable. The final structure is patriarchal culture, which is “composed of relatively a diverse set of patriarchal practices...as a set of discourses which are institutionally-rooted” (Walby, 1989: 227). Patriarchal discourses are like a religion that lays down the correct forms of conduct for men and for women. These codes of conduct are perpetuated through education systems that differentiate between men and women, and provide men with more credentials. Walby (1989) pointed out that the issue of femininity and masculinity is institutionalised in all areas of social life, such as religion, media and education and workplace.

The interaction between patriarchal structures produces two major forms of patriarchy: private and public (Walby, 1990). The former existed before the twentieth century, during a time when women’s labour was performed inside the household. Today, public patriarchy is the dominant form. It operates in the labour market in which women are not excluded from certain sites but rather are subordinate in all of them. Walby (1990) argues that in the West at present patriarchal ideology has shifted away from private patriarchy towards public patriarchy in each of the six structures. The dialectical nature

of the relationship of women to their private-public patriarchal environment offers two explanations to account for gender inequality. First, the exclusion of women from the structures that men occupy or dominate, and second women's segregation from men within these structures and the subordinate position of women. Thus women are excluded from certain types of occupation and from certain positions.

Walby's (1989 & 1990) work provides an inclusive way of understanding the patriarchal practices and discourses that run through various institutions in the private and public sectors, thereby excluding women from full access to resources such as leadership positions in organizations. Nevertheless, like any other theory, it has some shortcomings. For example, it has been criticised for failing to provide a complete account of gender inequality (Acker, 1989).

A number of scholars in the women and management field (Broadbridge, 2008; Powell, 1999, 2000; Wajcman, 1998) have indicated that patriarchy defines work roles by gender and this leads to men dominating the positions of power in organizations. Broadbridge (2008) conducted a study to examine the continued under-representation of women in senior management positions in the UK retail industry. Her research used a case study. She revealed that the lack of women in senior management positions in retailing can be attributed to patriarchal company cultures that support the way work is organized. These cultures perpetuate stereotypical beliefs and outdated attitudes about the role of women. Similarly, Mihail (2006) studied 173 employees across all the sectors of the economy in Greece, and argued that Greek society remains patriarchal and as a result, deeply rooted gender-based stereotypes have remained. This reflects the attitude of male employees, who still hold a relatively negative stereotype towards women as managers. Also, due to the existence of the patriarchal system, the education system in Greece still continues to spread gender stereotypes, thereby acting as an agent of socialization.

Within the Arab context, as seen in Chapter 2, the concept of patriarchy has been the focus of attention for many Arab scholars. They have argued that the subordination of women in society is directly linked to patriarchal culture. A number of empirical studies within the Arab management field support this claim. These studies indicate that the primary barriers against women's career advancement to top positions are found to stem from patriarchal values. These values stress that the role of women revolves around the

family, and they discourage women from seeking leadership positions. It is taken for granted that these positions rightfully belong to men (Al-Lamki, 1999; Jamali et al., 2005; Mostafa, 2005). It seems that (when compared with other women across the world) Arab women may encounter more constraints preventing their access to leadership positions in organizations. This problem arises as a result of the narrow interpretation of Islam that reinforces patriarchal culture, attitudes and practices (Jamali et al., 2005; Metle, 2002). This could be the case for women in Saudi Arabia, since the Kingdom adopts the *Hanbali-Wahhabist* interpretation which is considered the strictest in Islam (see Chapter 2).

3.3.3.2 Gendered Organizations

A number of researchers have studied the relationship between gender and organizations (Acker, 1990; Alvesson & Billing, 1997; Halford et al., 1997; Savage & Witz, 1992). However, it is the work of socialist feminist Joan Acker (1990 & 1992) that provides the most comprehensive account of organizational gendering. Consequently her work has served as a theoretical foundation for many contemporary scholars (Britton, 2000). In “Hierarchies, Jobs, and Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations”, Acker (1990) developed a theory of gendered organization to understand power relations in organizations, which are embedded in the broader social system. Acker’s definition of gendered organizations is as follows:

“To say that an organization, or any other analytic unit, is gendered means that advantages and disadvantages, exploitation and control, action and motion, meaning and identity are patterned through, and in terms of, distinctions between male and female, masculine and feminine” (Acker, 1990: 146).

Acker identified five categories of processes that lead to gendered organizations in which gender differences and hierarchies are constantly produced and reproduced. Firstly, gendering structures, which are related to gender divisions through organizational practices such as the gender pattern of jobs, hierarchies, power and wages. Acker said: “the construction of divisions along lines of gender-divisions of labour, of allowed behaviours, of locations in physical space, of power, including the institutionalized means of maintaining the divisions in the structures of labour markets, the family, the state” (Acker, 1990: 146). Here, assumptions about gender are used to legitimize organizational hierarchy and to justify the choices about who attains high positions and why (Acker, 2006). Secondly, gendering culture where symbols and

images are created to explain, express and reinforce gender divisions (Acker, 1990). These images and symbols function ideologically within organizations in order to help to naturalize, rationalize and legitimize the power relations between genders. Thus organizations use certain icons to create a culture that is associated with 'maleness', such as competitiveness, efficiency and aggression and this helps to shape the societal understanding of what it means to be 'male' or 'female' (Acker, 1992). Thirdly, there are interpersonal relations, "interactions between women and men, women and women, men and men, including all those patterns that enact dominance and submission" (Acker, 1990: 146). These interactions and communications all function to produce and confirm gender images that are deeply embedded and rooted in a gender division that could have differential gender impacts. Thus, masculinity and organizations are connected in that men tend to be the actors and women tend to be the emotional support or the weaker gender (Acker, 2006). Fourthly, there is the issue of gender identity, where individuals consciously construct their understanding of gendered organizations and attempt to adjust their behaviour accordingly. In other words, individuals form 'correct' gender identities and hide identities that are deemed unacceptable in response to commonly-held beliefs about the gender behaviour that is considered appropriate within the organization. Here, the individual identity becomes the process and outcome of organization (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004). Finally, there is the issue of organizational logic, where gender is a constitutive element in organizations - as in the social structure and family. Organizational logic is the underlying assumption or gender substructure that does not appear to be gendered, as it has material forms in written work rules, such as job contracts and evaluation or any documentary tool for running the organization.

Acker (1990) argued that practices and relations are fixed in arranged roles and are deeply embedded in the organization as they are rooted in notions of family and reproduction. However, on the surface they do not appear to be gendered because real jobs and real workers are gendered and embedded. What this means is that the way in which things are ordered appears as 'natural' or 'normal'. However, this is misleading because organizational structures and their established norms are closely aligned with the roles and assumptions of men. For example, they reflect beliefs about men as rational, goal-orientated and having a primary commitment to the workplace. By contrast, women are viewed as having a primary commitment to their homes and families. Thus, because women are seen as being preoccupied with many activities, it

can be assumed that this makes them unsuitable for certain jobs. Acker's work is remarkably important in that she highlights that the construction of male and female jobs and their career paths is related to the symbols and cultural language that are set up within organizations. She concludes that women are excluded and marginalized because they do not have the qualities of 'real workers' or men's qualities (Acker, 1990).

Acker's five sets of dynamically related processes prove to be extremely helpful when it comes to understanding gender relations in organizations. Acker's main contribution is the link she makes between the gender substructure of organizations and family and reproduction, and she identifies the ways in which these relations are fundamental to the processes and practices of the organization.

Based on Acker's earlier arguments about the gendering of organizations, together with research on organizations in the USA and research from other countries, such as the UK, Norway and Sweden, countries in which the inequality issues in organizations, including glass ceiling patterns are quite similar to those in the USA, Acker (2009) concluded that all organizations, though to varying degrees, have 'inequality regimes'. 'Inequality regimes' refers to the complex, interlocking practices and processes that result in continuing inequalities in all work organizations, including the top levels of management for women and men of colour. These practices may include the organization of work on an unencumbered worker model, selective hiring and promotion, the segregation of jobs along race and gender lines and discrimination against women as they begin to bear children. These practices are supported by deeply embedded images of men as natural leaders and women not only as unsuitable for leadership, but also as unacceptable if they attempt to show stereotypical 'masculine' leadership behaviours. Again, there is clear evidence of the way in which gender roles create a double bind for women— a situation in which whichever choice she makes will be seen as wrong.

The notion of 'gendered organization' has been adopted by numerous researchers with the intention of addressing different aspects of organization. For example, Stead and Elliott (2009) noted that women leaders were denied the opportunities to take on more challenging jobs that would enable them to progress in their careers. Women are not viewed as leaders because the opaqueness of gendered practices is "...due in part to the taken for granted assumptions that leadership is the prerogative of men" (2009: 103).

These gendering practices, although not explicitly articulated in the organization, have had the effect of excluding women from top positions. Another example of gendered organizations is provided by the work of Korvajarvi (1998) who, based on case studies from the public and private sectors in Finland, reported that there are opportunities for women to occupy positions in the organizational hierarchy; however they have to be in the majority and without conflicts regarding job goals. This means that gendering practices within organizations leave women in lower positions and these practices are more advantageous for men.

A question that was raised is whether inequality regimes can be challenged and changed to facilitate women's reaching senior management. Acker (2006 & 2009) argues that such regimes can be difficult to challenge. One reason is that the interest of senior managers and the power those interests can mobilize often outweigh the interests of people who experience inequality. Also, it is difficult to achieve greater equality inside organizations at the present time. Whilst employees are pushing for equality in pay, medical care, and retirement benefits, one major impediment is the lack of any broader social movements outside organizations that could speed up changes (Acker, 2009).

Nevertheless, Acker (2006 & 2009) argues that change is possible and she outlines the characteristics of a successful change project to challenge inequality regimes. First, change efforts that target a limited set of inequality-producing mechanisms seem to be the most successful. Also, there is the need for a combination of social movements and legislative support outside the organization with active support from insiders. In addition, there should be the use of coercion or the threat of loss to employers who do not follow the law. These measures can be achieved through the use of affirmative action and pay equality. Affirmative action programmes increase employment opportunities for women and men of colour in the organizations and occupations in which they have very low representation. Pay equality projects, intended to erase wage inequality between women-predominant jobs and men-predominant jobs of equal value, are authorized primarily by state and local legislation. These projects take place primarily in public-sector organizations. In change efforts at various levels, the mobilization of civil rights groups and women's movement groups are found to be essential to success.

Acker's gendered organizations theory has proved a useful conceptual tool for underscoring how gender is embedded in organizational structure and culture. Her analysis regarding gendered processes provides ways of understanding men's and women's attitudes and behaviours, which is critical for organizations wishing to promote gender equality (Liff & Ward, 2001). However, it has some shortcomings, as I will argue below.

3.3.3.3 Assessing the Social System and Institutional Perspective

The social system and institutional perspective has provided a thorough analysis which can help towards understanding the slow progress of women in management, by highlighting the operation of private and public patriarchy, and the various processes in which gender differences and hierarchy are produced and perpetuated in organizations. However, it cannot stand on its own (Omar & Davidson, 2001). For example, the focus on patriarchy raises a number of important questions. Does the shift away from private to public patriarchy in the West occur in the same way in other contexts, such as Arab countries? Is the system of patriarchy able to explain inequality in different contexts with regard to the position of women in organizational hierarchies?

Another strand in this perspective, Acker's gendered organizations theory, is useful in shedding light on the way the construction of divisions, use of symbols, interpersonal relations, gender identity and organizational logic all interact with gender (and, as she more recently recognized, race and class) to create inequality regimes. Nevertheless gendered organization theory raises further questions. One could ask whether gendered organization processes occur in the same way in different organizations. For example, can this analysis be applied to the Saudi public sector? Acker's gendering of organizations theory has been criticized for being too fundamental, in that it assumes that organizations are inherently gendered: structured in terms of a distinction between masculinity and femininity (Britton, 2000). Nevertheless, by offering an account of gender difference that is both material and discursive, Acker's theory does help to explain how gender is embedded within organizational processes and practices. It also helps to reveal hidden power relations. In other words, it demonstrates how work is organized along gender-specific lines. For example, it illustrates the way in which inequality of income and status between women and men in organizations is reinforced

through their practices, and it shows how these practices are responsible for unequal gender divisions of labour between paid and unpaid work.

3.3.4 Gendered-Organization-System Perspective

Ellen Fagenson (1990 & 1993), one of the leading writers in the field of women in management, has proposed a theory to explain the low percentages of women in top management. In 'At the heart of women in management research: theoretical and methodological approaches and their biases', Fagenson (1990) discussed her perspective: the gendered-organization-system. This perspective is based on an interactionist approach which assumes that:

“...there is a continuous interaction of feedback between personal characteristics (i.e. gender), situations (i.e. the organizational context) and the social-institution, and hence, when the individual, the organization or the system in which they are embedded changes, the other components change as well” (Fagenson, 1993: 271).

In this sense, Fagenson's theory incorporates all three perspectives discussed above. It captures the complex gender-organization-societal interaction, while acknowledging the significance of local social context, all of which can result in the under-representation of women in top management (Omar & Davidson, 2001). Therefore it argues that women's limited progression in organizations can be as a result of their gender, the organizational context and/or the larger social and institutional system in which they function.

Fagenson expands upon the three perspectives previously discussed in a number of ways. First, this theory agrees with the argument presented by the gender-centred perspective, namely that women do not attain high level management positions due to their 'inappropriate' traits or behaviour. According to gender-centred theorists, these traits and behaviours result from a process of socialization, or from societal practices and expectations which have been carried into organizations and acted upon by their members (Fagenson, 1990). Moreover, Fagenson's theory suggests that the organizational context, which includes its culture, history, ideology and policies, as well as its structure, may contribute towards limiting women's abilities to attain high-level positions. For example, this can be due to:

“...the devastating effects a past reverse discrimination lawsuit had on a (particular) company (history); an organization’s belief that individuals with military/combat experience should be promoted first (ideology); or a paternalistic culture that uses individual performance on the golf course rather than at work as the basis for promotion (cultural policy)” (Fagenson, 1990: 271).

Additionally, Fagenson’s theory argues that work organizations are located in societies with certain cultural values, histories, social and institutional practices, ideologies, expectations and stereotyped roles and behaviours for men and women: all of these factors affect the cultures and structures of organizations. Thus she agrees with the social system perspective, which argues that women are excluded from certain places of power as a result of social and institutional practices.

Fagenson’s (1990) approach was later utilized by Omar and Davidson (2001) to investigate the under-representation of women in management. They argue that the experiences of all women in management across national boundaries are similar to a certain extent. Women worldwide are being given better opportunities in organizations, but they are also experiencing certain forms of career blocks and discrimination in their roles as managers. However, women in industrialized countries like Malaysia and Thailand, or those in less developed countries like Bangladesh, may face even greater challenges due to the more traditional orientation of these societies. Women in Asia are raised and prepared for marriage and motherhood; thus they have no real choices between careers and families. With this in mind, Omar and Davidson concluded that organizations and their employees do not exist separately from the broader social system and it is this system that shapes the values, attitudes and behaviours of people in organizations.

This perspective implies that working women are confronted by a complex array of social, organizational and individual barriers, which must be understood in order to improve their position (Martin et al., 1983). On this basis, researchers have discussed how specific barriers facing women can be overcome. A study by Carli et al. (1995) showed that when women demonstrate more competence, they are given higher status in the group and are more influential than those who show a submissive style and appear incompetent. For this reason, women need to establish competence not only through hard work, but also by taking on challenging new assignments (Yoder, 2001), gaining job-relevant knowledge and being well prepared for meetings and negotiations (Eagly &

Carli, 2007). As researchers have noted, this requires women to be confident in themselves and to put themselves forward (Catalyst, 2003; Tharenou & Conroy, 1994). However, this is not easy because of the weight of social and cultural expectations; therefore, the solution to enhancing women's status to gain access to leadership positions should not rely only on women's efforts, as the system is inherently unjust and difficult (Yoder, 2001). Thus a fundamental change in women's status in the hierarchical organization will require simultaneous changes at all levels of social organization. For example, governmental policies need effective regulatory mechanisms to eliminate gender discrimination (Vinnicombe, 2000). Also, senior managers could be targeted to help bring about changes in the organizational culture by training and raising their awareness of gender and family issues and/or they could be educated about hidden and overt discrimination (Wirth, 2004). Thus it is vital to ensure that government policies work hand in hand with organizations to help achieve equality between genders. However, it is essential to note that societal strategies are more far-reaching than individual and organizational strategies (Adler & Izraeli, 1994).

3.3.4.1 Assessing the Gendered-Organization-System Perspective

Fagenson's (1990) theory offers a useful framework for studying the advancement of women's careers. It takes a more "systems-oriented view of organizations, as it views the status of men and women in organizations simultaneously with the organization and societal context from which those status differentials or equalities emerged" (Omar & Davidson, 2001: 53). Fagenson's theory shares some similarities with Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organization in that it looks at the interconnections between gender, organization and the social system. However, it differs from Acker's theory in that the explanation of women's under-representation in top positions in organizations is given in a much broader sense. Therefore, the gendered-organization-system perspective does not offer an in-depth understanding of the under-representation of women in top management, since the interlinkage between personal, organizational, and systematic factors are not clear. It is true that some studies have used this perspective; nevertheless it was used only in the form of an overarching framework.

3.4 The Research Gaps and Theoretical Framework

The previous studies have offered various explanations of what prevents qualified women from advancing to top positions within their organizations. Each of the four perspectives under consideration has a different focus on women's under-representation in top management, and is underpinned by different assumptions. In turn, they suggest, either explicitly or by implication, a variety of factors that would improve the position of women.

The gender or person-centred perspective assumes that women's marginalization from top management is due to perceived personality characteristics, attitudes and behaviours acquired either through innate biological or socialization predisposition. This view focuses on the role played by the family, school and the media in shaping gender roles and expectations. This process results in gender-stereotyping discrimination, and work-family conflict. Being person-centred, this perspective downplays the structural and organizational constraints to women's career advancement. By way of contrast these aspects are the focus of the organizational context perspective. As we have seen, this perspective is underpinned by the assumption that women's career disadvantage can be explained in terms of structural factors such as organizational opportunity, power distribution and group composition. However, this perspective fails to recognise that such factors are, themselves, the result of wider social influences, including historical factors.

The third perspective examined the social system and institutional perspective. Here the focus is on cultural values, ideologies, history and the legal context, all of which are assumed to underlie organizational expectations and practices. Key foci include the study of patriarchy and of the gendering of organizations, which marks a shift from materialist to more discursive accounts.

These three perspectives are brought together in Fagenson's (1990) gendered-organization-system theory, which assumes constant interaction and mutual feedback between personal, organizational and social factors, so that women's limited career progression can be the outcome of any or all of these factors and of the complex relations between them.

The literature review showed that women in management face many obstacles on their way to top positions and many answers have been offered to explain the 'glass ceiling' phenomenon. This body of literature has provided a strong background for this study by highlighting the key research of relevance. In order to develop an appropriate theoretical framework for this study, however, it is necessary to identify gaps in the existing literature and to draw together the various strands of argument to produce a preliminary model.

This review of the literature on women in management has shown that some studies are prescriptive, others descriptive. Other literature in the form of survey reports is based on specific groups, mostly in Europe or the USA. This is usually either a group of women who have obtained middle and high managerial positions in the public or private sector (but mainly in the private sector) or a group of university students. This can be problematic in relation to obtaining a clear picture of women's representation in management. It is open to question whether the experiences of these groups can be representative of other contexts, such as Saudi Arabia. Moreover, the prevailing arguments about such factors as individual characteristics, organizations or social systems that have so far been used to address the problem of women's scarcity in top positions are mainly focused on Western organizations within a Western cultural context. I agree that these theories and studies are intriguing, particularly as they were conducted in different contexts and they do offer numerous valuable insights that serve as a foundation for this study. However, my argument is that this research needs to be viewed as specific to a Western context; it cannot necessarily be generalized and applied to the distinctive culture of Saudi Arabia.

The few studies that did discuss women managers in the Arab context tended to provide a less in-depth overall picture. Most notably none of these existing studies attempted to give a strong voice to the views of the women themselves. Also, the use of quantitative or mixed research methods seems to be very common among Arab studies. This methodology can provide only limited data. Therefore it does little to convey the actual lived experiences of the women. The existing body of literature reveals that the experiences of Saudi women managers have seldom been brought forth in discussions. And crucially, there is no acknowledgement of any factors influencing the treatment of women managers in the public sector in Saudi Arabia. This leaves a gap in research to

explain why women are not selected in top positions within the Saudi public sector. My research aims to fill this gap and this gives rise to the first research question for the current study: What are the constraints that inhibit women's access to senior management positions in the Saudi public sector?

Another deficiency of the existing research is that it focuses mainly on the constraints to women's advancement in organizations. As a result, perhaps it downplays those factors that have supported women and that continue to assist them towards achieving heightened recognition and representation in organizations. Although a few writers have identified or implied such factors, they have been given less prominence than the prevailing constraints. Moreover, they have been mentioned mainly in Western contexts. As noted in Chapter 2, in the last two or three decades there have been enormous changes in Saudi Arabia, both economically and socially. It has been noted that the Kingdom is a society in transition. It is a society in which traditional beliefs and values remain strong but it is also a society in which the old beliefs and values are encountering the forces of modernization. This means that it provides a complex and dynamic research context which raises some fascinating questions. For example, despite the undoubted existence of cultural and structural constraints to women's advancement, some women, albeit only a few, have negotiated these constraints with some degree of success. They have carved out careers for themselves in a way which would have been unthinkable a comparatively short time ago. In order to examine how they achieved this degree of success a second question will be raised by this study: What factors have assisted the career advancement of women in management in the Saudi public sector?

The distinctiveness of the Saudi context and the consequent doubt as to whether Western explanations for women's disadvantage can be generalized also raises doubt about how far Western-generated 'solutions' may benefit Saudi women managers. Any measures to break through the 'glass ceiling' or to navigate the labyrinth or to overcome inequality regimes need to be tailored to the lived experiences of Saudi women and their cultural context. For this reason, this study will raise a further question: How can the career paths of women be improved to enable them to achieve senior management positions in the Saudi public sector in such a way as to facilitate wider political, social and economic development?

One significant and valuable contribution made by this study is that it includes the perspectives of Saudi women managers themselves, in an attempt to address 'what I wanted to know' (Watson, 1994) about women's experiences in management, in order to make the position of Saudi women in management more visible and this enriches the existing research. The study asks the women to reveal their career stories within their own context.

Thus the unique strength of this study is that it adopts a methodology that will effectively move the research data closer towards finding practical applications that will suit Saudi organizations.

Up to this point, I have identified the gaps in the literature on women in management. The remaining issue for this chapter is the theoretical framework of the study. The prevailing view is that the issue of women in management is very complex and multi-faceted (Fagenson, 1993; Powell, 1999) and there is no single explanation for understanding the dearth of women in top management (Terjesen et al., 2009), since each of the different explanations for this phenomenon reflects the particular theoretical perspective and culture of the researchers concerned (Fagenson, 1990).

The four main perspectives that have been offered to explain the 'glass ceiling' phenomenon (gender or person-centred, organizational structure, social and institutional systems, and gendered-organization-system) all make distinct contributions towards a greater understanding of women's scarcity in higher leadership positions in organizations. Yet, as I argued earlier, each perspective has its weaknesses and none provides a stand-alone explanation for the 'glass ceiling' phenomenon. In general, these four perspectives may overlap at some points and may complement each other to the extent that no single complete explanation is given. Given the theoretical shortcomings of the earlier work it is important to adopt a multi-dimensional perspective as a guiding tool for this study to explain the limited progression of women within the context of Saudi organizations and to accommodate the range of the research questions. Accordingly, I will use the gendered-organization-system perspective (Fagenson, 1990) as the organizing framework and overarching guide for this study, and I will use gendered organizational theory (Acker, 1990) to examine the way in which gendered values are embedded in the structures and cultures of the organizations. This multi-dimensional perspective is consistent with the basic assumption of this study, which is

that cultural ideology is created from the standpoint of men and embedded in organizational life. The gendered segregation of work including power, income and status inequality between men and women is created by organizational practices and processes. Also, images of gender are created by organizational practices, where the established norms for values and behaviour are closely aligned with male roles. Thus women are doubly victimized by these relations of ruling and effectively barred from top positions in the public sphere (Acker, 1990). Thus I argue that a multi-dimensional perspective provides a more thorough account of women's experiences by exploring the various factors that influence their career progression. In this way I will show that individual behaviours and experiences in organizations cannot be understood in isolation from the larger social system.

3.5 Summary

This chapter has presented an overview of literature on women in management, which offers some understanding of the tribulations and triumphs women face on their career journeys. It showed that in the 21st century women are still highly under-represented in senior positions worldwide, notwithstanding the various driving forces that support them. I have discussed different theoretical explanations for understanding this phenomenon, suggesting a number of constraints that are affecting women's equal representation in senior positions. Therefore, there is tremendous need to help women to develop their potential as leaders, which requires enormous efforts on all levels. This will lead to huge returns, not only for women themselves, but also for men, family, organizations and social policy (Burke, 2002). Recognition of the whole range of human potential, including a re-evaluation of women's leadership potential, could bring vital and much needed change to societies. This is particularly important because "in today's globally competitive market place organizations cannot afford to underutilize any segment of the talent pool, nor place constraints on what counts as effective behaviour" (Catalyst, 2007: 8).

Based on in-depth view of the existing body of literature, I have identified gaps in the available knowledge. In so doing, I have provided a strong justification for why this type of culturally specific research is needed in the field of women in management and I have explained why the current research is crucially important for women managers in the public sector in Saudi Arabia. In summary, this literature review will serve as a

platform for answering the research questions presented in Chapter 1, which will be revisited in the discussion chapter.

Next, in part III of the thesis, I will discuss the research methodology. Chapter 4 explains the philosophy underpinning the research and the methods adopted to achieve its objectives and Chapter 5 presents the actual operation of the data collection and analysis carried out by this study.

PART III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Chapter Four: Research Design and Approach

“...research design is similar to constructing a building” (De Vaus: 2001: 9).

4.1 Introduction

Different types of research approaches generate different kinds of knowledge in relation to the phenomena under study (Blaxter et al., 2006; Bryman & Bell, 2007; Saunders et al., 2012). Therefore, the question about which method might be considered to be the most appropriate is both a philosophical and a practical one. In this chapter the aim is to provide an understanding of how I conceptualized my research (Watson, 1994). Thus it provides an overview of the research methodology and the data collection methods that are used in this study, in relation to the research aims and questions and the theoretical framework of the study.

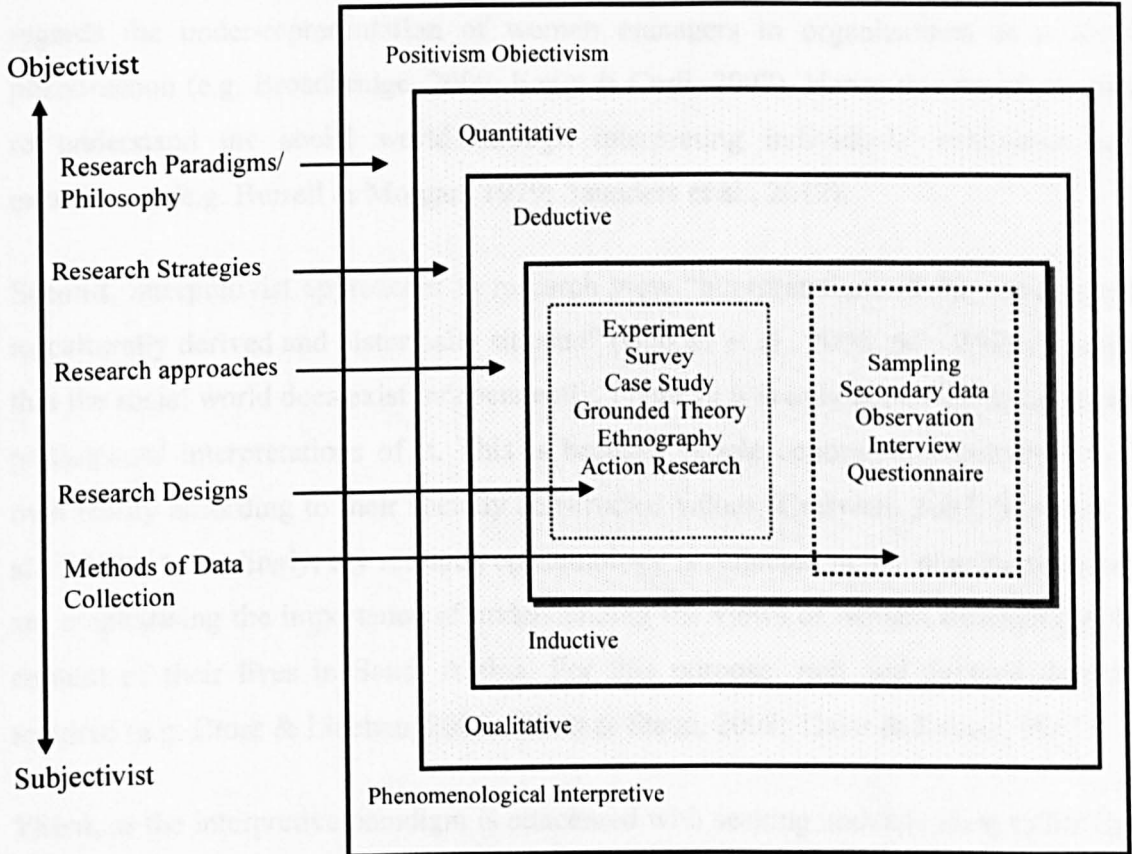
This chapter begins with recapitulating the research objectives and questions, highlighting the serious need to focus research on the factors influencing the career advancement of women into senior leadership positions in the Saudi public sector. The chapter continues with a discussion on philosophical assumptions underpinning the research, the research strategies, the research approach and the justification for the choices made. Subsequently, a discussion of the research design, case study, is provided, with a profile of the cases and the sampling techniques. The chapter discusses methods of data collection, including semi-structured interviews as the main method chosen for this study. Finally, criteria for evaluating the quality of qualitative research are discussed.

4.2 The Research Scope

As previously discussed there is a gap in the literature on women in management in the Arab world, specifically in Saudi Arabia. The current study addresses this gap by investigating the major factors that are involved in the career advancement of women. It reveals which factors constrain and which factors facilitate women's access to senior leadership positions in the Saudi public sector. Furthermore, it will explore strategies that might help women to attain higher positions (see Chapter 1).

In order to determine the most suitable method and methodology, it is important to be aware that the choice of paradigms range from objectivist to subjectivist approaches, as shown in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1 Dimensions of Research Process



Sources: Bryman & Bell (2007); Burrell & Morgan (1979); Collis & Hussey (2003); Easterby-Smith et al. (2008) and Saunders et al. (2012).

4.3 The Research Paradigm: Phenomenological-Interpretive

The word paradigm is used to refer to “a set of very general philosophical assumptions about the nature of the world (ontology) and how we can understand it (epistemology)” (Maxwell, 2005: 37). This is often referred to as the research methodology, which simply means the philosophical approach that underpins the research. Whichever methodological approach is chosen will have an impact on the subsequent findings. For example, an interview that is conducted within a qualitative paradigm will have a different underlying purpose and produce broadly different data from one conducted

within a quantitative paradigm (Blaxter et al., 2006: 58). This study is subjective and humanistic in nature and as such, it uses a phenomenological-interpretive paradigm. My reasons for drawing upon this paradigm are outlined below.

First, this study is subjective and humanistic in nature because this is in line with my values and beliefs about the nature of things. It is based in the social sciences and it regards the under-representation of women managers in organizations as a social phenomenon (e.g. Broadbridge, 2009; Eagly & Carli, 2007). Hence this paradigm aims to understand the social world through interpreting individuals' behaviours and experiences (e.g. Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Saunders et al., 2012).

Second, interpretivist approaches to research view “interpretations of the social world as culturally derived and historically situated” (Blaxter et al., 2006: 60). Whilst I accept that the social world does exist independently, I believe it is only accessible to us via the participants' interpretations of it. This is because people continuously construct their own reality according to their socially constructed values (Creswell, 2007; Saunders et al., 2012). Accordingly, my research epistemology is reflected in my practice because I am emphasising the importance of understanding the views of women managers in the context of their lives in Saudi Arabia. For this purpose, rich and detailed data are required (e.g. Cross & Linehan, 2006; Elliott & Stead, 2008; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011).

Third, as the interpretive paradigm is concerned with seeking understanding rather than with seeking causal explanations this implies that the same events or behaviour can have different meanings in different cultures. What is deemed appropriate in a Western culture may not be deemed appropriate in another. This is the case in many Arab countries and it is most notably so concerning Saudi Arabia. Thus the factors that influence women's access to management in the Saudi context may also differ from those that might apply in West (e.g. Bagilhole & White, 2011; Davidson & Burke, 2011).

Fourth, the interpretive paradigm is useful as it allows the researcher to assess multiple levels of meaning including the social, institutional, organizational, and individual factors (Saunders et al., 2009) that may influence women in management in the Saudi public sector. In addition, it helps to create an understanding of how the appropriate roles for both women and men are formed in social and historical contexts (e.g. Powell,

2010). Moreover, it will enable me to understand the dialectical relationship between organizational life, the wider societal value system and individual values, beliefs, feelings and thoughts (e.g. Acker, 1990). Consequently, the interpretive paradigm is deemed the appropriate methodology. It allows me to critically question the position of women in management whilst taking account of numerous culturally specific issues including cultural values and beliefs, religion, the education system, and the economic situation.

Fifth, the use of the phenomenological-interpretive paradigm is one of the most common approaches to research methodology in social science and it is especially relevant in business and management, particularly in the field of organizational behaviour and human resource management (Saunders et al., 2009). This is evidenced in the literature review. Many researchers have used qualitative methods to understand both women's positions in management and the factors influencing their representation in senior leadership roles (e.g. Ford, 2006; Allan et al., 2007). Also, the phenomenological-interpretive paradigm has opened the field for management to study diverse and formerly silent voices, such as those of women in management; and gender and organization (e.g. Acker, 2009; Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; Elliott & Stead, 2009).

Finally, the use of interpretive approach encourages researchers to reflect on their own experiences during the course of their research (Cunliffe, 2003; Moustakas, 1994; Saunders et al., 2009; Wolcott, 2001). In this study, I reflect on my own research journey whilst taking into account my own situation (see chapters 5 & 10). This is vital because qualitative research is a reflection of our own interpretations and understanding regarding the social-cultural, gender, class and politics factors that we bring to our research (Creswell, 2007).

4.4 The Research Strategy: Qualitative

Research strategies are the way in which researchers approach their research topics (Collis & Hussey, 2003). Many writers on methodological issues find it helpful to categorise research strategies into two fundamental camps: quantitative and qualitative (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Collis & Hussey, 2003; Saunders et al., 2012).

The fundamental differences between quantitative and qualitative approaches are related to their epistemological and ontological assumptions and their associated theories and practices (Bryman & Bell, 2007). As illustrated in Figure 4.1, a quantitative approach reflects a positivist paradigm, which uses quantitative and experimental methods to test hypothetical deductions. In contrast, a qualitative approach reflects a phenomenological-interpretive paradigm, which uses words rather than quantification. It often takes an inductive approach to understanding human experience holistically in a specific setting (Collis & Hussey, 2003; Saunders et al., 2012). The choice to adopt one and not the other is mainly related to the nature of the topic chosen. Some researchers use methodological triangulation whereby they can combine both quantitative and qualitative methods in one study (Patton, 2002). In this study a qualitative strategy was adopted to investigate the experiences of Saudi women managers.

Alvesson and Deetz (2000: 1) describe a qualitative approach as follows:

“Qualitative research or what might more appropriately be called 'interpretive' research aims at understanding the micro-practices of everyday life. Qualitative research is typically oriented towards understanding socially constructed reality. It focuses on meaning, ideas and practice, taking the native's point seriously without questioning either the wider context of it or the process forming it”.

This quotation suggests that interpretive research allows for a holistic view of social phenomena. The aim is to gather an in-depth understanding of how people make sense of their social worlds and explore attitudes, emotions, sensitive issues, opinions and conceptions by talking to people directly. To do so, it uses 'soft data' in the form of impressions, words, sentences, photos and symbols to collect data about events, processes, programmes, issues and activities as they happen within real-life contexts (Neuman, 2006). Therefore, an interpretivist approach allows the researcher to focus on interpreting the meaning of human experience. It does not aim to explain and predict behaviour, or achieve precise measurements and analysis of significant variables, as does quantitative research (Saunders et al., 2012). According to Ford (2006), a qualitative approach is the most appropriate way of discovering and exploring the experiences of managers in organizations. Additionally, a qualitative approach axiomatically assumes that researchers bring their values to the study. This requires that “the inquirer admit the value-laden nature of the study and actively report their biases as well as the value-laden information gathered from the field” (Creswell, 2007: 18). This

means that researchers will often adopt the first-person pronoun 'I' in the course of their writing.

In sum, these are my justifications for using a qualitative approach within the phenomenological-interpretivist paradigm for this study. This strategy will provide complex and rich detail on the experiences of women managers from within their own social and organizational context. My belief is that an understanding of the factors that influence women's careers could best be achieved by talking directly to the women themselves. I aimed to allow them to tell their stories, reflect on their actions, and to freely express their feelings, attitudes, values and beliefs (Saunders et al., 2012). Throughout this study, I use the first-person pronoun 'I' to tell the story of my women managers. My presence is apparent in the text and the women's stories are interpreted by me, thus they may reflect my values: values which I have made explicit throughout this study.

The use of a qualitative strategy may create some methodological problems in relation to its trustworthiness and authenticity. Qualitative research is often criticised on the grounds that human behaviour is complex and can be subject to different interpretations, and therefore the knowledge generated and analysis process cannot be made explicit or open to inspection. This means that the data collection could be subjective rather than objective which does not generate rigorous knowledge compared to the quantitative approach. The subjective nature of qualitative research may lead to difficulties in establishing validity and reliability (Neuman, 2006). However, this is not to say that the qualitative research lacks rigour, or that the insights it generates have no value beyond the immediate context. A number of researchers have reconceptualised and suggested alternative quality criteria for qualitative research, and I discuss those, together with the measures taken to enhance quality, in section 4.8.

4.5 Research Approach: Inductive

There are two main research approaches: deductive and inductive (see Figure 4.1). The deductive approach represents the positivistic paradigm (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008) in which the researcher emphasizes development of conceptual and theoretical structures and then tests them by empirical observation (Collis & Hussey, 2003). Thus it means moving from theory to data or from general to specific in a very linear way, where one

step follows the other in a clear and logical sequence (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). In contrast, the inductive approach represents the interpretive paradigm, in which theory is developed from the observation of empirical realities (Collis & Hussey 2003). This means moving from the specific to the general. Researchers using the inductive approach are particularly concerned with the context in which events take place (Saunders et al., 2012). Thus a researcher can understand how humans interpret their social world, as theory follows data rather than vice versa as in the deductive approach. This is one of the strengths of the inductive approach over the deductive approach (Saunders et al., 2012). This is the major difference between the two approaches.

This study follows the inductive approach in which the theory is built from data, in line with the phenomenological-interpretive paradigm and the qualitative strategy. This study was guided by a multi-dimensional perspective, which was drawn from two main theories: gendered-organization-system and gendered organizations (Acker, 1990; Fagenson, 1990). These theories provided the framework that guided my thinking throughout the study, but they were not tested. Thus, based on the analysis of the data collected together with the guidance of these theories, I developed a framework for understanding women's career advancement.

4.6 Research Design: Case Study

Social research needs a design or a structure before data collection or analysis can begin. Yin (2009: 26) comments, "The design is the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study's initial research questions and, ultimately, to its conclusion". The research design is a general plan; the research must be planned well, before thinking about what type of sampling or methods of data collection need to be used to be able to answer the research questions (Saunders et al., 2009).

There are a number of basic designs for social science research: action research: grounded theory, ethnography studies and case study (Saunders et al., 2009). However, detailed discussion of all research designs is outside the scope of this study and not all such designs are suitable for it. For example, action research aims to bring about change in the social world, and both researcher and the research itself will be part of this change (Collis & Hussey, 2003). This design was not used as I did not aim to bring about specific changes to the participants. Ethnography aims to focus on the role of culture

and how it is linked to the research problem (Bryman & Bell, 2007). This design was impractical because it requires spending a long time in the workplace. The main ethnographic method is participant observation, and this study had time limitations, along with difficulties in obtaining access to organizations. Finally, there is a case study strategy, which is an empirical investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, where the boundaries between the phenomenon being studied and its context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2009). Thus the context is highly important in order to gain a rich understanding of a social phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2009).

In the light of the previous brief discussion, a case study was deemed the most useful in this study for numerous reasons. First, as Yin (2009: 8) notes, there are three indicators to help researchers to choose the most suitable research strategies: the type of research question posed, the extent of control the investigator has over actual events and the degree of focus on a contemporary phenomenon. According to Yin (2009), 'how' or 'why' questions can be investigated by experiment, historical or case study research. The main aim of this study is to investigate 'why' there are few women in senior management. Thus I had little or no control over events. Therefore, adopting a case study strategy meant that it could be used for explanatory and descriptive purposes, which would strengthen the study compared to other research approaches (Collis & Hussey, 2003; Saunders et al., 2009).

Also, a case study is appropriate for a research area that requires the development of new theories. Saunders et al. (2009) argue that a case study is very valuable in that it can explore an existing theory, challenge an existing theory or even be a source for new research questions. However, building a theory from a case study does not mean developing a theory only from the data collected, but rather building it from a mixture of the existing literature and empirical studies, experience or even a pilot study (Perry, 1998). In line with this guideline, I conducted a pilot study and carried out in-depth interviews with women managers in the Saudi public sector (see Chapter 5). From the outcomes of these, together with the guidance of the literature review, I was able to develop a theoretical framework for understanding women's career progression to top management that is culturally appropriate to the Saudi context (see Chapter 9).

In addition, a case study is particularly well suited in situations in which the empirical investigations involve a complex and multifaceted contemporary phenomenon within its

real-life context using multiple sources of data collection (Yin, 2009). The study of women in management is considered as a new phenomenon within the Saudi context because tradition and religious beliefs exert a strong influence on the position of women in society and in the workplace (see Chapter 2). Thus the case study had the potential to deepen my understanding about this research problem by using a variety of data sources (see section 4.7).

Moreover, a case study is the design that is most often associated with a phenomenological-interpretivist philosophy and the inductive qualitative approach chosen for this study. Accordingly, a case study is the method most suited to describe and explore a phenomenon inductively in its real-life context, in order to obtain rich data. This practice has been very common among researchers who attempt to understand social phenomena inductively and holistically in a specific setting (Yin, 2009).

However, there can be difficulties in accessing a suitable organization and the research process is time-consuming (Collis & Hussey, 2003). There are issues with validity and the representativeness of the case study (Yin, 2009). Access to the chosen organizations in the Saudi public sector (see section 4.6.1) was not without difficulties, and the process took a long time (see section 5.2.3). Nevertheless, because I planned my research well (Saunders et al., 2009) and I was familiar with the Saudi social environment, I was able to deal with these difficulties. With regard to the representativeness of a case study, it has been argued that case study is not statistically significant or representative of larger populations; rather it relies on obtaining valuable data (see section 4.8).

My next concern was the appropriate number of cases, which is perhaps the most important issue in any qualitative study. This is because it is important to decide the target population to be included for investigation. Yin (2009) distinguished between two types of case study, namely: single and multiple. A single case study focuses on a single unit of analysis, such as an organization, which can be used for testing existing theory; a unique case, or a critical case. By contrast, a multiple case study design will focus on more than one case and researchers can generate theory. Yin (2009) argues that multiple cases may be preferable to a single case because they enhance external validity and generalizability. Hence the conclusions arising from a multiple case study design can be

more powerful than those coming from a single case. Therefore, a multiple case study is employed in this study. It has been suggested that in order for empirical study to be credible, between two and four case studies is accepted as minimum and between twelve and fifteen as maximum (Creswell, 2007; Eisenhardt, 1989; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2009).

Taking into consideration the above discussion, this study took the Saudi public sector as the frame and within this frame three organizations were selected. The selection process was based on the main areas in which Saudi women are employed, together with considerations of accessibility.

4.6.1 The Case Study Profiles

The aim of this section is to give a brief background of the Saudi public sector and the three specific organizations chosen. The background information was gathered mainly from Saudi documentary materials, including the Ministry of Civil Services (MCS), the Ministry of Economy and Planning (MEP), KSU, KFH and IPA. The study was conducted in Riyadh; the capital of Saudi Arabia, and the focus was Saudi public sector organizations. The creation of the Saudi government sector is closely linked to the establishment of the Kingdom by King Abdulaziz (see Chapter 2). The King established the Council of Ministers in 1953, to facilitate the development of central bureaucracy in order to set out and implement governmental policies. Since 1953 (particularly with the launch of the Seventh Development Plan) the public sector has been responsible for planning and implementing development projects and providing public services (MEP, 2005). It encompasses various services and 21 ministries.

In 2008, total employment in the Saudi public sector reached 1,070,460 employees in professional positions, 91.7% of whom were Saudi and 8.3% non-Saudi (MCS, 2012a). Women accounted for less than 22% (World Economic Forum, 2011), although, as stated in Chapter 2, 96% of Saudi working women are concentrated in the public sector (MCS, 2012a).

Recruitment and selection in the Saudi public sector is based on a grading system from 1 to 15. Salary and benefits are linked to employment grade. Promotion to grades 14 and 15 is primarily done through the Council of Ministers, while grades from 13 down

are based on the decision of the competent minister. Promotion to grade 14 and 15 posts, which are linked to a well-defined career path posts requires 6 or 7 years of experience in the previous post, depending on the level of higher education of the candidate. It also depends on two main criteria which determine the comparative merit of the candidate, namely, integrity as measured in confidential reports and quality and output of performance. All employees, men and women, are subject to an annual performance evaluation by senior officers and their subordinates. The review includes personal information, personal qualities such as creativity and planning, and general information such as relationship with others and punctuality (MCS, 2012b).

The general distribution of employees in the public sector with regard to different managerial scales shows that women are concentrated at the middle and lower end of the occupational scales and are outnumbered by men in almost all grades, particularly at higher scales, where very few if any women are present (MCS, 2012a).

Training and development programmes are offered to all public sector employees at different stages of their career. Training can be inside or outside official working hours and at all ministries and government departments, to enable employees to receive training in their respective fields (MCS, 2012a).

Three public sector ministries were selected for this study. The Ministry of Higher Education, which is responsible for all universities and institutes of higher education; the Ministry of Health which is in charge of the administration of health care and hospitals; and the Ministry of the Civil Service. This ministry is responsible for manpower planning for the government sector, classification of governmental jobs and planning of salary scales (SAMIRAD, 2012). The sample selection was based on prior information about the concentration of Saudi working women in these specific ministries. Also, cases were selected based on a mixture of homogeneity and heterogeneity. They are homogeneous in that they are Saudi public sector organizations which are subject to the same legal, cultural and social environments, and they are heterogeneous in that they are chosen from different ministries and different working environments.

Three organizations were chosen from the three ministries, namely KSU, KFH and IPA. These three organizations were mainly chosen to reflect the different sectors of women's

employment and the places where women managers are mostly found. The time available for this study and the difficulty of accessing other organizations in the three Ministries were also influential factors. These were the only three organizations that gave me permission to access and interview their women managers (see section 5.3.3 & Appendix 1). Below is a brief profile of each of the selected organizations.

The first organization, KSU, was established in 1956. It was the first and remains the largest university in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It currently has a total population of 72,903 students, 41,617 of whom are female; and 6,869 faculty members, of whom 2,052 are female (KSU, 2012). KSU espouses commitment to the values of Arab and Muslim culture, the pursuit of learning and researching, and development to promote honesty, integrity, respect, fairness, trust, civility and diversity (KSU, 2012).

The KSU is divided into five academic departments: community colleges, the women's centre, humanities colleges, health colleges and science colleges. Each department comprises various colleges. The women's centre was established in 1976 and named the Centre of University Studies for Girls. As the number of specialisms on offer began to increase it was split into two: the Centre for Humanities at Oleisha and the Centre for Sciences and Medicine at Malaz. In most subjects the female students are taught either by female professors or, if female teachers are not available, by male professors through closed-circuit TV. However, in the College of Medicine, women participate in the same environment (clinic or training) as their male counterparts. Administration in the two centres consists of a Dean, a Vice Dean for Academic Affairs, a Vice Dean for Administrative Affairs, a supervisor, and 71 women: each holding various managerial positions, such as deputy of college or deputy of department. However, the two centres for women are linked to the equivalent main institution or male centre both academically and administratively (KSU, 2012).

The second organization is the IPA, which is the Saudi national centre for development of best practice in public administration and public management. It was established in 1961 as an autonomous corporate body with headquarters in Riyadh. It later proved necessary (due to the extensive amount of training, research, and consultation needed) to establish three branches: the IPA branch in Dammam in 1973, the Jeddah branch in 1974, and a third branch, for women, in Riyadh in 1983. The total number of employees is 1318: 630 academic staff, 348 administrators, and 340 technicians and workers (IPA,

2009). The total number of women employees in the women's section is 125, employed in teaching, training or administration. Twelve women hold various managerial positions, such as general director, programmes director, research and consultations director or public relations manager, along with other responsibilities like teaching and training.

The IPA provides pre-service and in-service training programmes for all civil servants. It participates in the administrative reorganization of government agencies, advises on administrative problems and assists the various ministries in conducting research related to public administration. The IPA also acts as a consultant to government agencies to help with training needs. The women's branch of the IPA performs the same activities as in the main institutions – the men's institutions – in that it trains female civil servants in areas such as information studies, hospital administration or secretarial work (IPA, 2009). Nevertheless, the scope and direction of the training activities differs between men's branches and the women's branch; e.g. training programmes for women are tailored to suit their needs. Also, consultation services in the women's branch are offered only for organizations which have women's sections, whereas consultation in the men's branches is offered to all organizations, including women's sections. Furthermore, the women's branch is not involved in forming IPA policy, budgetary decisions, or planning training programmes (IPA, 2009).

The third organization is the KFH, which is one of the leading healthcare institutions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It was established in 1973, under an operating agreement with the Hospital Corporation of America (HCA). In 1985, its operations and administration were transferred to a national team. It provides medical services of a highly specialised nature, promotes medical research and provides education programmes, including postgraduate education and training for health care professionals in a multi-disciplinary academic environment. By 2007, KFH was the largest hospital in the Middle East (KFH, 2012).

As is generally the case in the medical profession in Saudi Arabia, women and men work in the same place, though in different offices and each within their own specialisation. The total number of employees is 8,104 (44% Saudi) and the number of managerial positions is 1,787. The Board of Directors comprises 10 members, all male. Women doctors are relatively few when compared with men, since women were only

admitted to the School of Medicine in 1974. The women work in various areas, including managerial positions such as Head of Patients, Head of Environment, Head of Appointments and Head of Support Services, or they work as consultants and heads of clinics (KFH, 2012). Nevertheless, women do not hold key positions in the hospital, such as head of planning and implementation or head of budget.

4.6.2 Sampling: Purposive

Qualitative research may lack clear guidelines or principles for sample selection when compared with quantitative research (Saunders et al., 2012). In quantitative research there is a clearly established preference for probability sampling, meaning the sample is chosen at random. The aim of so doing is to draw a representative sample from the population, so that the results of studying the sample can then be generalized back to the population (Saunders et al., 2012). In qualitative research, non-probability sampling techniques are appropriate for selecting the population of the study (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Saunders et al., 2012). The literature suggests various types of non-probability sampling techniques: quota sampling, purposive sampling, snowball samplings, self-selecting sample and convenience sampling (Saunders et al., 2009). However, many qualitative researchers indicate that the most appropriate non-probability sampling technique for case studies is purposive sampling (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

In this study purposive rather than representative sampling was used. One reason for choosing purposive sampling was the interpretive phenomenological approach adopted for the study. This study aimed to study a phenomenon and to add new insight into the field. Purposive sampling involves selecting a sample of the people who are most readily available to participate in the study (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003), and who can purposively provide an understanding of the research problems (Creswell, 2007). Hence the selection of participants is based on particular features or characteristics, such as having reached a managerial position and worked for a number of years in their career. Moreover, purposive sampling enabled me to answer the research questions and to meet study objectives (Saunders et al., 2009). Purposive sampling can be criticised for involving deliberate choices which could lead to bias. However, the process of sampling requires a clear objectivity which minimises problems that may occur (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

4.6.2.1 Sampling Frame and Sample

A list of the target population, women managers, was obtained from the Personnel Departments in the three organizations (KSU, KFH & IPA). From the KSU, I selected the 'women's centre', which houses education for girls. It includes two divisions: humanities colleges and scientific and medical studies. From the IPA, I selected the 'women's branch': premises where women work. In the KFH there is no separate workplace for women; therefore, I selected women from the main hospital. A question that could be raised here is why women managers were chosen and not men. My answer to this question, as mentioned in Chapter 1, is partially in line with Stead and Elliott (2009: 1) who indicated in *Women's Leadership* that they focused on women because of "a paucity of critical work on women's leadership; a persistent lack of equality for women in the workplace and a personal motivation to contribute to women's progression". I chose to focus on women managers because of the gaps in the body of literature on women in management, particularly in the Saudi context, a lack of gender equality in the workplace, particularly at senior management positions, and my personal motivation to give voice to the unique perspective of women's own lived experiences. This will contribute to women's career advancement by producing a framework that applies to women's complex lives (Metz, 2003) and is culturally appropriate to the Saudi context. Another reason is that, in Saudi Arabian culture, it is not acceptable for a woman researcher to interview males, particularly in view of workplace segregation (see Chapter 6). Of course other methods were considered such as the use of telephone interviews, but these would not allow the same depth of insight.

To decide on a sufficient number of Saudi women managers, it is essential to bear in mind that statistical representativeness of the total population is not considered in qualitative research sampling (Saunders et al., 2009). However, there is a debate among researchers as to the correct sample numbers. Patton (2002) argues that there are no specific rules for choosing a qualitative sample. It depends on the research objectives, time and resources. However, Arksey and Knight (1999) argue that the researcher should continue his/her investigation until he/she is confident that the respondents will not produce anything new on the research topic. In other words, the researcher should add respondents until he or she reaches a level of theoretical saturation (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). However, they suggest that eight respondents are sufficient when conducting interviews. Bauer and Gaskell (2000) suggest that 10 to 15 respondents are

sufficient for interview. Their justification for this is that they think the most important concern is the information and not the number of respondents. They also note that interviews are costly and time-consuming.

Bearing in mind all these arguments, 28 women managers were chosen from different departments, with selection based on the level of data saturation: the point at which I began to hear the same information reported and was no longer learning anything new. I interviewed thirteen women managers from the ‘women's centre’, in the KSU, seven women managers from the ‘women's branch’ in the IPA and eight women managers from the KFH. The main criteria for the selection of women for interview were that they should occupy managerial positions (lower, middle and senior) in Saudi public sector organizations and have four years working experience or more. The selected ministries, organizations and participants are shown in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1 Study Population

Saudi Public Sector		
Ministry of Higher Education	Ministry of the Civil Service	Ministry of Health
KSU	IPA	KFH
Women's Centre	Women's Branch	The main Hospital
Colleges Education, Art, Business and Administration, Law and Sciences and Medical Studies	Sectors Education, Business and Administration, and Organizational Behaviour	Divisions Medical, Clinical Services and Patient Services.
13 Women Managers (Dean, Vice Dean Heads of Colleges and Heads of Departments)	7 Women Managers (Heads of Departments)	8 Woman Managers (Heads of Departments)

4.7 Methods of Data Collection

There are different ways of collecting data in qualitative research. Yin (2009) identifies at least six sources of evidence: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation and physical artefacts. Similarly, Creswell (2007: 129) indicates that data collection can be grouped into four basic types of information: observation (ranging from non-participant to participant), interviews (ranging from closed-ended to open-ended), documents (ranging from public to private) and audio-visual (including materials such as photographs, compact disks, and videotapes).

Methods of data collection can be used in combination (e.g. focus groups and individual interviews or participant observation and interview) to investigate the same phenomena in the study from different angles (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Willig, 2008). This represents a form of triangulation. In social research, triangulation is essential to verify and strengthen the validity and reliability of the research result (Collis & Hussey, 2003). It presents a more accurate picture of outcomes than does a single method (Saunders et al., 2009). Moreover, it can overcome the potential bias and sterility of a single-method approach (Collis & Hussey, 2003: 78).

Interviews were the main data collection method for this study. This method sheds light on the research problem, enhances its validity, and enables conclusions to be formulated on the best possible basis. An interview is defined as a method of collecting data in which participants are asked questions to find out what they do, think or feel (Collis & Hussey, 2003; Payne & Payne, 2004). There are three main categories: structured, unstructured and semi-structured interviews (May, 2001; Punch, 2005; Saunders et al., 2012). The structured interview is based on a predetermined set of questions, so that the responses are recorded on a standardised schedule (Saunders et al., 2012). The unstructured interview has no predetermined set of questions and allows the interviewees to talk freely about the situation, event, behaviour or beliefs in relation to the topic area (Punch, 2005). The semi-structured interview is the most common type of interview in qualitative research. It is defined as a purposeful discussion between two or more people in which the interviewer asks his/her respondents open-ended questions. These questions are prepared by the interviewer in advance, but need not be asked in the same order (Collis & Hussey, 2003; Bryman & Bell, 2007; Saunders et al., 2012).

I wanted to understand the women's perceptions of their experiences in management and therefore I needed to immerse myself in the research process in order to evaluate the beliefs, values and judgments of the participants. For this reason, I chose two types of interviews: the unstructured interview and the semi-structured interview. The unstructured interview was only used for the preliminary interviews. The rationale behind this was to understand women in management in the Saudi public sector, and to collect preliminary data concerning the factors that influence the position of women in these organizations (see section 5.2.2).

As the main method of data collection, the semi-structured interview helped me gain insight into the perceptions of the participants because I was trying to understand how managers make sense of their work experiences within the context of their lives (Ford, 2006). Punch (2005) indicates that interview is a good way of understanding participants' perceptions, means and definitions of certain situations. This approach allowed me to engage in a dialogue with participants, thereby enabling me to modify my initial questions in response to their answers. Thus I was able to probe for rich and deep information. Additionally, my questions were flexible and they encouraged participants to express their views in their own words (Yin, 1994) (see Appendix 2).

Furthermore, the interview technique elicited a high response rate as it involves interpersonal conversation. A survey would have elicited a lower response rate (Collis & Hussey, 2003). However, the interview method may have some drawbacks. It raises problems of accessibility which can produce errors and bias (Collis & Hussey, 2003). Additionally, researchers may find it difficult to set aside their own opinions and perspectives while conducting the interview (Saunders et al., 2009). Moreover, it may result in responses that are not relevant to the research topic (Saunders et al., 2009). Nevertheless, I was able to overcome most of these obstacles, as discussed in Chapter 5.

After conducting the individual interviews, I ran workshop-based discussions in order to provide an opportunity to discuss the preliminary themes emerging from the interview data. Also, I wanted to validate the interviews by showing them to the group members (see section 5.3.1.2). As I will explain in Chapter 5, I introduced the themes to my participants in conversation form and later wrote their feedback on a flipchart. This generated insights and information that confirmed and added to the individual interviews. In addition, it enabled group discussion in which participants focused collectively upon the themes related to the aims and objectives of this research. It could be considered a new supporting type of data collection, as well as peer-checking. This is consistent with Creswell's (2007: 129) advice: "I encourage individuals designing qualitative projects to include new and creative data collection methods that will encourage reader and editors to examine their studies".

I used documents as another supportive source of data in the current study. I obtained documentary materials on Saudi Arabia's background from different institutions,

including MCS, MEP, KSU, KFH and IPA. I used personal documents, including a diary, memos, and field notes that I kept as a research journal while conducting this study. The use of a personal journal helped me to document all my own observations, reflections, feelings and perspectives and it helped me to formulate follow-up questions and to identify issues that needed clarification from the participants (see Chapter 5). Generally, as Yin (1994) indicates, the use of documentation serves a number of purposes. These include the verification of names and titles that might have been mentioned in the interviews; confirmation of information from other sources; and to enable inferences be made, such as new questions about communications or networking within the organization.

4.8 Criteria for Evaluation of the Quality of Qualitative Research

There are on-going debates among qualitative researchers about the evaluation criteria for qualitative research and the use of terms such as 'validity', 'reliability' and 'credibility' in qualitative research, as these have traditionally been linked to positivist research in which inquiry is assumed to rely on the measurement and analysis of actual relations between variables (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Some researchers argue that validity and reliability are the relevant criteria for qualitative research. For example, Neuman (2006) argues that researchers can achieve reliability and credibility when conducting qualitative research by using a variety of measures such as problem formulation, field notes, and interview data analysis. Silverman (2005) indicates that validity in qualitative research is concerned with the truth in research findings, i.e. whether the research findings represent what is really happening in the situation. Other qualitative methodologists have suggested alternative quality criteria or a re-conceptualisation of the traditional criteria. For example, Guba and Lincoln (1994) propose two primary criteria for judging the quality of the research: trustworthiness and authenticity. Achieving an account that can be considered trustworthy entails four principles: credibility mirrors 'internal validation', transferability mirrors 'external validation' or 'generalizability', dependability mirrors 'reliability', and conformability mirrors 'objectivity'. Bearing in mind all these different views, I adopted Guba and Lincoln's (1994) four criteria for evaluating qualitative research to establish the trustworthiness of this study.

Credibility in qualitative research relies on the ability to demonstrate that the research was designed in a way that accurately identifies and describes the phenomena to be investigated (Remenyi et al., 1998). In this research, the proposed research design was scrutinized and approved by Hull University Business School, and by members of the ethics committees at the Hull University Business School, the Institute of Public Administration in Saudi Arabia and the Saudi Arabia Cultural Bureau.

Another aspect of producing a credible account concerns “whether the researcher has gained full access to the knowledge and meaning of respondents” (Remenyi et al., 1998: 115). During the whole process of the data collection I used a number of different resources to ensure that I had access to the knowledge and meaning of respondents (see section 5.2). These resources enabled me to capture the meanings and interpretations of participants by reporting my findings through the voices of the women themselves, e.g. in quotations from interviews and my research diary. Also, writing in full detail, providing rich descriptions, peer validation and partial member validation enhances the credibility of the study (Creswell, 2007). The credibility of the study was further ensured by my determination to remain consistent with the philosophical assumptions underpinning the research.

Transferability relates to the possibility of transferring the findings from the particular case study to other situations. There is much diversity of opinion among researchers as to whether the outcomes of a qualitative study can be generalized or not. Collis and Hussey (2003) point out that positivistic research seeks generalizability, meaning the ability to extend the characteristics found in the sample to the wider population; but in interpretive research a researcher may not be able to generalize from one setting to another. Nevertheless, some researchers argue that since the interpretive researcher begins with specific statements (fact) and ends with a general statement (theory), generalizability “can take the form of concepts, theories, specific implications or rich insights” (Walsham, 2006: 322). Geertz (1993) indicates that generalizability in interpretive research is to provide a ‘thick description’, and the aim is not to generalize across cases but rather within them. Pace Geertz, Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue that a thick description strengthens the study by providing others with what they refer to as a ‘database’ for making judgments about the possible transferability of findings to another environment. The reasoning process in interpretive research is a form of generalization

and this is precisely what Yin (2009) calls 'analytic generalization'. Accordingly, my intention is not to make generalizations either to the rest of the universe, or to the Arab world. Nor is my aim to make statistical generalizations. However, the findings may be transferable to other public organizations in Saudi Arabia, since they all share the same environmental features. Transferability at this level and potentially beyond is obtained by providing a deep analysis of the context and of the data on Saudi women's experiences in management, which allows readers to access the meanings attached to them and evaluate the relevance to other settings (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Furthermore, and since the value of the study lies in its ability to identify patterns and to make linkages to other theoretical models (Bryman, 1989), the study aims to generalize to the propositions propounded in the literature on women in management.

Dependability is another way of evaluating the trustworthiness of qualitative research. Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue that in order to establish the value of the research, the researcher should adopt an auditing approach. Auditing refers to the recording of interviews, field notes, and interview transcripts and data analysis. In the context of this study, findings from the interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and then translated by me, and reviewed by members and peers (see sections 5.3.1.1 & 5.3.1.2). This practice provides assurance that the accounts were accurate. This can be seen in the findings and discussion chapters in which I present quotations, metaphors, proverbs or phrases from these transcripts (see Chapters 6–9). Another way in which I attempted to produce dependable findings was through the use of a range of different data sources to build up an accurate picture of findings (see section 5.2).

Conformability means that researchers should not allow their personal values to bias the conduct of the research and the research findings (Bryman & Bell, 2007). In business and management research, it is impossible to achieve complete conformability or objectivity (Bryman & Bell, 2007), but judgment of objectivity acts as a check and a balance for the examiners of qualitative research. The researcher's own values will play an essential role in all stages of the research process and they must be made clear and reflected upon if the researcher wants her/his research results to be credible (Cunliffe, 2003; Saunders et al., 2009). As a researcher I was conscious of my own values during the research process and I made them explicit. This is consistent with the interpretive perspective, which recognises that researchers carry with them certain values which will

guide their work (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Saunders et al., 2012). Furthermore, an interpretive approach allows the researchers to expose their views about culture, religion and politics in order to justify and clarify design decisions and the outcome of the research. Nevertheless, it is important for researchers to limit the influence of their personal and behavioural characteristics by developing and using skills such as being honest with others, confident of their information, and showing genuine interest in the people who participate in the research (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Saunders et al., 2012) (see section 5.4).

To sum up, this research places emphasis on the trustworthiness of the research process as well as on maintaining the authentic voices of those women who participated in this study. Thus this research accords with the view of Ritchie and Lewis (2003: 267) who state that:

“...the particular value of qualitative research lies in its ability to explore issues in depth and from the perspectives of different participants, with concepts, meaning and explanation developed inductively from the data ... the degree to which the data from a study support existing theories can be assessed, by comparing how well different cases ‘fit’ within an established theory and how far it is able to explain behaviours in individual cases”.

4.9 Summary

The chapter began with a discussion on selecting the best research approach for this study. It then outlined the research methodology and methods of data collection for this study. The research was identified as falling within the phenomenological interpretive paradigm and justification for this choice was given. Furthermore, the research strategy was identified as qualitative, the research approach as inductive, the research design as case study and interviews as the main data collection method. Justification was given for these choices. Finally, the criteria that are commonly used to evaluate qualitative research were discussed in terms of credibility transferability, dependability and conformability.

The next chapter will discuss the actual process of data collection on the site of the study and data analysis carried out under the chosen paradigm.

Chapter Five: Process of Data Collection and Analysis

“The value of our research depends on the skill with which we manage to match our questions in the pursuit of knowledge and understanding” (Willig, 2008: 161)

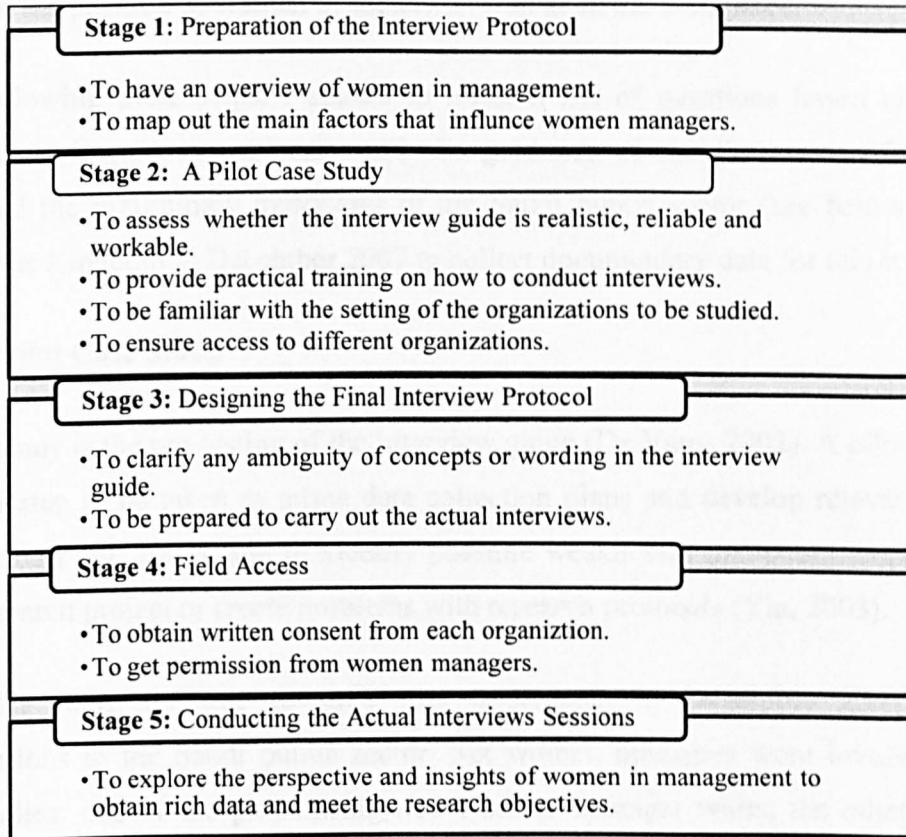
5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I provided an explanation and a justification of my selected methodology and method. In this chapter the aim is to provide an understanding of how I gained access to information resources (Watson, 1994) and how I analysed the data that were collected based on the chosen paradigm. The chapter begins with an account of the data collection process. This is followed by a discussion on qualitative data analysis, which is divided into five sub-sections. First, I describe the preparation for data analysis, which covers recording, transcribing and translating and validating the interviews. Second, I will discuss my approach to qualitative data analysis and I will explain why an interpretative phenomenological analysis was chosen for this study. The third subsection is related to the actual process of analysing the study data. The remaining two subsections are related to ways of presenting my interpretations and writing style. In addition, I will reflect on my role in the field as a researcher and discuss the ethical issues that arose during the process of this research.

5.2 Data Collection Process

As stated in the previous chapter, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the method most suited to achieving the research objectives, namely, to explore the factors influencing women’s access to senior management positions in the Saudi public sector and to find ways to overcome the constraints that inhibit women’s access to senior leadership positions. The data collection process entailed preparing the initial interview questions, undertaking a pilot study, designing the final interview protocol, accessing the field and conducting the actual interviews sessions, as illustrated in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1 Data Collection Process



5.2.1 Preparation of the Interview Protocol

In preparing for qualitative interviews, it is essential to design a guide or protocol. A protocol is a set of guidelines that help in running the interview sessions (Arksey & Knight, 1999). It has a list of questions or general topics which serve as a framework for the main body of the semi-structured interview, and it is based on the key questions addressed in the study (Arksey & Knight, 1999). Stake (1995) indicates that developing protocols for the case study is a way of enhancing the quality of the research. To develop a study protocol, researchers need to be aware of other people's research and writing on a topic, as this will provide a fruitful source of ideas from which we can generate questions (Arksey & Knight, 1999). Hence I examined the literature on women in management as discussed in Chapter 3. I identified the factors reported to influence women's career advancement to top positions and the strategies that help women managers to succeed to senior positions in organizations. Additionally, I reviewed the literature on Saudi cultural values and the literature on women's position in society (see

Chapter 2). This helped me to understand how the beliefs and values of national culture influence the position of women in society as well as in the workplace.

After following these steps, I started to make a list of questions based on the key questions addressed in the study and the guidance of the literature. After that, I conducted the preliminary interviews in the Saudi public sector (see below), when I went to the Kingdom in December 2007 to collect documentary data for this study.

5.2.2 A Pilot Case Study

A pilot study is the pre-testing of the interview guide (De Vaus, 2002). A pilot test is an essential step to be taken to refine data collection plans and develop relevant lines of questioning (Yin, 2003), and to identify possible weaknesses that could jeopardise the main research project or create problems with research protocols (Yin, 2003).

The pilot study for this research was undertaken in December 2007, in two organizations in the Saudi public sector. Six women managers were involved in the pilot studies; one of the participants was a senior manager whilst the others were at middle management level. The interview sessions were unstructured and carried out on a convenience, access, and geographic proximity basis (Creswell, 2007). The interview sessions with these six managers lasted from 40 minutes to an hour. The participants were very cooperative and gave valuable comments. The interview sessions were transcribed and analysed.

The pilot study enabled me to achieve a number of goals. First, it helped me to assess whether the initial interview guide was realistic, reliable and workable. For example, during the pilot interviews, I realised that some modifications were needed in the interview guide, such as rewording some of the questions so as to get a richer response. For example, the question 'What religious factors have influenced you from holding top positions in organizations?' was changed to 'What social-cultural factors can influence you in holding top positions in organizations?' Also, I realised that I needed to avoid closed questions that suggested a 'Yes' or a 'No' answer. For example, the question 'Are there any developmental opportunities available at your organization?' was changed to 'Do you think developmental opportunities are available to you at your organization?' Also, the pilot study helped me to familiarize myself with the

organizations' settings. In addition, it provided me with practical training on how to conduct interviews, so I was able to predict and to avoid any potential problems before undertaking the main fieldwork, such as the issue of power relations between me and participants (see section 5.4). Another important goal of the pilot study was to identify which organizations in the Saudi government would be included in this study. Hence this preparatory work was intended to facilitate my access when I carried out the actual interviews.

5.2.3 Designing the Final Interview Protocol

After conducting the exploratory interviews together with the guidance of the literature review, questions were generated to design the final version of the interview protocol. The procedures for designing the final interview protocol followed the advice in the literature, which suggested two types of questions: primary questions and probing questions. These types of questions ought to be coherent and follow a logical sequence, to help participants to be at ease and to 'break the ice' or to answer the questions more easily and to help the researcher to organise the interview, to ensure good use of interview time and to keep interactions focused (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Creswell, 2007). Hence the interview protocol started with broad and open-ended questions such as personal information (family background, demographics, educational background, and employment background). Then, it progressed to the primary questions which were also open-ended and aimed to gain a wide range of experiences and perspectives from the interviewees. Much effort was made to ensure that 'open-ended' questions were expressed naturally and without any bias. Examples of such questions are: What are the factors influencing your progression to a senior position? What do you think are the most persistent constraints to women gaining powerful positions within organizations? Such questions can help informants to elaborate more and explain their points of view. Also, these types of questions encouraged me, as a researcher, to ask follow-up probing questions that aimed to obtain more detailed information about the study topic (Yin, 2003; Arksey & Knight, 1999). Probing questions were given particular care since they were mostly posed as 'why' questions. Patton (2002: 363) indicates that "why questions move beyond experiences and feelings to the making of analytical and deductive inferences 'and also makes the valid point that' using 'why' as a probe can imply that a person's response was in some way inadequate". Examples of 'why' questions are: Why

do women not work towards changing their situation? Why should organizations help women?

To increase the validity and reliability of the interview protocol, it was reviewed thoroughly by my two supervisors (Prof. Kevin Orr & Dr. Barbara Allan) to test the clarity of the questions and to test whether they were appropriate for the research objectives. As a result, many changes and alterations were made to the original version of the interview guide. The interview guide was also shown to some academic staff in different disciplines and at different universities⁹. Their comments resulted in some changes related to the probing questions. They advised that some questions should be rephrased and that other questions needed to be omitted as they were deemed merely to repeat other themes. For example, the questions ‘Are there any organization policies do you feel that could influence women to hold senior positions? If yes, what are they?’ were deleted and replaced by ‘What organizational policies do you think will influence women’s career advancement to top positions more? Their suggestions were taken into consideration and changes were made accordingly.

The general topics covered in the interviews are summarised as follows:

- ❖ The social-cultural, economic, religious, political, educational, family factors that facilitate/constrain women’s career advancement.
- ❖ Organizational factors that inhibit women from accessing powerful positions within public sector organizations.
- ❖ Personal factors that influence women’s career advancement.
- ❖ Approaches to overcome various challenges or obstacles women face in their career path.
- ❖ Individual strategies that would help women’s career advancement into top management.
- ❖ Organizational strategies that would help women’s career advancement into top management.

⁹ Prof. Ann Cunliffe: Anderson School of Management University of New Mexico/USA. Dr. Cecilia Loureiro-Koechlin: Brunel University/UK. Dr. Marianna Afanassieva: Business School/Hull University /UK. Dr. Suzanne Clisby: Gender Studies/Hull University/ UK.

- ❖ Social or political strategies that would help women's career advancement into top management.

After going through all the stages of developing the interview protocol and after considerable forethought and testing to find the most appropriate formulae of words that met the research objectives, the final interview protocol was made, as represented in Appendix 2. Then, the interview guide was translated into Arabic and reviewed by a panel of three academics from Princess Nora Bint Abdul Rahman University in Saudi Arabia to ensure that the questions reflected the objectives of the study, and that they were easily understood so that participants could respond to each question with no difficulty. In response to feedback from the assessors, modifications and changes were made to some questions and the sequence of items was reorganised for the pilot study.

While working on producing the final draft of the interviews protocol, I was working on seeking permission to access the three organizations, as discussed below.

5.2.4 Field Access

Prior to conducting the field study, researchers need to bear in mind the realities on the ground in places where the research is being conducted (Blaxter et al., 2006). As a member of Saudi society, I was aware that the research environment in Saudi Arabia would require special attention because its cultural setting might impose a number of constraints and restrictions on researchers. For example, it can be difficult to obtain cooperation from employees in the government sector, especially for sensitive studies, unless written permission is obtained from the authorities concerned. Moreover, conducting research in a conservative country like Saudi Arabia can be challenging, particularly for female researchers. For example, it was difficult for me, as a woman, to obtain letters permitting access, since these have to be obtained from the main division in the Saudi public sector, which tends to be a male domain: hence women's entry is restricted. Therefore, the only means of contacting the male division were through e-mail, telephone, fax, or post.

Keeping these considerations in mind, I was aware of the need to prepare well in order to gain permission to enter the field of study. At first, I used a formal approach by contacting 12 different organizations in the public sector by fax and post. I received

only one initial response from the 12 organizations and that was from the IPA, the organization where I used to work. Then I contacted the organizations by telephone, but there was no definite response. After three months, I realised that the only available option for me was to use my informal networks. This is because the methodological challenges of collecting data (Omair, 2008) and accessing the field work require strong personal networking and well-functioning links, which allow researchers to avoid dependence on official gatekeepers (Easterby-Smith & Malina, 1999). The researcher's informal networking usually includes parents, friends, and relatives (Michaliova, 2004).

Networking was beneficial and it helped me to gain access to the field, although it put me under an obligation whereby I would be expected to return favours to the people who helped me to access organizations. If I refused and did not follow the reciprocity rules, I would be viewed as unappreciative and untrustworthy for some time. Networking and the idea of reciprocity rules is not unique to Saudi Arabia; it also applies in other contexts such as Russia and China (Michaliova, 2004).

Together with my personal and informal contacts, I managed to obtain written permission to access the chosen organizations (KSU, KFH and IPA) (see section 4.6 & Appendix 1, section 1.1). After obtaining a signed written consent from each organization, I obtained a list of women managers with their contact details from Personnel Departments in the chosen organizations. I then contacted the participants via email and telephone to get their permission to conduct interviews with them. Following that, a consent form was sent to each participant (see Appendix 1, section 1.2) explaining the protocol of the study. The consent form emphasised that all information collected in this study would be kept strictly confidential. Also, it stated that all identifying data would be changed in order to protect participants. In addition, it indicated that audiotapes would be used for the purpose of this study only and would be destroyed afterwards. Furthermore, participants had the right to withdraw from this study at any time without further consequence or to refuse to answer any question with which they did not feel comfortable.

After testing the validity and reliability of the interview protocol in English and Arabic, and after gaining permission to access the three organizations and obtaining participants' agreement to be interviewed, I decided to conduct my study between October and December 2008, as discussed below.

5.2.5 Conducting the Actual Interview Sessions

The interview is a social occasion or event in its own right whereby researchers and respondents jointly create social reality through interaction (Arksey & Knight, 1999). According to this perspective, the researcher needs to make plans prior to conducting interviews and to provide the basic resources and equipment in order to be prepared for unexpected problems (Wilkinson & Young, 2004). There are three types of preparation: logistical planning; advance management of the physical context and properties of the interview situations; and mental preparation (Wilkinson & Young, 2004). Logistical preparation is the plan that takes the researcher to the right place at the right time for the interviews. This involves finding out the location, getting directions to the place and discovering how long it will take to get there and obtaining information about the weather conditions and the availability of transport. The management of the physical context and properties of the interview situation is concerned with organising the venue, discovering the appropriate dress code, obtaining business cards, props and recording facilities. Mental preparation is concerned with how to manage the interview process. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) refer to the first two types of preparation as 'stage-management', and to the last type as a process that starts with easing the interviewee down from their everyday activities to a deeper level at which researcher and participants can together focus on the study topic; towards the end the researcher needs to signal the return to the everyday level. This means that mental preparation involves six interrelated stages: arrival, introducing the research, beginning the interview, during the interview, ending the interview and after the interview (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

To meet the objectives of the research, I followed the guidance given by Ritchie and Lewis (2003) regarding interview preparation. First, I had to 'stage-manage' by being clear about what I was going to do before commencing the actual interviews. I decided that all the interviews would be conducted in Arabic, since the local language is Arabic. Bryman and Bell (2007: 496) indicate that:

"If you are interviewing people whose primary language is not English but another language in which you, the interviewer are fluent, you may decide to interview respondents in their primary language, so that their ability to communicate effectively is not impaired by having to speak in a language with which they are less familiar".

All the interviews were scheduled at times that were convenient for the participants. I had to prepare a day before the interview to find the interview locations: interviews were conducted either in the participants' offices or in their homes. I needed to dress well as it was important to observe a formal dress code. I also made sure that I had a high quality digital recorder to record the interviews after obtaining the participants' permission.

Second, I had to be clear about what I was going to do on the day of the interviews; hence I followed the six interrelated stages of mental preparation as identified by Richie and Lewis (2003). In stage one, upon arrival I made sure that the place was suitable, quiet, private and comfortable for conducting the interview. Also, I tried to establish a relationship with the participants by trying to make them at ease and breaking the ice. To this end, I identified commonalities and helped them to feel in control of their territory. I then started a conversation about everyday topics such as the weather in Saudi Arabia. Selltitz et al. (1965: 576 cited in Oakley, 2005: 218) suggests that "a brief remark about the weather, the family pets, flowers or children will often serve to break the ice". Once I felt that the participants were comfortable with this stage and they did not have any queries about the interview process, I moved to the next stage whereby I started to direct the interaction by introducing the research topic. This included providing the participants with a clear picture of the research objectives, reaffirming confidentiality, and explaining that they had the right to withdraw from the interview or not to answer certain questions. I also asked for their permission to record the interview.

After that, I had to prepare myself mentally. This was achieved on the one hand, by giving the interviewees the chance to talk freely about their situations, events, behaviour or beliefs in relation to the topic area, and on the other hand by controlling the direction of the interview process. To help me to manage this balance, I had the interview guide, which consisted of questions related to my study objectives. I was very careful to ensure that my questions ranged from the general to the specific. I started the interview by asking the participants about their backgrounds, such as their marital status and children etc. Follow-up questions (for example employment status, years of employment and education background) were used to help me to set the scene of the interview and to judge how easily the interviewee would take to this role and I adapted my approach accordingly. This process was essential as it enabled me to adjust to the way

interviewees perceived my role and the power relations between us, as discussed in section 5.4.

In the next stage, I started to guide the participants towards the key questions of the study. Consistent with my interpretive stance, these questions were explored in more depth, to capture the subjectivities of the participants. At this stage the interviewees were working at a deeper level as they talked about their experiences, feelings, thoughts and ideas. To encourage them to talk without restraint, I avoided a too standardised and directive approach. I used different techniques in order to obtain good and rich data, for example, listening actively and establishing a relaxed style of questioning and maintaining eye contact with the person being interviewed as much as possible. By doing so, I managed to show my respect for the thoughts and beliefs of the participants, which in turn, helped them to feel more comfortable and to talk freely about their experiences. It also helped me to encourage the participants to tell their stories in their own words, to help them to clarify or develop their accounts (Arksey & Knight, 1999). As an interpretivist researcher, I acknowledge that my own values, beliefs and experiences inevitably come into the research (Cunliffe, 2003) (see section 5.4), for example, influencing my choice of questions. However, I tried not to let these issues unduly intrude during the interviews, as my aim was to capture the inner experiences of the participants and to understand the meanings that they themselves ascribed to these experiences.

Subsequently, I ended the interview by allowing the participants to return to their normal activities. For example, I signalled the end of the interview by saying, 'This is the final question' and 'Do you have anything you would like to add?' Ritchie and Lewis (2003) have highlighted that in the five or ten minutes leading up to the end of the interview, it is vital to use phrases such as 'the final topic' and to ensure that the participants have not been left with any unfinished business, for example, any feelings or issues that have not been mentioned. These types of questions helped me to give a clear picture of the participants' views regarding the key topic of this study. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 90 minutes. The total amount of time spent in the interviews was about 40 hours.

In closing the interviews, it was very important to thank the participants for their time and cooperation and to assure them that their contributions would be of great benefit to

my study. Again, I assured all the participants of the confidentiality of their identities. Later I also sent all the participants a thank you card to show them how much I appreciated their help and to leave them with a good feeling about me and my research.

Having completed gathering the data for this qualitative research, it was very obvious that the process was not a straightforward one of deciding on a topic, selecting a site, designing questionnaires and selecting a group of people to collect data for a research. The process of collecting the data for this study has been a complex one where I had to use my common sense and knowledge as I interacted with different situations such as negotiating access to the field or dealing with participants. Also, as an interpretivist researcher, I found that difficulties arose from seeking to understand the women managers and to discover their work life experiences within their social and culture setting. Rather than aiming to find the right or wrong answer or to find a truth about them, I was aiming to convey women's voices, which have not been touched by researchers within the organization and management field.

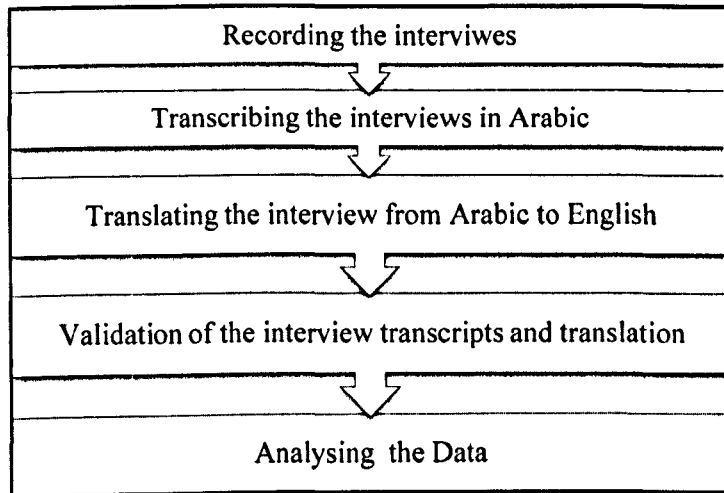
5.3 Qualitative Data Analysis

The process of qualitative data analysis involves a mixture of creativity and systemic searching by combining inspiration and careful detection to form ideas and to understand the phenomena under study, which begins from at the start of the research study and ends by writing up the results (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). It is thus a long process that requires researchers' time and effort, given that it relies on analysing text and describing and representing people experiences (Neuman, 2006). In this section the focus is mainly on the following tasks: preparation for data analysis, approaches to qualitative data analysis, with particular emphasis on the interpretive phenomenological approach as the adopted approach and the actual process of analysing the data collected. Also, in this section I will discuss ways of presenting my interpretations and writing style in this thesis.

5.3.1 Preparation for Data Analysis:

Preparing the interview data for analysis is an important process that needs to be undertaken before the data is analysed. The process involves a number of interrelated activities, as illustrated in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2 Preparation for Data Analysis



5.3.1.1 Recording, Transcriptions and Translating (RTT)

Qualitative researchers are advised to use a tape recorder when conducting an interview, since it is difficult to write down everything the participant is saying (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Accordingly, I recorded the interview sessions, and sometimes used field notes, which helped me to overcome the natural limitations of human memory and the intuitive glosses that I might be tempted to place on what people said in interview. Also, recording enabled me to run the interviews smoothly, and so helped me to establish a rapport (Smith & Osborn, 2008). I used a WS-300M voice digital recorder that allowed me to download the file into my computer and to play it back repeatedly. Therefore, I could listen to the voices of the interviewees several times over. In this study, all interviews were tape-recorded except for the two women who refused to be recorded during the whole interview (see section 5.4).

Transcribing the interviews into text was the next step in preparing the data for analysis, and this can be considered the initial step of data analysis. The literature suggests different methods of transcription. One method is transcribing the whole interview, including verbal and non-verbal communication as well as pauses, interruptions, intonation, volume of speech etc (Willig, 2008). Another method is transcribing the contents of the interview, which is most often used with grounded theory analyses (Willig, 2008). Any of these methods of transcribing could be used in qualitative research. The method that is chosen will depend on researchers' decisions about what

they want to include, since texts, documents and recordings are transcribed and analysed for their meaningful content and they are interpreted rather than counted or measured (Willig, 2008). One important aspect that the researchers need to keep in mind is that transcription of tapes is a time-consuming task; Smith and Osborn (2008) estimate that it could take around five to eight hours of transcription time per hour of interview.

In this study, I used a combination of the two types of transcription. For example, I transcribed the text and when I noted features like unfinished sentences, silence and repetition, I stopped to question their underlying meaning. Interviews were transcribed in Arabic, since this was the language in which they were conducted. Also, as my first language is Arabic, it was easy for me to capture the nuances of language and to understand the metaphors, proverbs and symbolic words that were used by the interviewees. Additionally, it helped me to become more familiar with the data.

Next, the text had to be translated from Arabic to English, as the data analysis needed to be in English. Bryman and Bell (2007) suggest that researchers should first transcribe the interviews in the language spoken during the interview session and then translate it into English, so that researchers would be able to analyse the data in the language that they will be using during the writing up stage Temple and Young (2004) argue that translation forms part of the process of knowledge production and that there is no single correct translation of a text. In this study, I followed the procedure of most conventional translation methods. This procedure entails, first, translating the transcripts from Arabic to the English, then back-translating from English to Arabic, and finally establishing equivalence between the two versions (Nida, 1964). This agrees with Bryman and Bell's (2007) suggestion to go back and forth between the two languages to compare the back-translation with the original version, noting any differences. I also took into account the social and cultural context of the Arabic language and used a contextualised (Xian, 2008) or 'meaning-based' approach (Marschan-Piekkari & Ries, 2004), in order to understand the embedded meaning of the interviewees' perspectives.

However, translating the qualitative data was not a neutral activity and it was never a straightforward process, since Arabic and English are completely different languages and share few similarities in structure, form and logical relationships. Bryman and Bell (2007) argue that the process of translation may lead to some distortion of meaning between words in two languages. It is a difficult task because text is situated within a

historical, cultural, political and institutional context (Derrida, 2001). Also, because the nature of language is fluid, has different layers of meaning and is not simply a technical tool for establishing a clear meaning, meaning always escapes people (Derrida, 2001). Therefore, I faced some difficulties during translation. For example, when translating the Arabic proverbs, idioms, metaphors or phrases that were used by interviewers, I had to interpret not only the meaning of these concepts, but also their embedded meanings. To put it another way, I was trying to understand both the meaning of the words and the complexity of the participants' experiences by engaging in an interpretive relationship with the transcripts. My aim was to understand the situated meanings of these responses, i.e. to understand them within their social, economic, political and emotional contexts. Also, accurate data translation reflects the feelings and experiences of the translators (Twinn, 1998); hence I had identified certain issues and struggles when I translated the data. For example, during the process of translation, I felt that I was using my other self or identity, as I shifted between the two languages. The shift in thinking from Arabic to English was difficult, since shifting the brain from right to left (from Arabic to English) or the other way around (from English to Arabic) was not as easy as shifting the computer's keyboard. The need to travel between two languages presented me with a big challenge, since when I translate into English, I am actually thinking in Arabic, but also considering my English readers. Thus translating qualitative data can be a crucial issue since it involves the structure of languages, social-cultural background and methodological problems (Temple & Young, 2004; Xian, 2008), and yet these issues are rarely discussed in qualitative research (Xian, 2008).

Nevertheless, one significant advantage of translating the qualitative data from Arabic to English was that it allowed me to engage thoroughly with the data; there were many times when I had to stop and think of the meaning of Arabic concepts and phrases and to make decisions about what they mean in English. I also had to think about how to interpret interviews in order to make sense of them, which in turn produced rich and meaningful qualitative data. Additionally, the process of translation provided me with the opportunity to grasp certain important themes and issues related to the study. This sense-process brings the researcher's personal experiences, social background and knowledge into play (Xian, 2008).

The process of transcribing and translating was the initial stage of data analysis. The time it took for the whole process, including transcribing and translating, going back and forth between the two versions to verify meaning, and extracting the key ideas, was approximately six months.

5.3.1.2 Validation of the Interview Transcripts and Translation

There are different ways of seeking validation of qualitative data sources. However, most researchers agree that there are two approaches to validating interview transcripts: member validation and peer validation (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

A member check, also known as respondent validation, is a process whereby the researcher provides an account of the findings of the research to the members with whom the research is conducted (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Participants should play important roles in the research in terms of judging the accuracy and the credibility of the account (Stake, 1995). Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit that this is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility. However, the process of member-checking may lead to a problem of censorship by powerful groups (Bryman & Bell, 2007). It may also lead to confusion rather than confirmation, because participants may change their minds about an issue, or may forget what they said (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Peer validation is used to provide an external check of the data collected, similar to reliability in quantitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985: 308) define peer validation or debriefing as “a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind”. This means that peer validation helps researchers to reduce biases, perspectives or assumptions and to become more aware of their stance as they analyse data.

Both member validation and peer validation were used in this study. With regard to member validation, because of time and resource constraints, it was not possible to meet every participant individually, so I arranged a workshop-discussion group. Of course other methods were considered, such as the use of emails or telephone, but due to the sensitivity of the topic it was expected that the response would be very low and also it

would not be possible to gain a deeper insight into the subject of this study. The workshop-discussion group involved 17 of the participants and asked them to reflect on the accuracy of the account. I did not take back my transcripts or the raw data from the individual interviews to participants, but I took the themes that had emerged from the data collected.

The workshop-discussion group was conducted in the women's branch of the IPA, in February 2008. Since I was a member of the IPA staff, and part of their activity is programmed training, the IPA helped me to arrange this workshop-discussion group. They did so by providing the location and by sending invitations to the women managers who had already been interviewed for this study.

The workshop-discussion group was organised to run from 10 am to 3 pm. In order to help me guide and structure the workshop, I divided the discussion into four phases. In doing so, I drew on suggestions for focus group interviews provided by Collis and Hussey (2003) and Ritchie and Lewis (2003).

Phase one of the workshop-discussion group was an introductory session. This involved having the participants introduce themselves and say a few words about themselves (e.g. the organization they represented, their employment status and years of experience). Also, I gave an overview of the workshop by explaining my aims. Furthermore, I presented the themes and issues that had emerged from mapping the stories of women whom I had interviewed previously. After the introductory session I moved to the second phase, in which the participants were divided into three role groups, each consisting of five to six participants. Each group was asked to select a participant who would be responsible for writing notes and giving a short presentation of the main elements of the discussion. Also, each group was assigned a discussion topic that related to the preliminary themes, for example, the social-cultural context, education, religious issues, organizations, or the aspects of family and personal life that influence women's careers.

In phase three, all groups came back to the main room for a final discussion. The leader of each group gave a short presentation of the main elements of the 'common ground vision'. Each group was able to provide an insight into the topic by assuring me that they saw the initial themes presented in this study as vital aspects of women's careers.

In the final phase, it was acknowledged that women in management face many challenges as well as opportunities, and also that there is a need to help them overcome these challenges. My role in the workshop was to encourage group members to contribute by expressing their opinions freely on the subject under discussion. I also encouraged discussions amongst the participants themselves and amongst the different groups. The interactions between me as a researcher and the group of women managers, and among the women managers themselves, added to the richness of the discussion, which in turn supported the data collected. This approach complies with Wilkinson (1998) who indicated that what forms the basis of the analysis is the interaction between researcher and participants. Since the workshop-discussion supported and generated some information about women's experiences in management that had been previously mentioned in the individual interviews, I recorded these fresh discussions on flip chart sheets and transcribed them for use during the data analysis: an approach which I believe has added to the depth and quality of this study.

With regard to the peer validation, the translation from Arabic to English was checked to test the equivalence of the two language versions. This step typically involves having bilingual individuals check both language versions. In this study, I chose three lecturers from the English Department at the Princess Nora Bint Abdul Rahman University, who speak Arabic and specialise in teaching English literature, to review the translation of the transcript¹⁰.

5.3.2 Qualitative Data Analysis Approaches: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

The richness and complexity of qualitative research requires different methods of analysing the data (Punch, 2005), from those used in quantitative research as it depends on analysing words, not numbers and figures (Neuman, 2006). There are various approaches toward qualitative data analysis, though there is no standardised or single approach, since the nature of qualitative data implies that it cannot be collected in a standardised way (Collis & Hussey, 2003; Creswell, 2007; Punch, 2005; Saunders et al., 2009; Willig, 2008).

10 Due to the sensitivity of the topic, the reviewers of the translation from Arabic to English requested to remain anonymous.

The variety of approaches towards qualitative data analysis is linked to basic epistemological assumptions about the nature of qualitative enquiry, the researcher's accounts, and the aims of the analytical process (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). All such approaches involve the selection and interpretation of the data collected (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). To discuss all of these qualitative approaches is beyond the scope of this study as they are too numerous and not all were suitable for the present study. For example, content analysis, which has been defined as a systematic technique for converting many words of text into fewer categories (Punch, 2005), was not used, given that I was interested in deep, rich data and not in word counts. Also, the theoretical base of content analysis is not clear and "its conclusions can be trite" (Silverman, 2006: 162). Grounded theory is an approach which generates theory from data, and it tends to be used when there is no theoretical framework (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). It was not used in this study because it is a precise method that requires a high level of both experience and good judgment on the part of the researcher. Discourse analysis is concerned with language and the use of language. This approach was not used in this study because the study is not focused on analysing talk and linguistic styles (Silverman, 2006). General data analysis as defined by Miles and Huberman (1994) consists of three main activities: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. This method may provide the researcher with an appropriate set of procedures to analyse qualitative data; however, it was not used in this study because the exact procedures to be followed within its framework are not specified (Saunders, et. al., 2009: 505), and in some ways it is similar in logic to quantitative data analysis (Punch, 2005). Computer software programs such as the NUD*IST and NVivo software (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008) were not used to analyse this study data, since the essential thinking and the deep understanding of the data comes from the present researcher and not from computer software (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996); and also the use of computer packages is not suitable for all types of qualitative research (Willig, 2008). The last approach towards qualitative data analysis is interpretative phenomenological analysis. This approach requires a process of interpretive engagement with texts and transcripts to unravel their meanings (Smith, 1997). There are several versions of analysis within this approach, including interpretive, hermeneutic and template analysis and there is not much variation among these versions of analysis (Willig, 2008).

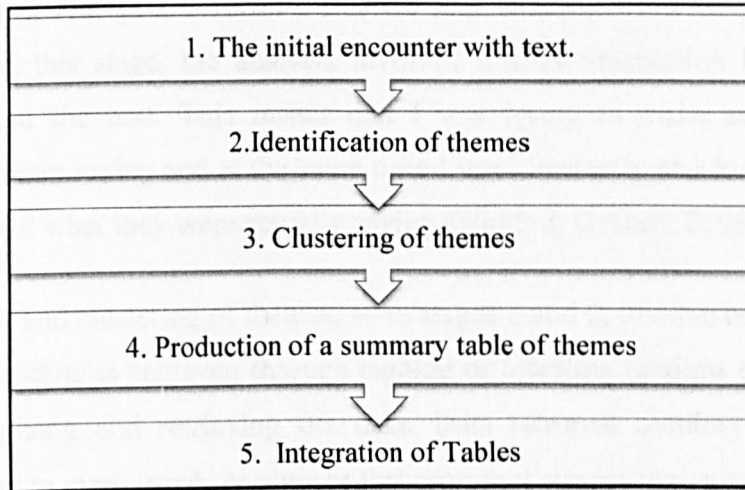
Looking at the previous brief discussion, it seems that all qualitative approaches involve the selection and interpretation of the data collected and hence there are no approaches that are entirely descriptive or theoretical (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Each approach has its weaknesses and strengths. Since there is no one best way to describe and analyse qualitative data (Coupland, et al., 2008), I chose the interpretive phenomenological approach for a number of reasons. First, the interpretive approach has become an increasingly attractive research method that has been used by many researchers in social science fields (e.g. Orr 2009; Woolnough et al., 2006), as its main purpose is to provide a detailed analysis of individual experience (Willig, 2008). Second, I was deeply involved with the data from the beginning and throughout the process of recording, transcribing and translating. This is because I was very keen to understand the meanings emerging from the content and to understand the complexity of the participants' experiences. Moreover, the interpretive approach is flexible in that there is no single definitive way to conduct the analysis and researchers may have their own personal ways of working (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Although there are no specific procedures to analyse the data within an interpretative approach, I was guided by Willig (2008) in order to manage and control the huge volume of data collected. Willig's approach is based on an analytic procedure or a series of steps that allowed me to engage fully with the texts of the transcripts, to identify emerging themes and to combine them into a meaningful group that could then be translated into a narrative account. This will be explained in the next section.

5.3.3 Process of Data Analysis

The process of data analysis in this study was informed by Willig (2008). She provides a step-by-step procedure for data analysis: the initial encounter with the text, identification of themes, clustering of themes, the production of a summary table and the integration of all tables, as illustrated in Figure 5.3.¹¹

¹¹ Another illustration of the data analysis procedures appears in Appendix (3).

Figure 5.3 Process of Data Analysis



5.3.3.1 The Initial Encounter with Text

The initial encounter with the text is the first step towards obtaining a general sense of the information and reflecting on the meaning of the data gathered. At this stage the aim was to capture the essential quality of the transcripts. Accordingly, and based on guidance from Ford and Collinson (2011) I read and re-read each transcript, producing wide-ranging and unfocused notes as a reflection of my initial thoughts in response to the text. For example, I noted comments on the use of language such as metaphors or proverbs and questions about the hidden meaning or certain actions such as pauses, sighs and silences. I also looked at the similarity and differences, amplifications and contradictions in what participants said. As Creswell (2007) asserted, this is a way of understanding the expression, the tone and the general ideas of participants about information. While reading the transcripts, I found that some parts of the interviews were richer than others and so permitted more commentary.

5.3.3.2 Identification of Themes

The aim at this stage was to reduce data and transform it through such means as selection, summary, paraphrasing, or through being subsumed in a larger pattern. Consequently, this stage involved a more analytical or theoretical approach as I tried to make sense of the connections which were emerging between themes. Some themes were grouped together, whereas some themes emerged as subordinate (see Table 5.1).

5.3.3.3 Clustering of Themes

As the themes emerged, I formed clusters and labelled them to capture their real meanings. At this stage, the analysis involved a close interaction between me as a researcher and the text. This meant that I was trying to make sense of what the respondents were saying and at the same time I was constantly checking my own sense-making against what they were actually saying (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Identification and clustering of themes, as in stages 2 and 3, involve coding as a process of analysis: coding is achieved through tagging or labelling sections of analysis, which means organizing and retrieving the data. Data retrieval requires some system of categorisation to mark words or phrases that represent similar topics or information with the same label (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Punch, 2005; Willig, 2008). In stage two, coding was used mainly to classify what was in the data by identifying and describing themes, as they entailed little interpretation. For example, some themes that emerged from the data were related to cultural, educational, religious or organizational aspects that have an influence on women's career advancement. At stage three, coding helped me to get the analysis started, to have more sense of the data and to produce an index for data that functioned as a basis for storage and retrieval (Punch, 2005); and provided a pattern for coding (Willig, 2008). Also, at stage three coding was used to group the themes. This tended to be more explanatory as it was possible to identify emergent themes, sub-themes, explanations and relationships between participants' experiences. In other words, this stage of coding was to break down information into smaller and more meaningful components (Willig, 2008). Thus I started to group the cases and give them initial codes or labels. For example, themes such as 'social', 'culture', 'tradition', 'woman', 'subordinate', 'position', 'organization' and 'hierarchy' could be clustered as 'the influence of social cultural and tradition on women's subordinate position in the organizational hierarchy'. It is important to ensure that the clusters of themes that are identified at this stage make sense in relation to the original data. This means that it is necessary to move back and forth between the transcripts to check that the themes are actually reflected in the details of the participants' accounts. Some clusters consisted of many themes, whereas others were much more narrowly focused. At stage three coding helped me to identify a number of themes which provided constructs for answering the research questions. Table 5.1, is an illustration of an abstract from a respondent's transcript. It shows the ways in which themes are identified and grouped together with

their subordinate theme labels, brief quotations, and accompanying references for the relevant extracts in the interview transcript.

Table 5.1 Identification and Clustering of Themes (Example)

Lines	The Interview Transcript of a Respondent	Identification of Themes	Clustering of Themes
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32	<p>...I am among the pioneers who have a PhD and work in the field of women and development issues</p> <p>Although, when I was young in the late 1950s, there was no formal school for girls, we [I and some other girls] used to go to a religious lady to teach us Qur'an and Haddith, but later my father decided to send me, my brother and sister to [Arab] countries to study at formal schools. After that I went to the USA and obtained my Bachelor, Master and PhD degrees [...] my father's support continues to influence my career and career progression as well.</p> <p>Change in Saudi is too fast with regards to having big roads, buildings, cars, TV and satellites... immigrants who influence our culture and more. Nevertheless when it comes to women issues actually I feel in many areas it is regressing that we are debating women's right to education and work in many areas whether they are suitable for women or not. The world has gone beyond that and we are still constraining them... for example, mobility by prohibiting them from driving car</p> <p>Our culture in some ways can be barriers to women's career, since it contributes to women's seclusion together with economic affordability... for example to separate women from their male colleagues in the workplace and education ... if women do not interact with their male partners how could they develop?</p> <p>Interaction creates a rich environment. Males have had greater opportunities in work and education and have been exposed to many experiences. If we change our Society's beliefs about the importance of valuing women's work, environment definitely will help women to progress in their career...(Arwa, senior manager).</p>	<p>1-When I was young in the late 1950s, there was no formal school for girls (Lines 3 & 4).</p> <p>2-We used to go to a religious lady (Lines 5 & 6).</p> <p>3- My father decided to send us to study (Lines 6 & 7).</p> <p>4-My father's support continues (Lines 10 & 11).</p> <p>5- Changes in Saudi Arabia (Lines 12 & 13).</p> <p>6- Debating women's right to education (Lines 15 & 16)</p> <p>7- Women's rights to work (Lines 16 & 17).</p> <p>8- Suitable work areas for women (Line 18)</p> <p>9- Constraining mobility (Lines 19 & 20).</p> <p>10-Our culture can be constraints to women's career (Lines 21 & 22).</p> <p>11- Separate women from their male colleagues (lines 23 & 24).</p> <p>12- Women's seclusion (Line 22).</p> <p>13-Interaction creates a rich environment (Lines 26 & 27).</p> <p>14-Males have had greater opportunities ...experience (Lines 27, 28 & 29).</p> <p>15- Change our society's beliefs ...will help women (Lines 28,29,30,31 & 32).</p>	<p>Cluster 1: Education attainment (Themes 1 & 2).</p> <p>Cluster2: Family support (Themes 3 & 4).</p> <p>Cluster3: Social change (Theme 5).</p> <p>Cluster 4: Women's right to education and work (Themes 6 & 7).</p> <p>Cluster 5: Gender Separation (Themes 11 & 12).</p> <p>Cluster 6: Places Suitable for women to work at (Theme 8).</p> <p>Cluster 7: Cultural Attitudes (Theme 10).</p> <p>Cluster 8: Benefit of interaction (Themes 12 & 13).</p> <p>Cluster 9: women's career progression (Themes 14 & 15).</p>

5.3.3.4 Production of a Summary Table of Themes

The analysis in this stage involved the production of summary tables to include those themes that captured something about the quality of the participants' experience of the phenomenon under investigation. This means that some of the similar themes generated during stages two and three were combined, whilst others were excluded, either because they were not well represented within the text or because they were not important to the phenomenon being studied. For example, I excluded a theme related to the influence of immigrants on changing the social values of Saudi Arabia. As another example, I have combined two groups of themes, educational attainment and women's right to education and work (see Table 5.1). It is here that I began to decide what things meant and to draw conclusions based on explanations, patterns of differences/similarities, causal flows, and regularities. However, I held these conclusions tentatively at first in light of Miles and Huberman's (1994) suggestion. The authors stated that the competent researcher should hold such conclusions lightly, while maintaining both openness and a degree of scepticism. Table 5.2 is a summary of themes drawn from an analysis of one participant transcript, as drawn from the text in Table 5.1.

Table 5.2 Table Summary for a Transcript

Combination of Clusters	Themes
Clusters 1 & 4	1-Educational attainment
Cluster 2	2-Family support
Cluster 5	3-Gender segregation
Clusters 6 & 7	4-Cultural attitudes
Clusters 8 & 9	5-Ways to progress women's careers

5.3.3.5 Integration of Tables

After producing summary tables for each participant, I integrated these tables into a comprehensive list of the major themes that reflected the shared experience of participants as a whole. Therefore, I looked across the entire data collected to obtain a more generalized understanding of the phenomenon. The integration process was carried out in a cyclical manner, so that any themes that emerged were checked against the transcripts. This is an essential process to achieve a full integration of themes, since interpretative phenomenological analysis cannot be complete until the elements that are shared between participants have been identified and captured in major themes (Willig, 2008). Thus the integrated tables generated a list of major themes and sub-themes that

captured the nature of Saudi women's experience in management, which will be discussed in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. A summary of themes and sub-themes, and their relation to the research questions is presented in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3 Production of a Summary Table of Themes, Sub-themes and their Relationship to Research Questions

Research Questions	Themes	Sub-themes
1) What are the constraints that inhibit women's access to senior management positions in the Saudi public sector?	Recruitment and selection	'Automatic' Complicated
	Power Structure	Roots of male power Exclusion of women
	Lack of appropriate training	
	Favouritism in promotions	Gender-based bias Family-based bias.
	Gender segregation.	Negative side. Positive side.
	Token status	Token women and Queen Bee syndrome
	Gendered- Upbringing	Family School
	Cultural attitudes and stereotypes	Men rational and women emotional Undervaluing women's contributions
	Women's own attitudes	Women's own view of themselves Low level of confidence
	Work and family commitments	
2) What factors have assisted the career advancement of women in management in the Saudi public sector?	Access to education Family networks	Government's Initiatives Positive side of <i>wasta</i> Negative side of <i>wasta</i>
	Family male members' support	Fathers as supporters Husbands as facilitators
	Personal strength	Self-confidence and role models
	Career aspirations	
	Access to the Global World	Benefits of ICT Concern to preserve identity.
3) How can the career paths of women be improved to enable them to achieve senior management positions in the Saudi public sector in such a way that this will facilitate wider political, social and economic development?	Overcoming traditional stereotypes	Education system The media 'Joined-up thinking'
	Political action	Legislative action Changing the male guardianship system
	Organizational Processes and Practices	Professional training and development Changing organization policies and procedures
	Empowering women	Building women's networks. Establishing competence
	Women's own resistance	

During the qualitative analysis, memos, which can be "a sentence, a paragraph or few pages..." (Glaser, 1978: 83; cited in Miles & Huberman, 1994: 72), were used as a helpful tool during the data reduction. For example, coding begins with the initial data analysis and continues until the end of analysis and memoing runs from the beginning of conceptualisation to completion (Birks, et al., 2008). Therefore, memos and coding

are interrelated parts that do not occur in clearly distinct and progressive stages; this enabled me to get a more in-depth analysis of the material and to facilitate the extraction of meaning from the data and its subsequent expression in conceptual terms. Also, the use of memos was one way to map research activities by recording the decision-making trail that establishes and guides the research through its many phases (Birks, et al., 2008). Yet the use of memos was not restricted to these activities because I also recorded my personal thoughts and ideas (see section 5.4). According to this view, qualitative data analysis is a dynamic and inventive process. However, one must keep in mind that the analysis of qualitative data cannot be reduced to rules, with one exception to this: record all ideas as they occur, as memos, and when an idea occurs during coding, stop coding and record the idea (Glaser, 1978: 83, cited in Punch, 2005).

It is important to mention that the analysis of findings (in chapters 6, 7 & 8), will be presented without specific reference to any of the organizations being studied, but rather I will refer to the case studies in general terms as 'the Saudi public sector'. The same principle will be followed in the discussion and the concluding chapters. The main reason for this is that, due to the small number of women managers at various levels, the women managers working in these three organizations could be identified and their careers could be affected by what is reported. As a researcher, I have an ethical responsibility to protect respondents from any possible adverse consequences that might result from their participation (see section 5.5). It is also worth pointing out that comparison among organizations was not one of the aims of the study. Indeed there was a marked similarity in the range of issues raised by respondents, due to the pervasive impact of socio-cultural forces on all types of public organization.

5.3.4 Interpretation

Data interpretation is the point at which the researcher moves from summarising the themes towards writing up the findings and providing a final statement (Willig, 2008), in other words, translating the themes into descriptive accounts. Smith and Osborn (2008: 76) point out that "the division between analysis and writing up is, to a certain extent, a false one, in that the analysis will be expanded during the writing phase". There are two different levels of interpretation: descriptive and empathetic, and critical (Willig, 2008). The descriptive and empathetic level of interpretation allows researchers to enter the world of the participants whereas the critical level of interpretation permits

researchers to interrogate the accounts of participants in order to gain more insight and understanding. In this study, both levels of interpretation were used to enrich the research. I have provided both a descriptive and empathetic interpretation and also a critical interpretation of the accounts provided by participants. Thus, after producing the final table of themes, I started to write about each theme in a descriptive argument, interspersed with verbatim quotations from respondents (Smith & Osborn, 2008). I also critically interrogated the accounts of respondents (see Chapters 6, 7, 8 & 9). However, I was very careful as I was writing each account to distinguish between the respondents' comments and my interpretation.

5.3.5 Writing a Report

Smith and Osborn (2008) suggest two possible presentation styles for writing up the final research report. The first is to present the 'results' in a separate section that contains all the emergent thematic accounts and the 'discussion' in a separate section with links to the extent literature. The other presentation style is to discuss the links to the literature as one presents each theme in a single 'results and discussion' section. In this study, I present the findings that contain all thematic accounts in chapters 6, 7, and 8, and link these findings to my research questions. I then present the discussion in a separate chapter (see Chapter 9) and link this discussion to the research questions, my theoretical framework and the literature review.

5.4 A Reflection on My Role in the Field

As discussed in section 5.2.5 my aim was to gain an insider's view of the worlds of the participants by allowing them to make sense of their experiences and by exploring their attitudes, emotions, opinions and beliefs. My task was to interpret their experiences in a way that does justice to them. This meant that I had to be aware of my role and responsibility throughout the research process, particularly in the 'field' (Cotterill & Letherby, 1994). Researchers' values may come into play during the research process, since they are relevant to our identities (Cotteril & Letherby, 1994), and therefore they need to be explicit about their assumptions and values they hold, so that the reader is aware of their impact on the research inquiry (Cunliffe, 2003). This is to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the data and its interpretation (Saunders et al., 2012).

While in the field, my identity as a native Arab Saudi female and my previous professional identity (as a lecturer, trainer and a manager) in the Saudi public sector along with my identity as a researcher were in play. This means that I brought my experience of different roles and my own cultural and social beliefs and values into this study, which in turn, may shape the way I view and understand the data and interpret the findings. Throughout all phases of the research process, I was sensitive to my role and aware of my ethical responsibility towards my participants. For example, in the field, the issue of power relations between participants and me arose; such relations concern the status of participants or control over access to desired information. During the interviews, I felt that some interviewees arrogated to themselves the right to be superior to me as they held higher professional positions or a higher academic rank than me or simply came from an *élite* family. Sometimes these interviewees assumed that they had the right to ask personal questions of me such, as ‘Are you studying alone in the UK, or is your *mahram*¹² with you?’ or ‘Who funded your study?’ Other interviewees assumed subordinate positions to me as I was the researcher or the ‘expert’ who is studying in a UK university and (in their eyes) this meant that I had ready-made solutions to their problems. For example, they asked me how they could deal with difficult bosses in the workplace. I believe that in any relationship things will not always go smoothly: unexpected things happen, and accordingly a researcher needs to be sensitive to the balance of power relations (Hatch, 2002). I also believe it is the researcher’s responsibility to have general plans for building a good relationship, to maintain rapport with participants and not to marginalise or stereotype them. However, managing the balance of power between the participants and me during the interviews was not without its difficulties. With the first group, it took an extra effort to keep the arrogant participants from dominating the discussion whilst at the same time allowing them to feel as comfortable as possible. For example, I started with an open-ended question related to their success, such as ‘What are the major reasons for your success?’, ‘How do you explain your career success?’ and ‘What sets you apart from the crowd?’ These types of questions helped to break the ice and to make sure that conversation flowed. Then, I moved gradually to the questions related to my research objectives. In the second group, I had to make sure those respondents were not saying what they

12 Saudi social norms and religious requirements do not permit women to travel without being accompanied by or having the permission of their *mahram*, father, husband or brother (see Chapter 8).

thought I wanted to hear. For example, I used probing as a device to stimulate greater the responses and obtain more clarification and explanation. I was able to adjust myself to the needs of participants and to the shifting balance of power by using the recommended communication skills (Arksey & Knight, 1999), including active listening, maintaining eye contact, managing my body language, being thoughtful and considerate; engaging in a personal relationship with my interviewees; and at the same time generating high quality responses (Oakley, 2005). Oakley (2005: 218) suggests that “a balance must be then struck between the warmth required to generate 'rapport' and the detachment necessary to see the interviewee as an object under surveillance”. Allowing all of the participants’ voices to be heard and obtaining their story in a friendly setting helped me to gain rich data and to build mutually respectful relationships with them.

I encountered another problem in the field: managing time whilst interviewing respondents. Some respondents were not aware of the time limits I was encountering. They came very late for our meeting. This made it difficult for me to manage the time that was left to interview the rest, with whom I had already made appointments. Some of the respondents gave excuses for being late, for example, transport problems due to the delay of their driver¹³ or children’s illnesses etc. However other respondents did not give good reasons for being late. This, perhaps, has a cultural explanation. Arab culture is commonly said to have less concern for time than the West. It is not that punctuality is not valued or appreciated, but other values may take precedence. It is culturally accepted to keep someone waiting if one is engaged in a conversation with another person, since conversation and relationships will take priority over the clock. However, although I am totally aware of these Saudi values, since I have been living in the UK for almost five years, my concern for time has changed.

Recording the interviews was another issue that arose during our meeting. Some of the participants did not want the whole discussion to be recorded, even though I had obtained prior consent from them. It took me some time to explain the purpose and safety of using the recorder. I would attribute this behaviour to the fact that conducting qualitative research is not common in Saudi Arabia, so they were not used to being

13 Women in Saudi Arabia are not allowed to drive a car and accordingly hire male drivers to drive them to work or any place.

recorded. Also, they were afraid that they would say something which might affect their position in the organization or in society in general. Additionally, it might be that trust had not yet been built between me and the interviewees. Moreover, they may perhaps simply not have felt that they could talk freely and comfortably. In instances where interviewees refused to be recorded, I respected their rights and managed to take notes of the discussion.

Withdrawal was another problem. Two participants withdrew from interview after the actual interview started. I respected their right and stopped the interviews. However, I asked them their reasons to be sure that there was no misunderstanding and I had not inadvertently offended them. Their reason for withdrawing was that they did not believe women should hold any senior leadership positions in society. Their justification was that when women hold senior leadership positions in the Saudi public sector they will be in contact with men other than their *mahrms*. According to them, Islam prohibits this type of contact. Here, the respondents were viewing the concept of women and leadership in accordance with cultural and religious values and expectations regarding women. They did not want to be part of this research, which challenges certain cultural issues, beliefs and values that are directly related to interpretations of religion (see Chapter 6).

5.5 Ethics of the Research

In the context of research, 'ethics' refers to the appropriate code of behaviour (Saunders et al., 2009). The term research ethics refers "to questions about how we formulate and clarify our research topic, design our research and gain access, collect data, process and store our data, analyse data and write-up our research findings in a moral and responsible way" (Saunders et al., 2009: 184). Bryman (2004) indicates that all social research involves four main areas relating to ethical issues: whether there is harm to the participants; whether there is a lack of informed consent; whether there is an invasion of privacy; and whether dishonesty is involved. It is clear that the main concern of ethics within management research is to make sure that the interests and well-being of people are not harmed as a result of the research being done. In conducting this research effectively, I was fully aware of these ethical principles.

After obtaining approval for my research design from the Business School at the University of Hull, I obtained permission from the University of Hull Business School Ethics Committee, the Institute of Public Administration in Saudi Arabia, and the Saudi Arabia Cultural Bureau in London. This study was reviewed by all these institutions and given ethical clearance in order to ensure compliance with all ethical guidelines.

With regard to ethical behaviour toward participants, I explained the purpose of this study to all participants, respected their viewpoints, obtained permission for recording the interviews and assured them that the data given by them would be treated as strictly confidential. In addition, I respected the privacy of the participants which is considered the basis of ethical issues affecting those who undertake research (Saunders et al., 2009). Also, I did not force any participants to respond to questions and I respected those who did want to answer certain questions. Furthermore, I respected the right of respondents to withdraw at any time; the two respondents who chose to withdraw after the interview had started were not forced into participation. Moreover, when I analysed and interpreted the data, earnest measures were taken to protect the identities of participants. The confidentiality of each participant has been protected by adopting the following procedures: pseudonyms were randomly assigned to protect the identity of each participant; their employment status is not identified but rather they are referred to as managers or by their level of management; information about where the participants work in the three organizations that were studied was masked and excluded (see Chapter 6).

Another ethical issue that was borne in mind throughout this study was related to the decision-makers, and my responsibility to provide them with the information they needed. With reference to the implications of this study, I tried to suggest to the decision-makers in the public sector in Saudi Arabia how they might use this information to lower their costs and to maximise their benefits (see Chapter 10). This meant that I had to be knowledgeable and I had to interpret the research findings honestly and fully. I have a duty to serve the sciences by carrying out the study accurately and reporting it truthfully.

5.6 Summary

This chapter has presented the actual method of data collection that was undertaken in the research field and it has discussed the process of data analysis used in this study. It began by explaining the five stages of the data collection process, including preparation of the initial interview; the pilot case study; design of the final interview questions, field access and permissions and conducting the actual interviews sessions. Then the chapter moved on to discuss the preparation for analysing the interview data. Various approaches to qualitative data analysis were presented in brief, along with their advantages and disadvantages. This chapter also entered into a detailed discussion concerning the interpretive phenomenological approach to data analysis that was employed in this study, together with discussing the actual process of analysing the study data and ways of presenting my interpretations and writing style. My role as researcher and the ethical considerations related to this study were discussed in detail.

Next, in part IV of the thesis, I will present the findings, discussion and conclusion of this study.

PART IV: DATA FINDINGS, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Chapter Six: Women Managers: Constraints and Challenges

6.1 Introduction

The earlier review of the literature on women in management identified a number of factors that function as barriers which prevent women from advancing into the top echelons of organizations (e.g. Broadbridge, 2009; Davidson & Burke, 2011; Fagenson, 1993; Kanter, 1993; Powell, 2010; Schein, 2001; Singh & Vinnicombe, 2004; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011). In order to contribute to this body of literature, this study adopted an interpretive paradigm to understand the views of women managers in the context of their lives in Saudi Arabia. An interpretive phenomenological approach was used to analyse the qualitative data that was collected from the in-depth interviews with Saudi women managers.

The main themes generated by the findings were as follows: background information on the women managers, the constraints and challenges that inhibit women's access to senior management; opportunities available to women managers; and perspectives on improving women's career paths to senior management positions in the Saudi public sector which, in turn, can influence wider political, social and economic development. These interrelated themes are discussed in three main chapters (6, 7 & 8). It is important to point out, as mentioned in Chapter 5, that the analysis of findings will be presented without specific reference to any individual organization, but will refer in general terms to 'the Saudi public sector', in order to protect the identity of women managers whose careers could be affected by what is reported. I would also reiterate that comparison among organizations was not one of the aims of the study, and indeed the issues raised by respondents, were very similar, irrespective of organization, as a result of the persistent impact of socio-cultural forces.

The first chapter of the findings is this chapter, which is organized as follows: first, a general overview of women managers' demographic information. Secondly, the chapter focuses on the themes related to the first question of this study: 'what are the constraints that inhibit women's access to senior management positions in the Saudi public sector'? In answer to this question a number of constraints were identified. These included recruitment and selection, the power structure, a lack of appropriate training, favouritism in promotions, gender segregation, token status, gendered up-bringing,

cultural attitudes and stereotypes, women's own attitudes plus work and family commitments.

6.2 Women Managers' Backgrounds

This section provides a general overview of the demographic information that was gathered during the interviews involving twenty-eight Saudi women managers. All of the women interviewed were living and working in Saudi Arabia. They were drawn from three organizations (KSU, IPA & KFH) in the Saudi public sector. The participants came from diverse backgrounds and their career routes to attaining their current positions varied greatly.

Table 6.1 shows the personal demographic information that was collected, including age, marital status, educational attainment and employment status and management level.

Age: The participants ranged from 30 to 50 years of age and over, with an average of 40–49 years. Sixteen of the participants were aged between 40 and 49; six of the participants were between 30 and 39, and six of the participants were 50 years and above.

Marital Status: This study showed that twenty of the interviewees were married; one was a widow; one was divorced; and six were single. Thirteen of the women had between three and four children; three women had either one or two children, and nine of the participants (the six single women and three married women) had no children. Three women had five children or more.

The majority (two-thirds) of participants were married. The in-depth interviews revealed that marriage is considered an essential institution in Saudi Arabia: it is regarded as a religious obligation and a social requirement. This idea has been shaped and reshaped over time through a number of complex interrelated factors including the socialization of children in the family and in school, broader social expectations and the influence of religion. All of these institutions regard family as the primary life goal for women (see section 6.3.8). Motherhood is also highly valued; therefore those women managers who were married started a family almost immediately after marriage. However, the women managers in this study had fewer children than other groups in

Saudi Arabia. This may be because of their commitment to work, the shortage of nursery provision in organizations and the lack of family-work policies (see section 6.3.10).

Education Attainment: The educational attainment of the interviewees was remarkable. Sixteen women had PhD degrees, while two of them were professors, eight women held MAs, and two women held BAs. Two women were Doctors of Medicine (DM). Twelve of the participants had received their higher education in Saudi Arabia, one in another Arab country, ten in the USA and five in the UK. They specialised in various subjects: seven in education, seven in business and administration, five in social science and nine in medical science. The reasons for such remarkable achievement in education for women will be discussed in chapter 7 section 7.2.1.

Employment Status and Management Level: The participants held different managerial positions with titles such as Director General, Director of Programming, Head of College, Head of Department, Research Director, Supervisor and Dean. Seven women were at lower management level, seventeen women were at middle management level and four women were in senior positions. Nearly half of the participants indicated that they joined the public sector immediately after achieving their Bachelors Degrees, when they were in their early twenties. This means that the women in this study had lengthy working experiences, ranging from six to thirty years. Two of the participants had between 6–9 years of experience, nine had between 10–14 years, five had between 15–19 years, seven had between 20–24 years, and five participants had more than 25 years. The women had substantial experience of work and management. Access to employment and the recruitment and selection processes for women will be explored in section 6.3.1.

Table 6.1 Women Managers' Background

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Marital Status	Children	Higher Education Level	Specialism	Place of Higher Education	Years in Employment	Management Level
1. Ahlam	40- 49	M	4	PhD	English literature	SA	19	M
2. Amal	40-49	M	5	PhD	Biology	SA	11	M
3. Amjad	40-49	M	4	PhD	Pharmacology	UK	24	S
4. Arwa	50-up	S	0	Professor	Education	USA	29	S
5. Asma	50-up	M	3	PhD	Education	USA	22	M
6. Ebtisam	30-39	W	3	PhD	Parasitology	UK	6	L
7. Hanaa	40-49	M	4	PhD	Business	USA	20	M
8. Heba	40-49	M	3	PhD	Economics	USA	10	M
9. Huda	30-39	S	0	BA	Radiology	SA	8	L
10. Jamila	40-49	D	1	MA	Business	SA	25	M
11. Lulwa	30-39	M	3	BA	Social work	SA	15	L
12. Maha	40-49	M	0	MA	Administration	UK	18	M
13. Majdouline	40-49	M	4	MA	Law	USA	12	L
14. Monira	30-39	M	3	MA	English literature	USA	13	L
15. Nada	30-39	M	0	MA	Business	USA	12	L
16. Nadia	40-49	S	0	PhD	ysiology/ Biology	SA	18	M
17. Naima	30-39	M	5	MA	Administration	SA	10	M
18. Najla	40-49	M	4	PhD	Biology	SA	18	M
19. Narmeen	50-up	M	1	PhD	Chemistry	SA	24	M
20. Nawal	40-49	S	0	MA	Business	Bahrain	14	M
21. Nofa	40-49	M	3	Professor	Arabic Literature	SA	23	M
22. Noha	50- up	M	5	MA	Sociology	USA	25	S
23. Norah	40-49	S	0	PhD	Psychology	SA	28	M
24. Ohoud	40-49	M	3	PhD	Sociology	USA/UK	23	M
25. Reem	50-up	M	0	PhD	English literature	SA	30	S
26. Salma	50-up	M	3	PhD	Education	USA	21	M
27. Samira	40-49	S	0	MD	Medicine	UK	10	L
28. Sarah	40- 49	M	2	MD	Medicine	USA	14	M



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Since its sixth development plan, the government's Saudisation project (which aims to employ Saudi citizens in place of expatriates in the public and private sectors) has meant that the selection and recruitment of women to work in the public sector was not complicated, but rather required a qualification and the applicant's desire to work.

In recent years, however, it has become more difficult for women to secure employment because job opportunities are limited to certain fields, certain management levels and in women's branches only, even though the number of female graduates has increased. The following remarks show evidence of this trend:

"... now we have to go through complicated procedures to be employed" (Ohoud, middle manager).

"Job opportunities in the government sector are now very limited for women [...] That is why you find them mainly in teaching or administration, or sometimes a doctor in hospitals and only in female sections" (Noha, senior manager).

As a result of women being concentrated in certain areas such as health and education, which have become very competitive, the women must compete amongst themselves as well as against their male counterparts. In addition, applicants (men or women) have to have a good network of connections with senior male employers to help them get a government job more easily (see section 7.2.2). Evidence of this can be found in the following comment:

"To work in the government sector is not as easy as some people might think; since there are large numbers of women graduating from universities specialising in education and health [...] they usually need to queue for a long time to get a job due to the complicated procedures. However, some people who have a good network [family and friends] can find a job more easily" (Nofa, middle manager).

Thus the recruitment and selection of women in the Saudi public sector is becoming more complicated. This is particularly true when it comes to recruiting women to top positions. Recruiting women to senior management seems to be a very sensitive issue in Saudi Arabia since social and cultural values impose certain restrictions on the government, on decision-makers and certainly on the women themselves, as testified in this chapter. The government usually does not go beyond traditional social beliefs and values in terms of the extent to which women should be visible. Similarly, male decision-makers may not select women to top positions as they view male applicants as

the breadwinners and thus more in need of a job (see section 6.3.4). Also, male decision-makers do not desire to challenge the view of women's visibility that is socially and culturally acceptable. For example, a senior position requires more mobility, and women's mobility is restricted because it requires written approval from their male guardians (see section 6.3.3). Male decision-makers may take advantage of such limitations and thus recruit men and not women to top positions. Despite this difficulty, the preceding discussion suggests that the women interviewed in this study perceived that employment opportunities in the public sector helped them to be more visible in the public sphere, which in turn helped them to progress in their careers, albeit within certain boundaries.

6.3.2 Power Structure

Women interviewed in this study revealed that the power of men in Saudi Arabia is rooted in patriarchy and the tribal system and in religious belief. Accordingly, they considered the structure of Saudi public sector organizations resembles the patriarchal or tribal hierarchy. This is best illustrated by one manager at middle management level who had eighteen years of work experience. This woman drew an analogy between the public sector structure and the social structure of the tribal system. She referred to this structure as 'tribal administration': a system in which the leader must be a man who is surrounded by other men for advice and support, while women come at the bottom of the hierarchy. The social network within tribal administration is very important because the closer a person's relationship is to the leader of the 'tribe', the more he is able to attain what he seeks. Within these circles, women tend to be excluded due to their subordinate roles in the organizational hierarchy:

"Our [organization] is a tribal one; we have a clan leader equal to Director-General, and then the closest allies to the Director General, and then followers, and then women [...] The closer individuals are to the centre of the circle the easier they can reach their purpose and the further off the women are! We still deal with our affairs at work using our inherited ideas of tribalism" (Maha, middle manager)

Also, it was found that the notion of power in Saudi public sector organizations is linked to religious thought. One manager, for example, indicated that the structure of power is linked directly to the idea of *al qiwama* in Islam. *Al-qiwama*, mentioned in the

Qur'an (4: 34)¹⁴, is viewed as the most important verse regarding the relationship between men and women. In Islam *al-qiwama* has different interpretations but it is widely interpreted to mean that God privileged man with a superior intellectual capacity and greater abilities than woman. Hence the man is assigned to care for and to have custody and guardianship rights over his women – wives, daughters or even mother and sisters. According to Reem, this idea is not only found within the household but also in the workplace. In the workplace, men carry the idea of *al-qiwama* with them and think that they have a right to be the guardians or controllers of women. Thus Reem found it difficult to deal with the men in her organization who considered themselves as superior to her. This manager portrayed this connection in an interesting way when she observed that:

“Dealing with men in the workplace is very difficult even though we work from a distance [...] Men believe that they are the guardians of women in the workplace as if they are at home [...] This is because they get the wrong idea of the meaning of *al-qiwama* in the Qur'an. The book [Qur'an] stated that men are *quwwamuna ala* [responsible] for women if they spend on them, and if they do not, they are not [...] Unfortunately my male colleagues, particularly my boss, use this idea of *qiwama* with us at work, as if we are his women and he is our guardian who spends on us” (Reem, senior manager).

The previous two descriptions of public sector organizations indicate that men are at the top and women tend to be at the bottom of the hierarchy. Consequently, major decisions are in the hands of men. Nearly half of the respondents, mainly in middle management, reported that men hold the final decision-making power over the women's sections, even when women managers have the same qualifications and experience. For example, when women managers want to promote or appoint a woman within their administration, they have to write a report about the chosen employee and send it to the men's institution, which has the final decision. This process applies to any major decision such as approval of certain projects. Below is an example of this situation:

14 See Qur'an, Surah al-Nisa, 'Women' (4: 34): “Men [*quwwamuna ala*] have charge of women in matters where God preferred some men over women, and on what the men spend of their property (for the support of women).

“I hold a high managerial position, but in reality it is not regarded as one. When it comes to the main issues in management [...] such as appointments or promoting my employees with whom I work very closely, I do not make the final decisions” (Ohoud, middle manager).

In this study, the women managers believed themselves to be not only excluded from making policy decisions or from holding autonomous positions, but also assigned to do routine tasks. In reflecting on their experiences in organizations, two of the respondents provided interesting accounts. Ohoud felt as if she were an ‘executive secretary’ for the management in the men's section, even though she held a middle management position and had been working since the 1980s. She talked about the many obstacles that she faced in management, like doing routine tasks, unclear work procedures, processes and lines of authority that involved much duplication between female and male departments. She used the imagery of family relationships to express the subordination of women to men. Her feeling was that a woman who works in management is like the child rather than the sibling of a man who works in management.

“I regard myself as an executive secretary for the management in the men's department. We are kept busy with tiresome, routine tasks [...] like keeping up with maintenance work, timetables, examination procedures [...]. Besides the limitation of authority, the procedures and processes of our tasks are not clear, and lines of authority are not clear. These obstacles make a female manager like the child rather than the sibling of a male manager [...] all our departments [female section] are administratively run by male departments” (Ohoud, middle manager).

Similarly, Amjad indicated that there have been many women in different positions who have played a great role in organizations, but from ‘behind the scenes’. She commented that:

“... women play a great role in management behind the scenes” (Amjad, senior manager).

Although it is not really clear what she meant by ‘behind the scenes’, it is perhaps the case that her role as a manager was not identified or viewed as important in her organization because of the traditional ‘male managerial model’ (see section 6.3.8).

It seems women are doubly disadvantaged in organizations. Firstly, society places them in an asymmetrical relation to men because they are regarded as men’s property if men spend money on them. Secondly, even in a situation in which this is patently not the

case (e.g. the workplace), the woman continues to be ruled over by a man who chooses to place himself in this paternalistic relation to her. As this is an asymmetrical power relation, a woman's power to make decisions will only ever be symbolic because she does not have the final authority. One manager interviewed commented on exclusion from decision-making:

"I have the same certificates, same experience, maybe longer, and probably more accuracy than my male colleagues. I know what is going on within my department, and sometimes when I made simple decisions, my male colleagues at the men's branch criticised me, saying that this was not within my authority [...]. This is regarding administrative matters, but for the academic work, I am a decision-maker. In fact, I feel puzzled about why things run this way, that men do not give us administrative powers; while in academic life that involves teaching and marking we have this authority. Perhaps this is due to the policies of the organization itself or the belief that 'management' is the man's right, like custody and guardianship" (Nadia, middle manager).

What also emerged from the findings is that it was difficult for the women to criticise their male colleagues directly so they resorted to 'circumlocutions' in which men were described as having 'a stronger voice than women' or men's power was said to have 'happened by default'. These managers indicated how disappointed and frustrated they were, as they were very well educated, each with a PhD, and yet still they did not have genuine power or autonomy in their organizations, as is evident from the following accounts.

"Yes, women are given a chance to hold positions of authority in the women's section, but in fact they do not hold the final say [...] For example, when a woman manager wants to promote one of her female staff, she has to write a report to the head manager [man] in the men's branch to make the final assessment. Men hold all the final decision-making, budget-granting and occupy high positions [...] this is not official policy but has happened by default" (Heba, middle manager).

"In my administration, I do not make the 'big decision'. I am the director of [department] and when someone from the faculty needs to publish a research paper, for example, I do not have the final judgment to approve the research, but my colleague in the men's section, who has the same level of qualifications and is on the same managerial level, has the final decision [...] Men's voices in [organization] are the strongest" (Nadia, middle manager).

It is very clear that a tangled web of issues is involved here and also these issues seem to derive primarily from religious ideology coupled with tribal Arab values about the

nature of the relationship between the sexes. Thus women are taken to be 'naturally' subservient to men and also considered to be the property of men or rather it seems that men become the 'protectors' because by 'nature' women are taken to be the weaker sex. I agree that this may be the case in family relations and it seems to be transferred over into the workplace. Given this situation, I can understand why it is extremely difficult for women to be openly critical of their male colleagues. There are a number of reasons: for example, the women are already in very vulnerable positions in relation to these men and in relation to men *per se*. Also they risk challenging the stereotype of what it is to be female in Arab culture so it might also be problematic in terms of how they feel about their own identities as Arab women. And, more crucially, any challenge to a man's authority is open to the possibility of misinterpretation and if this were to be the case, the woman would be placed in an impossible situation (see section 6.3.5).

6.3.3 Lack of Appropriate Training

According to my respondents, all employees in the public sector, men and women, are offered training opportunities in various forms: in-service training, conferences and short or long courses. These opportunities were made available because the Saudi government established a national centre for the training and development of employees working in different professions in the public sector (see section 4.6.1). Nevertheless, the women managers in this study argued that the training programmes continue to be strongly influenced by gendered socio-cultural stereotypes. The differences between women and men are emphasised through segregation along gender lines that occurs not only in training but also in the education system and in the employment sector (see Chapter 7). The interviewees indicated that women are trained in subjects such as business and administration, team-building and interpersonal skills which may provide female managers with techniques and strategies to help them to perform a full range of management tasks effectively. However, these training courses are very limited because they are not designed to promote women into senior leadership positions. One interviewee commented:

“Training in skills such as business and administration and team-building, interpersonal skills is important for women to improve their managerial and leadership skills and they are available for everyone but they do not really benefit women to be leaders” (Heba, middle manager).

This situation had led some respondents (those who were well educated and came from upper class families) to take management training courses abroad at their own expense, as they believed that the courses available locally are not beneficial to their career development. Also, they thought that the procedure for enrolling in the local training courses was too lengthy and they were not willing to wait for their organization to provide them with such opportunities. One respondent indicated that:

“I have developed myself by myself by taking courses related to management – on topics that I think will enrich my work [...] such as successful management – in America at my own expense” (Amjad, senior manager).

The Saudi public sector sometimes gives women the chance to go abroad to attend conferences or to study, which enhances their career development. However, these same organizations continue to impose certain restrictions on women who wish to undertake training abroad: restrictions that effectively prevent them from travelling alone, as they need to provide permission from their *maharam*. The following account reveals this problem.

“For the first time, I attended an international conference in Malaysia. It was a great experience to travel abroad and to meet academics from different countries. The government nowadays encourages us to travel abroad to attend conferences or study to improve our career, but some male guardians in the family refuse to give their wives or daughters permission and without their approval women cannot take leave from their work nor can they travel” (Ebtisam, lower manager).

Travelling is a problematic issue and the restriction on women is based on two main assumptions. Firstly, women are expected to give caring for their families priority, and secondly it is feared that they might be subject to sexual harassment if they travel alone. These two main assumptions are embedded in the minds of male decision-makers in the workplace. Of course this restriction is not written into the labour law, but it is adopted as a policy in the workplace, in conformity with traditional socio-cultural values and *Sharia* law. Again, this is an example of how, despite there being formal equality under the law, in practice women are discriminated against because of gender bias and socio-cultural beliefs about what is acceptable for women, which in turn, is based on what is deemed to be the ‘natural’ order of things. This further disadvantages women in relation to their male counterparts.

6.3.4 Favouritism in Promotions

Again almost all of the respondents confirmed that there is equality under the labour force law in terms of wages, training, performance appraisal and promotion. However, they reiterated that women in the workplace are subjected to the same constraints when it comes to promotion but now there is the additional barrier of social class or family background. In this regard, respondents discussed two forms of discrimination that were related to promotion: gender bias whereby men are favoured over women and family bias, whereby certain families are favoured over others. In relation to gender bias, the respondents indicated that in theory, there is equality between genders in the labour force, but in practice, organizations favour men over women in almost everything. This is because men in Saudi Arabia are considered the primary income-earners and the heads of their households. This notion of the family wage is used to justify men rather than women being promoted, even if a woman has equivalent skills, training, experience and education and is the breadwinner in her household. For example, some senior male managers in organizations (namely, those who make decisions about promotion) view men as the breadwinners, and as a result, women are not taken into consideration. Here, it can be seen that male senior managers are misusing their authority, which can create further inequality between genders. The account below explained this idea in more detail.

“The system provides equality in everything but inequality comes from the misapplication of some individuals in organization. I’ll give you an example. When it was time for promotion, I found out that my male colleague got it before me [...] I tried to search for some reasons, but I did not get a convincing answer [...] but later I realized that my male colleague was promoted assuming that he needed extra money to help him with his family expenses” (Narmeen, middle manager).

Thus the idea of the family wage can create discrimination between men and women not only in promotion and performance appraisal, but also in selection and in training and development.

Women's opportunities for promotion are also blocked because of the social background or social class¹⁵ of their families. One of the respondents, Nada, who has twelve years of work experience and has a Master's degree from the USA, said that working women face discrimination not only in terms of their gender, but also in terms of tribal origin. She believed that because her family do not come from a well known tribe, she was discriminated against and not promoted. She described her experiences as if she were in a battle and needed to fight and resist this attitude in order to win her rights.

"I think we [women] in Saudi are facing discrimination not only between men and women, but also between tribes. Your family name can contribute to your position at work [...] Things were not easy for me [...] I feel I am always fighting to get my rights in [organization] When I did not get promoted, like my female colleague, I questioned why this was happening. I was told, 'Your performance was not as good as hers'. I think I know why. It is my family background and I do not have strong connections [...] I am sure that my performance is better than my colleague's [...] The administration do not want me to question anything. In fact they did not listen to me, but I will fight to the end to get my rights back" (Nada, lower manager).

What emerges from this account is that the upward social mobility of women in Saudi Arabia is made doubly difficult for those who do not come from privileged backgrounds. Those who do come from advantaged backgrounds are able to secure training to further their careers (often with the support of their families in terms of both money and social networks). Those who do not come from privileged backgrounds have to struggle against both class discrimination and gender discrimination. However, it is also the case that many women from privileged backgrounds are working hard to challenge this misuse of power because they view this discrimination as 'unethical' (see section 7.2.2).

15 Traditionally, social class in the Arab courtiers, particularly in Saudi Arabia is linked to the origin of tribes. Tribal affiliation constitutes a major status category based on bloodline. At the top of the tribal status category are the *qabila*, families that could claim purity of descent from one of two eponymous Arab ancestors, Adnan or Qahtan, and could therefore claim to possess *assl*, the honour that stemmed from nobility of origin. To some extent, tribal status could be correlated to occupation, yet manual labour in general, particularly tanning hides and metal work, was considered demeaning for individuals of *qabila* status. *Qabila* families consider themselves distinct from and distinctly superior to *khadira*, non-tribal families (see for example, Al-Rasheed, 2010; Barakat, 1993).

As evidence of how the family name was a determining factor that helped some women and not others to advance their careers, one women manager, Reem, who came from privileged background and held a senior position, mentioned that her family was a great influence on her career progress in the organization, particularly her father and his male networks (see section 7.2.2). She reported that she was very fortunate that her powerful family was behind her in every step she took; thus she was not discriminated against as many women had been, and she had been promoted to a higher position, even if she was not totally in charge. However, as a very ethically-minded manager, she expressed her desire that the system should be changed, since it is not fair to promote people on the basis of their family background or gender. She also wanted a system that questioned and punished managers who misused their power in organizations. She said:

“I did not suffer in the workplace as many women did [...] It is unfortunately down to individuals who hold positions in the [organization]; they can promote, give opportunity to some and not others. I really wish things would change [...] as it is not fair. I wish that we had a system that questions people who misuse their position” (Reem, senior manager).

Given this situation, the upward mobility of women in Saudi Arabia is constrained by the traditional societal views about women’s appropriate role in society and family social background. Consequently, some women managers, pioneers in education and employment, who had devoted their time and energy to building up their careers, and were qualified, experienced and enthusiastic, were preparing themselves to leave their organizations, either to work for another organization or to establish their own businesses. Women managers believed that their work is not valued, they are not involved in decision-making even though they hold managerial positions, and they work very hard but their promotion is put on hold for a long time. For example, one manager who held a PhD from the USA and had twenty-one years of work experience told me that she had sought a job in another Arab country with a view to improving her career. As a result she had been promoted to a senior position in a university outside Saudi Arabia.

“Opportunities are very limited here; I had to apply for a job outside Saudi Arabia. My long work experience in teaching and management allowed me

to be promoted to a top senior managerial position at a university in the [Gulf].¹⁶ It is rarely possible in Saudi Arabia” (Salma, middle manager).

In similar mode, another manager in her late forties, who was also at middle management level, had obtained a PhD from the UK and had worked for twenty-three years, told me she was planning to leave the public sector in order to work for a private organization in Saudi Arabia. She explained,

“I am fed up with administrative work and I have no desire to stay in this [organization] since the path to a higher rank is a long way and difficult to reach [...] I am moving next year to another place [private organization]” (Ohoud, middle manager).

Other respondents were planning to establish their own institutions and leave their current jobs. They believed that the work environment did not help them to progress in their careers, nor did it allow them to participate in decision-making. According to the women who were interviewed, their involvement in decision-making could help them to carry out projects that would ultimately improve the status of women in Saudi society. Two respondents (both with PhDs from the USA, each with over 22 years work experience) were planning to embark on their own projects to research women’s issues. Asma explained that her project was to help women to understand their identity and their position in society. This is because she believed that women are often torn between two conflicting cultural positions in relation to how they view themselves: liberalism and religious conservatism. It seems that women are caught between progressive and traditional mores/values/beliefs. What emerges from Asma’s account is that she did not necessarily view this as being an either/or position: Her aim was to develop positive identities for Saudi women that are based on the values and beliefs of both traditions. She stated:

“I am tired of my work that does not appreciate our potential as women , therefore I am planning to take early retirement and set up a centre for women’s studies that concentrates on serving women’s issues [...] because the image of society at present is that of either an extremist attitude that seeks to diminish the role of women in social life or an extreme inclination to emulate the Western style [...] I wish to establish a good Islamic approach similar to what was known at the time of God's Messenger, Prophet Mohammad”.

16 ‘Gulf’ here refers to the GCC (see Chapter 2).

Similarly Arwa explained her plan to embark on creating a centre for women with the aim of educating them about their rights in society and at work. She disclosed:

“I am taking early retirement to open a centre for women [...] to support their education, to teach them about how to value themselves, to make them aware of their rights in the work place and society [...] because I believe I am a very fortunate woman to have so many opportunities in my life; having a good education, studying abroad, having a very supportive family [...] but my work did not allow me to do what I feel I am capable of – to improve other women’s status”.

Helping women to develop a positive identity is really important because whilst the women quoted above were well-educated and well able to recognise on an intellectual level that they were being discriminated against, they were still very affected by this discrimination on a personal level. In terms of their own identities and self-image it seems that class and gender discrimination affected them very negatively. I suggest that it is very difficult to hold on to a positive identity as a working woman when one is surrounded by a culture which views women’s primary role as domestic/caring, which may deter women from pursuing promotion and erode their confidence in their abilities and achievements. Perhaps a negative self-image is another reason why very able and qualified women do not pursue top jobs (see section 6.3.9). Again there is a complex tangle of issues here to do with education, religion, economics, social and cultural beliefs and values and so on.

6.3.5 Gender Segregation

The findings of this study show that women who are working with men in any public sector organization are physically segregated, usually in separate branches. The health sector is one exception to this rule, although even there, women work in segregated offices. This gender segregation is related to the cultural values and religious traditions whereby women’s modesty and morality must be preserved, and this is interpreted as requiring avoidance of face-to-face contact. This influences the structure of the labour market, as illustrated by the following respondent.

“The institutional set-up of our labour market is segmented along many lines: male/female, private/public, Saudi/Non-Saudi” (Heba, middle manager).

Similarly, another said

“We do not mix with our male colleagues [...] *urf waadat wa taqalid* [norms and tradition] in Saudi prevent us from doing so [...] We work in women’s spaces only” (Nofa, middle manager).

About half of the respondents who were interviewed saw the negative side of institutional gender segregation, which is perhaps an indication of their level of education and their awareness of the consequences of such segregation on women’s career development. They felt that this ongoing gender segregation is creating a number of problems for working women. The first problem is that professionally it hinders a woman’s chance of promotion and improvement since women are managed by men and under the supervision of men’s institutions in the public sector. Women are excluded from decision-making and they lack access to information or resources. The second problem is that the over-crowding of women in the public sector can create a negative atmosphere of competition among women since there is a shortage of job opportunities, and selection and recruitment procedures are influenced by family connections. One respondent explained that:

“In terms of segregation specifically, it harms our chances of exposure to different experiences, getting promoted or enriching us professionally [...] the crowding effect has created a pool of women competing for very few higher positions” (Heba, a middle manager).

Another problem that gender segregation creates is that of communication, particularly in the education sector. Respondents commented that communication between men’s institutions and women’s sections was a major problem for their advancement into senior positions. Most communication occurs via written memos, letters, telephone, or most recently, through e-mails. Only to a very limited extent and in matters of urgency women may sit with men at the same table – with their veils on, as one respondent commented:

“We are segregated from interacting with our male colleagues in the main [men’s] branch. The only means of communication is through telephone, email or post. However, there has been a little improvement in the last two years. When there is an important meeting for the administration we sit at the same table with our veil on [...] it is not acceptable! But it is sometimes important” (Ohoud, middle manager).

Furthermore, gender segregation appears to have a psychological impact on women since it is forbidden for women to develop any informal personal contact with their male colleagues, even in hospitals where they work alongside men. Women fear their

behaviour is under scrutiny and any informality will be misinterpreted; hence they must behave in a very formal way when contacting male colleagues in the workplace. Two women described this situation as follows:

“When I call or email my colleagues in the men’s section [...] I always fear being misunderstood, so to avoid any misunderstanding, I have to be very careful in choosing the appropriate words” (Majdouline, lower manager)

“In our [organization] I have no problem communicating with my male colleagues, nevertheless I have to be very cautious about the way I talk, the way I respond [...] otherwise I will be misinterpreted and people will gossip about me, which I do not like as it affects my reputation, my family’s reputation, my work” (Sara, middle manager).

Women may fear their behaviour being misconstrued when they communicate with their male colleagues, whether in a closed or an open environment. It seems that these women were, in fact, creating a boundary between themselves and men at the workplace in a pragmatic way, in order to avoid giving people cause to disparage them in a way that might harm their reputation in the workplace and in the wider society. One interpretation of women’s formality with their male colleagues is to view it an outcome of their upbringing and socialization in the family and in educational institutions. In social and religious institutions women are seen as symbols of purity. On a practical day-to-day level it is their responsibility to protect and maintain this purity, thereby preserving the honour of their families: honour which is primarily dependent on their morality.

Of course, this does not mean that because women fear being misunderstood when they have contact with their male colleagues at the workplace, they are passive and inactive. In fact, some women were very proactive members of their organizations and demonstrated assertiveness and self-confidence. This paradoxical situation in which women showed two contradictory behaviours could be explained by suggesting that it is the challenges that women face in organizations and society as a whole that have contributed towards this attitude of personal self-assurance. This is not to say that this situation does not adversely affect women. For example Sara reported:

“Just thinking all the time that any small mistake can be interpreted in a bad way makes me feel worried [...] even though I deal with men in a serious way and only try to focus on job matters [...] I feel sometimes I am very firm and rough. I do not like it, but I have to do it to protect myself and my

family from getting a bad reputation [...] but things are different of course when dealing with women as I feel more relaxed” (Sara, middle manager).

This account suggests that this woman found that she needed to be very assertive when dealing with men and she was more relaxed when dealing with women, which placed her in something of a ‘double bind’. For example, if she was unassertive with men, she might be misunderstood, yet if she was assertive with women she might also be in danger of being misunderstood or accused of adopting a male style of being tough. Another explanation for Sara’s behaviour is that she had to be assertive when dealing with men because she felt challenged and under scrutiny and hence she needed to prove her competence. In contrast, when she dealt with women, she felt more comfortable because she knew their way of thinking, or felt that they supported her.

Women who expressed disapproval of gender segregation in the workplace did not necessarily condemn the use of the veil or *hijab* when working in the same places as men. Two thirds of the women interviewed indicated that it was important to use the veil as it is a part of the Arab heritage that reflects its values and customs. The women believed that the Islamic *hijab* is not an impediment to women’s participation in the public sphere. They viewed *hijab* as a tradition that needs to be respected, which enhances their social respect in society.

“In our Islamic history a woman could be a nurse, scholar, teacher, businesswoman, and work side by side with her fellow men, with the use of *hijab*. Wearing *hijab* gives us more social respect since it is the custom in our society” (Jamila, middle manager).

However, other participants perceived institutional gender segregation to be ‘normal’ or ‘natural’. Some respondents believed that gender segregation protects family honour, as explained by one respondent.

“Mixing with non-*mahram* men in any place (school or work) is *haram* [forbidden] in Islam [...]. This is to protect the woman’s *sharaff* [honour] and her family from any bad reputation” (Norah, middle manager).

Other respondents thought that it has created more job opportunities in teaching or administration, as illustrated by one manager.

“Due to the economy and the separation of the sexes, women have enrolled in education and had more job opportunities, they would not have otherwise

[...] they became independent by working as directors or teachers in girls' sections exclusively for them" (Araw, senior manager).

Thus, according to some women in this study, gender segregation goes hand in hand with the norms and custom of Saudi society. It has opened the door to more opportunities for women outside their traditional social roles as wives and mothers; perhaps the provision of segregated workplaces for women in a conservative society like Saudi was deemed as the only acceptable way to improve the status of women.

Based on the findings in this section, it can be seen that Saudi public sector organizations are gendered. Moreover, this gender segregation in the workplace was viewed as having both a negative and a positive side and this duality can be seen to reflect the cultural and intellectual backgrounds of the women interviewees. Some respondents indicated that gender segregation has increased women's participation in the labour market and that it has given them more opportunities. At one level, this is true. However, these women may not be fully aware of the negative impact that gender segregation could lead to in the future. Gender segregation can be economically problematic because having to provide separate premises for women in every occupation can be expensive for the government. It may also generate more problems in that it can subordinate women and affect their career progression opportunities, particularly their access to senior leadership positions. As discussed in the previous section, even if women do hold managerial positions in the women's sections, in practice they are not totally in charge since the final decision-making authority is always held by men. Hence separating women from their male colleagues is another impediment to women's careers advancement.

6.3.6 Token Status

Due to women's limited access to organizational opportunities and to these opportunities being few in number, women are a token presence in organizations. Therefore, as a minority group they are more visible among other groups in the organization. This situation puts more pressure on women. Women feel that they are under scrutiny and therefore they need to work extra hard to prove themselves in the workplace, whilst at the same time they need to fulfil their traditional roles as mothers or wives. Two women interviewed thought that being visible presented them with an opportunity but they felt as if they were a test case for the future. They remarked that:

“...the feeling of being in the spotlight is a sword edge, on one hand holding a [senior] position itself is an opportunity ... and on the other hand I fear making mistakes at work or home” (Amjad, senior manager).

“I have proved to be able to hold administrative work in my [organization]” (Noha, senior manager).

Tokenism of this sort could lead to a pattern of behaviour called the ‘Queen Bee’ syndrome (see Chapter 3). The study findings showed that there are a small number of women in powerful positions who tend to come mainly from the élite families. These powerful women sometimes exercise power over other women in the women’s sections. They resent younger women and sometimes deliberately hold them back. Such women are unwilling to mentor or to advise other women. This behaviour, where women are seen to be acting like the ‘Queen Bee’, was described by two thirds of the respondents. One explanation for the ‘Queen Bee’ phenomenon is that women in power fear that other women will be better than them, particularly if they come from a different social class. Evidence for this claim is expressed below.

“Some women who are appointed to a higher position in the workplace and come from a powerful family [élite] in our society [...] want just to be in the limelight and do not wish to help other women [...] It is selfishness! Maybe it is the feeling of superiority?” (Amal, middle manager)

The women interviewees suggested another possible reason for this phenomenon might be that the idea of women accessing middle or senior management in the public sphere is new to Saudi society. They claimed that this novelty factor has generated strong competition among women. Thus every woman wants to be the leading light of her organization. However, whatever the reasons are, these powerful women tend to act as barriers to other women’s career development, as illustrated by the following comment:

“Some women employees have been against other women employees in [organization] [...] this may be related to the fact that women's access to higher management positions in public organizations is a new trend. This in turn generates strong competition among women and the lights are focused on this specific group of women. Therefore, the prominent women do not want other women to compete with them for certain positions or social status or administrative status” (Nawal, middle manager).

These token women can exercise a certain power by constraining other young women. Yet these powerful women have themselves experienced the same obstacles as other

women (albeit to a different and perhaps lesser degree) when it comes to balancing power relations.

What makes the 'Queen Bee' phenomenon possible is the fact that there are no formal mentoring programmes to facilitate women's career advancement. Also women are not allowed access to male networking. As a result, women's networking opportunities are facilitated by men, usually their male relatives (see sections 7.2.3, 8.2.4.1 & 9.2.2.1).

6.3.7 Gendered Upbringing

All women managers interviewed, irrespective of age, management level, work experience or marital status, confirmed that Saudi society is patriarchal. This patriarchal system has been reinforced through a process of socialization in two main institutions: the family and the education system. Both institutions play a significant role in teaching the appropriate gender role behaviour for social interaction, which in turn influences the position of women in the workplace.

During the course of socialization within the family, parents will reinforce and encourage appropriate gender-based behaviour by assigning different roles to children. Role assignment relies on gender-based assumptions about the different abilities, development and interests of boys and girls. The following statement illustrates this view.

"The process of the social upbringing of boy and girl intensifies the distinction between them [...] parents raise boys to be strong, dominant, proactive, not to cry, protectors to their sisters who are thought to be weak and dependent" (Narmeen, middle manager).

The Saudi family tends to naturalize the 'men are superior and women are subordinate' gender relationship. For example, a brother is expected to care for and protect his sister, even when he is the younger sibling. Girls are taught that men are their protectors and that they should defer to men and show respect. For example, a sister should show respect for her brother by lowering her voice when talking to him or obeying his commands. This upbringing allows men to continue to display their authority in the workplace.

In school, traditional gender roles are reinforced via a curriculum that is designed to channel women into specific subject areas that are deemed suitable or gender-appropriate. Text books depict women in passive support roles such as homemakers and carers. By contrast, boys are depicted as proactive and responsible members of the community. Here it is clear that ‘family values’ are transmitted and reinforced through the education system. This idea is explained in the following comment:

“The way school-books are designed shows women’s place is at home or comparable places and men’s place is always outside [...] The images in these books demonstrate women as cooking, teaching in class or helping an ill person [...] The images of men on the other hand are building a house, sitting at the head of the table, driving a police car or leading prayer in a mosque” (Noha, senior manager).

The participants emphasised that the education system further reinforces the messages already embedded by the family concerning appropriate gender role values and behaviours. Therefore the education system plays a role in domesticating women rather than liberating them. This may lead to some psychological problems for females. For example, they may feel less capable than males, reliant on others, weak, in need of protection and less responsible, as one respondent explained:

“Our education system is designed to differentiate between boys and girls [...] A boy is always looked upon as the commander, while a girl is taught to meet the demands of such a male commander, in the sense of belonging to that male [...] The family of a son repeatedly say, ‘You are the man of the house and you should look after your sister’ [...] From childhood, boys’ upbringing in family and school consists of elements of superiority and authority [...] and females are formed with the personal elements as being dependent on males. Education holds females back rather than lifting them up from the traditional role” (Sara, middle manager).

The education system is very much influenced by religious teaching, which extols the virtues of women in terms of their roles as good mothers, wives, daughters, teachers and interestingly doctors. One of the key issues arising here is linked to women’s identities and the difficulties they experience when they compare these traditional norms and expectations with what is happening in the outside world. Women may experience a state of ‘alienation’ and this is why it is hugely important for women such as Asma and Arwa to set up centres that will address women’s issues, as discussed in section 6.3.4. Centres such as these could go a long way towards countering the forces of the religious, educational and familial traditions that socialize women into accepting

subordinate positions in relation to men. One respondent, Sara, explores this view by stating:

“Religious teaching in school taught us great values of how to behave on a daily basis; however there is greater emphasis on the role of girls that revolves around the family life or performing occupations that suit their ‘nature’. Things are changing now [...] Girls are more exposed to the outside world [...] Girls are not the same as twenty years ago. Nowadays we can notice that girls are living in a clash between the education that reinforces the traditional role of women and what they see outside in the world where women in many countries, including Muslim and Arab, are very visible and active members in all domains” (Sara, middle manager).

Thus one conclusion that could be derived from the above is that the family and the educational institutions together with the influence of the religious establishment all combine to reinforce the patriarchal nature of Saudi society: their main message is that men (fathers or husbands) are the dominant gender and are expected to have power over the family. The man’s role is an authoritarian one in that he assumes responsibility for maintaining the family structure. The woman’s role is taking care of the family and remaining dependent on the male guardian in order to maintain the family structure. Consequently, the process of socialization is a contributing factor in shaping and reshaping attitudes and gender roles, the sum total of which contributes towards maintaining women’s subordination in the workplace.

6.3.8 Cultural Attitudes and Stereotypes

The findings of this study reveal that the early socialization of women and men into very specific gender roles has led to the existence of a phenomenon referred to as ‘Think manager, think male’ in Saudi organizations. Again, this can be viewed as a consequence of certain assumptions about the ‘natural’ characteristics of women which make them more suited to specific roles. For example, there is a marked tendency to subscribe to the idea that men are by nature more rational whereas women are more emotional and therefore incapable of reason. To assume that women are by nature made this way means that it is easy to justify barring them from jobs which carry higher levels of public responsibility. The majority of women interviewed recognised this phenomenon as a key factor in explaining the lack of women in top positions. The following quotations are illustrative of these stereotypical images of women.

“There is a degree of doubt regarding the ability of a woman to hold a top position in society” (Noha, senior manager).

“I think it is a matter of trust from men who are in leadership positions [...] It is because of our inherited culture that has been passed to generation after generation which emphasizes that men are privileged and women not” (Ahlam, middle manager).

“Erroneous social beliefs still exist in our culture where women are seen as emotional and taking things more personally, while men are seen as rational” (Group discussion).

The entrenched gender stereotypes have a negative effect on the people around the women who come to doubt their own capabilities. They also affect the women themselves in terms of low self-esteem, low self-confidence and so on. For instance, decision-makers, who tend to be male, do not support women’s progression to top positions since they prefer to appoint men, as one respondent explained:

“When you look at rules, policies and constitution in the [organization] there is no discrimination between men and women; however this is only on paper and women still lag behind men in senior positions [...] Perhaps men in authority don’t want to hire or even support us to be the head (Samira, lower manager).

Another factor that explains the lack of women in top positions is that women’s contributions are undervalued, so that even if a woman works very hard, it is easy for the men to dismiss her input. One issue here is that a self-perpetuating vicious circle develops that derives from gender stereotyping. The women are undervalued as employees; therefore, any contribution they make is subject to the same devaluing. In short, the women are in a no-win situation, as described by one of the respondents.

“Working hard does not mean moving ahead in our career, since negative attitudes towards women’s work make our work not valued as much as men’s work” (Amal, middle manager).

A number of explanations could be offered for the devaluation of women’s work in public organizations. The first explanation is that jobs such as teaching, medicine and managing at lower levels are similar to women’s ‘domestic’ caring role, and are therefore deemed less important in the workplace. Another explanation is that according to some interpretations of Islam, men are assigned full financial responsibility for the family, hence the view that women do not ‘have’ to work (see section. 6.3.4). Additionally, organizations may not value women’s work because they are fully aware

of the cultural norms that require women to live with family – parents, or husbands when they get married. Thus working women are still subject to their guardian's discretion and require their permission before carrying out any public activity. Women's guardians have the power to ask their daughters or wives to stay at home and look after the house or children, even if they are very successful in their careers. Of course, this can be seen merely as a private social restriction that subsequently has an influence on women's ability to accept promotion to top positions in the workplace, as illustrated by one respondent.

“My husband asked me to take early retirement to take care of our children and to look after the house” (Naima, middle manager).

Furthermore, organizations may not view women's work as being of equal importance to men's work. A number of male decision-makers who come from a conservative religious background and whose voices tend to be powerful and strong in society and work, may act as an impediment to women's career development by viewing women as second class citizens in Saudi society. These men firmly believe in male superiority. The following examples reflect this view.

“Religious bosses are very powerful in [organization] and they see us [women] as someone who should come after men mostly in everything [...] they believe that men are superior to women in every aspect of life since they are considered the family supporters” (Amal, middle manager).

“The reason for society looking down on women as less qualified than men to hold top administrative positions is the result of austere religious leaders who influence the way things are perceived at work” (Noha, senior manager).

Also, the religious people who hold traditional views about women's role form a very powerful lobby against the empowerment of working women. It is unfortunate that some Saudi men in public office who are willing to improve the position of women are also subject to threats from the religious authorities. This is an extremely difficult situation because it arises out of a complex tangle of religious and socio-cultural values and beliefs which are present in society and are mirrored in organizational culture. As one respondent commented:

“Fear of the religious authorities in society is an obstacle for women and men. My male boss has the desire to help us to be very active in society, but he hesitates to do so, because he is afraid of the religious authorities’

reaction [...] The reaction would be something like that he might be insulted in the newspaper, accused of liberating women, or of not being a good believer in God” (Noha, senior manager).

The values and beliefs that perpetuate gender stereotyping may generate psychological and health problems for women managers, including, for example, stress, frustration, disappointment, anger and alienation. Problems such as these were revealed in the comments of a number of respondents: “I have to prove myself by working double or triple [...] I sometimes feel frustrated and disappointed” (Samira, lower manager) and “Most of the time I feel that I am running without any sign of reaching my target” (Salma, middle manager). Nevertheless, it seems that the feeling of being excluded and marginalised had the greatest impact on women managers when they felt they were treated as outsiders or not present in their organizations in contrast to the men who were invariably seen as valuable staff members, and were continuously rewarded as a result.

The previous discussion suggests that the interplay between Islam, the dominant social customs and cultural norms of the family, and organizational culture leads to gender stereotyping. In turn, this determines women’s positions in the organizational hierarchy, and contributes towards holding women back from progressing into senior leadership positions. In Saudi society, there are some men who hold to the generalized stereotypical image of women as being too emotional and subjective, which they perceive makes them unsuitable for leadership positions and therefore best suited to routine jobs. These gender stereotypes lead Saudi public sector organizations to routinely underestimate and underutilize women’s ability to lead, since their work is viewed as not necessary and top management is considered a male space. Thus the women in this study were severely affected by cultural stereotypes, even though public organizations are expected to have sound policies prohibiting any type of discrimination. Women work hard, but their efforts are not fully acknowledged. One important aspect, emphasized by all respondents, is that Islam actually gave them equal rights, but the narrow interpretation of Islam by some religious people is what lies behind women’s subordinate position in the organizational hierarchy. Another important aspect is that some male managers working in the public sector are keen to improve the status of working women in Saudi public sector organizations, but they still fear the reactions of conservative people.

6.3.9 Women's Own Attitudes

The findings of this study show that the women's own views of themselves and their levels of self-confidence can act as barriers to their career progression. Some women interviewed viewed leadership as a 'male space' at which women should not aim. For example, Norah, who had obtained a PhD and had twenty-eight years of work experience, expressed her personal belief regarding leadership positions. She believed that women should obtain a good education and work; however they should put their family as their priority and their job second. Also, according to Norah's understanding of Islam, she indicated her belief that men are responsible for women; they are the family breadwinners, whereas women are the ones who bear the dual responsibility for children and husband. Furthermore, she stressed that women are privileged to have their male guardians to look after them financially and socially. Norah believed that the differences between men and women were ordained by God and, as such, that women's subjection was part of the 'natural' order of things. Hence leadership should be left to men, not only in the family but also in the workplace, since it requires time, effort, travelling, and strength; and women's time and effort should be devoted to their families and not to their careers. Norah said:

“Taking care of the family and children should be women's priorities. Women are more compassionate, caring and motherly. They know by nature how to look after their families [...] They can, of course, study and work, but men have more time, strength and ability to work and earn money [...] and Islam requires men to be the head of the family by supporting them, whereas women are required to look after their husbands and children [...] I think it is a fair balance? Our religious laws need to be respected and followed in which men are given more responsibility not only in the house but in the workplace” (Norah, middle manager).

A number of explanations could be offered for why the women consider themselves as inferior to men and why they think the men should be in leadership positions. This view is strongly held amongst women who are very traditional and conservative and it is particularly difficult to challenge because the women believe this situation is preordained, that it is God's will. Gender role socialization is also very influential here because girls are encouraged to view family and marriage as a form of career or rather as a natural outcome for their specific characteristics and so on. On a more positive note, it is the case that marriage offers women a form of social and financial security. However, it is also true that women do not have the freedoms that are taken for granted

elsewhere and that given the social obstacles (e.g. requiring permission to travel) it is unsurprising that women feel daunted and often defer to gender stereotypes and opt for family life rather than a career outside. Or perhaps there are other embedded reasons for women to view themselves as inferior?

Whatever their reasons might be, when women consider themselves to be naturally inferior to men they create their own barriers which hamper their advancement to better positions. This idea was confirmed by one respondent who believed that inequality between genders does exist in the Saudi public sector, and that the women themselves assert and promote this type of inequality. She observed that

“Women also are a barrier to themselves. Some women who are very traditional and conservative see themselves as important in the society and strong to emphasise inequality between men and women [...] claiming that it is God’s will [...] that should not be questioned” (Reem, senior manager).

Low self-confidence is another barrier that is related to the women’s attitudes about themselves and this factor may slow down a woman’s chances of progress. One manager who had worked for fifteen years and had obtained a BA degree, and was also married with three children, seemed to exemplify a negative self-image when she explained why she had no desire to hold any higher position.

“I really do not want to hold any senior positions [...] because it requires travelling, making many quick decisions which I do not feel comfortable with; along with that it requires interacting with men and I do not like to have any contact with them nor to compete [...] I do not like to fight to establish a reputation or to fight to be a leader as I am sure that I am going to fail. As you might know, traditionally in our society [...] women are not expected to be leaders or to compete with men” (Lulwa, lower manager).

This respondent seemed to give expression to the sorts of struggles the women face at both a practical everyday level and on a psychological level. For example, to be in a senior position one needs to travel and interact with men, and the rules and regulations surrounding sexual morality in Saudi Arabia forbid women to do so. Hence, because of these social restrictions Lulwa thought that she was certain of failing in any leadership position. Another example is that leaders are seen to make quick decisions and to be very competitive, something with which Lulwa did not feel comfortable. This woman’s image of herself as lacking the confidence to succeed in her organization may be due to social attitudes toward women. She seemed to have internalised the negative view of

women within the organizational culture, despite her not inconsiderable achievements in managing to combine work with caring for her family.

6.3.10 Work and Family Commitments

Given the hugely important role played by family life and the value placed on the institution of family, it is not surprising that the women regarded themselves as running two organizations simultaneously. The majority of women (two thirds) believed that family responsibilities reduced their chances of progressing in their career. Women managers still bear the main responsibility for raising children and performing household tasks. Therefore, they found it difficult to balance home and work effectively, particularly with the tendency towards extended families that is common in Saudi Arabia. The family is highly valued, as explained by one respondent who disclosed, “A post does not mean a lot to me but my family does”. Women are responsible not only for children but also for all members of the immediate and extended family, including husbands and parents-in-law, and, if they have them, domestic staff. In addition, they are responsible for other commitments such as social and life events – for example, visiting ill relatives or family members. Along with family demands, there are management roles which they have to fulfil. Juggling a career and family has indeed affected some women’s chances of promotion to senior level. It also holds back women’s desires for leadership positions and some had deliberately turned down promotions so that they could reduce their work schedule, reduce the stress at work, and concentrate on raising children, as is evident from the following account:

“Taking care of the family does not mean taking care of children only, it means that you run a private organization which involves children, husband, in-laws (mother or father or relatives) and on top of that a driver [...] Also I am responsible for other commitments [...] such as visiting relatives when they are ill, having a baby, getting married, wedding, Eid [religious festivals]. Along with these responsibilities, I have to make sure that everything is performing well at my work” (Hanaa, middle manager).

Women managers were very aware that administrative work in the higher echelons is not easy and requires a lot of time and energy, particularly with the lack of social infrastructure to support them, such as nursery provision, public transport, or the option of part-time employment. Some thought that with family responsibilities, it is

impossible to be fully committed to the demands of work. The following quotation illustrates this view.

“I would like to be at the top, but it is impossible at the present time, without any support from my work [...] I have young and adolescent offspring who require care and attention [...] and administrative work at the higher level is not an easy job, it requires a lot of time [...] Possibly in the future when my children older, my [organization] and society changes” (Najla, middle manager)

It seemed that invariably women choose to place family before work commitments (willingly in most cases). To them, balancing work and family is not an easy job, particularly with the high expectations of the culture toward women’s role within the household.

However, interestingly enough, a third of women interviewed in this study pointed out that they managed well the two ‘fronts’ of family and work. These women managers agreed that holding two full-time roles requires a great deal of energy, but with family support and the availability of a housekeeper, as well as good time management, they were able to reduce the conflict between family and work. The account below serves as an example here.

“There is constant conflict between work and family, but my husband’s understanding of my job as well as the availability of a housekeeper to take care of the household chores and sit with the children helps to reduce the tension” (Nofa, middle manager).

Those female managers who indicated they faced little difficulty in balancing family and work may raise a number of questions. For example, do these women come from elite families who do not need to worry about the cost of housemaids and baby sitters? Are their husbands well educated or non-traditional males? If there were a social infrastructure in place would this remove a barrier to women’s participation and advancement? If women received different sources of help, would they be able to hold leadership posts?

6.4 Summary

Saudi women managers working in the public sector face many constraints that impede their reaching senior management positions. Hence they are exceptionally under-

represented in top positions. Whilst there is theoretical equality in terms of labour law provisions, this is undermined in practice by a complex web of socio-cultural values and beliefs. These values and beliefs are reinforced through two main institutions: family and education, both influenced by religion. What results is an extremely patriarchal society which is mirrored in organizational culture. Women are taught from an early age to defer to men while males are presented as active, outgoing and responsible for women's honour and safety. Thus, in organizations, as in the family, men assume guardianship over women; female managers are subordinate to key decision makers in men's sections, and organization practices and values are predicated on a male model. For example, the qualities needed to succeed are assertiveness, competitiveness, confidence and so on. These characteristics are not encouraged in women so it is not easy for them to behave in these ways.

Hence women are caught in a complex network of gender stereotypes and cultural expectations and obligations which do not reflect the position of women in modern society. Therefore, they are constrained on two levels: practically, in terms of the limits and restrictions on their freedom to conduct their day-to-day lives and psychologically in terms of the negative effects this situation has on their self-identities as working women; some interviewees, for instance, had internalized the idea of women's subjection and viewed it as natural and proper.

In the next chapter, attention will be given to identifying those factors that influence women and which act as supporting elements to women's careers in management in the Saudi public sector.

Chapter Seven: Women Managers: Opportunities within Constraints

7.1 Introduction

Previous cross-cultural studies have been shown that women are severely under-represented in leadership positions; yet there are a number of factors that may act as facilitators of women's improved positions in the labour force and in management such as social policies (e.g. Davidson & Burke, 2011; Wilson, 2011), organizational support (e.g. Bagilhole & White, 2011; Powell, 1999) or family support (e.g. Al-Lamki, 1999; Elliott & Stead, 2008). Similarly, while, as discussed in the preceding chapter, Saudi women managers are challenged by various cultural and structural constraints that hinder their career advancement into top positions in public sector organizations, it seems that there are a number of aspects that have acted as supporting elements to women's careers. Therefore this chapter is designed to focus on the positive aspects of women's experience as managers in Saudi public organizations. This was generated from the findings by interpreting respondents' reflections on the second research question: 'What factors have assisted the career advancement of women in management in the Saudi public sector? There were a number of factors reported, namely: access to education, family networks, male family members' support, personal strength, career aspiration and access to the global world.

7.2 Factors that have Facilitated Women's Careers

During the individual interviews and to a certain extent during the workshop discussions, the respondents identified which factors, both professional and personal, had assisted their career development. These factors are presented and analysed, together with supporting quotations from respondents in order to provide an overview of the opportunities that are available to Saudi women managers within an extremely challenging male dominated environment, as discussed below. It is important to note that due to the complex nature of Saudi society, which is a tangled web of socio-cultural and religious values, this issue was not straightforward for the women involved.

7.2.1 Access to Education

All participants in this study, irrespective of their age, work experience and level of management, agreed that access to education, and access to higher education in particular, represented a great opportunity for them to move into careers outside the family unit. This move would have been unthinkable for their mothers' generation.

Until the 1960s women in Saudi Arabia were virtually unable to access any formal educational opportunities. At that time, education for women meant religious education at home with female teachers. The focus was limited to the holy Qur'an and understanding Islamic behaviour, as is made evident in the following comment.

“I think now women in Saudi are very fortunate to have access to education [...] when I was young in the late 1950s, there were no formal schools for girls. We [I and some other girls] used to go to a religious lady to teach us Qur'an and *Haddith*” (Arwa, senior manager).

However, despite these restrictions, the evidence in my study shows that some women, like the one reported above, had the opportunity to study not only at home but also abroad. This was made possible because they were able to obtain the necessary support from their respective families. Other women, like Asma, registered themselves as non-attending students at the men's university in Saudi Arabia, which was the only one available during 1957. Asma then went abroad to pursue her higher education.

“In 1972 there was no university for females and I registered as a non-attending student at King Saud University [...] At the end of the academic year I used to go to university to undertake my examination [...] but later when I got married my husband was awarded a scholarship to study in America, I went with him, and did my Master's and Doctoral degrees” (Asma, middle manager).

Formal public education for women was introduced by King Faisal's government during the early 1960s, and this represented a huge step forward for women. Women were encouraged to attend educational establishments, despite opposition from religious leaders. Under the leadership of King Faisal the government introduced a series of educational initiatives for women, which began with compulsory primary education. These reforms continued under the reign of King Fahad. At present, under the reign of King Abdullah, women's education is continuing to expand. It is clear that political initiatives have been the main driving force behind these reforms. The following

comment shows that in spite of objections from conservatives in the religious establishment, it was political power which played the most important role.

“What helped us [women] to improve our status are not the social forces, but political initiatives. King Faisal introduced compulsory primary education for women and girls in 1960s despite the objection of many conservatives in the religious institutions. Thereafter, King Fahad reformed the Ministry of Education and played an important role in furthering education for Saudi women [...] At present and under the rule of King Abdullah, women’s education has been expanding more than ever before” (Group discussion).

It is evident from the above statement that political power can improve the position of women not only in education but also in employment. Thus education in Saudi Arabia is widely appreciated.

“I think Saudi is adopting the sayings of Taha Hussein¹⁷, education is like the water we drink and the air we breathe. We are very fortunate to have easy and free access to education [...] I believe this has been possible for us because of government support and the availability of oil” (Nadia, middle manager).

On a very positive note the government has been extremely generous and committed to ensuring access to education for all its citizens, whether male or female. This is evident from the following account.

“It is the government that made it possible for me to study abroad by funding me throughout my studies [...] I obtained my Bachelor’s degree from the USA, and Master’s and PhD from the UK” (Ohoud, middle manager).

The government’s initiatives in relation to women’s education in Saudi have encouraged more women to apply for higher studies. As such, there is strong competition among women for access to higher studies. This is evident from the following account from a woman who believed that achieving a higher education gave her respect and improved her status in society.

¹⁷ Taha Hussein is one of the most influential Arab writers, known as the ‘Doyen of Arabic Literature’ and a pioneer of enlightenment. As Minister of Education in Egypt in 1950, he managed to put his saying, ‘education is like the water we drink and the air we breathe’, into practice through succeeding in making primary and secondary education compulsory (see Hussein, 2010).

“I took advantage of the educational opportunities provided by the government and studied up to doctorate level [...] it was not easy though, particularly in higher education, since more and more women are eager to undertake higher degrees [...] because higher education brings prestige and improves our status in the family and society. These reasons have indeed increased the competition among females. They work very hard in order to get a distinction at Bachelor level that will lead them to be admitted to Master’s or doctorate programmes” (Majdouline, lower manager).

Notwithstanding the competition among women for higher education, the woman quoted above agreed that higher educational attainment did provide women with the opportunity to access career choices. Thus holding professional status helps women to achieve social respect, offers a means of security and helps them to enjoy improved social and financial status, which in turn, allows them to experience independence in the wider societal context.

However, it seems that the choice of subjects available to women at university level is limited. One participant, along with ten others, appeared to be disappointed because she only had access to subjects such as education and health and was denied entry into non-traditional female subjects. She explained:

“It is true that education is available for all women, poor and rich, from primary to higher educations. However, we are still not allowed to study certain subjects [...] I was very interested in designing buildings, but I was not able to study architecture because there is no-one at the female section” (Nawal, middle manager).

Despite the fact that there is no evidence of differences in abilities, women are nevertheless steered towards those subjects that are deemed suitable for their traditional role in society. For example, architecture and engineering are closed to women. Hence women are forced to accept gender role stereotypes both publicly and privately. In spite of the narrower range of opportunities for women, all were agreed that education is vital. Nevertheless, although Saudi women are able to access higher levels of education, they are still subjected to gender bias and this bias follows them into the workplace.

7.2.2 Family Networks

The findings in this study show that all of the respondents, irrespective of their social and academic background, agreed that ‘social network’ refers to the extended family. Family networks have certain norms, values and expectations that are shared by their

members in order to maintain the solidarity of the group. Also, respondents emphasised that the family network rules have to be followed and many of these rules are not written. Some of them have a behavioural component, such as helping other members of a group, while others are more affective in nature, such as feeling positive or negative. In addition, the social network involves a system of reciprocity by exchanging favours and sharing information. Thus part of the social network is the idea of '*wasta*' or 'vitamin W' or connection among family and friends that is deeply rooted in Saudi culture, according to the respondents in this study. The term *wasta* cannot easily be translated into English by any single generally accepted term (see footnote 3, in section 2.3.1). It refers to one person's mediation on behalf of a family member or a close friend which is intended to help them towards achieving a goal. It involves a series of 'gatekeepers' whose relationship with one or two important people in an organization is enough for one to get what one requires. Two respondents, one in middle level management, the other in lower level management, viewed social networks and connections or *wasta* as a supportive aspect and a positive tool for use in their career development. *Wasta* helped them to get their work done more easily, thereby avoiding the lengthy bureaucratic process within the system. They pointed out that following the rules of *wasta* and exchanging favours can, in fact, help women and men to improve their positions in the organization, for example, by undertaking training courses. They recalled that:

"In Saudi culture, family, and relatives or even friends networks are very important for both men and women; and that is what really helped me to get a job and progress in my career [...] In this life as you give you will take [...] get some help today, and you will help someone else another day [...] it is the vitamin *waw* [W] that you need [...] I don't see anything wrong with the use of *wasta*, although it is perhaps not the best way of getting things done." (Nofa, middle manager).

"I am the only female [consultant] in the [department]. When I asked to go to the UK to do further training my male supervisor did not allow me to go, so my father who has good networks, helped me to obtain approval" (Samira, lower manager).

Although the respondents acknowledged that *wasta* is a powerful tool to facilitate various activities, and some respondents admitted the necessity of using it, they did not, in fact, approve of it. This can perhaps be explained by the fact that they were very well educated and had long working experience, that ranged from six to thirty years, as

indicated earlier in Chapter 6. For example, two of the respondents reported that they were not very keen on using *wasta*, but sometimes they had to use it, since it is such an embedded practice in Saudi society, and also they were not able to handle the lengthy official procedure.

“*Wasta* is a very powerful tool! I do not like it, but it is the only way to get things done [...] and without it you would need a few months just to get a small job done” (Najla, lower manager).

“...Yes, networking is the *wasta* [...] I am not very keen in using it but I have to use it [...] It is so common in our society that if you are anti-*wasta*, you'll just get left behind. I cannot handle the long bureaucratic procedures and unresponsive civil servants” (Monira, lower manager).

In a male-dominated society it can be hard for women to get what they think they deserve. Women are seen as forming a part of their guardian male's group; therefore if they need any help they can use their male connections to facilitate their work. The use of *wasta* may lead to frustration and resentment, and will undoubtedly demotivate women who believe that they have the right to improve their careers. The following account shows that the respondent accepted the use of *wasta* if it was not used at the expense of others, and indeed, it might even be used to correct an injustice within an organization.

“Friends and family are my great support, they help me to get what I think I deserve [...] Yes I have used *wasta* when I have the right to get what I deserve and if what I get is not going to be at the expense of others [...] For example, when I applied for study leave, it was refused several times by the administration at the male branch, whereas my colleague who is a man got it so easily [...] Since I believe that I should have got it, I used my brother's connections to get approval for study leave” (Nawal, middle manager).

Networks involve a rule of punishment by showing disapproval of certain behaviour, for example, the exclusion of a member from the whole kinship or friendship network. Such sanctions can be very effective in maintaining the social norms. As a result, even those women managers in this study who disapproved of *wasta* and thought that Islam prohibits such practices, did admit they might feel uneasy if they were asked for help and did not give it, as they were aware of the consequences of not following *wasta* rules. This unease was disclosed by one manager, who held a degree in law and had twelve years of work experience.

“What we have more here, is called ‘under the table’, and I think our religion prohibits things that are done ‘under the table’. *Wasta* is something I will not use [...] it is against my principles. However, sometimes I feel so embarrassed when one of my close friends or relatives asks me for help knowing that I can help out [...] I have experienced such situations several time and said sorry I cannot help!” (Majdouline, lower manager).

According to my respondents the negative outcomes of *wasta*, such as favouritism, nepotism, and corruption, are to be found in Saudi society as well as in public organizations. Personal values, ethics and morals led more than a third of the respondents in this study to view *wasta* as a source of injustice, unfairness and sometimes as a corruption of the system. *Wasta* is used as an organizational tool in recruitment, selection, promotion, evaluation and development processes. The respondents believed that organizations should use a meritocratic approach and select the best talent (women or men) wherever they come from rather than relying on family and friendship connections.

“When I think of people who are not able to obtain *wasta*, I feel it is not fair and morally wrong. In fact, it is corruption. I think it should be halted because if everyone continues to use it, the criterion for evaluating people will be on how many people they know [...] therefore, competency is not the criterion to progress into higher levels, rather having a strong network is [...] The idea of equal opportunity between *muwadafeen* (employees) is absent from decision-makers’ (men’s) minds. In fact, no one will ask them why this person was promoted and not the other” (Heba, middle manager).

“Networks are very important for Saudi men and women. However it could be a major hindrance to career progression, especially for women [...] for example, if a person is competent for a certain position, but does not have a strong network, she or he may not get the job” (Group discussion).

In Saudi society, *wasta* is well known, understood and tolerated, rather than accepted by all. As shown in the preceding discussion, some women reported that they were happy to play the game of *wasta* and to use it, since it is accepted in Saudi society. Other women viewed *wasta* as unjust and thought that it was unfair to use it in organizations, for example, to get promoted or to obtain study leave. Some women were torn between their personal values and the use of *wasta* as a tool with which to avoid the lengthy processes of bureaucracy.

Despite the fact that the network of family and friends is very important in supporting women’s careers, some women, who did not approve of the use of *wasta*, reported that

they had faced problems. For example, they were viewed as not worthy because they did not accept being a part of the chain of ‘gatekeepers’. They were also viewed as less valuable, but this did not change the values and beliefs of these women; rather, they developed certain strategies to deal with the pressures, such as being assertive and learning how to say ‘NO’. The women believed that not everyone has a good network or social capital and usually people who have it are better off; whereas those who have lower levels of social capital tend to be more disadvantaged. Consequently, the issue of whether or not to give equal opportunities to all employees is a very important one. The competence of employees should be the criterion on which they are judged as fit to progress into senior positions, or indeed any positions, and not the connections of their families and friends.

7.2.3 Family Male Members’ Support

The family is the most fundamental institution of the Saudi social structure. Almost all of my women respondents articulated different views on their relationships with family members. They talked about the general implications of family support and they identified several dimensions: the value of education, financial support, emotional support and moral support. For example, one respondent, Arwa, talked about the support she received, particularly from her educated father. Her father supported her education financially and emotionally, and sent her (along with her siblings) abroad to pursue their education, since during the 1950s, there was no formal schooling for girls in Saudi Arabia. Not only that, her father continued to support her, even after she had received her PhD from the USA and he encouraged her to work towards supporting the right of women to receive better education and work.

“My father arranged for me and my sisters to receive private lessons to study religion. Then my father decided to send me, my brother and sister to Arab countries [...] to receive a better education. After that I went to America and obtained my Bachelor, Master and PhD degree [...] My father’s support continues even after I got a job; in fact he has influenced my progression to a higher position and encouraged me to help other women” (Arwa, senior manager).

Twenty-three participants cited their fathers as the biggest influence on their career choices and successes. The image of the father as a role model was very noticeable among participants, especially in relation to the way the fathers supported their

daughters' education and their professional lives. Mothers, on the other hand, were seen as socialization agents for their daughters, and this was evident from the findings. All of the women, except one, viewed their mothers as figures of love and care and only one participant viewed her mother and grandmother as role models who had played a major role in forming her personality. The following account explores the idea of the father as a role model and a supporter.

“When I chose my career my father was my guide. He always encouraged me to pursue whatever I was interested in and not to impose any artificial limitations on myself in terms of what I thought I could and couldn't do [...] Since I was young, I was expected to have a career, as were my brothers, and I became the only female not only in Saudi but also in Europe who specialised in this area of [expertise]” (Samira, lower manager).

The image of the father as role model was very clear among my participants. It may be of interest to note that these women did not mention any role model outside their families, for example, in the work place.

The study also revealed that about half of the women interviewed reported that they also received support from their educated husbands, and that they considered this support as a factor in their career advancement. Husbands may act as 'facilitators' or 'consultants', people who provides advice on how to deal with management work. The following accounts reflect such experiences.

“My husband is the wall that I lean on for help and guidance [...] he is a professor at the university and has managerial experience, I always consult him about my managerial work [...] because administrative work is very hard [...] it requires social intelligence, a diplomatic and tactful way of dealing with people and I feel he is very good at these things” (Najla, middle manager).

“The strongest source of support is my husband. I always discuss my work issues with him and he is always happy to advise me on what to do [...] problems such as approaching employees who perform badly, dealing with difficult employees” (Salma, middle manager).

Other respondents described their educated husbands as 'great supporters', who supported their wives by allowing them to travel abroad, to study, take more job training or to attend a conference. Also, husbands were able to support their working wives by employing housekeepers to look after the house and children. The need for this type of support is reflected in the following explanations.

“I would not be able to work, travel or study in Saudi without the support and the approval of my husband, [...] I will not be allowed for example to go on study leave without getting permission from my husband” (Heba, middle manager).

“My husband brought me a housekeeper to look after the house and children, and also a driver to drive me to work, so I can focus on the demands of my job” (Noha, senior manager).

The impact on women of this type of support from husbands was very obvious: the women talked about being stronger, more focused, motivated and determined to succeed; nevertheless they also had to perform their traditional roles.

Furthermore the findings of this study have shown that women managers received support not only from their fathers or husbands but also from their sons.

“My family, particularly the male members, have been supportive. My father is an ideal man [...] my son, whose experience in modern administration has been helpful to me, as he works with a foreign company” (Ohoud, middle manager).

It is interesting to find that a woman with lengthy experience of work was receiving advice from her son. It is likely that the son, being educated more recently, would have been exposed to new developments in management thinking which were not current when his mother gained her degree. The fact that he worked for a foreign company is also significant, as such companies have often been channels for the transfer of new ideas and techniques. This manager did not say whether her husband supported her or not, as she did in reference to her father and her son. Perhaps this implies that she was not receiving any support from her husband.

The findings of this study also showed that some of the women did not receive any support from their husbands, even if they were educated. In fact, a third of the respondents viewed their husbands as barriers to their career advancement. These respondents reported a number of reasons for the negative attitudes expressed by their husbands towards them. Some respondents believed that their husbands were traditional in outlook; thus they assumed that women should be submissive and should follow traditional roles as wives and mothers, as set for them by society. For example, one manager disclosed how she managed to walk a tightrope between her career and her traditionally-minded husband. She described how she maintained this balance by being

submissive, obeying the authority of her husband and being what her husband perceived to be a good wife and a good mother to their children, whilst simultaneously in the workplace she was a strong and very successful manager who managed over 100 employees. Her justification for such behaviour was that she feared that her husband would ask her to leave her job, particularly in view of his family's traditional background. They originated in the *Najd* region (see Chapter 2) which is known as the most conservative region in Saudi Arabia. The cultural norm in this region is that it is not acceptable for a woman to be superior to her husband in education or career. Also, a husband has the total authority to stop his wife from studying or working (see section 6.3.8). Perhaps that is why she undertook her Master's Degree as a part-time student without her husband's knowledge in order to improve her career. This woman had devised a strategy to avoid marital disaster and to accomplish her personal goals silently and to continue to perform well in her work. She said:

“Access to this position was difficult and too long, as I passed a number of managerial positions. But my big problem now is my husband! He came from the *Najd* where people have a tradition of not accepting women to be in contact with male colleagues at work. He asked me many times to change my job [...] He does not want me to talk to or deal with men employees, he is not happy about me holding a good managerial position [...] I completed my Master's degree part-time without him knowing about it as he does not want me to obtain a higher degree than him, perhaps, as he holds only a secondary school certificate [...] but I have to play the game. When I am at home I try not to talk about my job, to be humble and do all the routine housework, look after our children and at work I am the boss for about a hundred employees” (Naima, middle manager).

This woman clearly had a strong character, but had these conflicting roles affected her health, her social life or her career choices and development? Inevitably this type of work-life balance creates a huge amount of stress. Again this is linked to culturally-situated gender stereotyping and fixed ideas about women's role.

Another woman interviewed in middle management asserted a similar view in the following comment:

“My parents support me a great deal, but my husband did not. He always feels that my success is a threat to his career [...] We are not working in the same organization, he works in the private sector and I am in the government sector [...] My success indeed created so many problems in my life that they unfortunately ended my marriage [...] You know in our society

some men do not like women to be successful and work hard toward their career goals” (Jamila, middle manager).

This manager, unlike the previous one, experienced the breakdown of her marriage due to the conflict between her and her husband, since she insisted on the importance of her career and personal satisfaction. The negative attitude of this husband toward his wife may be explained by the fact that as a traditional male, he could not accept his wife being in a higher social position than him. Or is it perhaps that this husband felt jealous of his wife’s high achievement, and his jealousy caused the marriage to break? If this woman manager had ‘played safe’ would the feelings of inferiority and jealousy on her husband’s part have been reduced and their marriage saved?

From the previous discussion, it can be seen that the family in Saudi Arabia can be hard to understand since it is linked to a number of factors including the level of education of the male members and their traditional background. The male family figures played a major role in women’s career development. The study showed that some women received support from their male relatives, particularly educated fathers who supported the education of their daughters, encouraged them to advance in their professions and provided them with the means to do so. Other women managers received support from their sons. However, some women managers showed contradictory views about their husbands’ attitudes toward their work and the level of support they received. One group of women viewed their husbands as facilitators, consultants and as great supporters of their career advancement. These men gave their wives permission to work extra hours, to travel, to attend conferences or training courses and to continue their education. Other women recounted very different experiences which showed a different picture, one in which their husbands had acted as barriers to their careers. Although different pictures emerge here, one factor remains consistent: the women were expected to defer to their husbands in all cases, regardless of whether the husbands were supportive or not.

7.2.4 Personal Strength

The respondents in this study demonstrated signs of self-confidence. This self-confidence was a major factor in their ability to challenge the prevailing socio-cultural stereotypes. They were consciously aware of their potential in terms of their own specific strengths and they were aware of their development needs in relation to the demands of leadership roles. About half of the respondents said that family support,

along with work experience and the pursuit of higher education abroad either in the USA or the UK, had taught them to be more independent and to be more goal-oriented. The following reports are by two managers, one with a PhD from the USA and twenty-one years of work experience, and the other with an MBA from the USA and twenty-five years of work experience.

“Keenness and perhaps self-awareness have assisted my career development. I have always set goals, found plenty of reasons why I wanted to accomplish them, and worked on achieving them. Studying abroad has not only taught me about other societies, views, and ideas, but also it has given me a greater sense of independence [...] Holding different jobs and being involved in community activities have enabled me to be willing to take on difficult tasks and to seek more job opportunities” (Salma, middle manager).

“I have been working in the [organization] for twenty five years. After holding various teaching and administrative positions, I now hold a [higher-ranking] position in the female branch that took me about ten years to reach [...] this is perhaps related to my personal efforts, my zeal, my loyalty to improve females in my [organization]” (Noha, senior manager).

The high self-confidence of women managers in this study led them to think of the importance of leaving a clear imprint on other young women. This can be achieved, according to the women interviewed, through working harder and harder, not only to achieve their goals, but also to make a difference in their organizations and in society as a whole, as well as setting a good example to others. About ten of the participants raised this issue. Sarah said:

“I am the head of [department] in the [organization], I do a lot of charitable work in the community to educate people [...] I have come to that because I have the desire to work and to help others, particularly women who have very low self-esteem [...] hoping to leave a clear imprint in the community” (Sarah, middle manager).

Another manager asserted a similar view and said:

“Being one of the pioneers in teaching in the [discipline], I have tried to set a good example to my staff and female students [...] by being patient to work for my goal, working hard to move to the next steps, engaging in many workshops to refresh my knowledge” (Reem, senior manager).

Perhaps these women managers had faced and overcome many challenges and saw themselves as pioneers in their career and in management. These women did not

themselves have female role models in their organizations; hence they wanted to make other women more visible in society by empowering them and changing their negative self-perceptions.

Therefore, a combination of self-belief and a strong character are what enabled one manager to cope very well with the circumstances in her organization when it went through many ups and downs as part of what Saudi Arabia was going through during the late 1970s and early 1990s. She pointed out that during the late 1970s and early 1980s women's development was taken seriously in her organization. However, between the 1980s and 1990s, this ceased to be the case since the Kingdom was going through a period of accumulated political complications. These complications included internal affairs, and foreign intervention, such as the Gulf War, religious movements and the Iraq-Iran war, all of which affected not only her organization and the country's institutions, but also women's career development. She confidently asserted that even with the continual ups and downs of the organization it was important for her to improve her skills in order to be able to manage effectively. She commented:

“We are a system within a system, and [organization] is part of that system. During 1970s to the early 1980s things were good for working women [...] then came the lean years from about the 1980s to 1990s, when Saudi was going through some political complication, internal affairs, and foreign intervention. In spite of these lean years, I managed to produce good work, travelled abroad, received high degrees, and accordingly I was appointed to good positions in [organization]. I believe that as a woman I was able to deal with this crisis very well” (Amjad, senior manager).

The study findings also revealed that there were a number of respondents who lacked confidence and felt that they were inferior to men; they believed that men were more capable of managing at higher levels in their organizations. This issue was discussed in Section 6.3.10.

The above discussion shows that the characteristics of these respondents, such as self-confidence, self-belief, awareness of personal and professional strengths, readiness to be a role model, the determination to leave a good impression on others plus family support, had helped them to achieve good positions as managers in their organizations. There are three possible explanations for why these women are so highly motivated. First, they faced many challenges in organizations and in the wider society, as discussed in Chapter 6; second, these women recognised that career advancement would take

more than serious effort, strong ambition and hard work; and finally, the participants had strong beliefs and the desire to instigate changes in their organizations and in society.

7.2.5 Career Aspirations

The desire to advance into leadership positions and be more visible in the organization held true across nineteen of the respondents, irrespective of their marital status, educational background, or years of working experience. The remaining respondents reported that for personal and family reasons it was not their ambition to hold leadership positions.

The study shed some light on what type of leadership respondents were aspiring towards. As mentioned earlier, a number of women viewed themselves as hard-working, goal-oriented and capable of holding leadership positions. Therefore, they reported that they aspired to hold certain positions (such as CEOs) in the Saudi government sector. For example, a woman interviewed in middle management said:

“I would like to be, in future, an active member of the Board of Directors of the [organization]; I have repeatedly asked for this, as there is no woman in this Council [...] with the hope of improving our workplace” (Nawal, middle manager).

Another participant in senior management hoped to become a minister, and she disclosed the following information:

“I see myself holding a higher position in the society like a minister [...] because I believe that I have all the basic skills for success: education, long work experience in administration, and the desire to move up to a position that will lead to more changes in our society” (Reem, senior manager)

Four expressed their wishes to be a member of the Consultative Council (*Majlis alshura* or *Shura* Council). An interviewee offered the following example:

“I hope I will be an active member in the *Shura* Council to be an instrument of change and to develop women in society [...] because I believe being in the *Shura* Council will allow me to address women’s issues at a closer distance [...] This will lead society to understand the challenges women face and thus they will be rewarded for their efforts and education” (Nofa, middle manager).

These women offered a number of reasons for their ambitions: for example, they felt that they had the potential and the capability to achieve their aims, or they wanted to improve women's status in society.

Two of the respondents expressed their desire to work within an international organization and they each gave different reasons for wanting to do so. One woman, in middle management, wanted to work at an international organization because she believed it provided a system that was based on evaluating and appreciating the quality of work. She commented:

“I hope that I will work at an international organization [...] where they have a system and appreciate quality of work” (Heba, middle manager).

Heba was opposed to many practices prevalent in Saudi society, particularly *wasta* and the issue of inequality between genders in the workplace. One explanation for Heba's desire is that women's mobility is restricted by the prevailing cultural practices in Saudi society. Therefore, working abroad in well-known organizations such as the United Nations or the World Bank or similar would help to improve her career. Also, in international organizations the systems may allow women to advance on merit. Another explanation is that exposure to different experiences in a different culture will help her to pass on her experience to other young females in Saudi society generally.

Another woman manager (Salma) in middle management expressed her wish to be promoted to the position of educational consultant on an international level. One reason for Salma's ambition was that she wanted to support the right to quality education and educational opportunities for all women at all ages across the entire globe.

Focusing on an intended functional role rather than on a specific post was a career goal expressed by Sarah. The response given below reflects women's preference for working at the micro-level rather than at the macro-level. She identified herself as a professional woman who devoted a great deal of her time to voluntary work. Hence perhaps she thought that through volunteer work she would encourage other women to identify their strengths. She said:

“I will continue working with the aim of achieving justice and equality among staff, and to draw women's attention to their strengths and abilities in

all areas as well as changing men's attitudes toward women's role in society" (Sarah, middle manager).

Although the women interviewees were clear about their aspirations, again they come up against the restrictions that are placed on women's visibility in Saudi society. One woman manager for example, in keeping with eight other women in this study, explained that her ambition was to hold a higher position. Her belief was that women should be given this opportunity since Islam gave them these rights. Nevertheless, although this manager's family encouraged her to complete postgraduate studies and to work, they did not encourage her to aim for any position that would make her very visible in the public domain. She clarified this in the following way.

"Holding a higher position in the [organization] would be inconsistent with the values of my family as they are very traditional, but I hope to see other women holding one [...] I believe the most efficient person should hold the appropriate position, whether man or woman, but women must be given a chance [...] Islam gave women their full rights, but erroneous interpretations of religion gave men more powers over women" (Nadia, middle manager).

Conservative families tend not to allow their daughters, whatever their ages, to hold positions that are traditionally seen as men's positions. This woman manager would not go against her family's will and seek a higher position in her organization, even though she believed that she was capable of holding a leadership position; she was totally aware of her rights as a woman in Islam and understood the narrow interpretations of religion that gave men power over women. I argue that there are different interpretations for this manager's behaviour. One is that it could be a way of expressing respect for her family, who raised her, educated her and provided a sense of security and belonging. Another is that in accordance with social norms and values, this woman manager would find it difficult to challenge the prevailing cultural values.

The above discussion demonstrates that although these women managers had all worked hard to advance their careers in their organizations, their opinions differed as to whether or not they should continue the progression of women's roles in society. Some women wished to contribute to the development of women's visibility and their greater empowerment by obtaining leadership positions; however, they felt unable to pursue these aims because of family constraints or religious beliefs. These religious and socio-cultural barriers seem, at present, insurmountable, as women are reliant on the support

of either their families or their husbands. However able and successful these women are, these barriers remain firmly in place.

7.2.6 Access to the Global World

The increasing spread of globalization has been hugely influential in terms of opening up Saudi Arabian society culturally, economically and politically. The women interviewees all felt that it was impossible not to be influenced by the globalization system since the world has become, in one sense, 'without borders'. This view was explained by one manager who said:

“Joining the globalization system and the international melting pot is unavoidable whatever the geographical features are, and whether we like it or not, [...] with the internet, we live in a world without borders” (Amjad, senior manager).

In this study, all respondents had access to the internet and agreed that openness to the outside world beyond Saudi Arabia had opened up new opportunities for working women. They believed that Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) had been a major influence on virtually every aspect of the lives of Saudi women and men. This has been a very positive development, particularly in relation to their respective roles in society. Two respondents reflected on the positive aspects of ICT:

“Contacting other countries through different means of communication, either the internet or media, has been a strong influence on changing women’s perceptions of themselves as they become more conscious about the importance of the role that they play at work [...] men also are now changing” (Reem, senior manager).

“Changes in Saudi are becoming more obvious with openness to the other world [...] Women now are more aware of many issues [...] for example they ask for more autonomy, to have marital and parental rights, to have fair promotion and to know more about the opportunities that are available” (Amal, middle manager).

In addition, the women interviewed disclosed that global communication systems, e.g. the internet, had opened up for women an entirely new field for integration, social interaction, gathering information and exchanging experiences. They are now becoming part of different networking groups. One manager, along with fifteen others, indicated that the internet has become an invaluable communication tool for women who are now using it to discuss family issues, women’s issues, including women’s rights and even

work-related problems without fear of being judged and without needing permission from their guardians. This is potentially very liberating for Saudi women.

“The internet helps me to communicate with other organizations locally and internationally [...] and to be part of different networks. It helps me to identify what is happening in the outside world. Regularly I speak with people whom I have never met [...] and who have helped me to avoid falling into mistakes that they made in their career” (Arwa, senior manager).

Although all of the respondents in this study agreed that openness to the global world is more beneficial than otherwise, they were still sceptical about the implications of the globalization phenomenon, which they thought may interfere with Saudi affairs. They argued that it has resulted in some negative consequences for society, particularly in matters related to national identity. Two managers emphasised the need for Saudi Arabia to respond to the pressures of globalization in ways that were decided internally by Saudis themselves rather than externally imposed.

“We have to be careful of *al-awlama* [globalization] as it may affect *al-huwiyya al-watani* (national identity) [...] I believe that the government, family, school and mosque must understand the objectives of this new trend, so that people would not feel alienated in their country” (Reem, senior manager).

“Foreign forces interfere in the affairs of the whole world [...] We are under scrutiny, and we have to take the initiative to change the current situation. We should examine the ideas coming from other cultures carefully and take steps ourselves rather than have them imposed by others. We should determine what suits us to develop our society” (Amjad, senior manager).

One woman interviewed made various points summing up what other respondents had said before but in an interesting narrative way. She acknowledged that on the positive side globalization had brought changes and imposed certain conditions on the Saudi state: not least that it should ensure gender equality for women. She questioned the motivations of the West, suspecting that its own self-interest played the main part. This manager also wanted to make clear that she feared the loss of her identity as an Arab woman and that she did not want to become merely a copy of another identity. So there are obviously concerns here about the loss of an ‘authentic’ Arab identity. Another important issue here was the need for the various institutions in Saudi society to fully understand the implications and objectives of globalization in order that Saudi does not lag behind other countries.

“Al-awlama is moving the world and represents the cards to pressure to change on our society [...] I do not know the real reasons why the West is eager to develop my country [...] I believe that first and foremost the West seeks their own interests [...] But I will be more realistic and say that this rapid change has created resonance in society. The United Nations, the International Parliament and other international organizations, for example, have imposed certain conditions on the state to improve the role of women so that the state can be approved of to be part of these organizations [...] This is, of course, a positive action for women [...] but I am concern[ed] [that] our Arab identity might fade away with time. I do not like to be a copy of others [...] because the fast pace of change in our society is immature and in response to Western organizations [...] Changes [are] not happening from the inside, but rather coming from the outside. For this reason, you will find contradictions and differences in people's opinions regarding this trend” (Nadia, middle manager).

In the preceding discussion, the women managers agreed that globalization in its different forms, economic, political or cultural, is becoming a reality in Saudi society. Openness to the global system has allowed women to be daily exposed to different manifestations of globalization through the internet or the media. The women managers viewed globalization as having more positive than negative effects with regard to their career development. However, they were uncertain about the implications of globalization. Therefore, they recommended that various institutions in Saudi society, such as the family, school and mosque, ought to understand the objectives of globalization in order to maintain the Arab national identity without the country lagging behind other countries. In general, the women believed that being a part of the global world helped them to access information and to join international networks with other men and women, which, without doubt, did empower them. However, the question that I need to ask is: ‘would openness to the global world facilitate women’s access to top management?’ I argue here that on the one hand it depends on how far the government is prepared to extend equality to women, and on the other hand, it depends on how far the women themselves might be willing to compromise their identities as ‘Arab women’.

7.3 Summary

The women identified a number of factors that have facilitated their careers. Thanks to government initiatives, they had enjoyed access to formal education, which previous generation of women had been denied. Family relatives had helped them to secure opportunities for work and training. Most had benefited from the support of male family

members, for example, a father who encouraged his daughter's education, or a husband who facilitated his wife's career by giving the necessary permission for travel, hiring domestic help, and even acting as advisers. Women also spoke of how their own self-belief and career aspirations had contributed to their advancement. Finally, women noted the impact of access to the global world, particularly via the media and the internet, which had contributed to greater cultural, economic and political openness in Saudi society. Whilst all of these factors have indeed been helpful, nevertheless in each case they were still subject to the barriers and restrictions that derive from the prevailing religious and socio-cultural values and beliefs. It is the case that these remain the main constraints that women face. Notably there was no mention of any organizational factors that are designed to facilitate women's careers, such as mentoring programmes.

In the next chapter, attention will be given to the women's perspectives on ways to improve their careers in order for them to achieve senior leadership positions in the Saudi public sector.

Chapter Eight: Women Managers' Perspectives on Ways to Access Senior Management

8.1 Introduction

In Chapter 3, the literature review revealed that the position of women in management will only improve if considerable efforts are made on a number of fronts. An improvement in the position of women will require a general change in attitudes towards women plus legal and organizational initiatives, as well as efforts made by individuals (e.g. Acker, 2009; Adler & Azraeli, 1994; Burke, 2002; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Singh et al., 2006). The current research aims to contribute to this process of improvement. Hence this chapter will address the third research question, 'How can the career paths of women be improved to enable them to achieve senior management positions in the Saudi public sector in such a way that this will facilitate wider political, social and economic development?' Saudi women managers in the public sector have reported that they face enormous problems when trying to access senior management positions (see Chapters 6 & 7). This chapter will explore the different ways in which the respondents navigate these labyrinthine problems within their own cultural context. Five main areas will be discussed and the discussion will include suggestions for policies proposed with the following aims in mind: to overcome traditional stereotypes, to facilitate political action, to ensure equality in organizational processes and practices, to empower women and to address women's own resistance to change.

8.2 Perspectives on Ways to Access Senior Management

The respondents in this study asserted that various vital culture-specific issues need to be tackled in order to remove the enduring constraints that women experience and to enable them to achieve equitable management positions in the Saudi public sector. The various suggestions that were made about how to address such issues could then be the starting points for public policy. Any subsequent policies should aim at achieving change at a socio-cultural level, an organizational level and at an individual level in order for women to access and to be represented in senior leadership positions in Saudi public sector organizations.

8.2.1 Overcoming the Traditional Stereotypes

As discussed in Chapter 6, gender stereotypes and traditional attitudes towards women are one of the main obstacles impeding women's access to senior leadership positions. In this study, seventeen of the women interviewed suggested that major changes are necessary in order to change cultural attitudes towards women managers so that they can be appointed to higher-ranking positions in the Saudi public sector. The women thought such change could be achieved through various channels, including the education system, the media and the practice of 'joined-up thinking' between various institutions.

The education system was seen as the key factor in changing people's attitudes concerning whether women managers should be accepted as leaders in organizations. As discussed in section 6.3.7, the education system reflects Saudi cultural values and its religious tradition, and subsequently these factors have an influence on women's positions in the workplace. Consequently, the women interviewed suggested that work is needed to improve the current education system in order to promote change regarding the prevailing stereotypes and traditional attitudes towards women. This can be achieved if the policy makers are willing to take three main steps. First, the general education curriculum needs to be genderless; for example, text books should be designed to include the same topics for both boys and girls, as proclaimed by one manager:

“For women to be able to reach the top of the pyramid in any institution, social attitudes toward women need to be changed first [...] This can be done through amendment of the educational curriculum at all levels [...] Boys and girls are better off to learn the same subjects and topics, but this needs political power (Majdouline, lower manager).

Second, since the education system is segregated along gender lines (boys and girls are taught separately and treated differently due to different societal expectations of them) it was suggested that there is a need to introduce a co-educational system in which boys and girls study the same subjects and interact with each other. This can prepare both boys and girls for the labour market and can lead men towards accepting the fact that like them, women can occupy any positions, including leadership. For example, one woman interviewed suggested the following:

“Opening schools with mixed gender (male and female) will definitely help boys and girls to get used to dealing with each other [...] Boys specifically ought to understand that girls are not different from them. In this way, as they grow up both will learn how to interact and value each other in society or at the workplace [...] It is not easy and not acceptable though, so *al-hawkamah* [government] support is needed” (Nawal, middle manager).

Third, the women managers suggested that new disciplines should be established at the level of higher education by opening up fields for women that are currently available only to men, such as political science. They felt that women should not be confined to certain subjects and should be able to study in any field.

“There is a need to open new disciplines at all Saudi universities [...] such as political science, engineering, public relations...etc and to close some fields that are overcrowded with females [...] like sociology, education...etc. We are overloaded with women specializing in these disciplines, which harms their job opportunities (Monira, lower manager).

Thus, according to participants, the education system can play a significant role in changing societal attitudes toward women managers, which in turn, would allow them to advance to high positions. However, the women in this study asserted that in order to take this step forward and for it to gain acceptance in Saudi society requires the involvement of decision-makers in the Saudi government.

The media were also considered to play a major role in changing stereotypical images of Saudi women managers. The respondents called for the media to take a more proactive stance in highlighting the issues that pertain to discriminatory and stereotypical images of women. The media should aim to develop an alternative image of women, one that is designed to portray the positive aspects of women’s roles in all activities. Respondents argued that the Saudi media should undertake two major steps. First, they need to educate people in Saudi society about how stereotyped images of women will have negative effects on society in general, and on men and women specifically.

“The media should run an advertising campaign in the community to change attitudes concerning the roles of women and men [...] Educating the community through the media, whether television, radio, printed publications is an essential step to be taken. This mission may take a long time, but would be worth the effort to see more women in leading positions” (Sarah, middle manager).

Second, the media ought to approach women with the aim of helping them to change their negative self-images. The media should raise their awareness by explaining the causes of negative self-images and should work to create more positive self-perceptions amongst women and in the wider society.

“To be able to identify priorities and to raise awareness regarding the importance of women’s role among Saudi community members, we need special programmes in the media to target everyone: men, women, students, workers, decision-makers” (Ahlam, middle manager).

“Raising awareness among women themselves to define their role in society away from that drawn for them by the traditional institutions should be part of the media project” (Group discussion).

It was suggested that the implementation of new programmes through different types of mass media in Saudi society, can work towards promoting a wider social awareness of women’s legal right to participate in all aspects of development: a move which could achieve equality between men and women. I would argue, of course, that this is not an easy task for two main reasons. First, changing people’s attitudes, values, and beliefs will take a long time. Second, it requires immense effort, commitment, time and budget, for which government support is required.

The use of ‘joined-up thinking’ between various institutions such as the school, the workplace, the media and the mosque was also suggested. Respondents indicated that the Saudi government had spent a great deal of money on women’s education, yet it did not use its talented women. Therefore, they strongly believed that women’s situation could be changed through the use of ‘joined-up thinking’ between the various institutions in Saudi society which may help to raise social awareness of women’s roles in society and in organizations. They thought that this move could lead to changing the traditional stereotypes about women, which in turn, can help women to achieve equal treatment in organizations and to attain senior leadership. Eight of the participants expressed this view. For example, one manager said:

“Many people have said to me it is a matter of time and women’s position in society or in the workplace will change [...] but in fact I disagree with this idea because without addressing this problem in the media, in the school, in the university, and everywhere, things will never change. The Saudi government spends billions of riyals [Saudi currency] on women’s education (at all levels from primary to postgraduate) [...] but unfortunately

it does not use these talented resources as it should” (Salma, middle manager).

Thus, according to the managers interviewed, the situation of women managers could be improved in the Saudi public sector. This improvement could be achieved in a number of ways, for example, changing the education system, raising awareness of women’s role in society through the mass media and adopting ‘joined-up thinking’ between various institutions in order to change traditional stereotypes about women. All of these changes can contribute towards achieving women’s equality in organizations.

8.2.2 Political Action

As seen in the previous two chapters, women are extremely under-represented in senior management since they are defined as a specific group or a secondary group in the workplace. This remains the case despite the fact that they have attained high levels of education, and they possess both experience and talent. According to the respondents in this study, in order to resolve this contradictory situation, political support is needed to change the current situation of women. Political support is vital if they are ever to achieve equality in appointment and promotion to senior leadership positions. For example, one woman in middle management strongly emphasised the role of the government in forcing changes to happen and in opening more choices and opportunities for women:

“We are surrounded by strong women who can play a great role in Saudi. They just need more choices and more opportunity [...] therefore only political decisions will enforce their rights and role in leading this country” (Amal, middle manager).

Another woman manager pointed out that when the decision comes from a political leader, people in Saudi society, even the traditionalists and the religious conservatives, will tolerate and accept the appointment of women to top positions. She supported her claim with the following example:

“Political decision-making has an active role in the advancement of women’s careers. King Abdullah gave women an active role in society. He appointed two women for the first time in Saudi history to senior levels in the public sector and people accept this situation, even among the most traditional and religious people [...] since it is a political decision” (Nofa, middle manager).

In this respect, almost half of the respondents suggested that in order to promote equality between genders in the workplace regarding appointment to top positions, there are three important areas that need political decisions: changing the male guardianship system, legislative action, and providing easy access to transport. The first action that political decisions need to work on, it was argued, is modifying the male guardianship system. As noted previously, women are considered to belong to their male guardian (see Chapters 6 and 7), and are not allowed to perform any activities such as studying, working, travelling to study, undertaking training or attending conferences, without his prior approval. The participants thought that this law needed to be abolished to ensure that women are independent and equal members of Saudi society. Also, they argued that changing the male guardian system will balance out the relations between women and their guardians. The women viewed these relations as often being unfairly balanced between women who have a high level of education and their guardians, who may not be educated to the same level or may be even younger than the women, for example, brothers. From the perspective of the interviewees, a move to change the male guardianship system will send out a positive message, one that says women are capable of dealing with issues related to public life and are not in need of protection. This will help women's career progression, particularly to senior leadership positions, since they will have control over their affairs. However, respondents believed that the male guardianship system should be regulated in a way that does not go against the ethos of Islam and does not harm women or men. Two managers, for example, expressed this view:

“The state must eliminate and abolish the male guardianship system which severely limits the rights of women to act as autonomous and equal members of Saudi society. It restricts women's rights in marriage, property ownership, choice of residency, study abroad, travel, education, jobs mobility and just name it [...] it is basically everything” (Nawal, middle manager).

“The issue of guardianship of men over women is troublesome in our society [...] You may find a woman with a PhD degree, but her guardian is an uneducated man or younger than her [...] Changing the family law would benefit women since it is not incompatible with Islam” (Nadia , middle manager).

The second action that interviewees thought political decision-makers need to undertake is to form legislation for working women as the key to empowering them in the

workplace. The Saudi government has the power to create laws to protect individuals against any type of discrimination. For example, it could enact an Employment Discrimination Law or Equal Employment Opportunities Act to protect employees (men and women) from any form of discrimination in areas such as hiring, promotion, job assignment or even sexual harassment. Such laws would protect women who are qualified for senior positions in the Saudi public sector. The following account by one manager indicates how strongly she believed that legislation is the solution for working women in Saudi society:

“To advance women to higher positions in public organizations, first and foremost we need to work on having the government put forward legislation to promote and protect women’s rights [...] I highly recommend: Legislation! Legislation! Legislation!” (Arwa, senior manager).

The provision of access to transport was the third suggestion made by the interviewees. All of the women managers in this study were agreed that transport is a major problem for working women in Saudi Arabia, and one which creates tension on a daily basis. Thus the respondents suggested that women should have easy access to transport like most women in the rest of the world, since it is a basic human right, and not an extravagance. For example, one woman in senior management commented that it is not enough for Saudi women to be educated, employed or even be managers: if their mobility is constrained, they cannot benefit fully from these other rights. She argued that for a woman to drive a car is not against Islamic teaching, as many people wish to believe, because women in the early Islamic era used different means of transport. By analogy, women should not be prevented from driving cars.

“It is a backward step that we are debating women’s right to education and whether work in many areas is suitable for them or not [...] The world has gone beyond that and we are still constraining women’s mobility by prohibiting them from driving cars [...] We need to help women not only to be educated and employees but also to make their mobility easy since it is not against the teaching of Islam, and women in Prophet Mohammad’s time rode horses and camels and this is a means of transportation” (Arwa, senior manager).

Two explanations could be offered for such restrictions on women’s mobility. First, such prohibition is based on the idea that a woman might leave off the veil or headscarf, which may put women in danger of sexual harassment, which would destroy their family’s reputation. Another justification is grounded on the idea that when women

drive cars they will have to interact with males such as policemen who are not their *mahram*, and this is displeasing to the religious authorities. However, removing the social restrictions on women by allowing them to have easy access to transport would give women more independence to engage in professional activities

To summarize, from the above discussion it is clear that women are prevented from holding senior management positions by certain social practices. In view of this, the respondents recommended that the government should actively intervene to secure women's rights in the workplace. The government should legislate for the protection of employee's rights and for the abolition of the male guardianship system in order to enhance women's autonomy and it should legislate for easy access to transport. I would argue that it is not easy to abolish the male guardianship system, since it is deeply embedded in Saudi society and it is directly linked to the patriarchal system and to some interpretations of Islam. However, I believe that change is possible with the support of government, particularly as the guardianship system is a social norm rather than a religious matter.

8.2.3 Organizational Processes and Practices

According to the respondents in this study there are two main suggestions that organizations could adopt to facilitate Saudi women's career advancement. These are more professional training and development provision for women, and the amendment of organizational practices and procedures.

8.2.3.1 Professional Training and Development

Respondents were aware of the importance of professional training and development programmes for women's career advancement. Accordingly, and since the current training programmes in which Saudi working women enrol continue to be strongly influenced by gendered socio-cultural stereotypes (see section 6.3.7), respondents in this study suggested that women in management need a new approach to training and development. Training programmes are needed in areas such as leadership skills, business and administration, team-building, interpersonal skills and assertiveness skills. Respondents thought such skills training will provide women managers with techniques and strategies to help them to be confident and competent, to perform a full range of

management tasks effectively and most importantly to be qualified for leadership positions. One manager argued:

“To improve women’s situation at work, there should be unceasing training for women to make them qualified and knowledgeable about the world of management [...] and the existing training models should be changed so that the image of women in society may change” (Ohoud, middle manager).

The participants argued that Saudi women need specific training in leadership skills such as assertiveness. The justification for such emphasis was that women in Saudi society are socialized to believe that they are inferior to men and thus they are encouraged to believe that senior positions belong to men and that women should only play supportive roles (see sections 6.3.4, 6.3.7 & 6.3.9). Also, women tend to deny their rights and to shy away from speaking up as they fear their voices being heard or misunderstood. The following account illustrates these views:

“I think skills like assertiveness come first in our society because women have been raised to shy away from their rights and they fear for their voices to be heard” (Heba, middle manager).

This situation is very stressful for women to manage and it draws attention away from the main organizational aims and objectives. Hence it was suggested that designing and implementing specific training and development programmes for women will help to increase the number of women in senior leadership positions and make them fully equal to men without discrimination.

8.2.3.2 Changing Organizational Policies and Procedures

Training and development programmes to enhance women’s careers are not enough, according to my respondents, who believed that Saudi public sector organizations also need to change or restructure their policies and procedures to enable women to move up the ladder. Thus, they suggested a number of ways to improve women’s positions in organizations, including implementing new rules and regulations to achieve gender equality; sanctions against people who misuse the system; establishing clear communication channels; and the recognition of accumulated experience.

Implementing new rules and regulations to achieve gender equality at senior management level was the main step that respondents suggested needs to be taken. This could mean changing the power structure in the organizations. This is really the heart of

the complexity because the organization is a microcosm of the wider society within which it operates. In section 6.3.2, the organizational structure was labelled with different names such as ‘tribal administration’ or ‘patriarchal administration’: all of these terms point to the fact that women are in a subordinate position. In this regard, one respondent suggested that organizations need to make changes that might include designing and implementing new rules and regulations to ensure justice in the recruitment and selection procedures, and in the promotion and the performance appraisal system. Also, she strongly insisted that, above all, the use of *wasta* must be abolished as it puts many talented employees (both men and women) at a disadvantage. She felt that in doing so, equality would be achieved in the workplace, not only on a gender basis, but also in terms of race and class. This would ensure a meritocratic system, one in which people were promoted on the basis of their competencies.

“Women’s case is not an easy one! It is not a matter of training and educating them. I think we need a total reform to change our bureaucratic system or tribal administration, or patriarchal administration [...] You can call it anything but all has the same meaning, men at the top of the ladder and women at the bottom [...] We need to improve the performance appraisal system, have clear job descriptions, implement new rules and regulations to achieve equality between men and women and above all to eliminate *wasta* which damages many talented people, men and women, who do not have a powerful network or come from the lower class” (Reem, senior manager).

An additional organizational policy that the women suggested was to hold to account any individual who violated the systems that were in place to ensure gender parity. This practice of accountability would be one way to ensure that equality between men and women was maintained in the public sector. One woman manager, for example, called for a proper application of the rules and regulations and asserted that if anyone abuses the system; he or she must be questioned and punished. She said:

“There must be a proper application of the rules and regulations which state that there is equality between men and women [...] There must be accountability for individuals who violate the systems. Anyone who abuses the use of the system should liable to punishment” (Hanaa, middle manager).

The communication system was also reported as presenting a big problem to women managers (see section 6.3.5). This is a hugely important issue since it can be viewed in relation not only to the constraints it places on the relationship between men and women

within the working environment in Saudi but also to the ability of Saudi Arabia to compete at a global level – not least due to the expense of having to create separate spaces to accommodate women workers. Also, there are a number of talented and potentially effective communicators amongst the women who were interviewed, and their skills are not being fully utilised. Accordingly respondents stated that there was a need to introduce clear communication channels between men and women. An identification of the appropriate channels of communication with regard to written, verbal or electronic methods or face-to-face communication would help to overcome the communication barriers that exist in the workplace. It would also ensure that all members of the organization know what is expected from them.

“For women to succeed at management work, a clear communication channel between the men’s branch and women’s branch is very vital”
(Ohoud, middle manager).

Although communication is a critical issue in the workplace, the respondents gave only general advice on how to improve the channels of communication. Interestingly, they did not discuss how this could be done in practice; they left the door open for discussion. Perhaps their reticence was due to the fact that it is very difficult to confront this issue directly since it is linked to sexual morality and all of the prohibitions around the policing of women’s bodies and their behaviour. On a very practical level communication will be hampered by the rules about segregation. For example, the practice of segregation excludes women from important meetings with male colleagues thus making it physically impossible for them to have their voices heard. In addition, it is fraught with all the psychological tensions and difficulties that are highlighted above.

The last area that was pointed out by respondents is the recognition of the women’s accumulated management experience in organizations. It is no secret that Saudi women’s experience in management has a short history (see Chapter 2), but they have been able to accumulate valuable experience and knowledge in managerial work coupled with an understanding of workplace policies and procedures (see Chapters 6 & 7). Accordingly, the respondents argued that women with long managerial experience should be given the opportunity to climb the career ladder to higher positions. A top management position, like any position, can be gained and the necessary skills can be learned through daily work practices and interaction with others. Women only need to be given the opportunity to be in top positions, as they have proved themselves to be

very talented, capable and motivated (see section 7.2.4). Also, the use of women's accumulated management experience will allow members of organizations and society in general to accept and expect the gradual promotion of women. One manager explained this idea in the following account:

“I wish my long experience in administration was accumulative (rather than) a mere commission that ends on a specific date [...] I mean that administrative work should be a process that leads a woman from one position to a higher one, which means to climb up the hierarchy [...] This would make the members of society accept and expect the gradual promotion of women, just as the case is with men” (Ohoud, middle manager).

To sum up, organizations have a huge responsibility for ensuring the existence of a system that treats men and women equally, so that women's careers can progress to top positions.

8.2.4 Women's Strategies

The women managers in this study suggested that for women to be able to hold top positions, they need to build up women's networks and establish their competence.

8.2.4.1 Building up Women's Networks

The act of forming a professional women's network was seen by a quarter of the respondents as an essential step towards improving women's careers into higher managerial positions since social norms prevent them from joining the men's social club or *diwaniyah* or *majlis*. The *diwaniyah* refers to a place where men gather to discuss various issues that are related to family, work, politics or other topics. It is similar to the idea of the 'old boys' network in the Western sense. It is a place for men to learn, and to exchange and share information. Women in Saudi Arabia tend to be excluded from the *diwaniyah* since it is seen as the centre of male socialization and the centre for sharing important information related to organizational politics and decision-making. Thus the respondents suggested that establishing women's networks could help to promote women in different ways. First, women's networks will help women with sharing knowledge amongst women working in different organizations. This idea is explored in the following account:

“I think networking with men in our society is not tolerated. We are a conservative society [...] For that reason, we women do not go to *diwaniyah* [...] Therefore, I think we need to form our own *diwaniyah* to discuss our concerns and problems” (Asma, middle manager).

Also, it was suggested that women’s networks will encourage women to talk about the issues that concern them and to develop the required skills, abilities and attitudes for leadership. In addition, women’s networks can help women to gain recognition as a group in order to campaign for their rights. As one manager said:

“I just want to remind all women in Saudi that “rights can be fought for and cannot be given”. This could be done through forming their own group to stand up for their rights as a group and to work hard to achieve their goals” (Arwa, senior manager).

Furthermore, women’s networks will help women to secure their rights in the workplace and will help to increase awareness of the importance of women’s roles among members of the wider society, as the following comment indicates:

“For women to be able to achieve equality at work, to identify priorities and to raise awareness among community members, they need to develop synergistic relations with other women. They need to form a professional network for women or even to form their own union to secure their rights in the workplace” (Nawal, middle manager).

One senior manager agreed that the formation of women’s networks would be highly beneficial to their career advancement and she argued that women are capable of creating their own opportunities, like men. However, she suggested that first, women need to stop competing with each other and they need to stop feeling threatened by other women, either in the workplace or in a social environment. She said:

“I believe that men create their own chances and I’m sure that Saudi women are capable of creating their own chances and can be contributing citizens in all fields, not only in leadership, but they must stop competing with each other. They should support each other and make their own group” (Reem, senior manager).

From the perspective of the interviewees, the idea of forming women’s professional networks is to assist women to improve themselves at all levels, socially, professionally and personally, which means empowering women.

8.2.4.2 Establishing Competence

The interviewees argued that women can enhance their abilities and become effective leaders by establishing that they are competent, although as they admitted, this is not an easy task due to embedded social cultural expectations that view women as less capable (see section 6.3.8). Some respondents believed that women can hold leadership positions, but they need first to understand that they are fully capable of carrying out any task. One manager suggested that by taking on tasks, women will gain self-respect and this will reinforce their confidence in their own natural abilities. She continued by giving examples of women across different countries, including Muslim and Arab, who have all succeeded in positions that were traditionally reserved for men. She believed that these achievements should be highlighted in Saudi society. She further challenged the traditional view that men are better equipped for leadership because they are logical and rational by 'nature'. She asserted that Saudi women are also logical and rational and that there are some men who are perceived as emotional and irrational, as is the case with other people in different cultures. Here, this manager was trying to stress that women's leadership styles are not necessarily any different from men's, but it is the process of socialization during childhood that reinforces certain behaviours (see section 6.3.7). Hence women must change the illusion that they are not capable of exercising leadership. She said:

“I think our problem is women themselves. They need to change themselves in order to get rid of the illusion that their capacities are less than those of men, [...] an illusion that is fed to them from their early childhood. They need to train themselves on how to control their emotions and to change the idea that women are emotional and men are rational [...] There are so many examples of women across Muslim or non-Muslim countries [...] for example Benazir Bhutto and Khaleda Zia [...] who have proved that they are able to lead and control their passions. Men are not always rational and they cannot always make good decisions” (Asma, middle manager)

Similarly, another respondent said that for women to hold senior leadership positions, they needed to work hard and to accept challenging tasks. Of course, again this is not easy, especially in a culture like Saudi Arabia in which women are viewed as being weak or inferior to men (see sections 6.3.7 & 6.3.8). Therefore women must trust in their abilities and take an active role in their organizations. One woman manager believed that women in management must step out of their comfort zone.

“For women to improve their careers and to be more visible in organizations, they need to step out of their comfort zone and do the extra bits of work, accept additional roles and tasks [...] Women should insist in taking part in their organizations” (Huda, lower manager).

Leadership positions require extra efforts from women. They need to learn how to trust their capabilities and to be highly competent by accepting additional tasks and challenging assignments. However, can these women managers stand alone to create their opportunities?

8.2.5 Women’s Own Resistance

The findings of this study illustrate that women in management are faced with socio-cultural or organizational constraints which have resulted in reduced opportunities in senior positions in the Saudi public sector. Throughout Chapters 6 and 7, the women expressed different feelings about this situation, such as stress, frustration, disappointment, anger, alienation, the sense of being excluded and the sense that they did not receive due recognition for their hard work. Therefore, it came as no surprise when some women managers suggested that women should not be passive in their organizations and further that they should actively resist and challenge their situation in management. One woman manager believed that nothing will change unless women do something about it, and she referred to a Qur’anic verse which states that God will not change what a person has, until that person makes an effort to change and is committed to that decision. What this manager was trying to say was that women must be proactive in bringing about the change that they wish to create, and in this way, the culture of the organization will be changed.

“Women should believe that nothing will happen until they do something about it to change. The Almighty Allah [God] said, “Allah does not change what you have, until you change what is in yourself” (Huda, lower manager)

The women managers in this study reported the different strategies of resistance they had deployed in order to express their unhappiness about the situation. These strategies included disobedience, a refusal to carry out instructions, adopting a tough manner and, occasionally, being ‘aggressive’. As discussed in section 6.3.4, one woman manager, for example, described her struggle with management over her right to be promoted based on her competence rather than her family background. Thus she responded to this injustice by being very aggressive and tough. She resisted the notion of her evaluation

being based on her tribal origin, and she rejected nepotism and favouritism as the criteria for judging someone's work. She revealed her determination in the following comment.

“I will fight to the end to get my rights back [...] by being very forceful and calling the head of the department every day and I think I have the patience to do so” (Nada, lower manager).

Another woman manager refused to be treated as a ‘token’ or to perform only routine tasks since she had a lengthy experience of work and she was highly qualified. Therefore, she tended to ignore the demands of her male boss in the men's administration. This woman has provided an inspiring example of someone who refuses to defer to male superiority and she has the courage of her convictions. She knows that she knows best!

“I really do not follow what my [male]boss at the men's branch asks me [...] I do what I think is best for women's branch [...] He is not on the ground and does not understand what we are facing as women on a daily basis” (Ohoud, middle manager).

As is evident from the above examples, the women adopt diverse forms of resistance. It is important to recognize that they face huge challenges in trying to overcome the rigid constraints that are the result of Saudi Arabia's conservatism. The interaction of social and cultural values and religious teaching is what lies behind women's exclusion from leadership positions in public life.

8.3 Summary

The main goal of this chapter was to investigate how the women viewed their own situations and what suggestions they might have for advancing their careers. The respondents proposed a number of strategies and procedures for overcoming the career constraints that currently face women. These strategies included policies that are designed to overcome traditional stereotypes; for example, positive messages about women's role and women's right to equality should be promoted through various channels in order to reach a wide audience; political action is deemed necessary in order to change the guardianship system, legislative reforms are needed along with the provision of easy access to transport. Also, participants thought organizations should provide more training and development programmes for women and practices within

the organization should be changed in order to comply with the existing legislative framework policies in the public sector so that women will be regarded as 'equal employees', i.e. have access to the same career development opportunities as men. Additionally, participants argued, women should be encouraged to build up their own networks and to believe that they are competent. Lastly, various strategies of resistance at an individual level were also suggested.

The following chapter will further discuss the findings of this study. It will offer a more in-depth analysis of the various factors that are intertwined in ways that either help or constrain the development of women's careers in the Saudi public sector.

Chapter Nine: Factors Influencing Women's Access to Senior Management: Analysis and Discussion

“To become leaders, women must navigate through the labyrinth, overcoming barriers and dead ends along the way” (Eagly & Carli, 2007: 161).

9.1 Introduction

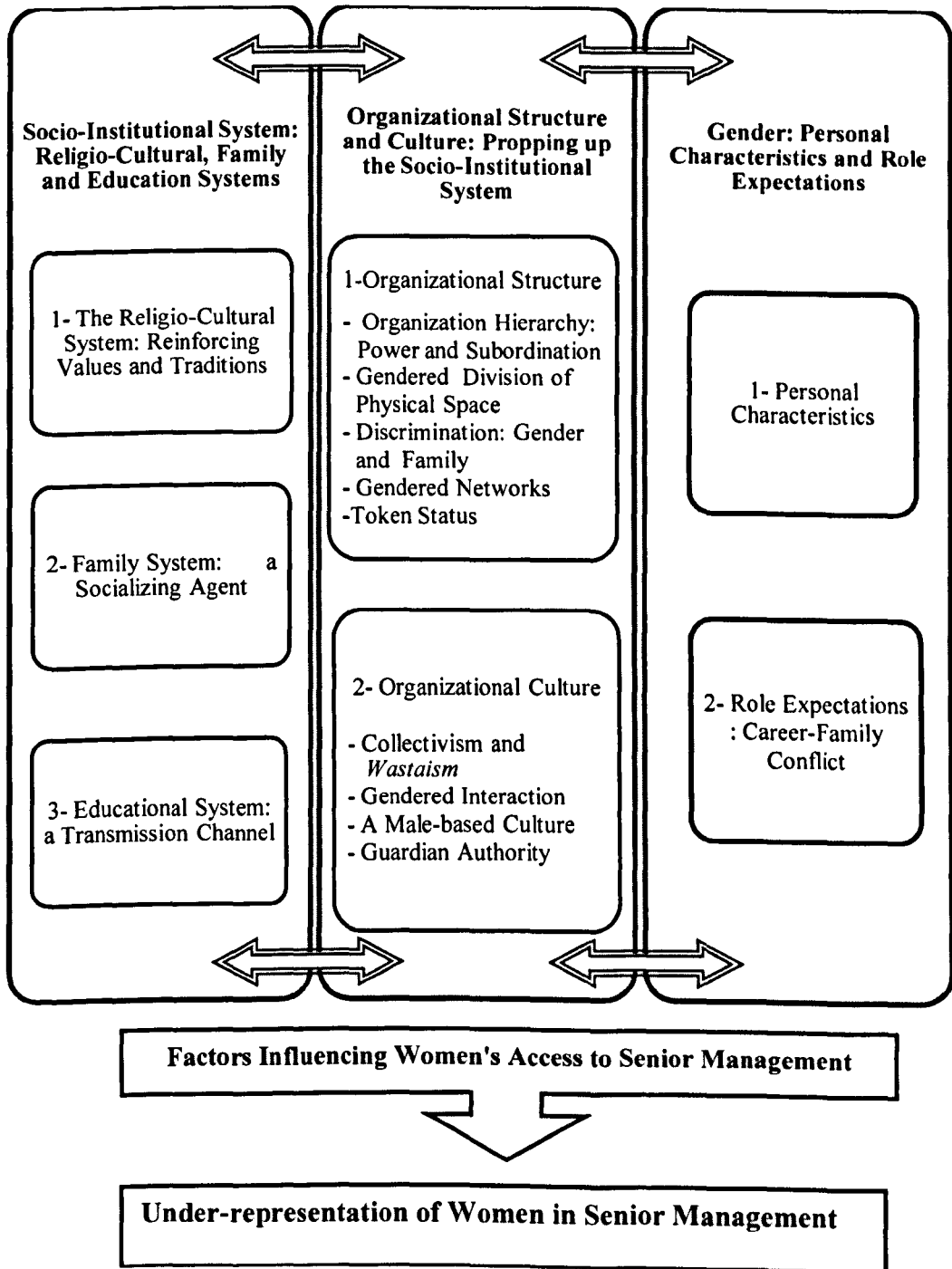
This chapter will discuss the findings of this study with the intention of addressing the research questions. However, the analysis of the findings proved to be a very complicated and difficult task since the picture they revealed concerning the experiences of women managers in the Saudi public sector was a complex one. This complexity is due to an intertwining of the public and private domains, which then creates a specific configuration of socio-cultural values, religious ideology and socio-political stances. These factors subsequently feed into the gendered nature of public sector organizational structures and cultures. This chapter is divided into two main sections. In order to address the main research question ‘Why are there not more women in senior management, in the Saudi public sector?’ the first section will discuss the major factors that influence women’s career progression into senior positions. This section is divided into three sub-sections: the social and institutional system, organizational structure and culture, and gender characteristics and role expectations. The discussion will be linked to the literature reviews in chapters 2 and 3. The second section will consider the interactions between the social and institutional system, organization and gender in order to explain how these three factors interact in a dynamic way, which in turn, influences the position of women in the organizational hierarchy.

9.2 Factors Influencing Women's Access to Senior Management

My analysis of the study findings was guided by a multi-dimensional perspective, namely, Acker’s (1992) gendered organizations theory and Fagenson’s (1990) gender-organizations-system theory, as introduced in Chapter 3. These theories help to identify the underlying assumptions and practices of organizations and to assess their influence on the careers of women managers in the Saudi public sector. Therefore, I have identified the constraints faced by woman managers in their career paths. To this end, I have developed a theoretical framework based on the findings of the qualitative data

analysis that would suit women in management in the Saudi context, as presented in figure 9.1.

Figure 9.1 Socio-institutional System, Organization and Gender Framework



This framework details the dynamic interaction between the social system, and the organization and gender factors that are affecting Saudi women's access to top

positions. I call this framework the 'socio-institutional system, organization and gender'. It suggests that Saudi women's experience in management is very different from that of women in the Western context, the context in which most previous studies have been conducted (see Chapter 3). Also, this framework suggests that the status of women in Saudi society in both the private and public spheres, which includes managerial life, is defined in relation to the social-cultural system of Saudi Arabia (see section 9.2.1). Additionally, this framework suggests that Saudi public organizations are a reflection of the larger society in terms of their structure and culture, including values, norms, artefacts, regulations and rules (see section 9.2.2). Furthermore, the framework implies that women's personalities and identities develop as a result of socialization in the family system and in the education system, which is reinforced later in the workplace. These institutions are the conduit for transmitting the values and beliefs of the social-cultural system (see section 9.2.3). Thus, in relation to women's career advancement, it appears that the status of women in the larger society coupled with cultural attitudes toward women as leaders or managers, and gender role stereotypes all come together to play a role in women's subordination in the organizational hierarchy, even though some women are supported by their families. In turn, it seems that there needs to be a change in the cultural values and norms toward women as managers in the larger society coupled with a change in organizational culture. There is also a need for measures to be put in place to help the women managers to believe in themselves. All of these measures could potentially help women to achieve equal positions at the senior management level (see section 10.4).

The framework in Figure 9.1 clearly shows the cyclical process of which women's experiences in organizations may be influenced not only by their gender or the organizational context but also by the social and institutional system within which these organizations function (Fagenson, 1990). This is because organizations are located in societies with particular cultural values, social and institutional practices, ideologies, history, laws and policies, expectations and stereotyped roles and behaviours for men and women, which in turn, affect women's positions in management (Martin et al., 1983). Hence the production of the framework is extremely important in terms of understanding the complex experiences of Saudi women in management. It offers a comprehensive and holistic view of the 'glass ceiling' phenomenon in the Saudi context. This section focuses on addressing three factors which interact in complex

ways: namely the social and institutional system, organizational structure and culture, and gender characteristics and role expectations.

It is important to recognize that all of the factors influencing women's access to senior management positions are interconnected and often overlapping; this is further explained in the discussion below.

9.2.1 Socio-Institutional System: Religio-Cultural, Family and Education Systems

In order to reveal the taken-for-granted assumptions and beliefs about gender that are embedded in organization life and then come to play a significant role in determining the positions of gender in the workplace, particularly women's positions in management, it is necessary to examine the socio-institutional systems in Saudi. This study reveals that there are three main socio-institutional systems: religio-culture, family and education.

9.2.1.1 The Religio-Cultural System: Reinforcing Values and Traditions

As discussed in Chapter 2, 'culture' can be construed as a set of values, attitudes and meanings that are learned in particular societies and which function to distinguish one society from another (Barakat, 1993). According to the study findings, Saudi culture, like Arab culture, has its foundations in the Islamic religion and Arab cultural values and traditions. Hence the resulting social structure in Saudi Arabia is patriarchal and it is nested in the kinship system. This system consists of some important practices, principles and values such as honour, respect and protection, that are intended to maintain the unity of kin members (see section 9.2.1.2). For example, men have roles as the heads of their families and as such they have absolute power over resources. Hence they are responsible for the protection of all members in the family, including the women. On the other hand, women's role is mainly perceived as reproduction and supporting the authority of men in order to maintain family unity. This idea was expressed by a respondent, who said, "It is our inherited cultural beliefs and values that have created the different status between men and women". These findings resonate with what Walby (1990) referred to as the 'patriarchal mode of production' which is related to housework. In housework women's labour is expropriated by husbands or fathers.

Religion is the central component of culture (Barakat, 1993; Geertz, 1993). As the dominant religion in Saudi Arabia, Islam has played a significant role in defining and shaping its culture, and, most particularly, it has shaped the relationship between men and women. According to the respondents in this study, Islam came to uplift women's rights and therefore it emphasises the equality between the genders in every aspect of life, including seeking leading positions in the workplace. The broad outline of this equality can be perceived in many Qur'anic verses. Nevertheless, the presumption of equality between men and women that is found in Islam has been subject to restrictions by the different interpretations of Muslim scholars. Religious scholars have interpreted the Qur'anic verses as referring to women's position in society within the framework of the social-cultural system. Therefore, the women interviewees repeatedly emphasised that Islam should not be blamed for the subordination of women in society or in the workplace; the fault lies with cultural attitudes and narrow interpretations of Islam by some religious scholars, as revealed by one respondent, who said, "Islam gave women their full rights, but erroneous interpretation of religion gave men more powers over women". This finding echoes Afshar (1994), Ahmed (1992), Joseph (1996) and Mernissi (2011), who indicated that the existing gender inequality is not due to Islam as a religion, but to social-cultural interpretations of Islam by Muslim jurists. Such writers claim that Muslim jurists have made interpretations concerning women into a form of law in order to justify and legitimise the hierarchal social and cultural order between women and men. Also, this finding resonates with Walby (1989) who argued that religion is an example of a patriarchal discourse that lays down the correct forms of conduct for men and women, and which provides men with more credibility.

This study showed two specific examples of interpretations of the Qur'anic verses that are linked to family values and the traditional social system. These interpretations justify and legitimise the patriarchal order and, as a result, they come to influence the position of women managers in the workplace. These are the notions of *al-qiwama* and the issue of women's modesty and morality.

The notion of *al-qiwama*, as explained by the findings of this study (see section 6.3.2), is widely interpreted by religious scholars (particularly the *Wahhabi* School which predominates in Saudi Arabia) as meaning that God created men as superior to women. Accordingly men are assigned to take charge of women's affairs, both in the household

and in society at large. The idea of *al-qiwama* in the Qur'an deals with the particularities of family life (husband and wife), and is interpreted as meaning that the one who works more and earns more will take responsibility for the other. Here, *al-qiwama* is understood to express the shared economic obligations of both husband and wife towards the family. As a consequence men and women are treated equally in the Qur'an, but a narrow interpretation of it has facilitated a situation in which there is no clear demarcation between public and private in 'public' institutions, as revealed by a respondent: "...they get the wrong idea of the meaning of *al-qiwama* in the Qur'an". Thus the patriarchal power structure of the family replicates itself in the public institutions and this 'appears' to be sanctioned by the highest authority: religion. Accordingly, women are excluded from leading positions in public organizations; this idea will be explored in section 9.2.2.1.

The second example is related to the issue of morality, which shows how the interpretation of some verses of the Qur'an¹⁸ is closely linked to the family's social values. Modesty and morality are part of the Muslim faith and these values form the cornerstones of the Arab cultural heritage, which instructs both men and women to dress modestly and to behave morally. This study revealed that according to the ideology and interpretation of the Saudi religious establishment, women's morality and modesty tends to be judged in terms of maintaining sexual purity. Sexual purity can be preserved by the practice of veiling and by the avoidance of face-to-face contact with non-*mahram* men, as revealed by a respondent: "Mixing with non-*mahram* men is *haram* [forbidden] in Islam [...] to protect the woman's *sharaff* (honour) and her family from any bad reputation" (see section 6.3.5). In Saudi Arabia Muslim scholars view any mixing in the workplace between men and women who are not related by blood as forbidden. Under the religio-cultural system, there is an obligation to protect the

18 See Qur'an, *Surah* Light, 31: "And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their modesty; and to display of their adornment only that which is apparent, and to draw their veils over their bosoms, and not to reveal their adornment save to their own husbands or fathers or husbands' fathers, or their sons or their husbands' sons, or their brothers or their brothers' sons or sisters' sons, or their women, or their slaves, or male attendants who lack vigour, or children who know naught of women's nakedness...."

See also Qur'an, *Surah* An-Nur, 30 - 31: "Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them: and God is well acquainted with all that they do" Qur'an (24: 30-31).

family's honour in both private and public spaces, and this depends primarily on women's morality, since they are seen as symbols of purity.

This interpretation of women's morality and modesty had a direct influence on the structure of the labour market, which was designed to have separate work spaces for women and men, and women were and continue to be required to wear the veil when they are in contact with men at work, as will be discussed further in section 9.2.2.1. As such the idea of gender segregation within the Saudi context resonates with what Mernissi (1992) argues, that women's segregation is a mere institutionalization of authoritarianism, resulting from specific interpretations of the Qur'anic texts that reinforce male power in Muslim societies.

The previous discussion has shown that Islam and the culture are intimately related to each other and if isolated from each other, they lose their original meanings (Geertz, 1993). Therefore, cultural values and religious beliefs came together to justify males as dominant. This is the case in the Saudi context where men are privileged over women, and accordingly they are assigned guardianship over them (see section 9.2.2.2). The justification for male guardianship over women within the family or in society at large is that men are assigned both economic responsibility and the role of protectors of the family honour. To invoke shame constitutes a crime in Islamic law and is regarded as unforgivable behaviour in society because it could damage the family's reputation. The subordination of women within the household has implications for the creation of gender inequality in the workplace. This means that at every level of the organizational hierarchy, women will be disadvantaged and, most particularly, they will be precluded from holding any senior managerial positions in public sector organizations. This will be elaborated further in section 9.2.2.

9.2.1.2 Family System: A Socializing Agent

The family is the main unit in Saudi society. Therefore, marriage is a highly valued social institution as it is seen to maintain the cultural norms and value system. The role of the family is to transmit the patriarchal values and belief system that operate on the macro-level through the process of socialization. Therefore, males are socialized to be dominant, proactive and forceful in order to prepare them for their manhood roles as fathers or husbands who are held responsible for heading the household. By contrast,

females are raised to be caring, dependent, passive, and obedient. They are socialized to prepare them for motherhood, a role in which they will be expected to provide care for the family, and to remain dependent on the head of the household or their male guardian. One respondent explained that “the process of the social upbringing of boys and girls intensifies the distinction between them” (see section 6.3.7). This resonates with Powell (2010), who suggested that the family contributes to socializing children into gender roles, which then may be perpetuated and reinforced in the workplace and may negatively affect the career development of individuals. In turn, these roles form people’s expectations about what are thought to be identifiable as female and male characteristics.

As a result, these fixed gender roles and expectations indirectly support gender stereotyping in the workplace by reinforcing the ‘think-manager-think-male’ phenomenon (Schein, 2007), since the concept of gender becomes significant in the organization (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004). For example, jobs are constructed along gendered lines and this practice is an outcome of the practices and values that are embedded and reinforced by the family structure and the prevailing cultural ideology. This explains why Saudi women managers are assigned lower status than men and it explains why they are excluded and marginalized from decision-making positions. This will be discussed further in section 9.2.2.1

Also, the family helps to form a sense of belonging among its group members through the process of socialization. Each family unit teaches its members that certain forms of behaviour are correct, for example, loyalty, reliability and conformity are encouraged in order to maintain the strong connection among group members. As a respondent commented, “Get some help today, and you will help someone else another day” (see section 7.2.2). This means that the individual’s identity is linked to the collective identity of the larger group, either the tribe or the extended family. This is what Ibn Khaldun (1967) called *alsabiyya* or solidarity, which helps to strengthen the bonds between family members. Thus each family member has to be part of the social network. Consequently, the use of connections among family and friends or the idea of ‘*wasta*’ applies not only in the private sphere but also in the workplace; this will be discussed further in section 9.2.2.2. The women who are involved in this process are expected to rely on male family members for economic and social support because the

identity of a woman is directly linked to her family, particularly its male family members.

Hence it is the male family members who play an essential role in the lives of women managers. The evidence from this study suggests that in Saudi culture the relationship between men and women has a profound influence on women's careers. Educated men play a crucial role in helping their wives or daughters to become more visible in society, as reported by one manager: "My career success was the result of the support of my men". Fathers provide support by financing the education of their daughters and by encouraging them to pursue higher education inside Saudi Arabia or abroad and by generally encouraging them to pursue their interests and to realize their potential. This support was evident in the case of those women managers who had studied abroad, who accounted for more than half of the respondents (see section 6.2). Furthermore, these educated fathers were highly influential in determining women's career choices and they were instrumental in their subsequent successes, as one interviewee commented: "When I chose my career my father was my guide". Mothers also were seen to be supporters but rather on an emotional level (see section 7.2.3). This resonates with what Elliott and Stead (2008) demonstrated, that the family plays an important role in shaping women's ambition to succeed by providing support, networks and advice. However, with regard to the type of support women managers in this study received from their parents, it seems it is different from Aycan's (2004) and Halpern and Cheung's (2008) findings. In these studies the women leaders viewed their mothers as facilitators and supporters to their careers and not their fathers. The findings indicate that Saudi women managers view their fathers as career facilitators and this is perhaps related to the fact that fathers are educated and have more experience and knowledge about career development. These men are already working in the public spaces, whereas by contrast mothers are not working outside and therefore their knowledge is limited.

In addition, an educated husband was seen to play an important role in a woman's education and her career (see section 7.5). Husbands were seen as supporters and consultants, who gave their wives permission to travel for purposes of study or to allow them to attend training courses or conferences, which helped the women to advance their careers. One manager described the nature of this relationship by stating that "My husband is the wall that I lean on". It could be the case that a husband will support his

wife because both share the belief that it is important for women to become better people in organizations and in society as a whole. This attitude might well reflect their level of education and their awareness of women's role in Saudi society. The fact that husbands act as a career facilitators and consultants within the Saudi context is an interesting finding when considering the literature on career facilitators and mentoring. The career facilitators and mentors are generally associated with the workplace and are not usually family members (Allan et al., 2007; Ragins et al., 1998) (see section 9.2.2.1). However, it could be that there is a lack of mentoring programmes to facilitate the advancement of women's careers, and therefore they rely on their male family members for career support.

Nevertheless, the husband who is a support for his wife to lean on can be contrasted with the husband who is a metaphorical wall that blocks his wife's progress because he feels threatened by her success. Therefore, it was noted from the findings that not all Saudi men were supportive of their wives' careers. In fact, some husbands were the main constraints to their wives' careers. These husbands adopted a traditional male role by exercising socially sanctioned power over their wives. One explanation might be that they fear losing control of their successful wives and thus their own status is threatened. Those women who wanted to succeed but were hindered by the negative attitudes of their husbands were faced by even greater challenges in their careers. For some, divorce was the only solution to resolve the tension between family and career success, as one respondent explained, "My success ... ended my marriage". Others managed to walk a tightrope between work and home. At work they acted as strong and assertive managers, whilst at home they adopted a humble, submissive stance by conforming to the prevailing social stereotype of mother and homemaker, for example, one manager said "I have to play the game" (see section 7.2.3).

As the above discussion makes clear, the relationships between Saudi men and their daughters and wives are very complex, and thus it is unjust to stereotype Saudi men as repressive, authoritarian or oppressive. There was clear evidence of caring and solidarity between men and their daughters and wives. It was noticeable that the women who were self-assured and had the desire to advance their careers (see section 7.2.4 & 7.2.5) were successful in their professional lives. These women most often reported that they had strong relationships with their men – fathers or husbands. However, there were

some men, particularly husbands, who continued to show negative attitudes towards their wives' careers. These attitudes effectively hindered their wives from pursuing higher managerial positions.

9.2.1.3 Educational System: A Transmission Channel

The current study underlines that it was only relatively recently (during the early 1960s) that the Saudi government, led by King Faisal, introduced formal public education for females. Women were encouraged to attend educational institutions, despite opposition from conservative factions (see section 7.2.1). The support of the Saudi government, through its various development plans, along with economic prosperity, has continued to ensure that free education is available. This situation has played a major role in encouraging more females to obtain higher education, and this was widely appreciated by respondents. One woman revealed that "Education is like the water we drink and the air we breathe". This idea was also confirmed by the study findings regarding the high qualifications of participants (see section 6.2). Indeed, the World Bank (2005) has recognized Saudi Arabia's progress in women's education.

The findings also revealed that higher education has come to hold the promise of social respect and recognition for women, and it has opened a route for them to pursue professional careers in education or medicine. As disclosed by this respondent, "Higher education brings prestige and improves women's status in the family and society" (see section 7.2.1). This result is consistent with Mernissi (1993) and Al-Lamki (1999) who stated that access to education seems to have a tremendous impact on women's status in society with regard to their perception of themselves, their social role and their expectations of social mobility. As a result, it is at the root of women's emancipation.

Although the education system has helped to improve the status of Saudi women in the public sector, it was evident from the findings that education is designed along gender lines. The education system reinforces a cultural ideology that is influenced by religious traditions, and it reminds both men and women of their place in society and the role that they should play (see section 6.3.8). For example, the curricula that are designed to suit women's traditional roles in society had a restrictive impact on women's education and on their subsequent employment. As indicated by an interviewee, "School books depict women's place as in the home and they depict men as actors in the public sphere". Girls

are taught to perform their duties as good daughters, good wives and good mothers, and they are encouraged to work as teachers and doctors, as these occupations are thought to be the ones most suited to women's nature. On the other hand, boys are taught to take a more assertive role, for example, to think more independently and to be more active in the public sphere (see section 6.3.7). These findings agree with Powell (2010), who argues that school, like parents, contributes to socializing children into gender roles. Also, this study result is in line with Mihail (2006) who indicated that education continues to spread gender stereotypes through its educational curricula, thereby acting as an agent of socialization.

Higher education is also gendered in the sense that certain fields of study, such as political science and architecture, are reserved for men. Women are grouped into certain areas, such as social and religious studies, education and health studies, as highlighted by a respondent: "We are still not allowed to study certain subjects" (see section 7.2.1). This is unlike other parts of the world, where women are not excluded from certain fields, although they are not actively encouraged to enrol in traditional male fields, since education continues to be experienced largely along gendered lines (Davidson & Burke, 2011; Holdsworth et al., 2007).

Saudi women are confined to those areas of specialisation in education and employment that reflect societal perceptions of their 'appropriate role'. However, these restrictions lead to three of the major problems that women face. First, there is strong competition among women to access higher education, and their admission requires higher achievement in high school. Second, the output of women's higher education is much larger than the employment opportunities that are available in the public sector. This situation could result in higher unemployment rates among women, as indicated by respondents (see section 7.2.1). The third problem is that the gendering of higher education did not help women to access senior leadership positions, as was evident in this study. All the respondents except four were still in lower or middle management, even though sixteen of them held doctorates (see section 6.2). As one interviewee disclosed, "To hold higher managerial positions... is rarely possible in Saudi Arabia". This result is unlike some research findings in different contexts, for example, Metz and Tharenou (2001) who indicated that women's human capital is an important element that supports women's advancement to upper management positions in organizations.

Nevertheless, it agrees with other study findings such as Adler and Izraeli (1994) and Simpson et al. (2004).

It is clear from the previous discussion that the women were strongly encouraged to pursue higher education, and it has provided them with higher levels of social visibility through their involvement in public sector organizations. Holding professional status gave women more social respect, increased independence and an awareness of their legal rights in society. However, education has been used to reinforce the gender ideologies that are rooted patriarchal values. In other words, as Smith (1987) argued, the education system is an important element in this process of domination because it disseminates a certain patriarchal ideology. This means that Saudi women may not be permitted to achieve equal representation in senior positions in the government sector, even if they have the appropriate degree.

9.2.2 Organizational Structure and Culture: Propping up the Socio-Institutional System

In the preceding section, it appeared that distinctions between the genders are deeply rooted in the Saudi social system and its institutions, including religion, family and education. In the wider social system this gender distinction acts as a major barrier to women's full participation in the public sphere. The organization is a socially situated institution in which gender distinctions are deeply embedded in organizational process and practices (Acker, 1990), and organizational patterns such as culture, structure, and policies shape women's behaviours in organizations (Fagenson, 1990). With these factors in mind, this section will focus on identifying the organizational factors that contribute to the absence of women in senior roles. These factors are grouped into two major areas, namely: organizational structure and organizational culture. These two categories overlap (and interact) but each offers an effective way of organising the key ideas in this section.

9.2.2.1 Organizational Structure

In Acker's (1990) theory, the core of the gendering process in organizations is the division between women and men through ordinary organizational practices. She sets out these divisions as follows "divisions of labour, of allowed behaviours, of locations in physical space, of power, including the institutionalized means of maintaining the

divisions in the structures of labour markets, the family, and the state” (Acker, 1990: 146). In this regard, there are five important elements of the organizational structure that are responsible for creating gendered divisions, which in turn, lead to Saudi women’s exclusion from senior positions in the public organizations: these are organizational hierarchy, gendered division of physical space, discrimination, gendered networks and token status, as discussed below.

Organizational Hierarchy: Power and Subordination

An organizational hierarchy is one dimension of the division between genders, which contributes to the subordination of women in organizations (Acker, 1990). In this study, respondents described the ‘official’ structural components of their organizations as being similar to a formal bureaucratic¹⁹ structure in Western organizations in relation to the hierarchy of authority and a division of labour that is based on functional specialization and standardized rules and procedures. However, in practice, it seems that the meaning of the structure of public organizations is different in some respects to those of the West. For example, there were differences regarding the relationships between men and women, and women were differently positioned within the overall structure. This was reflected by one respondent who put it this way: “Our [organization] is a tribal one... we have a clan leader who is equal to the Director-General, and then the closest allies to the Director General, and then followers, and then women... the closer individuals are to the centre of the circle the easier they can reach their purpose, and the further off the women are”. Here it can be observed that the structure of these organizations is characterised first by placing men in the highest positions, which carry power and set rules and regulations (see section 9.2.2.2.). Second, there is a reliance on formal and informal relations to ensure the unity of the group members through flows of information (see section 9.2.2.2, Collectivism & *Wastaism*). Hence Saudi women are

19 See Burns & Stalker (1994).

placed at the bottom of the organization; whereas men are positioned at the top in organizations. This finding echoes those of Acker (1990) and Kanter (1993).

In the context of Saudi Arabia the hierarchical order within its organizations is a reflection of particular religious and social values and beliefs. Within this belief system men are privileged over women, thereby, expressing domination over their female employees in the same way as they would assume authority over the women of their households, according to an interpretation of the Islamic notion of *al-qiwama*. This was illustrated by one respondent: “Men believe that they are the guardians of women in the workplace as if they were at home...they get the wrong idea of the meaning of *al-qiwama* in the Qur’an”. Any leadership position (responsibility or *al-qiwama*) assigned to men in the family unit is taken to imply their exclusive leadership in public life as well. Therefore, women cannot supervise men, since they are perceived as not responsible and their morality and modesty is often expressed in terms of sexual purity, as discussed in section 9.2.1.1. Hence the social and religious meanings that characterise the public sector are linked to the values of the family system; these values have been transferred to public life, to justify excluding women from public leadership positions. Within the organization, private and public life intertwine to form a new type of structure which, in the light of interviewees’ comments, I have chosen to label as ‘private-public administration’.

There is, therefore, a crossover between the private and the public spheres. This crossover means that men are inevitably placed at the top of the organizational hierarchy, and make all the major decisions, such as those concerning recruitment, selection, promotion, performance evaluation and allocation of work, approval of certain projects and budget-granting. On the other hand, women, who are inevitably found at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy, are assigned to do routine jobs or to make ordinary decisions. This was exemplified by respondents who said, “We are kept busy with tiresome, routine tasks” and “Women ... do not hold the final say... men hold all the final decision-making” (see section 6.3.2). In a culture that is based on patriarchy, women are expected, as at home, to behave in an appropriate and subordinate way, and they are not expected to be responsible for making important decisions in organizations, as discussed in section 9.2.2.1.

The interconnection between private space and public space is, in some respects, similar to Walby's (1990) argument. Walby contends that patriarchal ideology in the West has shifted from private towards public patriarchy. However, as seen previously, in the Saudi context the meaning of this shift is somewhat different from its meaning in the Western context. This difference is due to the fact that, in Saudi Arabia, patriarchal ideology is deeply rooted in Islamic beliefs and tribal values.

From the previous discussion, it can be understood that Saudi female managers are enduring another form of patriarchy that derives from socio-religious beliefs. These patriarchal values reinforce the pattern of male domination and female subordination that women have traditionally experienced within the household. Hence it is clear that the organization hierarchy acts as a barrier to women holding leading positions. This is simply because they are women, and higher status in organizations requires a male figure. This finding is akin to those of Broadbridge, (2008), Jamali et al. (2005), Mihail (2006), Mostafa (2005) and Powell (1999), who argue that the exclusion of women is a patriarchal practice that acts to bar women from certain positions in the public sphere, particularly leadership positions

Gendered Division of Physical Space

As discussed in section 9.2.1.1, the workplace was designed to comprise separate buildings or offices for women, as explained by a respondent: "The institutional set-up of our labour market is segmented along many lines: male/female, private/public". One explanation for the existence of the physically segregated places was that when the door was opened for Saudi women to work in the public sector in the 1970s, the Saudi government was faced by very critical questions about how to deal with this specific group of employees in terms of where they should fit, how to engage them in economic activities and what role they should ideally play. Accordingly, the decision-makers created sections/branches/offices for women within the men's institutions: institutions that are based on male values and patterns of domination. As evident in this study, all public sector organizations are physically segregated: the health sector is one exception to this rule, although even there, women work in segregated offices.

Given the parameters that are set by religious teaching and cultural norms and customs or *urf* and *adat wa taqalid* the provision of segregated workplaces was the only way to

permit women to participate in different economic activities such as teaching. As one respondent said, “We do not mix with our men colleagues... *urf* and *adat wa taqalid* in our society prevent us from doing so”. Also, according to respondents, the creation of segregated workplaces is intended to prevent the problem of sexual harassment that it is feared might occur in a mixed environment where women might be seen by men who are not their *mahrims*, and thus be a source of *fitna* (temptation or social disorder), which could potentially damage the reputation of the family and lead to social instability. Segregation has provided a moral work environment. This agrees with Sonbol (2003), who indicated that gender-segregation is related to *urf* (custom) and *Sharia* law which reflects the need to ‘protect’ women from being subjected to sexual harassment. In addition, segregated workplaces have provided more job opportunities, as revealed by one interviewee: “Due to the separation of the sexes, women had more job opportunities...working”. Saudi women hold administrative jobs in the public sector, although mainly at lower and middle level and only in women’s sections. Moreover, segregation between genders in the workplace gives some women a sense of autonomy, since they are working mainly in women’s sections, which enables them to pursue careers. Furthermore, working in women’s sections has, in fact, empowered women and strengthened their solidarity as a group. What is more, some women managers prefer to work in segregated places, as they feel more comfortable in a female-only space.

However, the gendered division of the workspace has created more problems. For example, women are treated as a specific group and they work in a section within the men’s institutions. Also, women in the workplace are generally supervised and subject to decisions coming from men’s institutions. Consequently, they are excluded from decision-making and have limited access to important information or resources that would improve them professionally. As expressed by a respondent, “Segregation ... hurts our chances as women to be exposed, promoted, and enriched professionally” (see Gendered interaction section). Another problem of segregated workspaces is that they lead to unhealthy competition among women, since women are working mainly in the public sector and they are largely restricted to traditionally female fields (education, social work or health). This is perhaps because women feel insecure in their jobs and as a result they compete with each other to prove their commitment to their higher ranking male colleagues.

On the whole, the main conclusion that can be drawn from the above discussion is that in a conservative country like Saudi Arabia, the only way to permit women to enter the public sector was by providing a segregated space and by limiting their presence in public spaces. Of course, this could not occur without the availability of economic wealth, which has helped to provide segregated spaces for each gender. However, this practice has also reinforced the patriarchal system and the social value system, agreeing with Norris (2009). In effect it has reduced the role of women in the labour force, as suggested by Ross (2008), and limited their access to leadership positions in public organizations. The segregated workplace expresses and reinforces a pattern of authority, in which women are under the supervision of men. In fact, women are physically separated from the organization and are subject to surveillance not only from the organizational authorities, but also from the larger social system.

Discrimination: Gender and Family

Generally speaking, in almost all countries men have higher wages and are promoted faster than women (Alimo-Metcalf, 2010; Kumra & Vinnicombe, 2008; Metle, 2002; Wirth, 2004). In Saudi Arabia, the Labour Law guarantees that women and men are equal and should receive the same pay for the same job (see section 2.4.2). However, the women managers in this study reported that they faced both explicit and implicit discrimination which involved excluding and restricting them from opportunities that would help their career development. One respondent commented that the “Labour laws regard men and women as equal ... but the implementation of these laws differs with the different people who are in charge”. Thus it was possible to identify two types of discrimination that were hindering women managers from accessing senior positions in their organizations (see section 6.3.4), namely, gender-based discrimination and family-based discrimination, as discussed below.

- ***Gender-based Discrimination***

Gender-based discrimination refers to a situation in which decision-makers favour men over women in selection, performance appraisal, training and the development processes and procedures that lead to promotions and higher salaries. This discrimination applies regardless of whether the women have the desired personal characteristics or not. The desired characteristics include higher education

qualifications, a high level of skill, extensive work experience and the capability to be extremely hard working (see sections 6.2 & 7.2.4). Gender-based discrimination is based on two main grounds. The first is related to the religious and cultural tradition whereby men, and not women, are expected to be the primary income earners and the heads of households (see section 9.2.1.2). As one respondent said, “The cultural heritage views men as being entitled to promotions ... because they are responsible for family expenses”. This notion of the family wage is used to justify men rather than women being promoted, even if they have equivalent skills, training, work experience and education level. The perception of men as breadwinners who should be given advantages over women in the workplace is expected and encouraged in Saudi culture, despite the social changes in recent years. These changes include the family structure (Al-Khateeb, 2007), higher rates of unemployment among young men (UNDP, 2009), and higher education levels among young women (World Bank, 2005; World Economic Forum, 2011). The idea of men being totally responsible for spending exists only in theory. Working women are now spending on the house, on the children and sometimes on their unemployed husbands. According to my interviewees, “My job helps me to support my family”. The second reason stems from the traditional stereotype that views women as not being able to handle the demands of higher managerial positions, as expressed by some respondents: “There is a degree of doubt regarding the ability of a woman to hold a top position” and “Our cultural beliefs do not trust women to lead” and “the belief that ‘management’ is the man’s right, like custody and guardianship”.

In this sense, Saudi women are restricted from accessing top positions. Hence there is some commonalty between Saudi female managers and other female managers in different contexts in that they are similarly disadvantaged with regards to top management, since leadership features have been associated with masculine characteristics (Alimo-Metcalfe, 2010; Ford, 2006 & 2010; Kumra & Vinnicombe, 2008; Stead & Elliott, 2009). However, Saudi female managers are doubly disadvantaged. First, they are restricted because they are thought not to be financially responsible for the family and therefore, it is argued, they do not need to be promoted; and second their ‘feminine’ traits’ are perceived as not suitable for handling the demands of higher managerial positions. Nevertheless, whatever the reasons, the conclusion that I can draw from this finding is that there is a strong connection between being a ‘male’ and being a ‘manager’, or rather that management requires male

characteristics as suggested by Schein (2007) – hence the “think-manager-think-male” phenomenon that is found across cultures, to which Saudi society is no exception.

- ***Family-based Discrimination***

Family-based discrimination refers to a situation in which decision-makers favour certain people (women or men) in promotion, evaluation or training and development based on their family background. The name of the family is central to social and political identity in Saudi Arabia, and as a result this factor plays a major role in determining position in Saudi public sector organizations. This was evident in the findings. These revealed that people with a privileged background and those from high status families along with individuals who had strong social network connections all tended to have greater support in accessing top positions in the public sector, for example, positions such as Dean of a university or CEO (see sections 6.3.4 & 7.2.2). One interviewee indicated that “Your family name can contribute to your position in the organization”. Thus the use of the family name can indeed lead to a level of prejudice and discrimination that affects the rate of promotion and the opportunities available not only for women but also for men.

These two types of discrimination – gender-based and family-based – mutually reinforce one another and together they influence women’s entry into top management, in three ways. First, women will not be able to access leadership roles, which would support the idea that they are seen as not contributing to the family wage. Second, certain cultural beliefs regarding women's characteristics are used to ascribe feminine-stereotypic qualities that are seen as not ideal for leadership roles. Lastly, some women (and men) are viewed as not having the type of family background that would make them fit for positions of leadership. Overall, the perception that the female gender is not suitable to leadership roles, coupled with tribal prejudice, produces more obstacles for women to overcome in order to be successful in these roles.

Gendered Networks

The findings of this study suggest that, unlike their male colleagues, women lack access to workplace networks which again hinders their career advancement when aspiring to top management. This idea was disclosed by a respondent: “[We] women do not go to

diwanniyah". The *diwanniyah* or *majlis* or the male networks is the centre of male socialization: these networks are similar to the Western idea of the 'old-boys' club. The women managers in this study strongly believed that most organizational decisions are made based on access to information, which is gained not only through formal but also through informal networks. This is similar to what Kanter (1993) argues, that women are disadvantaged from benefiting from social networks because they are a disempowered group and social networks are only available to those people who have power.

However, this does not suggest that Saudi women do not have their own informal networks. Saudi women have their own informal networks and have a strong solidarity between them. Nevertheless their networks are often tied to men's networks. Women are seen as part of the family network, particularly that of their male guardian. Therefore, they are expected to rely on family social networks to share information and to exchange favours, and even to acquire help in order to attain a position in institutions (see section 9.2.2.2). For example, interviewees revealed that, "My father's networks helped me" and "I used my brother's connection". Also, it is important to note that due to the Saudi traditional cultural norms and religious laws, women do not mix with *non-moharam* men, and thus they rely on their family networks. This is another explanation for women's exclusion from male networks in the Saudi public sector (see sections 6.3.5 & 6.3.8).

The practice of excluding women from direct or indirect networks in the workplace prevents them from having contact with people who are influential and who may have the requisite experience to act as mentors. Access to mentors could benefit the women regarding issues such as visibility and upward mobility. In sum, if women are forced to rely only on their guardian's network, this will inevitably make the path to senior leadership positions longer for women managers. A number of researchers have supported this conclusion. Their findings show that when women are excluded from the 'men's club' or the 'old boys' club", they are effectively excluded from reaching senior management positions (e.g. Bagilhole & White, 2011; Cross & Linehan, 2006).

Token Status

Kanter (1993) argues that when few in number, women are 'token' in professional and managerial positions in organizations. 'Token' women do have the advantage of being more visible in organizations, but they also experience social and psychological pressures that can have long-term negative effects on their feelings and attitudes (Oakley, 2000; Powell, 2010). This is the case in this study, where very few women coming from strong backgrounds are promoted to higher positions in Saudi public sector. Their scarcity puts them in a very stressful situation as they need constantly to prove to the decision-makers that they are capable of leading. This is unlike Singh and Vinnicombe's (2004) findings that successful women on boards with strong backgrounds and significant corporate experience are not in 'token' positions. This is perhaps because women who are working in the private sector may have better opportunities than those working in the public sector, as in the case of my women informants.

The fact that women are being placed in token positions will lead to a pattern of behaviour called the 'Queen Bee' (Mavin, 2008). This is the case in this study, as explained by a respondent who indicated that some Saudi female directors act as barriers to other woman's career development because they "want just to be in the limelight". They resent women employees in the organization and sometimes deliberately hold them back, as they feel intimidated and threatened, particularly by those who are highly educated, skilled in their professions, potentially successful characters overall and above all not from the same social background. Such women are unwilling to mentor or to advise other women.

However, even these token women managers who come from an élite background encounter some difficulty in obtaining information, and are excluded from the formal and informal social activities and networks that are formed by their male colleagues.

9.2.2.2 Organizational Culture

There is a common agreement among researchers that organizational culture includes patterns of beliefs, values, norms, symbols, and assumptions (Acker, 1992; Fagenson, 1993). In Acker's (1990) theory, the creation of symbols, images and forms of consciousness can explain and reinforce divisions between genders. The function of

images and symbols helps to naturalize and legitimize power relations between genders. In this regard, the Saudi public sector uses certain images to create a culture associated with 'maleness' and 'femaleness'. Thus there are four important elements of organizational culture that function to exclude Saudi women from senior positions in the public sector organizations, namely: collectivism and *wastaism*, gendered interaction, a male-based culture and the guardian authority.

Collectivism and Wastaism

As discussed in section 9.2.1.2, Saudi culture, like other Arab cultures (Hofstede, 2001), is a collectivistic culture that emphasises strong group commitment and loyalty to group members. In other words, the notion of *alsabiyya* (Ibn Khaldun, 1967) is very clear in the culture of Saudi public organizations, where the individual's goals are more aligned with group principles. According to this study, the function of the collectivist system between individual and family is to protect each other and to provide mutual support for group members; for example, by providing financial or emotional support or by facilitating access to resources, e.g. finding better jobs in a government institution or through exchanging favours and sharing information. This perhaps explains why all of the women managers in this study strongly emphasised the word 'we' in most of their talk. Their expressions reflected the values of the family and the notion of unity and collaboration with others that Islam emphasises, agreeing with what Ali (2005) noted. Interviewees showed that their sense of self was embedded in their relationships with kin and family. This self-relation has been termed 'patriarchy in the self' by Joseph (1996). The function of this self-relation is to maintain the relationship between members of the family and to preserve solidarity. Thus the power of connections among family and close friends is highly valued. This powerful connection was referred to as '*wasta*', or by the metaphoric term 'vitamin W', which was well represented in the organizational environment.

Wastaism is a very complex phenomenon that cannot be understood in isolation from the social-cultural context. As explained in section 7.2.2, the etymology of the word has to do with mediation. It is originally linked to family affairs such as marriage, sharing, exchanging favours, helping out, solving a conflict, etc. It can be viewed as an informal system of connections or personal relations that provides social support to family

members and close friends, who share certain rules and norms such as trust, loyalty and the ability to return the favour in the future.

Although *wasta* is attached to personal-level relations, it became, like other family values (see section 9.2.2.1), an important factor at the organizational level. The use of *wasta* in the public organizations is strongly embedded and tolerated, but not necessarily approved or used by all. *Wasta* had been used by some women managers in this study for various reasons. First, it was used as a supporting tool to assist women's access to prestigious positions; to gain permission to attend training courses or to take study leave; or simply to share information and exchange favours. This was revealed by respondents who stated that *wasta* helped them "to get the job done", "to obtain approval to do further training" and "to get approval for study leave". Also it was used to avoid lengthy bureaucratic processes. This applies particularly in a male-dominated society, in which it can be difficult for women to get what they think they deserve without the use of their male relatives, as described by a respondent: "In a male society ... family helps me to get what I think I deserve". In addition, *wasta* was used to avoid group punishment such as exclusion from the group or being viewed as 'less valuable' or 'not worthy'. Members of the extended family or close friends are expected to help each other: if they do not, they will be viewed as worthless and disloyal to their kinship and accordingly they will be excluded from the kinship or friendship circle. Such sanctions can be very effective in maintaining social norms, and accordingly group solidarity will be preserved, as stated by one respondent, "If you are anti-*wasta*, you'll just get left behind".

Thus *wasta* has many positive sides for helping women to handle the pressures of the social and bureaucratic system. However, a third of the respondents in this study did not approve of the use of *wasta* even though, as a result, they were viewed as less valuable to their group. The reason for this attitude is the women's own personal values, ethics and morals, and the belief that Islam prohibits practices such as discrimination, nepotism or cronyism that might produce social injustice. They expressed views such as "It is morally wrong" and "Islam prohibits things that are done under the table". These women understand that Islam provides an underlying moral principle that is often claimed to be divine justification for collective action (Ahmed, 1992; Ali, 2005). Also they are aware that Islam emphasises the notion of individual responsibility, but places

it within the framework of collaboration with others while acknowledging the rights of individuals (Ali, 2005). Accordingly, these women agreed that not everyone has good connections and they saw it as unfair that those who have lower levels of social capital tend to be disadvantaged. This was illustrated by those respondents who said, “Having a strong connection is the criterion for progress into a senior position” and “If a person is competent for a certain position, but does not have a right connection, s/he will not get the job”.

Wasta may lead to corruption in the organizational environment since it is based on nepotism and favouritism: a system whereby some people tend to violate, bend or ignore aspects of the law when selecting, appointing and promoting women or men to certain positions. Consequently the influence of one’s *qabila* or tribe or family name, or who one knows in society and in the workplace, can take precedence over the established law. This certainly can disadvantage very talented women or men whose families are not élite or powerful (see section 6.3.4).

In section 9.2.2.1, I discussed how women are excluded from the networks of their male colleagues in the workplace; hence they rely directly on their male family members’ connections. It emerged that the women habitually used their father’s, brother’s or husband’s networks to help them in their career development. Since the core of *wasta* consists of networks, a social network is critically important to women’s career advancement to higher managerial levels, as suggested by the findings of this study and as supported by previous researchers (O’Neil et al., 2008; Sealy, 2010). However, in the Saudi context, social networks only benefit those people who have strong family connections, and those who tend to be wealthier and come from privileged families. As a result, those women who lack strong social networks are less likely to be promoted to top positions in public organizations, and this finding is supported by Metcalfe (2006) and Singh (2008). A failure to promote the most talented women as a result of their lack of strong social capital may lead to frustration and resentment, and it will undoubtedly de-motivate those women who believe that they have the right to improve their careers.

Gendered Interaction

Acker (1990) described gendered interaction as the interaction between individuals, which function to produce gender images that are directly linked to gender divisions. In

this study, the patterns of interaction between men and women were easy to identify, but this area was difficult to examine, since it requires a deep level of analysis. In essence, organizational communication patterns need to be understood within the social environment. As discussed in the earlier section on gendered division of physical space, interaction between the genders is governed by family discourse and by religious interpretations. In both cases it is forbidden for a woman to interact with a man who is *un-mahram*, that is, one who is not her guardian. This study shows that women communicate with men mostly via written memos, letters and telephone calls or, most recently, through emails and video conferencing in two of the organizations studied (KSU & IPA). An example was given by a respondent: "I talk to my colleagues in the men's institution by telephone or by writing an email". In the KFH, the interaction between men and women is direct, face to face. However the interaction rules apply here and women are required to wear *hijab* and to guard their behaviour, as confirmed by a respondent: "I am very cautious about the way I talk, the way I respond, the way I walk".

Thus such rigid rules of interaction impede women from participating in the main organizational activities: the sort of activities that lead to one learning and thus improving one's position, such as important meetings and group work. Also, these rules of interaction may lead to psychological and health problems such as stress, habitually behaving in a formal and assertive way and fears of being misunderstood when in contact, either directly or indirectly, with men in the workplace. Since women are seen as symbols of purity they are responsible for the protection of their family's honour, an honour which relies primarily on their chastity. This is an extremely stressful situation for the women involved. As one respondent said, for this reason, "I am always afraid of being misunderstood" (see section 6.3.5).

From the preceding account, what can be understood is that the patterns of interaction between women and men in the workplace are restricted to avoid the threat of any sexual harassment or pre-marital relationship. These relationships are prohibited by Islamic law and are not acceptable according to the prevailing family values. Therefore, women managers are excluded and marginalized from top positions in public organizations.

A Male-based Culture

It is a well-documented fact that organizations are a male-based culture, as has been found in many countries (e.g. Acker, 2009; Broadbridge, 2008; Ford, 2010; Jamali et al., 2005). In this respect, Saudi public sector organizations are no different from other organizations in different contexts. As discussed in section, 9.2.2.1, the structural components of Saudi public sector organizations are intended to reinforce certain meanings and values that are drawn from the religious and social systems in which male values and pattern of domination are legitimated. In this sense, women are given lower status within the structure of the organization, as seen in the gendered hierarchy, gendered division of physical space, gendered networks and discriminations, all of which serve to reinforce the prevailing male-based cultural norms and values. The use of certain images to produce a culture of masculinity and femininity (Acker, 1990) was very clear in this study. For example, the image of a successful manager is stereotypically masculine: assertive, aggressive and competitive, while women are often stereotyped as being emotional, incapable and less committed to the work, as indicated by respondents, "...women are not expected to be leaders or to compete with men" and "women are seen as emotional ... while men are seen as rational". This finding resonates with those of some researchers, such as Jamali et al., (2005) and Mihail (2006) (see section 9.3).

A variety of images, phraseology and metaphors were used by women managers in this study to describe the culture of maleness, for example, phrases such as 'men's power happened by default', 'Men's voices are the strongest' and 'A female manager is like the child rather than the sibling of a male manager'. These examples give us a strong indication that men in the public organizations are given the right to exert power over women, since they are perceived 'naturally' to have the power, the ability and stronger voices in organizations.

Guardian Authority

The mobility of women managers' is restricted by legal constraints and social controls in Saudi Arabia. Women are not allowed to work or to travel abroad to study or to undertake training without the express permission of a male guardian, as illustrated by a respondent: "... but some male guardians refuse to give their wives or daughters

permission and without their approval women cannot take leave from their work nor can they travel". Saudi labour law does not require women to provide any letter of permission from their male guardians and ostensibly maintains equality between men and women, as stated in Articles 3, 4, and 9 (see section 2.4.2). However, in practice women's freedom to engage in and to develop their professional activities in order to gain access to any opportunities is restricted, mainly by the insistence on the guardian's consent and by the interpretation of labour law by the decision-makers, which reflect the prevailing cultural norms and religious instructions.

So what is the implication of this symbolic letter of permission from the women's guardians? My understanding of this symbolic letter is that Saudi men – fathers, husbands or even sons – are given authority by society and its various institutions to exert control and power over a woman's movements in the public sphere and to limit her space. In the work context, as a member of Saudi society, a male manager cannot go beyond the traditional unwritten rules and so he requests a letter of permission from the woman. Here, women are treated as children, and considered as legal minors under the control of their *mahrms* and subject to legal restrictions to protect them from any potential risks. Here one can notice the fluidity between family rules and work rules so that they seamlessly merge to produce gender inequality at work. The letter of permission can be seen as an example of the organizational logic: their underlying assumptions in Acker's (1990) sense.

9.2.3 Gender: Personal Characteristics and Role Expectations

The literature on gender has long argued that the dearth of women in top management is related to factors that are specific to women, for example, behaviour traits, cognitive factors, personality and attitudes (Fagenson, 1990; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011; Powell, 2010). In this study, the women managers faced constraints that were related to their gender, which blocked their chances of accessing senior positions in the public sector. These included the attribution of personal traits and the dual roles they play in managing career and family.

9.2.3.1 Personal Characteristics

As discussed in section 9.2.1.2, the concept of the individual is defined in relation to familial terms and expressed in kin idiom. Through the process of socialization, gender

identity is constructed and shaped to form distinctions between female and male, feminine and masculine (Oakley, 1985; Powell, 2010; Wharton, 2005). Saudi women are socialized to possess certain characteristics and traits, such as being submissive, passive, and emotional. This means that certain roles or jobs are seen as stereotypically masculine or feminine (Schein, 2001). For example, some women were willing to defer to men and they accepted the view that they were less capable of leading either in the household or at the workplace. They said that this situation is socially accepted and is commanded by Islam, as explained by one respondent: "Taking care of the family and children should be women's priorities...our religious laws need to be ... followed". Some of the women interviewees believed that holding leadership positions requires time, effort, travelling, and certain capabilities, as disclosed by a respondent: "Men have more time, strength and ability to work". In their view women's time and effort should be dedicated to the family through caring for children and husband, and performing household duties. On the other hand, men were thought to have more time, and to be capable of more effort and to possess the capabilities to take on greater responsibilities such as leadership roles. This image of women as being less capable than men can limit the career aspirations of the latter, so that they do not desire to hold a higher post in any organization (see section 7.2.5). In this sense, individual gender identities are produced by organizational process and pressures, as Acker (1990) and Ashcraft and Mumby (2004) suggested. Therefore, women demonstrated the role behaviours that are associated with the expectations of others, which in turn reflected their gender identities within organizations. This may restrict women's career aspirations and lower their self-confidence and achievement, as has been suggested by a number of researchers (e.g. Halpern & Cheung, 2008; Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989).

As mentioned in section 6.3.9, although the general pattern of socialization in the Saudi family emphasises certain forms of behaviour that are considered appropriate for women, some women showed a strong sense of their ability and self-confidence. The women interviewed developed this strong sense of self from a variety of sources. Mostly it derived from upbringing and what they learned from their families, social networks and work environments. However, I would argue that educated fathers may play a key role in creating women's high levels of self-confidence, as discussed in section 9.2.1.2. Here, some participants reported that their fathers were both role models and primary supporters of their daughters' careers. Women's belief in their capability

plays a major role in determining their self-motivation and self-image, and their self-awareness of personal and professional strengths. This helps them to mobilize their energy and keeps them working hard, as suggested by Halpern and Cheung (2008),

This strong sense of self-belief was reflected in the women's desire to advance into leadership positions. The women aspired to positions on the Board of Directors as CEOs, as ministers or ambassadors, or as members of the Consultative Council (*Majlis al-shura or Shura Council*) or even to membership of an international organization such as the United Nations or the World Bank (see section 7.2.5). In turn, this strong sense of self-belief among the women interviewees also enabled them to be enthusiastic about the prospect of improving the status of other women. They wanted other women to be made aware of their rights in society and in organizations. For example, the women's professional status as managers, researchers, doctors or writers in local newspapers means that they can give a voice to other women.

9.2.3.2 Role Expectations: Career-Family Conflict

Women are socialized to see themselves as subordinate in relation to their families, their careers, their jobs, their organizations. Hence they are encouraged to see themselves in terms that are not congruent with the requirements of top management positions (Fagenson, 1990). For example, people at the top level of organizations are able to demonstrate a strong commitment to their jobs, their career development and their organizations, whereas women are taught to prioritize their personal/family lives over their careers (Fagenson, 1990). In this study, it was evident that since women still bear the main responsibility for raising children and performing household tasks, two thirds of the respondents struggled to manage two 'fronts', family and work. The conflicting demands of this situation affected their career advancement to senior leadership positions. Women are responsible not only for children, husbands and households, but also for other members of the extended family. Along with family demands, there are management roles which they have to fulfil. Running two organizations (family and work) puts a hold on women's desires for leadership positions (see section 6.3.10). For example, some women had deliberately turned down promotions since family was their priority. These women managers were aware that administrative work in the higher echelons is not easy in a male-dominated society because in accordance with cultural norms they are expected to give priority to performing their traditional roles and to

subordinate their careers to that priority. This finding is in line with those of Al-Lamky (2007), Broadbridge (2009) and Lewis (2002).

However, other women managers indicated that they managed to balance family and work very well. This may be surprising to the reader who is aware of the current interest and debates around the struggles that face many women in different countries when they try to achieve a balance between work and family life. Their difficulties can be explained by the fact that women rely on family support, such as mothers, mothers-in-law, and other close relatives for childcare. Along with family support, some women, especially those of middle and upper socioeconomic status, hire helpers or housekeepers to care for their children and to help with the household tasks while they are at work. These helpers are usually women migrants with low socioeconomic backgrounds who come from other Arab or Asian countries.

Generally speaking, the women managers were supported by their families because Saudi society is based on a traditional culture that values co-operation between group members (see sections 7.2.2 & 7.2.3). This is particularly important for women managers working in the public sector, since there is limited availability of facilities to support women with children. For example, there are very few nurseries available for managers working in the public sector. Additionally, there are no WLB policies in the workplace that might ease the problem of balancing family and work. One respondent said, "I would like to reach the highest rank, but it is impossible at the present time, without any support from my work ... I have young and adolescent children". Hence, although some women managers were able to run two lives: family and work, generally speaking, the women still find it difficult to give an equal commitment to both roles. This is due to the fact that traditional values and expectations require them, as women, to prioritize certain duties and obligations and as a result, public organizations have done very little to support the career progression of women. In other words, top positions within the public organizations are allocated on the basis of perceived levels of commitment. Hence women are barred from leading positions, since they are perceived as not committed to their organizations. These findings are in line with those of Al-Lamki (1999) and Jamali et al. (2005).

9.3 Intersectionality of Socio-institutional System, Organization and Gender

The previous discussion has revealed a rich and complex picture regarding the factors that prevent Saudi women from accessing senior leadership positions in the public sector. These factors include the social and institutional system, coupled with organizational and gender factors, all of which are dynamically inter-related. However, certain questions might be raised about whether these factors each exert an equal influence on women's position in the organizational hierarchy. Is one factor more dominant than the others? If so, is it the larger social system with its subsystems such as family, religion and education; or is it the organization with its assumptions, practices and processes; or is it gender traits, behaviour and role expectations? Throughout the discussion, although it seemed that these factors were intertwined, one dominant factor emerged: the social and institutional system, including religion, family and the influence of education. This system proved to be the most influential factor concerning women's position in the organizational environment. The prevailing factors are the family and religion, which in turn determine the logic, practices, procedures, rules, regulations, relationships, metaphors and images within the organization. The family and the religio-cultural system influence gender identity and gender roles. Furthermore, they shape the educational system through reinforcing traditional values regarding appropriate gender roles before women enter the job market. Thus it was very clear that religious beliefs and family values, the education system and organizational practices and processes have all been woven together in order to keep women in subordinate positions in the organizational hierarchy. In order for these insights to be understood, I need to elaborate on Saudi public sector organizations with regard to the way women are positioned in the organizational hierarchy.

If one looked at Saudi public sector organizations at a very mundane level, one could see that the prevailing discourse appears to be one that promotes the ideal of everyone working together as kin or as one big family: a family that is governed by the rules of the wider social system and by Islamic beliefs. It is also about caring for women, who bear the main responsibility for families and child rearing. Consequently, public sector organizations do not over-burden women with major tasks like leadership, which require time and energy; rather they provide jobs in certain fields that suit the traditional role of women. Additionally, the organizational values and practices are about

protecting women from any harm, such as sexual harassment, by providing segregated workplaces, restricting women's movements and restricting their interactions with male colleagues. Moreover, they are about caring for men by handing over the responsibility of top managerial positions to them. The societal expectation is to see a successful manager as the 'father' of the organization who is always ready to lend a helping hand to everyone, particularly his family and close relatives. It is also about meeting the needs of men who are assigned responsibility by social and cultural expectations as the main economic providers for their families; thus they are helped to earn more by being promoted faster.

However, at a more complex level, it is these religio-cultural beliefs and assumptions coupled with family values that serve to structure the organization in patriarchal mode and influence its culture and members. At the most basic level, the structure of Saudi organizations resembles the social structure of the family and it reflects religious beliefs regarding who should be in the dominant position. Organizational practices such as hierarchies, relations of power and subordination, physical space, wages and networks are all segregated along gender lines. This gendered segregation prevents Saudi women from career progression into senior positions, according to the career development models suggested by a number of scholars (Burke, 2002; Davidson & Burke, 2011; Mavin, 2000).

Also, at a deeper level, the culture of the public sector reflects family values and religio-cultural beliefs. For example, when going through the findings it was very noticeable that the power of men as fathers, or the power of masculinity, dominated organizational life. In their roles as managers, men were clearly the heads of organizations, just as they were the heads of households. Women, on the other hand, are quietly doing the organizational housekeeping, in Acker's (2009) sense, in order to keep things running. Thus roles, responsibilities and behaviours in organizations are constructed along gendered lines and linked to the family and cultural ideology that differentiates between male and female. This traditional gender order was used to legitimize male domination and to justify the exclusion of Saudi women managers from senior positions in the public sector. It is also clear that family values regarding commitment and loyalty to group members are operating in public sector culture. It is 'who you know' and 'what is your family name' that facilitates the careers of both women and men within

organizations. In addition, the authority of male guardians is highly valued and their permission is required to allow women career mobility and to allow them to perform their professional roles within the public sector.

Additionally, the education system, in Saudi Arabia, is like the family in that it plays a pivotal role in reinforcing the prevailing cultural values and religious beliefs with regard to gender role stereotyping in society and in the public sector, thereby strengthening the 'glass ceiling'. Education is segregated along gender lines both in terms of physical space and in the content of the curricula. This means that as an agent of socialization education plays an important role in channelling the genders into certain areas of specialism which then lead into specific areas of occupation to suit the gender ideology of society. Accordingly, Saudi women are excluded from occupations that are perceived as being more suited to men, such as higher managerial positions in the public services.

It is thus through the discourses of family, education and the influence of religio-culture that women's personalities and identities are constructed. Women possess certain characteristics and traits that reflect the process of socialization that takes place first in the home and later in educational institutions and workplaces. Some women showed certain types of behaviour such as submissiveness and passivity, which discouraged them from aspiring to leadership positions that would make them visible in the public domain. In contrast, other women were able to exhibit a very strong sense of self-confidence and self-belief, which had enabled them to challenge stereotypes through an awareness of their potential, and an awareness of their specific strengths and development needs. Thus some were able to resist male domination and were able to fit into leadership positions. It is clear that the social value system that shaped and reshaped gender identity and roles is reflected in organizational life.

Therefore, Saudi public sector organizations can be seen as a social structures that do not exist independently of their social environment, and this finding is in line with Acker (1990) and Fagenson's (1990) arguments. Within such organizations there are strongly held patriarchal norms and values to prevent women from occupying positions that are traditionally held by men. The religio-cultural system, the family and education system and the organizational processes, practices and assumptions intertwine which results in women being extremely under-represented in top management. This conclusion is resonant with Acker (1990). Acker argued that organizations are gendered

in the sense that their internal practices and assumptions, including power, action and motion, meaning and identity are patterned through the distinctions between male and female, masculine and feminine (Acker, 1990). To sum up, I would agree with Ford (2005 & 2010) who has long argued that the social and cultural context are very important when studying a social phenomenon. It would be extremely difficult to explain the paucity of women in top management in the Saudi context without taking account of the larger social system and its influence on organizational structure and culture, and gender role socialization. Without these factors one could only achieve a very limited understanding.

9.4 Summary

This chapter has discussed the complex interweaving of the social and institutional systems, including religious beliefs and cultural values, family and education, organizational structure and culture, and gender factors. All of these factors have an influence on women's representation at senior management level in the Saudi public sector. An interpretive approach and the use of multiple perspectives have helped to provide a comprehensive explanation of the interaction between the private and public domains in order to unravel and to explore the constraints faced by women who aspire to senior management positions. It showed that women are caught in a complex network of factors that combine to result in their being remarkably under-represented in senior management positions. In particular, the narrow interpretations of the Qu'ran, together with cultural values of honour and modesty, encourage gender segregation and the subordination of women. These values are in turn reinforced by socialization within the family and transmitted through the education system. They are moreover mirrored in organization hierarchies and power relations, resulting in discrimination and tokenism, as well as in organizational cultures in which men arrogate to themselves the same power over women that they exercise in the household. All these forces exert psychological pressure on women, in many cases inducing lack of confidence as well as role conflict, which may deter women from seeking advancement.

Saudi women managers face many challenges in their labyrinthine journey toward top positions. Here, I raised the question, 'Can Saudi women's careers be advanced to top management positions in the public sector?' According to the literature review in Chapter 3, there are certain strategies that need to be developed and implemented in

order to facilitate women's progress to top management. Within the context of this study's findings – as seen in Chapter 8 – various strategies for change were suggested. Thus this study not only provides a comprehensive understanding of the under-representation of women in top management by creating a framework that is very specific to the Saudi context, but it also suggests a number of strategies for change. These strategies have been developed based on the findings of this study and they are specifically designed to help Saudi women to reach leadership positions. This will be the focus of the following chapter, together with a reflection on and the conclusions of this study.

Chapter Ten: Reflections and Conclusions

10.1 Introduction

My aim at this point in the study is best articulated by Alvesson and Deetz (2000: 136) who stated that:

“through making it clear that it is not an objective picture of social reality but a set of impressions and interpretations produced by a situated person, and characterised by feeling, imagination, commitment and a particular pre-structured understanding associated with education, intellectual, intellectual heroes, etc., the reader is reminded that what is offered is one story – at best empirically sensitive and well-grounded, and full of insights and theoretical contributions but still open to other readings, and informed by other perspectives, interests or creative power”.

This chapter will conclude the thesis by reflecting on the whole research journey in relations to the subject of this study. Wolcott (2001:127) suggested that “... if you close on a note of reflection, keep the subject(s) of your study the focus of your reflections”. My aim is to reflect firstly on whether the study objectives have been achieved; secondly, I will consider whether this study can be regarded as a contribution to existing knowledge, and what implications it might have for individuals, public sector organizations, policy makers and researchers. This is followed by my assessment of the limitations of this study and suggestions about how future research can overcome these limitations. I will conclude by suggesting possible new departures from this thesis.

10.2 Returning to the Research Objectives

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the fundamental research questions are both conceptual and methodological. They can be summarised as the ‘what’ ‘why’ and ‘how questions (Watson, 1994). These questions were re-iterated throughout this study in order to achieve the answers. My research questions and objectives were presented in Chapter 1. These questions were designed to address the gap in knowledge concerning women in management that was identified in the literature review (see Chapter 3). The research aims and questions were presented in Chapters 1, 4 and 5 and they determined the conceptual and practical research methodology of this study. In chapter 4, I discussed my philosophical stance. My approach is rooted in my desire to provide an in-depth and inter-subjective understanding of what has been said by my interviewees. I believe that

this approach will provide a far greater insight into the nature of social phenomena. To this end, I adopted a qualitative strategy via an inductive approach with in-depth interviews as the main research technique, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. My use of these methodological techniques enabled me to pay close attention to my participants' perceptions about the phenomena under study, which in turn, allowed me to remain sensitive to the specific cultural context. The empirical research methodology that was employed in this study proved to be highly appropriate. It has generated rich data and it has supplied complex details about the factors that are influencing women's career development, thereby achieving the research objectives, as shown in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. The rich descriptive data in this study allowed the research objectives to be analysed and discussed in more detail in Chapter 9. This was achieved by using an interpretative paradigm and multiple perspectives, all of which helped to develop a framework for understanding the under-representation of women in senior management in the Saudi context.

The first objective of my study was to explore the constraints that influence and inhibit women's access to senior leadership positions in the Saudi public sector. This objective was addressed in Chapter 6. The findings in this chapter confirmed that Saudi women managers who are working in the public sector face many constraints: constraints that impede their reaching senior leadership positions. Women managers face gender discrimination, such as men being favoured over women in selection and recruitment, in performance appraisal, and in training and development. In addition, there is family bias that results in some families being favoured over others. The study also showed that the process of gender socialization that takes place in the family and in school is heavily influenced by religious teaching which fosters certain cultural attitudes towards women in the workplace. I discovered that patriarchal religious and social structures were, in fact, being mirrored in organizational structures and cultures. For example, within the organizations the women were in subordinate positions and they were subject to paternalistic authority. In turn, this hierarchy of relations was shown to affect how the women saw themselves, and their levels of confidence. As a result, it can be claimed that the prevailing cultural ideology in Saudi society appears to create both practical and psychological constraints to women's career advancement in public sector organizations. The practice of gender segregation ensures that women are mainly concentrated in lower and middle management jobs in the feminized professions such as

health, teaching and administration. In situations where men and women work in the same organization, the women are disadvantaged by unequal power relations. For example, men are located in the upper echelons of the organization's hierarchy and consequently they have the ultimate decision-making authority, even in issues that are related to the women's sections. Women are also adversely affected by their limited access to organizational opportunities. Hence they are seen to constitute a token presence in organizations: this means that as a minority group women are more visible in the organization, which in turn, puts more pressure on them. The findings of this study have also demonstrated that family life plays an important role because the family is a highly valued social institution. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that the women are experiencing tension as a result of the conflicting demands of family and work, which also affect their career advancement to senior leadership positions

The second objective of the study was to reveal those factors that have assisted the career advancement of women. These were discussed in Chapter 7. The findings in this chapter showed that despite the constraints that women are facing, there are some factors that are helping them. A number of Saudi government initiatives have provided free access to education. This represents a significant development in a country where there was no formal education for women until 1960. This has been a background factor which has given women increased respect and status in society, and it has been highly influential in determining women's career choices. Access to higher education has given women wider opportunities, even though they are still steered towards those specializations that are deemed to be suited to traditional concepts of women's nature and role. Women may also be helped in their careers by strong social networks which include the extended family and friends. Male family members such as fathers and husbands, particularly those who were educated, were highly influential in determining women's career choices and their subsequent successes. These men were either role models or they were able to provide certain forms of moral support and practical facilitation. In addition, it was often their own personal strengths that helped these women to achieve good managerial positions in their organizations. The desire to advance into leadership positions and to become more visible in the organization was a factor that helped and motivated the women to work harder. They had pursued their careers with determination, and they were assertive in defence of their rights. The final facilitating factor that was mentioned was openness to the global system, and this was

seen as presenting both an opportunity and a challenge for them. On the one hand, global communications facilitated women's networking and influenced their perceptions of themselves and their place in society. On the other, globalization raised concerns about the need to retain an Arab identity and not merely to copy or be subsumed into a Westernized global culture. One important point that should be mentioned is that the respondents in this study did not report any organizational factors that helped women's career development.

In Chapter 8 the findings were concerned with the third objective of the study which was to explore the views of respondents regarding how to overcome the constraints that face women in management. Here the findings highlighted the need for policies that are designed to overcome traditional stereotypes. The women thought this could be achieved through 'joined-up thinking' between the education system, the media, the social and religious institutions and political action. Legislation should be introduced to release women from the guardianship of men, to introduce equal opportunities, to provide easy access to transport and to allow women to drive. Respondents called for organizations to provide more training and development programmes for women and to change their policies to give women the same rights as men. For example, organizations should move away from private-public administration, enhance communication systems, improve measures for transparency, implement sanctions against those who abuse the system, and recognize the accumulated experience of women. The respondents also thought that women should be encouraged to build up their own networks and encouraged to believe in their competence and further that they should be encouraged to use strategies of individual resistance against patriarchy and discrimination.

The discussion and analysis in Chapter 9 was instrumental in giving coherence to the findings through an interpretive methodology and the use of multiple perspectives. This approach provided an answer to the main research question by providing an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of women's under-representation in senior management positions, in the Saudi public sector. The analysis revealed that the roots of the problem lie in the social and institutional systems, including religion, the family and the education system, all of which interact in a dynamic way. The assumptions, beliefs and values of these three institutions exert a powerful influence on organizational structure

and culture and on attitudes to gender, which in turn, impact on women's representation at senior management level in the Saudi public sector. Thus, based on these findings together with the guidance of the literature review I was able to develop a framework for understanding why women are so under-represented in senior management.

So far I have provided answers to the 'what' and 'how' questions and this process has served to generate rich and complex data concerning the factors that influence Saudi women's career development. In the following section I will provide an answer to 'why' this thesis makes a very valuable contribution to the current body of knowledge concerning women in management. My contention is that it goes a long way towards overcoming the shortcomings of the existing literature, and it will also provide a practical guide for individuals, practitioners and policy-makers who are interested in widening participation for women in the field of management.

10.3 Research Contributions

Phillips and Pugh (2005: 63) stated that "the contribution of the thesis is the evaluation of the importance of the thesis to the development of the discipline". This research was an extensive study which covered women in management in the Saudi public sector, a sector which employs 96 per cent of the total public workforce. Although it has its limitations, this study represents the first detailed field research to examine women in management in Saudi Arabia. It is the first attempt to evaluate the challenges that women face in trying to achieve a representative place in decision-making positions. Thus, in line with the comments of Alvesson and Deetz (2000) quoted in the introduction to this chapter, this research is empirically sensitive and well-grounded, it gives rich insights into women in management in the Saudi public sector, and it thereby makes a contribution to the body of knowledge. Specifically, my study contributes to the two major areas identified below.

10.3.1 Contribution to Theory

Despite the vast array of research on women in management, there has been relatively little research within this particular area and the reasons for this are obvious. One of the main strengths of this thesis is that my status as a native Saudi woman has given me privileged access to a hitherto hidden domain. As a result my research was able to

unpick the social fabric of Saudi society in order to reveal a complex intertwining between the private and public domains, or rather between the social system, the organization and the prevailing gender ideology. My research has shown that this tangle of issues effectively prevents Saudi women from accessing top positions. It should be noted that much of the existing research was carried out by using a Western framework of ideas, as was seen in Chapter 3. Therefore, it will not necessarily identify what is causing the 'glass ceiling' phenomenon within Saudi Arabia and, as a result, it will be impossible to suggest strategies that are contextually specific and designed to overcome the constraints that women face. With these limitations in mind, and guided by the lenses of a multi-dimensional perspective, I have developed a new framework, which I call the social–institution, organization and gender system perspective.

This framework offers a reliable way of understanding the phenomenon of women's under-representation. It helps to show that the experience of Saudi women in management is, in some respects, very different from that of women in other contexts. It further suggests that the status of women in Saudi society in both private and public spheres, including managerial life, is defined in strict relation to the socio-cultural system. It reveals that an organization cannot be viewed separately from its social context. In order to fully understand how an organization functions it is necessary to take account of social-cultural values, religion, the political context and gender-based behavioural norms and practices. In other words, what is needed is the development of a new holistic theoretical framework and, more importantly, one that is culturally specific. My social–institution, organization and gender system provides such a framework. Hence it can be considered as a theoretical development in the existing theory concerning the under-representation of women in senior management and their place in the organizational hierarchy. This research has produced a significant body of knowledge that, in turn, has enabled a deeper understanding of this complex phenomenon not only in the Saudi public sector but also in the wider field of women in management. Based on my findings I have suggested a number of strategies in the belief that they will be useful as a career development model, precisely because they are targeted and contextually specific. These strategies are specifically tailored to address the demands and requirements of Saudi culture and organizations: they are not borrowed and re-constructed from a pre-existing programme (see section 10.4). Thus this research has demonstrated its originality by focusing on a new area of study and by

adding to knowledge in a way that has not been done previously. Also, because this study draws on elements of business and management, sociology, psychology and gender studies, it showed its originality by being multi-disciplinary (Phillips & Pugh (2005). Thus it has added not only to the literature on women in management but also to the literature in other disciplines.

10.3.2 Contribution to Research Methodology

As noted in my introduction, the aim of this study was not to discover one objective truth of the social world, but rather to present “a set of impressions and interpretations produced by a situated person, and characterised by feeling, imagination commitment and a particular pre-structured understanding...” (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000: 136). Whilst I do acknowledge the theoretical and methodological contributions that have been made by previous researchers in the field, I am convinced that a positivist approach based on quantitative data analysis techniques would not have provided the in-depth understanding of a social world that was my aim here. For this reason, I chose to adopt an interpretive paradigm as I believe it has a number of advantages over the positivist approach. For example, it has enabled me to understand the women's experiences and perceptions in the context of their own lives and it has allowed me to acknowledge my own position as someone who is a researcher and also a Saudi woman. Hence, for the purposes of this research I was somewhat uniquely placed (in the field as yet recorded) as both an outsider and an insider. The interpretive approach based on my analysis of unstructured and semi-structured interviews allowed me to look at what lies behind the public face of organizational structure and culture in order to reveal the cultural ideology and religious beliefs, the effects of socialization in the family and in the education system, and the influence of tribal values and practices. For example, all public sector organizations have policies regarding the equality of male and female employees. However, in practice these policies are over-ridden because family and religious values play such an important role in organizational culture. For example, the idea of the family wage is used in organizations to justify men rather than women being promoted, even if women have equivalent experience and education. Also, organizations routinely request permission for women's activities from their male guardians. Thus it is clear that male authority over women is implicit in all organizational processes and practices. Another illustrative example is the idea of

family connections or *wasta*: again this is an important factor at the organizational level. *Wasta* can either facilitate or hinder women's progression to top positions in the organizational hierarchy, and this will depend on the strength of their family connections.

In addition, the interpretive approach revealed that male family members (particularly those who are educated) exert an influence on women's career development. The relationship between women managers and their family male members was too complex to be summed up in one generalized sentence. However, the interpretive approach did show that the negative stereotype of male authority in which husbands are characterised as uniformly unsupportive (see Chapters 7) was an over-simplification and was certainly not applicable in all cases. In other words, not all women experienced themselves as repressed or prevented from adding value to their lives.

Moreover, the interpretive approach showed that women in this study were severely affected by cultural stereotypes, which generate both psychological and physical health problems for women managers including stress, disappointment, and anxieties about being misunderstood. Also, the feeling of being excluded and marginalised had the greatest impact on women managers. The interpretive approach also revealed numerous strategies of resistance among the women. Again, this finding contradicts the simplistic stereotype of an Arab woman as passive and obedient and so on. For example, the women were disobedient, often refusing to carry out instructions and they were willing to adopt a tough and occasionally aggressive stance when necessary. These findings show that even in unfavourable circumstances, the women have taken responsibility for their choices by taking the initiative in developing their careers. For example, it emerged that some women intend to leave the public sector organizations in order to find better opportunities elsewhere, either locally or globally.

Not surprisingly, Islam is a major factor in the lives of all my interviewees. However, the women were clear that their subordinate status is not the result of Islam but rather it is due to the narrow interpretation of Islam by some religious people. These interpretations are one factor that lies behind women's subordinate positioning in the organizational hierarchy. Again, this finding contradicts the simplistic stereotype of Islam as responsible for the existing gender inequality within the Muslim world.

Another interesting finding was that although some male managers within organizations act as barriers to women's career development, others are keen to improve the status of working women but still fear the reactions of conservative people.

In addition, a contribution that could be added to the research methodology concerns the data collected. In this study the collected data were original in that unstructured interviews were used in the preliminary interviews, while semi-structured interviews were used in the main data collection. I based my conclusions on the interviews, as this seemed the most appropriate way to obtain the in-depth insights that were necessary, but I used a broad range of other sources – including participant workshop-based discussions, documentary, diary, memos, and field notes.

Another contribution that could be added to the existing qualitative studies concerns the issue of translation. In order to translate my qualitative data from Arabic to English I had to adopt a contextualized approach to translation (Xian, 2008; Marschan-Piekkari & Ries, 2004) and not rely on the use of dictionaries. This means that I translated Arabic proverbs, idioms, metaphors or phrases by looking at the embedded meaning of the interview and relating it to its socio-cultural background. I looked between the lines in order to find the meaning as it was constructed in the minds of the participants (see Chapter 5). This was made possible by my status as both an insider and an outsider during the research process. However, I do not claim that translating the data in this study has no limitations, as certain information may have been lost, missed during translation or it could be that my personal views and experiences may make my work biased. Nevertheless, I was aware of the need for being alert to the potential hazards of trying to negotiate two very different language systems,

10.4 Research Implications

If Saudi women are ever to be represented at top management level in the public sector, it is imperative to take into consideration the multifaceted problems that they face. Therefore, it is essential to implement a strategic plan in order to achieve change in the wider society and at the level of organizational culture. This section will concentrate on identifying strategies for change. These changes are intended to facilitate women's progress to top management, at societal and governmental, organizational, and individual level. These suggestions reflect the findings in Chapter 8 as they relate to

research question 3. In addition, this section will discuss what the future implications of this study might be for other researchers in Saudi Arabia.

10.4.1 Societal and Governmental Initiatives

It is essential to ensure that government policies work hand in hand with organizations to help achieve equality between the genders: any attempt to improve women's positions in the Saudi public sector will necessarily involve certain issues that are sometimes beyond the scope of organizations. Undoubtedly, societal strategies are more far-reaching than individual and organizational strategies (Adler & Azraeli, 1994). In order to achieve equality between men and women in management there must be a profound change in the prevailing assumptions about organizations and society which could be a lengthy process (Acker, 2009). Nevertheless, this study suggests that any decision issuing from a political leader will be widely accepted by the people in Saudi society, including traditionalists and religious conservatives. Accordingly, there are two main changes that the government should facilitate by providing policies that are designed to overcome traditional stereotypes and by legislating for equal opportunities.

10.4.1.1 Policies to Overcome Traditional Stereotypes

This study shows that gender stereotypes and traditional attitudes towards women are among the main obstacles impeding women's access to higher positions in management. There are three areas on which decision-makers need to focus in order to change stereotypical perceptions towards women: education; the media; and joined-up thinking between the various institutions. With reference to education, the gendering of curricula in the formal education system needs to be amended. Also, the government needs to open up new disciplines for women in Higher Education, such as the political sciences and engineering, which are currently reserved for men. In addition, the decision-makers should introduce a co-educational system in which boys and girls study the same subjects and interact with each other. By doing so, they will be prepared for the labour market. This situation could also lead to gender de-sensitization whereby men just accept that a woman can occupy any position in an organization, including leadership. In regard to the media, the issues pertaining to discriminatory and stereotypical images of women in the media can be removed. They should be replaced by alternative images of women that portray the positive aspects of women's roles in all

activities. The use of mass media can target different social groups, such as students, parents, workers, and decision-makers. This can promote increased social awareness of a woman's legal right to participate in all aspects of development. The last strategy is aimed at achieving joined-up thinking between the various institutions (e.g. media, school, workplace and mosque).

With government support, these strategies can be implemented through the education system, through the mass media and through joined-up thinking. An intensification of efforts in these areas would indeed help to change attitudes towards women in society as a whole and more specifically in the public sector.

10.4.1.2 Promoting Equality

This study has revealed that there is a major contradiction between Saudi labour law, in which there is equality between men and women, and the HR policies and practices within organizations. Therefore, there are three important actions which political decisions-makers need to undertake: establishing affirmative action legislation, changing the male guardianship laws and providing easy access to transport.

The adoption of various legislation such as EEO and AA, by developed countries has been effective to a certain extent in terms of increasing the percentage of women in management (Acker, 2009; Davidson & Burke, 2011; Mathe et al., 2011; Powell, 1999; Wilson, 2011). Therefore, Saudi women may benefit from introducing affirmative action legislation to secure equal representation in higher management. This may guarantee equal rights for both genders and it will open up more opportunities for women. Also, EEO can bring about changes to organizational culture, employment policies and practices. In addition, AA programmes could lead to the development of human resource management (HRM) structures that, in turn, will increase the percentage of women in top management (Powell, 1999).

The second area that requires political action is the male guardianship laws, which can be changed without contravening Islamic guidelines. In fact, this move will help both women and men. It will free women from being in submission to the guardianship of a male family member and enable them to handle their own affairs without obtaining prior permission, and accordingly women's mobility will not be restricted. Lifting such

restrictions will help women to advance their careers as they will be able to travel both inside Saudi Arabia and abroad and be able to attend workshops, seminars and conferences, or to study. It would release men from the burden of responsibility placed on them by social norms, namely the expectation that they will regulate the conduct of their female relatives, and it could give them a greater understanding of women's role in society.

The final area that requires action by political decision-makers is women's mobility. The restrictions on women should be lifted and they should be provided with easy transport. For example, public transport should be made available and accessible and women should be allowed to drive. It is important to clarify the reasons for such mobility restrictions because they are related to socio-cultural attitudes and to the strong concern for family honour, which depends primarily on women's chastity. Lifting the mobility restriction that prevents women from driving cars would be one way of giving women more independence so they need not rely on their male guardians or male drivers. This freedom would also act as an incentive for women to accept offers of senior leadership positions.

10.4.2 Public Sector Organization Initiatives

The literature has suggested a number of strategies to overcome the organizational constraints that are preventing women from progressing to top management (e.g. Acker, 2009; Allan et al., 2007; Ragins et al., 1998; Tharenou et al., 1994). Organizations should acknowledge that women in the workplace have different knowledge and skills. These women would be of great benefit to their organizations if they were assigned to senior management positions. Women in leadership roles can serve as role models and mentors for future female leaders in the public sector. Undoubtedly, the culture of the Saudi public sector cannot change without the support and commitment of senior managers, who need to be trained in specific areas such as gender and family issues, and hidden and overt discrimination. Therefore, this study suggests that there are three main strategies that would facilitate Saudi women's career development in the public sector: changing the organizational culture, providing more professional training and development for women and introducing family-friendly policies.

10.4.2.1 Changing the Organizational Culture

To enhance the representation of women in top positions in the public sector, two main areas need to be addressed with regard to the organizational culture. Firstly, organizations need to introduce initiatives that are targeted at senior managers because senior managers are responsible for ensuring that recruitment, selection and performance evaluation procedures are not biased. If the male bias were to be removed then a woman's accumulated experience would be taken into account. This would be one way of tackling the under-representation of women.

The second issue concerns communication. There is a need to develop channels of communication between male and female employees in the workplace. Gender segregation (see Chapter 6) means that women face huge problems with communication because they can mainly contact the male sections via telephone, letters, email or video. This is very different from the problem facing women in Western organizations. In the West, such problems are often related to linguistic styles, such as being 'too feminine' or soft as against being 'too masculine' or aggressive: in either case the linguistic style is viewed as not suitable for leading the other gender (Alimo-Metcalfe, 2010; Catalyst, 2007; Ford, 2006 & 2010; Kumra & Vinnicombe; 2008; Oakley, 2000). By contrast, Saudi women must negotiate indirect channels of communication and they continually fear that they will be misinterpreted by their male colleagues when they communicate indirectly with them. I would suggest that the way to solve the communication problem between men and women is to educate and train employees on communication skills along with providing a co-workplace. In addition, governmental policies such as EEO and AA (Acker, 2009) (see section 10.4.4) should be implemented. These policies include detailed information about protecting women employees at all levels including the prevention of sexual harassment so that women can communicate freely and without fear.

10.4.2.2 Training and Development

Training and development initiatives are crucial to women's career development because they enhance the knowledge, skills, credibility and credentials of women (Burke, 2002; Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989; Tharenous et al., 1994). In this study, it was evident that women managers need particular training since the current training

programmes in the public sector continue to be strongly influenced by gendered socio-cultural stereotypes and as such they are not designed to promote women into senior leadership positions. Therefore, a new model of training programmes is required and it should be designed to help prepare women for leadership positions.

Such a programme can cover both education and training in various areas including decision-making structures and promotion systems; the budget process; and skills like assertiveness, leadership, interpersonal skills and mentoring. Within this special programme, there should be an emphasis on the two main areas: assertiveness and mentoring. Assertiveness is considered as the most important skill here because women in Saudi society are socialized to shy away from claiming their rights. In view of this situation, it is clear that assertiveness training is vital in order to help women to express their ideas clearly and confidently and to develop effective relationships in the workplace. In turn, this training would help them to be more credible candidates for higher positions at work. The second vitally important area is mentoring. As discussed in Chapters 7 and 9, women managers rely mainly on their male guardians for facilitating their career. Therefore, there is a need to establish mentoring or e-mentoring programmes to suit the organizational setting. This is intended to provide career development including coaching, providing challenging assignments, helping protégées to be more visible and giving personal support (Allan et al., 2007; Ragins, 1999; Tharenou, 2005), including counselling and role modelling (Kram, 1985).

Designing and implementing this type of programme can help women managers to develop their skills in the public sector by acquiring leadership and management capabilities. It can also encourage women to change their self-image and give them increased levels of confidence in their leadership abilities.

10.4.2.3 Family-Work Policies

The study findings indicated that most women struggle to balance the demands of family and career. These women managers performed the bulk of the household duties which inevitably resulted in conflicts between family and work (Al-Lamky, 2007; Broadbridge, 2009; Lewis, 2002). Therefore, the introduction of family-work or WLB policies in organizations may help the women to progress in their careers, for example, the provision of flexible working arrangements and child-care services (Kelliher &

Anderson; 2010; Spinks & Tombari, 2002). If such policies were introduced then Saudi women might feel more integrated into their organizations. This recognition would encourage them to demonstrate their potential and competence, thereby gaining more visibility and experience through taking on more challenging tasks. More importantly, it will help reduce their feelings of guilt toward their families, while at the same time increasing their satisfaction with work (Kelliher & Anderson; 2010). However, it is essentially important to note that family-friendly policies benefit may be limited. It has been noted that these policies have not been very effective even in Western organizations (Ford & Collinson, 2011; Lewis, 2010). One reason for this is that these policies are a challenge to the values and assumptions about gender which are embedded in organizational culture. Introducing WLB within the Saudi public sector will ease the tension between family-work, but it will require an immense effort to change the culture of organizations.

10.4.3 Individual Strategies

The strategies for success that are recommended by the literature are based on individual determinants that can offer women more opportunities to be chosen for leadership positions (Carli, et al., 1995; Yoder, 2001). These determinants focus on adopting two key strategies that are aimed at establishing competence and building up networks, in order to counteract the limiting effects of organizational discrimination.

10.4.3.1 Establishing Competence

This is an extremely interesting area because it illustrates one of the limitations of using a Western theoretical framework. As indicated in the literature, even in the West the practice of women putting themselves forward is not accepted, due to the widely shared cultural expectation that women will deploy their knowledge and skills to the benefit of their employers (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Adler & Izraeli, 1994; Yoder, 2001). However, the task of establishing competence is even more challenging for women in a culture that is not only male-dominated but also collectivist. This tension between the individual and the collective is experienced by the women. For example, the woman who seeks challenging assignments is at risk of being labelled selfish and ungenerous. As discussed in Chapter 6, some of the women in this study viewed themselves as less competent than men and accordingly, they were willing to accept that they were unable

to hold leadership positions. This indicates that certain women find it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to disentangle themselves from the widely shared religious and cultural beliefs about gender. Yet Saudi women need to be encouraged to understand that they are fully capable of carrying out any task, including leadership. Women managers need to trust in their own competence in order to be assertive and to put themselves forward. This places a great deal of stress on the women because they need to work very hard, accept challenging tasks, believe in themselves, be willing to take on more responsibilities and keen to make that extra effort. It is true to say that in so doing women's self-respect and confidence in their natural abilities will be reinforced and their work will be more valued (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Yoder, 2001). First, these challenges and opportunities need to be made available and this will require more than just effort from the women themselves because it challenges the whole basis on which collectivism is premised.

10.4.1.2 Building up Women's Networks

The current study has shown that although there is strong solidarity between women managers, as they have their own informal networks, nevertheless these networks are often tied to men's networks and they do not have the same professional status. Saudi women managers are excluded from the networks of their male colleagues (see section 8.2.4.1), so they need to build up their own strategic networks to facilitate their career progression (Sohrab, et al., 2011; Singh et al., 2006). Women's networks offer a means to promote and enhance the social capital of women in different ways. Firstly, they will give women group representation to campaign for their rights. Also, they will help women develop their careers through facilitating knowledge-sharing between women in different organizations. They can also provide social and psychological support by encouraging women to talk about the issues that concern them, and they can help women to develop the required skills, abilities and attitudes for leadership. Moreover, they can provide female role models and mentoring, rather than women relying on male family members (see Chapters 6 & 8).

10.4.4 Implications for Researchers

This thesis has implications for researchers who are attempting to conduct research in Saudi Arabia. The study has revealed that Saudi culture is collective in that it

emphasises strong relationships, and commitment and loyalty to group members. Accordingly, it can be extremely difficult to conduct research in the public sector without first building a strong personal relationship with the people involved. This aspect of Saudi culture can be challenging, particularly for foreign researchers (see section 5.2.4). Nevertheless, networking is very beneficial in facilitating access to the field and in minimising any difficulties that are associated with socio-cultural traditions. This is related to the fact that Saudi cultural values and norms encourage friendly personal relations in order to express the Arab values of hospitality, kindness and willingness to serve others. However, this should not be taken for granted; researchers need to be aware that personal relations have certain rules that must be followed, including rules about trust and reciprocity. If these rules are not followed, researchers might be viewed as not trustworthy and as unappreciative and, as such, they will not receive support in the future (see section 5.2.4).

Another issue that has important implication for researchers is gender segregation (see section 6.3.5). Male researchers are not allowed to carry out studies in the women's sections and vice versa: women are not allowed to carry out studies in men's institutions. However, in an open environment such as some hospitals or the private sector it might be allowed, depending on whether the authority has approved access and whether the researcher has strong networks.

An additional issue that also has significant implications for researchers is that scheduled meetings may be delayed and sometimes re-scheduled (see section 5.4). This is due either to the urgency of personal matters such as the family, which always takes priority, or to another engagement, such as a meeting or conversation. This should not be perceived as indicating a lack of interest or as not being punctual about time, but rather as a practice that manifests the importance of family issues over work affairs and also the valuing of relationships over the clock. Also, researchers should be aware that meetings may sometimes be interrupted and again, this is not due to a lack of interest or seriousness but rather it is related to the nature of Saudi cultural values, which prioritize personal dealings.

10.5 Limitations of the Study

An acknowledgment of the limitations of a study is an important aspect of any research, which “encourages a reflexive awareness of the boundaries of our own and others’ claims to knowledge and understanding” (Willig, 2008: 159). Accordingly, and since this study provides only “one story” (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000: 136), it has a number of limitations. One essential limitation that inevitably arises here concerns the issue of generalizing or transferring the findings to other situations. In this study, the findings are only applicable to women in the public sector in Saudi Arabia. Whilst my research presents significant findings in this context it is not necessarily transferable to other contexts such as the wider Arab world, since in each case there will be major differences: social, political, economic and educational, as well as different levels of development. However, my data does provide a reliable and rich analysis which will facilitate judgement on the transferability (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) of my findings and it has produced a new framework for understanding the position of women in the public sector in Saudi Arabia. I accept that my analysis of the interconnections between the socio-cultural and institutional system (including religion, the family and the political and education system) is specific to Saudi Arabia; however I do believe that it is possible to abstract from my findings to discover ways of overcoming gender inequality in other similar situations.

The power of the social-cultural setting and organizational procedures precluded me from accessing other sites and respondents within the public sector organizations (see section 5.2.4). Also, the issue of gendered division of physical space disallowed me from entering males’ institutions, and I consider this another limitation of this study. Taking into account the perspective of men towards women as leaders in the Saudi context would generate more insight that adds to the organizational research, particularly in the women and gender in management field.

The final limitation of this study concerns how I placed myself as an individual with certain beliefs, values, feeling and biases in relation to the research process. As previously mentioned, I believe that research is culturally derived and historically situated. Hence throughout my research journey I have adhered to the rigorous protocols of good research and yet, at the same time I cannot deny the fact that I am an Arab

woman with certain beliefs, values and feelings. Therefore, my research position is a subjective one, in the sense that my beliefs, values and feelings are inscribed in my research and they are implicit in my research agenda which aims to 'give voice' to Saudi women in management and, in turn, to empower them.

10.6 Areas for Future Research

Most research is based on the implicit assumption that it will answer certain questions whilst leaving others unanswered, which will point to new directions for future researchers. Therefore, this study presented the story of my women managers that will be open to other understandings, since as Alvesson and Deetz (2000) indicated earlier, "what is offered is one story ... still open to other readings, and informed by other perspectives, interests or creative power".

During the research process a number of questions were raised that are beyond the scope of this study. These questions might prove useful in guiding future research which is aiming to expand on and to facilitate women's career mobility in the public sector, and in other male-dominated organizations in countries other than Saudi Arabia.

The study found that gender segregation in the workplace presents a major obstacle to top management and that the economic cost of it is very high. Further research should explore whether the Saudi government, in the long term and taking into account the economic uncertainty of recent years, will be able to continue to segregate the labour market by providing different spaces for women and men. There is also the question of whether oil depletion will alter the role of women in the work force, in management or in politics.

The study reported some psychological health problems amongst the women, such as frustration, disappointment, anger and alienation. There was also the sense of being excluded and of not receiving recognition for their hard work, all due to the various constraints they face in the workplace. It might be interesting to conduct a study that focuses specifically on the levels of stress among women in management and the subsequent cost to the Saudi government in terms of absence and sick leave.

The findings of this study revealed that access to the global world through the use of the internet has helped women to access information and to join international networks with other people, both men and women. This development has undoubtedly empowered them. This is an extremely important area and it is one that has scarcely been touched by the literature; therefore it would be interesting to see a study conducted on how openness to the global world has influenced women and facilitated their access to top management.

One aspect of my research that could be further developed concerns the perspective of men towards women in management in Saudi Arabia. It was clear from my findings that some men are willing to support women in developing their careers. As I am subject to the same restrictions as other Saudi females, thus far my gender has prevented me from pursuing this line of research.

Another suggested topic relates to the development of research methodology. Whilst my research has allowed me to interpret the factors underlying women's under-representation, I think a research study that uses other methods of qualitative data collection could bring more insight into the phenomena under study. For example, an ethnographic research method would allow researchers to be involved in the field for a prolonged length of time, so that they would be able to describe and interpret the patterns of shared and learned values, behaviours, beliefs and language (Creswell, 2007; Van Maanen, 1988). A narrative research method would also help researchers to recognize the extent to which the stories that are told can be used to provide more insight into the experiences of women in management (Elliott & Stead, 2008).

10.7 Concluding Remarks

This qualitative study has provided an in-depth understanding of Saudi women's experiences in management in the Saudi public sector. It has shown that understanding the phenomenon of women's under-representation in senior positions in public organizations requires an immense knowledge and understanding of Saudi culture, since public sector organizations and their employees do not exist separately from their cultural value systems, attitudes and behaviours. The major challenges for these women derive from socially sanctioned gender inequality. In Saudi public organizations, women managers endure another form of patriarchy, one that is based on the pattern of

male domination and female subordination that is traditionally experienced within the household. This means that the structure of work in public organizations is sexualised and despotic power relations are used to control women. Thus Saudi women managers are an extremely under-represented group in senior leadership positions, not least because their route to the top is a labyrinthine one.

The study has also shown that in spite of these difficulties some women are able to access certain opportunities to help them in their careers. This is quite an achievement when one considers that professional women everywhere in the world experience tremendous difficulties in reaching the highest positions within their organizations. It seems that discrimination against women is a universal phenomenon and it occurs even in those countries that practise greater gender equality and have adopted affirmative action legislation.

Therefore, it is significant to find that these constraints and obstacles do not go unchallenged amongst Saudi women. At an individual level, some women try to resist and challenge patriarchal authority within the organization. It is to be hoped that the actions of these women may serve to pave the way for other women who might feel encouraged to challenge male domination. This resistance is vital because a challenge to hitherto accepted behaviour and practices is the driver of change.

However, it would be unjust to rely solely on the efforts of women managers to improve their position in management. The empowerment of women needs to come from strong internal government-backed forces that can challenge patriarchal institutions. The government's policy-makers need to acknowledge that changing the entrenched male value system will require an intensive programme that is implemented in different institutions including the workplace. This programme must challenge and change the beliefs and perceptions of senior managers, and it must change the structure and culture of the public organization. In addition, policy-makers need to acknowledge that advancing women's careers into leadership positions requires more than a symbolic gesture that allows a few privileged women to attain leading positions in the public sector; rather, it must extend to the empowerment of all women regardless of gender and social background.

The empowerment of Saudi women will help them to play an important role in the social and economic transformation of the country. Thus their visible presence in senior management will gradually create a space for them in the conservative public sphere. It is expected that over the years the 'private-public administration' that prevails in the Saudi public sector will become destabilised and this will lead to more women becoming visible in senior managerial positions. This positive expectation is built on the knowledge that Saudi society is going through many socio-economic and political changes which will subsequently have an effect on the beliefs and value systems of the Saudi people. They are already becoming accustomed to seeing women achieving higher educational qualifications and going out to work in a world beyond the confines of the household. These developments mean that they will increasingly see more women holding senior positions and public office.

Also, my positive expectations are fuelled by the Saudi government's work in its recent Development Plan which aims to achieve the UN's third MDG: to promote gender equality and empower women. In addition, the increase in Saudi women's human capital has exceeded the increase in men's human capital in recent years, all of which could mean that Saudi decision-makers will not deny that women have the capacity to occupy leading positions. One may hope that in addition to the existing legislative framework they will eventually impose sanctions on the practices that devalue talented women in the workplace. My optimism about the future position of Saudi women managers is also linked to the anticipated impact of globalization in all its different forms. These economic, political and cultural developments will ultimately come to affect the social fabric of Saudi society, which will lead to more changes, particularly concerning the position of women. New opportunities in the labour market will be opened up for Saudi women because of the need to interact with other countries through production, trade, and financial transactions with the WB and the IMF, or the WTO. Additionally, ICT and the media will continue to play important roles in facilitating change in Saudi society. I think it is possible that one day women will enjoy equal representation in senior positions in the hierarchies of public organizations. I believe that, in the years to come, we can expect a healthier environment to emerge as Saudi society begins to recognise women's status as equal to that of their male counterparts. It is my hope that this long-awaited recognition will ensure women's increasing participation in every aspect of economic activity, including leadership positions.

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Appendices

Appendix (1) Letters Requesting Permission

1.1 Letter to Obtain Access to Organization

April 15, 2007

The Centre for Management and Organizational Learning,
Business School, the University of Hull,
Cottingham Road, Hull HU6 7RX.

Dear Sir / Madam,

I am currently doing a research degree at the Business School in the University of Hull, on the topic of "Women in management: Barriers to Women's Progression to Senior Management in the Public Sector in Saudi Arabia". The research focuses on determining factors that have influenced women in management from attaining senior leadership positions in the Saudi public sector.

Your organization has been selected to participate in this study of women in public sectors. This research will be reported in my doctoral thesis. The responses will be confidential and will only be reported in aggregate form.

Participation is voluntary and participants may withdraw at any time; however your organization's participation in this study will ensure that recent data on the status and experiences of women in management is available to the community, practitioners, policy makers and researchers.

I would appreciate it if you would agree to the research being conducted at your organization. However, if you have any queries or require any further information about the study, or you would like to receive a copy of the research findings once the study is completed, please do not hesitate to contact me at 0044 1482 887110 or 0044 7979020083, or email me on J.Abalkhail@2005.hull.ac.uk or Abalkhailj@hotmail.com.

I look forward to receiving your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Jouharah M. Abalkail

1.1.1 Letter of Permission to Access KSU

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



المملكة العربية السعودية
وزارة التعليم العالي
King Saud University
Center for Scientific
& Medical Colleges

August, 12, 2008

Mrs. Jouharah Abalkhail
The Center for Management and Organizational Learning,
Business School, the University of Hull,
Cottingham Road, Hull HU6 7RX.

Dear Mrs. Jouharah Abalkhail

We are pleased to confirm acceptance to undertake your fieldwork for doctoral thesis entitled "Developing Women's Potential: "Women in management: Barriers to Women's Progression to Senior Management in the Public Sector in Saudi Arabia" in our Organization.

We are enthusiastically looking forward to helping you on this vital project.

Should you require more information, please do not hesitate to contact me directly by email or telephone>

Yours Sincerely,

Amal Jamil Fatani, PhD

Head of Female Scientific
And Medical Colleges
King Saud University
P.O. Box 616. Riyadh,
11421, Saudi Arabia
Tel: 00966-505491876
Fax: 009661- 4918477

1.1.2 Letter of Permission to Access KFH



مستشفى الملك فيصل التخصصي ومركز الأبحاث
King Faisal Specialist Hospital & Research Centre
مؤسسة عامة Gen. Org.

26 JAT 1429
(30 June 2008)

REF: PRI/792/29
26 JAT 1429
(30 June 2008)

REF: PRI/792/29

Mrs. Jouharah Abakhail
The Centre for Management and
Organizational Learning Business School
The Univ. of Hull, Cottingham Road, Hull HU6 7RX, UK

Dear Mrs. Abakhail:

This is to confirm acceptance to undertake here in our institution your fieldwork for doctoral thesis entitled "Developing Women's Potential: A Critical Review of the Constraints and Opportunities for Women's Career Development in Saudi Arabia."

Should you require more information, please do not hesitate to contact directly Mr. Khaled Al Shami, Public Relations Coordinator at tel # 00-966-1-4427566.

Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

Fahad Al Shair
Head, Public Relations & Info. Dept.
Tel # 00-966-1-4427562/ Fax # 00-966-1-4427567

1.1.3 Letter of Permission to access IPA

Kingdom Of Saudi Arabia
Institute Of Public Administration



No :
Date : 1 - JUL - 2008

To Whom It May Concern

Mrs Jouharah Abalkhail is one of our employees at the Institute of Public Administration. As part of our human resources development program, Mrs. Abalkhail has been awarded a full scholarship to gain her Doctorate degree. The IPA will continue assisting and supporting Mrs. Abalkhail to finish her degree by allowing her to conduct her research at the IPA facility. In addition, Mrs. Abalkhail is welcomed to use the available resources at the IPA in order to achieve her academic study. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any further questions or concerns.

Best Regards,

Dr. Musaed A. Furyyan

Planning & Development Dept. Director



Headquarters, P. O. Box 205	: Riyadh 11141	Cable : Ipadmin	Tel: 4768888	Telex {	401160	Fax : 4792136
Western Province Branch, P. O. Box 5014	: Jeddah 21141	Cable : Ipadmin	Tel: 6314629		404360	Fax : 6313442
Eastern Province Branch, P.O. Box 1455	: Dammam 31141	Cable : Ipadmin	Tel: 8268300			Fax : 8268881

1.2 Participants' Consent Form

The Centre for Management and Organizational Learning,
Business School, the University of Hull,
Cottingham Road, Hull HU6 7RX. Tel (0044) 1482887110,

Jouharah Abalkhail, PhD Student

September 9, 2008

Dear Manager,

You are being asked to participate in a study that is investigating the views and experience of women managers towards factors that influence them in management from attaining senior leadership positions in the Saudi public sector. This study will be conducted by utilizing semi-structured interviews with each participant in order to allow for more follow-up questions. All participants are encouraged to speak from their own experiences in order to add to the richness of the data collection. The interviews will be approximately between an hour to one hour and a half in duration. I, the researcher, will conduct all interviews, which will be taped and transcribed for data analysis.

By agreeing to participate in this study you are agreeing to endure any foreseeable risks, which may include discomfort in revealing personal or meaningful information. This study aims to further the research area of women in management. In addition, it is anticipated that data yielded from these interviews might be used to inform organizational level interventions for raising women into leading positions in the Saudi public sector. All information collected in this study will be kept 'Strictly Confidential'. All identifying data will be changed in order to protect participants. The audiotapes will be used for the purpose of this study only and will be destroyed afterward. You have the right at any time during this interview to withdraw from this study without further consequences. Additionally, you have the right to refuse to answer any question with which you do not feel comfortable at any time during the interview process.

In closing, I would like to thank you very much in anticipation for your kind cooperation. If you have any queries or require any further information about the study, or you would like to receive a copy of the research findings once the study is completed, please do not hesitate to contact me at (0044) 1482887110 or 00447979020083, or email me on J.Abalkhail@2005.hull.ac.uk or Abalkhailj@hotmail.com.

I have read the above information regarding the right of participants, and agree to the stated terms. I voluntarily give my consent to participate in this study.

Participant's Name

Participant's signature

Date

Appendix (2) Interview Protocol

Time of the interview: Place of the interview: Name of interviewee:
 Date of the interview: Length of the interview:

Main Research Question		
Why are there not more women in senior leadership positions, in the public sector, in Saudi Arabia?		
Research Questions and Objectives	Opening and Follow-up Questions	Questions related to participants' background
<p><u>Research Question 1</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ What are the constraints that inhibit women's access to senior management positions in the Saudi public sector? ❖ Aims to investigate the major constraints that inhibit women's access to senior management positions in the Saudi public sector. 	<p><u>1 Opening Question:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would you please describe your views on key challenges facing women in management in general and in particular your career experiences in the Saudi public sector? <p><u>2-Follow-up Questions:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the factors influencing your progression to a senior position? (** I would then go on to ask specifically about barriers based on the interviewee's response). • What social-cultural factors can influence you in holding top positions in organization? • What aspects of organizations create obstacles for women to hold leadership positions? (e.g. in recruitment, selection policies, lack of mentors and role models, career development and promotion policies and appraisal system) • What do you think are the most persistent barriers to women 	<p><u>Personal information :</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Marital status • Number of children...etc. <p><u>Education Background:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialism • Degree achieved • Place of study...etc. <p><u>Employment background:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment status • Number of years in the current position • Number of employees you currently manage

	<p>gaining powerful positions within organizations?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From your experiences in management, have any of these barriers had an impact on your work opportunities? If yes, can you explain in more detail? • Do you think women in general and you in particular experience tension between their work and family? • Do you consider the social and economic changes happening in Saudi Arabia as barriers or opportunities to women career development? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • level of management ...etc.
<p><u>Research Question 2</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ What factors have assisted the career advancement of women in management in the Saudi public sector? ❖ Aims to investigate if there is any factor that have assisted the career advancement of women in management in the Saudi public sector. 	<p><u>1-Opening Question</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can we share your success story of being where you are now as a manager and factors contributing to such success? <p><u>2-Follow-up Questions:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In your opinion do you think there are social, cultural, economic, religious, and political or personal factors that contribute positively to women's career development in general and yours in particular? • Do you think there are any specific social-political factors that have assisted your career advancement? • What aspects of organizations have helped you (or other women) to improve your career? • What kind of developmental opportunities are available to you at your organization? • Were there any person(s) who had a particular influence on your career move? 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think was the most helpful of any of the factor(s) you mentioned on your career advancement? 	
<p><u>Research Question 3:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ How can the career paths of women be improved to enable them to achieve senior management positions in the Saudi public sector in such a way that this will facilitate wider political, social and economic development? ❖ Aims to explore ways that would allow women to achieve senior management positions in the public sector in Saudi Arabia which can influence wider political, social and economic development. 	<p><u>Opening Question:</u></p> <p>Based on your experiences as a manager, given the nature of your work, obstacles you faced in the organization and your social environment, what do you suggest to help you and other women to achieve top positions in the public sector organizations?</p> <p><u>2-Follow-up Questions:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you think of any social or political strategies that are important to the advancement of women’s career? • What organizational policies do you think will influence women’s career advancement to top positions more? • Do you think for women to reach top positions in your organization, they need to develop themselves (e.g. being highly self motivated, self-efficacy, very competence and hardworking)? • What role do you think women can play in leadership positions in Saudi’s public sector organizations in the future? 	
<p>Closing Questions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you see yourself on a particular career path or trajectory? (If so what is it)? If you could change anything about your life choices or employment experiences what would that be? • Where do you see yourself in 5 or 10 years time? The ideal and the real? • Would you like to add anything not mentioned during our discussions? 	

Appendix (3) Sample of Data Analysis

To obtain a sense of how to approach a text from an interpretative phenomenological analysis, below is an extract from the interviews with women managers.

Line	A Short Extract from a Woman Manager.
1	My family, particularly the male members have been supportive to my education
2	and career. My father is an ideal worker, and he is interested in literature and
3	language. He highly influenced my choice throughout my career. My son, whose
4	experience in modern administration has been helpful to me, works with a foreign
5	Company
6	The working conditions at my [organization] are tiring. The burden is too heavy. I
7	regard myself as an "executive secretary" for the management in the men's
8	department. We are kept busy with tiresome, routine tasks [...] like keeping up
9	with maintenance work, timetables, examination procedures [...]. Besides the
10	limitation of authority, the procedures and processes of our tasks are not clear, and
11	lines of authority are not clear. [...] All our departments [female
12	section] are administratively run by male departments. All these things make female
13	management the child rather than the sibling of male management, that is, female
14	departments are in different places and administratively subordinate to male
15	departments...The quality agency for development exists as an equal system, but
16	the implementation mechanism and the hiding from the women's department are
17	perhaps the reason for this remoteness from decision makers and the obstacle
18	against getting information to the right people...we need clear communication
19	channels between the men's branch and women's branch ...and unceasing training
20	for women to make them qualified for higher managerial work, and changing the
21	existing educational models so that the image of women in society may change...I
22	wish the experience of administrative work would be accumulative, rather than
23	being, as it is now, a mere commission that ends at a specific date...I mean that
24	administrative work should be a process that leads a woman from one position to a
25	higher one, not only men... I am now fed up with administrative work and have no
26	desire to hold any other position. ' I'm tired with my work and have no
27	desire to continue in this organization since the path to higher rank is
28	a long way to reach [...] what I really want is to continue my research in the field I
29	am interested in outside [the organization] (Ohoud , middle manager).

1-The Initial Encounter with the Text:

Upon initial reading of this short extract from one of the women who was interviewed in my study, I was surprised how this woman talked about the support from her male family members, both her father and son, but not her mother. I was struck with how this manager used very powerful metaphoric images such as, “I regard myself as an executive secretary”, (line 7) or “female management is the child rather than the sibling of male management” (lines 13 & 14). This manager talked about how the policy of the organization is based on an equality system between men and women, but the implementation mechanism of this system makes it difficult to deal with it on a daily basis (lines 16 & 17). She talked about the tiring working conditions without hope of improving to a better position in the meantime (lines 8 & 9). She highlighted the limitation of authority, unclear procedures, hiding of information, from the women’s department (lines 10 & 11). Further, she talked about the segregation between the women’s and men’s departments (lines 11-15). Moreover, she provided some suggestions to improve women’s careers, such as changing the existing education system, communication and training, development and line management (lines 21 & 22). The closing part of this extracted text showed that this manager desired to leave her organization as she was fed up with being in middle management and having limited authority, and accordingly she wished to continue her research in the field that she is interested in outside her organization (lines 26-29).

2- Identification of the Themes

Following the initial open engagement with the text, I moved on to more systematic reading to capture what this manager was really trying to say through thematic labels. This meant working through the text line by line. I was able to identify the following themes:

- 1- Family male member as influential to woman’s education and career (“My family, particularly the male members have been supportive to my education and career and he highly influence my choice throughout my career”) [lines1-5].
- 2- Limitation of authority (“my authority is limited”) [line 11].

- 3- Subordination (“I regard myself an executive secretary” and “female departments are administratively subordinate to male departments” [lines 7 & 14].
- 4- Discrimination (“but the implementation mechanism of this system”)[lines 16 &17].
- 5- Need for changing the education system to overcome traditional stereotypes (“changing the existing educational models”) [lines 21-22].
- 6- Training programmes (“unceasing training for women to make them qualified for higher managerial work”) [lines 20-21].
- 7- Communication channels (“we need clear communication channels between the men’s branch and women’s branch”) [lines 18 & 19].
- 8- Career ambitions (what I really want is [...] to continue my research in the field I am interested in outside [organization] [lines 27 & 29].

3- Clustering of the Themes

Some of the themes identified in stage two of the analysis share reference points, while other themes constitute different expressions of a particular condition. For example 1 and 9 refer to the opportunities that help women to improve their careers, while themes 2, 3, 4, 5 and 7 are related to barriers women face in their careers. Other themes like 6, 7 and 8 are related to ways to overcome some of barriers women face in their careers. Theme 6 is also another policy that would help to overcome the traditional stereotype of women. These themes capture the main categories of meaning that the respondent was using in her account of factors influencing the career advancement of women in management. They are as follows:

Cluster 1: Family support and self ambition (themes 1 & 8).

Cluster 2: limitation of authority, subordination, discrimination and communication channels (themes 2, 3, 4, 5 and7).

Cluster 3: training and development and clear communication channels (themes 6 and7).

Cluster 4: changing the education system and overcome traditional stereotypes (theme 5).

4- Production of a Summary Table and Integration

Cluster 1: Family support	My family, particularly the male members have been supportive to my education and career”.	Lines 1-5
Career aspiration (Factors promote career development)	“Continue to research in the field”	Line 30
Cluster 2: Power Structure Discrimination (Constraints to career development).	“Limitation of women’s authority and exclusion” “Organization’s policy does not discriminated between gender, but the implementation mechanism does discriminated between gender”	Lines 6-14 Lines 15 &16
Cluster 3: Training and development. Clear communication channels (Organization’s policies).	“Unceasing training for women...” “Clear communication channels between the men’s branch and women’s branch”	Line 19 Line 20
Cluster 4: Changing education system (Ways to overcome the stereotypes and tradition).	“Changing the existing educational models so that the image of women in society may change”	Lines 21-22

This is a table summary of one interview with a participant. Therefore, after producing summary tables for each participant, I integrated these tables into a comprehensive list of master themes that reflected the experience of participants as a whole. I looked across the entire body of data to obtain a more generalized understanding of the phenomenon. As in stages three and four above, I carried out the process of integration in a cyclical movement, so that any emerging higher-order themes were checked against the transcripts. This allowed me to see whether any emerging new themes were simply new expressions of old themes or whether they produced new meaning and concepts. As a result of this process, a list of themes developed over time until it reached completion that captured the quality of the participants’ shared experience of the phenomenon under investigation (Willig, 2008). The list of master themes includes the labels of super-ordinate themes and their key themes.

