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Eudaimonic career identities – Finnish executive women’s career navigation at the top management level

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Eudaimonic career identities
– Finnish executive women’s career navigation at the top management level

Anita Pösö

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Westminster for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Even in one of the most gender-equal countries in the world, Finland, the share of women in executive business roles has remained at less than 20%. This thesis examines the career identities of executive women in business-related roles in large companies in Finland. A model of eudaimonic career identities was built to understand the enablers of executive women's career navigation and success. The data were collected through a pilot study consisting of 133 interviews with women and in-depth interviews with 17 Finnish women executives.

The research questions the validity of current career models by explaining executive women's career progression to the top organisational level. This research integrates a missing element—the concept of eudaimonia—into a career identity model, which comprises the enablers of executive careers. The findings suggest how executive women's career identities are constructed on eudaimonic values instead of objective career success measures, including status, money and power. Moreover, the research challenges the approaches of systematic career planning and position-based career goals as the enablers of career progression.

The research findings evidence three types of career patterns leading to the top management team (TMT) level: conventional linear careers and moderate and frequent boundaryless moves. However, executive women were not hindered by the typical barriers that boundaryless career theories suggest that women leaders specifically encounter. The career patterns demonstrate the need for meaningful work, the possibility to influence and continuous challenges, which increase the women's competence in the executive leader role while accepting new positions within or outside the current employer.

Demonstrated excellency in leading people and extensive business understanding, which is acquired often through finance and accounting experience or knowledge, were perceived as imperative enablers of a successful executive career. Additionally, agency, risk-taking and decision-making skills were seen vital career resources.

As an academic contribution, this research contests the incongruence of leader and gender roles suggested by the social role theory. The women executives effortlessly demonstrated both stereotypically masculine and feminine traits and behaviours in their leader role identities, without emphasising or compromising their womanness. Moreover, the concept of authenticity operates as a discursive bridge between the gender and leader roles, resonating with eudaimonic aspirations.

This research assists professionals and leaders of all genders to aim for excellence and authenticity in their pursuit of meaningful career experiences.

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Declaration

I declare that all the material in this thesis is my own work.

Helsinki, 14 December 2022

Anita Pösö

1. Introduction

'If the future of leadership were more meritocratic, and managers selected leaders on the basis of their talent and potential rather than Machiavellian self-promotion, reckless risk taking, or narcissistic delusions, we would not just end up with more women leaders, but also with better leaders'. Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic (2019)

The current thesis investigates the careers of executive women leaders in large corporations in Finland, which is ranked among the most gender-equal countries in the world (section 2.1). Researching executive women's career identity construction is justified by the requirement for new career models following the increase of women in executive roles and top management careers. Leadership at the highest organisational levels includes an assumption of masculine norms and values (Schein, 1973), which do not fully explain the executive careers of women in Finland.

The research's purpose is to provide insights into how executive women in business roles have navigated their careers towards the male-dominant roles at the top management team (TMT) level. The research constructs a model of executive women's career identities and integrates the concept of eudaimonia into career research by investigating actual career experiences and subjective perceptions of career resources that enable career navigation to executive roles. Women executives' career identities in Finland require new definitions instead of applying the dominant masculine assumptions of executive careers. This research opens new avenues for understanding the enablers behind women executives' successful career navigation.

The motivation to research executive women leaders in male-dominant roles arose from the stagnant development of women's share at the top management level in large companies in Finland (section 2.3). The statistics show only minor increases in the number of women executives in business roles in Finland (section 2.3.1), regardless of the increasing number of women in other leadership roles—middle management, on the boards of directors and in politics.

As defined in the current dissertation, an executive is a leadership role and type of manager. A term senior management is often used interchangeably with executive management to describe the upper echelons (Hambrick, 2007) of an organisation. The present research adheres to the global statistics' ranking (e.g., EU, Catalyst, World Economic Forum) and uses the term executive leaders in reference to the top management of a company. The subsequent top-down levels are senior management and managers (Catalyst, 2020; World Economic Forum, 2021; Eurostat, 2022). Executives hold the responsibility for the management of a company at the highest level, forming a TMT. The TMT usually consists of various functional, regional or unit/departmental

responsibilities allocated to a specific executive leader, for example, CEO (chief executive officer, overseeing other executives), CFO (chief finance officer), MD (managing director of a subsidiary), CD (country director), COO (chief operating officer), VP (vice president), SVP (senior vice president) or EVP (executive vice president) (World Economic Forum, 2021).

The higher up in the organisation, the more gendered and male dominant the leadership positions become (Kumra et al., 2014). Globally, as of writing this dissertation, women account for approximately 40% of all (Catalyst, 2020). Only 14% of business executives in Finnish stock-listed companies were women in 2021 (Finland Chamber of Commerce, 2022), remaining below the European (19.3%) and global (23%) average (Catalyst, 2020). Even though global statistics show an overall slow positive increase in the number of women in business, a recent slight decline in executive women in business roles (Finland Chamber of Commerce, 2022; Catalyst, 2020) is not signalling any rapid positive change towards gender parity at the top corporate level. This calls for more empirical evidence of those women who, against all odds, have reached the TMT level.

Finland has the highest female labour participation in Europe in terms of full-time employment (Confederation of Finnish Industries, 2013), with women being more highly educated than men in Finland (section 2.4). However, these common solutions to improving gender equality have not increased the share of women in executive business roles in Finland (World Economic Forum, 2019). Thus, Finland offers an intriguing context for exploring the women who have reached executive positions in which women represent the gender minority.

The low number of women executives in business roles in Finland has consequences: the literature offers little empirical evidence of executive women's careers in business-related roles in large companies in Finland, partly because of the sheer scarcity of executive women (section 2.3.1). The possibility of researching women in top corporate management is limited because men have dominated—and still dominate—most senior-level positions in almost every country and every industry around the world (Catalyst, 2020).

Thus, leadership career theories are primarily based on empirical evidence that is generally collected among male leaders, which occurs because of the extensive natural supply of the male target group, resulting in the need for more research about executive women in Finland. Additionally, most research investigating the careers of women leaders is conducted among easily reachable participants: students or adolescents searching for their career aspirations or professional women who have faced obstacles and been stuck at the middle-management level.

The present thesis gives voice to authentic Finnish executive women who discuss and explain their career identity construction, here through qualitative social constructivist qualitative research.

The rationale for researching and aiming at gender parity in decision-making positions goes beyond the ethical issues related to gender equality, fairness and women's rights. The advantages of having more women at the top corporate level have been identified, specifically from the increased business results following the diversification of management in corporations. The McKinsey Global Institute estimated that a scenario in which women achieved complete gender parity with men could increase global output by more than a quarter relative to the business-as-usual scenario. (Woetzel et al., 2015)

The public discourse on women leaders taking over more positions of power and the positive news about successful women ruling nations give a deceptively positive image of gender equality. This is reflected in a recent global study finding that 50% of men and, even more surprisingly, 30% of women think that women are well represented in senior leadership positions (McKinsey & Company, 2021), hence indicating positive development in gender equality at work.

More awareness of executive women's careers is essential to correct misperceptions. Women executives at the top level of companies are a required and exciting target for research because more empirical evidence is required to understand their career navigation, which has been commonly shown to be halted at lower managerial levels (section 3.4).

1.1. Positioning the research

The vast literature and empirical evidence show that women leaders have interested researchers for decades already, mainly focusing on the possible gender-based differences in leadership styles (van Engen and Willemsen, 2004) and the barriers and reasons why women do not reach the executive level (section 3.4).

Leaders and leadership have been researched for decades, and the topic of women in leadership has gained a lot of attention. In 2017, approximately 5% of Web of Science articles addressed both leadership and gender when using the word 'leadership' (Gipson et al., 2017). Women's leadership identity has been problematised since Schein's (1973) 'think manager, think male' research. Even to date, perceptions of effective leadership as synonymous with stereotypically masculine, agentic attributes persist. Thus, inductive research investigating the enablers of women's successful career navigation to the top corporate level is required.

A large amount of women leadership research has concentrated on barriers to women's careers: metaphors including glass ceiling (Baxter and Wright, 2000), glass cliff (Ryan and Haslam, 2005; Hewlett, 2008), kaleidoscope (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005), labyrinth (Eagly and Carli, 2007b) off-ramps and on-ramps (Hewlett, 2007), glass slipper (Ashcraft, 2013; Spangsdorf and Forsythe, 2021) or the Teflon effect (Simpson and Kumra, 2016) to describe the difficulties women face while attempting to progress in the corporate hierarchy. Even though barriers for women aiming for leadership positions are well known, the knowledge has hardly opened more doors to women, only increasing the awareness of the hindrances and challenges women in middle management and other professional roles encounter. Consequently, the current career models fail to fully explain executive women's careers and lack of an eudaimonic perspective.

Eudaimonia, originating from Aristotelian ethics, is commonly translated as happiness, flourishing or a life well lived. Eudaimonia indicates the virtue of living in accordance with the 'true self' (daimon) through exercising intelligence and expressing a good character. It is based on taking advantage of opportunities, fulfilling personal goals and living up to one's potential (Waterman, 1993; Deci and Ryan, 2006; Huta, 2013; Huta and Waterman, 2013).

The concept of eudaimonia, which is commonly employed as a construct of well-being (Deci and Ryan, 2006; Ryan, Huta and Deci, 2006; Kashdan, Biswas-Diener and King, 2008), has not been integrated with leadership career identity theories before. However, several career theories, specifically in subjective career success literature (Judge et al., 1995; Nicholson and de Waal-Andrews, 2005; Shockley et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2021) and the kaleidoscope career model (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005), include notions of eudaimonia: meaningfulness, authenticity and excellency, which have not been considered as a benefit or enablers of women's careers in management.

Career development theories are commonly based on research among relatively broad and rather homogeneous samples of easily reachable students, employees and job seekers. Moreover, empirical evidence related to women leaders is often conducted using hypothetical managers or laboratory-created leaders (Elsesser and Lever, 2011). Consequently, because of the scarcity of women at the corporate executive level, specifically in a small country like Finland, the prior research has naturally encompassed the roles in which most women leaders are commonly found—women on boards, middle-management or executive women in support functions, that is, human resources and communication roles (Hearn et al., 2015). The extant empirical evidence needs more validation in explaining the career choices and behaviour of more specific, marginalised or underrepresented groups (Rudolph, Zacher and Hirschi, 2019). Researching the

career identity construction of executive women is justified by the nonprototypicality of women in those roles at the top organisational level (Ibarra et al., 2014). Because the empirical evidence of executive leaders is based largely on male target groups, the present research's inductive qualitative approach provides more knowledge on women executives' career enablers and resources.

A research approach focusing on positive examples, real women executives in business-related roles, without comparing men and women as opposites (Koenig et al., 2011), directs the discourse on women leaders from barriers to career enablers. Although more women are reaching the top decision-making levels in Finland (section 2.3.1), research should address the question 'how' rather than 'why not'. Thus, the present research investigates lived career experiences and perceptions of actual women executives, who are perceived as female role models and facilitators of other women's career success (Sealy and Singh, 2010; Adamson and Kelan, 2019; Catalyst, 2020).

Figure 1.1 illustrates the multidisciplinary focus of the current research. In this research, the career identities of executive women are viewed through three intersecting areas of career, gender and leadership theories.

Figure 1.1: The multidisciplinary focus of the research



The concept of career identity—defined as 'a structure of meanings in which the individual links his own motivation, interests and competencies with acceptable career roles' (Meijers, 1998, p. 191)—provides a holistic view of how executive women define themselves in terms of their work (Meijers, 1998; Fugate et al., 2004). By studying both identity and competencies, we can provide a fuller account of executive leadership development.

The current research adheres to a social constructionist perspective that perceives a career as representing a unique interaction of self and social experience (Young and Collin, 2004), following the notion of sustainable careers that acknowledges both individual and contextual elements as being related (van der Heijden et al., 2020) to career identity. Executive women are seen as part of their own environments, in which their actions contribute to the creation of either the constraints and opportunities they face while navigating their careers (Weick, 2001) in an iterative and continuing process of the reproduction and transformation of existing structures (Cohen, Duberley and Mallon, 2004).

The cultural and societal structures in Finland have a long history of aiming to support equality and the position of women in the labour market (section 2.2). However, the statistics convey an inconsistent message: compared with other European countries, Finland has average shares of executive women leaders in corporations (Horttanainen and Kajala, 2020). Similar to Norway, another Nordic welfare society, gender equality and new softer masculinity ideals have increased over the past few decades, yet the TMTs in business seem to represent a fortification against these changes (Halvorsen and Ljunggren, 2021).

Role identity is considered a central integrative concept in career research because it operates as the analytical bridge between the individual and the social environment. Role expectations exist not only in the minds of individuals, but are also shared with other people, producing social and cultural structures (Biddle, 1986). For an executive woman, both leader and gender roles are imperative because of the stereotypically masculine assumptions connected with leadership (Koenig et al., 2011).

A social constructivist approach was selected to address career navigation and the constructs of executive women's career identities. The present research answers the call to research leadership with interpretive assumptions using a qualitative methodological approach (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012) to inform various understandings of career construction from women's standpoint at the executive level.

The focus and aim of the research are explained next based on the research questions and their intended contributions to the theoretical knowledge and implications for practice.

1.2. Research aim and questions

The present research aims to contribute to the knowledge and discussion of women leaders' careers by exploring Finnish executive women's career navigation and constructing a model of executive women's career identity. The research focuses on the elements of executive career navigation, gender and leader role identities as part of executive role identity, subjective perceptions of success guiding career choices and essential career enablers for women executives' career construction.

The current research constructs an executive women's career identity model, which is based on career identities and the navigation of women who have successfully reached the top management level in large companies. The concept of career identity is perceived to operate as a 'cognitive compass' (Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth, 2004, p. 17) guiding women leaders to navigate their personalised career paths.

The present inductive research integrates the concept of eudaimonia as a key construct of the executive women's career identity model. The contribution to both theoretical and empirical knowledge arises from the lived experiences and perceptions of actual women executives in Finland. Even though career identity and women leadership research have long traditions in Finland, prior empirical research has not built a model of career identities of executive women in corporate business roles.

Careers are assumed to consist of objective and subjective sides (Barley, 1989). The objective side of executive women leaders' careers can be observed and measured by third parties, for example, through career paths and the sequence of positions and functions in an organisation (Biemann and Wolf, 2009). The subjective side of careers presents the perspectives in which executive women make sense of their careers and interpret the meaning of various attributes, actions and experiences (Biemann and Braakmann, 2013). The first subquestion contributes to the career identity model with an objective, and subquestions 2–4 contribute to the subjective side of career.

Thus, the aim of the present research is to investigate how Finnish women executives in business-related roles in large companies have navigated their careers in male-dominant executive positions in corporate top management. The research aim is divided into the following subquestions (SQ) that define the scope of the present thesis.

SQ1: What kinds of career patterns establish career construction of executive women to the top management level?

Women are assumed to follow nonlinear career patterns (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; Arthur, 2014). SQ1 investigates the observable career navigation of executive women.

This subquestion adds to the existing knowledge by identifying the career patterns and moves that have enabled and evidence executive women's career construction and development towards the top corporate level in Finland

SQ2: How are gender and leader role identities articulated as part of executive women's career identities?

Decades ago, the contemporary leadership paradigm became more feminine (Tomlinson, Brockbank and Traves, 1997), and female managers have been shown to possess distinctive abilities; as global competition increases, companies cannot afford to overlook half of the potential candidates for leadership positions (Adler and Kwon, 2002). Moreover, traditionally feminine characteristics have been perceived as increasing value in creating new perspectives in organisations (Mertelius-Louniala et al., 2003), which challenges the role congruity theory claiming an inherent mismatch between women's social gender and leadership roles (Eagly and Karau, 2002). Because of these changes, the doors to executive positions should be opened for many more women, especially in gender-equal Finland.

This research contributes to the knowledge and discourse of women in leadership roles by exploring gender and leader role constructs and their congruence (Eagly and Karau, 2002; Eagly and Wood, 2012) in the career identities of executive leaders in Finland.

SQ3: What kinds of discourses do executive women construct around the concept of career success?

The present research assumes that personal values and individual sense-making and perceptions of success affect educational choices, choice of employer, work involvement, career attainment and life satisfaction (Dyke and Murphy, 2006). How executive women engage themselves in the

discourse around career success and how they define success relates to executive career identities because career success conceptualisations are seen as an imperative part of career identity.

This subquestion aims to expose the underlying motivations and career goals guiding the career choices of executive women through the conceptualisations of career success.

SQ4: What career resources are emphasised as enablers constructing executive women's career success?

Corporate top-level positions have historically been, and even today, male dominated. Correspondingly, the stereotypes of top positions are even more agentic than lower-level leadership positions in an organisation (Eagly and Karau 2002; Koenig et al. 2011; Martell et al. 1998). The present research assumes agency is an integral prerequisite for achieving an executive position, regardless of gender.

This subquestion contributes to the literature about executive women's career identity construction by researching subjectively perceived enablers of successful careers and the career resources executive women find imperative, specifically in executive roles in the Finnish context.

1.3. Implications to practice

The present research's contribution to the lack of knowledge and empirical evidence of women executive role models additionally serves a practical perspective: to support women in leadership roles by sharing the knowledge of executive women's career experiences as a response to the concerns and desires voiced by women aspiring to reach the top corporate level.

More than half of all women of all ages and the majority of young men and women (16–34 years old) believe that increasing the number of women in senior roles at work would give them more role models to look up to (Pipeline, 2018), which shows the significance of role models. According to Uusiautti and Määttä (2015), the key to finding courage to abandon old perceptions and norms and create new solutions is expected to be found among strong women. The knowledge of women working in top leadership positions demonstrates how to enhance performance and exploit individual capabilities and professional competency at the fullest, eventually changing all society by increasing gender equality in corporate executive positions.

Organisations and future leaders, regardless of gender, will benefit from the research findings through a model of career identity that includes the career enablers and resources required at the top organisational level. Organisations may acknowledge the career identity model elements in designing meaningful work roles to attract talented executive candidates, both internally and outside the company. Additionally, the knowledge constructed by this research will support the career navigation of leaders aspiring to reach the executive level and higher educational institutes to adjust career counselling for their undergraduates and alumni.

1.4. Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into seven chapters.

| Chapter | Main content of the chapter |
|------------------|--|
| Chapter 1 | Outlines the need and motivation for the thesis, positions the research study within women leadership and career research, presents the research aim and questions and the intended contributions to knowledge and practical implications. |
| Chapter 2 | Presents the social and cultural contexts of this work and the environment in which the executive women navigate their careers by discussing social position of women and leadership in Finland. Moreover, a pilot study focusing on the research is presented. |
| Chapter 3 | Discusses the literature related to careers of women leaders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observable career patterns • Career identity • Career success • Barriers to women leaders • Distinct features of executive leaders |
| Chapter 4 | Consists of the methodological choices of the research; the research philosophy, approach and methods are presented. Moreover, data collection and analysis, limitations and reflexivity are discussed. |
| Chapter 5 | Presents the empirical findings of the research according to the research questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career pattern profiles • Gender approach at work • Executive role identities • Discourse of career success |
| Chapter 6 | Discusses and analyses the findings through a career identity model of executive women |
| Chapter 7 | Concludes the contributions to knowledge and practical implications of the thesis. The methodological choice and its limitations are discussed, and future research is outlined. |

2. Finland—A societal and cultural setting for executive women

'It is like winning the jackpot in a lottery to be born in Finland'. – A Finnish proverb

Finland is often mentioned as the best place to be born in, especially if the baby is a girl, as verified by ranking second after Norway in the Female Opportunity Index (N26, 2021). The common Finnish lottery quote given above remains correct: unless the girl is dreaming of becoming a business executive one day. Regardless of the equal and democratic environment demonstrated by the high full-time employment levels of women, executive management in business remains a masculine and male-dominated field of society in Finland.

Chapter 2 presents the societal and cultural context of the present research. Understanding the environment in which Finnish executive women construct their career identities requires a wider understanding of the interrelated spheres of life (e.g., education, society's structures, workforce) forming the distinct work and leadership culture (Kirkman, Lowe and Gibson, 2006; Hofstede, 2012). This chapter discusses the Finnish national culture's elements constructed by the values and norms that shape the development of equality and social position of working women and leadership discourse in Finland. An overall landscape of Finland's development to an allegedly equal society with its distinct national characteristics' as a welfare state is portrayed. Thus, Chapter 2 contextualises the Finnish work environment, along with the enablers and hindrances in which women executives navigate their careers.

First, an exhaustive list of Finland's recent triumphs in numerous world-level rankings is presented to depict Finnish gender equality. Section 2.1 posits and compares Finland with other Nordic countries, EU countries and the US.

Finland's reputation as a prosperous Nordic welfare state suggests high gender equality resulting from the restructuring of gender as one of the great transformations in modern society (Beck and Ritter, 1992; Therborn, 1995). Section 2.2. explains the framework that the Finnish welfare society has established to encourage and enable the full utilisation of its citizens as part of the labour force.

The particularly high employment rates of women in all socioeconomic classes and the aim for equality and solidarity (Tanhua, 2020), as enabled by the social services in Finland, are discussed in section 2.3. Section 2.3.1 continues the discussion of women's position in the Finnish labour market by presenting international comparisons and statistics of women in senior business

executive roles. Section 2.4. presents how education—one cornerstone of the Finnish welfare society—enables gender equality. The distinct features of the Finnish leadership culture—hard work, low power relations, masculine and technical hegemony, straightforwardness and fact-based leadership and the changing leadership paradigm—are discussed in 2.5.

Section 2.6. presents a pilot study, which contains the secondary data of 358 women leader's interviews (Keksi, 2017) and which has informed and focused the research's focus. The interviews were conducted as part of Finland's 100-year independence projects. A campaign of 365 women leaders' interviews about their careers and perceptions of being a woman and leader in Finland is positioned under the contextual chapter to show evidence of the current topics revolving around women in leadership in Finland. Chapter 2 ends with a summary in section 2.7.

2.1. Finland noticed in world rankings and media

In the Nordic countries (Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland), women are treated more equally than anywhere else in the world. In 2021, Finland ranked second in the World Economic Forum's annual Global Gender Gap Report after Iceland. Norway held third place and Sweden fifth place after New Zealand. The Nordic countries have consistently been ranked at the top of these reports that benchmark and track the progress of closing gender-based gaps based on four key dimensions: economic participation and opportunity; educational attainment; health and survival; and political empowerment (World Economic Forum, 2021).

Finland's gender equality, which demonstrates opportunities for women, is renowned for its track record of giving women rights in society among the first countries in the world. Women received full political rights: voting rights for national elections (the first country in Europe) and the right to be electoral candidates (the first country in the world). In 1906, the Marriage Act released wives from being under the guardianship of their husbands, and wives were given the right to their own property in 1930. In 1978, parents gained the right to share parental leave, which name just a few milestones in the history of equality in Finland (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2022).

Moreover, Finland's judicial system supports career navigation in a stable environment and is ranked as the most independent in the world. Similarly, Finland's police force is the most trusted, its banks the soundest, its companies the second most ethical, its elections the second freest, and its citizens enjoying the highest levels of personal freedom, choice and well-being (Henley, 2018). Verified in numerous rankings, Finland has been designated as the happiest country on the World Happiness report four years in a row (Helliwell et al., 2021), highest in judicial independence

(World Economic Forum, 2018) and fourth after the other Nordic countries in the Legatum Prosperity index (Legatum Institute Foundation, 2021)

Additionally, Finland is the sixth freest country, together with Canada, in an index using 82 indicators of personal and economic freedom (Vásquez et al., 2021) and the fifth safest country in the world (Getzoff, 2021). A recent accomplishment in the sphere of women in politics is Finland's womanised coalition government in 2020, which had the youngest female prime minister in the world (Finnish Government, 2020).

The long list of Finland's high rankings should indicate a history of successful emancipatory politics (Giddens, 1991; Williamson, 2012). However, Finland—the current top performer in rankings—had only a minimal welfare system compared with the other Nordic countries as late as 1930 and was rejected from the analyses and groupings of European welfare states. Because of rapid growth, Finland first appeared in the welfare spending ranking as seventh in 1980 and has since been recognised as one of the top developed countries over the past 30 years. (Cousins, 2005)

Regardless of Finland's current triumphant success in rankings exhibiting a prosperous country, its reputation has its stains. Finland has been seen as a secluded and distinct national culture (REF). The disparate and closed society comes through in the low number of immigrants—only 8% of the population in 2021. The ethnic background of the population is not reported in the Official Statistics of Finland, only the country of origin (Official Statistics of Finland (OSF), 2021). The minority groups of Finland are commonly categorised by their native language, including Swedish speakers (5.3%), Russian speakers (1.4%), Estonians (0.9%), Roma (0.2%) and Sámi (0.1%) (Minority Rights Group International, 2020). Finland has recorded twice the highest perceived racist violence against people of African descent in the Being Black in the EU survey (FRA, 2019), which evidences the homogenous and unitary culture of a country with a small population of 5.5 million inhabitants, of whom roughly 440,000 have a foreign background (Official Statistics of Finland (OSF), 2021).

Unexpectedly, the world's 'happiest' nation also ranked the fourth highest in domestic violence for women in the EU in 2017. However, the report is not all inclusive and lacks some EU countries. A more comprehensive survey will be published only in 2024 as part of the Gender Equality Index (EIGE, 2022). The reporting of domestic violence cases has been increasing during 2018–2020 in Finland (Haapakangas, 2020), which is alarming but may also signal a positive phenomenon indicating increasing openness and gender-equal culture by breaking the silence around an issue considered taboo in most countries.

Even though women's representation in politics has doubled globally over the past 25 years, women continue to be underrepresented in the highest political positions. Finland and New Zealand are the only countries to have had three top female political leaders (O'Neill, 2020). Moreover, the rare women leaders in high positions receive an extraordinary amount of media attention (Carli and Eagly, 2016), and often, the media trivialise their contribution and weaken their credibility as leaders, as evidenced in the UK by media naming women MPs babes and labelling them too sexy or dowdy (Mavin, Bryans and Cunningham, 2010), while creating a distorted illusion of gender equality in leadership.

Women's long tradition in political participation in Finland has received extensive publicity, amplifying the image of a gender equal and woman leader-friendly country. Since the start of this century, Finland has had two female prime ministers and a widely liked female president who served for 12 years (Finnish Government, 2020). Recently, Finland's reputation as a highly gender-equal country was brightened even more when the prime minister, Sanna Marin, 34, took office in December 2019, leading a coalition government in which all five party leaders were women (Finnish Government, 2020). In contrast to many other countries, Finland's gender equality minister is a man, and the most powerful ministries are led by women (Östling, 2020). In Marin's government, there were originally seven men and 12 women ministers. The five women portrayed in the news worldwide were the political party leaders of the coalition government. Moreover, in February 2020, Finland became the Nordic country with the highest share of women (47%) in parliament (Statista, 2020). Following Dahlerup and Layenaar's (2013) classification of gender representation in politics, gender balance (women >40%) was achieved in 2007, with 42% of women parliament members.

In conclusion, Finland is renowned for its success in various country comparisons, its women leaders in politics and its modern democratic Nordic welfare state model (Hemerijck, 2013; Julkunen, 2017), hence being seen as embracing exemplary equality. Regardless of societal support and highly feminised politics, gender parity has remained unattainable, specifically at the TMT level in business organisations (section 2.2.6). The next section discusses the construction of working women's position and gender equality in the Finnish welfare society.

2.2. Finnish welfare society enabling gender equality at work

Several distinct models of welfare states have been categorised over the past five decades (Tervonen-Gonçalves and Oinonen, 2021). In a typology of welfare states as liberal, social democratic and conservative (Esping-Andersen, 1990), Finland, among other Nordic countries,

represents the social democratic welfare model, promoting an equality of high standards. The Nordic welfare model is perceived as a form of state moderating capitalism with a multidimensional system constructed on interdependent social and economic politics (Hemerijck, 2013; Julkunen, 2017).

The Nordic welfare model is often conceptualised in the political economy, with the main components of the model being described as the universal welfare state, centralised wage-bargaining structures and high level of taxation (Kuisma, 2007), here aiming for and requiring full employment, which assumes all capable citizens participate in paid labour, including all genders. The Nordic welfare state's gender equality model is generally comprised of three pillars: gender equality legislation, gender-quota policies and family-friendly welfare state policies and, to a lesser degree, by the policies developed by companies and other labour market actors (Kitterød and Teigen, 2018).

The Nordic welfare state model shapes the circumstances of laboured work and is characterised by publicly funded and administered comprehensive and relatively egalitarian benefit structures that aim to guarantee individuals and families a minimum income, certain social contingencies and ensuring all citizens the best standards available in relation to a certain agreed range of social services (Briggs, 1961). Citizens' income is secured by unemployment benefits and pensions, which vary according to the payments made by workers throughout their careers. Additionally, universal and free healthcare and social security insurance schemes cover a number of different situations (Swank, 2000), often offered as employment benefits or covered by personal insurance in other countries.

Even though the Nordic countries are among the most developed rich democracies, the critique of the welfare model (Korpi, 2000; Mandel and Semyonov, 2006; Andersen, 2016; Mun and Jung, 2018) has increased over the past few decades. The Nordic model was traditionally based on a form of welfare state nationalism; especially in Finland, the construction of the independent national identity was related to the development of welfare state in the period after World War II (Kuisma, 2007).

However, the nationalist welfare model has become increasingly difficult to sustain in the globalising world. An increasingly heavy financial burden to maintain the state-secured social services has led to economic and political disputes in Finland. For example, should the country increase its debt yearly or rely on full employment policies along with high taxes depends on the

public opinion and current government's view on the income (re)distribution (Kuisma, 2007; Kautto, 2012; Tervonen-Gonçalves and Oinonen, 2021)

For women participating in the labour force, the most significant downside of the Nordic welfare model is the persistent occupational and vertical gender segregation of the labour force (section 2.2.2), which has received a lot of public attention but remains an extremely complicated issue to correct and change without breaking down the foundations of the welfare model. Particularly, women aspiring to obtain leadership positions are claimed to suffer the most from the structures of the welfare model (Mustosmäki, Mankki and Sihto, 2019; Urpelainen, 2019) because of the societal and cultural norms in Finland. Moreover, the Finnish welfare model has resulted in high segregation of work, leading men and women to work in different professions and sectors, which will be discussed next.

2.2.1. Work as a norm: dual-earner and dual-career model

Among the Nordic welfare states, Finland can be interpreted as a product of secularised Lutheranism (Nelson, 2017), aiming to make a norm the moral obligation that everybody ought to work. The Nordic family and gender role policy and discourse in the welfare society is rooted in the development and increasing the work, production and economy of society (Kolbe, 2010). Consequently, full employment became a shared programmatic objective in all Nordic countries after World War II (Kettunen, 2001), and the construction of extensive public services of health, care and education created the preconditions for generalising wage work as the norm.

The construction of the welfare state in Finland reinforced the notions of wage work as the norm, including for women and as a source of individual autonomy (Kettunen, 2001). Similarly, the classic liberal intentions advocated by J. V. Snellman (an academic, journalist and senate member during the Russian reign) whose liberalist and nationalist objectives aimed for Finland's independence as part of the Fennomen movement focused primarily on the economic prosperity, for which all citizens were needed (Anttila, 2007; Kortelainen, 2007). Dismantling class society structures served the objective of following the Hegelian idealism of individual freedom (Alavuotunki and Viitala, 1990). Thus, work operated both as a source of independence and prerequisite for the construction and maintenance of the welfare state. The great shortage of all resources following World War II catalysed the endeavour of Scandinavian countries to create their characteristically positive circles of efficiency, solidarity and equality. In Finland, this development was enabled by the substantial war indemnity to Russia after World War II, which created the need for industrial production that artificially maintained employment and mitigated the economic downturns (Temmes and Temmes, 2020).

Diverting from the traditional family ideals of a single breadwinner model, the Finnish gender division of labour existed before the Nordic welfare state era. According to Lähteenmäki (1997), the hard labour of women in rural households included both masculine tasks, for example, field work and herding cattle and feminine caregiving tasks. Moreover, the industrial wage work of women was common in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, even though it was often a limited phase of life before marriage and a family's first child. However, the number of married women working in factories was relatively high, 13% in 1930, even before the introduction of the welfare model after World War II. Thus, already in the early twentieth century, the debate on the place of women was dominated by the family–society clash: it was stressed that women's place was in the home, while women's right to work was being demanded (Lähteenmäki, 1997).

Kettunen (2001) described Finland as a democratic wage-work society in which the transformation of the gender division of labour along with the family–society relationship became vital in building the welfare society. Thus, everybody was needed in the labour force, including women. This contrasts with the idea of neoclassical theory claiming that a family's welfare is most efficiently secured by gender specialisation (Becker, 1991).

With its gender equality emphasis, the Nordic model has reinforced the twofold dependence on women in the welfare state (Kettunen, 2001)—here with the preconditions supporting women's work outside the home, for example, childcare, and with the public sector jobs created within the welfare state—resulting in strongly gender-segregated labour markets (section 2.2.3). To help working mothers with their domestic duties, statutory school meals were introduced in 1943 (Official Statistics of Finland, 2019); this reflects the need to support the dual burden of both household work and paid laboured work assigned to women (Lähteenmäki, 1997).

Consequently, work–family policies in Finland have been built on a dual-career family model according to the ideals of the Nordic welfare model. Originally, the dual-career (dual-earner/dual-career) model was defined as a type of family in which both heads of the household simultaneously pursued careers outside the home and maintained a family life together. Thus, men and women equally engaged in both caregiving and paid employment, as opposed to an earner-carer model, the single breadwinner model, in which the man brings in income and supports the family financially while the woman remains at home (Rapoport and Rapoport, 1971; Gornick and Meyers, 2003).

Full-time work is valued as a guarantee of economic independence and one of the most important parts of social inclusion (Julkunen, 2013). Tanhua (2020) perceived part-time work as positively affecting women's socioeconomic position by enabling both work and care responsibilities at the same time. However, part-time work is not often well-paid and does not include the same career possibilities as full-time work, which reinforces vertical segregation at work and, thus, weakens women's socioeconomic position. Neither does part-time work offer opportunities to work as an executive TMT member, bearing the highest level of responsibility for the organisation's success. On the other hand, without the possibilities for part-time work, women may stay longer at home, which is visible in the participation in subsidised childcare outside the home in Finland, where only 33% of under 3-year-old children were in publicly subsidised childcare in 2018 (Tuononen, 2021). The corresponding figures were 89% in Denmark, 74% in Iceland, 69% in Norway and 51% in Sweden (Duvander and Ellingsæter, 2016).

In the Finnish model, the dual-earner model is encouraged through individual and strongly progressive income taxation and legislation aiming to secure and ease the employment of parents. At the same time, families' care work is supported by providing inexpensive publicly subsidised childcare for young children and free education for older children, including meals (Anttonen, Häikiö and Stefásson, 2012; Tanhua, 2020). These generous parental leave policies, subsidised childcare and a commitment to work–life balance mean young working mothers are the norm rather than the exception in the twenty-first century (Graham-Harrison, 2019).

The negative side of generous parental leave subsidies include discrimination against young women at their fertility age. Paid maternity leave and a long absence from paid employment may discourage employers from hiring women to positions of authority and power. Thus, young women are handicapped in their ability to compete successfully with men for elite positions (Mandel and Semyonov, 2006), which will remain as long parental leaves are costly for employers because of salary compensation and the costs and difficulty of finding a competent fixed-term substitute (Kolehmainen, 2016). For example, Eydal and Rostgaard (2011) argued that the recent introduction of cash-for-care schemes in the Nordic countries seems to go against the Nordic dual-earner/dual-carer model and ideals of gender equality because these schemes support the maternal care of children at home (Eydal and Rostgaard, 2011).

According to the Finnish Gender Equality barometer (2017), taking family leave was still considered easier for women than for men, particularly in the private sector. However, the subsidised care benefits are modest compared with the wages, and as a result, the dual earner with a higher income in the family, usually the man, continues to work. Thus, it can be argued that

even the Nordic welfare society ideal is founded on valuing the norm of a (male) wage earner in the end (Tanhua, 2020).

Women's participation in work outside the home does not necessarily entail a diminishing share of unpaid reproductive work in the private sphere of the family or vice versa. Research in Austria showed highly educated mothers with children below the age of three were increasingly turning away from the dual-earner model and choosing the male breadwinner model (Berghammer, 2014).

2.2.2. Horizontal and vertical gender segregation at work in a welfare state

The Finnish labour market is the sixth most gender segregated in the EU-27, with women dominating public sector jobs and men the private and public sectors in construction work, logistics and traditional manufacturing industries (EIGE, 2022). Occupational gender segregation refers to women's and men's different concentrations in different occupations, different industries, different jobs and different levels in a workplace hierarchy (Charles, 2005). Despite the excellent employment levels of Finnish women at the aggregate level, gender-based segregation of labour is particularly strong in Finland when looking at international comparison (Official Statistics of Finland, 2018).

Gendered structures at work indicate the invisible processes of organisations in which gendered assumptions about women and men and femininity and masculinity affect decisions. The most common inequalities discussed in the literature are the sex segregation of jobs, occupations and hierarchical positions and the wage gap between women and men (Acker, 2012). Social role theory (Eagly, 1987) proposes that gender imbalance in career interests and choices are the result of historical divisions of labour within families, in which the historical position of women as the primary caregivers to children has led to the migration of women into careers that value nurturance and social sensitivity and are more broadly people oriented.

The historical and cultural norms have directed women to work in certain fields outside the home; in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the majority of upper- and middle-class women undertook paid work solely for 'respectable' activities. Most women of this class were expected to marry and look after their children and home and were not expected to work for money. However, for nonwealthy and nonmarried women, full-time work until marriage was a necessity, which was equally the case for men. However, men who have historically held the position of provider have migrated towards careers that require more analytical skills and competitiveness to succeed (Wolf, 2010). Consequently, Perrons (2005) categorised segregation with three C's for women—cleaning,

cooking and caring—whereas men occupy three M’s—money, management and machinery—which is clearly visible in the gender division of labour in Finland (EIGE, 2022; Official Statistics of Finland, OFS, 2022).

In Finland, women’s activities and jobs are concentrated in the public sector, which is generally staffed by women and explains the high labour force participation of women (Official Statistics of Finland, OFS, 2022). On the one hand, the public sector offers a way to ease work–family conflicts without challenging the gender division of household labour; on the other hand, it increases statistical discrimination (Baumle and Fossett, 2005) at work and, thus, reinforces glass ceilings (Weyer, 2007). The consequence is one of the main gender equality weaknesses of the Nordic welfare societies: a steep gender segregation of the labour market, in which the public sector employs women to traditional ‘feminine’ low-status positions where women earn less than, for instance, in private industries (Ellingsæter, 2013, 2014).

When researching executive women’s careers, both vertical and horizontal career opportunities and hindrances become relevant. Regardless of the developed Finnish welfare state model with high levels of female labour force participation, women are concentrated in female-typed occupations with low access to positions of power, resulting in relatively low female representation in managerial occupations (EIGE, 2022).

Gender divisions contributing to inequality are entrenched in the culture and historical structures of the economy. When discussing the social forces that generate gender inequality, Blau, Brummund and Liu (2013) distinguished between proximate mechanisms (discrimination, internalisation, labour force commitment and cultural devaluation) and macro-level forces (economic, organisational, political and cultural forces). Economists have discussed a dual labour market based on gender. The dual labour market divides work and workers into different sectors—primary or secondary, formal or informal—and, in this case, male or female. In occupations from journalism and medicine to teaching, law and pharmacy, sociologists have noted a phenomenon dubbed the ‘feminisation of the professions’, in which salaries drop as women’s participation increases (Ashenfelter and Card, 2010; Kimmel and Aronson, 2014). Additionally, comparative biological advantages, underinvestment in human capital (schooling or training), differential income roles, preferences and prejudices, socialisation and stereotypes, entry barriers and organisational practices have been identified as key factors in the literature on segregation (Bettio and Verashchagina, 2009).

Hakim (1998, 2006) explained the gender segregation of work with her preference theory, claiming that women prefer and choose to be at home with children and do not like to travel or stay away from home. Similarly, Bertrand (2011) listed risk attitudes, attitudes towards competition, social preferences and attitudes towards negotiations among the factors affecting gender imbalance at work. However, most of the studies researching these aforementioned factors were carried out in controlled experimental settings, with many contradictory findings being found.

Consequently, as long as gender equality is combined with gender essentialism—the belief that men and women are essentially different and have different skills and abilities—labour segregation persists (Charles and Grusky, 2004). Kortelainen (2007) opposed preference theory and perceived the choices of women in Finland to be limited to societal norms; the historical and cultural assumption of women's ambition to change society and execute dynamic and economic power and to develop themselves and succeed in life has been channelled into voluntary associations and charitable organisations when all other routes to power were impeded.

However, Korpi et al. (2013) opposed the idea of well-developed work–family policies damaging the career prospects of highly educated women because they found no support in their research of 18 countries; countries with earner–career family policies had no more occupational gender segregation than countries with other types of family policies. Similar evidence has been found in Japanese companies (Mun and Jung, 2018).

2.3. Women in workforce in Finland

In April 2022, the number of employed persons in Finland was 2,641,000, with the employment rate of women at 74.1% and men at 75.3% (Official Statistics of Finland, 2022). Finland's female-to-male workforce participation rate was 88.5%, compared with a world average of 65.8% and an EU average of 81%, showing the gender equality of employment. In 2018, 78.9% of women worked full time and 21.1% part time. Additionally, women accounted for 33.3% of the entrepreneurs in Finland (Official Statistics of Finland, 2019)

Even though, in the nineteenth century, Finland—a part of Russia—was not associated with the most equal and prosperous countries in the world, the first advances of gender equality were imposed subsequently as part of the political and cultural development in Europe. In the UK, married women achieved complete personal control over all of their property in 1882, whereas a similar law was accepted in Finland in 1889. Surprisingly, in Finland, unmarried women at the age of 25 obtained full legal and merchant rights as early as 1864, equal hereditary rights for men and

women were imposed in 1878, and women became legally competent at the same age as men in 1897, here following the common development in Europe (Official Statistics of Finland, 2018).

Finland's rapid positive development occurring in its independence time (1917–present), specifically during and after World War II, has supported gender equality in accordance with the development of the welfare society (Kettunen, 2006). As in most European countries during and after World War II, when the struggling societies needed the contribution of every citizen at work, the women participated in the labour and ran all the necessary functions by themselves while the men were occupied on the war fronts (Kortelainen, 2007).

Women's participation in the labour force stabilised to 50% in the 1950s. However, women occupied merely working-class positions, and for women, the only way to become leaders was through ownership by heritage or marriage. According to Hernesniemi (1968), women occupied only 4.5% of leadership positions in business. Women dominated the lower middle class, constituting 60% of its membership in 1960 and 70% in 1980, an indication of their heavy employment in lower-level, service-sector positions, such as office workers, elementary school teachers and nurses (Alestalo, 1986).

Since the implementation of the Nordic welfare society with its dual-earner and dual-carer mode, Finland has succeeded in including women in the wage-earning society better than the OECD average. However, Finnish women's employment rate is lower than women's employment rate in the other Nordic countries, which can be explained by the higher full-time employment in Finland. In 2012, part-time employment as a percentage of women's total employment was only 19% compared with 46% in Iceland, 42% in Norway, 39% in Sweden and 36% in Denmark (Drange and Egeland, 2014).

In 2019, the Finnish Broadcasting company Yle investigated the fears and dreams of the Finns in a survey with 2,237 respondents. According to the survey, 20% of the respondents experienced discrimination (3% strongly and 17% somewhat). The most common reasons for discrimination were mentioned as being a pensioner, low incomes, gender, health issues, age and unemployment. Half of the respondents experiencing discrimination described the reasons being related to unemployment and low income level. There was not a big difference between the female and male respondents. Surprisingly, men experienced discrimination slightly more than women in all age cohorts. Problems with coping at work have clearly increased since 2013 because various physical and mental symptoms have become more common, especially among young and middle-

aged wage and salary earners, and are clearly more common among women than men (Official Statistics of Finland, 2019).

Similarly, in a recent Finnish Gender Barometer survey (Attila et al., 2019), nearly 60% of men but only just over 30% of women stated that the opportunities of women in their working life were equal to those of men. Men would appear to be more likely than women to believe that gender equality has already been achieved: nearly half of men but only one-fifth of women considered men and women to be equal in Finland.

Although Finland provides a seemingly egalitarian Nordic welfare state context for women leaders' career navigation to obtain the 'Finnish Dream' (section 2.1), women face contradictions between expectations of women as full-time ideal workers pursuing masculinist careers and continuing the responsibilities at home and performing 'good motherhood' (Niemistö et al., 2021). The next section presents women's representation at the top management level in private sector business organisations in Finland.

2.3.1. Women in executive management in the private sector in Finland

In Finland, the research on women as leaders began only in the 1980s, a decade later than in the Western world in general (Lämsä, Anna-Maija, 2011). An explanation for the late but fast development of women in leadership results from its history; Finland was among the poorest and most unequal countries at the beginning of 1900, and agriculture was the source of livelihood for 70% of the Finnish population even in 1920. Until as late as the 1970s, half of the labour force (54%) in Finland was categorised as working class, and only 5% of the population belonged to the upper middle class (Alestalo, 1986). In 2019, 37% of the population belonged to the working class, men and women equally. However, the majority of the working class has been female over the past 50 years (Official Statistics of Finland, 2019).

Historically, the prototypical leader has been a man (Ibarra et al., 2014; Eagly, 2016). Finland is no exception to this. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Finland, following the prevalent Enlightenment (e.g., Rousseau's) thoughts of women, the acknowledged business women had gained their power generally through hereditary positions or were the appendages of a powerful man (Lewis, 2021); thus, women have historically occupied very few direct leadership positions in business organisations (section 2.1), which is reflected in the statistics of the twenty-first century.

The societal gender segregation of labour (section 2.2) has a twofold influence on women in executive management. First, by the diminishing share of women along the position level or

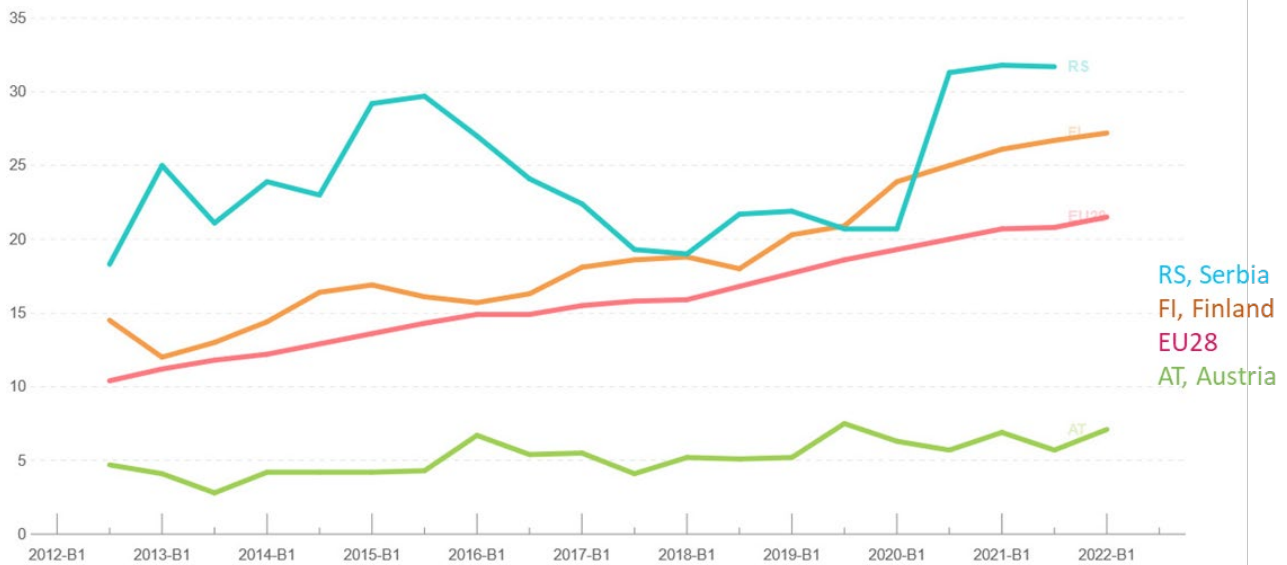
organisational size growth, vertical segregation shows how rare it is for women to get to the top management level. Second, horizontal segregation affects the roles women hold by directing women mainly to support function roles, such as communication and human resources, at the top organisational level (Horttanainen and Kajala, 2019).

According to the Finnish Gender Equality barometer survey, the achievement of gender equality in executive positions has been considered beneficial: 80% of the respondents believed that businesses and the economy would benefit from a greater number of women in executive positions. Women held this view more often than men, irrespective of age group (Attila et al., 2019).

Even though the proportion of women at the senior executive level has been steadily increasing throughout the world and in Finland during the twenty-first century, gender equality remains distant: the number of women has decreased, along with the organisational hierarchy. In 2020, women comprised 34% of all managers in the EU, while, in Finland, the respective figure was 37% (Eurostat, 2020). According to the EU statistics, women made up 27.2% of executive positions in the listed companies in Finland. However, Finland is above the international averages: the EU average was 21.5% (EIGE European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022), and globally, it was 23% (Edwards et al., 2020).

The number of women executives in the EU shows an overall positive increasing trend. Finland has almost doubled the number of women executives during the past eight years, from 25 women (10%) in 2013 to 65 women (21%) in 2021. In comparison, Austria has remained behind the EU average at below 10%, while in the country with most women executives, Serbia, the data show an increase with fluctuations (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1: Development of women executive's share (%) in selected EU countries (EIGE)



EIGE's Gender Statistics Database - Indicator: Largest listed companies: CEOs, executives and non-executives
 Source: European Institute for Gender Equality.
 LAST UPLOAD ON: 01.06.2022

Comparatively, the highest share of female senior executives in the largest stock-listed companies are found in the EU in Eastern European countries: Serbia (31.7%), Romania (31.6%) and Estonia (31.1%) (EIGE European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022). However, when looking at the number of executives, the small stock market size can be seen, which partly explains the fluctuation in, for example, Serbia: all the aforementioned countries show less than 25 women at the executive level. In a comparison of the EU countries, only in the UK (133) and France (102) does the number of executive women exceed 100 persons, and the total number of executive women remains at 901 compared with men, who total 3,423 executives.

The first comprehensive research on gender equality in top management in Finland, focusing on determining the ratio of women and men reviewed by different company types and background variables, was published by the Gender Equality Unit of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health in 2015 (Teräsaho and Kupiainen, 2015). Moreover, the Finland Chamber of Commerce has collected the data for their yearly women leadership report. The data, the number of women executives in the Finnish stock-listed companies during 2011–2021, are compiled in Table 2.1 from the yearly publications on Finland Chamber of Commerce's website (Finland Chamber of Commerce, 2022).

Table 2.1: Women in the Finnish stock-listed companies, 2011–2021 (Finland Chamber of Commerce, 2022)

| Women in | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
|---|--------------|--------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|
| Boards of Directors | 18% | 22% | 23% | 23% | 24% | 25 % | 27% | 29% | 29% | 30% | 29% |
| Executive teams in business roles (n) | 2.8% (26) | 4.5% (36) | 8.9% (41) | 10.3% (44) | 11.2% (49) | 9.8% (45) | 11.3% (53) | 14.3% (67) | 12.6% (58) | 15% (69) | 14% (67) |
| Executive teams total (n) | 16% (146) | 16% (133) | 16,7% (143) | 18% (146) | 19% (157) | 20% (145) | 22,9% (179) | 25% (205) | 24% (*) | 27% (220) | 27% (232) |
| CEOs in stock-listed companies (n) | 0% (0) | 0.8% (1) | 0.8% (1) | 0.8% (1) | 2.6% (3) | 4% (5) | 7.2% (9) | 7.2% (9) | 9% (11) | 8% (10) | 8% (10) |
| (*) not available from 2019 because of a change in the report content and focus | | | | | | | | | | | |

The majority of executive women leaders in Finland work in areas other than business or CEO roles. This horizontal segregation (section 2.2) extends all the way to the top executive level and has not increased since 2018; of all the executive team members in business roles, 14% were women, and only 8% of the CEOs of stock-listed companies were women in 2021 (Table 2.1). Equal shares of women can be found in US Fortune 500 companies (Hinchliffe, 2021).

In Finland, women in executive management work mainly in support functions; 44% of support function executives were women in 2021. Human resources (HR) function is headed more by women (81%); in communications and marketing, women present a clear majority (75%) of executives. Moreover, almost half of the legal executives were women (47%), whereas the majority of CFOs were men (80%). The least number of women worked in executive sales positions (12%) (Finland Chamber of Commerce, 2020).

The 2019 research by the Finland Chamber of Commerce shows a positive development trend in the youngest age cohort (less than 40); clearly, more than half (63%) of women executives are working in business roles with a change of +10% compared with the previous year. However, among 41–50-year-old executive women in business roles, the proposition of women dropped to 34%. Compared with the older age cohort, the change is dramatic because the 51–60 age group occupies only 12% of business executive roles (2018). Moreover, the proposition of women has

been growing the fastest, specifically among the age cohort 41–50 (Finland Chamber of Commerce, 2020).

As more women achieve positions of leadership in organisational and political life (World Economic Forum, 2018, 2021), leading critics have asked whether the glass ceiling metaphor (Eagly and Carli, 2009) is still relevant. Finnish women have gained access to lower and middle-management leadership positions. Clearly, the number of women in the corporate power elite is small, and many of their positions are peripheral to the decision-making power of the company. Moreover, companies may award executive titles to women just for the appearance of diversity (Eagly and Carli, 2007a).

According to the trend shown in the Finnish yearly surveys (Finland Chamber of Commerce, 2022), gender parity could be reached in boards and total executive teams within 20 years with the current approximate +1% per year development pace. However, not all consecutive years show positive progress. Consequently, the metaphors of barriers to women leaders remain relevant (section 3.4).

Thus, to reach a true gender balance in companies' TMTs, more women would need to be hired in other than HR and communications. Simultaneously, the number of men in the leading roles in support functions in marketing should not be increased because they occupy already two-thirds of the positions, especially the CFO positions, which is already a stepping stone to CEO positions (Tienari et al. 2012). Moreover, vertical segregation stretches to the horizontally segregated sectors of work; even in the most women-dominant sectors—healthcare and consumer goods and services—women business executives comprised less than 30% in 2017 (Finland Chamber of Commerce, 2020).

The number of women in executive business roles is considered the key to increasing women CEOs and board members because women in executive management, specifically in business and financial roles, form the main pipeline for boards of directors and other positions of power. Even though gender equality is at a relatively high level in Finland (73.4/100 index in EU Gender Equality Index) and the share of women in corporate boards and politics is high without imposed legislative quotas, women at senior executive levels in companies remains at an average EU level (Eurostat, 2020).

Comparing the data on women in management from different sources and across countries includes challenges. The official Finnish and EU statistics cover only stock-listed companies and

show limited categories of executive roles. However, the official statistics in OECD countries, including the EU, follow the same definition of organisation size (OECD, 2022), which allows an accurate comparison between Finland and EU countries. According to both the EU and Finnish sources, the share of women leaders in the top management of Finnish stock-listed companies is around a quarter (EIGE European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022; Finland Chamber of Commerce, 2022). Unfortunately, the Official Statistics of Finland does not provide data on the executives in all large companies; thus, the data are limited to the 129 stock-listed companies in Finland (Horttanainen and Kajala, 2019).

Moreover, the definition of executive has no universal standard (section 1.x); comparability between the EU senior management definition and categories of company size vary according to the surveys. For example, Catalyst (2020) reports senior management separately and below the executive level. In some statistics, CEOs are included in the figures, while some explicitly show them separately. Consequently, the accurate gender shares at the aggregate level in various executive positions are not reported regularly. The total number of stock-listed companies in the Helsinki Stock Exchange is 129. The total number of large private companies was 655 in 2018 (Mäkelä, 2020). Thus, the various stock-listed companies can give only a limited view into the world of work in general.

To conclude, Finnish and EU statistics show the dramatic descent of women's share while approaching the top decision-making roles in companies (Eurostat, 2020; Finland Chamber of Commerce, 2020a; EIGE European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022). Thus, the glass ceiling (Weyer, 2007) has shifted from middle management to the senior or executive management level in Finland. Similarly, the smaller proportion of women in the business roles demonstrates the persistent historical and societal tradition of women's concentration on 'softer' and more people-oriented roles (section 2.2). The statistics presented in this chapter underline the necessity to target research to executive women in business roles to understand and improve the opportunities for more women to reach the TMT level in the future.

2.4. Education as a key to equality

Excellent quality education is one of the cornerstones of the Finnish welfare society. Bettio and Verashchagina (2009) emphasised the role of higher education in desegregation processes in the labour market, showing that highly educated women are entering male-dominated jobs that require high qualifications. Women have a substantial advantage in education. Young women attain not only much more education than their mothers and grandmothers, but also more education than young men (Eagly and Carli, 2007b).

However, the equalitarian education system in Finland has not removed gender segregation, even though compulsory and free education, including the university level, which is enabled by the welfare state, is considered an important instrument of social ascent and personal development. When there is a lack of inherited wealth, the route to the middle class has been sought through education. Finns have benefitted from educational policies as a group and as individuals alike (Official Statistics of Finland, 2020). Money has not paved the way to education in a country without private or boarding schools and expensive private universities. However, sociologists have found the impact of family background both in education and occupations that inherit from generation to another, restraining social mobility and enforcing stratification (Erola, 2009).

Education is claimed to be one of the cornerstones of Finland's development into a modern knowledge economy, which occurred within a relatively short period of time. Literacy, a key part of Lutheranism, which is the state and majority religion of Finland, presumed that Christians would be able to read the Bible in their native language. Already in the 1850s, before the time of independence, Finnish women activists promoted the importance of educating girls because education was seen as a way to avoid poverty. Finland has had public schools since the 1860s in which equality was introduced through a mixed gender school system in 1883. The first Finnish-language mixed gender school was founded in 1886. In accordance with the Act on Compulsory Education in 1921, which had the objective for all children to learn the primary school syllabus, equal opportunities for all citizens were advanced. Additionally, the schools were free of charge and compulsory for both genders (Hanska et al., 2010; Heikkinen and Leino-Kaukiainen, 2011; Klinge, 2011). The Finnish mixed gender public schools and lack of expensive private schools enabled the mix of all social classes and both genders to socialise.

The educational level of the population has risen in the past few decades, mainly as a result of women educating themselves further after compulsory education. Study subsidies and monetary support by the state, in addition to cost-free higher education, has made studying a lucrative option for young adolescents. The proportion of highly educated women in Finland surpassed that of men in the early 1990s. In the following decades, the level of educated women has continued to increase at a faster rate than for men. The proportion of women aged 25–64 years with a higher education degree is higher in Finland than anywhere else in the OECD. Women were completing 59% of all university degrees in 2018 (Official Statistics of Finland, 2020), similar to the UK at 57% in 2018/2019 (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2020).

However, despite the rise in the level of education among women, the fields of education have remained strongly segregated by gender. A majority of degrees or qualifications in the field of technology have been completed by men, while women have completed the majority of degrees or qualifications in the fields of health and welfare and education (Official Statistics of Finland (OSF), 2020). In this, Finland is no different than other Western countries.

Educational choices are affected by perceptions of what professions are suitable for men and women (Reskin and Bielby, 2005). Finnish girls have been outperforming boys in both mathematics and natural sciences since 2015 (Vettenranta et al., 2016), yet they are far less interested in engineering and technology as study fields than boys (Teräsaho and Keski-Petäjä, 2016; Stoet and Geary, 2022). Moreover, Finnish research has shown that women and men start their careers with different tasks, and these differences in later career progression increase the gender difference at work (Kauhanen and Napari, 2009; Kauhanen and Riukula, 2019). Thus, because of the segregation of educational choices, the segregation of work careers begins before entering the job market.

The proportion of women in all students attending education leading to a degree was 53% in 2017; however, the variation was large between the fields of education. A majority of degrees or qualifications in the field of technology (84%) have been completed by men, while women have completed most degrees or qualifications in the fields of health and welfare and education. In 2017, 87% of all graduates in the healthcare and welfare sector and 78% in the educational sector were women. The clear majority of graduates (67%) were women in the service, humanistic and arts and business, administration and legal sectors, and 58% of all higher education graduates were women in 2017 (Official Statistics of Finland, 2020).

Educational segregation is noticeable among executive management. A business degree is the most common educational background of the executive management (47%), followed by a technical degree (31%). There is a clear difference between men and women because, of executive women, only 10% hold a technical degree. Even though women total more than half of the business graduates in Finland (Official Statistics of Finland, 2020), only 29% of executives with business degrees are women (Finland Chamber of Commerce, 2020a). In Finland, men have studied and worked traditionally in engineering and the technical fields, fitting in with the demands of industrial companies, which have long emphasised the engineering and technical backgrounds of their employees, specifically in management roles (Kauhanen and Napari, 2009).

According to the TASURI report (2015,) women need a higher education than men to get to the top management positions. Moreover, the report also showed that, even though gender representation was a little more equal in younger age groups, the higher education of young women has not offered them management positions equally (Pietiläinen, Keski-Petäjä and Katainen, 2015) because men are over-represented in the management, even in the female-dominant fields (2.8.3).

The next section discusses leadership values and norms in Finland, here in the cultural and societal context of the research, to present the distinct environment in which executive women leaders navigate their careers.

2.5. Finnish leadership culture

Many notions of good leadership are built on universally accepted basic assumptions (den Hartog et al., 1999). However, the cultural context—the overarching conceptions of life and historical and societal values and norms—constructs the leadership paradigm specific to a country, making leadership culturally dependent (Smith, 2002; Hofstede, 2012; Lewis, 2018). This section supports the aim of the research by discussing the underlying assumptions and values that construct the Finnish culture and leadership discourse, hence influencing executive women's careers.

However, modern society is fragmenting and becoming diversified; thus, national identity ingredients may be selected according to one's own preferences instead of conforming to a unified national identity, which means it is becoming more difficult to define a national leadership style or preference because leadership is considered mostly situational. Different nationalities and even subcultures and the individual life arenas of other cultures may act as imaginary communities that serve as new collective identities (Anttila, 2007). However, the Finnish cultural context sets certain norms and values according to which behaviour is measured and, thus, for example, role expectations of good executive leaders are formed and developed within the culture of a nation and various business sectors. The Finnish cultural identity may be termed 'glocal', which combines local and global identities (Torkington, 2012).

2.5.1. Hardworking secluded Finns

The Finnish Lutheran orientation appreciating hard work resonates with the role models of women leaders. Even though the welfare society is paving the way to men and women sharing domestic duties equally while working full-time outside the home, the contemporary executive woman's life, apart from the number of children, resembles the example of Minna Canth—the icon of the feminist movement and the only woman with a national flagging day in Finland: she simultaneously worked

as an author, business woman, single mother of seven children and active social influencer (Krogerus, 2022).

Finnish culture and society have absorbed the influences from both the East and West, many of which are still perceptible today in the culture and attitudes of the Finns. The hundreds of years between the two empires of Sweden and Russia, who fought to rule the area of Finland, have left their marks. During the Swedish reign until 1809, Finland was not a national entity but merely a group of provinces. After Finland joined Russia in 1809, it became an autonomous Grand Duchy. The brief history of the independent Finnish society has been described as a consensus coloured by conflicts, combined with a carefully and dedicatedly constructed uniform culture (Zetterberg, 2017).

The small size of the country (population of 5.5 million) and modest conditions from which the construction of Finland began, including the lack of clear and old power relationships that mark the cultural background of many European countries, have emerged as a lack of power distances and strong equality (section 2.4.2), which describes Finnish society on a global scale (Haavisto, 2014). In addition, Finnish work values adhere to classical liberalist ideals. According to Salminen, Hannula and Härkäpää (1984), Snellman's main interest was the state and its success, and individuals' own interest or happiness was not a focus (section 2.3). The sole purpose of the 'free individual' was to serve the state and produce wealth for the nation.

Furthermore, Kettunen (2001) argued that the heritage from a rural community, in which work was a necessity, duty and a source of dignity, still plays a crucial role in Finland for both men and women. This heritage was, however, not only a matter of mental continuities but had been shaped by the history of political hegemony, which continues to shape Finns' work values.

Finnish national identity is constructed based on three layers of values: 1) Protestant values (including equality, work, honesty and education), 2) nature-related values, as constructed by the nineteenth-century nationalist movement and 3) national defence, originating from World War II (Helkama, 2018) and recently emerging as important again because of Russia's 'operations' in Ukraine in 2022.

Correspondingly, according to a comprehensive (N = 6938) survey investigating Finnish work values (2018), Finns still lean towards the classical Protestant work ethics, which are rooted in late 1800 industrial societies where the idea was that the creation of economic wealth also required a change in the ethical atmosphere (Weber, 1980). However, Finland has been fairly secular for a

number of years; in the 2018 survey, over 70% of the Finnish population belong to the Evangelical Lutheran Church, yet over 40% of them do not consider themselves religious (Pitkänen, Saukkonen and Westinen, 2020). Similarly, according to an EVAs survey (Haavisto, 2014), Finns perceive themselves as focused on work and being hardworking. The two main work values esteemed in Finland are traditional values: hard work and conscientiousness. Finns describe themselves as additionally determined, honest, relentless, helpful, reliable and reserved. The tradition and ethos of a hardworking ethic and the right to equal opportunities for education can be seen in over 80% of Finns emphasising vocation and education as important to their identity (Pitkänen, Saukkonen and Westinen, 2020).

Moreover, younger Finns have described Finns as patriotic, respected, restrained, positive, honest, fair, jealous and stubborn. Kolbe (2010) compared Finns to Classical Greek people: simple and poor peasants who have the ability to transform themselves into courageous, persistent and solidarity fighters when faced with danger. Finns are not merchants; one does not survive in Finland by selling and buying. Honesty is valued, as well as straightforwardness and openness, despite stupidity and dangerousness (Kolbe, 2010).

In international comparisons on values, social systems and working life models, Finland is typically clustered together with other Nordic countries. However, the groupings of cultures have been contested because of the notion of culture as an elusive construct, a complex and evolved product of multiple and diverse (e.g., geographic, historical, religious and economic) elements (Ronen and Shenkar, 2013). The surveys of national culture comparisons have traditionally confirmed the notion of a distinct Nordic style of leadership valuing low hierarchies, openness, a team-like approach, equality, a drive for consensus and functionality. However, the studies perceived the Finnish leadership style as more hierarchical than the other Nordic nations. Even though all Nordic countries are societies in which trust is a top priority, in Finland, so-called micro-level trust between individuals is particularly strong, when based on international comparisons (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2018).

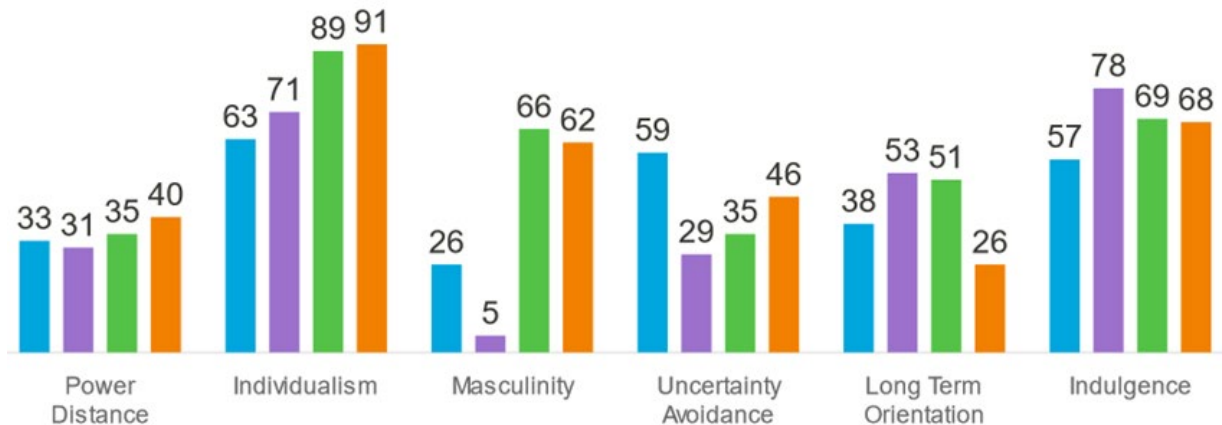
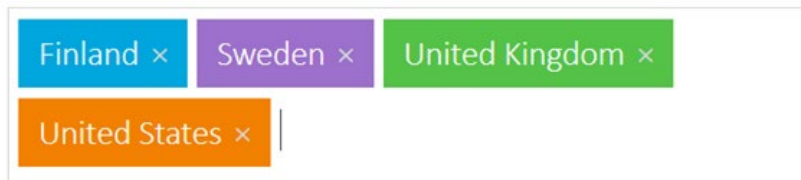
Finland is clustered among the Nordic European countries in Hofstede's (1984, 2001, 2012) model of national culture characteristics, which is the most widely used comparison of national differences in management and leader values across countries. The model has been criticised for not addressing the methodological challenges of cross-cultural research and for being vague and contradictory (McSweeney, 2002), questioning the comparability of nations. Specifically, the clear bipolar dimension of masculinity–femininity has received opposition not only for adhering to stereotypical categorisations based on biological sex differences, but also for ignoring the

multiplicities of gender representation (Moulettes, 2007; Smith, 2016). However, Hofstede's masculine–feminine dimension provides insights into gender differences, even though women's voices were originally lacking in his survey, which first consisted of white middle-class working men's perceptions (Moulettes, 2007).

However, Hofstede (2001) claimed that many scholars who have misinterpreted this dimension refused to accept the convergence in social gender roles. Moulettes (2007) agreed that when people make comparisons between national cultures, they have an overall tendency to use gender differences as a measuring instrument. Nevertheless, the present thesis is limited to one country; thus, the cross-cultural comparison remains peripheral and only useful for describing the Finnish culture to show the context of the executive women's career construction. Moreover, the current research adheres to the need to relocate research on culture and gender from dichotomies to local and multiple discourses (Ralston et al., 2022).

In Hofstede's model (Hofstede Insights, 2022), when compared with Sweden, the UK and the US, Finland appears feminine but more masculine than Sweden; high in uncertainty avoidance and average in individualism, power distance and indulgence; and low in long-term orientation compared with Sweden and UK but higher than the US (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2: National culture characteristics of Finland, Sweden, UK and US according to Hofstede model 2022



The power distance and masculinity of Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 2001) will be discussed in the next sections.

2.5.2. Equality in low power relations

Regardless of Finland's comparatively late development into a welfare society following the other Nordic countries (Kettunen, 2006; Julkunen, 2017), the foundations of an equal society were already in place in classical liberal thinking (Brennan and Tomasi, 2012), through which individuality, self-governance and autonomy were emphasised (Ekelund and Hébert, 1990; Hunt-Earle, 2012). The nineteenth century's emancipatory development trends of enlightenment and liberal ideals in Europe were introduced in Finland, especially by Andreas Chydenius (1729–1803). Chydenius derived his endeavours largely from Locke's and Smith's thoughts, which were entrenched in Anglo-Saxon England (Butler, 2015), and was among the first advocates of classical liberalism to strongly defend the rights of the servant class in Sweden and Finland in the late 1700s. He even suggested the creation of an open employment market (Hyttinen, 2020). In particular, J. V. Snellman's endeavour to raise the appreciation of the poorer Finnish-speaking population has been acknowledged among one of the key factors enabling Finland to gain its independence as a democratic nation-state in 1917 (Anttila, 2007; Kortelainen, 2007), thus paving the way for Finland's national culture, with its social structures and equality.

However, according to Kortelainen (2007), the liberal thoughts and ideals of both Chydenius and Snellman primarily revolved around criticising aristocracy. The perception of equality between

genders was not addressed in the discourse on power relations. The concept of the free individual advocated by classical liberalists was, by definition, a man adhering to the common perception of women's capabilities and roles in European societies in the late 1800s and early 1900s (Kortelainen, 2007). Similarly, neither Snellman nor Chydenius placed women among the free individuals in their classical liberalist theses. Nevertheless, the new, independent Finland was built on general civilisation and education, which belonged to everyone, regardless of the heritage, socio-economical background and even gender; these are values still present in Finnish culture.

The myth of Finland lacking a class society, which reflects the small gaps between the social classes in Finland, has been affecting how people are reluctant to show their wealth and success. Finnish leaders are described as straightforward, clear and honest; Finnish leaders are easily approachable. Finland is less hierarchical than many Western countries in leadership practices but not equally as democratic as Sweden (Hofstede Insights, 2022). The small power distance between employees and leadership enables a far less hierarchical discussion culture compared with Central European countries (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2018).

The low power distance and equality depict not only Finnish culture, but this is a Nordic/Scandinavian norm and ideal. The law of *Jante*—or *Jantelagen*—originating from the Swedish reign over Finland, is one of the fundamental pillars of all Scandinavian societies. *Jantelagen* embodies the assumption that no one is better than anyone else, which is demonstrated by humbleness and modesty. Consequently, this Nordic norm prevents people from talking about wealth and success, that is, promoting oneself above others (Johansson and Jönsson, 2017).

Finnish leaders are not overly self-important or emphasise their leadership role. In practice, this is evidenced by managers eating lunch in the same cafeteria or at the same table as their subordinates and employees at any level (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2018). However, the downside of being too ordinary and modest is the propensity of such an attitude to lead to a low ambition level (Lewis, 2018).

Even the presidents of Finland have been down to earth regarding their attitude and an ordinary character. Even though they serve in the highest public position, they are considered to be near the common person (Hofstede, 2012; Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2018). Finns respect the rights of the people in weaker positions; thus, the informality of the corporate climate facilitates the interchange of ideas and the development of mutual respect within Finnish companies. Thus, identifying Finnish executives as elite leaders (Williams and Seaman, 2012) is

strongly against the equality and modesty values in Finland and may even be interpreted as an insult.

Meritocratic discourse supposes that individual achievements are decisive factors in determining access and success in leadership. Following *Jantelagen* ideals, meritocratic beliefs, in which people obtain success or power because of their abilities or competence, not because of their money or social position (Young, 1963), are widely accepted in Finland. In many companies, the underlying perception is the idea of meritocratic equality, which is based on the notion that an individual's competence defines their career success. In this case, competence is the only difference that affects the position of the individual in society and at work (Sealy, 2010). However, gender—masculinity—still overrules the meritocratic beliefs in the selection of executive leaders because men dominate the positions in Finland (section 2.3).

2.5.3. Masculine and technical hegemony of Finnish leadership

The masculine executive leader role stereotype is deeply rooted in the Finnish leadership discourse through two domains: a high appreciation of prior experience in leadership positions and technical education, both of which portray the key assets of a good leader in Finland (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2018). Billing and Alvesson (2000) suggested that leadership and management are dominated by men and conventionally constructed around masculine norms. Consequently, the less-privileged positions are defined with feminine notions. Even in gender-equal and comparatively feminine Finland, management and leadership are mainly associated with men, maleness and masculinity, either consciously or unconsciously (Collinson and Hearn, 1996).

Masculinity appears in leadership, for example, through men's numerical domination in top management especially; through management and leadership styles, which are often labelled 'masculine' or 'feminine'; through language using metaphors from sports and war; and through assumptions about sexuality and domestic situation (Hearn and Collinson, 2018). Moreover, masculinity represents a more competitive society, a culture that prefers achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material rewards for success, whereas the opposite, femininity, stands for a more consensus-oriented society valuing cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak and quality of life (Hofstede and Arrindell, 1998).

The requirement of prior leadership experience can be linked with the Finnish Army. The current corporate executive and leader roles adhere to deep-rooted military science concepts, including bureaucratic structures and strategic management (Swain, 2019). The masculinity of warfare has spilled into leadership in general, so leader role models and practices of the famous military

leaders have formed one stream of the historic reasons behind the accumulation of leadership roles for men, in Finland and globally. Moreover, Finland has had a tradition of staffing top leadership positions between a relatively small elite network of men sharing the same officer training background, similar to countries with a small, privileged aristocrat ruling class. Consequently, one path to gain leadership experience without any prior experience is the leadership training and experience accumulated during military service, especially officer training, which has been perceived to predict a leadership position at work, as evidenced in Swedish empirical research (Gronqvist and Lindqvist, 2016).

In Finland, military service or, alternatively, civil service is compulsory for men. Sweden and Norway are the only European countries with compulsory call-up for the whole age group, regardless of gender. In Finland, 73.5% of the men's age group called up in 2019 chose military service, whereas the number of women voluntarily called up since 1995 has totalled approximately 10,000 women. However, 65–70% of women in military service are selected for officer training, which signals the women's high motivation towards a career in military leadership positions (The Finnish Defense Forces, 2021).

The masculinity of Finnish culture is evidenced by an appreciation for technology and engineering. Resulting from high educational levels and for historic reasons, high technology has been a proven enabler of Finland's rapid development to a wealthy state after World War II and the substantial war indemnity to Russia, with its export of industrial products, especially in the forest and mechanical industries (Temmes and Temmes, 2020). The technology glory has continued after the post-World War II era, transforming from Finland's 'crown jewel' Nokia in the current information and communications technology industry hype, to a start-up era that emerged after a few successful gaming companies (Rovio, Supercell), hence ensuring important export revenue for Finland.

Engineering competence is highly valued in the executive leader roles, not only in technical industries, even though the top management leadership roles would not require any technical skills. Whereas approximately 80% of people with technical education in Finland are men (Official Statistics of Finland, 2020), most women fail to fit into this important leadership norm and qualification. Thus, corporations have been—and still are—typically led and managed by engineers with their special technological professional competence (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2018). The globally acknowledged need to get more women to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) careers (Burke and Simmons, 2020) is especially imperative

in a country valuing technology and engineers. Moreover, the structural segregation of the workforce underlines the division of the male and female spheres of work (section 2.2).

Professional gender segregation shows an even steeper concentration of women in certain fields within the STEM disciplines in Finland. STEM education and occupation have been classified further into LPS (life science, psychology and social sciences) and GEMP (geoscience, economics, engineering, math/computer science and physical science) (Charles and Grusky, 2004; Bettio and Verashchagina, 2009). LPS fields focus on people, whereas GEMP fields focus on technology, computer systems and the manipulation of things. In general, women favour LPS careers, and men favour GEMP careers (Kahn and Ginther, 2018). At the executive level, women are concentrated on LPS-related roles, for example, human resources and communication (section 2.3), fortifying gender segregation and hindering women's careers within leadership (sections 3.4 and 3.8).

Moreover, the traditional model of a successful leader is based on a single breadwinner and family structure (Sayer et al., 2011). In this model, the breadwinner (male) is free to invest in their career by working long days, travelling and always being flexible. Regardless of the transition to the dual-career model in Finland (section 2.3), women leaders are still assumed more often to be single, while family life is not considered to be a hindrance to executive men's careers (Hewlett, 2007).

In conclusion, the appreciation of engineering with subsequent fact-based and technology-oriented behaviour (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2018), including leadership education from the military traditions, has affected the way Finnish leaders are assumed to behave in their leadership roles.

2.5.4. Straightforward and fact-based leaders

In 2007, GLOBE research found that Finns value leaders with integrity and who are honest, sincere, just and trustworthy (Chhokar, 2007). A small qualitative research with 20 internationally operating Finnish leaders presented similar results: Finnish leadership was perceived to consist of three key characteristics: a clear and simple way of doing business, fast decision-making process fairness and responsibility in business (Simon, Bauer and Kaivola, 1996). Other universally appreciated characteristics and adjectives of an outstanding leader, the ability to inspire subordinates, enthusiastic, positive, encouraging, team oriented and able to build, integrate and coordinate teams, were associated with Finnish leaders (House et al., 2004).

Finland is positioned as a low-context culture in Hall's (1981) high–low-context continuum, principally illustrating verbal and nonverbal communication. In a low-context country, straight

communication is central, using facts, figures and rich, accurate details to communicate. Moreover, communication is an informal form in the Finnish business corporate world. Finns say they will get things done and do as they say.

Finnish leadership was described by nearly 100 leaders, researchers and expert participants in a programme aiming to define the Finnish leadership of today and future developments, with characteristics which are strengths and weaknesses at the same time. Professional skills, shared basic values and the down-to-earth nature of leadership were seen as the strengths of the Finnish leadership. A better culture of discussion, the ability to encourage the engagement of people and a higher ambition level were raised as clear future development areas. Finnish leaders focus on issues and do not deem it necessary to emphasise hierarchies or put themselves on a pedestal. Finnish leaders trust their subordinates and give them room to get their work done. (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2018)

The downside of being down to earth is a highlighted sense of humility and modesty. Having a reputation of being full of oneself continues to be one of the worst social stigmas attributed to a person in Finland. In leadership, such an attitude may lead to an overly low level of ambition (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2018).

In a Finnish employment survey, many of the experts highlighted professional skills as the biggest strength of Finnish leadership, as opposed to the tradition of leadership by profession. A large share of management continues to be promoted to their leadership positions among the professional employees. Finnish leaders know how to interpret numbers and rely on processes. This has enabled a good ability to make profits. At best, a Finnish organisation is like an efficient machine that is led as regularly as clockwork towards the desired objective (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2018). Therefore, Finnish leadership involves both efficient and solution-oriented delivery of results, as well as attachment to old, previously learned models that bury humaneness under numbers and figures (Neilimo, 2012).

In Finland, silence is not equated with the failure to communicate, but it is an integral part of social interactions. A common perception is that Finns prefer to keep quiet. However, what they say, they really mean (Kolbe, 2010). However, the concept of the 'silent Finn' is a rough categorisation and stereotyping based on nationality, and in discussing it in an academic context, the tendency of confirmation of existing stereotypical views should be acknowledged: promoting Finnish silence may affect how people behave in actual situations (Olbertz-Siitonen et al., 2015).

The common characteristics of Finnish leaders (and followers) are autonomy, the importance of one's own space, the leader not needing to manage often, and communication needing to be subtle with quiet coaching. All this does not diminish the respect towards a strong and powerful leader. Because Finns' leadership orientation is fact-based leadership, Finnish leaders aim to be competent and strong substance managers. However, people leadership has not been considered a strength of traditional Finnish leaders (Neilimo, 2012). The downside of the engineer-like approach is the focus on systems and processes instead of people; indeed, the relatively poor ability to inspire people and lead through a sense of meaningfulness was considered a weakness of Finnish leaders (TEM 2018). Next, new avenues of Finnish, more people-oriented leadership values are discussed.

2.5.5. Towards more people-oriented leadership paradigm

In the last decade, the latest trend in the discourse on how to lead organisations in Finland has turned towards self-organising organisations and a paradigm shift in the consequent leader role. The autonomy, responsibility and authority to identify necessary tasks and follow up on actions have shifted from managers to employees and resulted in radically decentralised models in self-managing organisations (Gamrasni, 2021). Instead of relying on management to solve problems and take responsibility, peer-based accountability in bottom-up emergent processes, which are built on transparency of information and rewarding, creates not only new structures, but also assumptions on the role of a leader (Martela, 2019).

Similarly, emerging postheroic leadership, as a less individualistic, more relational concept of leadership, focuses on the dynamic, interactive processes of influence and learning intended to transform organisational structures, norms and work practices (Fletcher, 2004). The feminine traits associated with postheroic leadership suggest opening more opportunities for women executive leaders, even though both men and women can demonstrate both heroic and postheroic leadership (Due Billing and Alvesson, 2000; Denizci Guillet et al., 2019).

The androgynist, gender neutral turn and emergence of nonbinary gender identities may eventually make gender thinking in leadership obsolete. Especially in the Nordic countries, gender neutrality has existed for decades and can even be seen in the language; the Finnish language has never divided male or female in the third person, and the official dictionary of the Swedish language introduced a gender-neutral pronoun, 'hen', in 2015. However, gender differences have not disappeared by using gender neutral language but still may support a reduction of the traditional gender role division. The high workforce segregation and low number of women executives persist (sections 2.5 and 2.6), even though the gender neutral third persona has always existed in the

Finnish language. However, many professional titles have the suffix 'man' (e.g., foreman, craftsman), and to attain more gender neutrality at work, this word has been replaced with the suffix 'person' (Eronen, 2013). Thus, the language has been shown to reflect changes in societal and cultural values and intentions. Fletcher (2004) argued that the discourse around and social construction of the stereotypic associations strengthen the dichotomic divisions into masculine or feminine while labelling countries, professions and characteristics as masculine or feminine.

Similarly, the conceptualisation of soft and hard power dichotomy (Nye, 2009) appears less polarised in executive leaders' work, which means it should be viewed as a continuum or as a balance or combination of the two extremes (Williams, 2012). However, contemporary people-oriented leadership theories adhere to soft power, which is defined as the ability to shape the preferences of others. Nye (2008) distinguished soft power from influence and defined it as a source of influence. Influence can also rely on hard power through threats or compensation (Nye, 2008).

Emergent leadership (Hlupic, 2014), transpersonal leadership (Grant, 2020) and transformational leadership (Bass and Riggio, 2006) theories equally emphasise follower empowerment, which is in line with contemporary organisational changes and management theories stressing the need for organisations to become less hierarchical, more flexible, team oriented and participative. A culture of leadership that facilitates autonomous work, a fruitful culture of discussion and an experience that every employee is valued and trusted have become a competitive advantage in organisations. Finnish leadership contains the inherent features that support current leadership trends and organisational culture. Finnish managers who are not overly self-important or make a big deal out of their role seem to fit the conception rather well (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2018).

Because no country operates in isolation from the rest of the world, current trends in leadership are emerging and changing the norms of good leadership in Finland, thus influencing executive leader selections in companies. The high technology level in Finland and increasing digitisation require a new set of leadership capabilities. Thus, the concept of an agile leader responding to the needs of the digital era emphasises characteristics such as humbleness, adaptability, visionary skills and engagement (Neubauer, Tarling and Wade, 2017). Similarly, in their research of 33 senior leaders, Watson et al. (2021) suggested five key leadership capabilities that need to be continuously developed and updated: digital know-how, data-driven focus, networking, ethics and agility. Underlying these five key capabilities is a growth mindset focused on continuous learning and self-development.

Moreover, a recent study investigated a rich data set from almost 5,000 job descriptions of executive and CEO positions, finding that the traditional backgrounds—CEO or another technical expertise, superior administrative skills and a track record of successfully managing financial resources—have been shifting towards skills to motivate diverse, technologically savvy and global workforces. TMT members need to act as ‘corporate statespersons, dealing effectively with constituents ranging from sovereign governments to influential NGOs; and who can rapidly and effectively apply their skills in a new company, in what may be an unfamiliar industry, and often with colleagues in the C-suite whom they didn’t previously know’ (Sadun et al., 2022, para. 2).

According to qualitative research with 34 participants in Finland (Koivunen, 2015), the gatekeepers in organisations—both directors and headhunters—thought gender imbalance in top management would be corrected by itself over time when more women seek education and go into lower levels of management. Regardless of women in top management positions being generally better educated than men, the statistics show that the stronger rise in educational level has not promoted women in top management (section 2.6). Similarly, in most countries across the world, the current system of assessing merit cannot be said to be equitable because the proportions of women in senior management positions remain low and show only a slow yearly increase, if any (Sealy, Ruth, 2010).

To support the aim of the current thesis of investigating the career navigation of women leaders at the top executive level in large companies, recent data collected for Finland’s 100 years of independence are presented as part of this contextual chapter. The next section discusses the perceptions of 365 women leaders regarding their careers and being a woman leader in Finland.

2.6. ‘Presenting Finnish Women Leaders!’—A pilot study

A pilot study has been integrated into the current research to present knowledge of the current discourse on women leadership. The pilot study was part of the inductive-deductive research process and provided empirical knowledge to enhance the research design and conceptualisation (Kezar, 2000). Moreover, the pilot study was utilised to narrow down the research topic and modify the in-depth interview questions (Kim, 2011; Sampson, 2004) while also helping improve the credibility of the research by triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Moreover, the pilot study also acted as the major channel to reach potential participants for the research’s interviews.

2.6.1. The pilot study: ‘Presenting Finnish Women Leaders’—Campaign

The pilot study, ‘Presenting Finnish Women Leaders’, was a campaign in which 368 Finnish women leaders were photographed and asked to respond to nine questions related to leadership and women leaders. The campaign was part of Finland’s 100 years of independence (2017) celebration projects, and the aim of the campaign was to celebrate the long history of gender equality by presenting one woman leader for each day of the year on a website. The campaign was initiated and conducted by the Central Chamber of Commerce in Finland and a visual communication agency, Keksi.

Exclusive access to the campaign was given for this research purpose in April 2017. In addition to the published interview data, the database included confidential information, for example, the justification for selecting and rejecting participants and motivation to agree or refuse to participate. Even though the survey was not designed for academic research purposes and was categorised as secondary data, the scope and extensive coverage allowed for a unique opportunity to employ exceptionally rich and topical data on Finnish women leaders’ thoughts. Thus, the survey operated as a pilot study, not only describing the current perceptions of women leaders in Finland, but also as a channel to reach potential research participants for the in-depth interviews of the research.

The primary aim of the campaign was to call attention to gender equality in 100-year-old Finland and to encourage girls to strive for their aspirations in society by presenting examples of women leaders and sharing their experiences (Keksi, 2017). Additionally, the campaign aimed at building a network of women leaders to empower young girls and boys and improve equal opportunities with subsequent events at the campaign participants’ workplaces. The principal outcome of the campaign was a collection of professional photographic portraits of women on a website. In addition to the portraits, women were introduced with demographic information (name, age, job title and employer) and replies to nine open-ended questions (Appendix 1: Example – Annukka Lantto translated). The portraits and interviews were published on the campaign website www.naisjohtajatesiin.fi on International Women’s Day, 8 March 2017.

2.6.2. Campaign participants

Campaign participation was organised through voluntary enrolment, which was launched on the campaign website and among the Finland100 projects. The enrolment period continued from 8 March 2016 until October 2016. The targeted number of participants, 365, was reached two months before the original time limit, at the end of 2016, showing an apparent interest among

women in representing themselves as a woman leader and, thus, in improving and demonstrating gender equality in leadership in Finland.

Women were able either to enrol themselves or be suggested with justifications by another person. Altogether, 213 women enrolled themselves, and 342 women were suggested. From the 555 potential participants, 368 women were selected, including a trio and pair of entrepreneurs.

The main argument to be excluded from the campaign was a missing supervisory experience and a verified organisational leadership position. Consequently, professional specialists categorised as thought leaders (Brosseau, 2013), influencers and celebrities were not classified as women leaders.

Moreover, some women suggested to the campaign refused to participate. The most common reason for not agreeing to participate in the campaign, when proposed by others, was the unwillingness to identify oneself as a 'woman' leader. The refusal demonstrates Lämsä's and Tiensuu's (2002) findings of media presenting women leaders as representatives of their gender, while men are seen as representatives of a neutral gender.

The aim of effacing the gender prefix from the professional context reflects the meritocratic and gender neutral attitudes in Finland (section 2.8.5). Similarly, the reluctance to identify oneself publicly as an advocate of the feminist and a leader endeavours prevails 100 years later, revealing the gendered structures in society: the phenomenon of the civilised, wealthy and educated business women being negligent or even hostile towards the women's movement. Aleksandra Gripenberg, an influencer of the women's movement and one of the founders of the Finnish Women's Association, acknowledged before Finland independence wealthy women's dependency of the men in power and potential unfavourable reputation in the eyes of the gatekeepers if they identified themselves as proponents of the women's movement (Tuulio, 1959; Kortelainen, 2007). Consequently, identities are always on display in the twenty-first-century world of ubiquitous connectivity and social media. How women leaders present themselves—not just as executives but as people with oddities and broader interests—has become an important aspect of leadership (Ibarra, 2015).

In total, 368 women were selected for the campaign because some of the women enrolled in working pairs or groups. The acceptance rate was 65% (Keksi, 2017). The selected women leaders represented all labour sectors and reflected Finland's labour structure rather well (Table 2.2: Campaign participants by labour sector). The few women who participated in the campaign as

pairs or working groups were excluded from the database. Thus, the total number of participants was decreased to 358 women leaders. Here, 70% of the participants represented the private sector, which equalled the total size of the private sector in the Finnish labour market (Keskuskaupakamari, 2017). Moreover, within the private sector, the division between participants in large (33%) and SME (67%) companies was aligned with the labour market structure, in which 34% of employees in Finland work in large companies and 66% in SMEs (Official Statistics of Finland (OSF), 2019b).

Table 2.2: *Naisjohtajat Esiin!* Campaign participants by labour sector

| Labour sector | Participants (n) | Participants (%) |
|--|------------------|------------------|
| Private sector/large companies | 83 | 23 |
| Private sector/SMEs | 167 | 47 |
| Public sector | 59 | 16 |
| Nonprofit organisations | 40 | 11 |
| Other (e.g., private art institutions) | 9 | 3 |
| Total | 358 | 100 |

However, the portion of Finnish women in the labour market does not follow the generic labour structure because of the high level of horizontal and vertical gender segregation (section 2.5). In contrast to the pilot study data, women are over-represented in the public sector and nonprofit organisations. In 2017, 55% of women in the labour force were employed by the private sector and 44% by the public sector (Official Statistics of Finland, 2019). Additionally, the over-representation of some business fields in the data results from the networks and business field of the company responsible for the campaign, which diverted the data towards the media field.

2.6.3. Data collection

The interview data were collected via an email questionnaire with nine open-ended questions, in addition to the demographic questions (Appendix 2). The answers were edited before publishing them on the website. The edited texts were sent to the participants for proofreading and acceptance. The editing was, in most parts, minor corrections and shortening of the text. Although a few long answers needed to be condensed a lot, no content was completely removed by the campaign staff (Baer, interview June 2017). With the text acceptance process through participant checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the texts may be seen credibly representing the authentic voice of the participants.

During the data collection process, question number seven 'Tabus' (Appendix 2) was often left unanswered and created a lot of confusion among the participants. Thus, it was removed from the questionnaire during the campaign (Baer, interview, June 2017).

2.6.4. Data analysis process

The essential purpose of the data analysis was to generate direct and current knowledge (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005) from the study participants. Consequently, the aim of the approach was to investigate emerging themes to adjust the research questions and subsequent in-depth interviews (Ryan, G. W. and Bernard, 2003). Thus, a qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2000) was conducted to analyse the textual interview data.

Purposive sampling among the campaign participants

The units of analysis were selected among the campaign participants through purposive sampling (Mason, 2002), following the research focus: women executives in top management in business-related roles. Because of the extensive number of participants, a purposive sampling strategy (Patton, 2002) was employed. The goal was to add more participants until data saturation had been reached.

The sampling was performed according to the following steps:

1. First, the demographic information of every participant (name, age, education, job title and employer) was copied into an Excel file and categorised.
2. Categories for the sample inclusion criteria were created.
3. Employer information was categorised to determine the employment sector. Employer information was categorised into four sectors: private sector, public sector, nonprofit organisations and arts. The private sector was further divided into two subcategories: large companies (>250 employees) and SMEs—micro-, small- and medium-sized companies (>250 employees).
4. The position level was formed from the job titles and was divided into the following categories: top management, middle management, specialist and other. The organisations' official material, webpages and participants' LinkedIn profiles were investigated to verify the correct position level.
5. The research focus on executive women leaders in large companies guided the sampling further. Following a purposive sampling strategy, all 83 women working in larger companies were selected. However, women in nonmanagerial roles were excluded. Only 29 women in large companies were at the executive level, which evoked the need to expand the selection to other than large companies.
6. Prior job position level at the executive level and work experience in private sector were used as the secondary inclusion criteria when selecting women from companies other than large companies. CEOs and the managing directors of SMEs were included next to the large organisations. Sole entrepreneurs (e.g., make-up artists) without prior experience in management large companies were excluded.

7. Public sector women were selected into the analysis among those women who operated at the top management level to equally represent education, healthcare, government and politics.
8. Nonprofit organisations' top management was selected with the same purposive sampling criteria.
9. One woman representing 'other' was selected randomly.

Altogether, this totalled 133 participants for data analysis (Table 2.3). However, the data saturation (Lowe et al., 2018), in which no more information related to the research questions were discovered, was reached at 125 participants, equalling 35% of the total participants of the campaign. Regardless of the saturation point, all 133 selected participants were analysed according to the original plan to demonstrate the findings corresponding to Finland's labour structure.

Table 2.3: Campaign participants according to labour sectors and company sizes

| Sector | selected (of total participants) (n) | total (n) |
|---|---|--------------|
| Private sector/large companies | 83 (100%) | 83 |
| Private sector/micro, small and medium-sized companies (SMEs) | 31 (19%) | 167 |
| Public sector | 11 (19%) | 59 |
| Nonprofit organisations | 7 (18%) | 40 |
| Other (e.g., private art institutions) | 1 (11%) | 9 |
| Total | 133 (37%) | 358 |

While researching the demographics and background of the campaign participants, a similar phenomenon to the general lack of women leaders in business roles in large organisations in Finland was identified; only 22 of the 83 (26.5%) women working in private sector large companies were at the top executive level and working in areas other than the female-dominated HR or communications positions. Thus, the sample of campaign participants well represents women leaders in large organisations (section 2.6).

Data analysis process: Step-by-step

The analysis began by reading all the texts of the 133 selected participants twice. During the second reading of the text, all the unique words were identified in the text, and the occurrence was counted (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). Because of the large number of participants, the word

frequency count for data condensation was conducted in NVivo, a qualitative data analysis computer software. The Finnish language is not supported by the software; thus, manual marking of words was used and the frequency was calculated through the markings, not by automated wordcount features of NVivo (Appendix 3: Word frequency).

The codes represent explicit communication because many of the answers were short sentences or only a few words long. As texts become shorter and less complex, looking for transitions, metaphors and linguistic connectors becomes less efficient (Ryan and Bernard, 2003), if not impossible. Moreover, discovering themes by looking for missing content was similarly inappropriate for very short responses to open-ended questions because of the difficulty in interpreting

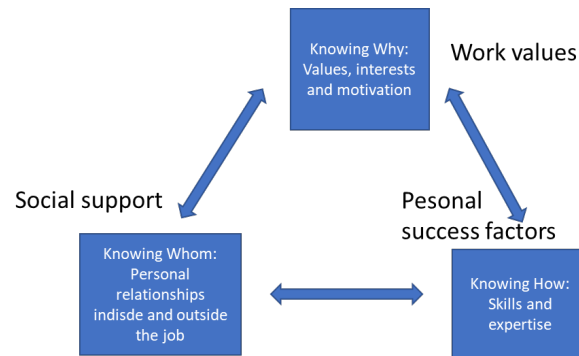
The codes were identified inductively in the texts and were further reduced to fewer categories (Appendix 4: Codebook). The theoretical background and research questions were employed to define the category criteria (Mayring, 2000). The questions in the interview questionnaire were utilised as the first pass for generating the categories (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). The category and theme development adhered to the basic principle: the more frequently the same concept occurred in the text, the more likely it developed into a theme (Ryan and Bernard, 2003).

After the open coding, similar and dissimilar categories were reduced to broader higher-order themes (Dey, 1993). The categories were grouped under three main themes: social support, work values and personal success factors (Appendix 4: Codebook), which will be discussed in the below section.

2.6.5. Discussion of the findings

The discussion of the findings adheres to the main themes of the content analysis: social support, work values and personal success factors (Appendix 4: Codebook). The findings follow Parker and Arthur's (2004) concept of intelligent career, in which career elements are divided into three areas of knowing.

Figure 2.3: Content analysis themes, adapted from Parker and Arthur (2004)



Personal success factors

According to Lent et al. (2016), strong self-efficacy and positive outcome expectations towards career behaviours motivate people to set goals related to such behaviours. Agency, action and self-efficacy were the key themes in the advice to other women: 'Believe in yourself', 'Have courage', 'Don't be modest' and 'Do it!'. The agentic perspective suggests that when individuals have a strong motivation to engage in boundaryless careers, they tend to proactively plan and prepare for the career transitions to achieve their career goals (Arthur, 2014).

Following Sandberg's (2013) perception of all advice being autobiographical by nature, the advice to other women reflects their personal experiences of what has been important either from a positive perspective as success factors they possess or from a negative perspective, which is something women usually encounter as a challenge or lack of something. These perceptions reflect the barriers and discrimination women experience and witness on their journeys to leadership positions.

Courage was mentioned throughout the interview questions as the most pertinent category. In a career context, courage combined with the need to 'act' and 'do' something reflects the development of self-efficacy through experiences and learning. Moreover, trusting oneself and one's competences directly translates into career self-efficacy, which is defined as the extent to which individuals believe that they are capable of successfully managing their careers (Day and Allen, 2004). Career self-efficacy has been found to be a strong predictor of career-related outcomes (Abele and Spurk, 2009).

Authenticity—the feeling that one is being one's true self (Eagly, 2005; Martela, Ryan and Steger, 2017; van den Bosch et al., 2019; Gino, Sezer and Huang, 2020)—emerged as an imperative factor defining the careers of women. The women encouraged others to follow their own dreams,

goals and values and help other people, perceiving that the ultimate goal for individuals was to develop and nurture those choices that are consistent with their true self (Huta and Waterman, 2013).

Work values

According to Lechner et al. (2018), the categories of learning, work–life balance, challenges, growth as a leader, performance/work results and inspiring and meaningful work were grouped under one theme: work values. Work values were seen as playing a decisive role in shaping career aspirations.

The findings within the pilot study follow the notion that, on average, the women placed importance on intrinsic rewards (e.g., learning opportunities), prosocial and interpersonal aspects and work–life balance, whereas men tend to place a higher importance on high salaries, power, prestige and career opportunities (Konrad et al., 2000; Dyke and Murphy, 2006; Spence, 2014). Learning and development were emphasised by most women, whereas only a few women mentioned salaries and power as their future goals.

People are consciously engaging in continuous learning and reflecting on how different work assignments permit them to obtain new abilities, skills and knowledge while increasing their marketability (Sullivan, 2011). According to this survey, the women valued achievement and self-direction, which have usually been connected more to men than women (Schwartz and Rubel, 2005).

Work–life balance was emphasised in the responses, which may reflect the traditional double burden, that is, the situation of women who perform paid work outside the domestic sphere (Hochschild and Machung, 2003). This may also result from the formulation of the question ‘Your best hint to help daily chores’ with the assumption of the preliberal patriarchal distinction between public (male) and private (female) life (Eisenstein, 1981) and the view that women working full-time are faced with a higher amount of a domestic workload than men (Arendell, 2001; Doucet, 2006). However, this survey has supported the notion that women often focus on both work-related and nonwork-related factors and are interested in finding a balance between those worlds with the help of their spouses (Greenhaus, Collins and Shaw, 2003; Heikkinen, Lämsä and Hiillos, 2014).

Social support

The social support theme was formed with the following categories: sponsors, network and family. Sponsors included current and former supervisors of both genders; network was grouped from friends, colleagues and mentors and family from current and childhood family members. Additionally, women's own ambition, motivation and willingness to achieve ('I' and 'Me, myself') was the second most important factor—mentioned by 50 women—when asked, 'Who has pushed you forward in your career?' This evidences the importance of self-efficacy (Abele and Spurk, 2009; Chang and Edwards, 2015).

Social resources (often referred to as social capital) have been defined as 'the goodwill available to individuals or groups' (Adler and Kwon, 2002, p. 23). The women leaders emphasised the role of sponsors as important gatekeepers in their career progress, which aligns with the findings that, without sponsorship, women are not only less likely than men to be appointed to top roles, but they may also be more reluctant to attempt to earn these roles (Ibarra et al., 2010).

People obtain self-verification primarily from their supervisors and coworkers; however, today's workers are more likely to seek self-verification from fellow members of their profession, family, their community or other important constituents (Sullivan, 2011b). Thus, women's networks and mentoring are seen as particularly important in overcoming career barriers for women (McCarthy, 2004). However, in the present study, only a few women mentioned mentors (3) and other women leaders (2). Other women leaders may be, however, considered part of a network.

Colleagues, friends, networks and other people around the women were also shown as important to their career progression and development, including family (e.g., spouse and parents) and favourable circumstances. However, without sponsorship, women are not only less likely than men to be appointed to top roles but may also be more reluctant to seek or accept them (Sullivan, 2011).

2.6.6. Limitations of the data

The first limitation of the pilot study was its nature as secondary data. The main purpose of the campaign was not research, so the questions have not been designed for a set research purpose because their primary function was to support the visual content of the campaign. Hence, the interview questions were partly generic and lacking a clear focus. However, it may be considered an advantage because the looser framework leaves room for participants' own interpretation and choices (Fina, 2015). Moreover, some of the questions had hidden assumptions; for example, question 8 assumes that women need help with their everyday lives, and one of the questions

proved to be difficult to understand. Because many women did not answer the difficult question about taboos, it was removed from the questionnaire during the campaign.

The second limitation relates to impression management. A conscious process of self-presentation attempting to control the impressions of others is one of the biggest limitations of the data (Singh and Vinnicombe, 2001). Women's stories and answers included selective and strategic notions constructed for public audiences for particular purposes while also reflecting societal expectations and norms. Stories seek recognition from society and audiences that women believe important (Brooks and Anumudu, 2016). Thus, the answers represented personal branding, which is the deployment of individuals' identity narratives for career and employment purposes. The answers were mostly positive and politically correct and suitable for open access and online publishing. For example, most women talked about the challenges from their own personal behaviour or competence development perspective, leaving out the eminent gender issues and refusing to talk about mistakes as something other than opportunities to learn, hence adhering to heroic leadership theory (Allison and Goethals, 2013).

The data collection method has both advantages and disadvantages. The written email questionnaire format lacked the possibility to ask for additional questions for clarification and further details, resulting in partly short, one-to-three-word answers. It can be said that in a face-to-face interview, answers are more intuitional and authentic if the interviews are conducted professionally with a positive interviewer effect (Hunt and McHale, 2007). Conducting an interview by email means that several relevant cues to the interview may be missing when there is a lack of reciprocal communication between the researcher and participant. Moreover, during a face-to-face interview, the participant generally provides plenty of information that is not verbal by nature (Hunt and McHale, 2007).

2.6.7. Implications to the thesis

The thematic analysis findings have indicated that career success demands both internal and external resources—personal career aspiration and agency (Leicht et al., 2017; Carvalho et al., 2018)—and to exploit the circumstances and career opportunities when they emerge (Bright, Pryor and Harpham, 2005; Rice, 2014).

The findings of the pilot study adhere to the literature proposing that employees are seeking work experiences that will fulfil their desire for challenge, work–life balance and being authentic to their self-concept (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005; Deci and Ryan, 2017; Martela and Pessi, 2018; Ryan and Deci, 2020). People are making career choices influenced more by their own values rather

than the values of employers (Briscoe, Hall and Frautschy Demuth, 2006). The findings of the pilot study have enforced the need to investigate the construction of career identities and subjective perceptions of career success as a representation of work values.

Additionally, with its limitations, the pilot study has verified that a confidential in-depth interview can provide an appropriate method for researching executive women's career identities construction and career navigation, delimiting the aspirations of impression management and personal branding. Thus, the discursive nature of in-depth interviews and possibility to ask follow-up questions have produced more authentic and richer data on career success factors and career identities, going beyond the well-intended autobiographic advice.

2.7. Conclusion of Chapter 2

Finland, among other Nordic welfare societies, enjoys a reputation of excellent gender equality in numerous world rankings (section 2.1). However, gender parity has not yet been reached (2.2). In particular, the share of women senior managers has stagnated to the average European level (2.3.1). The low number of women executives indicates the vertical segregation of labour. The common setting in companies all over the world applies also to Finland: the entry-level positions in companies are equally divided by gender, whereas the proportion of women drops at every succeeding organisational level (Chilazi, Bohnet and Hauser, 2021).

The Finnish welfare society and culture have been, and still are, built around three main pillars: education (2.4), hard work and equality. Based on the Lutheran tradition, hard work is a matter of pride in Finland (2.5.1), which is repeated in the pilot study results as advice for other women to work one's way up to leadership positions (2.6). A fact-based, straightforward and down-to-earth leadership style (2.5) combined with an appreciation of equality, autonomy and gender neutrality are assumed to be distinct cultural values to enable efficiency and trust in low hierarchies in Finnish organisations (2.5), which resonate in the evolving leadership paradigm affecting executive selection.

A paradoxical thinking combining equal opportunities and meritocracy (2.5.1-2) is widely perceived in business as defining career success; anyone who works hard and shows results should be able to reach a leadership position. However, the prevailing male dominance in the top management of companies contradicts the idea of meritocracy because the number of women in top management positions has not increased in accordance with the educational level of women (2.4). Technical education and professional competence are highly valued leadership capabilities (2.5.3) that disqualify many women from top management positions because the educational choices and

labour structure are heavily segregated into masculine technical fields and feminine public sector and care-related fields (2.2.2).

Women leaders are still considered exceptions, especially at the executive level in business roles in companies in Finland (2.3). The extraordinariness of women as leaders is evidenced in the need to establish a campaign to promote and make women leaders visible as part of Finland's 100 years of independence milestones (2.6) to demonstrate gender equality. A similar campaign was not established for men.

The recent increase in the share of women at the executive level (2.3.1) requires gathering more data, even though the gender composition at the executive level of companies is slowly changing. Hence, the current thesis contributes to the literature by investigating executive business women's careers in the context of Finnish society and culture.

3. Women's careers in leadership

This chapter discusses career theories related to women leaders. The career literature offers a vast array of theories and conceptualisations of managerial careers without distinction of gender. Most career theories applied to women leaders' career progression explain and explore the work roles and professions women have been traditionally occupying and address the challenges and difficulties women face while navigating in the sea of organisations and the hierarchies to a wider range of roles in organisations and fields of industries. However, the literature exploring and evidencing positive examples of executive women in business roles remains limited. Consequently, the empirical evidence of women leaders' careers has primarily investigated the middle-management level, early careers of young adolescents and aspirations of students. Thus, because of the lack of career theories explaining, in particular, executive-level women leaders, a wider-ranging review of career literature is presented to discuss the potential aspects of executive women's careers, here with an assumption that many career conceptualisations and theories may be applicable to all genders.

Men and women leaders face similar demands and goals while navigating the corporate ladder, yet the process of reaching those goals may vary (Carr-Ruffino, 2005). The career patterns of male and female managers have been claimed to be dissimilar (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996). In particular, the career development process has been claimed to be unique for men and women in management positions, even though the differences have been diminishing to some degree (Powell and Butterfield, 2012): women may share similar levels of work motivation (Day and Allen, 2004) and ambition (Ely, Stone and Ammerman, 2014), yet women have been claimed to make different career choices. Women, particularly, have emphasised personal values, work–life balance and authenticity (Sullivan and Mainiero, 2007b) and are constrained by societal and cultural barriers (Eagly and Wood, 2012).

Thus, regardless of the changing environment and increasing number of women leaders in companies (Catalyst, 2020), executive women in business roles are perceived as nonprototypical in the male-dominant context. The gender imbalance in leadership positions has been researched from myriads of perspectives, resulting in multiple personal, organisational and societal reasons (Lämsä and Hautala, 2013) behind the low number of women working in leadership roles. The sparse representation of women in executive leadership roles, which can be seen through the 'leaky pipeline' metaphor (Hancock and Hums, 2016), explains the disappearance of women among potentially promotable TMT candidates.

Career research focusing specifically on women's career development has responded partly to the need to address the environmental factors, in the form of barriers, whereas the mainstream research of managerial careers at the top level of organisations has described the reality of men leaders, who do not face similar challenges as the marginalised gender. Theories and conceptualisations of women leaders' careers noted specifically the career patterns and paths, as well as societal opportunities and constraints, because the low number of women executives is merely rooted in statistical discrimination, the beliefs about gender differences in skills and capabilities. (Hartman and Barber, 2020)

The chapter is structured according to the research aims and subquestions. First, the concept of career is defined and positioned (3.1.). Second, observable career mobility and patterns—linear and nonlinear—are presented (3.2). Next, theories associated with career identity (3.3) and career success (3.4) are discussed to show the research gap related to the subjective careers of executive women, which is followed by a discussion of common barriers or women's careers in leadership (3.5) and the distinct features of executive selection (3.6). Because the research is focused on women as executives, section 3.8 discusses the combination of gender—women—and leadership through social role theory. Finally, a summary of the chapter is presented (3.9).

3.1. General career theories

To investigate objective, visible career mobility (SQ1) and subjective career identities (SQ2, SQ3 and SQ4), the present research has adopted the perception that career can be seen as an interplay between the individual and society, similar to Bourdieu's concept of habitus regarding how social structure and individual agency can be reconciled or Durkheim's 'outer' social and 'inner' self-shape one another (Manton, 2014). The present research adopted a classical distinction assuming that careers have an objective and subjective part (Barley, 1989), or external and internal careers, as conceptualised by Derr and Laurent (1989). The objective side of executive women leaders' careers can be observed and measured by third parties, for example, through career paths, the sequence of positions and functions in an organisation, whereas subjective careers present the perspective in which executive women leaders make sense of their careers and interpret the meaning of various attributes, actions and experiences (Biemann and Braakmann, 2013) related to gender and leader roles and the perceptions of success in the executive role.

Early career theories, for example, Holland's theory of career choice and Dawis, Lofquist and Weiss' theory of work adjustment from the 1950s and 1960s, have emphasised the idea that people can choose their preferred careers, largely ignoring environmental factors and chance

events (Brown, 2012). Specifically, women leaders—who entered the arena of management much later in 1980 in Finland (section 2.2)—are assumed to encounter barriers (section 3.7) in their preferred careers and even opt out for other careers or work altogether (McKie, Biese and Jyrkinen, 2013; Wilhoit, 2014; Biese, 2017).

The most recent development in the exhaustive list of career conceptualisations is the sustainable career, which is defined as ‘sequences of career experiences reflected through a variety of patterns of continuity over time, thereby crossing several social spaces, characterized by individual agency, herewith providing meaning to the individual’ (van der Heijden and de Vos, 2015, p. 7). Sustainable careers include the notions of boundaryless (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) and kaleidoscope (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005) careers, social cognitive career theory (Lent, 2013) and constructivist career theories (Savickas, 2013), which will be discussed in this chapter. In addition to meaning, sustainable careers aim to increase well-being (McDonald and Hite, 2018).

The present research has defined a career as ‘a lifelong process of working out a synthesis between individual interests and the opportunities (or limitations) present in the external work-related environment, so that both individual and environmental objectives are fulfilled’ (van Maanen, 1977, p. 31). This definition integrates the two main origins of career theory: psychological ‘people make careers’ and sociological ‘careers make people’ perspectives (van Maanen and Schein, 1979), acknowledging both individual and societal enablers and restrictions: psychological theories inform the cognitive processes of self-development, career motivation and career orientation, whereas sociological research explores career paths and career stages within organisations and the positions of various occupations in society (Derr and Laurent, 1989). Similarly, the present research has integrated the two perspectives, individual and social (section 4.1), perceiving executive women as constructing their careers in the social structure by exploring the observable facts and individuals’ interpretation of their subjective experiences (Barley, 1989) in the Finnish cultural context.

Ever since the concept of career was introduced in the field of management and organisational research in the 1970s (Hall, 1976; van Maanen and Schein, 1979), the concept of career has included an inherent notion of change or development over time (Savickas, 2001), which can be especially observed in managerial careers as an upward progression in an organisation (Hall, 1996). Thus, one stream of the managerial career research has focused on career mobility or career patterns, which is discussed in the next section.

3.2. Observable career patterns of leaders

The literature on observable career patterns will be discussed to present the concepts related to career outcomes to explore and evidence executive women's career navigation in the hierarchies of companies. Career patterns, which are objectively observable paths or movement through organisational hierarchies or occupational choices (Vinkenburg and Weber, 2012), have been presented as one rationale for the low number of women at the executive level because women leaders' career patterns are perceived to divert from men's careers (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; Wood and Lindorff, 2001; Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005).

Managerial career progression is commonly divided between linear and nonlinear careers within an organisation's hierarchies or consisting of multiple organisations (Biemann, Zacher and Feldman, 2012). The linear and nonlinear career patterns are discussed below.

3.2.1. Linear careers

A linear, traditional career consists of progressive upward steps in an organisational hierarchy to positions of greater authority (Brousseau et al., 1996). Linear careers are depicted with three traditional pattern dimensions: rank (i.e., hierarchy), centrality and function (Schein, 1971). The idea of rising to the top level is seen as especially reflecting the Western white male career trajectory, while women and ethnic minorities have been typically hitting obstacles that exist below the top management level (Baruch and Vardi, 2016).

Upward mobility through increasing responsibilities and hierarchical status is generally perceived as a norm in executives' careers (Vinkenburg and Weber, 2012). Traditional managerial careers have often progressed with a single employer until the top echelon has been reached. However, the linearity or upward progression possibilities come to an end when the top echelons of the organisations have been reached at the executive level. Executives' possibilities to develop their competencies or broaden the work role within their current employer become limited because of functional embeddedness, hence limiting the changes from one's relatively narrow vocational areas of expertise (Feldman and Ng, 2007). Often, the only remaining option for executives' career development is to conquer the company's CEO position or leave the company, which results in horizontal and interorganisational mobility.

According to Hambrick's (2007) upper echelons theory, managers act based on their personal experiences and values, and their decisions can be linked to organisational success. TMT members are expected to deliver desirable performance outcomes shortly after they assume office

(Wiersema, 2002). Consequently, organisations' ability to fit the environmental changes is typically ensured by changes in the top executive team (Tushman and Rosenkopf, 1996), resulting in involuntary and high turnover at the TMTs.

Short tenure figures reflect the demands and barriers executives encounter in their career development. The average tenure of the executive directors working in FTSE 100 companies in the UK was 6.6 years for men and 3.3 years for women in 2019 (Clark, 2020). Whereas, in Finland, in the stock-listed companies, the average tenure was even shorter in 2020: 3.8 years (women 3 years and men 4.4) (Finland Chamber of Commerce, 2020b). Consequently, managerial career patterns are strongly limited by employers. Thus, linearity has become a new boundary limiting contemporary managerial careers (Vinkenburg and Weber, 2012) by increasing nonlinearity at the top executive level.

The lack of women in senior management positions generally falls into two different categories of causation. The cause of corporate practices, which tend to favour the recruitment, retention and promotion of males over females, especially the typical career paths of a future senior manager, poses internal barriers to the traditional linear career progression. Behavioural and cultural causes—stereotyping, tokenism, power, preferred leadership styles and the psychodynamics of male/female relations—explain the barriers of both linear and nonlinear career progression of women leaders (Oakley, 2000).

3.2.2. Nonlinear careers

Nonlinear, also termed 'new', careers are described by multiple employers, knowledge cumulation, and expression of identity (Baker and Aldrich, 1996) in the rise of the new knowledge economy, questioning the traditional concept of a hierarchical career (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; Pongratz and Voß, 2003; Guan et al., 2019). Greater mobility across organisational and occupational boundaries has been categorised at the top organisational level in three types of job mobility (Koch, Forgues and Monties, 2017): status (different degrees of responsibility), function (moves across functions such as marketing, etc.) and employer (moves across and within organisations and industries).

In particular, women leaders' careers have been conceptualised as nonlinear (Arthur, 2014), even though both male and female leaders have followed nonlinear careers in increasing numbers (Mallon, 1998; Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005), transcending organisations and industries, even occupations, either for personal or societal reasons, resulting in greater and faster mobility across organisational and occupational boundaries (Koch, Forgues and Monties, 2017).

The most acknowledged nonlinear conceptualisations of careers associated with women leaders are 'protean' (Hall, 1976) and 'boundaryless' (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996) careers. The protean and boundaryless career concepts overlap significantly. However, the protean career concept predominantly focuses on an individual's motives for following a particular career path, whereas the boundaryless career concept mainly concerns different forms of mobility (Sullivan and Baruch, 2009).

Boundarylessness refers to frequent moves across organisations, emphasising the validation by the external job market, external networks or information, thus receding the hierarchical advancement principles (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996); it has been claimed to reflect specifically women leaders' careers (Sullivan and Baruch, 2009) as the boundaryless nature of career is seen resulting from different types of boundaries: organisational, relational, hierarchical, work–life and psychological (Guan et al., 2019).

The boundaryless career has received opposition in particular among managerial career research (Inkson et al., 2012). For example, Hassard, Morris and McCann (2012) found little evidence for boundarylessness in the careers of managers in Japan, the UK and the US. Similarly, Blair-Loy (1999) found female finance executives' careers followed an orderly (linear) pattern with few inter-organisational transitions and a disorderly (nonlinear) pattern with changing career fields and organisations and unplanned job changes. Similarly, O'Neil and Bilimoria (2005) opposed emergent (nonlinear) careers by characterising women's career patterns by stable, predictable, strategically planned and executed movement through organisational hierarchies, which involve chosen learning opportunities and long-term planning to accommodate other life roles.

There is no consensus on the effects of nonlinear career patterns on women's careers. The labour market segmentation perspective connects mobility with employment instability, therefore being less favourable towards objective and subjective outcomes (Fuller, 2008; Kovalenko and Mortelmans, 2014), whereas recent career theory assumes a positive view on career mobility, seeing it as instrumental to career development in contemporary transitional labour markets (Defillippi and Arthur, 1994; Inkson et al., 2012; Guan et al., 2019). Biemann and Wolf (2009) found both interorganisational and intraorganisational mobility can be effective in facilitating career progression for top managers in Denmark, Germany, Japan, the UK and the US. Yet the findings largely described men's careers, because only 3 out of the 160 top managers in the study were women. Thus, the share of women leaders in the empirical evidence insofar has reflected the overall low number of women in leadership roles, so the research findings continued to fortify the male-dominant perceptions until the share of women leaders can reach a significant enough level.

Consequently, following the aim of this research, specific and separate attention has been required to address women executive leaders' career progression to fill in the research gap.

The transitions from one organisation and industry to another benefit not only the executives' career, but also the companies' performance by disclosing interindustrial benchmarks and practices of other organisations. Thus, to build their careers, executives move across different organisations and even industries once they have reached the highest organisational level (Bidwell and Briscoe, 2010). However, an external labour market strategy with frequent career moves across employers has been negatively related to career success because of the requirements of a substantial amount of firm-specific human capital (Hamori and Kakarika, 2009).

The observable, external conceptualisations of career patterns, career paths, trajectories or moves (Vinkenburg and Weber, 2012) present the outcome of the career development and progression, addressing mainly structural and cultural factors, specifically the barriers affecting the careers of women leaders (section 3.4). Thus, the literature has partially failed to answer how women leaders can navigate from one position to another as a result of their personal resources and choices, which are equally subject to the cultural and societal impact (Lawrence, Lonsdale and le Mesurier, 2018; Lublin, 2018).

The next sections discuss the subjective constructs and conceptualisations of career.

3.3. Career identity

Recent career theories have suggested that, in the changing environment, people need to construct their own meaning of working (Duffy et al., 2016; Akkermans and Tims, 2017). Similarly, the concept of protean career (Hall, 1976) sees careers as being shaped by the individual's values and identity rather than by organisational career norms, especially for studying the careers of women leaders (Valcour and Ladge, 2008), who are less likely than men to follow traditional career paths. Career identity is considered an essential construct in helping individuals deal with the emergence of a boundaryless career and individualisation of society as a whole (Fugate et al., 2004). Thus, identifying oneself as an executive leader employs both the individual and social constructs of career identity.

In the present research, career identity is defined as a dynamic multiplicity of personal positions or voices regarding work and a structure of meanings that the individual links to their own motivation, interests and competencies with acceptable career roles (Meijers, 1998). Career scholars have generally been vague about the definitions of identity and how they relate to career success.

Career identity has additionally been defined as 'one's self-definition in the career contexts, describing "who I am" or "who I want to be" (Fugate et al., 2004, p. 17) or the clarity and stability of subjects' career goals, interests and talents' (Merino-Tejedor, Hontangas and Boada-Grau, 2016, p. 95). As a construct, career identity includes career aspirations, values and beliefs informing our self-concept, which motivates individuals to act and enables them to realise opportunities (Lysova et al., 2015), thus providing a suitable framework for an inductive-deductive qualitative research exploring the subjective constructs of careers of women who have successfully reached the top level of companies as a minority among their male colleagues.

Related concepts to career identity are professional identity, which is the extent to which an individual feels a sense of 'oneness' with their profession (Guan et al., 2016, p. 117) or occupational/vocational identity (Skorikov and Vondracek, 2011). Even though the concepts overlap, there are clear differences. For example, according to Skorikov and Vondracek's (2011), work as a career is characterised by intrinsic motivation and growth as preferred career dynamics, whereas vocational identity may refer to a more stable vocation, for example, being a nurse or teacher. The current research has employed the concept of career identity as a reference to work-related identities because leader roles at different levels of organisations include an inherent change and growth assumption.

The psychological perspective of career identity focuses on the role of identity development and associates identity with 'knowing-why' (Parker, Khapova and Arthur, 2009), including self-knowledge regarding one's needs, values, abilities and aspirations (Defillippi and Arthur, 1994). Career identity is perceived as operating a 'meta-competency' (Hall, 2002, p. 32) or 'cognitive compass' (Fugate et al., 2004, p. 17), hence guiding women leaders' navigation of their personalised career paths.

The sociological perspective of career identity focuses on how identity management enhances employability, especially during career transitions. For instance, identity management was found to be critical for unemployed older workers (Riach and Loretto, 2009). The importance of the social process of identity construction has been emphasised when individuals work to maintain a positive image while navigating a turbulent labour market (Mao and Shen, 2020) or facing obstacles during their career progression, as women leaders do (section 3.4.). Empirical studies of career stories have demonstrated a continuous, coherent identity useful in coping with employment uncertainty and change among Chilean male middle managers (Nazar and van der Heijden, 2012), which may be similarly applied to women executive's careers in uncertain environments.

Career identities have been perceived as discursively produced social identities associated with the profession and personal identities (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010). Individuals draw on the social norms and discourses of how they present and represent themselves to others. Individual agency (section 3.5.1) and social norms (Chapter 2) interact in a dynamic and iterative way in the discursive production of executive women's professional identities (Brown, 1997). Brown and Bimrose (2012) identified three important factors enhancing midcareer learning and identity development at work: the personal characteristics underpinning learning and development (e.g., sense of personal agency, personality, motivation, resilience and self-efficacy), career orientation/career decision-making style and career adaptability. The same factors have been identified in the protean career orientation, which is said to especially reflect women leaders' careers (Wiernik and Kostal, 2019).

Additionally, career identity refers to how central a career is to one's identity. It consists of two subdomains: work involvement and desire for upward mobility. Career resilience is an important component of career identity, specifically in the context of women executives' careers; it reflects a person's resistance to career disruption in a less-than-optimal environment and is divided further into three subcomponents: self-efficacy, risk-taking and dependency (Hirschi, 2012).

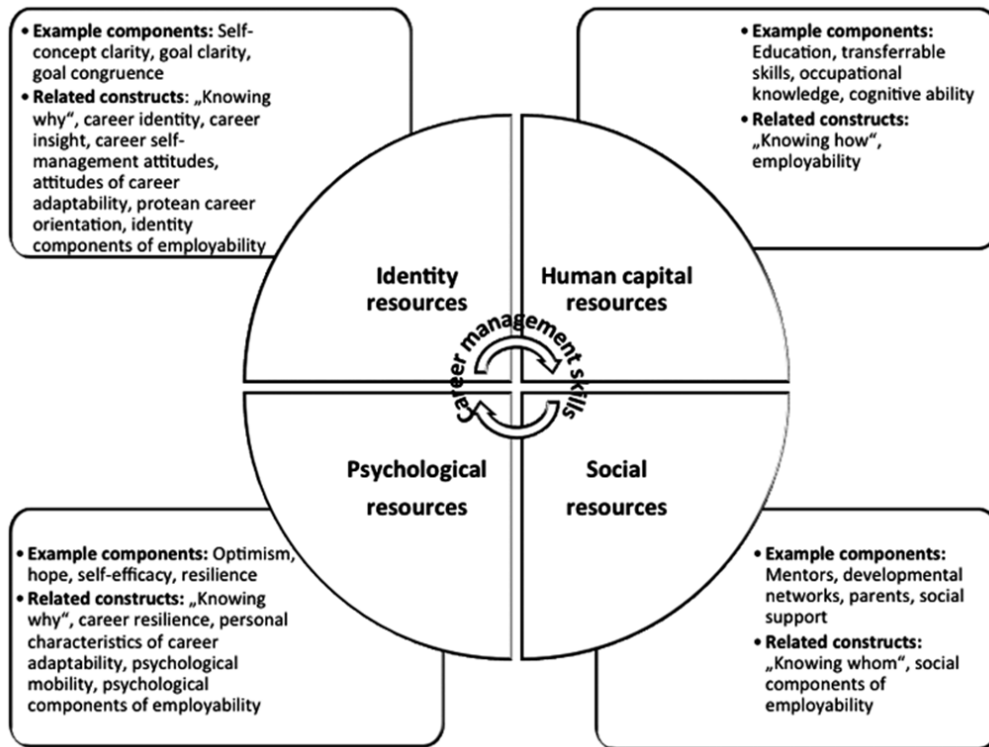
Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) proposed three central career goals or 'signposts' throughout careers: challenge, authenticity and balance. The kaleidoscope career model translates these goals into the career patterns (Sullivan and Mainiero, 2007b): alpha careers, which is typical for the majority of men, focus first on challenge, then on authenticity and finally on balance, while beta careers, typical for the majority of women, focus first on challenge, then on balance and finally on authenticity.

3.3.1. Career resources

To answer one of the research questions (SQ4), the concept of career resources, as part of career identities, is essential. The career resources model (Hirschi, 2012) adheres to the conceptualisation of the intelligent career framework (Arthur, Claman and DeFillippi, 1995; Parker, Khapova and Arthur, 2009), which divides career competences into three ways of knowing, reflecting an individual's motivation and identity (*knowing-why*), skills and expertise (*knowing-how*) and relationships and reputation (*knowing-whom*). Hirschi's (2012) model divides critical career resources into four categories: human capital resources, social resources, psychological resources and identity resources (Figure 3.3). However, the model includes some overlapping constructs, thus remaining vague in identity and psychological resources. The four resources of the model are

proposed to work in tandem in promoting successful career development. The elements of the model are discussed in the context of leadership and managerial careers below.

Figure 3.3: Career resources model (Hirschi, 2012)



Human capital resources

Human capital resources reflect one’s ability to meet performance expectations for a given occupation, which has also been conceptualised as employability (Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth, 2004; Inkson et al., 2012). Human capital resources include factors such as education, experience, training, cognitive ability and a broader category of work-relevant knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics (KSAOs) (Hirschi, 2012).

Researchers have generated substantial evidence that the demographic profiles of executives are highly related to strategy and performance outcomes (Boeker, 1997; Singh, Gaur and Schmid, 2010; Weiss, Schneider and Lebid, 2015). In managerial careers, executive women and men in the US have emphasised hard work, managerial skill, performance in high-visibility assignments and demonstrating expertise (Giscombe, 2007) as examples of human capital resources.

Social resources

Even though social resources are one category of a person's career resources, its source lies outside of the individual, acknowledging that available environmental support is a significant factor. Empirical evidence has shown that interpersonal determinants, such as mentors, superior support, networks and spousal support (Kirchmeyer, 2002; Wolff and Moser, 2009; Heikkinen, Lämsä and Hilllos, 2014), impact the career success of managerial women.

Similarly, the pilot study of the current research (section 2.8) showed the importance of social resources in the form of supervisory support and networks and family's support in the career development of women leaders in Finland. Moreover, headhunters and their networks may either enable or hinder leaders' career progression to the top level (section 3.6).

Psychological resources

Psychological resources refer to positive psychological traits and states, cognitions and motivations that are generalised and expressed specifically in relation to the work role (Hirschi, 2012). The list of requirements for excellent leaders is exhaustive. Leaders at the top executive level, because they represent not only themselves but the whole organisation, are expected to be confident about their skills, to demonstrate strategic thinking and high professional and cognitive skill profiles and to be authentic and motivated to lead others (Ashby and Miles, 2002; Sadun et al., 2022).

Identity resources

In Hirschi's (2012) conceptualisation of career resources, identity is viewed as a subconstruct, as opposed to the career identity concept discussed in section 3.1. Equal to psychological resources, identity resources seek responses to the 'knowing-why' questions related to career. Identity resources consist of self-concept and goal clarity and relate to the protean career orientation and career identity (Hirschi, 2012). The current research has integrated the subjective perception of career success among the 'knowing-why' constructs that direct the careers of women to executive leader roles (section 3.5.2).

The upward progression in organisational hierarchies towards more demanding roles includes the notion of development. Below, career development theories are presented, focusing on individual factors, including the coping strategies that can strengthen the positive effect and weaken the negative effect of the barriers and circumstances women face on their way to executive positions.

3.3.2. Career development theories

Recent theoretical advances have suggested that, in a changing career environment, people need to construct their own meaning of working (Duffy et al., 2016; Akkermans and Tims, 2017). Along with the increase of nonlinear career models in contemporary managerial careers, the responsibility for career development has shifted from the organisations' responsibility towards the individual's own interest and resources (Allred, Snow and Miles, 1996).

All these conceptualisations note the influence of personal values shaping a career (Brousseau et al., 1996). Similarly, Sullivan and Mainero (2007a) perceived careers as being defined by the individual worker's values and life choices rather than by an organisation. The choices of leaders may represent, for example, a lifelong commitment to developing high-level skills in a particular field, speciality or shifts between related occupational areas, specialties and disciplines or regular changes between often seemingly unrelated positions (Brousseau et al., 1996; Sturges, 1999; Hall, 2004).

Career development theories focusing on the individual perspective have often originated from psychological traditions and researched largely using quantitative methods, here with the aim of serving the purpose of career counselling or interventions. Moreover, career development theories are based on research among relatively broad and rather homogeneous samples of students, employees and job seekers; they still lack empirical validation in explaining career choices and behaviour of more specific, marginalised or underrepresented groups, for example, executive women (Rudolph, Zacher and Hirschi, 2019), specific phases of the lifespan, for example, midcareer and late adulthood (van der Horst and Klehe, 2019), or research adopting a person-centred perspective (Aleni Sestito et al., 2015).

Moreover, empirical evidence related to women leaders studied is often conducted using hypothetical managers or laboratory-created leaders; however, when researching actual leaders, the results typically reveal little or no bias towards women leaders (Elsesser and Lever, 2011).

Contemporary career development theories partly overlap, emphasising certain elements that may be considered the universal essentials of career development and antecedents of career success: self-directedness, adaptability and career resources. Social cognitive career theory (Lent, Brown and Hackett, 1994; Lent and Brown, 2013; Lent et al., 2016), career construction theory (Savickas, 2005, 2013), the protean career model (Hall, 1996; D T Hall, 2004) and Hirschi's (2012, 2018) career resources model are prominent elements when it comes to researching women executives' career navigation; these will be presented next.

3.3.3. Self-directed career management

Even though soft skills are increasingly emphasised in the role of executives (Sadun et al., 2022), agentic decision-making and responsibility-taking elements remain at the core of the top management competence requirements. Evidently, agency and self-directedness are embedded in the role of executives, regardless of the executive's gender, because changes in the nature of work and organisations have led to an increased need for self-directed career management in all vocations and position levels, including leadership careers. Women aspiring to reach top leadership positions are required to demonstrate high levels of agency, self-efficacy and capability. The 'labyrinth' metaphor articulates the multiple requirements for reaching executive leader roles as 'persistence, awareness of one's progress, and a careful analysis of the puzzles that lie ahead' (Eagly and Carli, 2007b, p. 63).

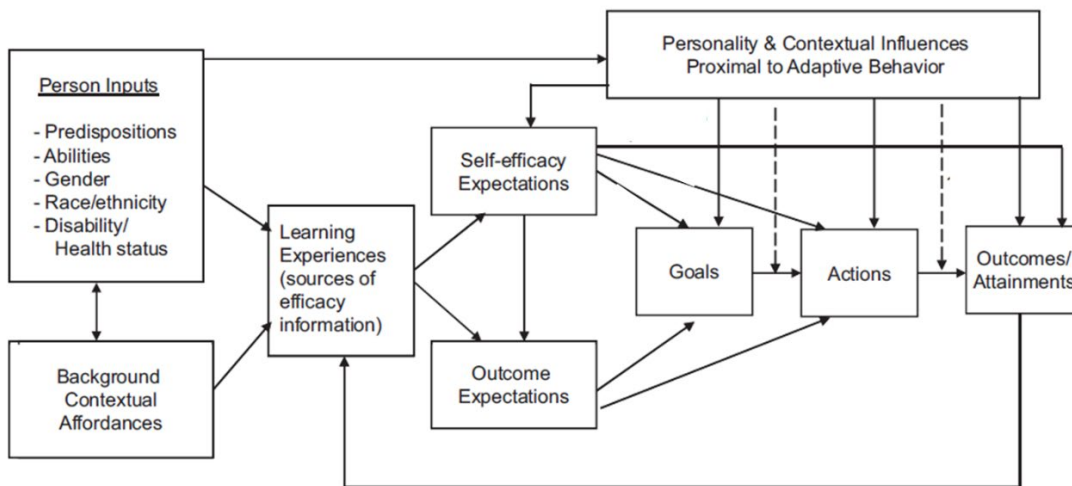
Similarly, Hall's (1976) concept of protean career emphasises subjective personal values as guiding career choices, combined with an individual's agency and self-efficacy rather than organisations creating and affecting individual career paths. Protean career orientation is, moreover, suggested to be an appropriate framework for studying the careers of executive women, who are less likely to follow traditional linear career paths (Valcour and Ladge, 2008) and who, thus, need more agency in navigating among the constraints and opportunities along their career paths.

In taking responsibility for one's personal career development, the role of outcome expectations, self-efficacy and personal goals becomes imperative, here according to social cognitive career theory (SCCT) (Lent, Brown and Hackett, 1994), which expands Bandura's (1982, 1991) social cognitive theory as a way to explain the dynamics of various internal and external career development factors. SCCT explains career self-management across a life span by investigating factors that enable and motivate individuals to actively manage their careers through various self-directed career behaviours, for example, by constantly updating professional skills and building networks across professional and organisational boundaries to secure continuous employment (Lent, Brown and Hackett, 1994; Lent and Brown, 2013; Lent et al., 2016).

Self-efficacy, which has been defined as people's beliefs about their capabilities to organise and perform particular behaviours or courses of action (Lent and Fouad, 2011), is a key element of career development. Outcome expectations are personal beliefs about the consequences of performing particular behaviours. Personal goals refer to one's intention to engage in a particular activity or affect a particular future outcome (Lent et al., 2016).

SCCT proposes a wide range of individual and contextual factors (Figure 3.1) that affect career choices by contributing to learning experiences that serve as a basis for developing self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Because the theory is broad reaching, it may be difficult to operationalise as a whole; thus, the focus of empirical validation has concentrated on self-efficacy and outcome expectations.

Figure 3.1: Model of career self-management



Adapted from 'Toward a unifying social cognitive theory of career and academic interest, choice and performance', by R.W. Lent, S. D. Brown, & G. Hackett, 1994, *Journal of Vocational Behavioural*, 45, p. 93.

Moreover, a meta-analysis (Choi et al., 2012) found self-efficacy and outcome expectations as generating interests, goals and career development performance and social support and career barriers, influencing individuals' interests, goals and performance through self-efficacy. However, the results showed no significant effect of gender on career decision self-efficacy. Similarly, White (1995) found that the career development of successful women resembles the career stages described by Levinson et al. (1978), even though Levinson's model was based on men's careers. Both successful women and men experienced periods of stability followed by periods of questioning and change; however, the timing of the relationship and family events diverted.

A more recent development of SCCT, the career self-management (CSM) model, emphasises the concepts of adaptive career behaviours and personal agency and how they help individuals direct their own career development and manage career changes through conscious career planning. The CSM model focuses on the dynamic interplay between social cognitive factors, environmental attributes and personality traits that promote or prevent the career-planning process. Two key

social cognitive variables of SCCT that serve as proximal antecedents of career planning are self-efficacy and goals (Lent and Brown, 2013).

3.3.4. Career construction through adaptability

In addition to agency, career adaptability has been highlighted in contemporary career theories. The increasingly globalised economy, fast technological development and constantly changing organisational structures require shifts into more flexible employment relationships and less predictable career patterns for executive women. The adaptation to environmental changes does not necessarily follow a preset plan; factors affecting career choices and progression may not be in the hands of women leaders. Unplanned or unpredictable events and their influence on career development have been conceptualised in numerous terms to describe the phenomenon, including happenstance, serendipity and chance (Betsworth and Hansen, 1996; Bright, Pryor and Harpham, 2005; Krumboltz, 2009, 2011). Similarly, early career research has found inconsistency and a lack of logical choices already in the 1960s (Roe and Baruch, 1967). Unpredictability and rapid change make career planning difficult and may increase the likelihood that chance events will affect people's career development (Rice, 2014).

However, relying on social constructionist epistemology, construction theory views careers from a contextual perspective that sees people as self-organising, self-regulating and self-defining. Career construction theory conceptualises development as driven by adaptation to an environment and integration into the community (Savickas, 2013). The framework for the theory has been built to support career counsellors aiming to help people deconstruct and coconstruct identities and identify life themes to create a sense of meaning and give direction and purpose to one's work role (Savickas, 2013). Career adaptability, which has been noted as an important component of career construction theory, has received considerable recent research attention (Rudolph, Zacher and Hirschi, 2019). However, most studies focusing on career adaptability have been based on college and student samples or younger workers, so relatively little is known about the career adaptability of older and more experienced workers (Zacher and Griffin, 2015), including women in senior-level executive positions.

The concept of career adaptability has an inherent assumption of the individual having challenges with career choices and progression, assuming high personal control in adaptability while ignoring the serendipity and luck elements. However, Savickas (2005, 2013) divided career adaptability into four interrelated dimensions, which, remarkably, are the qualities needed for turning a chance into opportunity (Krumboltz 2009) and that have a positive effect on career development. The dimensions are compared in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Comparison of career adaptability and chance capabilities

| | |
|--|--|
| Career adaptability Savickas (2005, 2013) | Turning chance into opportunity (Krumboltz, 2009) |
| Career control , addressing the level of personal responsibility (career decidedness) and awareness of personal needs, interests and qualities. | Persistence to deal with obstacles |
| Career curiosity , exploring possible future selves (self-exploration) and external opportunities to discover the fit between oneself and occupational roles. | Curiosity to explore learning opportunities |
| Career concern , indicating preparedness for the future by planning future career developments, building a career vision and translating this vision into concrete career goals, which predicts successful careers (Feldman and Ng, 2007) because the goals in general predict effort and effort predicts performance (Locke and Latham, 1990). | Flexibility to address a variety of circumstances |
| Career confidence , describing people’s beliefs that they can turn their career goals into reality and successfully solve problems and overcome obstacles (Savickas, Mark L. and Porfeli, 2012). | Optimism to maximise benefits from unplanned events |

With career adaptability emerging as an important construct of career development and progression, it has been approached from many different angles. However, there is no consensus on what career adaptability entails and whether it should be conceived as a competence, resource, disposition or personal readiness (Hirschi, 2012).

Savickas (2005) described career adaptability as an individual construct enabling individuals to implement their self-concepts effectively in occupational roles. Morrison and Hall (2002) conceptualised adaptability as a meta-competency that enables the development of other competencies, while Kossek et al. (1998) defined adaptability as the ability to adapt to changing career circumstances, proposing it as an indicator of openness to change and the ability to handle the stresses of a new career context. Moreover, Fugate et al. (2004) conceptualised personal adaptability as a component of the psychosocial construct of employability, referring to optimism, propensity to learn, openness, the internal locus of control and generalised self-efficacy.

Similarly, commitment to constant learning and skill development, ongoing self-assessment, assessment and feedback from others, effective networking, work–life balance and financial planning were among the identified factors enhancing possibilities to respond to unpredicted and unplanned circumstances (Krumboltz, 1979, 2009). Thus, career adaptability can be seen as a response to the serendipity and environmental changes that women executives capitalise on while successfully navigating their careers towards and in the top management roles.

Next, career success is discussed, which operates as a key concept of the present research, demonstrating the underlying values and motives guiding career choices and navigation of executive women.

3.4. Career success theories identifying objective and subjective elements

The complexity of the concept of career success can be seen in the variety of perspectives in empirical career success research since the 1970s (Ng et al., 2005; Sullivan and Baruch, 2009; Biemann, Zacher and Feldman, 2012): in how career success is enhanced and affected by career mobility strategies and networking (de Janasz C. and Forret, 2008), planned or unplanned life events (Valcour and Ladge, 2008), self-efficacy and career goals (Abele and Spurk, 2009; Lent et al., 2016), different personal characteristics (Boudreau, Boswell and Judge, 2001; Nicholson and de Waal-Andrews, 2005; von Stumm et al., 2010; Orvis and Leffler, 2011; Duckworth and Gross, 2014; Rigotti, Korek and Otto, 2018) or in a scale to measure subjective feeling of being successful (Shockley et al., 2016). Career success definitions can be summarised as ‘the positive psychological or work-related outcomes or achievements one has accumulated as a result of one’s work experience’ (Judge et al., 1995, p. 486).

Based on a classical distinction made by Hughes (1937), careers have an objective and subjective part. Thus, researchers have often operationalised career success equally in one of the two ways, either with objective or subjective measures (Arthur, Khapova and Wilderom, 2005; Heslin, 2005a; Abele and Spurk, 2009). Whereas objective career success can be defined as directly observable by others and measurable in a standardised way (Arthur, Khapova and Wilderom, 2005) by weighing a person’s career against societal norms concerning salary, job level, promotion history or occupational prestige (Dries, Pepermans and Carlier, 2008), subjective career success can be defined as the person’s own evaluation and experience of achieving personally meaningful career outcomes (Seibert, Kraimer and Liden, 2001; Ng et al., 2005; Shockley et al., 2016).

Heslin (2005) distinguished between a self-referent assessment and an other-referent success evaluation. Other-referent career success is based on comparing oneself against others, for

example, with the same education or position level (Heslin, 2005). Other-referent measures are largely related to objective measures (Abele and Spurk, 2009). The recent career success literature has largely presumed that people conceptualise and evaluate their career success only relative to self-referent criteria (Heslin, 2005a), such as their career aspirations and values. A recent development in career values and motivations has been the inclusion of the ancient concepts of eudaimonia and hedonia (LeFebvre and Huta, 2021). However, the concept of eudaimonia is commonly connected with the research on happiness and well-being and has been criticised for lacking a clear definition and consistent measurement; empirical evidence has suggested that hedonic and eudaimonic well-being overlap conceptually (Kashdan, Biswas-Diener and King, 2008).

Additionally, Hirschi et al. (2018) developed a framework integrating existing empirical and theoretical work on the resources needed for successful career development. The framework identified three main critical resource categories for attaining career success: knowledge and skills resources, motivational resources and environmental resources. However, the concept overlaps heavily and may be perceived to complement the earlier intelligent career theory (Arthur, Claman and DeFillippi, 1995), defining three 'knowings' of career resources: knowing why, knowing how and knowing who (section 3.1.1).

Developing an understanding of women's careers requires considering career success as more subjective in nature (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005; Valcour and Ladge, 2008; Powell and Butterfield, 2012). However, when researching high-achieving women, objective career-related factors were mentioned prominently in their definitions of success: both men and women mentioned job titles, job levels and professional achievements at roughly the same rates (Ely, Stone and Ammerman, 2014).

Although measuring objective and subjective success separately is common, it fails to reveal the criteria individuals use in determining whether or not they are successful (Dyke and Murphy, 2006). Similarly, Arthur et al. (2005) claimed that the concepts of objective and subjective career success are interdependent. Morrison and Hall (2002) agreed, suggesting a cyclical model in which career success enhances a person's level of self-esteem, in turn positively affecting objective career success and, thereby, creating a success cycle that links objective and subjective career outcomes. Thus, both objective and subjective perspectives are required for a comprehensive understanding of executive women's career success; both objective and subjective perspectives are presented next.

3.4.1. Objective measures of success

In the present research, SQ1 aims to discover observable career patterns of executive women, including a notion of position-based career success: the higher up in the organisations' hierarchy, the more successful the leader (section 3.2.1). Objective career success variables measure extrinsic career success with factors that can be seen and, therefore, evaluated objectively by others, such as salary attainment and the number of promotions in one's career. Objective careers can be observed and measured by third parties, for example, the sequence of positions and functions in an organisation (Judge et al., 1995).

In the sense of moving up from one hierarchical level to the next, upward mobility is automatically associated with more pay, greater responsibilities and more status (Ng and Feldman, 2014), which are all traditional indicators of career success. According to Dyke and Murphy (2006), traditional measures of success, such as position and power, may not be as important as they once were or were presumed to be, and gender differences in defining success may be more complex.

Objective career success comprises an external perspective to evaluate the current career situation of an individual based on socially accepted success criteria (Heslin, 2005a; Ng et al., 2005). In empirical studies, objective career success has been mostly operationalised by income, hierarchical level and number of subordinates (Biemann and Braakmann, 2013). Nicholson and de Waal-Andrews (2005) utilised the framework of comparative anthropology and widened the criteria to six objective success outcomes (utilities): status and rank (hierarchical position), material success (wealth, property, earning capacity), social reputation and regard (prestige, influence), knowledge and skills, friendships, network connections and health and well-being.

Over the past two decades, organisational changes have reduced the relevance of some traditional objective indicators of career success. For instance, trends such as organisational delayering, downsizing and outsourcing have lessened the scope (Evans, Gunz and Jalland, 1997) and relative desirability (Reitman and Schneer, 2003) of hierarchical progression through promotion (Heslin, 2005).

According to Nicholson and de Waal-Andrews (2005), status or other objective aspects of career success matter equally to women as they do to men. However, it has been stated that women are less compelled to compete in the same arenas as men, whose status is said to be more determined by occupational factors. Women's status motivations relate much more to their networks of inclusion and association, towards which value orientations are a principal instrument of alignment rather than goal-directed striving. (Feingold, 1994; Perrone, Sedlacek and Alexander,

2001) Thus, in a world where more women increasingly capture leadership positions and become chief or sole family breadwinners, women who enter competitive arenas enact strategies similar to those of men but with different styles and effects.

Research has supported the positive relationship between education and objective career success, in which mental ability is also considered a salient form of human capital that is positively related to objective career success (Melamed, 1996). This relationship has been theorised to occur through several mechanisms, such as increased learning and knowledge acquisition, successful performance and the ability to set priorities and handle novel work situations (Dreher and Bretz, 1991). However, the empirical evidence does not support the gender perspective. Assuming that individual attributes and education straightforwardly lead to success, highly educated women should already be a majority in the leading roles in many Western countries, including Finland (sections 2.5 and 2.6). Thus, the effect of cultural and structural factors are not addressed, so the empirical evidence in research relate to men or middle or lower-level workers and managers.

Research has also implicated progression ambition and centrality (or importance) of work as the salient predictors of not only objective, but also subjective, career success. Conceptually, these variables reflect stable motivational energy because they appear to be instrumental in energising effort and performance (O'Reilly III and Chatman, 1994). Similarly, researchers have suggested ambition and work centrality as the predictors of objective career success. Especially in relation to subjective career success, ambition and work centrality have been theorised as motivational elements influencing the internal standards by which career success is judged (Judge et al., 1995).

3.4.2. Subjective measures of success

The concept of subjective success implies that individuals measure their own success according to their personal criteria. Subjective career success captures an individual's reactions to career experiences (Hughes 1937; Heslin 2005). The way in which women leaders define success subjectively has been claimed to have a significant impact on the choices in both their personal and professional lives. Personal values and individual perceptions of success affect educational choices, choice of employer, work involvement, career attainment, relationships and life satisfaction (Dyke and Murphy, 2006). The concept of subjective career success also denotes that the world around us, culture, expectations and own identity/self-perception affect the way executive women perceive success (Dyke and Murphy, 2006). Thus, it can be argued that it is impossible to define the concept objectively.

Consequently, individuals differ regarding their career aspirations and the meaning they ascribe to work-related outcomes (Arthur, Khapova and Wilderom, 2005). Subjective career success has been defined as the individual's perception of success concerning achievement, future perspectives, recognition and satisfaction (Nabi, 1999).

Subjective career success can be reflected in one's subjective evaluations of the achievements, work-life balance, health and well-being associated with career development (Judge et al., 1995; Zhou et al., 2016). Additionally, subjective career success has been typically measured as career satisfaction (O'Neil, Bilimoria and Saatcioglu, 2004; Guan et al., 2016) or perceived career success (Heslin, 2005b) and, more recently, as a multidimensional evaluation of growth and development, personal life and authenticity (Shockley et al., 2016). Moreover, Nicholson and de Waal-Andrews (2005) identified six utilities of subjective career success: pride in achievement, intrinsic job satisfaction, self-worth, commitment to work role or institution, fulfilling relationships and moral satisfaction.

One stream of the literature has explored the consequences of pursuing a passionate interest with determination and effort over a longer time span. Here, grit and related constructs are associated with lifetime educational attainment and professional success (Locke and Latham, 2013; Houliort et al., 2014). Prospective longitudinal studies have shown that grit predicts the completion of challenging goals, despite obstacles and setbacks (Duckworth and Gross, 2014).

Work values have been found to exhibit significant effects on job-choice decisions. Individuals are more likely to choose jobs whose value content is similar to their own value orientation (Judge and Bretz, 1992). Similarly, the anchor model of career (Schein, 1996) proposes that an individual's career goals are closely related to their own values, hence affecting the career, for example, by the needs of autonomy, security, competence, creativity, challenge and lifestyle. Following these perspectives, career success should be assessed by executive women's subjective evaluations of the attainment of various goals (Perrone, Sedlacek and Alexander, 2001).

Sturges (1999) classified midlevel women manager's perceptions of success into four orientational categories: (1) climbers who focus on organisational level and rewards, (2) experts who focus on mastery and recognition, (3) influencers who focus on impact and legacy, and (4) self-realisers who focus on enjoyable work and personal fulfilment. Sturges found that women's definitions of success tended to be broader than men's—women were over-represented among the experts and self-realisers, and none were climbers (Sturges, 1999). Similarly, women middle-management leaders in the technology industry in Finland (Ekonen, 2007) were typified into four types by their

career stories: balance-seeking, hierarchical, ideological and horizontal career development. Moreover, the kaleidoscope career model, in which changes in people's dynamic lives while seeking authenticity, balance and challenge are reflected in their careers like in a kaleidoscope, has been claimed to reflect on women leaders' career (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005).

Gender differences have been noted, especially in many of the studies in the 1990s, providing rich evidence proving that women and men differ in the dynamics of achievement striving (Melamed, 1996); this conclusion is that women have a more values-based than goal-focused orientation to career success. Dyke and Murphy (2006) found that women who had made it to the top of the career hierarchy did not primarily define success in terms of career; instead, they emphasised balance. Additionally, along with the increase of women in top management positions, research has shown both similarities and differences in the conceptualisation of executive careers of both genders. However, a survey of more than 25,000 Harvard Business School graduates showed that male and female graduates' ambitions were similar (Ely, Stone, and Ammerman, 2014). As women advanced to senior levels, they confront more similar barriers to men, including differences in behavioural styles from the organisation's norm, lack of significant general management or line experience and a lack of awareness of organisational politics (Giscombe, 2007). Thus, there is no clear research-based evidence of women being less ambitious, regardless of the way they define success. Consequently, the literature lacks evidence of executive-level women's careers in large companies.

Moreover, the research results reflect the existing gender imbalance in the workforce, in which women participants often represent a lower level of management and count for less than 10% of the groups under investigation. Most leadership research has been conducted among male participants, especially in the upper echelons of power because of the low number of women in these roles (Koenig et al., 2011). Thus, the think manager, think male paradigm (Schein, 1973) could also be translated into think research findings on top management leaders, think men's attitudes and perceptions.

In career success studies, women have emphasised personal values, work-life balance and authenticity (Sullivan and Mainiero, 2007a) as measures of success, reaching beyond the traditional yardsticks of a successful life: an abundance of wealth, power, possessions, prestige, popularity or fame (Dyke and Murphy, 2006; Spence, 2014). These conceptualisations of subjective career success that are typical of women coincide with eudaimonia, a concept originally coined in Ancient Greece by the philosopher Aristotle as a means to achieve well-being through high moral standards, exercising virtues and seeking to develop the best in oneself (LeFebvre and

Huta, 2021). From this, women are more likely to define success as a more personal and multidimensional concept because most of the categorisations are built mainly around eudaimonic values and motivation.

In their survey of 90 top executives attending Harvard Business School management programmes, Nash and Stevenson (2004) discovered that the most successful people have gotten where they are because they have a greater understanding of what success entails. According to their framework, which includes constructs similar to eudaimonia (Huta, 2013), experiencing enduring career success appears to be a function of attaining an adequate combination of 1) happiness (feelings of pleasure or contentment about life); 2) achievement (accomplishments that compare favourably against others); 3) significance (the sense of a positive impact on people); and 4) legacy (a way to establish values or accomplishments in helping others find future success). Subjective career success has also become a major life goal, and as a result, career attitudes and self-evaluations are increasingly gaining importance for predicting subjective career success (Rigotti, Korek et al. 2018).

The next section discusses the distinct features of executive selection to understand the typical structural traditions in career progression to the highest echelons of companies.

3.5. Barriers to women leaders' careers

Company profits and share performance can be close to 50% higher when women are well represented at the top (Dixon-Fyle et al., 2020). Regardless of recent research showing diversity of the TMT members positively related to company performance (Jeong and Harrison, 2017) and empirical studies specifically in US-based companies witnessing a positive association between the company's financial performance and percentage of women in executive positions (Carter et al., 2010; Krishnan and Park, 2005), women leaders still struggle in getting to the top hierarchical level. Despite women's success in education and middle management, only a few women have reached the top management, the executive or 'O' level—CEO, CFO, CIO, COO or CTO—in the corporate world (Cheung and Halpern, 2010); this is evidenced also by the low number of women executives in Finland (section 2.3.1).

As the low number of women managers in private companies suggests (section 2.6), women do not advance as far in the organisational hierarchy as their male counterparts. Thus, the potential population—middle-management women leaders or women aspiring for leadership positions—for research has directed the majority of research of women leaders' careers towards explaining the

reasons why women do not achieve the highest-ranking positions (Sullivan and Baruch, 2009; Schilling, 2015), as opposed to the aim of the present research, which focuses on women who succeed in reaching the top executive positions. The most common explanations and metaphors of women's career barriers are summarised in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Summary of the barriers women leaders face during their career

| Barrier metaphor | Content | Key authors |
|--|--|---|
| <i>The glass ceiling</i> | Is an invisible barrier for women and minority groups, preventing them from moving up the corporate ladder. Women are able to get through the front door of managerial hierarchies; however, they hit an invisible barrier that blocks any further upward movement. Failure to reach senior management positions has been explained by a number of different factors, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Corporate practices - Preferred leadership style - Biological, socialisation and structural/cultural explanations | Morrison et al., 1987 Townsend, 1997 Baxter, Janeen and Wright, 2000 Oakley, 2000 Carli and Eagly, 2001 Ridgeway, 2001 Powell and Graves, 2003 Puttonen, 2006 Weyer, 2007 Adams and Funk, 2012 Bruckmüller et al., 2014 Glass and Cook, 2016 |
| <i>The glass labyrinth</i> | The glass labyrinth illustrates that women are able to advance to top positions, as witnessed by some women who have managed to do. However, the right path is hard to find. | Eagly and Carli, 2007, 2009, 2016 |
| <i>The glass cliff</i> | Women more often than men are recruited to leadership positions involving unusually high risks, uncertainties and periodicity. | Ryan and Haslam, 2005, 2008 Ryan et al., 2011 |
| <i>The maternal wall, motherhood penalty</i> | This refers to the unique workplace challenges experienced by working mothers. | Crosby et al., 2004 Williams, 2005 Budig and Hodges, 2010 Correll et al., 2007 |
| <i>The sticky floor</i> | This characterises the obstacles that women face earlier in their career paths. | Smith et al., 2012 Carli and Eagly, 2016 |
| <i>The confidence gap</i> | Despite being as qualified as men, women often hold themselves back. Compared with men, women do not consider themselves ready for promotions, they predict they will do worse on tests, and they generally underestimate their abilities. | Kay and Shipman, 2014 |

Most of the theorisation and conceptualisations around the barriers faced by women—the invisible yet durable barriers and obstacles, which are presented through the notion of various glass-related metaphors—are based on research describing and evidencing the reality of women who work in middle-management or nonmanagerial and positions. However, Jackson and O'Callaghan (2009)

claimed that the literature, both empirical and nonempirical, has provided no objective and easily observable criteria that would ensure with certainty the real existence of a glass ceiling in companies. Similarly, Dowling (2017) argued that the glass ceiling metaphor describing the gender inequality of women at the top directly challenges the principle that merit should outweigh diversity. Moreover, it causes problems with fairness or ethics by promoting leaders based on gender, for example, introducing quotas instead of based on merit and competence.

However, gender continues to create extra difficulties and barriers for career movers in achieving career progress. In a research and development project in Finland, Hearn et al. (2015) found that work–family reconciliation (section 2.3) was particularly a source of the challenges arising in promotion of women in management positions and in equal opportunities at the workplace.

Ashcraft's (2013) metaphor of the 'glass slipper' explains how merit may not benefit women when social gender identity fails to fit the definition and assumed characteristics attached to the executive role. Simpson and Kumra (2016) extended the glass slipper metaphor with the 'Teflon effect', describing that merit requires recognition and needs to be effectively demonstrated through embodied performances. If left unrecognised, merit fails to stick onto those who possess it.

Consequently, the theories and conceptualisations of women's career barriers fail to explain successful career navigation to the top management level. Thus, following Sealy and Singh (2010,) the present research has aimed to explore the positive examples of women who have avoided the barrier other women typically encounter. The next section connects executive women's careers to social context and leader role identity by discussing the career identities and success of executive women, here by utilising the lens of social role theory.

3.6. Distinct features of executive leaders

Executive leaders are selected to the top level of organisations based on their demonstrated results, behaviour and personal character as leaders (Hollenbeck, 2009), which falls under a combination of both objective and subjective elements demonstrated and articulated in the recruitment processes. Most executives have 25–35-year career in middle or senior management before they are selected for TMTs. According to Korn Ferry, the average age for a C-suite member in the top 1,000 US companies is 56 (Korn Ferry, 2020). The TMT members are somewhat younger in Finland: for CEOs, the average age is 52, and for other members, the average is 49.3 years of age (Finland Chamber of Commerce, 2020b).

Leadership competency, on which the executive selections are based, depends on the leadership role and company's environment (Kragt and Day, 2020). Consequently, researchers have developed a variety of leadership competency models for specific leadership roles and professions (Hollenbeck, McCall and Silzer, 2006). Because the executive women in the current research operate in multiple roles and environments, executive competency has been researched only through self-reported career resources, not applying an existing competency list or model.

Executive-level positions are filled either internally as a promotion or externally by a headhunting process. In internal recruitment processes within companies, management and supervisors are important in promoting careers of potential leaders, as evidenced in the pilot study of the current research, which emphasised the role of supervisors (section 2.9).

When new TMT members are searched for outside the organisation, executives and leaders at the highest echelons of organisations are commonly recruited by executive search consultants and headhunters (Clark, 1992; Tienari et al., 2013). Tienari et al. (2013) defined an executive search as gatekeeping; headhunters utilise their power in defining selection criteria and in assessing candidates' suitability or unsuitability. Moreover, because positions may not necessarily be publicly available, gatekeepers have the power to influence the composition of the candidate list (van den Brink and Benschop, 2014).

Tienari et al. (2013) found in their research of Finnish and Swedish that headhunters' clients considered a search process without women executive candidates as unacceptable. However, only a few women have an appreciated technical educational background, and most women leaders have been witnessed to disappear from the 'pipeline' (Hancock and Hums, 2016) and, thus, are lacking the needed experience more often than men (Tienari et al., 2013). The difficulties in finding female candidates shows the practice of profiling executives that excludes most women without suitable education or experience.

Executive search practices include socially situated activities through which candidates are evaluated (Hicks, Nair and Wilderom, 2009). Executive search firms are perceived as controlling executive recruitment processes through structured power resources and relations between clients and headhunters. Moreover, headhunters possess the power to determine who is classified as a talented candidate and, thus, is admitted to the networks that provide access to elite executive positions (Faulconbridge et al., 2009), creating barriers to women middle managers who aim to reach the upper level.

Organisational power formally resides within and strategic decision-making is a key aspect of managerial authority in executive leader roles. In most organisations and industries, men predominate in senior managerial positions, which reflects and reinforces not only hierarchical, but also gendered, managerial power and authority (section 2.6).

Women are disappearing in the process, and male dominance in top management is reproduced by executive search consultants and their clients (Tienari et al., 2013). White male dominance continues as the norm for top management jobs (Acker, 1990) because white men disproportionately represent search consultants, candidates and clients (Faulconbridge et al., 2009). Moreover, headhunters are claimed to utilise networks of 'old and new boys' elite groups of preferred candidates (Faulconbridge et al., 2009, p. 806). Thus, the practices of executive search have been perceived as gendered (Tienari et al., 2013) and as reinforcing the underlying societal structures by more likely contacting white males than females and minority males (Dreher, Lee and Clerkin, 2011).

Moreover, Hamori (2010) noted that headhunters create career boundaries by predominantly recruiting candidates from large, renowned organisations and identifying candidates from their current executive positions and titles instead of evaluating actual accomplishments or potential. Thus, if an employer is inclined to hire only reputable executives who are assumed to be productive and pose the least risk to the company (Baumle and Fossett, 2005), statistical discrimination prevails because male applicants, who already occupy most TMT positions, are most likely selected for open TMT positions. The tendency to assume that someone who differs in terms of gender is likely to display a different approach to tasks at work (Ellemers and Haslam, 2012) is conceptualised in role congruity theory (Eagly and Karau, 2002; Koburtay, Syed and Haloub, 2019) and the glass cliff metaphor (Ryan and Haslam, 2005; Hunt-Earle, 2012; Bruckmüller et al., 2014), which will be discussed further in section 3.4.

In reality, executive women in corporate top management, especially in business roles, are still rare. Gender quotas and other equality initiatives with good intentions aim to mitigate structural inequality in companies (Sacks, 2013; Economist, 2018), giving a distorted image of equality in the labour force. As one negative consequence, to improve companies' reputation by meeting the diversity and inclusion objectives (Lämsä and Hautala, 2013), women are selected as tokens (Kanter, 1977) and placed in the less powerful and less-paid functional 'softer' HR or PR roles at the executive level, while more demanding and respected business decisions are still put on the shoulders of men. The quota percentage objectives are met, but true equality at the corporate top level is not reached (section 2.3.1).

Even though headhunters act as gatekeepers, the final decisions are made by the CEOs and accepted by the board of directors; a woman CEO has been shown to increase the attractiveness of an organisation among women applicants (Palmer and Bosch, 2017). Similarly, the findings of the pilot study (2.8) showed the importance of supervisors as gatekeepers and career supporters. Moreover, Bagues and Perez-Villadoniga (2013) found a similar-to-me-in-skills influence resulting in preference for the candidates who excelled in the same aspects as the interviewer. To get more women to be in the gatekeeper roles, gender quotas for women on the boards of directors have been introduced to pave the way for women executives. Unfortunately, so far, women on boards have failed to increase the share of women at the top management level in Finland and Norway (section 2.6). In conclusion, gender equality is both reinforced and diminished by gatekeepers and within networks (Dwivedi, Joshi and Misangyi, 2018).

Among personal reasons, the ambition level of women has been offered as an explanation for the lack of women executives (Fels, 2004; Sools, van Engen and Baerveldt, 2007; Harman and Sealy, 2017), even though the empirical evidence has been mixed. The 'opt-out revolution' coined by Belkin (2003) states that professional women leave the workforce for family reasons, which amplifies the view that women inherently have lower ambition towards work than men. Similarly, men have been found to possess stronger ambitions to achieve senior positions than women who refuse to identify their ambition because of its negative association with selfishness, manipulation and egotism, while men assert ambition as being an integral part of their working lives (Fels, 2004).

However, most of the evidence of low ambition towards work has been collected among women in various position levels other than the corporate senior management level and higher. More recent studies at the senior leadership level found females expressing higher career aspirations than their male counterparts (Watts et al., 2015). Furthermore, senior women who leave and opt out are pursuing roles with better work–life balance or flexibility, not leaving work altogether for family reasons (Anderson et al., 2010; Lewis et al., 2015). Thus, the present thesis aims to add knowledge of women's successful careers in the executive roles, which are considered to be achieved with high ambition and achievement orientation towards work, to respond to the need to go beyond the common barriers or bias framing related to women leaders' careers, instead examining remedies for the lack of executive women (Joshi et al., 2015).

The next section continues the discussion of the congruence of women and leadership roles by presenting the social role theory, which attempts to explain the lack of the women in leadership roles.

3.7. Social role theory of women and leadership

To address the research question (SQ2) on how executive women articulate their gender and leader roles as part of their career identities, social role theory is a relevant framework. In the context of executive women leaders' careers, stereotypes continue to portray successful leaders as more similar to men than to women (Koenig et al., 2011), which is assumed to hinder the career progression of women in leadership roles.

One of the most persistent reasons for the deficiency of women executives is claimed to be gender stereotypes (Peus, Braun and Knipfer, 2015), which are embedded in social and historical structures as generalised views prescribing acceptable aspects of performance, behaviour, traits and roles for men and women. In particular, occupational roles are perceived as being more or less consistent with gender roles (Eagly and Sczesny, 2019). Especially in Finland, the workforce is strongly segregated into female and male industries and professions (section 2.2.2). The implicit masculine ideal has long been perceived as affecting the share of women in top management; the manager or leader role privileges masculine traits and behaviours, leading to women being perceived as less fitting for such roles (Due Billing and Alvesson, 2000; Mavin and Grandy, 2016).

Women are seen as lacking the agentic qualities needed to be good leaders, but are also expected to be highly communal and exhibit qualities such as kindness, warmth and helpfulness (Eagly and Karau, 2002). Thus, women are placed in a double bind; for example, women are penalised for seeking power and salary increases or, otherwise, behaving too assertively (Carli and Eagly, 2016). Ronen (2018) concluded that, when the work is considered best suited to women, it is also considered inferior.

If the career progression of women only relied on individual resources, merits, competency and motivation, the gender parity would have been reached with the increase in women's educational level (Lewis, 2021). However, executive women in business-related roles are still in the minority, regardless of the demasculinisation of leadership paradigm and diminishing symbolic connection between men and leadership (Billing, 2011), such as through creativity, emotions, intuition and teamwork being now positive code words (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003; Fletcher, 2004), along with empathy, social intelligence and communication (Fondas, 1997).

The representations of women's executive role intertwine with the societal expectations of gender stereotypes and the inherently masculine executive role in Finland (section 2.7.3). Executive business roles produce exceptional yet powerful subject positions in which women construct their

executive role identities. The lens provided by role congruity theory connects the research participants' subjectivities and their potential contradictions and paradoxes to the external, societal and cultural circumstances shaping the participants' identities. The theory exposes the general role assumption and distinct conditions under which the participants make sense of their career experiences while navigating in and to the position of power in business organisation, in turn constructing and shaping the leader role identities towards a specific leadership role: executive role identity (Eagly, 1987; Eagly and Karau, 2002; Eagly and Wood, 2012).

However, utilising binary stereotypes and the categories of men and women includes the danger of essentialism (Tomlinson, Brockbank and Traves, 1997) by ignoring the individual differences among women and among men and assuming all women (or men) are the same. Gender essentialisation relies on the stereotypes derived from Bakan's (1966) conceptualisation of the 'two fundamental modalities': agency and communion (p. 14) (Eagly, 1987). Ridgeway (2009) argued that stereotypes transfer beliefs that men and women will only excel in jobs that are stereotypically congruent with their assumed gender: men in agentic leader work and women job requiring caring for other people. However, the leadership paradigm change towards more feminine leader role traits (Due Billing and Alvesson, 2000) during the twenty-first century has shaken the foundations of the congruity theory (Eagly and Karau, 2002).

Combining the ideas of sociologists and psychologists, the concept of identity can be classified according to the level of inclusiveness (individual, interpersonal and collective) and by static or dynamic approaches to identity change (Miscenko and Day, 2016). The present research adheres to the notion of career identity as both personal or social, here as perceived through the various meanings attached to an individual by not only the self, but also by others (Gecas, 1982; Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Thus, the concept of career identity encompasses the meanings based on the social role of an executive leader (social identities) and on personal, idiosyncratic characteristics the women executives show and others attribute to them based on behaviour (personal identities).

The present research adheres to the premise that career identity and its elements are rooted in social location and, therefore, always reflect the social and historical roots in which it is formed and has evolved. In the context of women executives' careers, career identity and related meanings develop in personal and work roles. Additionally, career theory's inherent assumption of change and development over time emphasises the importance of career identity construction through the identification or self-categorisation in various work-related roles (Koburtay, Syed and Haloub, 2019). Similarly, the traditional symbolic interactionist perspective claims that identities are self-

meanings that develop in the context of roles and counter roles (Burke and Tully, 1977; Burke, 1980).

Role is a central integrative concept in the social sciences that is critical because of the bridge it provides between the individual and social environment. Social roles, such as gender or leader roles, can be described by descriptive or prescriptive norms (Eagly and Karau, 2002). Role expectations exist in the minds of individuals and are shared with other people, producing the social consensus from which social structure and culture emerge (Eagly and Wood, 2012).

Gender role is the key construct in social role theory. Gender roles influence people's self-concepts, hence becoming gender identities—individuals' sense of themselves as female or male. These identities arise because most people accept or internalise at least some aspects of cultural meanings associated with their sex. Social role theory highlights how the stereotypes of men and women arise largely from the historical distribution of men and women into different social roles (Eagly and Wood, 2012).

Thus, social role theory explains gender inequality and the segregation of work through the historical division of men's and women's different roles and tasks in society, forming the basis of gender stereotypes and norms. A key assumption of gender role stereotypes is that both women and men are typically rewarded by other people for conforming to gender roles and penalised for deviating. Behaviour consistent with gender role beliefs accumulates approval and continued interaction. In contrast, behaviour inconsistent with gender roles is often negatively sanctioned and tends to disrupt social interactions. The sanctions for role-inconsistent behaviour may be explicit (e.g., losing a job) or subtle (e.g., being ignored in the executive recruitment processes) (Eagly and Wood, 2012).

Social role theory aligns with the emergence of the psychological research on cultural stereotypes about women and men, identifying people's consensual beliefs concerning men and women. Most of these beliefs can be summarised in two dimensions, which are often labelled agentic and communal according to Bakan's (1966) conceptualisation. The premise is that men, more than women, are thought to be agentic: masterful, assertive, competitive and dominant. Women, more than men, are thought to be communal: friendly, unselfish, concerned with others and emotionally expressive. As abstract, general beliefs about men and women, these stereotypes constitute gender roles (Eagly and Wood, 2012).

3.7.1. Role congruity of women leaders

Role congruity theory explains the underrepresentation of women at the executive level with the different stereotypes associated with women and leaders. Grounded in social role theory, role incongruity theory considers 'the congruity between gender roles and other roles, especially leadership roles' (Eagly and Karau 2002, p. 575). Role congruity assumes that the social expectations of the perceiver are confirmed and that the gender role stereotype likely becomes consolidated.

Discourses on leadership are understood typically to involve the core elements of masculinity that reinforce male identities and thereby sustain asymmetrical gender relations in organisational life (section 2.7.3 and 3.4). Central to this discourse is the notion that the occupational role of a leader is best understood through a hegemonic masculine interpretation (Collinson and Hearn, 1996; Hearn and Collinson, 2018).

Role congruity theory assumes that women are expected to be submissive and passive, while men are expected to be assertive and decisive (Eagly, 1987). Because men have set masculine norms for leadership, men are favoured because they have historically held the majority of leadership roles and, thus, are perceived 'in-role', whereas women leaders encounter a double bind in which they cannot simultaneously act 'like leaders' and 'like women' without appearing out of the roles' assumptions (Mui, Parker and Titus, 2021) For example, Dezsö and Ross (2012) found evidence of greater female representation in TMTs improving firm performance, but the strategic focus was on innovation, that is, in a situation benefitting from diverse thinking and different leadership styles. Generally, the female gender role has been described with communal traits, which does not overlap with the traditional leadership role: 'Given such inconsistency, women are generally perceived as possessing less leadership ability than equivalent men and their leader behaviour is evaluated less favourably than equivalent behaviour enacted by men' (Eagly and Carli, 2003, p. 856). This results in role incongruity, especially for women executives (Eagly and Karau, 2002).

Role congruity theory postulates that women who adopt a male-stereotypic assertive and directive leadership style are evaluated more negatively than men who adopt the exact same style. However, women and men who adopt more democratic and participative styles are evaluated equally. Similarly, empirical evidence has shown that in small-group interactions, women who behave in a dominant or extremely competent manner tend to lose their likability and influence (Carli, 2001).

Mui, Parker and Titus (2021) concluded that gender bias may be context dependent. Some circumstances have allowed women to lead without being forced to alter their behaviour or leadership style to avoid external gender bias. The contexts in which gender bias is most likely to arise are the masculinised industries (majority male or male-dominated leadership) and when past achievement is dominated by a small group of recognisable figures (most likely men).

Moreover, women leaders have been reprimanded for contradicting these gendered leader expectations (Heilman et al., 2004). Empirical evidence has shown that women in supervisory roles may be penalised for not attending to others' emotions or for expressing angry emotions (Brescoll and Uhlmann, 2008), as well as for performing extremely well in stereotypically masculine roles (Heilman et al., 2004), for seeking power (Okimoto and Brescoll, 2010) and for seeking salary increases (Amanatullah and Tinsley, 2013) or otherwise behaving too assertively (Carli and Eagly, 2016). Consequently, Eagly (2016) suggested that women might prefer transformational leadership because this leadership style entails behaviours that are considered to be more typical of women and, therefore, more congruent with the female gender role.

Although role congruity analysis can seem discouraging for female leaders, it has also helped identify the conditions that foster women's access to leadership. One consideration is that the leader role, although still more masculine than feminine, has slowly incorporated a stronger expectation that leaders will be socially skilled (Koenig et al., 2011). Thus, women working at the top leadership positions improve the congruity of the gender and leadership roles by acting as models for other women, breaking the stereotypes and, thus, working for not only themselves, but change in society (Uusiautti and Määttä, 2015).

3.7.2. Critique to role congruity theory

The critique of role congruity theory can be divided into the two perspectives: gender role and leader role. The discussion of contemporary advancement in both streams is discussed next.

Gender role

Assuming that men and women are either similar or different hardly describes the reality of the twenty-first century. Especially in Finland, equality and meritocratic thinking is widening the stereotypes and norms for both men and women. The concept of doing gender (West and Zimmerman, 1987) explains how individuals do gender by conforming to gender stereotype norms and sometimes undo gender by breaking these norms (Deutsch, 2007). A focus on difference has its own problems; however; there is a danger of essentialism, that is, of assuming that all women

are the same, thus neglecting the differences among women and among men (Tomlinson, Brockbank and Traves, 1997).

Scholars in organisational studies, as well as feminist linguistic research, have tended to move away from expectations that biologically labelled women and men necessarily use linguistic strategies coded as feminine or masculine (Billing, 2011), contesting the view that women and men have differently gendered linguistic styles (Sealy, 2010).

Especially in the Nordic countries, gender neutrality has existed for decades and has even reached the level of language (section 2.7.5). The changes in the languages do not make the gender differences disappear, but the development may be perceived as a sign of the traditional gender role division becoming more obsolete. Social constructionist theory also opposes the mainstream discourses of gender difference circulating in Western culture (Baxter, 2010, 2015) by postulating that the biological category of men or women is subject positioned to speak and behave in ways stereotypically coded as masculine or feminine, even though individuals of different genders can and do resist such stereotypical positioning. Adhering to this alternative perspective, Holmes (2006) showed that effective female leaders can expertly draw on a repertoire of linguistic strategies stereotypically coded as both masculine and feminine but tend to be positioned by whether they work in a masculine or feminine communities of practice. Additionally, empirical research found that, compared with lower-level women leaders, top-level women leaders were rated higher in agency and comparable in communion (Moor, Cohen and Beerli, 2015).

Moreover, people differ in the extent to which they incorporate gender roles into their self-concepts. Agency need not be inherently male and communion not inherently female. Rather, the genderedness of these traits relies on current stereotypes about men and women based on the roles they carry out (Schmader and Block, 2015). Modern forms of gender identity are more multifaceted and varied than they were a couple of decades ago. Many different factors may influence who we are and how and what we can be, along with how much time we can devote to our career; thus, identity at work should not be reduced to gender identity because individuals may belong to different social groups simultaneously. Additionally, identities are created socially in the interactions with others and may change over time; identities are under the constant influence of many different factors, not fixed in an essentialist past (Billing, 2011).

Individuals themselves, especially high-achieving women, are not limited by the barriers posed by gender stereotypes. Even though one feels and acknowledges themselves as a man or woman, it might or might not affect other identities (Billing, 2011). However, the structural position as a

woman (Gunnarsson, 2011) may hinder career progression through social rejection. As in a survey by Catalyst (2006), senior women leaders across Western Europe emphasised that gender stereotyping is still an important career advancement barrier to consider (Maznevski and Jonsen, 2006).

In conclusion, the premises of the role incongruence between women and leader roles are slowly occurring through the increase in the number of women leaders and through the changing expectations of gender-related behaviour. The term 'male' has no simple or absolute content, and neither has 'woman' (Billing, 2011). Modern forms of gender identity are more multifaceted and varied than they were a couple of decades ago. Among the new concepts of the twenty first century, nonbinary genders are now emerging and questioning the binary biological base of sexuality and gendered thinking through contemporary consideration of trans/nonbinary people (Vincent, 2020).

Leader role

Leaders are expected to have agentic traits such as aggressiveness, competitiveness and independence; the more demanding the position and higher up in the organisational hierarchy, the more these qualities are emphasised. However, a broad transformation in leadership has resulted in a more participatory, nonhierarchical, flexible and group-oriented way of leading, which suggests a critical discussion on gender labelling (Due Billing and Alvesson, 2000).

In the literature, leader role identity has been broadly defined as the degree to which an individual views themselves as a leader. Unlike gender identity, which is said to be developed at a very early age, the literature has suggested that leader development occurs over time through the experiences and interactions with others leading to the construction of leader identity. Identifying oneself as a leader is considered critical to an individual's continual development as a leader. (Lord and Hall, 2005)

Moreover, leaders can subjectively determine who they are at work to a certain extent; however, constructing a career identity in a leadership position is a complex process of both claiming identities and being granted and validated on those identities through social interactions (Derue and Ashford, 2010). Thus, leaders contend with the identities attributed to them, for example, based on characteristics, roles and expectations. Consequently, leaders engage in ongoing external and internal identity negotiations (Collinson, 2003).

Additionally, authenticity is the parameter that describes being genuine and true to oneself, knowing one's strengths and limitations and acting on the best information at the time. The need for authenticity is the quest to discover one's true voice, here in the form of being true to oneself at work, being secure in one's knowledge or leadership style (Sullivan and Mainiero, 2007b). Similarly, studies on women's self-efficacy and leadership show that women who have high levels of self-efficacy generally are not affected by traditional female stereotypes; they get better performance from their employees, enough resources, more support for initiatives and kudos from their supervisors (Rigotti, Korek and Otto, 2018).

Creativity, emotions, intuition and teamwork are now positive code words (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Fletcher, 2004), along with empathy, social intelligence and communication, which have been emerging along the transformational leadership (Fletcher, 2004). Social responsibility, ethics and environmental issues are also on the agenda today, reflecting the de-masculinisation of leadership and dissolution of the symbolic cultural connection between men and leadership (Billing, 2011).

Eagly's (2002; 2012; 2016) role congruity theory of prejudice towards female leaders states that getting more women to executive positions may improve the sparse representation of women in these roles. However, studies also show that simply having more women in top executive positions does not automatically result in challenging the gendered status quo (Mavin and Grandy, 2016; Faniko, Ellemers and Derks, 2021). So far, the proportion of women in TMTs has remained marginal, exhibiting the prevailing need for more theoretical knowledge and empirical evidence on executive women's careers.

To summarise, because of these changes and erosion of the automatic link between masculinity and management positions, the door to these positions could be opened for many more women, including those at the top executive level (Billing, 2011). This situation is different from a couple of decades ago, when gender divisions were more rigid.

3.8. Conclusion of Chapter 3

This chapter discussed relevant career and identity theories and the literature by addressing the objective and subjective sides of careers, presenting individual and social perspectives according to the research questions: observable career patterns (SQ1), career identity concepts (SQ2) and career success (SQ4). Barriers women have been shown to encounter during their careers and distinct features of executive careers (SQ4) were presented to position this research in the literature regarding careers of women in leadership. The literature review on career research

revealed that the concept of eudaimonia has not been connected with leadership career theories; thus, the present research contributes to the theories and literature by providing an additional perspective.

The theories, models and conceptualisations of career were presented to grasp the vast existing knowledge base on career theories appropriate for women executive research. In leadership, the theories have been based mainly on empirical evidence of men leaders and have concentrated on explaining the barriers women encounter during their careers. To step out of the masculine traditions of leadership and notion of women's ever-existing challenges in their leadership careers, the present research has adopted an approach of exploring executive women who have reached the top management level successfully, at least with the objective measures of career success (3.4.1).

Agency, self-efficacy and career adaptability (3.3.2-4), as highlighted in contemporary career theories, contain elements similarly important in leader role requirements and constructs of leader identity. Career construction theory (3.3.4), which emphasises adaptability, has received wide acceptance in career counselling. However, most empirical evidence has been based on students and younger workers. Because relatively little research has been conducted among older and more experienced workers (Zacher and Griffin, 2015), further research on executive women is essential in validating the theory further.

In the context of women executives, who are still seen as exceptions in the male-dominant business executive norm, social role theory has become a relevant framework for addressing the potential paradoxes of gender roles and leader roles (3.7). SQ2 (section 1.2) aims to contribute to the lack of evidence on discursive constructs of gender and leadership at executive-level business roles in Finland, which is a comparatively gender-equal country (section 2.1).

The research responds to the need to validate these theories by investigating a theoretically underrepresented group of midcareer, late adulthood executive women by adopting a person-centred perspective. Through such subjective perceptions of career identity (3.3) constructs, the present qualitative research add rich and in-depth empirical data to advance the career theories from the perspective of situated positions of Finnish executive women in business roles in large companies.

The concept of career identity has been applied to add to the theories with an individual meaning-making level to discover the subjective perspective on executive women's career choices, resources and success in Finland, which is one of the most gender-equal countries in the world

(section 2.1). Consequently, career identity forms a holistic conceptual starting point for inductive-deductive qualitative research with social constructivist underpinnings.

The methodological choices of the present research will be discussed next in Chapter 4.

4. Methodology and research design

This chapter discusses the methodological choices and research design of the current thesis. Additionally, Chapter 4 discusses the limitations of the research and researcher's position through reflexivity.

The present research produces more empirical evidence among women working in executive positions in companies. The research aims to explore how executive women navigate their careers and construct their career identities. Capturing the executive women's career experiences and sense-making around their careers in leadership have guided the research design and methodological choices of the present research.

Methodological choices have been aligned to answer the set questions and the researcher's beliefs about the theory of knowledge (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault, 2016). The underpinnings guiding the present research have adhered to the notion of executive leaders' careers being affected both by individuals themselves and society (section 3.1). The research aims to describe, explore and interpret data, which have been collected and derived from the executive women's subjective perspectives. A qualitative research approach was chosen to comprehend complex phenomena with rich in-depth data. Thus, the social constructionist approach has been applied to investigate the subjective perceptions related to careers (Lee, Mitchell and Sablynski, 1999; Patton, 2002).

In this chapter, the underpinnings—ontological, epistemological and axiological (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault, 2016)—guiding the research are discussed: the primary concern of philosophical underpinnings, the ontological beliefs of the social world and what can be known about it and the epistemological nature of knowledge and how it can be acquired (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016).

This chapter first addresses the philosophical underpinnings of the present research (4.1.), which is followed by the presentation of the research design (4.2), data collection methods (4.3) and data analysis (4.4). Then, the limitations of the research approach (4.5) and reflexivity (4.6) are discussed.

4.1. Philosophical underpinnings

Philosophical underpinnings involve various facets of research, including why the research is conducted, what makes the research good and what is considered ethical (Toit, 2014; Grix, 2019).

Career research under the business and management discipline may draw on a mixture of disciplines in the social sciences (e.g., sociology, psychology and economics), natural sciences (e.g., chemistry and biology), applied sciences (e.g., engineering and statistics), humanities (for example literary theory, linguistics, history and philosophy) and the domain of organisational practice (Starbuck, 2003). Thus, research problems addressing careers have been approached using multiple research philosophies, paradigms, approaches and methodologies. Similarly, the multidisciplinary nature of this research (career, leadership, gender) allows for various approaches.

In terms of theory advancement (Lee, Mitchell and Sablynski, 1999), the present qualitative research adopts social constructivism to generate and elaborate on the theories of women leaders' careers. The theory elaboration occurred with an inductive-deductive approach with a research design deriving from conceptual ideas without formal hypotheses included, as opposed to a quantitative research design in which a theory would be tested utilising formal hypotheses from theory (Bluhm et al., 2011).

Ontology and epistemology form the theory of knowledge, the view of reality and guiding theoretical perspective. A central decision and starting point for research were the perceptions of the reality and world we live in and the knowledge that helps us interpret reality or realities (Schwandt, 2000). The ontological and epistemological underpinnings are discussed and justified next.

4.1.1. Ontology: subjectivism

Ontologically, the aim of the present research adheres to subjectivism. The executive women's articulated career identities, subjective perceptions and sense-making of careers were at the core of the current study, forming the data. Although subjectivism asserts that social phenomena are created from the perceptions and consequent actions of social actors, objectivism proposes that social entities exist in reality, external to and independent of social actors (Saunders and Lewis, 2018). Thus, subjectivism and objectivism—the key aspects of ontology—are often referred to as opposite.

Ontology aims to answer the question of what is existence or what kind of things actually exist. Within social research, key ontological questions discuss whether social reality exists independently of human conceptions and interpretations, whether there is a common shared, social reality or if there is just multiple context-specific realities and whether or not social behaviour is governed by laws that can be seen as immutable or generalisable (Snape and Spencer, 2003). The present research believes that common shared social reality, for example, culture shapes the

reality of individuals while the individuals shape the social reality, acknowledging both individual and societal enablers and restrictions related to the careers of executive women (section 3.1).

Objectivism incorporates the underpinnings of the natural sciences, arguing that social reality is external to social actors. Because the interpretations and experiences of social actors do not influence the existence of the social world, an extreme objectivist believes that all social actors experience only one true, unchanging social reality, including the major social structures into which individuals are born (Burrell and Morgan, 2016). From an extreme objectivist viewpoint, this could be translated into the present research's focus into one stable leader identity for all leaders, omitting gender differences, environmental or contextual requirements and their change over time as affecting leadership development.

Because career research originates from the psychological research tradition, it often employs an objectivist perspective with quantified meta-analysis through large samples and quantitative research. Thus, objectivist quantitative research is often employed for studying women leaders' careers (Bluhm et al., 2011) and would be applicable to the present research. However, subjectivism corresponds better with research filling in a research gap by exploring career identities with rich, in-depth data in a small sample, and when addressing prevalence, generalisability or calibration would be out of the scope of the research (Spurk, Hirschi and Dries, 2019).

4.1.2. Epistemology: interpretivism

From the two main epistemological positions of positivism and interpretivism, this present research follows the interpretivist strain, which corresponds with qualitative research (Burrell and Morgan, 2016). Different methodological approaches are often underpinned by particular philosophical assumptions to maintain consistency between the philosophical starting point and methods they adopt (Morse, Swanson and Kuzel, 2000). Maintaining this consistency is one way of producing good-quality research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and a prerequisite for rigorous qualitative research.

Epistemology focuses on questions such as the following: How can we know about reality, and what is the basis of our knowledge? The main questions around epistemology are the theories around the 'truth' and the way in which knowledge is acquired (Snape and Spencer, 2003).

In the social sciences, the four major philosophies are functionalist, interpretive, radical humanist and radical structuralist. Interpretivism operates as an umbrella term that covers multiple

variations. According to Collins (2010), interpretivism is associated with the philosophical position of idealism and is used to group together diverse approaches, including social constructionism, phenomenology and hermeneutics, which reject the objectivist view that meaning resides within the world independently of consciousness.

Interpretivism seeks to understand social phenomena from the actor's—executive women's—own perspective. Interpretation is considered a basic structure of intentional life and, thus, unavoidable (Smith, Larkin and Flowers, 2009) because human beings are always engaged in interpretative meaning-making activities. Thus, following the interpretivist underpinnings, the present research investigates how the world is experienced by executive women, viewing careers through social constructions such as language, consciousness and shared meanings (Myers, 2013).

Opposing the interpretivist philosophy, positivist epistemology perceives meaning residing within the world independently of consciousness (Guba and Lincoln, 2005). Epistemologically, positivism seeks to discover the truth about the social world through the medium of observable, measurable facts, from which law-like generalisations can be drawn about the universal social reality. Thus, positivism seeks the facts or causes of the social phenomena apart from the subjective states of individuals (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault, 2016). In the present research, the career patterns of executive women (SQ1) functioned as measurable facts, observable and evaluated with external norms, for example, as successful based on the status set by the hierarchical level. Yet an executive woman may evaluate her career success using other subjective measures (section 3.4).

The multidisciplinary nature of the present research allowed for various epistemologies. While researching women, notions of phenomenology are often employed within postmodern/feminist research. However, the present research intended not to investigate the actual lived experiences, which is central to phenomenology (Smith, Larkin and Flowers, 2009); rather, the aim to explore executive careers resided in the interpretation of career experiences in constructing career identities. However, any method that seeks to elicit meaning by interpreting spoken words or written texts and applying to them forms of textual analysis is based on the hermeneutic conceptualisation of speech, act and meaning (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2015), which is coined a perspective called hermeneutical inquiry under the constructivist paradigm (Young and Collin, 2004).

Even though the focus of the present research was on the minority gender among executive leaders and the implicit motivation of the research was to open avenues for more women in top management by displaying positive examples of women reaching important roles in the corporate

world, the feminist epistemology, one of the most prominent epistemologies for researching executive women, was abandoned after analysing the pilot study data (section 2.9). The paradoxical stance towards gender in the pilot study—not wanting to participate in a campaign that gave a gendered label to leaders and giving encouraging advice to other women by making the leadership careers easy ‘just do it’ while acknowledging oneself being divergent among leaders in Finland—raised uncertainties about getting participants for the research interviews, even with anonymity and confidentiality guaranteed. Moreover, the present research did not give voice to suppressed participants as assumed in (post)feminism (Lewis, 2014) because the executive women hold a position of power, even though being in a minority position among their male peers (section 2.6). The gender perspective was from only one part of the multidisciplinary research framework (section 1.2).

Thus, a more gender neutral philosophy—social constructivism—was selected, with an awareness of the underlying feminist notions. The current research acknowledges postfeminist assumptions of not defining women with universal and stable labels with an understanding of femininity as multiple femininities (Lewis, 2014). Moreover, feminist epistemology was employed in investigating social norms and conceptions of gender affecting the careers of the participants.

The decision to follow an interpretive social constructivist philosophy, one aligned with the aim to study representations of career identities and sense-making around the career of women working in executive roles, was perceived as relevant in exploring career identities and career navigation in a changing social and cultural context.

4.1.3. Justification of social constructivist interpretive framework

The current research assumed social reality as constructed and accepted the situated nature of knowledge (Alvesson, Lee Ashcraft and Thomas, 2008). Social constructivism as a broad and multifaceted perspective (Alvesson and Sköldböck, 2018) provides a suitable framework for career and leadership research; specifically, when studying women or minorities, the interplay between individual and society with its opportunities and constraints becomes central.

The justification for social constructivism as the framework was in the existing social constructivist perspective in all the disciplines in the present research: identity construction (Stets and Burke, 2000; Praskova, Creed and Hood, 2015; Schmader and Block, 2015; Bimrose et al., 2019), career construction (Savickas, 2005, 2013) and leader role construction (Eagly and Karau, 2002; Powell and Butterfield, 2012; Karelaia and Guillén, 2014; Leicht et al., 2017).

Positioned under the umbrella of constructivist philosophy, social constructionism differs from constructivism, as the name suggests, in having a social rather than individual focus. Moreover, social constructivism responds to the shortcoming of highly individualistic constructivism, which is perceived to ignore social interactions, contexts or discourses that enable self-reflection, meaning-making and careers (Young and Collin, 2004). In social constructionist theory (Burr, 2015), the focus is on identifying patterns of relationships within responses from which to draw conclusions.

The constructionist ontological approach aims to explain how individuals make sense of their world. The current research adopted the view that construction of career identities occurs in social work settings (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010) that enable or prohibit the career development of women leaders, shaping the sense-making of their role identities. Even in a highly individualised society, identity remains socially constructed and people are not free to simply declare the meanings of their identity and have these accepted by others (Josselson and Harway, 2012).

According to social constructivism, individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work, whereas constructivism understands that words; for example, the names given to categories, the labels used or whole vocabularies, construct reality in addition to describing or reflecting it (Tervonen-Gonçalves and Oinonen, 2021). Social constructivism assumes that all knowledge is constructed in an interaction between human beings and their world, as developed and communicated within a social context (Crotty, 1998), emphasising the importance of culture and context in understanding what occurs in society and constructing knowledge based on this understanding (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2018).

Social constructionists perceive reality as accessible through categories. Thus, the knowledge and representations of the world are not reflections of reality, but are merely products of discourse (Burr, 2015). Burr (2015) emphasised the importance of language and culture, following Wittgenstein's ideas of the meaning of words as intimately bound up with situational social practice and Gergen's view of people as fundamentally historical and cultural beings in a world that is a product of historically situated interchanges among people (Burr, 2015; Gergen, 1985). Moreover, specific situations may restrict the identities that an individual can assume and the statements that can be accepted as meaningful (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). Thus, the context, presented in Chapter 2 becomes important in the construction and sense-making of executive career identities, so the data analysis has employed discursive practices.

Similarly, the feminist research premise holds the idea that knowledge always exists from and within a particular perspective or standpoint. Because standpoint epistemology is rooted in feminist

theory, the most common standpoint for knowledge is gender (Sullivan, 2009), which is a core element in the present research, specifically exploring women executive’s careers. The notions of standpoint epistemology have been addressed through discourse analysis exploring the subject positions of women executives in the social and cultural context of Finland.

Researching the career identities of executive women addresses the dimensions of gender categorised by Harding (1987). The construction of gender and its effects in social and political life can be researched from three dimensions: individual gender (the social construction of masculine and feminine gender identities), gender symbolism (the process of assigning dualistic metaphors to various perceived dichotomies) and gender structures (the use of gender identities and symbols to organise our collective institutions, such as the family and public sphere). Executive identity can be seen as a combination of both masculine and feminine elements (section 3.3.2), with the woman executive as a symbol of minority members in a position of power and executive positions (section 3.4) as one of the last fortresses of male dominance and gender inequality in Finland (section 2.6). By working in an executive role, women exert power, which will shape society (section 2.7.5).

Table 4.1 summarises the premises of the thesis following the social constructivist framework.

Table 4.1: The underpinnings of this thesis following social constructivist framework

| Interpretive framework | Ontological beliefs | Epistemological beliefs | Axiological beliefs | Methodological beliefs |
|---|---|--|--|--|
| Social constructivism (Alvesson and Billing, 1997; Young and Collin, 2004; Ellemers et al., 2012; Creswell, 2013; Savickas, 2013) | Multiple realities are constructed through lived experiences and interactions with others. Knowledge is sustained by social processes, and knowledge and social action go together. | Social constructivism asserts that knowledge is historically and culturally specific. Language constitutes, rather than reflects, reality and points to the historical and cultural location of that construction. | Individual values are integral part of social construction of knowledge different values are respected and negotiated among individuals. The researcher brings their own subjective experience to the research while aiming to develop understanding of the phenomena. | Use of inductive method. Interviewing, observing and analysis of texts. Small samples, in-depth investigations, qualitative methods of analysis. |
| Social constructivism applied in the research | Executive women’s careers are constructed through individual experiences and interactions with others in organisations, and articulated subjectively from | Career experiences are shaped by the societal and cultural context and articulated in discourse between the researcher and participants. | Values are considered as guiding career choices and, thus, an integral content of the research. The researcher’s own values are reflected in the reflexivity section. | Semistructured, in-depth, interviews with narrative career stories produce rich data and invite authentic voices leaving room for unexpected outcomes. The |

| | | | | |
|--|------------------------------------|--|---|---|
| | the perspective of the individual. | | Transparency and rich data are tools to expose underlying values. | pilot study analysed literary material. Discourse analysis was conducted to capture the social nature of careers. |
|--|------------------------------------|--|---|---|

In conclusion, career research operates in between an interaction of self and social experience and is discursively studied from the perspective of the individual. Social constructivist framework allows the freedom to capture individual constructs self over time and in a social context. (Young and Collin, 2004). Particular forms of subjective career constructions in the present research, in-depth interviews with career stories, will be discussed in the next section.

4.2. Research design

The research design refers to the plan for an entire research project to maximise the validity of the research findings (Myers, 2013). The purpose and goals of the present research (section 1.2), the characteristics of the research participants (4.3.1-2), the audience for the research, the funders of the research, the position of the researcher (4.6) and the environment (Chapter 2) all affected the research design, determining a particular way of capturing empirical reality that will allow the answering of a research question as unambiguously as possible (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). The current research adhered to an interpretive philosophy (section 4.1.2) that is often associated with qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018), which is employed to respond to the research purpose: to explore and define career identities and success. Hence, the present research has followed an interpretative, social constructivist, descriptive-explorative-explanative approach.

The aim of the present qualitative research was to develop concepts, insights and understandings of executive women’s careers from patterns in the data rather than collecting data to assess preconceived models, hypotheses or theories. This research followed a flexible research design, which is typical of qualitative studies (Marshall and Rossman, 2016).

Qualitative research emphasises the process of discovering how the social meaning of, for example, careers is constructed, while quantitative research focuses on the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables (Schwandt, 2000). Qualitative methods are used to address research questions that require explanation or understanding of social phenomena and their contexts. This is the approach that provides a deeper understanding of the social world; it is based on a small-scale sample; it uses interactive data collection methods, that is, interviews; and it allows new issues and concepts to be explored (Snape and Spencer, 2003).

The current research has adopted an inductive-deductive, that is, abductive, approach, which combines inductive approaches (building theory from the data) and deductive approaches (using data to elaborate on existing theory) by examining data and identifying the aspects that contradict or do not fit with existing theory (Saunders and Lewis, 2018). The need for an inductive approach arises from the contextual concern and social constructivist approach towards executive women's careers, which were assumed to follow individual paths with subjective experiences. Therefore, the study of a small sample of subjects was more appropriate than a large number aiming at generalisation (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). Thus, the present research employed both deductive and inductive reasoning to elicit the interplay between empirical ideas and research process (Grix, 2019).

4.3. Qualitative data collection

The data collection procedure of the research is presented in this section; the collection of the data by semi-structured interviews, the sampling of the research and the data collection ethics are addressed. The research data collection included a pilot study, which was utilised to inform the research focus and is considered to represent the Finnish context of this research (section 2.8).

4.3.1. Pilot study: Enhancing the research's focus

The pilot study has been presented in section 2.9 to provide empirical evidence of the current discourse on women leadership in Finland in 2017 to enhance the research design and conceptualisation (Kezar, 2000). The campaign data consisted of 368 selected women's interviews (section 2.9.2), of which 83 were working in large companies. Further, only 22 of the 83 (26.5% of the campaign participants) working in private sector large companies were at the top executive level and working in other areas other than the female-dominated HR or communications positions, that is, compatible with the present research's target group. All of them were included in the long list of potential participants because the campaign operated as a channel to reach interviewees.

The essential purpose of the pilot study was to investigate emerging themes through a qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2000) to adjust the research questions and subsequent in-depth interviews (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). The data analysis process has been described in section 2.9.4.

Agency, action and self-efficacy were among the key themes emerging from the pilot study data. The women emphasised work experiences that fulfilled their desire for challenge, work-life balance

and being authentic to their self-concept (section 2.9.5). All these career constructs identified in the pilot study were explored in the semistructured in-depth interviews.

4.3.2. Sampling criteria

The selection of the research participants from the small population of women executives in business-related roles in large companies included some challenges; the number of women in stock-listed companies' business functions in Finland (section 2.3.1) reflects the small number of women executives in business roles in large companies. Because of the small population, addressing women only in stock-listed larger companies poses a high risk of confidentiality. Exposing enough information for presenting the findings of the research, for example, the industry, current work role and career path of the executive women, may lead to the identification of the person in question, which lessens anonymity and confidentiality. Moreover, the likelihood of getting consent to an interview from a sufficient number of executive women in stock-listed companies in Finland involves a high accessibility risk because of the very limited population and the aforementioned confidentiality reasons.

Similarly, focusing on only one business field was impossible for a small population of executive women. More importantly, limiting the selection of the participants to a specific industry was redundant because of the kaleidoscope (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005) or boundaryless (Arthur, Michael B. et al., 2005) nature of the executives' careers extending from one industry to another, making the field of industry/business irrelevant. Evidence has shown that senior leaders with cross-industrial careers have been highly successful, which has increased companies' interest in hiring from outside the industry to improve innovation, processes or technological capabilities (Pearl, 2007).

To guarantee confidentiality and, thus, the in-depth quality of the research, the sample was designed to reflect any large company operating in Finland. The executive roles related to business were CEO, CFO, COO, country director, business director and sales director roles. Moreover, marketing roles were included if the executive role included a wide responsibility consisting of multiple areas, for example, corporate branding, sustainability, responsibility and business development, in addition to the main marketing role.

Human resources and PR and corporate communication executives were excluded because of the female dominance in these roles (section 2.6). Executives in these roles do not present a gender minority position, thus representing horizontal gender segregation (section 2.5) more than a minority in male-dominant positions.

The selection of participants was guided by the research question to fulfil the below criteria, as summarised in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Selection criteria of the research participants

| Selection criterium | Description |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Gender | Woman. |
| Position level | Executive (top management team member), has reached the top executive level in a large company in current or earlier career position. |
| Role or function in the company | All roles except human resources and corporate communications, which are female-dominated roles in Finland. Corporate communications and marketing were accepted only when the role included a wide range of other business areas. |
| Company size | + 250 employees, a large company according to the OECD categorisation of company sizes by the number of employees. |
| Country | Company and the person working in Finland. |

4.3.3. Participant selection and sample

The current research focused on the executive women in business-related roles in large companies in Finland, which informed the identification of the selection of the participants. In a nonprobability sample, units are deliberately selected to reflect particular features of or groups (section 4.2.2) within the sampled population (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003), and purposive selection (Patton, 2002) was used to find the suitable participants in a relatively small homogeneous group.

The sample was not intended to be statistically representative because of the qualitative nature of the research. Instead, carefully defined characteristics of the population were used as the basis of selection because the interpretive research employed a theoretical sampling strategy, in which the respondents were selected based on theoretical considerations to ensure the participants fit the phenomenon defined in the research (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Thus, the participants were chosen because they demonstrated particular features and characteristics and because they typified a certain position in society (executive in a business-related role in a large organisation) and held a characteristic (gender) known to have salience to the subject matter addressed by the research aim.

The sampling strategy followed a combination of two sampling techniques: the purposive sampling approach and convenience technique. A purposive sampling approach was used to find the

participants defined by the research question and framework of the research. In the small population, a convenience technique was chosen to access participants who would be potentially difficult to reach. The snowballing technique was considered a backup mode should many of interviewees have declined the interview request (Marshall and Rossman, 2016). The referral process, upon which the snowball technique is based, is particularly useful for studying rare or elite populations (Emory and Cooper, 1991) and has been used previously to study high-achieving women (Davies-Netzley, 1998).

However, the snowball technique was not employed because of the successful recruitment of the participants; 17 interviews were agreed within a week in October 2019. Thus, the second round of random selection from the list of 46 potential participants became redundant (Appendix 5).

4.3.4. Sampling process steps and sample size

After designing the selection criteria, an iterative approach of sampling and resampling was prepared to ensure an appropriately large sample; thus, the sampling process was conducted in two groups.

The first group sample group was formed from the pilot study (section 2.8.). A small number of executives (21/368) in the pilot study met the selection criteria, which resulted in a second sampling technique to be employed: convenience sampling (Patton, 2002). Moreover, a potential bias was considered: participating in a public campaign may attract only a certain group of people who want to be recognised publicly as women leaders (section 2.8.2), thus resulting in a distortion of the sample. The anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, also in the first group, was perceived to be better enhanced with another source of participants (Marshall and Rossman, 2016). Thus, the second group outside the pilot study was included for the following reasons: to increase the number of potential participants, to mitigate the potential bias of the pilot research, which was not initiated for research purposes (section 2.8.6), and to ensure research ethics related to anonymity and confidentiality.

The second group of potential participants—a convenience sample—consisted of the researcher's network of companies operating in various fields in Finland. A long list of potential participants was compiled, and random selection was used to pick the ones to be contacted after the pilot study participants (Appendix 5).

Sampling of the research participants was conducted according to the below steps, as summarised in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: The sampling steps

| | |
|--------|--|
| Step 1 | The pilot study provided access to the first group of potential participants. |
| Step 2 | The pilot study participants were categorised by their position level, work roles and employment sector. |
| Step 3 | Private sector companies were divided according to the official categorisation of the companies by size, including micro, SMEs and large companies (OECD, 2022). |
| Step 4 | The sampling criteria were met by 21 women who were selected as the first priority participants. |
| Step 5 | Invitation to the research was sent to 12 women, out of whom 9 agreed to the interview. |
| Step 6 | Invitations were sent with random selection to 9 women in the convenience sample, out of whom 1 declined. |

Sample size

In qualitative interviewing, fewer but more thoroughly analysed interviews are generally preferable to many interviews that are only superficially explored. As a rule of thumb, interview studies usually have around 15 participants, which makes possible a practical handling of the data (Brinkmann, 2013). Saunders (2018) summarised the limited guidance available for a homogenous group between 4 and 12 participants and for a heterogeneous group between 12 and 30.

However, although some consider saturation to be crucial (Guest, Bunce and Johnson, 2006) to establishing how many interviews or observations are required, according to O'Reilly and Parker (2013,) the findings are still valid without reaching saturation because it means the phenomenon has to be explored more. Qualitative research does not aim at statistical representativeness; instead, it provides detailed data on how selected people experience the world (Brinkmann, 2013).

When selecting the sample for the current study, it was critical to represent the population in a meaningful way and enable answering the research question and meeting the objectives. Although, in quantitative studies, sample size (N) is determined by calculations that demonstrate effects of a certain magnitude from an intervention, similar standards for the assessment of sample size have not been defined for qualitative interview studies (Saunders, 2019). The prevailing concept for sample size in qualitative studies is saturation (Morse et al., 2002) or information power (Malterud, Siersma and Guassora, 2016), which both guide an adequate sample size for qualitative studies.

Malterud, Siersma and Guassora (2016) identified five items that have an impact on the information power of the sample: study aim, sample specificity, use of established theory, quality of dialogue and analysis strategy. The items correspond to the present research as follows: the aim of this research was to explore career identities, which are individually constructed and need in-depth analysis (study aim); sample was rather specific because of the scarce number of women at the TMTs in business roles (sample specificity); multidisciplinary theory served to synthesise the small and exceptional sample to existing knowledge, as well as to extend the sources of knowledge beyond the empirical interview data (use of established career theory); the quality of dialogue was excellent, resulting in rich data; and, finally, within an exploratory analysis, the purpose is not to cover the whole range of phenomena but to present selected patterns relevant for an in-depth analysis of career stories and discourse details from a few, selected participants (quality of dialogue and analysis strategy). Thus, the research design fulfilled the five criteria of information power (Malterud et al., 2016), which is directed at a relatively small number of participants.

The research sample consisted of 17 participants. Only three of the approached women declined the interview invitation, one agreed, but an interview time was never set because of her maternity leave. All interviews were agreed upon within a week (Appendix 5), and no additional invitations were sent after the initial round of interviews had been conducted. The 17 participants' interviews with rich, in-depth data were sufficient to contribute the intended knowledge (Brinkmann, 2013; Saunders and Lewis, 2018). Moreover, theoretical data saturation (Marshall and Rossman, 2016) was reached at 15 participants when no new themes emerged from the data (discussed in data analysis, section 4.4). However, all the agreed interviews were conducted and included in the data; the sample size remained the initial number of the first-round participants (17). Thus, no new recruitment rounds of the participants with random selection from the list or through snowball sampling were employed.

4.3.5. Interview guide and process

Semistructured interviews have a number of questions prepared in advance in an interview guide by the interviewer. However, the questions of the present research were designed to be sufficiently open to leave room for the interviewee to decide what to include in the answers (Wengraf, 2001). The selected interview strategy for the present research was a combination of a semistructured interview and a narrative career story. The narrative career stories were employed as a method to produce authentic data, freed for the interviewer's prompted content (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000; Wellin, 2007).

The interview guide method provided a framework for the questions. The guide lists the questions or issues to be explored during the interview. The guide also provides topics within which the interviewer is free to explore, probe and ask questions (Patton, Michael Quinn, 2002). The guide ensures that interviewing several people is more systematic and comprehensive by delimiting the issues to be explored.

The interview structure was designed to adhere to Jovchelovitch's and Bauer's (2000) narrative interview technique to stimulate participants to express their experiences and views of their careers. The interview structure divided the interview into five phases: preparation, initiation, main narration, questioning phase and concluding talk. Table 4.4 compares the interview guide of the present research to the narration phases according to Jovchelovitch's and Bauer's (2000) template.

After the narration, the interview continued with a semistructured part, in which the research themes by the research questions were covered in more detail. Moreover, a straightforward question asking how the participant defined success was asked (Interview guide, Appendix 6).

Table 4.4: Narrative interview structure

| Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) | This research's interview design |
|--|---|
| Preparation | |
| Exploring the field Formulating extrinsic questions | The research literature review provides a frame of reference. The research aim and questions determine the areas to be covered in the interview: career story, gender influence, definition of success, career resources of an executive, leader role and future career plans. |
| Initiation | |
| Formulating initial topic for narration Using visual aids | Referring to the interview invitation, the aim of the research is briefly introduced. The participants were asked to tell their career story, beginning at any relevant time in their lives. |
| Main narration | |
| No interruptions Only nonverbal encouragement to continue storytelling Wait for the coda | No interruptions by the researcher as a rule during the career story unless asked by the participant. In addition to nonverbal encouragement, a solution-focused coaching technique (the researcher is a certified solution-focused coach) is applied in case |

| | |
|--|--|
| | <p>the participant needs encouragement to continue her story. (Utilising solution-focused questions What else? Tell me more about that...). (de Jong and Cronkright, 2011; O'Connell, 2012)</p> <p>No content-related questions or probes are allowed from the researcher during the career story, only encouragement to continue with the story.</p> <p>If the storytelling flow is interrupted or the participant gets lost with the story and seems unable to continue, the researcher helps the participant further with a suitable question.</p> <p>Once the career story has come to an end, verify it verbally.</p> |
| Questioning phase | |
| <p>Only 'What happened then?'</p> <p>No opinion or attitude questions</p> <p>No argument on contradictions</p> <p>No 'why' questions</p> | <p>After the story, unclear points may be clarified or more details asked with questions.</p> |
| <i>Semistructured interview: Before concluding talk semistructured interview following the interview guide (Appendix 6).</i> | |
| Concluding talk | |
| <p>Stop recording</p> <p>Why questions allowed</p> <p>Memory protocol</p> | <p>Possibility to stop recording at this point. If the recording is stopped, the researcher will make notes for data analysis purposes.</p> |

4.3.6. Justification for semistructured interviews with career stories

Adhering to the ontological and epistemological beliefs of interpretivist research, the data collection method employed was qualitative in-depth semistructured interviews to acquire rich data for the exploration and explanation of the executive women's career navigation. Moreover, the small number of potential research participants (sections 2.6 and 2.8.2) was directed at a smaller sample with more in-depth interview data for practical reasons.

In an interpretive framework of the social constructivism, oral histories and in-depth interviews are considered optimal for collecting data on individuals' personal histories, perspectives and experiences (Yow, 2015). Moreover, in-depth interviews and life-story interviews are commonly used in gender research to give a voice to people in minority positions (Jarviluoma, Moisala and

Vilkko, 2003): a loosely prompted career story and asking research participants open-ended questions allowed the research participants to fully and freely describe their own perceptions and experiences.

Holstein and Gubrium (2009) perceived career stories as tools for avoiding the mission of extracting the interviewer's presumptions. Thus, the career stories conveyed understanding of an executive woman's biography and career trajectory—her career progression revealing opportunities, choices and individual strategies.

Career Cohen and Mallon (2001) have identified four benefits in using stories, especially in career research. Story-based career research allows for a rounded, deep and multifaceted exploration of career that recognises its dynamic, evolving and often ambiguous, even contradictory, character. In their narratives, the participants revealed the inconsistencies and contradictions of their career experiences, and aspects with more scientific propositional perspectives can be elicited. The stories focused on the process of retrospective sense-making, whereby individuals gaze backwards and invest past events with meaning that resonates with the present. Consequently, career stories can enable insights into how individuals view their relationship to the salient features of the social structure they work within.

Moreover, the idea of partly narrative interviewing was motivated by a critique of the question–response schema of most interviews. In the question–response mode, the interviewer imposes structures in a threefold sense: (a) by selecting the theme and the topics, (b) by ordering the questions and (c) by wording the questions in their language (Riessman, 2008). In-depth interviews in the form of narratives give the interviewee a possibility to answer as they choose to attribute meanings to the experiences under discussion and interject topics, thus creating new knowledge and definitions (Yow, 2015). Similarly, Savickas (2001) suggested that narratives provide a means for articulating needs and goals, purposes and actions and for discovering life patterns. To summarise, career stories offer a way to study career success as deeply embedded in social and cultural contexts, while also recognising the agency and intentions of the individual (Cohen and Mallon, 2001).

4.3.7. The interview protocol

The potential participants were contacted by email in October 2019, and consent and participant information sheets (Appendix 7 and 8) were sent prior to the interview or were signed at the beginning of the interview. The researcher conducted individual, confidential and face-to-face interviews. However, two participants living outside the capital area were interviewed by phone.

Most interviews took place at the participant’s workplace, two at the Haaga-Helia campus and one at the researcher’s home.

The recorded interview duration varied from 53 minutes to 177 minutes, excluding the small talk and setting up the scene at the beginning of the interview and informal chat after the recording had stopped. Table 4.5 shows the duration of the interviews and the transcriptions by word and page.

Table 4.5: Interview duration, interview transcriptions by words and pages

| Participant | Duration | Words | Pages |
|-------------|----------|--------|-------|
| P1 | 1:12 | 6434 | 10 |
| P2 | 1:01 | 5694 | 11 |
| P3 | 1:14 | 7313 | 11 |
| P4 | 1:07 | 7553 | 11 |
| P5 | 1:03 | 6482 | 10 |
| P6 | 0:53 | 4660 | 8 |
| P7 | 0:53 | 4185 | 9 |
| P8 | 1:17 | 7302 | 13 |
| P9 | 1:15 | 6798 | 10 |
| P10 | 1:07 | 6478 | 11 |
| P11 | 1:44 | 9730 | 16 |
| P12 | 1:57 | 15282 | 23 |
| P13 | 1:09 | 6401 | 11 |
| P14 | 0:57 | 4819 | 8 |
| P15 | 1:03 | 4527 | 8 |
| P16 | 1:23 | 7128 | 11 |
| P17 | 1:43 | 9670 | 16 |
| sum | 20:58 | 120456 | 197 |
| average | 1:14 | 7086 | 21,9 |

The inductive and iterative nature of the research already became useful in the pilot interview. In the first interview (P1), the participant’s career story remained at a surface level; thus, the participant was asked to illustrate her career trajectory and transitions from one position and employer to another to clarify her career steps. However, the picture failed to provide more detailed or clearer information in addition to the career story. Moreover, it prolonged the interview and made the transcript difficult to understand. The idea of a visual career trajectory was considered an aid in case the participant was not willing or able to tell a story but was never used in the interviews.

Additionally, a distinct question about gender influence on career was added after the first pilot interview. Two themes—the networks and different roles of an executive—were also included after the first three interviews because the themes were repeated in the interviews (Wolff and Moser, 2009; Gjerde and Ladegård, 2019).

4.3.8. Native language and translation

The current research, adhering to the social constructivist philosophy, emphasised the notion of language as an important tool in expressing meaning and simultaneously affecting how meaning is constructed (Cohen, Duberley and Mallon, 2004). To provide the participants with the opportunity to express themselves in their native language, thus ensuring more authentic and nuanced answers (Welch and Piekkari, 2006), the interviewing language was Finnish, a common and native language of both the researcher and participants. Supporting the aim of the interview and the purpose of the narrative interview techniques being to capture the career stories in the participants' own words, the native language was chosen. The trend among researchers to use English as the interview language wherever possible has practical concerns. Interviewing in English avoids the problems of translation, reduces noise and provides greater convenience in the analysis (Welch and Piekkari, 2006).

English was considered as the interviewing language because all of participants work in a role that requires at least conversational English language skills. However, telling a personal story and explaining in-depth definitions of personal subject matters with a foreign language delimits the expression power and might result in shorter versions, more superficial talk and even misunderstandings because of the more limited vocabulary (Nes et al., 2010). The participants were given the interview participant information and consent forms in English, which opened up the possibility to conduct the interview in English, yet all the participants use Finnish in the interview.

All interviews were transcribed into NVivo in Finnish. To avoid distortion of the results (Harzing, 2005), the translation process was treated with sufficient care. Participant validation, that is, data and results, was checked for accuracy from the research participants if questions about the word choices in the translation or interpretation occurred (Birt et al., 2016). Because all the participants were capable of speaking English, they were expected to be able to discuss and verify the translations, if needed. However, the need never emerged because of clear articulation of the participants, voice recordings and thoroughly handwritten notes in the interviews.

4.4. Data analysis

Analysis of qualitative data aims to explore common patterns and themes from across the sample of multiple similar cases corresponding to the research topic and questions (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). The research findings generated insights that have informed career theory and the practice of executive women's careers. A systematic step-by-step approach was utilised to analyse the data to identify patterns and themes (Patton, 2002).

The data consisted of two parts: a narrative career story and answers to the semistructured questions (section 4.1.1 and Appendix 6) organised by the themes identified in the research questions (section 1.2). Because the research participants represented exceptionality among women who rarely reach the top management business-related roles and a minority group among executives based on their gender, the data analysis aimed to find novel avenues and explanations for executive women's careers by looking for deviations in the empirical data from career theories and leadership and gender expectations (Chapter 3). An interpretive approach, supported by discourse analysis, was employed to find emerging themes of career identities by what was said and maybe left unsaid (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2004).

The data analysis followed three sequences guided by the research aim:

1. Qualitative thematic analysis: to identify emerging themes from the whole corpus;
2. Narrative analysis: to analyse career progression and discover career paths from the career stories; and
3. Discourse analysis: emerging themes forming identities (career, gender, leader) were further explored to connect the career identity constructs with the Finnish environment and literature.

First, a qualitative thematic analysis was performed: coding to identify concepts and find relations between them. To extend the thematic analysis, discourse analysis was employed to analyse the executive identities as social constructions from the subject positions by making sense of who they were and how they were locating themselves within culturally circulating discourses in the narrative career stories and the answers to the follow-up questions.

The next sections present and justify the data analysis according to these phases.

4.4.1. Data analysis phase 1: Qualitative thematic analysis

All transcripts were read and coded by the researcher. Coding was guided by constructivist assumptions on language, society, the theoretical underpinnings and the research question (Holstein and Gubrium, 2008). Structural coding was utilized for its ability to collect topics lists or indexes of major categories or themes in research with multiple participants and semi-structured data collection protocol (Saldaña, 2021). Hence, the first step employed inductive coding according to the research question topics: career paths, leader and gender identity, concept of success and career resources.

After transcribing the interviews, the researcher read the transcripts twice and listened to the audiotapes multiple times prior to starting the analysis. After the interviews had been transcribed, they were transferred to NVivo. Additionally, during the data collection and analysis process, memos were created to capture insights for reflection on the quality of the data analysis process (Patton, 2002; Ravitch and Carl, 2015). In the first phases, the researcher employed in vivo coding method capturing the participants' words (Saldaña, 2021) and conducted a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013), which is commonly used as a starting point prior to discourse analysis.

The thematic analysis was not a linear process of moving from one phase to the next. Multiple rounds of listening to the recordings and reading through the transcripts were required for the recursive process, which consisted of a back and forth in identifying and extracting text as codes relevant to the research question throughout the research phase (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Instead of using predetermined categories, the themes that emerged from the participants' career stories and answers to the questions were recorded. The coding process was inductive; however, it was guided by the predetermined themes defined in the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The present research utilised a content analysis approach by investigating the data in each interview for key words, ideas and phrases, which were further grouped together into logical categories. The interview data were supported by the notes made during the interviews and the researcher's interview diary. As new themes emerged, previous transcripts were reviewed to ensure that all relevant themes had been captured in all of the interviews (Dyke and Murphy, 2006). This was an iterative process of adding and refining these categories and looking for themes and patterns that emerged across categories within each research question and, in some cases, more than one research question (Maxwell, 2013).

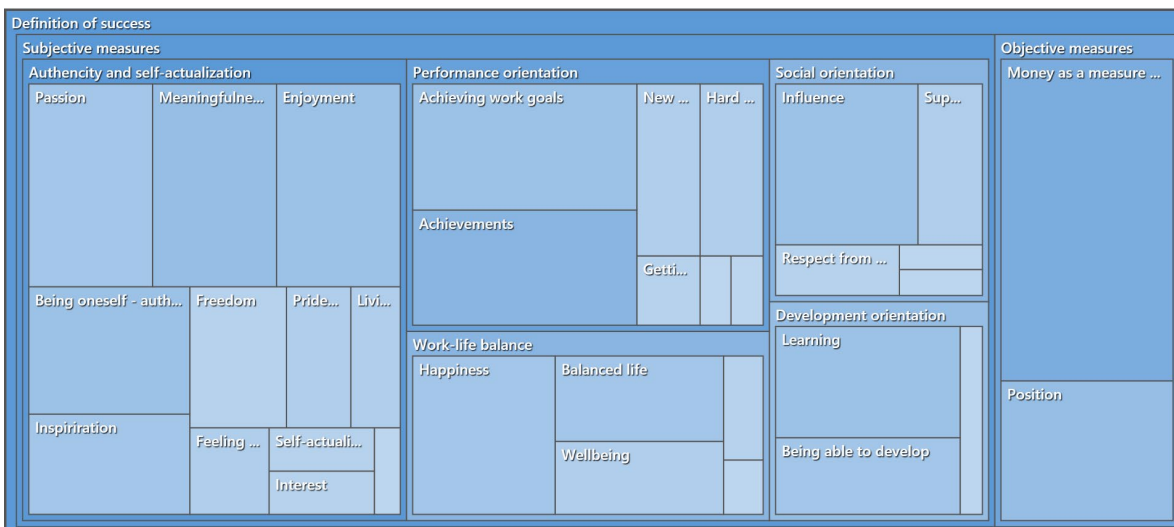
The transcribed text was in Finnish, but the codes were recorded in English when entered into NVivo (discussed in 4.3.3). In the first-cycle coding, the codes were deducted from the research framework, being aided by the pilot study themes and organised in coding trees in NVivo (Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1: Excerpt of career identity coding in NVivo

| Name | Files | References |
|----------------------------|-------|------------|
| Career identity | 6 | 12 |
| Career planning | 10 | 40 |
| Career progression | 8 | 55 |
| Success factors | 1 | 1 |
| Performance orientatio | 5 | 12 |
| Productive | 2 | 3 |
| Self-efficacy | 8 | 19 |
| Being not afraid of con | 3 | 8 |
| Courage | 7 | 14 |
| Determination | 4 | 8 |
| Fair | 1 | 2 |
| Leadership skills | 8 | 28 |
| Competence in own fiel | 3 | 4 |
| Resilience | 2 | 5 |
| Personal life crisis and t | 3 | 5 |
| Risk-taking | 3 | 6 |
| Testing and showing o | 4 | 4 |
| Challenging oneself | 2 | 2 |

The first-order themes include participant-centric codes (Figure 4.1), whereas the second-order categories and aggregate dimensions are hierarchically arranged researcher-centric themes to demonstrate rigour in the qualitative research (Figure 4.2) (Gioia, Corley and Hamilton, 2013).

Figure 4.2: Example of thematic analysis: codes, categories and themes of the definition of success



A table of first and second cycle coding is presented in Appendix 9. The words and fractions of sentences coded with in vivo method (Saldaña, 2021) are in Finnish (section 4.3.8) and translated further into English as codes, categories and themes.

4.4.2. Data analysis phase 2: Narrative analysis

The career steps and changes in positions and employers were collected from the career stories without the assistance of NVivo. The number of career transitions, length of tenure in one position,

the transition direction (horizontal–vertical) and the first leader position, along with the first executive level position, were recorded and mapped. Moreover, aspects supporting career progression were categorised and coded as success factors in NVivo during the analysis process.

The primary aim of the narrative analysis of the participants' career stories was to track career mobility patterns by investigating career steps and job positions. Additionally, CV information and work histories, which were collected for participant selection (section 4.3.3), from the participants' LinkedIn profiles were confirmed and utilised in validating the career stories. Moreover, the current employers' websites supplemented the data by providing more information on the top management members' work experience and job titles during the analysis phase. The career steps of the women who participated in the 365 women leaders' campaign were also confirmed from the pilot study data (section 2.8).

The initial motivation behind the supplementary information search was to investigate if some career stages or positions were not included in the participants' stories. However, the participants voiced all their career moves accurately and with rich explanation in the interviews, confirming the truthfulness and openness of the participants (Saunders and Lewis, 2018). Simultaneously, this served to verify the findings and determine the completeness of the qualitative data to improve the accuracy by triangulation (Patton, 2002). The career patterns of the participants are discussed in section 5.1. Table 4.6 presents a summary of the career identity categories deduced from the research aim and questions in the data analysis.

Table 4.6: Career identity categories

| Summary of the research participants | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|--|---|--|--|---------------------|---|
| Participant | Career identity representation | Leader identity representation | Gender representation | Definition of success | Family | Career type | Number of employers | Notes |
| P1 | performance orientation: a slogger | implementer | doesn't touch the topic of gender, except in the beginning as presenting herself as a woman | competence and respect gained through one's work and achievements, money representing one's worth, new challenges and task | 2 kids, talks about kids and husband, but not about work-family conflict | boundaryless | 3+ | proud of own success |
| P2 | performance orientation: business results | "excel" leader, learned to lead people | no own experiences of discrimination, but works in Swedish companies and believes that they are more equal than Finnish | successful people have done something meaningful for the humankind, looks up to them. Personally, enjoyment and inspiration. I am not after bigger companies, higher salary or fame and glory, everyday wellbeing and enjoyment is important to me. Enjoyment comes from achieving goals. | no kids | boundaryless | 3+ | hardworking and ambitious only A-level education, compensated by practical work experience |
| P3 | human (interaction) orientation or authenticity orientation, influence with and through people and communication | human leadership "good with people" | once some old man belittled and called a girl, but turned that a joke and continued | to work in a suitable and meaningful position serving the purpose of ambition with possibilities to influence and make decisions, passion work-life balance, no sacrifices | no kids | growing with the company. Linear | 2 | authentic leader |
| P4 | authenticity: professional competence, unpretentious, following own path | | sees gender as an advantage in finance business, a possibility to be different | business results and satisfied customers, hard work, a nice job, people who respect you, doesn't feel successful but others say so | no kids | boundaryless + entrepreneurship | 3+ | Sharp and intelligent, but creates a fussy feminine image |
| P5 | development/growth orientation, career identity build on leader identity, enthusiastic and energetic, sales/business orientation | "natural leader" always have been willing to take the lead and lead others, | laughs at some men who don't even understand how dangerous these blonds can be | two sides; the hard-side in which you achieve the goals and results and a soft-side in which inspiration and passion is the key | 3 kids, husbands support a must | boundaryless | 3+ | always ready for new challenges and task |
| P6 | expert identity, competence growing and widening as the company grows feels inspiring and cool, traditional CFO role | managing things and numbers learned how to lead people | was the only expatriate woman with husband following, no faced any discrimination, doesn't pay attention to such things, lucky to be surrounded by people (men) who want to promote women | cannot define | 2 kids, husband in an important role supporting the career, family-values important | Linear, growing with the company | 2 | calm and thoughtful |
| P7 | leader identity, emphasis on people skills, human touch to top management "you cannot lead business, only people", passion | openness and transparency | a strong gender identity, challenging the existing norms and stereotypes | materialism and success has no correlation, hates the word success and would like the self-actualization need, values driven, meaningfulness and enjoyment | no kids, don't want any | Linear, growing with the company | 2 | originally a teacher, changed to business |
| P8 | performance orientation: pioneer in own professional area in the industry, persistent and curious | deadly honest and deadly open, free-hand and support | experienced what is like to be only women in tech industry lead, difficult to change discipline as a woman. As a men would have been able to change the role easily (tech industry spec.). Wome are more clear on what is right and wrong | 20 years ago, title, position, money...but now meaningful challenges in which you learn all the time, hopefully bringing enough money too, and also the possibility to influence. | 1 kid, family not mentioned | kaleidoscope | 5 | changed from ICT to care sector after opting out, still the same role |
| P9 | leader identity, everything is done through people | leader identity, everything is done through people, | sees gender not negatively, has had no effect, believes in people | success is good everyday life, interesting job, family, everything, never interested in external/objective signs of success | 1, family values and support important | kaleidoscope | 8 | frequent changes to various fields, entrepreneur, |
| P10 | Change leader, result oriented | Strong leader identity, not leading from above, but very demanding | Being a strong woman in business is still like a red flag, women are seen differently in different industries | not title or money, influence and business, not selling one's soul, authenticity, I have always wanted to succeed but on my own way/conditions | 2 kids, British stay-at-home husband, helped a lot her career | boundaryless | 6 | actively raises gender issue in mgmt team. |
| P11 | from strong professional identity (accounting & numbers) toward business and leading, straightforward attitude | flexible with ideas even though opinionated, active, demanding but soft at the same time and asking stupid questions, showing the weaknesses | mixture of both genders, not a man among other men, using soft sides as benefits, gender has not affected career, but feel that sometimes has to prove competency by showing results as a woman you need to have strong evidence of achievements, big plates of taste-bites to show, more than men | Inspiring work in which you can influence own and others' lives positively and reach the goals and results, important to be yourself (authenticity) | 2 kids, husband in an important role supporting the career, family-values important | boundaryless | 4 | lost one child when late pregnant, which turned values upsidedown |
| P12 | janitor, teamleader and CEO at the same time, combination of expert and leader, strong negotiator | warm, values-based ethical leader, negotiator, middle-man role already at school "soft and demanding" at the same time | sees gender not negatively, has had no effect, believes in people | success is happiness, which comes from meaningfulness and inspiration | 1 kid, family not mentioned | boundaryless | 3 | uses a lot of metaphores to describe leadership, uses first names and talks about the people in business like best friends – super casual |
| P13 | helicopter perspective, logical strong intelligence profile, excellent in finding and communicating core points in large entities | sparring partner asking questions and supporting through dialogue, listening skills | in small things men suppress, no listening to a woman, but somehow they behave also more respectfully | success means balance in life and things rather well | 2 kids, family, has prioritized family as important | boundaryless | 3 | calm and thoughtful, intelligent and very nice feeling to talk to her, superior communication skills |
| P14 | walking own way, compination of determination and taking responsibilities "organizer" | casual team leader, not feeling or being superior to others, open and honest, values-based leader | no effect, except for the last CEO position in which gender was a plus | success is achieving which leads to happiness and satisfaction, not the height of the position | 3, kids, grandchildren... | boundaryless | 4 | oldest and juggling with 3 companies, own enterprise and board positions, interesting point in work-life balance work helping in personal life crisis (divorce example) |
| P15 | trusted player, follow own path by doing one's best | strong leader identity, in leading position from the first job after graduation, inspiring, impatient, "a nice person", demanding, spontaneous | has affected career both positively and negatively, not had all positions because of gender, the higher up you go the more it affects | freedom, freedom to choose a meaningful job, financial freedom to choose (father owns a big construction company) | 2 kids, moved back to home city to be closer to parents who helped with kids, husbands role crucial in supporting the career | boundaryless | 4 | talks about self-efficacy and financial resorces how easy it is to take risks when you know that you won't lose everything |
| P16 | expert profile combined with willingness to lead people "humane CFO" | | personality comes first, gender not important | own path enabling learning, position as director not that important, could be a specialist too | no kids, wanted to have but no... | Linear, growing with the company until now, kaleidoscope | 3 | opting out and moving back to countryside, having a break |
| P17 | specialist profile, process-oriented | active already during studies, transparency and inspiration important | gender is no priority, not making an issue of gender but is a proud to be a woman | meaningfulness, freedom to choose and influence, position is important but not how many people under, the possibility to influence | 3 kids, husband | Linear, growing with the company | 2 | not the traditional path, only girl in technical vocational school |

4.4.3. Data analysis phase 3: Discourse analysis

The narrative analysis performed in phase 2 was further employed as a basis for discourse analysis to discover the deeper meanings related to career identities and successful careers. A social constructivist epistemology does not directly guide any specific discourse analysis practice (Nikander, 2008); the research questions provided the basic frame for the chosen methods. However, discourse analysis is one of the most widely used approaches within social constructivism (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002; Nikander, 2008), so using it was logical in contextualising the research findings in Finnish culture and societal structures.

In discourse analysis, the researcher is not guided by a predefined way of analysing the data. The conceptual framework, which is elaborated on inductively from the data, fits a small sample size because of the laborious analysis (Lämsä, 2004). The current research employed the abductive approach (section 4.2), in which the theoretical and existing empirical knowledge is revisited after the preliminary classifications, categorisations and concepts (analysis phases 1 and 2) have been defined based on the research data (Eskola and Suoranta, 1998). Thus, discourse analysis was employed only after thematic analysis, when the career stories were coded and categorised.

The current research adhered to Potter and Wetherell's (1987) discourse analysis, which views discourse as a social practice constructed by the social world. Discourse analysis focuses on the cultural meanings attached to people, artefacts, events and experiences. These meanings are mediated through language practices. Thus, discourse analysis provided a means to study career-related meanings and their consequences because the accounts were constructed from a range of descriptive possibilities and were closely tied to the context in which they were produced and the functions they have performed (Wooffitt, 2005).

The career identities of women executives revolved around three discourses—gender discourse, leader role discourse and career success discourse—with the aim to contextualise the career narratives of women in power (Lämsä and Sintonen, 2001). Discourse analysis was used to consider the role of language in constructing descriptions, stories and accounts of the women in their executive roles. Interpretative repertoires (discussed in sections 6.1 and 6.2) occupy a place in analysis seeking to link the details of participants' descriptive practices and experiences to the broader ideological and historical formations in which those practices are situated (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). Deeper meanings and values are explored through discourse analysis: how the participants construct their own histories by using social discourses in their narrative patterns and articulate their own places in the social context and communicate past, present and future of their careers (Barley, Bechky and Milliken, 2017).

In discourse analysis, the central concept of representation refers to the language used to assign meaning to groups and their social practices and conditions (van Dijk, 1999). Discourse analysis aims to discover, for example, interpretative repertoires, which have been described as ‘a recognizable routine of arguments, descriptions and evaluations found in people’s talk often distinguished by familiar clichés, anecdotes and tropes ... “what everyone knows”’ (Seymour-Smith, Wetherell and Phoenix, 2002, p. 255). Moreover, ideological dilemmas represent the understanding of how the executive women made sense of their lives when attempting to convey opposing, even paradoxical, ideologies, often in the form of competing interpretative repertoires (Goodman, 2017).

Typically, interpretative repertoires are perceived to establish subject positions (Davies and Harré, 1990), relating to how the executive women constructed themselves and others in discourse. Subject positions are not predetermined and, thus, are perceived to always be constructed in social practices (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Discursive and social constructivist research commonly claims that identity is constructed through discourse (Gergen, 1985) and, thus, is flexible, contextual, relational, situated and modified by power relations (Seymour-Smith, Wetherell and Phoenix, 2002). In the present research, the concept of subject position was central because minority group members (women) in certain roles (executives) might face potential limitations to their agency in the social context (section 3.3-4).

Three dilemmas related to identity construction (Bamberg, 2011) were of essential interest in the discourse analysis:

1. *Agency and control* – Does the executive woman construct the world, or is the identity constructed by the surrounding world? How is this dilemma navigated in the context of career?
2. *Difference and sameness between me and others* – Positioning oneself in the social context of various possible groups and categories (executive leader, woman)
3. *Constancy and change* – Are the women leaders the same, regardless of the changes they face and how they articulate the change or constancy. What is the degree of development and continuity necessary to maintain the sense of self as unitary or authentic?

Special attention was paid to the executive women’s powerful and privileged standpoint and how agency and power were articulated from their subject positions (Collins, 1997; Pfeffer, 2010; Williams, 2012; Fairclough, 2015). Deeper meanings and values can be explored through discourse analysis; how the executive women constructed their own histories by using social discourses in their narrative patterns and articulated their own places in the social context and communicate past, present and future of their careers. The discourse analysis of the present research consisted of multiple deductive-inductive analysis rounds to explore career identity

constructs and their meanings and representations in the social and cultural context. In the next section, the limitations of the chosen methodological choices are discussed.

4.5. Limitations of the research approach

Qualitative paradigms are perceived to be built on an idea of contextuality: human experience, action or discourse are studied within a specific context. Taken out of context, they no longer are what they were when they were contextually produced. In qualitative research, generalisation largely depends on a theoretical understanding of the subject matter because qualitative studies cannot demonstrate generalisability statistically similar to quantitative studies, yet analytic generalisation is employed (Brinkmann, 2013). Thus, the lack of generalisability has been noted as one of the limitations of qualitative social constructivist research, which holds true in the present thesis.

The basic argument against interviews as a method of data collection is that they produce 'unnatural' data because the interviewer influences their production with questions, interruptions and silences, offering ad hoc interpretations (de Fina and Perrino, 2011). Narrative analysts have also questioned the role of researchers in the selection and interpretation of data (Riessman, 2008) because the researcher's influence becomes unavoidable during the interpretation and analysis phase, if not during the narration. In the present research, the uninterrupted career story was justified from the authentic storytelling perspective, avoiding the researcher's intervention but not interpretation of the data.

Discourses operate as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak. Foucault (1972) noted that discourses not only reflect or represent social entities and relations, they construct them; similarly, the narrative identities are perceived to be constructed amidst the storytelling. Thus, the subjective freedom to address the topics and reject the other enforces the agency and power of the participant to direct the research findings in a certain direction (Fairclough, 1992, p. 3-4).

The exploratory and explanatory nature of the present research provides an increased understanding of the careers of successful executive women leaders, a minority group with limited empirical evidence in Finland. The qualitative sample was composed of 17 interviews and, therefore, did not aim for generalisability. The results, however, expand the findings of the larger sample of Finnish women leaders in the pilot study, which consisted of interviews with 368 women (section 2.8). Thus, the current research complements existing knowledge by accessing a specific target group and providing rich data. In addition, because of the limited attention and access to

executive-level leaders, the findings of the present study can inform future research of the specific elements relevant to career success at the highest levels of companies. Therefore, being designed in the social constructivist paradigm, the present research benefited from the small sample size, ensuring rich and in-depth knowledge (Cohen, Duberley and Mallon, 2004).

Special attention was given to transparency and audit trails to address potential biases and subjective assumptions. The numerous direct quotes included in the discussion of the findings (Chapter 5) mitigated the risk of biased interpretations. Acknowledging the fact that a researcher can never be completely neutral and interpretations of reality are always imperfect can strengthen trustworthiness by making these limitations in the research process visible (Gubrium James; Marvasti Amir B. et al., 2012). A discussion of potential interpretations against theoretical and empirical knowledge enhances transparency. The discursive researcher always must avoid the temptation to treat interviews as decontextualised talk (McKinlay and McVittie, 2008).

4.6. Reflexivity: Researcher's position

Reflexivity entails critical reflection on the research process and the researcher's role in it. In qualitative research, the recognition that the researcher brings their subjectivity (perspectives, sense-making frameworks and passions) into the research process is seen as a strength rather than a weakness (Clarke and Braun, 2013). However, the positivist tradition holds that the researcher must observe the world without influencing it and minimise their presence in the data collection process to eliminate the potential bias resulting from the researcher, which is considered a major divide between the interpretivist and positivist philosophies (Burrell and Morgan, 2016). Hence, reflexivity is a crucial aspect of qualitative research in explaining how the research processes shape the outcomes of the research (Hardy, Phillips and Clegg, 2001).

Social constructivism perceives interviews as 'dialogical performances, social meaning-making acts and cofacilitated knowledge changes' (Kojo-Ljungberg, 2008, p. 430). Thus, the researcher needs to be aware of the meaning-making activities, the context of the interview and their own role in the social construction of the discourse. In qualitative research, not only do the participants alone create knowledge, but also the researcher shapes the research through their subjective values and assumptions (axiology), which affect the whole research process—from the construction of the research aim and questions until selecting methods and interpreting the findings (Crotty, 1998; Maxwell, 2005). The researcher must be actively involved in knowledge production (Alvesson and Sköldböck, 2018). The interview data are always inter-relational (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015) because the interview discourse is built in a context between the researcher and participants (Cohen, Duberley and Mallon, 2004).

A common language, symbols and discourses are vital in shaping meaning and power in interviews (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). Interview data may be seen as interpretively collaborative; hence, language becomes a constitutive act rather than just a form of information exchange (Welch and Piekkari, 2006). A common language is perceived as an advantage in interviews; for example, different meta-communicative norms (set of implicit shared norms governing communication) between native informants and non-native interviewers often clash, leading to communicative blunders or power imbalance in an interview (de Fina and Perrino, 2011).

In the present research, the researcher had prior knowledge of the topic area and had an insider status in relation to the participants (le Gallais, 2008). All participants and the researcher

- were women, white, middle-aged,
- had work experience as a leader in a large company,
- most had the same educational background (M.Sc. Econ) and
- and had lived and worked in Finland.

The insider status increased the common understanding and positively impacted the discourse created in the interview context. The likelihood of building rapport with the participants enhanced trust, in turn producing a deeper and more detailed discourse on personal and confidential perceptions and experiences (de Fina and Perrino, 2011). However, the risks resided in missing the outsider perspective, which created problems in understanding the context and, thus, misinterpretations because of missing the common language and contextual understanding (le Gallais, 2008).

In the present research, the researcher's work experience as a leader in large companies may have brought forth an objectivity/subjectivity dilemma for the researcher's position; depending on the philosophical assumptions, it may have been perceived as a benefit or limitation. In the current research, the researcher's background did not limit the conduction of the research. Finnish society, business culture and environment and gender-related issues were all familiar to the researcher, including the researcher's networks, opening doors for interviews. Moreover, the researcher, being a certified solution-focused coach and experienced interviewer, enabled the creation of an environment of trust in which the participants openly shared their subjective views and experiences, even quite tragic and challenging personal topics. Thus, in qualitative social constructivist research, the researcher's position was not seen as a limitation (de Fina and Perrino, 2011).

The next chapter discusses the research findings based on the data analysis phases presented in this chapter (4.4) and the research questions presented in the introduction (section 1.2).

5. Career identities of executive women

This chapter presents the findings of the research, exploring how women leaders navigated their way to obtain stereotypically masculine business executive positions at the top level of large companies in Finland. The findings are presented according to the research questions (section 1.2) and divided into two perspectives adhering to the terminology of career success, as coined by Huges (1937) and operationalised by a myriad of authors (Ng et al., 2005): objective and subjective careers (section 3.1).

Section 5.1 presents the objective side of careers by analysing and discussing the physical mobility, that is, the actual career patterns (section 3.2) of the participants. Section 5.1 answers the research question of how the participants navigated their careers to the top executive level, looking at this from a concrete observable perspective. Career mobility and career trajectory profiles are presented to evidence the career patterns and to provide the contextual framework for the discourses related to the subjective side of the executive careers discussed in sections 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4.

Section 5.2 discusses gender representations and the congruence between leader and gender roles. Section 5.3. continues to present leader role identity constructs in the executive leader role. The participants' subjective perceptions of career success and career planning are presented in section 5.4.

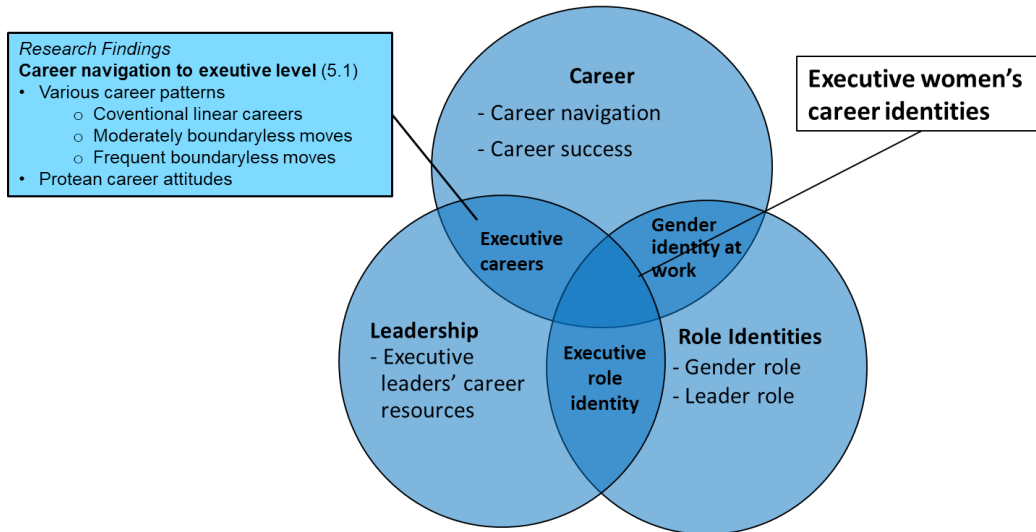
The findings chapter includes numerous quotations from the interviews to demonstrate the in-depth data and convey the richness and vividness of executive women's accounts, to present the authentic voices of the women executives and to provide a portrait of the participants' profiles. Additionally, this improves the transparency of the qualitative research, helping the reader evaluate the accuracy of the conclusions (Bluhm et al., 2011), without compromising the confidential nature of the interviews.

5.1. Career pattern profiles of executive women

This section presents the physically observable career mobility patterns (section 3.2) and contributes to the literature by demonstrating the executive women's diverse career paths leading to the top level of companies, including the descriptions and rationales ascribed to career mobility. Figure 5.1. positions the findings of career patterns within the conceptual framework of the

research. The three emerging career patterns—conventional linear careers, moderate boundaryless moves and frequent boundaryless moves—with the protean career attitude are discussed further in this section.

Figure 5.1: Career pattern profiles



The career mobility of every participant has followed a progressive upward path in the organisational hierarchies, with either minor incremental changes, more substantial leaps or a combination of various vertical and horizontal transitions. None of the women had taken involuntary steps to less demanding positions, lost their ways in the labyrinths (Carli and Eagly, 2016) or fallen off the glass cliffs (Ryan and Haslam, 2005; Hunt-Earle, 2012).

Even though the participants shared similar thoughts on their careers, they were not a homogeneous group: every participant had a distinct career trajectory leading to top management, regardless of the similarities in their educational level, age and gender. Thus, they did not share the same experiences, but they shared the experience of the role of an executive leader on the TMT and gender minority position by being a woman.

In the interviews, the participants were given the opportunity to start their career stories at any relevant point in their lives. All participants decided to include some of their childhood and adolescence experiences in the story because they perceived their career choices as being affected by their educational choice and orientation towards work emerging from childhood. In case the storyline did not begin from childhood, the story, however, diverted from the chronological progression of the career through jumps to earlier life events.

Regardless of having work experience prior to graduation from secondary or higher educational institutes, the conceptualisation of a professional career was perceived as beginning only after graduation from a higher educational institute. The participants distinguished their careers as being influenced by their educational choices and the definite professional career with relevant work experience as starting only after graduation. P2 was an exception, being the only participant without formal education after high school. Consequently, she reckoned that all her work experience was equally relevant to her professional career.

The pregraduation work experience was commonly associated with career identity and an enabler of future professional career progression, a sign of hardworking attitude or work orientation already during adolescence or simply a necessity for earning some money during the studies without any deeper meaning attached to.

P15: 'Sure, I have worked in a hamburger joint, jewellery sales, all kinds of summer jobs and teachers' substitute work ... and everything. And I worked in a bank during my studies, but the first job was directly a managerial position, and after that, I have always been in a supervisory role to smaller or larger groups. That has been a distinct feature throughout my career'.

P8: 'But then let's continue with my first real workplace, which was [company name].'

P15 emphasised her work orientation by listing her various jobs already as a teenager to evidence a hardworking identity and work-oriented attitude. Moreover, she later revealed coming from a wealthy entrepreneurial family and actually having no need to work for the money. She acknowledged her first managerial position as an important starting point of her leadership career and perceived managerial responsibility as describing her entire career. Additionally, she adhered to the perception that nonmanagerial positions in the beginning of professional careers may prevent further promotions to leadership positions. Especially for women, the lack of early managerial positions has generally been considered a hindrance to their later progression to more senior levels (McKinsey & Company, 2021).

Similarly, P8 excluded her work experience during her studies from her professional career. However, she identified her experience of negotiating conference and seminar content during her studies as crucial for both understanding the business and speaking the same language with leaders and building her network in the industry. Thus, the first expert or supervisory position was often considered the beginning of the professional leader career, even though all cumulated work experience was highly valued as a sign of hardworking mentality (section 2.8.1) and evaluated as important for later career progression.

Varied career mobility patterns, both linear and nonlinear (section 3.2), were discovered among the participants' career stories. An upward linearity and relatively long tenure within a few companies characterised the career progression of most participants. P8 and P17 demonstrated the two extreme cases among the participants: P17 worked for the same company during her entire professional career, whereas P9's career has intersected with multiple industries and a total of eight employers. The participants' careers were categorised into three career pattern profiles based on the number of employers:

- Conventional linear career (1–2 employers)
- Moderate boundaryless moves (3–4 employers)
- Frequent boundaryless moves (5–8 employers)

The participants' tenures in one organisation reflect the general average in Finland (Sutela, Pärnänen and Keyriläinen, 2019). A professional career experience of more than 15 years is commonly comprised of four employers, which equals an average 3.8 years of tenure of the executive women in the stock-listed companies in Finland (Keskuskauppakamari, 2020). Consequently, linear careers were labelled as conventional to show the divergence from the twenty-first-century mainstream career patterns with more than two employers (section 3.2.2). Similarly, the boundaryless career patterns were divided into moderate, close to the Finnish average tenure and more frequent career moves. Table 5.1 presents the number of employers after graduation (excluding the early adolescent work experience before and during studies), the first executive position and the career mobility type.

Table 5.1: Participants' positions, employment and career pattern profiles

| Name | Position/Title Field of industry | Number of employers after graduation | Employment with first executive-level position (no#) | Career pattern profile |
|------|--|--|--|-----------------------------|
| P1 | COO Restaurant chain | 3 | 2 | Moderate boundaryless moves |
| P2 | Country Manager FMCG industry | 3 | 2 | Moderate boundaryless moves |
| P3 | SVP, Content business Services and consulting | 2 | 1 | Conventional linear career |
| P4 | CEO Banking | 4 | 2 | Moderate boundaryless moves |
| P5 | Sales Director Consumer goods industry | 4 | 3 | Moderate boundaryless moves |
| P6 | CFO Energy | 2 | 2 | Conventional linear career |
| P7 | Business Director Services and consulting | 2 | 2 | Conventional linear career |
| P8 | On sabbatical Technology/ICT industry | 5 | 2 | Frequent boundaryless moves |
| P9 | CEO Service industry | 8 | 2 | Frequent boundaryless moves |

| | | | | |
|-----|--|---|---|-----------------------------|
| P10 | Commercial Director Service industry | 6 | 3 | Frequent boundaryless moves |
| P11 | Country Director Service industry | 4 | 3 | Moderate boundaryless moves |
| P12 | Managing Director Healthcare | 3 | 2 | Moderate boundaryless moves |
| P13 | SVP Technology industry | 3 | 2 | Moderate boundaryless moves |
| P14 | CEO Service industry | 4 | 4 | Moderate boundaryless moves |
| P15 | Business Director Healthcare | 5 | 3 | Frequent boundaryless moves |
| P16 | CFO Technology industry | 2 | 1 | Conventional linear career |
| P17 | SVP, Customers and Markets Technology industry | 1 | 1 | Conventional linear career |

Most of the participants had reached the executive level during their second employment after graduation (Table 5.1). The first employer generally offered development opportunities at the specialist or managerial level. When employed by the second company, the career progressed either through middle-management roles or began directly at a top management position.

The participants perceived their career progression as natural and smooth; they often suggested new positions or responsibilities either within or outside their existing employment. Moreover, when the tasks were considered too routine or easy, the participants explicitly voiced their aspirations and usually received more demanding tasks or a new role within the organisation. In case the employer failed to offer new inspiring tasks or roles, the participants began to explore opportunities outside the current company or accepted the offers headhunters presented them with. Moreover, none of the participants articulated a heroic survival story. Contrasting this, the career narratives were fact based and descriptive, constructed of smaller or bigger steps forming logical developmental stories towards more demanding work and higher positions following one's values and aspirations as leaders and professionals in one's own field.

5.1.1. Conventional linear careers

The conventional linear careers of the participants comprised only one (P17) or two (P3, P6, P7 and P16) employments. However, conventional linear careers do not follow similar patterns, but have distinct trajectories.

P6's and P7's careers began with shorter employment after graduation, and the career progression leading to the present executive position occurred during their current employment, whereas P16's first employment lasted 20 years and the second 7 years. P3 has stayed equally long with both of her employees. However, both organisations have grown and changed substantially because of

both organic growth and mergers and acquisitions, offering the needed professional growth for her. Similarly, P6's career progression has followed the company's growth and internationalisation. Table 5.2 summarises the conventional linear career steps with related career story quotes.

Table 5.2: Conventional linear career and related quotes

| | Career progression features | Quote from the career story |
|-----|---|---|
| P3 | Team leader position soon after starting in the first small but growing company, leading to more responsibility and the vice-CEO level. The company was acquired, and she decided to leave and found a new company with her colleague as a subsidiary. The group has grown substantially and is stock listed. Career progression has followed company growth and changes. | <i>'In a way I am still in the same continuum, in the same company. However, this has changed structurally tremendously. We were ... wait a minute, exactly three years, I think, the structure was so that we still had the own company, and I was the CEO and, thus, in the TMT of this group'.</i> |
| P6 | A shorter tenure during the first employment Company-initiated career progression included a period as an expatriate Incremental additions and new tasks included in the expert role according to the company growth and expansion Expert position changed to a leader and finally an executive position organically. | <i>'They had the practice to rotate young potentials in various tasks. In a way, even though I didn't understand it at the time, the company was building a career path for you. When I came to this company, I couldn't have imagined what it would be like, for example, after 10 years. I wouldn't have been able to build a career path like this in my mind when there was no such thing even in sight'.</i> |
| P7 | A career changer originally: started her career as a teacher but aspired for more variety in her work role. In second employment traditional transition from an expert position to a leader and finally an executive position following the changes within the company. | <i>'I have been given the opportunity to grow into the current role and the current understanding actually rather gently, through continuously increasing responsibilities and growing roles. It has been traditional apprentice thinking in which I have been able to surround myself with more competent people and absorb their influence. I have been open to this, however'.</i> |
| P16 | First employment long, 20 years and then 7 years in second employment. Traditional transition from an expert position to a leader and, finally, an executive position following the changes within the company during the first employment. Continued as an executive in second employment. | <i>'I have had some temp jobs while studying, but in a way, I don't know if this is rare. I have been in an international organisation for a long time (20+ years), and then, 7 years ago I changed to this company'.</i> |
| P17 | Only one employment. Decided to reject an academic career and instead start from a less demanding position in business. Expert position changed to a leader and finally an executive position organically, regardless of multiple maternity leaves. | <i>'After my master's thesis, I was offered a position in a company as a researcher, but no. I wanted to stay in Helsinki. Luckily, [company name] was recruiting an engineer for a maternity leave substitute. I had never thought to work in that field, and I was overqualified with my masters' degree. The manager was asking if I was really willing to stay even if I got a better offer from somewhere else. I said yes ... and I am still in the same company [laughing]'.</i> |

The participants were not hindered by glass ceilings (section 3.4) within the companies and instead were promoted from specialist/expert or middle-management positions to the TMT along the companies' organic growth, structural changes or because of mergers and acquisitions. Thus, their need for professional development and personal growth was fulfilled internally within only one or two companies. However, their career progression diverted from the traditional linear 'climbing the organisational ladder'-type of career (section 3.2.1) because the enablers of the career progression were shaped by both the individual need for growth and changes in the company or environment, not as a result of systematic and planned career paths initiated by the employers. The findings support the importance of self-directedness and agency associated with the protean career orientation framework (Hall, 1976, 2004). Even in conventional linear careers, the responsibility for career progression rests on the shoulders of the individuals. Consequently, the findings stretch Valcour and Ladge's (2008) suggestion of a protean career framework as more appropriate for nonlinear careers to being equally significant in the linear career patterns.

5.1.2. Moderate boundaryless moves

The majority of the participants (P1, P2, P4, P5, P11, P12, P13 and P14) have been employed by three to four companies after their graduation; thus, their career patterns were categorised as moderately boundaryless (section 3.2.2). Table 5.3 summarises the moderately boundaryless moves with related career story quotes.

Table 5.3: Moderate boundaryless career and related quotes

| | Career progression features | Quote from the career story |
|----|--|---|
| P1 | Steady increase of responsibilities Started in marketing and took over business responsibility and finally managed to gain the director position. | <i>'In every company, I have climbed a couple of steps upwards. Then, I was the country manager. I also took on the responsibilities of the MD for a few years, suddenly. If I had been asked 5 years earlier do I want to be the MD, I would have probably said no. But, then, suddenly, you have grown with the given responsibilities and the offered new position doesn't feel that strange, and you want to accept it.'</i> |
| P2 | Not interested in studying, worked already starting as a teenager. Founded a company (3.5 years) Recruited to a retail company in sales role and continued own business part-time Received more business responsibilities quickly and a country director's position Special competence to turn heavily loss-making units profitable. | <i>'Those were quite big leaps forward; the responsibility increased and the company grew at the same time, but also the role was remarkably bigger. And I have always reflected on what has been offered to me from outside the company, which one should I take. And I have shamelessly shopped around that, hey, I got this kind of an offer from outside, and I have considered it. I have done it only a few times, but sometimes, I have honestly asked where do they see me in a couple of years and that I like it here now, but if I get interesting offers from elsewhere, I will of course leave.'</i> |
| P4 | Career has three clear phases: | On deciding to found a company: |

| | | |
|-----|--|---|
| | <p>Started in an economic research institute for 4.5 years. Was asked to work for a few companies in the banking industry Decided to step out (a sabbatical year) and founded her own company in 2012.</p> | <p><i>'I realised when I was on sabbatical for the first time of my life ... the entrepreneurship mentality hit me and you know, you have to take risks, you only live once'.</i></p> |
| P5 | <p>Started in marketing Two shorter employments: in consulting and downsizing one company Moved to current employment, longer tenure of 11 years.</p> | <p><i>'As I said there were the three companies, that is how it was. If I go there and if I perform well, that is how it starts. Of course, an important part is that you have been working all the time and that they have evidence that this person should be transferred to another position. It is really important that, in the beginning, you have had all kinds of positions, not only up, but different'.</i></p> |
| P11 | <p>Background in banking and accounting Started a career in consulting (auditing), ~4 years Moved business side and was employed by the company 16 years with increasing responsibilities to a commercial director position Less than a year in her current employment as a country director.</p> | <p><i>'The commercial side had challenges, and he [CEO] asked if I wanted to take it. It was again a new role in the company, and it was surprising [the offer to take responsibility], but not as surprising as the previous offer'.</i></p> |
| P12 | <p>Started her career as a business analyst Changed to another field of business in 2000, responsibilities grew and gained a CEO role from 2006 onwards Started as CEO of a healthcare company in 2019,</p> | <p><i>'A quite big wave of change started to roll then, and [male name] needed someone to act as his right hand for the job ... then later, I was even more heavily the right hand of [another male name] when we established the region, which then became my own future'.</i></p> |
| P13 | <p>Started in marketing and gained more responsibility because of changes and a merger 16 years in first employment reached the division's top management Headhunted to another company in 2010 2013 headhunted to the current employer, which was stock listed soon after.</p> | <p><i>'I managed to follow super closely and be part of the true business turnaround, and we succeeded in excellently. One of my old colleagues had recommended me and so a head-hunter contacted me ... It was time for renewal, and we were pondering who would lead the big project. I then raised my paw at the right moment, when everyone was sitting quietly around the table'.</i></p> |
| P14 | <p>Started the career in a bank 10 years in first employment and 10 years in another. Changed to an ICT company (15 years) and finally to a CEO position in a healthcare company.</p> | <p><i>'I began to get bored in the HR manager position and asked if I could do something else here in the bank. But they wanted me to continue because they needed my competence. So I changed employer then to [bank name] to a development position'.</i></p> |

The moderately boundaryless moves included both internal transitions from one position to another and changes from one employer to another, comprising of surprisingly long employments. Usually, over 10 years of tenure in one employment is attached to linear careers (section 3.2.1). While researching middle-aged executives, their long work experience of close to or over 20 years or more naturally comprised a few transitions from one company to another (section 3.2.2). Thus, in the context of senior executive women, the boundaryless nature of their careers stretched along a longer time horizon. The transitions from one position to another were of various magnitudes,

driven by one's own willingness to develop and get new challenges or initiated by supervisors or external networks, such as headhunters (section 3.3). The careers followed diverse individual paths without clear similar patterns among the moderately boundaryless move careers.

5.1.3. Frequent boundaryless moves

Four participants' career patterns clearly reflected a boundaryless career's notion of constant movement in and out of organisations (Inkson et al., 2012). P8, P9, P10 and P15 had been employed for five to eight companies operating in various fields of industries. Similar to the majority of the participants, the changes were voluntary, initiated by the participants' aspirations towards something new or by lucrative offers from their networks and headhunters. Table 5.4 summarises the frequent boundaryless moves with related career story quotes.

Table 5.4: Frequent boundaryless moves and related quotes

| | Career progression features | Quote from the career story |
|-----|--|--|
| P8 | Worked in international ICT/tech companies (4) in marketing and communication, sustainability was added to responsibilities during the last employment in the field Participated in 20 mergers/acquisitions 2019 on sabbatical to find a new direction for her career. | <i>I have worked in headquarters leading a global function or in a country organisation of a global company responsible for Finland, the Nordics or North Europe. Those two perspectives have been important for my own development and learning'.</i> |
| P9 | Career started in customer and product responsibility area in the technology industry (first three employers) Moved to service business, and later to a smaller consulting company (CEO) and further to consulting and research companies (last three employers). | <i>'I started there as a product director leading a team of 30 people. And it did not take more than a year before the company was restructured, and I got the consumer business unit for my responsibility'.</i> |
| P10 | Career started in finance as a business controller Soon gained business responsibility in a global company and worked in a number of countries for 10 years abroad Changed to another technology field and stayed three years in each company A shorter period in one company followed by the current employer in the service sector. | <i>'I wanted to become an account manager of some client. The account manager role at [company name] meant that you had sales responsibility but also the business responsibility'.</i> <i>'I have taken the opportunities because I wanted to test my abilities. So in a way, I have shown to myself if I can do it or not'.</i> |
| P15 | Career started in banking field (7 years) from supervisor role to the service development and marketing After maternity leaves moved to the insurance business (10 years) Moved to healthcare business to work for the current employer six years ago. | <i>'The only industry I have wanted to work in is the current healthcare. I have never planned to go into banking or insurances ... in the insurance company, I was responsible for marketing, and I wouldn't have wanted to get the business responsibility, but they pushed it to me'.</i> |

Job opportunities outside the existing employment emerged partially because of the participants' reputation of excellent results or substantial changes achieved in previous positions. However, P9

explained her career moves partly through good luck but simultaneously admitted her own curiosity and self-efficacy's influence in grasping the opportunities. P8's career progression was enabled by headhunters until the latest position, to which she applied actively herself. She also explained her success partly because of luck but emphasised her reputation as a competent professional by using the words of others: *'Now that I have quit from the job, everybody says that it's so easy for you to get a job when you have such a strong name in this field'*. Similarly, P10 described her strong position as a reputable professional who has been asked *'to do the same challenging change processes again and again in various companies'*.

The participants perceived the transitions from one employer and field of industry to another positively, partly because of their experiences in only voluntary moves and progressive and developmental results to their personal resources and careers. However, P10 acknowledged different attitudes towards women executives; some fields of industry are more conventional than others: *'If the road gets blocked in one industry, it is worthless to bang your head against the wall'*.

Adhering to Mui, Parker and Titus (2021), in any context, women leaders must weigh the benefits of either adhering to convention or pursuing a path less travelled, and there are benefits and costs to both. At a minimum, it is potentially costly for women leaders to operate in conventional spaces that are likely to be hotbeds of entrenched gender and role congruity biases. However, the current research supports the findings of Guan et al. (2019) in their meta-analysis, which noticed the opportunities of career transitions positively as enablers of accumulated valuable experiences and achieved high levels of person-environment integration, which are beneficial for executive women's career progression and success.

5.1.4. Career breaks and interruptions

All the participants had uninterrupted careers, without any substantial involuntary breaks. None of the participants had diverted from their sphere of work (Cabrera, 2007; Biese, 2017) for anything other than parental leaves or shorter breaks, during which the current employment relationship continued as usual.

However, at the interview time in autumn 2019, P8 and P16 had decided to quit their jobs without a new position in sight. P8 had initiated a golden handshake for herself and was searching for a new, preferably CEO, position with a head-hunter. She also rationalised the momentary break to give her some time to concentrate on her own well-being in between the demanding 24/7 roles at the top management level. In the beginning of the interview, P16 confessed confidentially that she had already resigned from the current position and had promised to work until her successor was

selected. She was planning to move outside the capital area, closer to her relatives, without a new position in sight yet. Both of the participants had no intention to opt out from the sphere of work and were confident that a new job would be found. By the time of this research analysis, both had found new positions at the top management level.

P8: 'I told him [CEO of the company] that, with money, you can buy, and with a horse, you can ride ... and I'll take a little break and develop myself. And that has been an insanely good decision, because like when you work 27 hours a day, you need such breaks. Top management is just an insanely hard job'.

P16: 'I have resigned from [company name] a bit earlier this autumn, and I am now ... and they are recruiting a successor to me. I am in a recruitment process through a head-hunter, but I don't know yet what I am going to do next. This 7 years' endeavour is coming to an end for my part here at [company name], and the future is a question mark'.

Both P8 and P16 stated their current situation and future plans with some hesitation, searching for the right words. However, the determination and confidence of making a right choice resonated through the momentary uncertainty related to a bigger change. P8 voiced her determination to step out but wanted some compensation for the choice to leave. Moreover, P8 discussed her reputation as an acknowledged professional in her field, which is evidenced by the privileged position facilitating the possibilities to make unorthodox choices and accomplish authenticity, whereas P16 relied on her professional competence. Both of the participants worked in the technology industry; P8's career was characterised by frequent changes of employers, and P16 had had only two employers after her graduation from university. However, regardless of their different career patterns and experiences, they shared similar optimism and attitudes towards future opportunities.

Only five participants did not have children; thus, the majority of the participants had experienced one to three parental leave periods during their careers. Parental leaves were not perceived as hindering the careers of the participants and were generally mentioned only briefly as part of career story. However, P13 admitted that she might have progressed earlier to the executive level but chose to stay in current job and reserve time for her family and did not seek or accept more demanding positions while her children were younger. P17 and P11 experienced maternity leaves as stepping stones to new positions when returning to work. P17, with three children, suggested that her supervisor hire a permanent successor to her when she left for her second maternity leave, which lasted a total of three and a half years. It was a deliberate calculated risk to stay away for such a long time, especially when a new CEO had changed the whole organisation while she was absent. However, she was offered a good position, which led to her current role. Maternity leaves were mentioned in the career stories as a neutral part of life and working women's careers.

These attitudes reflect the Finnish welfare society's support and the tradition of dual-earner families as a norm. However, the husband's or family's support and role as an enabler of a leadership career was mentioned only generally in the interviews.

5.1.5. Conclusion of the career patterns

A variety of career mobility patterns—from a single employer to eight employers for over 15 years of professional careers—were found among the participants' career stories, evidencing the multiple routes to the top level of companies. The participants were no exception to the average tenure level in Finland (Sutela et al., 2019): a long professional career experience evidently includes at least a few changes in employment in the contemporary job market (Guan et al., 2019). All three categorised career mobility patterns, conventional linear careers, moderate boundaryless moves and frequent boundaryless moves, lead towards the executive level; thus, the career patterns failed to explain women leaders' career progression.

The participants' career moves were characterised by personal willingness for a change in the pursuit of inspiring work (section 5.4). The lack of more demanding challenges or inspiring tasks in the same organisation after reaching the top level (section 3.2.2) increased interorganisational mobility. However, many of the participants had already been employed for a rather long time by one company. This evidences the companies' aims to engage their key people to maximise the performance of the organisation (Kumar and Pansari, 2015).

Boundarylessness was perceived as a positive phenomenon (Tomlinson et al., 2017), supporting the career development of executive women through finding new possibilities for personal growth and inspiring work tasks beyond the current employer to explore and build a career based on their own preferences (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996). Thus, the notion of a 'scenic route' to the top (Hewlett, 2007) cannot be supported by the present research nor the notion of career boundarylessness as an undesirable phenomenon affecting women's career progression negatively (Sullivan and Baruch, 2009; Inkson et al., 2012).

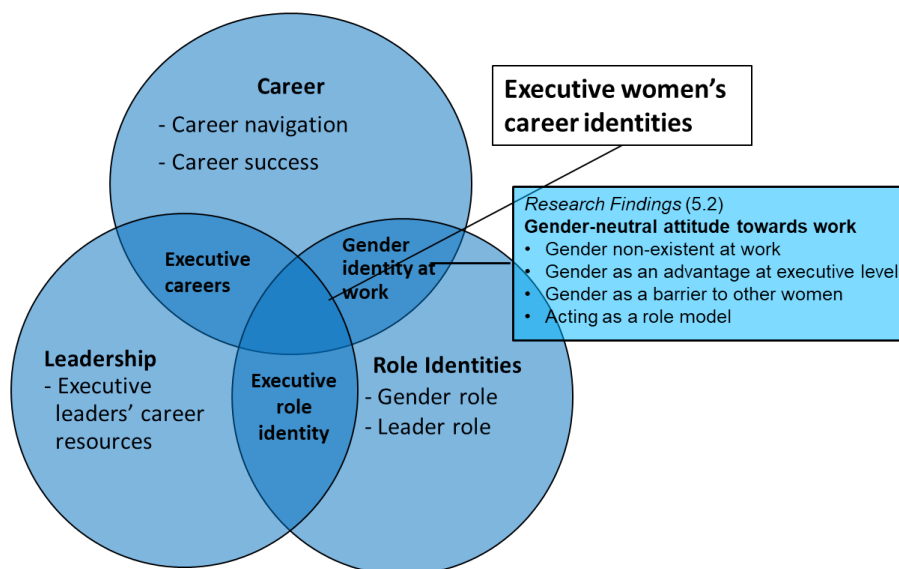
The research findings have demonstrated that women executives have followed various observable career paths that are equally appropriate for navigating their way up to the top management without being constrained by the typical barriers women in middle management face (section 3.4.). Not even parental leaves (section 2.5) hindered their career progression; the participants perceived their return from maternity leave as opening possibilities for negotiating new positions and bigger changes in their work roles. To further investigate the executive women's career navigation, the below sections (5.2–5.4) will discuss subjective careers, perspectives,

attributes, actions and experiences the executive women leaders attached to and interpreted their careers with (Biemann and Braakmann, 2013).

5.2. Gender approach to work

The research findings have contested gender stereotyping (Rudman and Glick, 2001; Hentschel, Heilman and Peus, 2019) and the incongruence of women’s gender and leader roles (Eagly and Karau, 2002) by evidencing an effortless combination of both masculine and feminine behaviours and the characteristics required in the executive leader role. Figure 5.2 positions the findings on gender identities in the conceptual framework of the present research. The three emerging attitudes towards gender at work—nonexistent, advantage and barriers to other women—with the aim of acting as a role model are discussed further in this section.

Figure 5.2: Gender identities



The executive women ingrained stereotypically feminine characteristics and behaviour as part of their executive leader identities and managed to utilise their femininity as a resource (Koenig et al., 2011), each in their own personal way yet without emphasising gender. Similarly, stereotypically masculine characteristics and behaviours formed an inherent part of the executive women’s gender identities.

Even though gender—womanness—was perceived differently in the executive leader role as an advantage, nonexistent or a hindrance to oneself or to other women, the overall tone conveyed in the interviews was gender neutrality. Thus, the executive women ‘did’ and ‘undid’ their gender

(West and Zimmerman, 1987; Butler, 2004) while positioning themselves as gender neutral professional leaders.

A strong pattern across the interviews that has formed a salient finding was the absence of spontaneous gender articulation in most career stories, evidencing gender neutral sense-making. Even though most participants worked in a male-dominant environment, at least when reaching the top management level, only a few included notions of gender among their career experiences and influencing career progression in their career narratives. This feature appeared in the pilot interview, in which the gender discourse was completely omitted, except while the participant was talking about her family background and a masculine leadership style. As a result, a direct question was added to the interview guide (Appendix 6) to break the silence around gender and address the core element of the research's focus specifically on women leader's career identity and success.

The successful career progression of the participants muted the gendered career discourse in most of the career stories: a smooth career navigation without major drawbacks made the common barriers of women's career progression (section 3.4) redundant, and consequently, the lack of personal experiences with gender as a constraint influenced gender articulation in the career stories. The exclusion of gender discourse signals strong gender neutrality and a willingness to eliminate gender from the sphere of work, predisposing meritocratic thinking (Sealy, 2010).

However, the gender neutrality emerging from the interviews did not convey avoidance of the topic by omitting gender. Gender emerged as a part of participants' identities outside the sphere of work; the women executives identified themselves as girls, mothers and wives and engaged in gender discourse when directly asked. The sense-making around gender revolved merely around dismantling stereotypes and broadening the acceptable behaviours and roles of both genders by doing and undoing gender (Butler, 2004). Instead of gender, meritocratic thinking lingered in all interviews and fortified gender neutrality within the work-related discourse (Sealy, 2010).

The absence of spontaneous gender articulation in the career stories appeared particularly surprising in light of the emancipatory motives of the participants who expressed their consent and willingness to participate in this 'important' and 'interesting' research (section 4.3.4). Combined with a straightforward, to-the-point and fact-based, yet casual Finnish communication style (section 2.8.4), a gender neutral and down-to-earth stance operated as an act to encourage other women to pursue the same positions by demystifying and diminishing the gender role and barriers. Hence, they acknowledged their influential position as positive role models for future generations of women executives.

The gender lens of the research may also have been considered obvious from the interview invitation, which communicated the research's focus on women executives. Thus, the participants may have taken an inherent standpoint as an executive, interpreting the gender lens as an integral element of their career story; thus, the need to explicitly emphasise gender was extinct.

The direct interview question researching gender's influence on the careers of the participants confirmed the existence of the common barriers and discrimination as an emerging theme; however, in most of the interviews, through other-referent categorisation as something the participants did not encounter themselves. The participants discussed their gender and womanness with a proud tone in their voices, yet resonating meritocratic thinking as the proudness echoes equally leadership competence, experience and self-efficacy.

Although gender's negative influence on the careers of the participants was almost nonexistent, the executive women perceived gender primarily as redundant, some (6) even seeing it as an advantage to differentiate themselves from the other male executives. However, while distancing themselves from the stereotypical gendered career discourse and negative experiences, they simultaneously acknowledged, through other-referent comparisons, their privileged subject positions in the existing structural and cultural environment in Finland, in which many of the 'other' women have faced barriers in their career progression.

The data related to perceptions of gender originated mostly from the answers to the direct open-ended question investigating how gender has affected the participant's career. However, P4, P8 and P12 also included notions of gender as part of their career stories. The sense-making and multiple perceptions of gender's influence on women executives' own careers and women's careers in general were categorised under following discourses.

- Childhood experiences,
- Gender as an advantage,
- Nonexistent gender influence,
- Gender as a hindrance and
- Gender as a barrier to other women.

Appendix 10 shows a collection of interview quotes according to the categories of gender influence. Next, the key findings and discourse around the topic of gender are discussed in depth based on the categories.

5.2.1. Childhood experiences and leader role models

Construction of the executive leader role identity was perceived as beginning in childhood, while experiences of leadership and gender were discussed proactively through childhood memories, even though gender was not included in the actual career narrations. When given the possibility to begin the career story at any point in their lives (Interview guide, Appendix 6), the participants started the stories with their childhood and school years' memoirs by identifying certain moments or recognising a continuum to the current executive role was to begin already from childhood before the choice of professional studies or work experience.

Many participants perceived their aspirations as being influential positions and motivations to lead (Waldman, Galvin and Walumbwa, 2013a) as originating from their childhood. This finding adheres to Bourdieu's assumptions of the taught schemata of thinking, perceiving and acting as being formed in the early stages of life and, thus, crucially determining one's options in life (Susen and Turner, 2011). The examples of childhood memories echoed both the existence of traditional gender norms and gender equality in the Finnish society by explaining their parents' attitudes that may have influenced the predisposition towards managerial careers.

The executive role identity construction originated from the support of hardworking parents, especially a father, as a role model. The typical Finnish hardworking, straightforward yet humble mentality combined with high performance/result orientation, growth mindset and self-efficacy were portrayed in the career stories as major career resources enabling career choice and development as a leader.

The gender neutral atmosphere in Finland built by the mixed gender school system facilitated the gender neutral thinking and integration of both genders and influenced parents' attitudes, encouraging their daughters to pursue leadership roles. The middle-aged participants grew up in a society in which women's participation at work was already high compared with the other countries, but the number of women in leadership positions was almost nonexistent (Chapter 2). Thus, the leader role model for them was naturally a man, a father in most cases. However, P7 noted her mother's entrepreneurial attitude as her childhood heritage.

Even though women/mothers have supported career choices with their attitudes towards work orientation and gender equality, fathers' encouragement and support were specifically raised as cherished moments between the fathers and daughters. The participants' stories about fathers' influence during their childhood in the 1980s or earlier evidence the alternative, nonhegemonic,

masculinities (Peukert, 2019) men in Finland express. The gender-equal attitudes and dual-earner model were conveyed to their daughters.

P3: *'I come from a family with both parents working all the time, and for example, my mother thought working very important part of one's own identity and brought up clearly that well, you should work ... my father was a leader and we had our common, like joke, that I will become a leader, too, when I grow up'.*

P1: *'I've pretty much absorbed my father's way of working, and he's made a career as an officer in Finnish Army in a variety of positions, and the outspoken way of communicating is inherited from him. Once, when my husband listened to one of my work phone calls, he told me that goddammit the balls are shrinking. [laughing out loud] How can you be so freezingly blunt, he asked me'.*

P4: *'It has been pretty clear to me that I can work in a male-dominated industry because I was growing up with the boys. I was that daddy's girl ... he said that she is the kind of woman who has the balls to do whatever she wants'.*

P10: *'I have always said that my parents have let me be who I am, and maybe I have been given support to be strong, also girls can be strong. My father was really jovial and equal, and in our family, girls were allowed to succeed. Even though my mother has given me the woman's role, it was my father who always supported me'.*

P8: *'Our family friend who was an entrepreneurial business manager and my great idol and was perhaps like a second father to me throughout my childhood, who affected a lot to my career choices. He seemed to me as extremely interesting and fascinating, and those stories about business and entrepreneurship and all that seemed very interesting, much something that wasn't part of my everyday life. And that's probably why I decided at the age of 10 to apply to business school'.*

P15: *'My father always said that you can do anything you want'.*

P5: *'When I was a little girl, I was sitting at my father's workplace in his room on the table [laughing] and said that I will be a leader when I grow up'.*

P2: *'... it definitely comes from my father's accounting company that I start with the numbers and Excel'.*

However, P9 and P13 took an opposing stance, in which the starting point for their occupational and career choices evolved from an eagerness to manage on their own. Moreover, P6 explained the influence of her living arrangements while her parents expatriated and left her behind in Finland, whereas P10 and P11 found the link from hobbies impacting the development of self-efficacy and leader emergence.

P6: 'I lived with my cousins, with four boys, for a year, and then, I lived alone in our house. So I have been on my own rather early in my adolescence'.

P10: 'So ever since I was a little girl, I've been interested in money, and since I was a little girl, I've also been interested in leadership. I started my career as a leader in the Scouts, as a patrol leader director, as a board member and then as a troop leader already at the age of 18. And as I was interested in money, not so that I would have it to myself, but how to work with it, I went to study at the Helsinki School of Economics'.

P11: 'I have coached other athletes in the sports club in addition to my own training when I was very young. I have always taken the leader role, like'.

P14, who identified herself as 'an extremely active person', not capable of shaking herself out of the leader role even during her holidays, articulated a divergent history of a timid child:

P14: 'I wasn't [a leader] as a child, but maybe I was anyway talkative. But leadership role, no I didn't take it when I was young'.

She continued about her long development journey towards adaptation of the leader role:

P14: 'My first leadership position was in a bank in [city name]. I was the director of a small bank office. I had only three or four subordinates, and I couldn't delegate at all. I didn't even dare to ask them to make me coffee when I had a customer coming in. I did it myself, you know. It was very difficult for me to ask people to do something because I thought it was demeaning, as I could do it myself'.

This research finding emphasises the multiple variations and possibilities in identity construction, regardless of the binding and restrictive hegemonic structures of society. Role models, regardless of their gender, provide a source of identity information that individuals can benefit from during their identity construction process (Ibarra, 1999) towards a future leader identity opposing stereotypical

constraints. Thus, a father's influence as a leader role model was perceived as important in the construction of self-efficacy and leadership role identity to executive positions.

Even though leaders and gender roles are something that people are born with, the link to childhood existed in all the interviews. Following a perception of identity being constructed through relational and interactional processes that enabled an individual to incorporate the leader role into her self-concept (DeRue, Ashford and Cotton, 2009), executive role identities were constructed and changed through prior leadership (Elprana et al., 2015) and other experiences and social interactions across time and situations.

Similarly, for Butler (1988), gender identity comprises intentional and performative acts; even though identity construction begins as a child, the discursively created positions through which the self becomes a subject (a woman) are not temporary but continue through a lifetime. Gender neutral and less traditional gender role beliefs are evidenced to enable women's careers in leadership positions in Germany by parents who convey a modern gender role that increases girl's motivation to lead (Felfe and Schyns, 2014). In light of this research, the construction of the leader role identity and gender neutral beliefs begin already in childhood.

5.2.2. Gender as an advantage

Postfeminist thinking asserts that women are advantaged as workers (Lewis, 2014), and P3, P5, P9, P11, P14, P17 perceived gender as a positive construct of their career identity. Womanness constituted a beneficial aspect of their career and leader role from various perspectives: flexibility in leadership styles, visibility/reputation in the organisation and the field and opportunities opened by quotas and other gender equality aims in the society and organisations.

The perceptions of gender influence as a positive factor were not linked with career pattern profiles; the participants discussing positive experiences represented all identified career pattern profiles, including the participants with both the most frequent career moves (P9) and the participant with only one employer (P17).

P9, who had most frequently changed jobs and fields of industries (frequent boundaryless moves), strongly denied the negative impacts of gender on her career. However, she assumed her personal character to be the most important enabler of a career and gender only as a minor part of identity at work. Moreover, she recognised 'drifting' from one job to another as a potential way to avoid people who might discriminate. Career barriers and discrimination based on gender obviously

remain distant when career progression is based on headhunters' offers instead of their own endeavours of applying to open positions.

P17, employed by a single company in the technology industry throughout her career (conventional linear career), identified the benefits of being divergent. For her, gender allowed for more visibility and influence in the organisation. Similarly, P8, who perceived gender as a hindrance, explained her strong reputation in the field of ICT technology being an elemental part of getting job offers. Moreover, P17 recognised a lower pressure to conform to the traditional masculine norms, allowing authenticity and flexibly performing femininities or masculinities. The finding contests the notion of doing gender as a coping strategy for handling female identity, as studied by Powell, Bagilhole and Dainty (2009) in engineering.

Similarly, P12 (CEO, moderate boundaryless career moves) discussed the benefits of being a woman through flexibility and variety in leadership style by using a card play metaphor: playing with two card decks, female and male cards:

P12: 'If you cannot convince them, confuse them [laughs].'

She explained that drawing 'male cards' only when, for example, a competitive negotiation demanded aggressive behaviour that is considered traditionally more masculine. Her strong desire to be authentic to oneself, a woman, fortified her dominant natural feminine style, reflecting her personal identity as a leader.

Doing and undoing gender (Kelan, 2010) increases the variety of behavioural and interactional options, as evidenced by P12, who summarised operating simultaneously as 'a janitor, a team leader and a managing director', all tasks required in the executive CEO role. Thus, combining masculinity and femininity has offered a competitive edge for executive women, more than for men who are less likely to apply feminine behaviour (Hunt-Earle, 2012). The executive women demonstrated leadership styles associated with effective performance (Eagly, 2016) according to situational circumstances.

The 'business case' rationale (Eswaran, 2019) for increasing the number of women in executive positions has opened up more career opportunities for women leaders. Endeavours to specifically hire women executives to improve companies' profitability (Noland, Moran and Kotschwa, 2016), reputation and gender equality permitted more women to executive roles. Appointing a woman in a male-dominated organisation may signal a strategy aiming to communicate change and attract the

attention of various stakeholders. P11 vividly explained how her supervisor made an unexpected offer to her:

'When I returned from the maternity leave, the CEO told me that there were bigger boots available as there was a need for a new COO because they wanted to change the current one and so on ... My first question to him was that does Mister CEO have the right medication? Because it was that kind of an offer. I would picture this to an outsider so that I was at the wrong age, wrong gender, wrong style ... it was a position of a middle-aged man in [company name] Finland and [company name] globally.'

P11 made sense of and acknowledged the masculine norms and gendered structures by positioning herself as the other (Beauvoir and Parshley, 1997), a feminine figure, further explaining her girlish appearance, lively running around the office with her long ponytail swinging from side to side. The repetitive usage of the word wrong, connected with age, gender and style, underlines the dominant masculine leadership norms in the masculine industry. However, her self-efficacy came alive through openness and authenticity (section 5.x). Using humour boldly—'Does Mr. CEO have the right medication?'—in reacting to the surprising offer simultaneously conveyed assertiveness and humbleness. Similarly, P14 uttered her astonishment when she was selected for her current CEO position:

'I found it surprising, because, when I applied, I thought that I was too old, 50+ and also a woman, that those are not merits. But those were exactly the selection criteria.'

In addition to gender, both P11 and P14 acknowledged their demonstrated achievements in the business field, experience, competence and personal character as decisive factors in the selection process. Thus, gender was considered only one beneficial element by the decision-makers. Because changes or unorthodox hiring decisions often contain high risks, the positions offered to women executives may be more precarious and include a high likelihood to fail and fall over a glass cliff (Ryan & Haslam, 2005). However, the participants' uninterrupted career paths without hindering barriers and discourse on the events of changing the business results (P2) or the organisational culture (P3) positively demonstrate their capability to succeed in precarious executive positions.

Additionally, female quotas and equality goals were suggested as career enablers by the participants. To improve women's share in top executive teams and organisations through quotas (Teigen et al., 2012) and recommendations, gender equality goals in Finland open more opportunities for women leaders. P8 discussed the generic tendency to hire more women on

boards based on her own experience as being invited to join a few boards of directors. Similarly, P3 noticed a need to balance the gender ratio in her employer's TMT.

The gender quotas were controversially received from the participants, some taking a strong stance against them while some perceiving them as rather positive opportunities. Participants P4 and P8 represented the opposite opinions: strongly against and pro quota thinking. P4 saw gender quotas as a phenomenon with 'an inherently negative connotation', whereas P8 reasoned the benefits of career opportunities: 'Whatever is available should be taken, quota or not'. For P4, competence and capabilities were the only reasons to hire or invest, as she explained in her comment in an investor event when asked about her company's willingness to invest in gender equality:

'Then, I said pretty sharply that I don't care whether it's Santa Claus, a man, a monkey or a woman. If the company is good, we will invest based on the facts.'

P4's meritocratic thinking lingered throughout her career story when explaining how achievements and results naturally lead to opportunities and jobs, without the need to apply to the positions: '*I have been always taken and asked to*'. Even though P5 identified the fact that she had always been recruited by women as a key reason for considering gender as a benefit, she followed a similar line of thinking with P4. Her pondering of a current recruitment process conveyed a clear inclination towards meritocratic thinking, in which achievements, competence and personal capabilities become more important than demographic factors (Sealy, 2010).

P5: 'Even now, I am in one recruitment process, and they're definitely looking for a woman. I'm like, yeah, I don't want to get selected because I'm a woman. That's the first reaction! I understand, a man, Nordic management team, only men, I really understand, the HR director is a man, too. I understand they're searching for a woman. But for me, it is ... blah. That's not why I want to become selected; I want to get selected because I'm good for the job. So this is what you don't want. But yeah, balance (gender) is good, but quota thinking is not good. I would really argue that people should get to the interview based on what is the level of competence, not gender or religion ...'

Achievement orientation, competitiveness and self-efficacy coloured the opinions with a clear view that recruitment should be fair and based on demonstrated results. However, the rationale for quotas as a means of improving gender equality in Finnish society was accepted, as evidenced in P5 quote above. Similarly, P3 acknowledged the positive effects of womanness when companies seek gender balance in management teams.

P3: *'When I think of the general discussion and comparison, with my acquaintances or friends, own networks, perhaps for my part there is surprisingly little, perhaps so that my own experience ... that I have thought ... it has been an advantage to me. That a balance has been sought, for example, by making sure that there is a woman in the management team.'*

First, P3 noted other-referent comparison barriers other women have encountered and positions themselves distant from the common oppression and discrimination, not fully denying their own negative experiences ('surprisingly little'). Her admitting of gender discrimination can be identified as a construct through the singular past experience demonstrating gender fatigue (Kelan, 2009), while arriving at the positive conclusion of having benefitted from the general gender balance aims in management teams, opening the executive positions to her.

P8 correspondingly acknowledged the gender equality pursuit in the technology field, but added the component of competence—'women who understand'—into the phenomenon. Opposing the other participants, P8 took a positive stance towards the quotas, emphasising the importance of improving gender equality, especially in the fields with low women participation in general, similar to the general aims to inspire and empower more women to STEM education and jobs (Burke and Simmons, 2020).

P8: *'A few headhunters have said that at the moment there is a need for women who understand technology organisations. And there has been such tremendous talk about the diversity of the boards that you can get there on worse merits as a quota woman. And my point of view is that what is available is worth taking. Regardless of whether it's a quota woman position or something else, it is a position anyway.'*

Even though the evidence of women's growing share at the top level has not yielded the expected positive results in increasing women's share in leadership positions, as evidenced in the research on quotas' effects in Norway (Economist, 2018) and Finland, P5 pondered the positive effect of her women supervisors as gatekeepers:

P5: *'This is a very interesting question. In terms of career progression, I have never experienced that I am second because I am a woman. I have not really experienced that gender would have held me back. But I've had some wise women out there hiring me, if there had been a man, would it have gone differently?'*

Thus, P5's experiences contested the 'Queen bee' metaphor, evidencing women top leaders being less supportive of the advancement of other women than their male counterparts (Faniko, Ellemers

and Derks, 2021) and supporting the findings of Arvate, Galilea and Todescat (2018), coining the concept of 'Regal leader' with a benevolent attitude towards subordinate women.

Even though gender was perceived as an advantage, the surprise (P11, P14) and hesitation (P3) in the narratives communicate the existence of gendered structures at work in Finland. Both vertical and horizontal segregation of the workforce in Finland have underlined the exceptional and privileged standpoint of women executives who have not faced obstacles and, thus, perceived their gender as an advantage, among other qualities. The idiosyncratic perceptions rooted in positive personal career experiences have highlighted achievement orientation, motivation to lead and influence and self-efficacy over the influence of gender, supporting the findings of Nentwich and Kelan (2014) claiming that women leaders undo gender when they perceived it as less relevant to making sense of a situation.

The next section discusses the neutral perceptions of gender influence at work.

5.2.3. **Nonexistent gender influence**

Most participants did not explicitly articulate gender as a significant element influencing their career progression. However, only three participants (P4, P6, P16) clearly considered their career experiences as gender neutral.

Even though some of the participants had worked with supervisors, calling them 'girls' and expressing their thoughts on women as a lesser gender, these circumstances and incidents were described with a neutral tone, revealing an attitude of simply bypassing and rising above the suppression. Consequently, instead of denying gender discrimination, the executives acknowledged gender as a construct or structural issue and named singular events that happened in the past, like P3, arriving on the more advantageous side of gender in the end.

P16 referred to her persona and chance instead of gender and perceived that gender was not relevant in the context of work when asked how gender has affected her career.

P16: 'Have I ever really thought about it? [pause], The first answer is no. Yes, the answer is no. It is more about being related to serendipity or luck, I mean, and to my persona ... if I were a man, I believe I would be in the same position in the same way'.

P4 strongly promoted gender neutrality and verifies the absence of personal experiences of discrimination, which aligned with her meritocratic thinking.

P4: 'I have never had anything like what others report, thankfully. I work in a male-dominated field, and I never experienced that someone had like put me down or treated worse'.

Professional attitude and competence were repeated in both P4's and P6's experiences. Their own sensitivity and reactions to belittling and discrimination attempts were emphasised in the gender neutral career experiences.

P6: 'I think it is neutral. But I'm not sensitive to these matters; either, it might be that someone else could have observed better or taken pepper in the nose more easily. Not me, I won't get irritated easily if there was anything''

P6 further referred to her experience as an expatriate with reverse gender roles in her family: she made a quick decision to leave Finland, while her husband and children followed soon after. She recognised herself as the other one among her middle-aged male colleagues but remained in the gender neutral stance.

P6: 'I'm sure there's no harm or benefit, but all those other expats were middle-aged men with a wife at home. In that sense, I was a bit of an exception, but I can't say that anyone would have oppressed or disturbed. I was only deviant'.

P4 discussed her aim to hire more women, but encountered a challenge with the lack of women working in financing because most students in the field were men. Especially for executive leaders, the organisational culture and structures aiming for gender neutrality or equality of which they held the accountability at the highest decision-making level may pose an ideological dilemma and may lead to gender fatigue (Kelan, 2009): how executive women could admit gender discrimination and execute the organisations gender neutrality actions simultaneously. However, the career stories went beyond the current employment, thus mitigating an articulation of the paradox of oppressing from the powerful position within the gendered structure and being oppressed because of their own gender at the same time.

5.2.4. Gender as a hindrance

Four participants (P8, P10, P12, P15) explicitly mentioned situations in which their gender had affected their career experiences negatively. Yet the participants' career progression had not been stopped by the barriers and hindrances faced. Agency and self-efficacy were described as common solutions to the challenges: if one cannot succeed, the advice was to take the lead and find a more suitable industry or environment. Persistence and taking responsibility were

emphasised more generally in the context of career progression, evidenced by P10's advice to herself and other women: *'Why bang your head against the wall? Seek another path'*.

Additionally, P13 uttered her 'other-referent' experiences in a manner that can be interpreted as her own experience. The experiences were expressed as generic by changing the narration tense from the first person to a second singular passive form or general passive format when entering the downsides of gender, leaving room for alternative interpretations.

P10, who has worked in mechanical engineering and other heavily male-dominant industries before changing to the service industry, emphasised the differences between the fields of industries. P10 perceived her gender as a barrier and, consequently, has changed from the technology industry to the service industry, which is more feminine friendly.

P10: 'Unfortunately, it is still like a red flag in the business in many organisations and organisational cultures when you, as a strong woman, get results. I have worked in the mechanical engineering industry, and there are only 3% women, and it is not the easiest place in the world'.

Similarly, working in technology industry, P8, with a solid reputation in the ICT field, identified the greater opportunities for men to move from one professional field to another.

P8: 'Having been working in male-dominated fields, if I had been a man, it would have been easier for me to change my own field, for example, from marketing to sales or product development or production, so yes, gender makes a difference. Yes, it affects your opportunities'.

P15, even though working in a more gender-equal industry in healthcare, identified the barriers. With a background in banking and insurance, she took a more hesitant stance on gender's negative effects.

P15: 'Well, certainly has affected, definitely, Both ways. But I wouldn't say more than any other characteristics, that you are open and outgoing. Maybe earlier, I would have said no, but I also see situations in which you could have progressed and gender is still a barrier. So that is how it is, still is. Unfortunately'.

The long experience as a leader and career path leading to the top executive level has changed her opinion: the higher up positions in the organisation, the fiercer the competition and less women

are considered as potential candidates for the top management positions. Thus, her perception of gender as a hindrance resulted merely from the position level rather than from the field of industry.

P12 introduced masculine norms and discrimination by comparing herself to her male colleagues with a 'tasters' metaphor, depicting how women are required to demonstrate their achievements more than men. She acknowledged the different requirements and positions offered:

P12: When I came in [selected to the CEO position], the situation couldn't continue like that. It was also a bit windy position. Those [positions] are wanted by many male colleagues, but many of them do not dare to take it. So it [gender] affects in many ways; you see what kind of men progress. And you see that you had to have really big tasters and lean heavily forward. I can see this, especially when I look at my colleagues. The demands for women, especially in a way with the business responsibility, it is ... one has to have, has to, produce, produce a lot. Be strongly co-operational and yet firm. And to get the deals done so that you are not bitchy'.

Women's performance level must be higher and achievement more impressive compared with men, which was clearly demonstrated proactively by concrete results. The women's gender and leader role incongruence (Eagly and Karau, 2002) was labelled in P12's narrative by the adjective 'bitchy'. The cultural mismatch, role incongruity, between women and the perceived demands of executive leaders' biased evaluations existed, according to P12.

The participants often compared their softer or more participatory leadership style (Gipson et al., 2017) and behaviour with male colleagues, evidencing the existing paradoxical gendered leadership norms in Finland. Women executives were expected to demonstrate firm leadership, financial business understanding, aggressive sales attitudes and competitiveness; however, only P12 entered the discourse on penalties of representing stereotypically masculine traits and behaviours, whereas for the others, they seemed to belong to the woman's repertoire (Koenig et al., 2011; Leicht et al., 2017).

An explanation for avoiding or overcoming the career barriers faced by other women was the pragmatic mode to confront potential discrimination through concentration on work performance and maintaining professionalism by ignoring or overlooking the misogynistic comments by men:

P13: 'Once they see that the jokes don't work, they will eventually stop'.

Emerging belittling and oppression were responded to by ignoring the situation and to rise above the malicious attempts by male colleagues. A few participants described their way of doing gender

by 'fooling them [men]' by utilising femininity and pretending to be 'a stupid blond' (P5), which puts the men off guard and forces them to make mistakes. Thus, entering the competition and attacking secretly by surprise was employed, though this was done by disguising the result-oriented masculine performance in stereotypical softer womanness by appearance and behaviour. In using the surprise tactic, the participants positioned themselves above their male colleagues and turned the typical feminine behaviour to their advantage (section 5.2.2) when combined with masculinity, showing the universal nature of the traditional stereotypes (Koenig et al., 2011).

5.2.5. Other-referent gender influence in Finland

Even though the own gendered experiences described in the interviews were scarce, all participants engaged in the gendered career discourse and acknowledged the barriers gender poses to women's careers in general, which was also frequently mentioned as the main reason to participate in the present research. The aim of the research to show positive examples of successful women and, thus, find new avenues for research and practice, provided a platform to contribute to the common good and act as a role model to other women and younger generations of leaders, regardless of gender.

A shared meaning emerged in the articulation of the common career barriers that women managers encounter (section 3.5). The prevalence of the barriers was generally voiced through other-referent comparison and observation of other women struggling with their careers, giving examples of women the participants know had experienced harassment, oppression or discrimination based on their gender. The participants positioned themselves as commonly external to gender effects at work by contrasting themselves with other women who may have struggled to advance to the top executive position. Thus, the existence of the gendered labour market in Finland (section 2.2.2) was verified by acknowledging one's own exceptional standpoint and privilege as a woman in an executive leader position. This reveals the societal discourse on labour segregation and gendered work norms in Finland (section 2.2.2). For example, P7 verified the structural barriers for women through the masculine stereotypes of executives; when a head-hunter and a recruiting director starts profiling the positions, the suitable candidate is often referred to as 'a guy or a buddy'.

P12 expanded her own experiences of barriers (5.4.4) to other women in general by describing the social behaviour, thus reinforcing the existence of the glass cliff phenomenon (Ryan and Haslam, 2005; Hewlett, 2008):

P12: So there has been a lot of playing all kinds of social playbooks around. Because, otherwise, you can't [succeed]. If you don't perform, you will be kicked out immediately'.

P8 identified the glass cliff phenomenon of selecting women to precarious leadership positions in poorly performing organisations, which headhunters kept proposing to her (Ryan and Haslam, 2005; Bruckmüller et al., 2014) and she kept on rejecting. Similarly, as evidenced in research among politics, male candidates are not penalised as severely as female candidates for repeated integrity failings (Thomas and Petrow, 2021). P8 discussed how women are allowed a second chance after a failure (Hewlett, 2008) by comparing some of the well-known Finnish male top executives who moved from one large company to another after 'continuous epic failures', while their female counterparts disappeared from the pool of top executives because of minor mistakes.

The present research has indicated the tendency of women to engage in gender neutral discourse claiming hard work, demonstrated achievements and self-efficacy as the antecedents of career success, despite the general experiences and observations in Finnish society to tell them otherwise. The empirical research among female Ph.D. students in engineering (Erickson, 2012) has conveyed similar findings. However, when researching successful professionals at the top level of large organisations instead of students, the emphasis on hard work and demonstrated prior achievements logically shows the reality: the fierce competition on the scarce positions available, which exist without the gender perspective. Yet reaching the top level appears to be more challenging for women in Finland, as the statistics have verified (section 2.3.1).

5.2.6. Doing and undoing gender at the executive level

The current research has contested the gender essentialisation (Ronen, 2018) that occurs when assumptions about an executive's characteristics and competencies are made based on gender. The research findings have demonstrated that women executives' gender identities are constructed of both stereotypically masculine and feminine elements. The findings support the idea of agency and communion as universal dimensions of human behaviour (Schmader and Block, 2015).

The stereotypical norms of behaviour have been, though, acknowledged through discussion of both traditionally masculine and feminine behaviours, which are benefitted in suitable situations (Ely and Rhode, 2010). Thus, being a woman at the top management is considered a benefit because it provides the possibility to act with the full spectrum of masculine and feminine traits and behaviours.

P12's vivid and comprehensive career story, including a myriad of metaphors, provided a rich example of the multifacetedness of gender identity performed and required in the executive leader role. She described her inherent supportive leadership role with an elephant mother metaphor, in which she emphasised her attitude towards a participatory leadership style: 'lifting the baby elephants (her team members) with a gentle push with her trunk from the muddy paddles when they get stuck'. However, when the situation demanded, P12 engaged in the common masculine hypercompetitive behaviour, for example, 'the foreseen drama' acted in business negotiations, when the participants announced their 'hard stops' as trying to win the game of who is the most important (equals busiest) person and needs to leave first. Or the softness changing to an extremely painstaking arrogance when demanding decisions from the counterparty:

P12: 'I could draw this traditional fight card on the table and be like this: is it A or B? A or B? We can negotiate, but is it A or B?'

Masculinity can become part of gender identity through social interaction, blending with the feminine constructs of the executive leader role in situations where calculated beneficial (Denizci Guillet et al., 2019). The experiences in childhood (5.2.1) disrupt the binary logic of stereotypes, providing evidence for the multiplicity of gender constructs and their origins. Thus, becoming 'one of the guys' (Deutsch, 2007; Powell, Bagilhole and Dainty, 2009) may have developed earlier in life as an authentic element of identity instead of being a coping mechanism. The ability to display multiple gendered behaviours may direct career choices towards executive leadership positions, which are assumed to be more agentic (Eagly and Karau, 2002).

P11: 'Still, I can imagine myself with middle-aged suit-men. I had very long hair then, often tied high up in a ponytail. Me going to the men, that hey, you should pay attention to the customers. I have always been good at this kind of work and done it with my personality, being authentic and built on my strengths ... Once, we had some discussion on men and women, and my colleague said to me, but you are that kind of hybrid-gendered. But I don't recognise myself as a bloke, on the contrary. I try to, you know, smile and use the strengths as much as possible'.

The executive women were not 'adopting' masculine styles (Fletcher, 2004) to fit in among their male colleagues. Instead, masculinity existed as part of the repertoire that the executive women could demonstrate authentically.

The current research supports the findings of Dozier (2019) on masculine females in diverse occupations, suggesting a greater complexity in how men and women are held accountable to gender. Additionally, accountability to gender may vary according to different circumstances. Specifically, in the executive role, the highest decision-making authority demands determination and assertiveness, yet variation of leadership style is broader. In the executive leader role, masculinity is not perceived to disqualify women executives, nor to operate as a coping mechanism, because the stereotypically masculine constructs are coined as inherent and authentic qualities of the executive women. Thus, the findings contest West and Zimmerman's (2009) claims that, although gender domains continue to change, accountability for gender remains.

The use of dichotomy in distinguishing male and female leaders leaves no room for women and men to display stereotypically opposite behaviours without confronting norms and expectations. However, the Finnish culture allows more variety in gender representation compared with, for example, China, where the traditional gender stereotypes are still alive, even among women leaders who reject the leader identity and emphasise the domestic role of women (Zhao and Jones, 2017).

However, the stereotypical differences in leadership styles were acknowledged and adopting masculinity was seen as a negative strategy for women in leadership positions:

P7: 'To promote female leadership by women leaders adopting the traits of male leaders is not the right way. Because I think it's just submission to the patriarchy. Rather, it derives from the inherent soft interpersonal skills that are typical for women. Not to dispel them, but to sustain the gender sensitivity and increase the benefits of it'.

The emphasis of gender neutrality at work reached from an individual executive role identity construct to a societal phenomenon: the demand for gender neutrality also emerged in the interviews as a societal and cultural construct in Finland. P12 engaged in a long discussion of the 'dark side' of the gendered leadership discourse and quotas emphasising the positive dispositions of feminine stereotypes in connection to contemporary leadership paradigms (Alvesson and Billing, 1997; Due Billing and Alvesson, 2000).

P12: 'It sometimes messes up people's understanding of what the job [CEO] demands. Some women think that they need to get the CEO position because they are women. They don't think about the content of the job and whether they are ready for the fight or not. And continues passionately: "It would be good to get rid of this whole female–male discussion; otherwise, we might end up in a situation with only a lot of fuss, and the consequence is that

when more women come, it is not their thing, as it is neither for all men. But then the women become examples why wouldn't this work!"

Highlighting the advantages of female leadership and exaggerating gender contribute to a perpetuation of gender inequality (Lammers and Gast, 2017) and may create false assumptions of the executive role requirements, which will create backlash when women are selected for positions based on their gender, not competence, experience and potential. Potential failing in the roles will have an equal negative effect on society's evaluation of businesswomen as in selecting women, over men, to precarious glass cliff positions (Bruckmüller et al., 2014).

Moreover, the lack of gender representation in the career narratives and articulated gender neutrality repeated the Finnish meritocratic and democratic heritage. In the pilot study, some women declined to participate in the public campaign to avoid gender labelling and aiming to be recognised as a leader, not a woman leader (section 2.6). Consequently, the participants appreciated the possibility of participating in the interviews as anonymous and confidential.

The executive women presented rare examples of women leaders who opposed the paradox of gender and leadership role's masculine hegemony effortlessly (Atewologun and Sealy, 2014). The findings of the present research support Baker and Kelan's (2019) claims that many executive women uphold the neoliberal ideal that perseverance leads to success, regardless of gender. However, the perception of executive women rejecting and individualised structural inequalities has not been supported by the findings of the present research: the executive women acknowledged the gendered structures and inequality in the Finnish society and tried to act as role models and help other women, as evidenced by P2 and P3. P2 was nominated as the best leader of the group competition in which four out of five nominees were women and was delighted that the winner was a female colleague.

P2: 'Of course, I always hope that the best wins, regardless of gender, as in all things, skills or know-how should take one forward. However, in this matter [gender], I get a slight feeling that little bit of help is needed, as it is not that obvious'.

P3 followed the similar support of gender balancing in the organisation:

P3: 'I was very delighted when we were divided into two business lines and a woman was chosen as our marketing services leader. You will recognise it and be pleased. This way, yes, it is good that those role models exist and they are needed'.

Thus, gender neutrality did not diminish the advocacy of gender equality. The executive women kept the gender discourse silent in the arenas where it did not create any added values in their leadership role. The importance of gender equality was conveyed in the gender articulation. All this made room for meritocratic thinking, as competence, experience and capabilities (to learn and develop) were emphasised over gender as means to eliminate the potential barriers women face in their careers because of their gender or sex category.

In Finland, gender neutrality includes both genders. P13 extended her family orientation to include her husband as well ('we value family'), emphasising democratic decision-making and seeking family's support on potential promotions that demand balancing work and private life. Thus, in dual-earner families in Finland, career-related choices equally include both genders (section 2.2.1). P6's example of her decision to accept an expatriate position abroad evidenced the spouse's support (Heikkinen, Lämsä and Hiillos, 2014) and equality in Finnish dual-earner families. However, in comparison with other countries, Finland was not considered a model society for gender equality, especially when compared with Sweden:

P4: 'A friend welcomed us to work in Sweden; there's no such thing there. She feels that it's easier there. She's always got whatever leadership position when applying. Others say the same thing: that it is really sticky in Finland. It's not said out loud, but there's real age racism here, and that's a fact'.

Similarly, P2, who has worked in Swedish organisations and reported to Swedish supervisors, assumed a cultural difference between the two neighbouring countries:

P2: 'Especially in Sweden, young women, I think more than in Finland, are supported. Family is not considered a threat the same way as in Finland'.

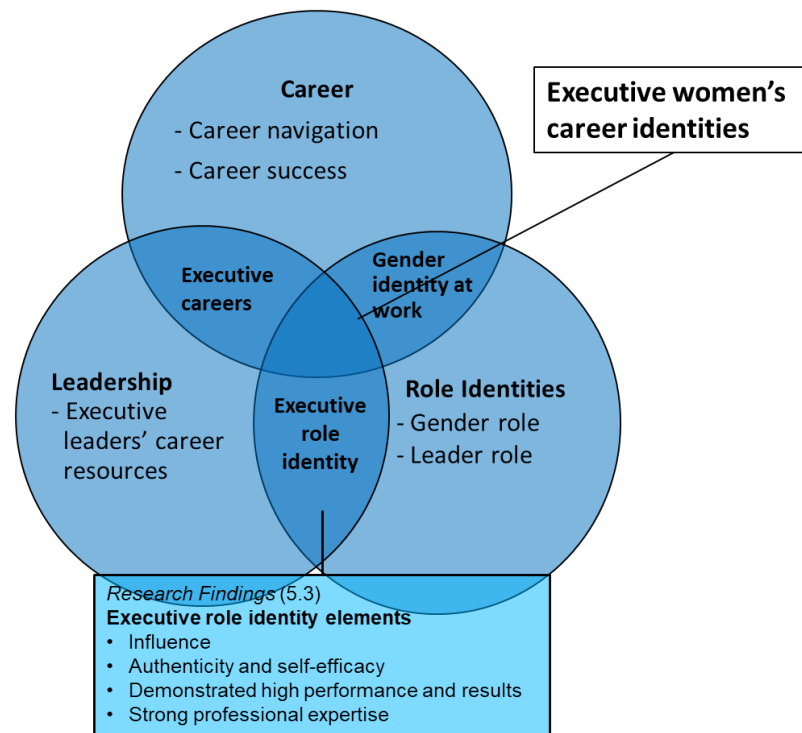
In conclusion, the present research has portrayed executive women as professional yet feminine leaders capable of navigating their career paths successfully in the male-dominant top management of the Finnish business world without major constraints. A gender neutral attitude diminishes the gendered perspective in the sphere of work from a privileged standpoint at the top of the decision-making hierarchy, enforcing meritocratic thinking built around competence and demonstrating achievements. The gender identity of executive women was constructed on multifaceted elements, when meritocracy, the emancipatory aims of role modelling, postfeminist thinking and gendered experiences transcend beyond the traditional binary feminine/masculine stereotypes of men and women.

Because of the equal and democratic culture and role of women participating in work in Finland, the ascribed gender role for women was less feminine than in more masculine cultures (section 2.5). Thus, less traditional gender role beliefs were evidenced to improve women's motivation to lead (Elprana et al., 2015). The gender role beliefs of the participants were already constructed in childhood. The parents, especially fathers', support and encouragement to leadership positions and hard work alleviated the gender barriers and improved self-efficacy of the participants (section 5.2.1)

5.3. Executive role identities

Four imperative discourses were identified through an inductive-deductive approach while exploring the representations of executive leader role in the data. At the surface level, the findings may seem contradictory. However, regardless of the complexity and tensions related to gender, coherent authentic executive role identities were constructed and conveyed from the interviews. Figure 5.3 shows the findings on executive role identities in the research conceptual framework. The four emerging executive identity elements—*influence*; *authenticity and self-efficacy*; *demonstrated high performance and results*; and *strong professional expertise*—are discussed further in section 5.3.

Figure 5.3: Executive role identity elements



The findings indicate multifaceted constructs of identities (Gecas, 1982) through which the executive women shaped their subjectivities from their executive leader roles. The executive role consisted of multiple positions as a leader: a leader to own direct reports, a leader of a whole business unit, geographical area or function and a leader among peers on a management team. P5 provided a sharp question to clarify a follow-up question on her perception of leader role: *‘Do you mean me as a leader in the management team or a leader to my team members? It is a completely different thing’*.

The participants’ constructs of the executive leader’s role fell under four themes: 1) influence through leadership, 2) high performance and results, 3) authenticity and self-efficacy and 4) professional substance area expertise. Table 5.5 presents the categories from the data, the participants and topical literature connected to the themes.

Table 5.5: Leader role representations connected to literature

| Theme | Leader role representations in the data | Themes in literature |
|-------|--|---|
| 1 | <p>Influence through leadership</p> <p>Leader role central part of identity</p> <p>Aspiration to excellence in people leadership</p> <p>Transformational leadership</p> | <p>Transformational leadership style typical of women leaders (Koburtay, Syed and Haloub, 2019)</p> |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| | | Transformational leadership (Bass and Riggio, 2006; Blane, 2017) Motivation to lead (Chan and Dragow, 2001) |
| 2 | Demonstrate achievements and results Demonstrating achievements Growth and personal development orientation Seeking new challenges High-performance orientation Ambition | High-achieving women (Gersick and Kram, 2002; Ely, Stone and Ammerman, 2014; Marcus and Olinsky, 2015; Wolontis and Hoff, 2018) Ambition (Fels, 2004; Sools, van Engen L. and Baerveldt, 2007; Harman and Sealy, 2017) |
| 3 | Authenticity Not willing to compromise Not glancing sideways Following high moral and ethical standards | Authentic leadership (Ibarra, 2015) Authenticity and gender (Eagly, 2005) |
| 4 | Professional substance area expertise Reputation in own professional field Business and financial understanding Sales skills Ability to Strategic thinking | Women in STEM (Burke and Simmons, 2020) Executive job demands (Hambrick, Finkelstein and Mooney, 2005) |

5.3.1. Influence through leadership

The participants emphasised the motivation to lead and excellent people skills as decisive success factors of executive leaders. The leader role constructs an integral element of executive women's career identity, as suggested by the early motivation to lead (Chan and Dragow, 2001; Waldman, Galvin and Walumbwa, 2013b; Schyns, Kiefer and Foti, 2020) in the participants' childhood (section 5.2.1). Day and Harrison (2007) proposed that 'thinking of oneself as a leader is an important motivator for acting as a leader and developing further leadership skills' (pp. 365–366).

Most (14) of the participants underlined the leader role as a main element in their career identity and motivational factor to their career and professional development. The only participants (P2 and P6) taking a divergent stance described how leading people has been an unavoidable necessity a leader needs to develop as the work role becomes more substantial and involves larger people responsibilities. However, their motivation to lead has increased with leadership experience (Chan and Drasgow, 2001). The leader role has become more effortless and a natural part of their executive role, even though their work motivation has arisen merely from the work content and results rather than from people leadership. Similarly, P12 denoted her delegation skills development from the beginning of her career (section 5.2.1); however, the leader role has always been an integral construct of identity to her. *P14: 'Something in the way of working has always pointed to taking a leadership role'.*

Additionally, P17 described the executive leader role construction and development as a more strategic role. She completed a lot of work that should have been done by her team members at the beginning of her leadership career, acknowledging her development of the ability to withdraw from operational tasks and focus on getting others to perform the tasks. The leadership development stories of the participants also verified their growth orientation to constantly improve their skills to become better leaders.

The leader role was perceived to accumulate influence. Executive leaders execute power to exert influence and achieve goals within the work role's context. Hence, leading requires that the leader has power (Sturm, Herz and Antonakis, 2021). Even though power was generally perceived as a central element of leadership (Williams, 2014), the word power was absent in the discourse of the executive leader role. The participants commonly substituted power with a softer word influence, which is more compatible with the word 'leader', an individual who is supposed to use her position to support the followers and improve the company's outcomes (Williams, 2014). Only one participant (P5) clearly announced her motivation to lead and influence through a powerful position, not hiding the coercive power and responsibility included in the executive role.

P5: 'I've always wanted to influence, and then, it's logical that you have to have a position where you have power. The responsibility, of course, it's always been clear'.

The discourse on equality and privilege in Finland (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2021) has guided the discourse of power towards more inclusive concepts. Discussing power through leadership—or leading—and influence suggests positive images of a person who, from her position, brings a team into a completion of shared goals through servant (van Dierendonck, 2011) or transformational (Bass, 2006) leadership. Consequently, the avoidance of the word power in the

context of leadership communicated both the paradigm shift towards more participatory and less authoritative leadership paradigms (Hlupic, 2014b) and equality and democracy in Finland, which assumed people do not exert power by lifting themselves over other people, regardless of the status of the person (section 2.7). For example, P14 explained the low hierarchies in Finland, and P8 made sense of the executive role in supporting the teams by bearing the ultimate responsibility.

P14: 'I am not pompous at all, and I don't wear a suit, so to say. I speak a common language and meet people as equals. I don't have a boss syndrome, and I receive feedback that we are [in the company] like common people, and by that, I get a lot done'.

P8: 'People need to be informed, openly. Therefore, I am deadly honest and deadly open in my communication. Be it difficult or not. I don't build layers; everything will be communicated to everyone as much as possible. And this way, I play the good cop–bad cop game with my teams. They can take care of the good matters, and I will handle the bad issues, and when the shit hits the fan, I will take the blame, and my team members can continue working without problems in their own communities'.

The equality of Finnish society and culture ascribed to the leadership norms and an acceptable leader role included rather informal communication and low power distance (Section 2.7), which was also present during the interviews. According to P17, the hierarchies and culture, even in traditional masculine factory organisations, are rather egalitarian. She compared Finland and US through her summer job experience in the US when she was trying to connect with another woman in a heavily male-dominant environment:

P17: 'The hierarchies in the US were really different. Even though it is the same here, as well. But here in a factory, it is so that we want to be in cliques. In the US, it was more hierarchical and not appropriate to hang out with the only other woman who was working in another department and higher in rank'.

The participants perceived influence connected with both leadership (communal orientation) and work results (goal orientation) as a desired element of the role. The research findings support the reasoning of London et al. (2019) that communal goal-oriented leaders perceive power as a responsibility and act in prosocial ways, supporting teams.

P15: 'I think I am quite inspiring and encouraging. I am also fast and impatient, uhm, I think people would say that I am nice. I am a nice person'.

All the participants claimed to adhere to people-oriented, participatory and coaching leadership styles, emphasising the power of working together with a team. The findings repeat the empirical evidence suggesting that women lead in a more democratic and participatory manner in comparison to men (Eagly and Carli, 2003; Koburtay, Syed and Haloub, 2019). Female leadership follows the transformational leadership style, focusing on leaders' ability to act as good role models and inspire and support their team members (van Engen and Willemsen, 2004).

P3: 'My career has been greatly boosted by the fact that, regardless of the positions, I have always been perceived as a people person'.

P9: 'I crystallise this to one thing: I am good with people, I am, like, good with people. Earlier, people were talking about managers and leaders. I am a leader because everything is done by people'.

P7: 'I don't believe that business can be led. I believe that people can be led. You cannot lead a business without leading people'.

P11: 'On the one hand, it is persistence and hard work and attitude, drive. And the soft side is that you believe in getting people along because nobody can perform alone. The first question is whether the people are with you'.

Even though the participants identified themselves as divergent from the masculine authoritarian (Harms et al., 2018) leadership style, especially P5, P12 and P10 acknowledged the need for a variety of leadership style for in some situations, in which their 'impatient' and 'demanding' sides complemented the inspirational leader identity. The flexible use of various approaches coincided with situational intelligent leadership, which adapted to the situations at hand and assumed various styles to be performed. The more varied repertoire of leadership styles is used, the more efficient the leadership will be (Goleman, 2005). Personal dominance, strong authority and control over subordinates demonstrate the other side of executive leader role identities. This more traditionally masculine range of the executive leaders' leadership behaviour can be employed according to the need for managerial corrective action or goal pursuit.

P5: 'And then it must be so that, in return, if someone does not perform, goes the wrong way, or is not trustworthy, the problems need to be dealt with. That's how it spins around. I am not afraid of difficult situations because the more you have leadership experience and the higher up you work, the more the difficult situations emerge. You have difficult discussions with people and you need to make big changes in the organisation, so I am not afraid of them. First, bigger downsizing almost took my marriage and my well-being, but unfortunately, well I

don't write this in my CV, I am also a good axe-man. One has learned that as long as you work in a commercial company chasing results, it is your job; it is part of it. And I don't say that I have learned to like it, but it is one task I am able to do. These are the difficult tasks, a strength built through the experience, which you can tolerate as part of the job'.

P10: 'Coaching leadership style is maybe the right term for me. At the same time, I am demanding. If someone is not doing his job or is simply not good enough according to my performance standards, I don't take that for long. I will do something about it because I demand that everyone in my organisation does his/her best. If the abilities are not sufficient, you have to do something, like changing the person. So someone could say I am a cold person, but no. I will take good care of the people who remain on the team'.

P12: 'People often tell me that it is great that you can be a warm and value-based leader in such an equal and fair way, but still, you can occasionally be a bitch from hell. The toughness is not really a value per se; it is a matter of conduct, and nowadays, you rarely need to be tough'.

P17: 'I am stubborn and persistent. When I take on a task, it will be done'.

The participants acknowledged and performed their influential position. However, simultaneously, they avoided the acceptance of cohesive power from their agentic positions at the top hierarchical level as an attempt to demonstrate participatory and transformational leader role identity, which can be seen as connected with better leadership results according to contemporary leadership discourse (Koburtay, Syed and Haloub, 2019). The participants' sense-making around the incongruence of the female gender role and leader role (Eagly and Wood, 2012; Eagly, 2016) remained minor and did not result from inabilities to excel in the executive leader role. On the contrary, the leader role representations of the participants demonstrate a successful match of the female gender and leader roles in the contemporary leadership paradigm shift (Hlupic, 2014a) towards more stereotypically feminine traits and behaviour, which may facilitate the emergence of women leaders to the top level of business organisations.

5.3.2. Excellency through demonstrated achievements and results

The second theme constructing executive role identities coincided with the main goals and mission of the work at the executive level: to ensure and deliver business results. Compared with the supervisory and middle-management roles, an executive's primary role to execute and ensure business results within her own area of responsibility by leadership and management at a strategic level (section 3.3). Thus, executive leaders are selected to lead organisations based on their

results, behaviour and character (Hollenbeck, 2009). The orientation towards and ability to reach high performance and results (Kragt and Day, 2020) are the prerequisites of the executive leader role, regardless of gender.

Executive women leaders represent real-life examples of the postfeminist shift from objectification to subjectification (Gill, 2007): the participants demonstrated agentic, active and doing subjects instead of being passive objects. Even though the participants did not explicitly describe themselves as high achievers or high performers, partly because of the Finnish inherent hardworking and humble mentality (section 2.7), hard work and performance orientation clearly characterised the executive leaders' identities. Ambition to high achievements, results and performance orientation were repeated in every interview as crucial antecedents of executive career success.

Adhering to meritocratic (Sealy, 2010) thinking, the participants opined that, without demonstrated accomplishments and competence, it is impossible to build a credible reputation as a business professional and achieve a position among the few leaders who are selected to compete for the scarce top-level executive positions. Thus, the participants perceived demonstration of achievements and a result orientation as crucial for executive identity and the resources needed to succeed in the executive role.

Determination and assertiveness demonstrate high self-efficacy, echoing the strong and clear articulation of performance and results, while P10, P9, P1 and P2 stated their leader identities:

P10: 'I make results. So I am very strongly profiled as a result-oriented person. Surely, being able to make results and efficiently convince people. I haven't complained about small issues. I have taken risks, exposed myself and rolled up my sleeves'.

P9: 'When I decide something and I want something, I will get it. It is done'.

P1: 'I can transform and also throw myself consciously into new ways of doing. And at the same time, I am, like, a very, very much a drudge. I am a performance machine in a certain way. As an inner-born feature, I hate routines; in a certain way, I hate routines, but I'm a routine machine. This is a very contradictory thing'.

P2: 'I know that I am productive. When I start with something, I will be finished. As I said earlier, I am a hard worker. It is not natural to me to be strategic; it is others' role. I am an

implementer. I made it into the goal. In that way, I am terribly active and productive. I think it is the courage and hard-headedness that have taken me forward'.

P1 and P2 identified contradictions in their relation to high-performance orientation. Both acknowledged that they were hardworking, and P2 was especially a results-oriented person. Even though P1 claimed to hate routines, she was willing to tolerate them as the performance orientation pushed her to execute and achieve, like a machine. Yet her performance-oriented disciplined way of working reached the sphere of development because she deliberately and consciously decided to engage in changing the routines.

P2's role as a country manager demanded strategic thinking at the executive management level. However, she knew her strengths rested in implementation rather than strategic work, which she identified as a development area she had been working on. She continued describing the achievements of turning a loss-making unit into a profitable one more than once, which is a remarkable success evidencing her capabilities. Her identity as a capable business transformation leader has paved the way to the executive level and resulted in job offers of similar roles in other companies.

P2: 'And when I started in that job, I got a heavily loss-making unit with no one really in the role of a country manager for two years because of the variety of corporate transactions and changes of ownership. It was turned into a profitable one in two years. So that was maybe that first, bigger showcase. I had made a little similar exercise when I worked as a store manager, and then, I got a heavily loss-making store transformed into a profitable one in eight months ... Then, I was persuaded to the current job; they had heard that I had done the turnaround. They had a similar situation. So again, a similar situation was that they needed someone to come and put the business in order. And of course, it is a bit scary to start it again; it's not just a day's job to do the turnaround. But I saw a lot of potential there, interesting aspects because this owner is really interesting. It is a family business and a huge group with excellent values'.

P2 has achieved the reputation of being a business transformation leader, someone who is asked for help when companies are struggling financially. Similarly, P9 and P10 shared experiences of headhunters and employers recognising their excellent performance and results, which have constructed and shaped their executive leader role towards being a reputable leader of change.

Personal engagement and identification with the executive role (Wolontis and Hoff, 2018) were articulated through devotion to hard work and going the extra mile:

P5: *'Now that we are talking about managers and executive team level, it's 24/7 work. So you have to learn to live with it. The foundations need to be balanced, that you take care of yourself so that you can succeed, and that you can contribute to the success. Everyone works through their persona; others take more risks, others toil with smaller steps forward. But if you think about it in general and you notice that, wow, someone has succeeded and is glowing with a certain balance, it rarely comes for free. You know that there is a lot of work done in the background. Yes, risks are taken and long days are weighed. Success rarely comes for nothing'.*

P2: *'Yes, my morning starts so that I check the sales figures right away and the evening ends with me checking where we are. So, I'm such a PowerBI-junkie, hah, as we joke with our CEO. That it is, yes, I get excited about those goals achieved, yes absolutely and really at the daily level. That is enough for me. Well hourly (laughs) is better sometimes'.*

P9: *'Work is a really big part of my identity. I have always worked a lot. People say that you are working so much. I go like, uhm yeah, maybe ... as it is such a big part of me. Well, sometimes, it is busier or a bit more to do, but it is so natural part of me that I don't distinguish work and free time because it is so fulfilling'.*

Hard work, long hours and devotion to work were described as the expectations of all executive leaders. However, only P12 raised the incongruence between the gender and leader role (Eagly and Karau, 2002) by acknowledging the prejudice towards women's performance and results: the demonstration and explicit articulation of the achievements needs to be substantial. P12 explained her performance orientation with a 'taster' metaphor: to stand out as a capable executive-level leader, a woman needs to present 'much bigger taster'.

P12 further described her reflection of an incident leading her to consider leaving the company but instead took the offered challenge to turn around a business and make it a profitable one:

P12. 'Well, at one point I thought that I am leaving myself. But then, I had second thoughts: "No way, honey, you are not gonna do that! Now, show how good you are. Please follow the targets and execute! You are gonna leave the perimeter and you are leave it so that everybody remains friends. And you are gonna leave with the money. Please, execute!" I had this kind of development discussion with myself and then executed it. And then I thought at okay. Well, it is good to talk to yourself'.

This self-reflection included social and individual aspects: notions of high-performance orientation aiming simultaneously at reputation building (successful execution and everyone remaining friends) and benefitting personally the situation (with the money and friends). The 'development

discussion with herself' portrays determination and self-efficacy in handling a difficult situation: escaping from an uncomfortable situation hastily was not an option for her. Instead, she was willing to take on the challenge and wanted to leave as a winner. Similarly, self-efficacy was demonstrated when P5 and P17 accepted a new position.

P5: 'It was a completely impossible task that started to interest me. And here we are, I was so difficult that I thought that I would take that as an interesting case'.

P17: 'I was on my first maternity leave when I was asked to work in production and lead a factory with 200 people'.

Self-efficacy and agency were ingrained in the executive role identities and operated as prerequisites for achieving demanding goals, managing difficult situations, accepting challenges and bearing the responsibilities at the highest organisational level (section 3.7). P1 explained her self-efficacy with concrete examples of the typical obstacles that work to her son:

P1: 'My son asked me last spring, when we had a little philosophical discussion, that do I always have a feeling, for example at work, that I can make it. And I told him that, yes, I do have difficult things, I have desperate situations, and I lose a good night's sleep. Things don't get forward and everything is stuck. But I have never had the feeling that this is not going to work'.

Agency was clearly communicated as an inherent characteristic of all the participants through active demonstration of one's achievements and being alert to one's own satisfaction with the job content and possibilities to grow and lead. Similarly, a development orientation was embedded in the continuous drive to receive more challenging tasks and larger areas of responsibility. A growth and development orientation can be seen as operationalised through work, as opposed to a common method of developing competence via trainings and development programmes outside work (Gipson et al., 2017).

Ambition and high-achievement orientation are articulated in multiple ways: results, drive, proactiveness and reaching goals and combined or contrasted with other constructs of executive identity. For example, P3 distinguished ambition from competitiveness, whereas P4 discussed her ambition in connection with passion and determination.

P3: 'I've never been in the same way [career oriented], like, I know some people think so terribly carefully about it. But yes, I certainly have ambition, but at the same time, I'm not

much competitive at all, so I see there's a certain difference. When you're planning a career and if you're ambitious, yes, then it's more about identifying and reflecting on certain possibilities, but if it involves a lot of competitiveness or a sense of ambition that it relates to external status, I have no such thing'.

P4: 'I had a really hard ambition then. Determination, ambition and passion that it must have defined working and career'.

Even though the participants were aiming high and constantly developing their competence by accepting new challenges, none of the women discussed aiming for perfection. P14, who identified herself primarily as a grandmother, while being a CEO for three separate companies in a corporation, helping in a family business and chairing a few company boards, explained her lack of perfectionism as an enabler of success. Not even her divorce or new employment resulting in moving between Northern and Southern Finland were perceived as deterring experiences.

P14: 'Everything has run smoothly. I am not at all perfectionist, and I claim that it is the reason why I have never had a burnout or something like that, even though there has been all kinds of things, a lot of work'.

As opposed to a Swedish study on high-achieving women (Wolontis and Hoff, 2018), this research has portrayed executive women who are gritty, that is, perseveringly and passionately working towards goals (Duckworth and Gross, 2014) without falling into a trap of being too self-critical or setting too high goals for their careers. Thus, the participants have avoided negative consequences of high-performance orientation, including burnout (Stoeber and Damian, 2015) or opting out (Harman and Sealy, 2017).

P4's, P12's and P14's self-referent comparisons with their siblings reveal a variation in self-efficacy and personal dispositions within one family: not all daughters were equally agentic. An extreme case articulation of self-efficacy and adaptability was voiced by P12, who referred to a discussion between herself and her sister, who she perceived to be more careful and risk-avoiding than herself.

P12: 'I told my sister that when you are in China, you have this slight fear of getting busted in the customs. And you might get into a conflict and go to jail. I told her not to worry because I am gonna make it anyway. Think, a Chinese female prison [exclaims laughing]! I know it is gonna be different. It is probably not gonna be fun, but I am gonna survive that, too. So in a way, the ability to adjust quickly is very important for a CEO. The adaptability. You don't have

to think about yourself in that. Like, do I, myself, like it or not [is irrelevant]. You just have to be like swoosh, swoosh [waves with her hands quickly]. Here, we go now!'

P12's story captures agentic self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982), a central concept of SCCT (Lent and Brown, 2013), which is required in executive career success. A Chinese female prison represents the ultimate harsh environment, which is considered a potential dread when doing business in a foreign masculine uncertain area (Wang and Shirmohammadi, 2016). Moreover, the discourse of self-efficacy includes a notion of persistence and determination that not all circumstances need to be enjoyable. Accordingly, challenges are meant to be tackled with a positive and action-oriented attitude, in which the focus and attention are not on oneself and personal well-being but rather are on the common good and results.

A less extreme tone of self-efficacy was articulated by P13, whose quote summarises common thoughts of the executive women. When talking about the role models and examples specifically for girls and women aspiring to top-level leader positions, she wanted to dissolve the high requirements:

P13: 'You don't need to make a career so grimly [a Finnish proverb meaning literally biting one's teeth together]. You have to be flexible, steer your way through and find the paths. But it is possible to raise to top of any organisation, regardless of your background. You don't have to think about whether I am up to it. Everyone is. As long as you are ready to work hard'.

Instead of painting a picture of difficulties and challenges requiring courage and extremely high capabilities, P13 assured that hard work combined with self-efficacy would be enough to reach the top in business. Similarly, P8 described her own capabilities as being '*not excellent in anything, but rather persistent and hardworking*'. Moreover, in her opinion, curiosity and flexibility were emphasised.

Additionally, spouses were praised not only for supporting possibilities to combine work and family obligations, but also for assisting in the construction of self-efficacy. P6 explained her spouse's influence in constructing confidence in believing in her capabilities:

P6: 'Personally, I am a bit worried about how I manage, but he always encourages me. And when the children were small, it was practically so that whichever had a less bad day stayed home. It is a fact that has been affected. Among my acquaintances, some people are in professions that demand that the other be always out and long evenings at work. It's just impossible for the other one (to have a career).'

Recent research in Sweden has shown no differences between men and women in occupational self-efficacy (Hartman and Barber, 2020); however, the feminine tendency of lesser self-efficacy (Betz and Hackett, 2006) was echoed in P6's narrative. She turned to her husband when in hesitation of her career moves and assessed her personal perception of self-efficacy lower compared with her husband, who always has trusted in her capability.

Moreover, the privilege of spousal support and an equal partner was emphasised by the other-referent comparison. P6 compared herself to other women who were not similarly fortunate to have supportive spouses (Heikkinen, Lämsä and Hiillos, 2014), and, thus, were not able to invest in their careers similarly, regardless of the self-efficacy levels. The importance of spousal and family support was also raised by P5, P6, P10, P11, P13 and P15 as an element outside the interview questions when asked if something important was missing from the discussion at the end of the interview. Thus, the social nature of executive careers was enforced: careers are affected and actualised socially in various interactions inside and outside organisations between executive leaders and multiple stakeholders.

5.3.3. Authenticity in leadership

Authenticity displays the third construct of the participants' executive role identities, ranging from gender to leader role identity. Authenticity, which can be defined as the degree to which a person acts in agreement with one's true self (van den Bosch et al., 2019), includes self-reflection and acting in accordance with one's values and self-identity. Authenticity was additionally identified among the constructs of success (P3, P4, P10, P11 and P16) and as guiding the career choices of the participants.

Authentic leadership has been perceived as a way to communicate goals that are built on common values benefitting a larger community. The four key qualities of an authentic leadership, self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing and a strong moral code (George, 2004), serve both the individual and business needs.

P14: 'I realised how important it is that I can lead the way I want. I am terribly open and tell everything already while being in the planning phase to my team members'.

P10: 'My guiding principle has been that I do my best, take risks and want to test my boundaries, but at the same time, I do it in a way that I am able to look into the mirror ... and

that I haven't sold my soul. I have begun [my career] and remained as my true self and have been capable of succeeding'.

P4: 'I have wanted to fulfil myself. I haven't been glancing sideways. I don't care what other people think about me. I don't think about those things'.

P5: 'You have to be honest with yourself ... is this for me or not? I cannot work without psychological well-being and a feeling of authenticity. It is not good for anyone'.

Authenticity was enacted through meaningful work as part of life and the possibilities to work in a role that fulfils high performance and growth orientation. Moreover, an authentic self was emphasised as an enabler of good results and performance.

P4: 'In Finland, you succeed with uprightness and straightforwardness, and you need to talk straight. You cannot succeed by faking, pretending, I mean'.

P15 perceived authenticity—the possibility to be oneself—through the concept of freedom supported by financial safety, which increases the possibility to utilise one's strengths better (Tong et al., 2021) by selecting suitable positions and pursuing individual needs and values.

P15: 'One thing that I find important is the financial situation. For me, it has been meaningful, even from childhood or adolescence, that it creates self-confidence when you have a safe financial backup. You have the courage to make decisions that you believe to be right, and you don't make the wrong choices only because you are afraid of losing your job'.

P15 compared her privileged stance to other women who need to stay in unsatisfactory work positions and are not able to fulfil their needs for financial reasons:

P15: 'I follow my friends, who are not in the same [financial] situation, and they make choices, work-related choices because they want to secure the financial safety. And then, they are not at their best in their work roles because they have the wrong driver. I am always, like, hey, if what I do is not enough, I will find something else. So I haven't needed to work, or if something happens, I'd have to keep the job at any cost. And I claim that this has a massive effect on success'.

According to P15, values-based authenticity enables good performance when decisions are not made based on risk avoidance or fear of losing something. Her sense-making followed eudaimonic motivation.

Moreover, an active show of vulnerability was utilised to demonstrate authenticity. Even though vulnerability often has negative connotations, it can be turned into a strength (Corlett, Ruane and Mavin, 2021), resonating with courage, authenticity and honesty. Authenticity was enacted as a tendency to 'ask stupid questions' (P13) in management team meetings or 'admitting one's ignorance' (P7) among peers and own team members.

P15: 'I got my first leader position at the age of 24. I tried to be something else [than myself]. I tried to be more mature and the kind that I thought a leader should be. And I tried to hide my bubbly, happy and sparkling personality. Then, I realised that it cannot go like this; this is not me, and it is not good. And I decided that from now on I am my true self; of course, I behave differently at work and at home, but in principle, it is the same person'.

P15 showed self-reflection on her change to a 'true-to-self' (Ibarra, 2015), a profile of leader authenticity in which the flexibility to transform oneself according to external circumstances or norms is low, but personal well-being increases.

Authenticity is among the eudaimonic aims (LeFebvre and Huta, 2021) that guides career choices while women executives are making decisions about their career moves (Deci and Ryan, 2017).

5.3.4. Professional competence of an executive leader

In addition to leadership skills and behaviours, professional substance and business competence and experience are needed for successful performance at the executive level.

P8: 'You have to be pretty super-good at something, and then, you have to be adequately good at other things so that you can add value'.

The achievements and performance discussed in 5.3.2 demonstrate the professional competences in one's own field of expertise. The growth orientation and willingness to learn more has developed the knowledge and skills because professional growth was perceived to reach through constantly changing work tasks and goals. Moreover, all the participants reported that they had been participating in numerous training and leadership development programmes during their careers.

A clear uniformed message was conveyed in the interviews: without business understanding, the route to the executive level is closed. Business understanding comprises the industry-related knowledge and experience and numerical side of business, which indicates the profit, margins and results of the companies, that is, the bottom line. Thus, the executive leader's role is to ensure that

monetary results are combined with ethical and sustainable company values (Hayes, 2002). The participants stated the important competences clearly and without hesitation:

P2: 'Business competence and numbers'.

P8: 'Every leader needs to understand financial management and accounting somewhat. It has been a vital part of success when joining the management teams and boards'.

P9: 'Playing around with Excel sheets is not my strength, but I know what Excel needs to include. The basics fundamentals of business are my core competence, and what I do is to grow the last row'.

P4: 'Then, you need to know the facts and know what you are talking about ... you have to understand numbers, and well, this is my worry when talking about women leaders, top-level financial competence is part of top-level business competence. You cannot lead a company if you don't understand what is happening on the balance sheet'.

P3 explained the requirements of the executive role through her educational background in which she concentrated more on marketing and the 'soft' side of business, admitting that, although the role becomes more demanding and covers wider areas of responsibility, a deeper financial understanding is required:

P3: 'Being a business school graduate who has minimised all the numerical side, which, of course, backfires at some point, and the need to study again emerges'.

The executive role entails competency in numbers and financial understanding. Most of the participants had some background in finance or accounting, either from education (a major) or have later developed/learned how to speak with numbers. Table 5.6 summarises the STEM-related backgrounds of the participants.

Table 5.6: STEM-related background of the participants

| | |
|------|--|
| P2 | Learning through work in parents' accounting company |
| P4: | Majoring in finance (PhD) |
| P6: | Accounting as a major in university |
| P8 | Accounting as a major in university |
| P9: | ICT business studies |
| P10: | Accounting as a major and taxation minor in university |
| P11 | Accounting as a major in university |

| | |
|------|---|
| P12: | Analyst and controller experience |
| P14: | Economics in university |
| P15: | Career start in banking field |
| P16: | Accounting as a major in university |
| P17: | Masters in material science and engineering |

Another imperative professional skill was noted to be sales, which employs the communication of one’s own ideas and a justification of decisions. P8 explained how her sales experience assisted her in levelling up with top management while she was selling management services during her studies at the university.

P8: ‘You learn to speak the same language with the male CEOs and at a certain level. This has helped in many management teams and boards. Because you have to be capable of arguing quickly and clearly what you want to deliver’.

P4: ‘And hey! There is also another thing that is a big minus: sales competence’.

The male-dominant STEM and sales field orientations and experiences differentiated the executive women in the male-dominated roles and industries (Smith, 2016). Thus, financial understanding and sales skills in business context were considered imperative success factors in executive-level business-related positions.

5.3.5. Conclusion of the executive leader role identities

The research findings portray various individual profiles of executive leader women.

The themes of the present research support Weidenfeller’s (2012) findings on high-achieving enterprise leader women: the executive women leaders aimed for influential positions through which they were seeking to make a difference by the work results and by leading people. The demonstrated high level of self-efficacy enabled them to accept challenges, thus enhancing their performance and competence. They were guided by their values to maintain authentic leadership in executive roles. The executive role identity constructs fell under four themes. Table 5.7 summarises the executive role identity profiles and respective themes.

Table 5.7: Executive role identity profiles and respective themes

| Participant | Executive role identity profiles | Theme |
|-------------|----------------------------------|-------|
|-------------|----------------------------------|-------|

| | | |
|-----|--|-----|
| P1 | Performance 'machine' | 2 |
| P2 | Business transformation leader | 2 |
| P3 | People leader | 1 |
| P4 | Ambition to follow own path | 3 |
| P5 | Inspirational leader | 1 |
| P6 | Substance area professional | 4 |
| P7 | Transparent humane leader | 1 |
| P8 | Deadly honest people leader | 1 |
| P9 | Change and people leader | 1&2 |
| P10 | Change leader | 2 |
| P11 | Persistent people leader | 1&2 |
| P12 | Jack of all trades | 2&3 |
| P13 | Challenging at the top management team | 2 |
| P14 | Transparent people leader | 1&3 |
| P15 | Inspirational, yet demanding leader | 1&3 |
| P16 | Soft leader and substance area professional | 1&4 |
| P17 | People leader with holistic business understanding | 1&4 |

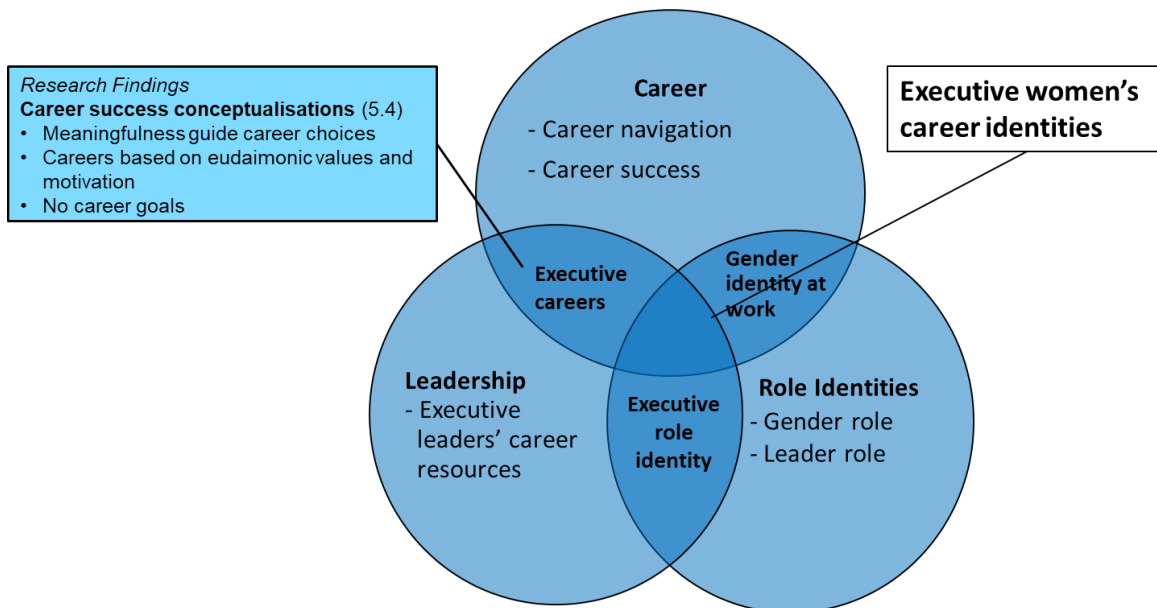
Themes: 1 = Influence through leadership, 2 = Self-efficacy to demonstrate achievements and results, 3 = Authenticity, 4 = Professional substance area expertise

In addition to leadership-, performance- and authenticity-related constructs, executive role identities were built on solid professional substance and expertise. Experience and expertise in one's own professional field was perceived as a necessity, but also solid holistic business understanding and sales skills were emphasised by executive women leaders. (Carucci, 2016)

5.4. Discourse of career success and career planning

This section contributes to the knowledge on executive women leaders' career success conceptualisation and career planning by presenting the participants' eudaimonic (section 3.6) associations and meanings related to career success, perceptions attributed to career planning and career goals. Figure 5.4 positions the findings of career success in the conceptual framework of the research. The emerging career success definitions and values and career motivation are discussed further in section 5.4.

Figure 5.4: Career success conceptualisations



The present research assumes the concept of career identity constructs to include career aspirations, values and beliefs informing self-concepts (section 3.6), which motivate individuals to act and enable them to realise opportunities (Lysova et al., 2015). Thus, the subjective perception of career success operates as the value-based foundation on which career identity is constructed and that guides the career choices made by executive women (section 3.7.2).

5.4.1. Subjective definitions of career and success

A combination of content-oriented and discourse analytical approaches was employed to identify the meanings and representations of success. The conceptualisations and articulations of success were addressed with a specific direct question: 'How do you define success?' (Appendix 6). However, the career narrations provided another essential source of data, enabling the in-depth analysis, resulting in a holistic understanding of the constructs of executive identities and guiding the career choices of executive women.

The participants took up a subject that integrated conceptual repertoires and locations within the executive position, allowing them to use the chosen repertoires: a standpoint from which they see the world through the particular images, metaphors, storylines and concepts relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned (Davies and Harré, 1990). The executive women defined success through various intrinsic values and subjective measures, barely

mentioning the traditional objective measures of career success (section 3.6.1). Additionally, they distanced themselves from the objective career success measures as status, power, money and benefits, instead emphasising meaningful work, authenticity and influence (Sullivan and Mainiero, 2007) as guiding their career choices.

The research findings contribute to Huta and Waterman's (2013) definition of eudaimonic motivation, which includes four concepts: authenticity, excellence, growth and meaning.

The findings support the empirical evidence of women perceiving career success in more subjective and softer terms than men (Sturges, 1999), often reaching beyond the sphere of work, which has been claimed to be one of the internal factors for the lower number of women in executive leadership positions (Ely et al., 2015). However, the findings have proven otherwise: defining success through subjective measures has not hindered the careers of the participants. For example, even though the majority of them (10/17) have children, work–family reconciliation (Hearn et al., 2015) has not negatively affected the promotion of the participants; neither because of the structural, cultural or work environmental factors nor because of the internal factors on which the women themselves have influence.

5.4.2. Conceptualisations of career success

In the present research, the participants' subjective definitions of career success complemented the concept of eudaimonic motivation, as defined by LeFebvre and Huta (2021), including meaning, authenticity, excellence and growth (section 3.6.2). The participants constructed their meaning of career success through diverse combinations of meanings, encompassing multiple aspects both in the sphere of work and life in general. Table 5.8 shows 12 emergent meanings connected to the concept of career success when addressing the specific direct question. The same themes were, however, also repeated in the career narratives.

Table 5.8: Meanings associated with the concept of career success by the participants

| | P1 | P2 | P3 | P4 | P5 | P6 | P7 | P8 | P9 | P10 | P11 | P12 | P13 | P14 | P15 | P16 | P17 |
|----------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Achievements | X | X | | | X | | | | | | | | | X | | | |
| Authenticity | | | X | X | | | | | | X | X | | | | | X | |
| Enjoyment | | X | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | |
| Freedom | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | X |
| Happiness | | X | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | |
| Influence | | | X | | | | | X | | X | X | | | | | | X |
| Inspiration | | | | | X | | | | X | | | X | | | | | |
| Learning | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | X | |
| Meaningfulness | | | | | | | X | X | | | | X | | | X | | X |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------|---|--|---|---|---|--|--|--|---|--|---|--|---|--|--|--|--|
| Respect | X | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Results | | | | X | X | | | | | | X | | | | | | |
| Work-life balance | | | X | | | | | | X | | | | X | | | | |

No common patterns or similarities in the combinations of meanings attached to those of the concept of career success were found. Two participants (P13 and P14) constructed their definitions of success with only one meaning, whereas most attributed two or three elements in their conceptualisations. Only one participant (P6) avoided the question altogether by expressing her unwillingness to go in depth in a matter that she was not prepared to answer.

No distinct profiles or shared conceptualisation of an executive woman’s career success definition emerged from the data. Instead, the subjective conceptualisations of success reflect the individual identities and values of the participants, fulfilling several aims and aspirations.

Meaningfulness, authenticity and influence received the most mentions among the participants, stated by five participants each. Even though authenticity and influence were connected to the concept of success, they were even more strongly repeated throughout the interviews as important themes representing the identities of executive women (section 5.3). The next section deconstructs the representations of the meaningfulness of work.

5.4.3. Representations of meaningfulness

For executive women, meaningfulness operates as an overarching theme, that is, a macro-theme (van Dijk, 1999), consisting of multiple subjective constructs of success steering the career navigation of executive women. Meaning functions in multiple ways to shape and guide behaviour (Baumeister and Landau, 2018). Similarly, meaningful work can be understood as a fundamental human need, fulfilling interests in freedom, autonomy and dignity (Yeoman, 2014). The meaningfulness of work became apparent throughout the interviews, albeit in different phases of the narratives, not only when discussing and addressing the definitions of success, but as a repeated concept clarifying the motives behind career moves from one position to another.

Meaningfulness encompasses various understandings and aspects of work and life in general (Fairlie, 2011). From the standpoint of executive women, meaningfulness emerged from three main conceptual categories: meaningfulness through 1) work, 2) others and 3) life in general. Table 5.9 summarises the representations of meaningfulness under the three categories, with corresponding codes, interview quotes and associated theoretical conceptualisations.

Table 5.9: Conceptual categories of meaningfulness

| 1. Meaningfulness through work (individual) | | |
|--|---|---|
| Codes | Interview quotes | Theoretical perspectives |
| Influence Decision-making power Results Achievements Challenges Interesting/inspiring tasks Learning Professional development | <p><i>P3: A meaningful position, which is a vantage position and a possibility to influence the future of the organisation and have decision-making power.</i></p> <p><i>P3: The feeling when you know that you can bring your own experience into work with our customers.</i></p> <p><i>P8: You have meaningful, challenging tasks in which you learn something new all the time.</i></p> <p><i>P9: I have been privileged to do 'insanely interesting' work.</i></p> <p><i>P7: Things I truly enjoy, I feel successful because I have been able to do the things I truly enjoy and in which I believe.</i></p> <p><i>P4: Success is that you have successful work results and satisfied customers.</i></p> | Subjective experience that one's work has significance, facilitates personal growth and contributes to the greater good (Allan, Autin and Duffy, 2016) Fulfilment of needs, motivations and desires is associated with self-actualisation (Lepisto and Pratt, 2017). |
| 2. Meaningfulness through others (social) | | |
| Codes | Interview quotes | Theoretical perspectives |
| Leadership Influence Role as a leader Inspiring others Team spirit Respect from others Own example as a leader Role model Authenticity | <p><i>P4: I think success is making a difference, good relationships, leaving a trace and such.</i></p> <p><i>P3: The people side of business.</i></p> <p><i>P5: And the energy, the kicks you get when we succeed in what we did. The burning fire of success in my, in their [the team] eyes, the enthusiasm.</i></p> <p><i>P1: Success is also about getting, how much you get, respect from others, your subordinates, colleagues, supervisors and various stakeholders.</i></p> <p><i>P7: ... with the people I enjoy, who I believe in, and who I respect'.</i></p> | Experiences of connection with others and their jobs (Bailey et al., 2019) |
| 3. Meaningfulness of life (existential) | | |
| Codes | Interview quotes | Theoretical perspectives |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| <p>Satisfaction Enjoyment Pleasure Work–life balance Freedom Happiness</p> | <p><i>P2: Everyday well-being and happiness from what you can do is what counts. Career-wise, for me, it is important to enjoy the work every day. I don't want to get frustrated, so that it would not inspire or put me in flames to change or learn.</i></p> <p><i>P14: Most important for me is that I am a grandmother to five grandchildren.</i></p> <p><i>P9: I define success through being able to live a really good everyday life. I am fortunate that I have a wonderful family, and basic things are okay, and let's hope that I remain healthy, that I how it [success] builds.</i></p> <p><i>P13: For me, success is really that my life is ... like ... balanced and things are rather well. We, my husband and I have always been very family centred ... I have said no [to some positions] and understood the consequences.</i></p> | <p>Positive significance in life (Martela, 2010)</p> <p>Perception of autonomy and control over one's life (Deci and Ryan, 2000)</p> |
|---|--|--|

Most of the participants made sense of success by combining at least two categories of meaningfulness: identifying values, purpose (including goals and achievements), positive social impact, efficacy and self-worth (Baumeister and Landau, 2018; Fairlie, 2011). The literature similarly proposed that the sense of meaningfulness arises from the coherence of various aspects: unity with others, expressing oneself, serving others and developing and becoming oneself (Lips-Wiersma, Wright and Dik, 2016). In the articulations of success, influence was connected equally to work tasks and results—control over one’s own work and to the social sphere of work—the possibility of influencing beyond one’s own area of responsibility by leading others.

Meaningfulness through work

From the subject position of an executive woman, perceptions of success guiding career choices primarily exhibited intrinsic motivation: the need to influence and achieve, to be competent professionals in challenging and self-determining (Deci and Ryan, 2017) positions and the need to grow and develop (Maslow, 2017). Meaningfulness through work was perceived as arising from excellent work results, achievements, inspiring, interesting and challenging work content and professional development.

The achievements and results were articulated as meanings related to the concept of success by P1, P2, P4, P5, P11 and P14. In the vocabulary of the participants, achievements represented various successful accomplishments and events. For example, P14 described success through small everyday accomplishments: *'It begins with succeeding in the things you do; it is not the status of the position, but achieving and succeeding in any position'*, whereas P2 constructed her definition of success on the larger meaning of achievements: *'For me, success is ... it goes like ... that you have done something great for the humankind and achieved a lot'*. P5 summarised various perspectives on the concept of success; the objective and subjective measures, including both individual and collective motivational factors related to the concept of achievement:

P5: 'There is the hard side, that you achieve the results, goals, succeed in the projects you wanted and well, the cold cash. This is one of the measures for success. But like, for myself, what motivates me, it is terribly ... how could I say this ... when I can see the burning of success or inspiration in peoples' eyes. And the energy, the kicks you get when you achieve your goals.'

The emphasis on achievements, results and continuous development portray the high-achievement and growth orientation of the participants, in which the significance and purpose of work have helped maintain motivation and acceptance of more demanding work roles (Both-Nwabuwe, Dijkstra and Beersma, 2017). Work centrality was clearly high among the participants, being an inherent and important part of their life. Thus, work was perceived to ensure an important source of meaningfulness, inspiration and influence in their lives.

Meaningfulness through others

In addition to being an imperative construct of executive role identity (section 5.3.1) for the participants, influence was mentioned as one motivational factor in seeking meaningfulness at work. The importance of the social aspect of meaningfulness was emphasised in the social leadership role of an executive. People used meaning to connect socially with other people, and their sense of meaning was enhanced by social connection (Baumeister and Landau, 2018). From the standpoint of an executive leader, meaningfulness through others appeared as twofold: leading others and respecting others.

P5: 'That is what motivates you to conduct difficult discussions and to make difficult decisions when you see that people are engaged and start to work with enthusiasm'.

P2: 'I enjoy the success of others in the organisation, to see someone growing up and learning and getting forward. We have a lot of good stories of people progressing, also outside of the company, and telling us about it. You get a lot of enjoyment, too, absolutely'.

Motivation to lead (Chan and Drasgow, 2001) emerged as one source of the social meaningfulness among the participants; the influential leadership position provided not only personal influence and decision-making possibilities, but the opportunities to influence with and through other people by leading a team. Some of the participants measured success with their own reputation as a professional and the respect from others (Lepisto and Pratt, 2017), containing additionally feelings of pride related to self-worth and oneself being an exemplary leader, even a role model as a woman executive.

Meaningfulness of life

Regardless of the demanding and inspiring work, the participants were capable of combining the executive role, often described as 24/7 work, with an active private life. Even though meaningful work as an executive played an important role in the participants' lives, many of the participants included non-work-related elements, extending in their conceptualisations of success outside the sphere of work to well-being, work–life balance, happiness, enjoyment and freedom. Thus, the executive role was not perceived as the sole content and fulfilment of a meaningful life.

For example, the oldest participant (P14) acted as a CEO in two companies and was a board member of many other companies, helping even in a family business. Yet she started her definition of success without hesitation from a private life perspective, rating herself as a grandmother as the most valuable success in life, demonstrating a satisfying sense of continuity in life (Baumeister and Landau, 2018). P6, P9 and P14 emphasised family values in their career narratives. However, P14 was the only one discussing the deliberate choices and compromises between work and family life, which, in the end, only slightly slowed her progression to top executive level, not functioning as a barrier.

From a social and structural viewpoint, the meanings related to success represent the discourse of acceptable and hegemonic associations related to a powerful position. By comparison and positioning oneself outside the objective measures of success, the executive women distanced themselves from the negative connotations of power and status as oppressive constructs.

5.4.4. The issue of money and success

From the dominant societal and cultural discourse perspective, the participants' conceptualisations of career success repeat the contradictory attitudes towards success in general in Finland. An ambiguous and even paradoxical executive leader stance towards success and material wealth was construed by resonating the Finns' mentality of equality and humbleness (section 2.5.2).

Even though career success—or merely achievements—were valued and desired silently per se, the norms in society, valuing equality combined with class-avoiding discourse, discourage people from demonstrating the symbols of success (power, money, big cars, etc.) in public. Instead, equity and equality embrace humbleness and silence around earnings and wealth, not allowing one to lift oneself above others (*Jantelagen*, discussed in 2.5.2) without a clear sign of deserving and earning achievement with hard work. For example, P4 defined career success through result orientation and hard work:

'To me, success is good work results and diligence. Nothing comes for free; it is like that. And it is exciting that someone can think that you are so successful and you don't feel like that at all. At the end of the day, this is mostly slaving'.

Simultaneously, she admitted, by other-referent comparison (Guan et al., 2016), the subjective and relative nature of the perceptions of success. A visible executive position in society may seem successful from an outsider perspective, yet one's own perception of success may contradict the position/status-based general view when measured with subjective constructs.

A discursive position of an executive—a societal location from which the discursive fragments are produced (Jäger and Maier, 2016)—is explicitly and continuously constructed through the career experiences and in one's current leadership position. This reveals both the relativity of knowledge and contingent and constructive nature of career success, as opposed to it being a static concept. Similar to a South African study among senior managers (Visagie and Koekemoer, 2014), the participants did not understand career success as a definitive state, while they perceived success by subjective measures as a continuing personal growth journey rather than hierarchical progression.

For example, P8 uttered the changing nature of the concept and her current privileged stance as an executive through a transformation from objective to subjective success measures. Her deficiency-based motivation was fulfilled along with career progression, giving space for self-actualisation needs to be fulfilled (Ryan and Deci, 2017).

P8: *'If you had asked me 20 years ago, I would have said that success is that you have a [good] title in a good organisation, enough money and ... like a position ... [laughs]. And when you reach it, the whole package ... it is not success. I think success is. I don't understand how you can put this to any research, that you have meaningful, challenging tasks in which you learn something new all the time. That is the measure of success. And hopefully, it brings enough money and possibilities to influence'*.

Similar to P8 laughing about her perceptions when she was young, the adolescent choices and perceptions were assessed as ridiculous by P13, who explained her study choices and changing plans through salary expectations.

P13: *'I got into the university to study biochemistry, but then, I changed my mind because, a really ridiculous reason, someone told me that biochemists' salary level was really low then'*.

Both participants described their family background as something that would not support or assume business studies or executive careers. Moreover, P13 utilised the silver spoon metaphor while explaining her need to survive on her own because her family was not very wealthy, whereas P8 described her role model for the business career coming from outside of her family, with both parents working as teachers.

Consequently, the privileged top-level position of an executive at the top echelon of a business organisation enables a standpoint above material wealth (Stoet and Geary, 2022): because the highest organisational compensation level has already been reached by the participants, only less significant incremental increases in compensation packages can be attainable through career moves, unless a CEO position with even higher compensation is taken. A hockey stick curve model (Hayes, 2021)—commonly referred to when depicting a business organisations' exponential growth—describes the typical compensation model in an organisation. Even though salaries and compensation are relatively equal because of the collective bargaining system in Finland, the hockey stick curve metaphor visualises the hierarchical compensation differences within an organisation. Lower-level managerial compensation usually remains at a lesser level (hockey stick blade) and a steep increase in compensation occurs only when moving to executive management. Similarly, a reverse hockey stick curve illustrates the stagnation of salaries and compensation after reaching the top executive level. Thus, after reaching the highest organisational level with incorporated extensive salaries, benefits, status and wealth, it is possible to turn one's attention towards intrinsic values or growth motivation instead, following the deficiency motive theory (Pink, 2011; Wallace and Wertz, 2017).

However, the topic of money did not remain untouched in the interviews. However, it was missing from the measures and conceptualisations of career success. P11 acknowledged the material wealth following the executive position as a natural element and a great asset giving freedom to fulfil one's identity through consumption behaviour towards ecological and more expensive everyday choices. P1 attached money to one's worth and respect and discussed the importance of setting the salary request at the right level: a high salary request was a sign of valuing one's own competence and, thus, showing one's self-confidence (Kay and Shipman, 2014). However, P10 explained that her decision to choose business education was an outcome of her genuine interest in money: 'as a concept, not something that I wanted for myself'.

The role of an executive includes attention to and understanding the financial side of business. The participants considered financial understanding as one of the most imperative competencies of an executive-level leader (discussed as part of executive identity in 5.3). Thus, the topic of money was fundamentally natural to executive women, which challenges the theories positing money as incompatible with the stereotypical female gender identity (Allen and Gervais, 2017). Consequently, the absence of discourse around money was not an avoidance of the topic but a sign of its insignificance as a meaning related to career success or as a career goal.

All the participants positioned themselves outside the objective career success definitions by voicing their own definitions of career success as something being different from the dominant discourse of success, even being unusual. The social comparison theory, coined by Festinger in 1954, posits that people compare others in relation to the self (Wood, 1996); here, the participants identified differences or similarities between them and other leaders or people with similar educational backgrounds. Similarly, psychological theories state people often gain a sense of their own identities through a process of contradistinction (Said, 1978), that is, defining in terms of who we are *not*.

Even though the definitions of success were constructed on subjective measures and intrinsic motivation, the objective measures of success were distinguishable in how the participants discussed and constructed their definitions of success, especially by contrasting their own perceptions to 'others', 'they' or 'those people' who pursued objective success through status, wealth and power. Consequently, success even received negative associations from some of the participants, with a disapproving tone in their voices while explaining 'others' openly showing their aspirations for objective career success symbols, which was perceived as clearly against the Finnish norms.

Thus, the research findings support the notion that other-referent career success (Heslin, 2003) is related to objective measures (Abele and Spurk, 2009). From an external viewpoint, it was unsurprisingly easier to measure other leaders' success through objective, observable measures. However, the participants referred to discussions among their peers and acquaintances, in which more detailed subjective perceptions and measures were also made explicit.

The prevailing societal norms and the existence of the traditional objective measures of career success were disclosed in the participants' other-referent comparisons:

P1: 'You know, it is not the amount of money or the cars and boats and houses and cottages, like, those are not my thing. But I understand that they are the measures of success and status symbols for many people.'

P10: 'Good question! Men would probably say that it is visible in the salary slip or in the title.'

The understanding of one's own subjective perceptions diverting from the dominant discourse of success additionally exposed the persistent masculine hegemony settled in society's structures in Finland. P10's answer, assuming a clear difference between men and herself—a woman—reveals the gendered structure of the success discourse in Finland. The mandated structures, that is, the expected roles and responsibilities of men relating to social norms (Karam, Afiouni and Nasr, 2013) in most societies (e.g., man as the main breadwinner), including Finland, are aligned with objective outcomes. Even though the dual-earner model is more predominant in Finland (2.x), the perception of a stereotypically successful leader being masculine endures. Even in one of the most equal countries in the world, men are believed to have the privilege to more openly assimilate with traditional constructs of success, power, money and status. A sarcastic tone in P10's voice echoed contempt towards this traditional and outdated perception, simultaneously positioning herself as a more contemporary leader pursuing virtuous developmental values and goals.

The most critical stance towards the concept of success was articulated by P7, who showed a strong despise towards the word success, which she perceived to be attached solely to objective measures: *'For me success and materialism ... that doesn't correlate at all. The understanding of the word success, it is an ugly word, and I don't like it at all'*. Similarly, the word 'success' was avoided and replaced with the word achievement, which can be used in a more multifaceted manner in Finnish language and lacks the (negative) connotation with the traditional objective measures of success.

However, one's own achievements, performance and results can be openly discussed without a sign of typical Finnish humbleness, as long as they are perceived to be earned by personal abilities and hard work. Thus, idiosyncratic perception, the experience of reaching a top-level position without constraints and gendered barriers, imposed and strengthened meritocratic (Sealy, Ruth, 2010) reasoning from the standpoint of executive women. Yet again, positioning through other-referent comparison alienated the participants from their male colleagues at the top executive level.

P7: 'The difference between men and women leaders is that men are driven by ambition and women by passion; that is a clear success factor'.

P7 articulated a gendered evaluation of male and female leaders' drivers. She defined ambition as a masculine concept with objective measures of success and extrinsic motivation, whereas passion was perceived more positively and connected to women leaders and intrinsic motivation. This shows the perception of meaningfulness and a higher purpose as a salient construct of women executive's conceptualisation of success influencing career choices. The next section will discuss career planning and career goals.

5.4.5. Deconstructing career planning and goals

A high level of consistency between the themes identified as the subjective constructs of success (section 5.4.2) and career planning was found. The participants took up a critical stance towards career planning and career goals. This mirrored the subjective meanings associated with career success definitions articulated by the participants, for whom career choices represented a way to find meaning through work.

The executive women's standpoint of deconstructing the dominant career-planning discourse was one of the salient research findings. Opposed to the prevalent narrative of career progression, the findings have indicated a counternarrative (Bamberg and Andrews, 2004), rejecting deliberate career planning and position-based career goals.

Regardless of the objectively successful career paths that have led to the top management positions, the participants themselves rejected the dominant discourse of career goals and career planning: the absence of career planning and career goals were identified in every interview, amplifying Cohen's (2014) findings of women having no plans and a concept of career imagination as suitable for executive women. The findings of the current research oppose a Swedish research of high-achieving women claiming that career goals are important for directing performance

improvement and self-development resulting in the aspired positions eventually after years of hard work, pressure and doubting own abilities (Wolontis and Hoff, 2018).

Two critical stances emerged in the interviews. One more critical stance rejected the concept of career completely, representing the subjective perceptions of career success, in which the traditional conceptualisations of career were judged as something repulsive. Similar to the conceptualisation of success, many participants avoided the word 'career'. P2, P4 and P15 asserted their positions opposing the career planning and career goals by articulating multiple extreme case formulations (ECFs) (Pomerantz, 1986)—superlative forms of adjectives (really pompous, insanely interesting) and adverbs (always, never)—to emphasise their exceptional meanings related to career and to distance themselves from the dominant career discourse.

P2: *'Well, career sounds really pompous when I think of myself. I have never thought about a career in any way, as I have been driven by the tasks.'*

P4: *'I have never thought of work as a career. And it might look like a career or something planned, but I have always been taken to positions.'*

P15: *'I have never had any career plans. On the contrary, I thought about an easy life regarding work. I have never had that kind of thought [career plan] ...'.*

The less critical stance admits the existence of one's own career, emphasising the lack of career planning as a required part of the successful career and uniqueness of one's own career. The absence of career planning and career goals were articulated in a more neutral way, specifically among those participants with a conventional linear career pattern, such as P6 and P3, but also the participant with the most frequent career moves, P9. However, the opinions and experiences related to career planning remained similar to the more extreme participants.

P6: *'This probably sounds really lame, but I have been working and it has just led to the next step. And those steps have been pretty natural so that I've been ready to move on. I haven't had any kind of leaps for something new; it's been in a way this kind of a sensible continuum. That you have grown with it, this is what you probably hear from many people that you just work wholeheartedly, and if it leads to something else, that's great. But I haven't had that kind of path either.'*

P3: *'Having an extremely clear goal or aim ... like ... I would definitely want to be a supervisor or a business area leader or that it would be really important for me to be a member of a management team. Or the fact that **I am** a member of the management team of a listed*

company, I've never thought about it. I'm sometimes truly amazed when you're in your own mundane day, and then someone else emphasises a lot that I am a person working in a listed company. I'm like oh yeah, right so'.

P9: 'But when talking about this work career. Someone asked me once how I had planned my career. I have just somehow; I have just found myself in various positions. I am so curious that things just happen, so that I have grasped the moments'.

Careers leading to top management were perceived to result from various aspects, including excellent performance, achievements, competence, opportunities and luck, without planning or specific goals in mind. Thus, the lack of career planning or career goals did not equal a lack of work aspiration, ambition and achievement orientation. The temporal focus set the major difference: the participants concentrated on 'here and now', not on dreaming of or planning a better future.

P2: 'I live the present day and concentrate on achieving these goals I have right now. But of course, I keep my eyes and ears open. As I said, I say yes if invited to discuss new challenges. So I don't exclude the world around me'.

Drawing from the career discourses in the interviews, the common job interview question—'Where do you see yourself in five years?'—was answered from a very holistic perspective: 'Hopefully, in a meaningful role in which I can be myself, influence and learn'. However, P17 admitted that, at a certain point, she was not willing to accept quality or administrative roles in the organisation and instead pursued the areas and roles closer to business she had already perceived as intriguing.

Following the conceptualisation of success, the absence of career planning or missing focus on career progression were explained and reinforced by positioning oneself against others (Davies and Harré, 1990) who emphasise career planning and explicitly discuss their goals and values. P4, who worked in the male-dominant investment banking field, compared herself with her business school classmates who valued status, positions and careful career planning.

P4: 'I have never understood people who calculate their lives so carefully. We have, not mentioning any names, we have classmates who seriously thought carefully how things look in their CVs, even some women'.

P8: 'At the business school, there were those certain guys who wanted to have an international career. Well, I was never part of this league of people wanting an international career. I believe that career forms mainly through the opportunities one takes'.

P12: 'I had a colleague who planned [career]. I remember when we were having lunch, and I was, like, seriously. He went like I am now here, and then, I go there, and the team size has to be this and the company turnover this and I need this and this responsibility ... I was like excuse me, you are doing what!'

The prevalent career planning discourse and need to set goals for a career resonated with masculinity and the traditional career discourse in the participants' talk, depicting an unwelcomed careerist phenomenon. Utilising the word 'guys' when talking about male colleagues or wondering how even some women calculate and are concerned about what their CV looks like represented a reality from which the executive women distanced themselves already at the beginning of their professional careers. The findings support the explicit associations between the double bind (Eagly, 2016) and women's ambition, showing that women manifest leadership styles associated with effective performance more often than men. Similarly, in a Dutch study, both the male and female participants disassociated themselves from a negative form of ambition and associated themselves with a more socially acceptable implicit drive (Sools, Van Engen and Baerveldt, 2007). Thus, the executive women aimed to demonstrate their excellence and competence as imperative factors leading to career success.

The rejection of career planning and career as a goal did not stop the career progression of the participants. Although challenging the construction of career planning, the participants simultaneously defended their privileged and powerful position. Privilege was defended by taking a stance as superior to those 'others' who needed to pay more attention to their career progression. The inherent emphasis on career goals and career planning has attained importance in the career theories aiming to serve career counselling and guidance for people facing challenges in their careers, for example, women in middle-management roles who are not able to reach the executive level (Savickas, 2013). Similarly, empirical evidence consisting mainly of students and early adolescents has lacked the actual experiences of successful careers (Rudolph, Zacher and Hirschi, 2019).

All the participants emphasised their own activity, adaptability, agency and self-efficacy in gaining inspirational, meaningful and influential positions by grasping the opportunities they encountered. For example, P2 strongly rejected the whole concept of a career but identified herself as a high-achievement and result-oriented professional willing to consider career moves if interesting opportunities are presented to her. Emphasising excellent performance at the current work instead of focusing on future possibilities cannot be interpreted as passiveness or stagnation because it demonstrates one's capabilities and reputation as a professional executive who gets invitations

from the headhunters and other professionals in their networks. One's reputation as an executive leader was seen as important, even though getting excellent marks on CVs were not considered significant.

Chance and luck emerged as one key element influencing careers, similar to the metaphorical cluster frame 'Self-representation as being at the right place at the right time' coined by Wagner and Wodak (2006) in their analysis of women in various work roles. The theme was repeated in most interviews; however, the difference lied in the self-efficacy and agency articulated by the executive women compared with the passiveness of the participants in Wagner and Wodak's research on highly professional women. This research portrayed an image of an agentic and determined woman who eagerly took the emerging opportunities and openly expressed her capability and willingness to do and learn more. For example, P6, who followed a conventional linear career path, perceived focusing on the current performance as a key element in ensuring excellent work results and, thus, succeeding.

P6: 'Yes, in a way, and shouldn't you, at least I think so, live in the present moment. I have been lucky to experience changes [in the company] and have maintained my motivation. One must not stay in an unsatisfactory situation for too long. You have to be active; either you get lucky and something good appears or not, and then, you have to be active and seek something else'.

The pursuit of meaningfulness through work was logically manifested in career progression. Even without the careful career plans or ambition to reach the next position levels, the aim to achieve and learn in more challenging and inspiring tasks through more demanding and higher positions served the same purpose as aiming for higher status and wealth following a leader role. All these elements exist in top-level management positions. The executive women's appreciation for autonomy as a possibility to influence beyond their own work, freedom to be an authentic, unpretentious self and to make important decisions constructed an executive leader identity and a privileged standpoint. Regardless of the motives, the end result was the same: an executive position.

5.4.6. Conclusion of the career success and planning discourse

Executive women's strong self-efficacy and agency, combined with high-performance orientation and motivation to lead, helped facilitate career adaptability. The executive women accepted and pursued new opportunities to advance their professional competence and possibilities to influence and achieve meaningfulness through work. The focus was on acquiring demonstrable

achievements and succeeding in their current work, which was believed to enhance the reputation of a professional capable of more demanding roles. Thus, career planning and position-based goals became redundant.

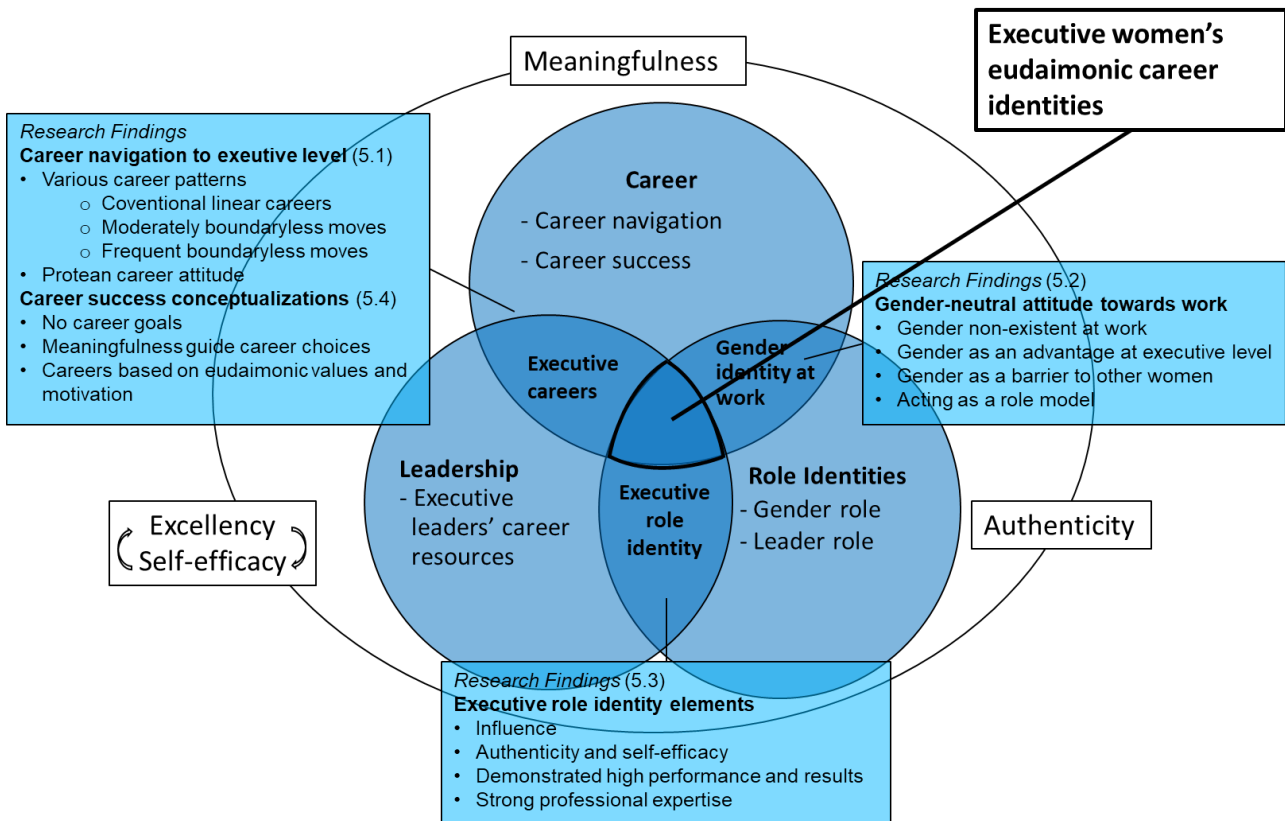
Regardless of the absence of objective career success goals, the careers of the participants reached the top organisational level. This clearly opposes self-determination theory (SDT)'s (Deci and Ryan, 2017) assumption of objective career goals and the findings of a meta-analysis (Deci, Koestner and Ryan, 1999) claiming that external rewards can undermine intrinsic motivation. However, the meta-analysis included only laboratory experiments and well-controlled laboratory-like conditions, which seemed to divert from the real-world field research findings, as evidenced by the present research. The successful career paths of executive women in Finland have proven that, regardless of the increasing salary and benefit levels and incremental external rewards attached to larger leadership roles, intrinsic motivation seems to increase and remains important for women at the top executive level.

6. Discussion of the findings

Chapter 5 presented the research findings, which were organised according to the research subquestions. This chapter answers the present research's overall aim by providing a model of executive women's eudaimonic career identities, which covers all the SQs. It became clear in the analysis that the emerging multiple individual career identities consisted of unifying themes, thus falling under a broader overarching framework. This chapter discusses the main contributions (Chapter 5) further through a discourse analysis, positioning the findings in the context of social structures the participants have encountered in Finland.

First (6.1), this chapter summarises and concludes the constructs of the executive career identities according to the research questions' focus, following the same structure as in Chapter 5. Second (6.2), the overarching eudaimonic foundations unifying and explaining the executive women's career identities—meaningfulness, authenticity and self-efficacy—are discussed further. The research framework (section 1.2) is supplemented with the research findings, as illustrated in Figure 6.1, forming the main contribution of the present thesis: a model of executive women's eudaimonic career identities.

Figure 6.1: Model of eudaimonic career identities of executive women



6.1. Constructs of executive women’s career identities

The research findings extend Drucker’s (2005) perception that arose from his experiences in consulting leaders throughout the decades: no stereotypical executives exist, even though the career identities of executive women may be constructed on professional expertise and self-efficacy, combined with a shared eudaimonic value base, that is, meaningfulness and authenticity. The similarities of the executive women’s sense-making originate from the executive positions’ common requirements for professional expertise and experience, which are enacted in the executive leader role discourse, whereas the differences originate from personal dispositions and socially constructed experiences that emphasise authentic personal identities. Thus, the present research highlights the recent movement in research to abandon societal-level analysis or complement it with individual-level analysis because of the heterogeneity of individuals (Ralston et al., 2022).

Table 6.1 summarises the findings of the participants’ career identity constructs discussed in Chapter 5 to demonstrate the nonstereotypical nature of the executive identities. The categories

are presented according to the research questions (section 1.2), and their main contributions are briefly summarised after the table.

Table 6.1: Summary of the career identity constructs by the participants

| Participant position/title field of industry | Career pattern profile | Gender influence at work | Executive role identity constructs | Subjective perception of career success |
|---|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|---|--|
| P3 SVP, Content business Services and consulting | Conventional linear career | Advantage | Leadership | Authenticity Influence Work–life balance |
| P6 CFO Energy | Conventional linear career | Nonexistent | Professional expertise | NA |
| P7 Business Director Services and consulting | Conventional linear career | Other-referent | Leadership | Enjoyment Meaningfulness |
| P16 CFO Technology industry | Conventional linear career | Nonexistent | Professional expertise Leadership | Achievements Learning |
| P17 SVP, Customers and markets technology industry | Conventional linear career | Advantage | Leadership Professional expertise | Freedom Influence Meaningfulness |
| P1 COO Restaurant chain | Moderate boundaryless moves | NA | Performance and results | Achievements Respect |
| P2 Country Manager FMCG industry | Moderate boundaryless moves | Other-referent | Performance and results | Achievements Enjoyment Happiness |
| P4 CEO Banking | Moderate boundaryless moves | Nonexistent | Authenticity | Authenticity Results Respect |
| P5 Sales Director Consumer goods industry | Moderate boundaryless moves | Advantage | Leadership | Achievements Inspiration Results |
| P11 Country Director Service industry | Moderate boundaryless moves | Advantage | Performance and results | Authenticity Influence Results |

| | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|--------------------|---|--|
| P12 Managing Director Healthcare | Moderate boundaryless moves | Hindrance | Leadership Authenticity Performance and results | Happiness Inspiration Meaningfulness |
| P13 SVP Technology industry | Moderate boundaryless moves | Other- referent | Performance and results | Work–life balance |
| P14 CEO Service industry | Moderate boundaryless moves | Advantage | Leadership Authenticity | Achievements |
| P8 On sabbatical Technology/ICT industry | Frequent boundaryless moves | Hindrance | Leadership | Influence Learning Meaningfulness |
| P9 CEO Service industry | Frequent boundaryless moves | Advantage | Performance and results Leadership | Inspiration Work–life balance |
| P10 Commercial Director Service industry | Frequent boundaryless moves | Hindrance | Performance and results | Authenticity Influence |
| P15 Business Director Healthcare | Frequent boundaryless moves | Hindrance | Leadership Authenticity | Freedom Meaningfulness |

Social constructivism sees reality as multiple and unfolding, understanding both obedience to dominant cultural norms and the possibilities to be and act otherwise (section 4.1.3). The executive women’s varied perceptions of gender’s influence at work and eudaimonic values diverted from the traditional think manager, think male norm (Schein, 1973; Schein et al., 1996) and the incongruence of women and leadership roles (Eagly and Karau, 2002). Thus, the research findings found no observed relationship between the congruence of people’s beliefs about men, women and leaders. Similar results were found in Lauritsen’s (2021) study with a polynomial regression analysis conducted in the US, via evaluations of the respondents’ current supervisors as criteria, thus not among the actual leaders.

6.1.1. Career pattern profiles

The research findings have indicated that career mobility patterns—career paths and moves—fail to explain the career progression of executive women leaders (section 5.1). The middle-aged participants’ number of employers ranged from single employment (over 20 years of service in one

company) to eight employers during their equally long professional careers. Consequently, all forms of career patterns leading to the top management level, both linear and nonlinear, were identified and divided into three categories: conventional linear careers (1–2 employers), moderate boundaryless moves (3–4 employers) and frequent boundaryless moves (5–8 employers). Regardless of the career pattern, the participants typically, with only a few exceptions, had reached executive-level positions commonly during their second professional employment after graduation (section 5.1, Table 5.1). None of the executive women reported male colleagues bypassing them when it came to promotions.

While moving towards more senior roles, the participants experienced changes in ‘status’ (different degrees of increasing responsibility) and ‘employer’ (including moves across and within organisations and industries), following Koch, Forgues and Monties’ (2017) typology of job mobility. However, ‘function’ (moves across functions such as marketing, etc.) appeared relatively stable in the executive women’s career paths. Even though professional expertise expands through experience and the executive role comprises many fields along an increase of the area of responsibility at the top level of the organisation, the positions and roles of the participants were mostly limited to one original function of professional expertise, with only some exceptions (e.g., P11, P14 and P17).

Gender was perceived as affecting the possibilities of functional moves. Specifically, the participants (e.g., P8 and P10) with backgrounds in the technology industry specifically voiced gendered differences in changing one’s professional field, revealing Finnish society’s gender-segregated structures and norms (section 2.2.2). The high levels of STEM and technology appreciation in Finland (Koskenlaakso, 2016) spill over to an evaluation of competence: a male executive with an engineering background is considered capable of occupying any field and function in the TMT, whereas a female executive with a business background is bounded to her experience and expertise in the current function/professional subject area only (section 2.7.3).

As opposed to P8 and P14’s perceptions, P17, with an educational background in engineering, has been able to change her function/field twice within the only company where she has been employed, underlining the valuing of STEM background in business in Finland section (section 2.7.3). Similarly, P9, with an ICT business degree, had the most employers (8) among the participants in various fields and areas of responsibilities.

Moreover, a commonly mentioned imperative career enabler—financial and numerical understanding acquired either through education or work experience (section 5.3.4)—exposed the

social-structural reasons behind the leaking pipeline (Vinnicombe, Doldor and Sealy, 2018), leading to a lack of women among the potential executive candidates (Tienari et al., 2013). Hence, as long as the dominant discourse around leadership in Finland continues to value STEM education or technical expertise as a leadership competence, most women will not be perceived as qualified executives because of their educational choices (section 2.2.4). Consequently, this further hinders women's selection to CEO roles in large companies, while the role is assumed to require more than the one function/field experience.

Consequently, the hegemonic masculine leadership discourse (Koenig et al., 2011) prevails in conveying the beliefs of a male-dominant educational background, providing a better foundation to expand professional expertise. The general leadership discourse's change towards less masculine traits and assumptions (Hlupic, 2014b) has formed a controversial social structure when integrated with the stagnant beliefs of engineering's supremacy in generating potential executives for business organisations in Finland. Thus, Finnish society can ensure gender-equal rights and prevent discrimination through legal rights and obligations, but the stagnant values and norms attached to leaders' suitability criteria exposed by the dominant discourse of leadership slow down the feminisation of top management of large companies in the private sector.

6.1.2. **Gender at executive work**

A paradoxical sense-making around gender neutrality, meritocracy, role modelling for women leaders and emancipatory tones emerged in the discourse of career, regardless of the perception of gender's influence at work, which ranged from negative to being seen as an advantage (section 5.2). The present research contributes to the feminists' and gender theorists' perceptions of gender identity as a socially constructed and reproduced, flexible and multifaceted concept (Fotaki, 2020); womanness had numerous meanings and was performed in multiple ways among executive women.

The first indicator of the topic's controversiality emerging from the data was the lack of spontaneous gender expression in most career narratives (section 5.2). The explanations of avoiding the topic of gender in the context of one's own career, unless directly asked, originated from multiple sources supporting the current research's findings; the social structures and norms, along with expectations towards executives (Wille et al., 2018) and personal reputation building (Singh and Vinnicombe, 2001), aim to maintain and enhance employability (Kortelainen, 2007; Hamori, 2010). The current research adds gender avoidance to the neoliberal discourses of splitting off the undesirable aspects of work or blaming other women for failure, as identified by Baker and Kelan (2019), among executive women. Instead of gender, authenticity (discussed in

6.2.3), as a concept representing personal identities that encompass inherent femininity and gender, was applied to mitigate the paradoxicality and incongruence of gender in a leadership role and personal and social identity conflicts. Authenticity allowed for multiple and divergent identities in performing the executive roles.

The identification of oneself as an executive and a woman intertwines personal identity constructs with social structures and norms that emerged similarly in the discourse of leadership in the interviews. To position oneself as a powerful leader, an executive belonging to a marginal group by one's gender demands navigation through conflicting assumptions and requirements (Tienari et al., 2013). The paradoxes have been perceived to arise from the duality of identity (Brown, 2017), the personal and social sides of identity work. In the present research, the personal gender identity was rationalised with the concept of authenticity, 'who I am and want to be' (section 5.3.3), whereas the social role identity is limited within and constituted by social norms (Butler, 2004) and the Finnish leadership associations (section 2.7).

Personal gender identity remained distant and barely touched upon because the discourse around gender revolved around the social structures and norms (Sealy, 2010; Baker and Kelan, 2019) and the barriers related to women's careers in general (section 3.4 and). The participants acknowledged their privileged positions among women in general and leaders at the top management level altogether. Additionally, they identified themselves as capable leaders and role models (Sealy and Singh, 2010; Hoyt, Burnette and Innella, 2012) for other women, from which the eagerness to participate in the research originated.

Working at the highest organisational level indicated that the participants had advanced their careers beyond the glass ceiling and avoided the common barriers (section 3.4) women typically face. The research findings do not indicate career path nor career identity-related differences between women executives with or without families and children (Cheung and Halpern, 2010; Hegewisch and Gornick, 2011); indeed, not even multiple parental leaves stopped or remarkably hindered their career progression (section 5.1.4).

Finland's gender-equal culture and welfare model with generous parental leaves have been perceived as career enablers in balancing work and family and supporting equality among dual-earner families (section 2.2.1). Even though families are kept mainly outside the career discourse, the demanding executive role's requirement for flexibility and dedication to long working hours became apparent in the interviews. Thus, external support, especially from the spouses of the women (Heikkinen, Lämsä and Hiillos, 2014), became crucial and was raised as a career enabler

by women with families and a spouse. Moreover, domestic duties were advised to be outsourced as much as possible in the pilot study data (section 2.6.5), supporting the statistics showing the stereotypically greater responsibility of women in household and care activities than men. However, according to Eurostat (2019,) the participation rate of men is the highest in Finland (93%), showing the long tradition of equality endeavours.

The participants in the present research worked in various industries and business fields, which was a conscious choice in the sampling (section 3.2.2) of the participants. In an executive role, the industry-specific competence and experience can enable career progression, but this is not limiting the careers to only one field of industry; business and leadership competence are considered universal and applicable in various range of industries. The executive women agreed that industry is somewhat irrelevant to executive career progression. However, the executives were often searched from within related fields of industry, even though some companies sought transindustrial experience, especially in need of changing to transform the business or culture. Industry-related, similar to country-related, cultural differences in accepting women leaders existed because some industries, unlike mechanical and technology industries, were perceived to be more women friendly, while Sweden was noted as a more equal place for women executives than Finland, even though the share of women executives was at the same level in the large-listed companies (27.2% in Finland and 27.5% in Sweden). Based on personal experiences, the industry and culture made a difference as a contextual factor through which leadership development and executive role identities were contested and conferred, supporting the findings of Mui, Parker and Titus (2021) on external gender bias towards women leaders being stronger in some industries. Similarly, the participants of the current research suggested women leave industries where men dominate and find fields where women leaders are judged on their own merits.

To conclude, from the subject position of an executive woman with a satisfactory career progression experience, the social and societal constraints may remain invisible from the current powerful position at the top level of the company. The assumption of gender differences was articulated by positioning oneself as exceptions compared with the majority of executives who were male.

6.1.3. Executive role identity constructs

The findings show the social constructivist nature of executive role identity formation (5.3). The development of executive leader identity occurs through professional experiences in social interactions, shaping the leader's role identity (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). Although the executive women navigated their careers in various positions and fields of business, individual

dispositions and motivations in accordance with the enablers and constraints of the social environment in Finland impacted, either facilitating or hindering, career identity construction.

Executive role identity was constructed by multiple simultaneous leadership roles. The executive role identity was shaped by diverse social structures and power dynamics; an executive woman operated as an executive with peers in the TMT, as a leader to one's own team of direct reports and as a role model to the whole organisation, leading by her own example. Moreover, the executive women acted as role models for other women aspiring to leadership or executive roles in Finland. Thus, the multiplicity of identities commonly connected to various roles (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Josselson and Harway, 2012) is demonstrated within one social role: the executive role.

The executive women's role identity as a part of their career identity was constructed on four inductively categorised foundations: influence through leadership, demonstrated achievement and results, authenticity and professional substance competence (section 5.3). Thus, the research findings support the notion of professionalism, which typically consists of self-governance, autonomy and expertise (Fournier, 1999). However, status—commonly attached to professionalism—was missing from the executive women's leader role constructs, while the discourse around executive role was built on eudaimonic aims for meaningfulness and excellency. Thus, the research findings contribute to the knowledge of executive careers by integrating the concept of eudaimonia into career identity.

The executive role demands high performance and business results, echoing Drucker's classic principles of efficient executives: exhibiting high levels of ethics and morals, focusing on results and building on personal and teams' strengths (Maciariello, 2006). Similarly, the importance of performance was repeatedly emerging in the research investigating business leaders in 15 countries, finding three themes most commonly in the top three: this year's profits, growth of the business and continuity of the business, though in different orders (Hofstede et al., 2002). An internalised executive role identity is enacted and communicated through various combinations of professional and leadership capabilities, resonating in harder, more measurable, business performance and softer virtues of good leadership (Sadun et al., 2022).

An emphasis was put on overall business understanding and financial competences as imperative career enablers (section 5.3.4), evidencing the historic masculine stereotype in the values and requirements of executive business roles (Sadun et al., 2022) in Finland. Because women leaders commonly focus on people functions (e.g., human resources, social and community service),

whereas men focus on things (including money) and technology (Eagly, 2021), women without the education or experience of these capabilities have not been considered viable candidates for executive business positions. However, the need for demonstrated achievements, referred as much bigger tasters, conveys the feeling of inequality and heavier burden to women leaders. The need for more demonstration and higher demands for women leaders (McKinsey & Company, 2021) resonated throughout the data, mostly as a positive emphasis of exceptional personal achievements or bluntly acknowledged facts of their own excellency, leading to the next-level position and creating the position of an exemplarily role model (Lublin, 2018; Adamson and Kelan, 2019).

6.1.4. Subjective perception of career success

The participants defined and measured career success through subjective concepts instead of traditional objective measures of status, power and money (sections 3.7. and 5.4), which were completely missing from the definitions of success. The findings add to a survey showing a gender difference in work values among young adults in a Finnish sample (Lechner et al., 2018). However, the explanation that the lower endorsement of extrinsic values is linked with lower leadership aspiration among women in the survey was opposed by the present research with actual executive women. The executive women pursued continuous growth and development through inspirational, demanding and challenging work and felt pride in their own work performance, resulting in a demonstration of achievements and enforcement of self-efficacy.

The sense-making around the values guiding career choices intertwined with the traditionally feminine, softer definitions of success, constructing a professional executive career identity. Even though executive roles included elements of objective career success, for example, status, economic wealth and power (section 3.7), the articulation of success avoided them and even replaced the word success with a milder form: achievements. This articulation demonstrates the societal norms of not showing one's wealth in Finland (section 2.5.2). Similarly, this articulation omitted the word power and utilised the word influence instead, underlining the more communal feminine language and focuses on people (Eagly and Carli, 2003; Eagly, 2021).

The research findings oppose the common notion of women's more subjective and softer, intrinsic definitions of success (Dyke and Murphy, 2006; Ekonen, 2007; Sullivan and Mainiero, 2007) as hindering their careers (section 3.7.2). The findings suggest otherwise: softer values are appreciated as recruitment criteria in contemporary leadership paradigms and societies with high gender equality (Halvorsen and Ljunggren, 2021), leading some participants to perceive their gender as an advantage in the highly fierce competition for executive positions (section 5.2.2).

The research findings evidence eudaimonia (Ryan, Huta and Deci, 2006) in career success definitions as guiding career progression to the highest organisational level. The next section discusses the themes unifying the career identities of the executive women. The three themes—meaningfulness, self-efficacy and authenticity—were identified across all the interviews, forming the foundations that guide career navigation and construct the career identities of the executive women.

6.2. Eudaimonic values guiding executive career navigation

The career identities of the executive women were constructed on eudaimonic values and motivations (LeFebvre and Huta, 2021): virtues and excellences constituting a good life originating from Aristotle's definition (Ryan, Huta and Deci, 2006). Generosity, wisdom and being fair and just in relation to others as executive leaders resonated in the participants' career identities (section 5.3). Similarly, following Aristotle's definition of eudaimonia, the participants' engagement in excellent activity through high performance and hard work, reflective decision-making and the aim to be good people leaders can be seen as representing the realisation of human virtues, which are perceived as the motives for action (Huta and Ryan, 2009). The same characteristics and capabilities have been linked to good leadership during the past few decades (Judge et al., 1995; Hambrick, Finkelstein and Mooney, 2005; Maciariello, 2006; Tuff and Goldbach, 2018; Kragt and Day, 2020); however, eudaimonia as an umbrella concept has not been connected with executive role identity. The research findings extend SDT. Ryan and Deci (2017) proposed autonomy as one of the three fundamental and universal psychological needs that are central to SDT, the other two being relatedness and competence. Autonomy can be seen as an influence and freedom to decide.

However, the orientation towards results and performance (section 5.3.2) has additionally shown in identifying oneself as an executive leader who has high demands towards other people's performance. The balancing between the agency–communion paradox, described as combination of being a soft yet a demanding leader, exposes the social norms and expectations women as executives are required to enact.

Zheng, Kark and Meister (2018) suggested a theory framework for facing the dual demands of agency and communion—role incongruity (Eagly and Karau, 2002)—in which women leaders may take either a paradox or dilemma mindset. The findings of the present research clearly support the paradox mindset, which simultaneously embraces agency and communion. The current research has contributed to the theory by adding the concept of authenticity to explain the means for

mitigating this paradox. The contradictory demands for women leaders are often referred to as a double bind, a situation in which, no matter what instruction is followed, the response will be interpreted as incorrect (Catalyst, 2007). However, the executive women combined the dual demands of agency and communion as a positive variety of identity and, thus, avoid the negative double bind.

The strong sense of eudaimonia—doing something right or authentically (Huta, 2013)—emerged from the data. Transparency and openness in communication and the aim to be an exemplary leader demonstrating the company’s values, including a tendency to focus attention on the results or collaboration with other people in the organisation instead of oneself as a leader, convey one’s identity of being of a high quality and standards. The positioning of oneself as a people-oriented leader is underlined specifically with self-referent comparison with ‘others’, commonly male peers, who seek success in life through power, status and financial wealth, compared with one’s own aspirations that entail excellency at work and even rejecting the whole concept of career. The subjective perceptions of career success measures (section 3.7.2) show the eudaimonic values on which the career identities are constructed.

Additionally, the eudaimonic aim for excellency in connection to intrinsic motivation can explain the theoretically high achievements. According to a meta-analysis by Cerasoli, Nicklin and Ford (2014), intrinsic motivation strongly predicts performance, and similarly, evidence from the nonprofit sector has shown that more motivated workers earn significantly higher wages, which signals higher productivity (Becchetti, Castriota and Tortia, 2013).

The imperative foundations of executive women’s career identities emerging from the data adhere to Huta’s (2013) conceptualisation of eudaimonia as a way of behaving rather than as a form of well-being. Table x compares the executive women’s career identity constructs with Huta’s (2013) themes and definitions of eudaimonia.

Table 6.2: Eudaimonia and career identity constructs

| Theme Huta (2013) | Definitions of the themes (Huta, 2013, pp. 242–243). | Eudaimonia in the context of executive women’s careers (Chapter 5) |
|-------------------|---|---|
| Excellence | ‘The concept that one is striving for something good/better or high/higher. However, whether the goodness of one’s actions is to be judged subjectively or objectively and consensually is a matter of debate’. | Performance orientation and demonstration of achievements (section 5.3.2) Personal definition of success (5.4.1) |

| | | |
|------------------------|---|---|
| Authenticity/autonomy | 'Acting in line with one's true self and deep values, and striving to integrate the different aspects of oneself'. | Authenticity in leadership and as a woman (sections 5.3.3 and 5.2.6) |
| Development | 'Following a purpose that promotes personal evolution and realisation of one's potential'. | Demonstrated achievements and results (5.3.2) |
| Full functioning | 'Using the full range of what one is, as appropriate, including unpleasant emotions'. | Executive role identity (section 5.3) |
| Broad scope of concern | 'Striving to serve a greater good, whether it be the welfare of entities beyond oneself, or some long-term goal for the self or others that transcends the immediate moment'. | Influence through leadership and meaningfulness as a career compass (sections 5.3.1 and 5.4.3) |
| Engagement | 'Actively applying oneself, rising to the challenge, and being deeply immersed'. | Accepting challenges and grasping new opportunities (sections 5.3.2 and 5.4.5) |
| Autotelism | 'Focusing on the quality of the means to an end, or seeing the means or process as an end in itself'. | Lack of career planning and objectively measurable career goals (section 5.4.5) |
| Contemplation | 'Thinking about the meaning of one's actions, and being guided by abstract principles'. | Influence through leadership and professional competence as an executive (sections 5.3.1 and 5.3.4) |
| Acceptance | 'While striving for excellence, simultaneously embracing and working with reality, oneself, and others as they are'. | Demonstrated achievements and results and authenticity in leadership (5.3.1 and 5.3.3) |

The research findings of eudaimonic values conceptually adhere to kaleidoscope career model's (section 3.2.2) types of aspirations, that is, authenticity, balance and challenge (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005), and develop a new understanding of women leaders' careers. However, instead of selecting between authenticity, balance or challenge as in the kaleidoscope model, the participants aimed to reach all of them simultaneously: meaningful work role and career progression fulfilled the need for challenges, authenticity was fulfilled through leader and gender roles, and balance was gained by meaningful choices in life. A successful simultaneous fulfilment of challenge, authenticity and work-life balance, resonating with the eudaimonic values on which the career identities of executive women have been constructed, opposes Hewlett's findings that executive women are not able to 'have it all' in the US (Hewlett, 2002).

The emergent concept of eudaimonia encompass discourses at the social/cultural and individual levels. First, the emphasis of eudaimonic values is explained through relatively high levels of national wealth distributed rather equally in Finland (section 2.2.1), which allow for motivations other than those focused on an income-related career (Stoet and Geary, 2022). In Finland, the welfare society's support systems with resulting progressive high taxation flattens the variation in the accumulation of personal wealth, specifically the cultural tendency towards moderation (section 2.3). In the discourse of success, the articulation around one's own material success is muted, resulting, for example, in feelings of shame when comparing one's own generous income with the direct reports' salaries.

However, well-paid executive positions generating relatively high level of personal wealth enabled the executive women to follow their eudaimonic aspirations instead of money and status, which they already have acquired integrally through their top management level positions. Wealth was perceived to result in freedom and authenticity in decision-making concerning both business and personal life choices (section 5.3.3). Hence, having a higher income makes people in any country evaluate their lives more favourably (Tong et al., 2021).

The executive women's subject position in a world of neoliberal business values forms an apparent paradox in connection with the emphasis of eudaimonic personal values (Evans and Sewell, 2013). Neoliberal values are articulated in the focus on results and performance and through meritocratic values towards career progression. However, the negative aspect of the business world's neoliberal ethos—a lower well-being because of the competitive quest for material success (Lamont, 2019)—is avoided by constructing career identities on eudaimonic values instead of hedonic individualism (Huta and Waterman, 2013).

Next, the emergent eudaimonic themes of career identity are discussed further: meaningfulness guiding the career and life choices, self-efficacy enabling continuous professional development and the importance of being authentic oneself—both as a leader and a woman.

6.2.1. Meaningfulness as a career compass

Many psychological, philosophical and religious theories support the noble human transition from self-indulgence to selflessness and altruism; human beings are hardwired to seek meaning in their lives (D'Souza and Gurin, 2016). In modern times, work has become one of the key domains from which people derive meaningfulness (Martela, 2010; Steger, Dik and Duffy, 2012). Hence, personal capabilities, values and motivation as career identity constructs guide executive women's

aspirations (section 5.4) and direct career paths towards meaningful work instead of predefined positions and roles.

The participants' rejection of the concept of career (section 5.4.5), in accordance with the importance of meaningfulness of work (section 5.4.3), as one of the major aims and measures of career success underlines the importance of intrinsic instead of extrinsic motivation—status, money and power—in the discourse of career. Rejecting the concept of career and systematic career planning, combined with the absence of objective career goals evidenced in the present research (section 5.4.5), also emerged from and reflected the external environment, showing the constant and rapid changes in today's world of work in which successful careers cannot be planned out in advance (Guan et al., 2019). Career development depends on the faced opportunities and ability to grasp them (Drucker, 2005).

However, the articulated lack of career planning and missing position or status-based career goals cannot be translated into the stagnation of career progression or drifting in the sea of job opportunities without aspiration. Career opportunities maintain or improve the meaningfulness of work through two subdimensions of intrinsic work values, as defined by Martela and Pessi (2018): a broader purpose serving some greater good or prosocial goals (executive as a good people leader) and self-realisation through autonomy, authenticity and self-expression at work (executive as decision-maker and authentic oneself).

The strongly articulated critical stance towards the concept of career appears paradoxical in the subject positions, which inherently result from career progression to the executive top management level, because accepting the offered positions at the top level conveys a notion of consent of the neoliberal business values (Adamson, 2017; Baker and Kelan, 2019). However, the explicit aim to distance oneself from the whole concept of career merely reveals a dislike of the notion of career as an objectively measurable concept. Taking subject positions through other-referent comparison of oneself as opposite of the 'others' who aim for marks on their CV, openly discuss their aspirations of next-level director positions or pursue big cars or other visible signs of status and success (section 5.4.5), underlines the loathing of the appreciated tangible values of status, power and money in society. Consequently, the discourse adheres to the request for moderation in Finnish society because the 'others' openly announcing their objective success measures were perceived negatively compared with the participants' own more virtuous, eudaimonic values. Moreover, the rationale for distancing oneself from mostly male peers in the organisations' top management demonstrated the active identification of oneself in a social group of leaders while doing gender as an executive leader (Koenig et al., 2011; Dozier, 2019), here belonging rather

than to a marginal group of exceptional executive women than being positioned in the stereotypically masculine hegemonic categorisation of leaders.

Even though the discourse of career success has resonated with the stereotypically softer feminine values (Dyke and Murphy, 2006) and higher levels of autonomy and self-determination needs (Deci and Ryan, 2017), the eudaimonic aspiration for excellency led to constantly increasing meaningful tasks and challenges and larger responsibilities with more influence at higher levels of organisations. As evidenced by the career patterns of the executive women (section 5.1), the influential position at the top level of company provided the opportunities for autonomy in decision-making and designing the work according to one's own needs, enforcing the meaningfulness of work (Deci and Ryan, 2017).

In addition to the intrinsic elements, executive top management positions contain elements satisfying extrinsic motivation: generous monetary compensation with multiple benefits and a powerful status that is ingrained in the executive roles. A decision-making role at the highest organisational level in TMTs provides a position of influence and possibilities for meaningful work, a standpoint in which authenticity and happiness are emphasised as an outcome of self-determination. The research findings verify Deci and Ryan's SDT in the context of executive women leaders (Deci, Koestner and Ryan, 1999; Ryan and Deci, 2020). Moreover, the research findings demonstrate how self-actualised individuals' peak experiences have been emphasised (Huta, 2013), in the career discourse through demonstrated achievements and social interactions when succeeding as a team.

Paradoxically, the meaningfulness of executive leader role was connected to the possibilities to influence through the top-level decision-making role and through others by leading a team and an organisation (section 5.3.1). The influential roles of the participants were inherently positions of power. Nevertheless, the word power was excluded from the vocabulary of the participants, similar to avoiding the word success and substituting it with achievement. The rationale for the avoidance of the words power and success may be interpreted through the gender-equal discourse (not raising oneself above the others) in Finland (section 2.3) and the changing leadership paradigm towards less authoritative leadership (section 5.3.3). Moreover, the vocabulary of the executive women revealed their aims to change the discourse of leadership towards a more accessible for women leaders by introducing more feminine concepts and terms (Fondas, 1997) to the social structures and hegemonic leadership discourse in Finland.

Inconsistently, the meritocratic tones in assessing the enablers of executive women's careers were based on the objective measures of success (section 3.7.1), here as demonstrated in their achievements, results and performance. Thus, the executive women were balancing between the notions of eudaimonic and meritocratic values. However, the notion of continuous development and excellency in the concept of eudaimonia (Huta and Waterman, 2013) was employed by performance and development orientation and aiming for the best results, the prerequisites of executive roles (sections 3.6 and 5.3). For most of the participants, demonstrating the results and conquering challenges and obstacles at work created meaningful experiences. Similarly, pursuing new tasks and engaging in the development of both business and oneself formed viable sources of meaningfulness at work.

Because career as a concept or career progression to higher status or compensated positions were not the participants' primary goals, objective career goals and deliberate career planning remained redundant. The career choices were based on continuous improvement and growth, which were actualised as demonstrated excellence in achievements and performance, leading to higher levels of responsibility in an organisation. Moreover, the motivation to lead and excel as an inspirational and a good leader guided the career choices towards the executive positions, rather than to specialist work. Consequently, leadership experience and reputation as an excellent leader opened the possibilities for new challenges and larger responsibilities at higher organisational levels, without specific career planning.

The reluctance to attach the prefix 'woman' to the concept of leader, which emerged in the pilot study (section 2.6) and the request of strict confidentiality and anonymity regarding the interviews, shows a paradox at the subject position of an executive woman trying to fit in and to distance oneself among the male peers and subtle incongruence of the leader and gender role (Eagly and Karau, 2002). The reputation as an excellent leader does not need a gender prefix.

The participants' definitions of success with soft measures (section 5.4) coincided with eudaimonic motivations (LeFebvre and Huta, 2021), following, for example the findings of Nicholson and de Waal-Andrews' (2005) subjective career success utilities: pride in achievement, intrinsic job satisfaction, self-worth, commitment to work role, fulfilling relationships and moral satisfaction (section 3.7.2) The executive women pursued the meaningfulness of work in multiple ways; in the work content, through influence or a leader role and the possibilities to challenge and develop oneself in the sphere of work rather than at home. However, the aim of meaningfulness was not limited to work only. Even for the highly work-oriented executive women, who were not willing to

scarify their work performance and achievements for private lives, the work–life balance became important in maintaining their own well-being by family, leisure and active social life outside work.

6.2.2. Excellency and self-efficacy enabling professional success

Excellency and self-efficacy which have been noted as one of the most relevant elements in career self-management (Lent et al., 2016), emerged as a crucial constructs of career in navigation towards demanding and challenging executive leadership positions. The rapid changes in the business environment and technologies caused mergers, acquisitions and constant structural changes in organisations, opening new positions and opportunities. To adapt to these changes in unstable circumstances within the current employment and find meaningful new roles requires agency, self-efficacy and proactive career orientation (Wiernik and Kostal, 2019), similarly as to seeking new opportunities beyond the current employment. Thus, following the SCCT (Lent and Fouad, 2011), career adaptability in executive roles was actualised by demonstrated achievements and results (section 5.2.3), in turn increasing the executives' self-efficacy and constructing their reputation as capable leaders.

The research findings indicate executive women leaders' strong self-efficacy in performing and accepting new challenges at work to fulfil the eudaimonic need for excellency and continuous growth as a professional and leaders. The women's core values directing career choices and moves with a high level of self-efficacy (Gubler, Arnold and Coombs, 2014) adhered to the protean career orientation (Douglas T Hall, 2004), which enhanced their career navigation towards the desired work roles. Because a protean career orientation was emerging in all career patterns of the participants, the research findings suggest that self-efficacy in taking ownership of one's career is an imperative construct, regardless of the career pattern and mobility form (Arthur, 2014), which is not only required in boundaryless careers.

The social construction of self-efficacy is typically perceived to have begun in childhood (Hyvärinen and Uusiautti, 2014); the executive women appreciated support from their parents, especially their fathers' encouragement to take responsibility and trust one's own capabilities in whatever the future will bring (section 5.2.1). Their fathers' masculine role model—rather than mothers, who were not commonly in leading roles in 1970s in business—directed and encouraged the executive women to stretch their gender identity construction and career identities towards paths not commonly perceived typical for women. The encouragement included strong notions of self-efficacy and authenticity, building trust in one's own abilities and emphasising the capabilities for success.

The demystifying and normalising of the executive-level requirements opposed the pilot study's findings (section 2.5.), which specifically emphasised courage. Moreover, the demonstrated achievements and results encompass external career resources. Self-efficacy can be enforced individually by work achievements and in social interaction and constructed socially, especially with the external enablers, supervisors and other people around the executives, not only in the sphere of work.

Self-efficacy can also be externally enhanced by social support that leads to the social construction of reputation building. The importance of supportive supervisors, which was noted as a key enabler of career progression in the pilot study (section 2.7), operates through the reputation, merits, achievements and expressed aspirations while staffing organisations. To attract gatekeepers, headhunters and recruitment decision-makers, women leaders need to demonstrate their achievements and capabilities to get among the 'boys' network' (Tienari et al., 2013). Being a respected professional evidenced the importance from the personal perspective, not only as a mechanism for getting on the lists.

Intrinsically, from an individual perspective, the achievements and results at work build self-efficacy; the willingness to accept challenges, grasp career opportunities and take risks increases along with positive experiences (Rudolph et al., 2017). Courage was one of the themes emerging in the pilot study's findings (section 2.4). Personal prior success and achievements enhancing self-efficacy could explain the autobiographical advice (Lämsä and Hiillos, 2008) given to other women in the pilot study.

In contrast to the pilot study findings, the word courage was almost completely missing from the interviews. The participants articulated their career moves, for example, with words 'daringly' stepping into new roles or 'shamelessly' comparing job offers or 'smaller and bigger leaps' while accepting new challenges or changing to more demanding roles. The lack of objective career goals and concentration on achieving the current work goals were viewed as beneficial as opposed to position- or status-based career goals. Fixed and narrow-focused goals have been proven to reduce intrinsic motivation and neglect chance and nongoal alternatives when new career opportunities emerge (Ordóñez et al., 2009). By not setting any specific position levels, roles or prescribed expectations for their careers, executive women have simultaneously avoided this dark side of goal setting and the emerging need for courage following a distinct career goal that remains distant and not reachable.

The lack of status or position-based career aspirations (section 5.4.5) or dreams shifted attention towards current high performance in the tasks at hand, which led to either substantial or minor incremental changes in the job role. Hence, the fear or insecurity related inherently to the concept of courage was minimised when distant goals and dreams of a better future were not disturbing their performance at work.

Courage, as an element of executive women's career discourse, has been posited among the constructs of serendipity/chance and adaptability (Rice, 2014; Hirschi and Valero, 2017). Courage takes a practical action-oriented form of risk-taking, decision-making, seeking challenges, being bored easily or testing one's abilities or boundaries. In the construction of executive identities self-efficacy and attitude towards work was contrasted through extremely hard life situations, which were considered more important than career-related experiences.

To conclude, executive career identities are constructed through reflexive assessment of experiences both at work and in the private life sphere. The executive women adhered to social constructivist underpinnings in the discourse of career identity: without their past experiences, positive and negative, identity-wise, they would not be the same and able to return to the earlier professional or personal identities. Even though the executive women embraced authenticity as being who they truly were, executive career identities were not perceived as stable achieved states; rather, they were seen as dynamic multiplicities of personal positions regarding work (Meijers, 1998) constructed through the experiences shaping the executive women's identities.

The findings suggest that, in the search of excellence, high-achieving women experience personal meaningfulness in engaging in high-performance behaviour and seek challenges involving risks, as long as the anticipated experiences outweigh the potential costs and they are able to complete their work on their own terms (Wolontis and Hoff, 2018), which is articulated through autonomy and authenticity.

6.2.3. Authentic women executive

Authenticity, an imperative theme emerging from the data, integrates executive leader roles and gender role identities and is articulated as a measure of career success, thus guiding the career choices of the executive women from three perspectives. The aim for authenticity can be seen as a discursive bridge between the societal discourse and individual experiences and as a concept for sense-making and rationalising the encountered inconsistencies: from the standpoint of an executive woman, a potential role conflict, the incongruence of gender role (woman) and leader

role (executive) (Eagly and Karau, 2002), can be rationalised and mitigated through emphasising authenticity, which encompasses both authenticity as a leader and as a woman.

In the present research, authenticity explained the tensions between agency and communion, which the women leaders claimed to face, as coined in the paradox versus dilemma theory framework by Zheng, Kark and Meister (2018). Eudaimonic authenticity represents the paradox mindset (Zheng, Kark and Meister, 2018) in the current research. The paradox can be rationalised by integrating eudaimonic values in the discourse of leadership by emphasising the leadership paradigm shift towards more participatory leader role.

For most participants, their motivation to lead (Badura et al., 2020) emerged from childhood experiences (section 5.2.1), constructing a logical and authentic work role to be pursued. Supplementing the high-performance orientation aiming at excellency, authenticity produced similar neoliberal ideals of individuality and expression that Baker and Kelan (2019) found with women executives in finance in the US. However, the participants in the present research reported no experiences of being blamed for too girly and feminine behaviours. The Finnish context allows more freedom to express both feminine and masculine behaviours, even though the participants admitted indirect forms of masculinity required, for example, in negotiations, communication and behavioural style. The need to masculine style i.e. to *'play with the male cards'* emerged only occasionally when extreme forms of agency were needed, and once the situation has been resolved, the more feminine, authentic style can be employed naturally again.

The participants positioned themselves discursively as executive leaders without personal experiences of the role incongruence (Eagly and Karau, 2002) by emphasising the inherent motivation to lead and influence and aim to neutralise gender in the professional work context. With only a few exceptions, the role of a leader was voiced as a natural tendency or path to follow, already in childhood and adolescence.

The discursive change from the hegemonic masculine values to the less authoritative leadership paradigm (Koenig et al., 2011; Hlupic, 2018) attached to modern leadership was evidenced in the executive leader role identities. The common theme, with only two exceptions, describing a personal strength as leader was the notion of being good with people or a peoples' person. The ease of taking the lead resonated in career stories while simultaneously not raising oneself above the team but rather to work together with the team and emerging as a leader (Yeager and Callahan, 2016) when the situation demanded it. Thus, authenticity in leadership underlines the

focus on task completion with others rather than emphasising one's own leader status, which shifts leadership virtues away from the hegemonic masculinities of authoritative or heroic leaders.

However, the prevalent masculine norms of leadership in Finland (section 2.8.3) emerged in the other-referent comparison of oneself against other women who have not reached the top management level, along with male peers in executive management teams, both of these comparisons underlining the nonprototypicality of women in executive business roles in Finland. Regardless of the personal experience of lacking gender discrimination and barriers, the discursive analysis portrays Finland as a country in which men and women are perceived as distinctly different, even opposite in their behavioural tendencies (Adams and Coltrane, 2005), which shows the existence of the role incongruence (Eagly, 2016) at the societal level and absence at the individual level. Thus, in executive career identity, authenticity can be perceived as mitigating the role incongruence (Frémeaux and Pavageau, 2022) because authenticity in leadership integrates the feminine qualities with the executive leader role's requirements of performance orientation and the demonstrated achievements, which are stereotypically distinguished as more masculine.

In the controversial standpoint of a powerful individual in Finnish society (a top-level executive business leader) and a historically marginalised group member (a woman), the gendered discourse applies the concept of authenticity to allow freedom to act as who one is ('true self') and neutralises the norms and restrictions of gender stereotypes. Finland's world-famous prime minister, Sanna Marin, is a recent role model in her party scandal (Greenall, 2022). She has insisted on her authenticity by 'wanting to be honest and myself' as a desire to maintain a normal social life, to her credit and occasional peril (Kale, 2022).

Simultaneously, the research findings have exposed the societal-level discourse on the role incongruence of gender (woman) and leader roles. Gender segregation, both horizontal and vertical, has been well acknowledged and discussed as a structural phenomenon in Finnish society (section 2.2.3), regardless of the high gender equality level in global comparison (section 2.1).

From a social identity perspective, the social construction of career identity demonstrates an existing paradox of the potential social groups executive women should adhere to (section 6.1.2). The participants categorised other women in the professional context as outsiders from their perspective. Thus, they did not associate themselves and fit into the suppressed crowd of women leaders because of their powerful—influential—position as business leaders. Neither did they belong among their male counterparts fully while being a minority gender group among their peers in the TMTs (Katila and Eriksson, 2013). Hence, authenticity and gender neutrality emerged not

only as important discursive concepts in sense-making around the executive role identity, but also as imperative values guiding the participants' career choices.

The gender-neutral attitude towards work coincided with the pilot study findings: most of the women who refused to participate in the campaign, when suggested by others or invited to participate, explained their decision to withdraw by the negative connotation attached to the concept of women leader (section 2.4). The existence of societal incongruence of the two role identities, a woman and leader, became evident in the refusal of participation in the pilot study and the interview participants' emphasis of gender neutrality by not touching the topic without being directly asked about it.

Moreover, the inconsistency of the participants' discursive positioning became specifically evident in their aim to act as role models to other women and simultaneously to be categorised as leaders without the gender label 'woman' attached to the leader role. Additionally, the executive women's aim to encourage other women by meritocratic articulation of equal opportunities—for those who meet the high expectations—signalled the experiences in navigating their careers and aiming to change gendered norms and stereotypical gender roles in the Finnish business context. However, the rationale for overcoming the inconsistencies and paradoxes lies in authenticity and being oneself while ignoring the cultural or societal norms and expectations by, for example, not glancing sideways and caring what other people think, not selling one's soul or faking and hiding one's true personality (section 5.3.3).

Internal self-awareness (Eurich, 2018)—an understanding of one's own values, passions, aspirations and impact on others—became vital in career navigation towards positions and organisations in which the executive women felt they can fulfil their pursuit of excellence and be accepted as who they were. Consequently, authenticity, self-efficacy and meaningfulness of work (Lent and Brown, 2013; Lent et al., 2016) operate as central enablers of making career-related choices accomplishing the executive women's eudaimonic pursuits.

7. Contributions and conclusions

This chapter presents the original contributions to the literature and concludes the research findings presented in the eudaimonic career identity model of executive women in Finland (Figure 6.1). Theoretical contributions, implications to practice the methodological choice, limitations and recommendations for further research are discussed.

Researching executive women's career identities is justified by the requirement for new career models following the increase of women in executive roles and top management careers. Leadership includes an assumption of masculine norms and values, which do not fully explain executive women's careers in Finland. The present research has opened new avenues for understanding enablers behind women executives' successful career navigation in one of the most gender-equal countries, setting directions for future research (academic contributions) and supporting individuals and companies in adjusting their actions to improve equal opportunities for leaders of all genders (practical implications).

7.1. Key contributions

The key theoretical contribution of the present research is a new career identity model connecting the concept of eudaimonia with executive women's career identities (Figure 6.1). Both concepts—career identity and eudaimonia—have long research traditions (Chapter 3) but have not been used to explain women's careers.

The key concepts of eudaimonia—excellency, meaningfulness and authenticity—form the imperative foundations on which the career identities of the executive women have been constructed. Several career models include notions of these elements; however, they have been suggested merely as career barriers hindering women's careers in management rather than imperative career enablers of women in leadership positions in the kaleidoscope career model (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005; Sullivan and Mainiero, 2007b) or literature around women's tendency to opt out (Wilhoit, 2014; Biese, 2017). The objective career measures based on traditional masculine hegemony attached to the top management positions have arisen in the research conducted among younger cohorts of graduates or students (Lechner et al., 2018; Stoet and Geary, 2022), which forms a substantial body of knowledge in career research. Subjective, eudaimonic values are commonly appreciated among older and more experienced leaders, both men and women (Ely, Stone and Ammerman, 2014). To conclude, the present research shifts the discourse of executive career success towards gender neutrality and away from the stereotypical

feminine–masculine divide by presenting a combination of agentic and eudaimonic constructs of executive career identities, simultaneously signalling the feminisation of leadership (Tomlinson, Brockbank and Traves, 1997; Adler and Kwon, 2002; Kark, Waismel-Manor and Shamir, 2012).

The key findings and their contributions to knowledge and implications for practice are discussed next.

7.1.1. Eudaimonic career navigation without planning and objective goals

The research findings have reconceptualised the career goals and transformed the traditional objective-, status- and position-based career goals into eudaimonic aspirations of continuous professional development. Aiming for excellence within a meaningful work role in an environment that allows for autonomy and authenticity is vital for women executive leaders.

The career patterns investigated in SQ1 fail to explain the career navigation of the executive women in the present research. Career development depends on the opportunities and ability to grasp them (Drucker, 2005). No particular career mobility profiles can be assigned to best describe executive women's career navigation. Three career mobility pattern profiles have been categorised in this research: conventional linear careers (1–2 employers), moderate boundaryless moves (3–4 employers) and frequent boundaryless moves (5–8 employers). The majority (12/17) of the interviewed executive women followed boundaryless career patterns (moderate or frequent career moves) that transcend organisations and industries.

Regardless of the career pattern, the careers of executive women have followed an uninterrupted upward direction. The research has shown a pattern of reaching the first executive-level positions during second or third employment after graduation from higher education. This finding opposes the new knowledge economy's common notion of questioning the traditional concept of a hierarchical career (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; Pongratz and Voß, 2003; Guan et al., 2019), simultaneously supporting the literature questioning boundaryless in the managerial career research (Inkson et al., 2012; Hassard, Morris, and McCann, 2012).

The research findings support the assumption that societal and personal reasons result in greater and faster mobility across organisational boundaries, specifically among leadership careers (Koch, Forgues and Monties, 2017). A societal, structural explanation for career boundarylessness has emerged from the companies' requirement to stay relevant in the constant changes in the business environment. The maintenance of shareholder value and positive future profitability is reflected in the renewal of TMT compositions by rapidly changing team members and not delivering expected

results fast enough (Korn Ferry, 2020). This unlocks career opportunities for potential executive candidates, while headhunters and management present new positions inside and outside the companies. The boundaryless nature of careers is evidenced by the executive women's average of approximately four years of tenure in a top management position (Clark, 2020; Finland Chamber of Commerce, 2020b).

The personal reasons for career mobility among the present research's participants were constructed on the eudaimonic values of seeking meaningfulness and excellency through more demanding and inspiring work roles. The eudaimonia in executive women's career identities guided their career aspirations and the perceptions of the career concept.

A strong rejection of the career concept, for some participants even resulting in thinking of being an 'unsuitable' participant in the current career-related research, can be linked with nonexistent conscious career planning or goals (section 5.4.5). The rejection of career as a concept or pursuing status or compensatory values represents the prevailing narrow conceptualisation of a career as an objective concept in the Finnish business world discourse.

Consequently, career success has been conceptualised with subjective eudaimonic measures, and the findings barely touch on the notions of money and compensation. This supports the literature providing findings of women defining success with more personal, softer values (Dyke and Murphy, 2006; Spence, 2014; Rigotti, Korek, et al., 2018): even the powerfulness of the executive leader's positions is discoursed through influence and meaningfulness. However, the research findings extend the present theories by connecting subjective career success conceptualisations with successful career navigation to the TMT level, instead of perceiving subjective career success as explaining only the women's careers stagnation to lower organisational levels (section 3.5).

7.1.2. Authentic and gender neutral women as successful executive leaders

The research findings show no support for an incongruence of women's gender and leader roles (Eagly and Karau, 2002) at the individual level. The articulated incongruence of the two roles was perceived merely as an other-referent concept, not arising from one's own career experiences, which evidence the prevailing traditional masculine societal and cultural norms and assumptions of leadership in Finland. However, the research findings have demonstrated the emerging nonbinary gender thinking (Vincent, 2020) through enacted stereotypically feminine and masculine behaviours and traits in the executive role. The research findings adhere to the changes towards simple male–female polarisation becoming outdated. This follows intersectional feminism's ideals (Acker, 2012) on which the Finnish government's equality policy is based (Kudel, 2021), posits

gender among other factors and advocates for new marginalised groups in their discriminated and suppressed standpoints.

The importance of authenticity in an executive career identity has been emphasised as an eudaimonic concept integrating executive leader role and gender role identities (SQ2) and as a subjective measure of career success (SQ3). Authenticity (Ibarra, 2015; van den Bosch et al., 2019)—the desire to be oneself, a woman and an executive leader—operates as a discursive bridge between the societal discourse and individual experiences. Sense-making and rationalising the encountered inconsistencies and potential incongruence of the feminine gender role and leader role can be mitigated through a strong determination to demonstrate one's true nature uncompromisingly at work.

The research findings extend to the social role theory (Eagly and Wood, 2012) by showing that demonstrating authenticity as being unpretentious at work develops executive role identities without the incongruence of gender and leader role. Executive women's career identities are constructed on an inherent motivation to lead and influence (Elprana et al., 2015; Guillén, Mayo and Korotov, 2015; Schyns, Kiefer and Foti, 2020). Integrated with a gender neutral attitude towards work, authenticity encompasses agency and communion in executive women's career identities.

The research findings have exposed the limitations of gender stereotyping in leadership (Due Billing and Alvesson, 2000). An avoidance of gender (section 5.2), as part of career narratives, contrasts the conventional ideas of the masculinity of leadership (Lauritsen, 2021); the topic of gender was left untouched in most of the participants' career stories and emerged only with a direct question asking about gendered experiences at work. Despite the varying attitudes towards gender at work, advantage, neutral or barrier to others, the findings have conveyed a message of releasing gender labels from the professional context, aiming to support women leaders through a meritocratic discourse of leadership and articulating that excellent leadership does not depend on gender but competency. Consequently, coining executive leader roles as either feminine or masculine may reproduce conventional stereotypes and the gender segregation of labour (Due Billing and Alvesson, 2000) and create misleading assumptions of women's or men's supremacy in executive roles.

7.1.3. Subjective career success: In search of meaningful work

The executive women's rejection of the concept of career (section 5.4.5) combined with the meaningfulness of work (section 5.4.3) guided the career choices and acted as an imperative underlining value conducting the discourse of career in the direction of intrinsic motivation away from the extrinsic measures of success—status, money and power. The rejection of career as a concept, lack of systematic career planning and absence of objective career goals (section 5.4.5) emerge from and reflect the external work environment in Finland, in which constant and rapid changes in today's world of work and in which successful careers cannot be planned out in advance (Guan et al., 2019).

In the executive women's eudaimonic career identity model, the conceptualisations of meaningfulness (Martela, 2010; Allan, Autin and Duffy, 2016; Martela and Pessi, 2018; Bailey et al., 2019) emerged from the work content and role, social relations at work and meaningfulness as a larger life-theme (Table 5.9). The subjective measures of career success defined in the present research add to the utilities defined by Nicholson and de Waal-Andrews (2005): pride in achievement, intrinsic job satisfaction, self-worth, commitment to work role, fulfilling relationships and moral satisfaction.

Similarly, autonomy, a central element of SDT (Ryan and Deci, 2017), was valued as a work-related aim. Autonomy is ingrained in the executive role; a position with a high autonomy level allows independent decision-making and responsibility-taking in managing the business areas or functions. However, the executive women's career model opposed SDT's proposition of extrinsic motivators lowering self-determination (Ryan and Deci, 2017). The extensive compensation packages and benefits integral to executive positions have not weakened the intrinsic eudaimonic motivation and experienced autonomy of the executive women. Nor have the substantial extrinsic rewards of monetary value directed career aspirations away from meaningfulness. This can be explained with autonomy and integrated regulation (Deci, Koestner and Ryan, 1999; Gagné and Deci, 2005); because executive career identity is an integral part of women's individual and social identity, both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation result in satisfaction coming from the activity itself and from the positive consequences to which the activity leads.

The word success—with its connotation towards objective career measures power, status and money—was omitted in the discourse of career and replaced with achievements, which represent individual agency in the executive role. In the Finnish and Nordic contexts, one explanation for avoiding the concept of success arose from the misalignment with success and its observable marks and societal norm of *Jantelagen*, not raising oneself above others (Johansson and Jönsson,

2017). However, success remained in the discourse at the business and organisational levels, including monetary results, revenue growth and other 'hard' goals. Thus, the participants' discourse around success combined, similar to the binary masculine-feminine behaviours and traits, a simultaneous existence of 'hard' monetary results and goals at the business level and 'soft' meaningfulness at the individual identity level.

7.1.4. Excellency in executive leader roles

A clear uniform message was conveyed in the discourse of career enablers: to succeed in executive roles or reach them, demonstrated excellent achievements and experience are essential. Several resources are required in companies' top management roles, depending on the area of responsibility.

The leader role identities of executive women were constructed on motivation to lead and demonstration of contemporary leadership capabilities combined with professional expertise (section 5.3). Excellency in leading people is a common requirement in the executive leader role. Another shared competence is business understanding; without comprehensive business and financial understanding, the road to the executive level is closed. This raises the requirement of mastering traditionally masculine STEM competence (Smith, 2016) and sales skills, which operate as the enablers of executive women's careers.

The executive role inherently requires agentic action: decision-making, influencing and taking responsibility beyond one's own tasks describe the work at the highest organisational level. The role entails the ability to think strategically and operate efficiently in a network of complex relationships, which also develop through experience over time (Kragt and Day, 2020).

Agency becomes alive in the discourse through the eudaimonic value of excellency. A performance and result orientation produce demonstrated achievements and build a reputation of competent and reliable professionals who have the potential for executive positions. Subsequently, the demonstrated achievements and excellent performance improve self-efficacy and career adaptability (Lent and Brown, 2013), in turn facilitating career navigation by grasping opportunities and taking risks. The strong self-efficacy of executive women, as opposed to the pilot study results (section 2.6), muted the need for courage; without insecurity and fear, courage does not emerge.

The current research extends the recent sustainable career concept (van der Heijden et al., 2020) with the concept of eudaimonia. Similar to sustainable careers, the research findings incorporate the notions of boundaryless (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996) and kaleidoscope (Mainiero and

Sullivan, 2005) careers, SCCT (Lent, 2013) and constructivist career theories (Savickas, 2013) into the eudaimonic career identity model of executive women. In the present research, the executives in the TMTs not only respond to the current context of work, but also shape the environment and lead the change in the business world. Thus, the latest business and leadership trends appear in the discourse around leader role identity, for example, the concepts of sustainable leadership (Hallinger and Suriyankietkaew, 2018) and sustainable career (van der Heijden et al., 2020), containing the elements of meaning and agency, persistence and employability.

To conclude the key findings presented above, women executives' careers are constructed on subjective, softer eudaimonic values, which have been considered in the literature as obstacles or hindrances for women leaders' careers (sections 3.4.2 and 3.5). The current research has proven otherwise. Executive women's career discourse is constructed around influence instead of power, achievements rather than success and rejection of career planning and objective career goals. Yet regardless of their socially perceived gender handicap—womanness—they have managed to reach the male-dominant top corporate level in Finland with demonstrated professional excellence and authenticity as capable leaders.

7.2. Implications to practice

The holistic model of executive women's eudaimonic career identities developed in the present research provides an understanding of what should be considered when designing engaging TMT positions and selecting leaders to the executive level. According to DDI's report, 47% of executives hired outside the company, and 35% of all executives promoted internally are considered failures (Paese, 2021). From the individual executives' perspective, the model will help leaders assess their career identities, executive stories, values, success factors and purpose, in addition to a typical executive transition journey that focuses merely on the organisational and other external factors while taking over or considering new top management positions (Cvetkovic, 2021).

All potential executives are not driven by objective measures of success, compensation and status; career identities are also built on intrinsic values, as evidenced by the eudaimonic career identity model of executive women. Emphasising the eudaimonic elements in the executive role—the possibilities to develop one's own and others' competences and performance, act as authentic oneself in leadership and one's gender and the meaningfulness of the work role—would attract a diversified pool of candidates. Creating meaningful work roles and environments engages executive leaders better than compensation or status, which is already at a substantial level and, thus, may appear as less relevant to experienced executives.

For younger generations and leaders aspiring to executive positions—following the executive women’s aspiration of being a role model—the current research findings show that all career paths and executives are not alike. Appreciation of more diversity also invites authenticity (Brenneman, 2020). However, competing for the scarce executive positions at the top of companies requires self-efficacy, which is demonstrated achievements and excellent leadership skills, which are independent of gender.

In the pilot study, women leaders have emphasised courage in seeking leadership positions (section 2.6), whereas in the interviews, courage was barely mentioned. The career progression of the executive women was seen as a result of organic development from one achievement and role to another, which did not require specific courageous actions, especially when career progression in itself and objective career success measures were not guiding the aspirations. However, the pilot study’s advice to have courage similarly included action and taking responsibility. If the career aspirations and goals are based on status and the dream position level perceived remains more distant, such as multiple steps up in the career ladder, courage becomes a relevant word to describe the substantial transition. Emphasising smaller incremental career steps and moves in career counselling and coaching of aspiring leaders and executives direct the focus to more concrete agentic actions, excellency and demonstrated achievements, which improve self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982; Stajkovic and Luthans, 1998; Rigotti, Korek and Otto, 2018). Thus, career adaptability’s (Lent and Brown, 2013; Hirschi, Herrmann and Keller, 2015) emphasis turns to capitalising on chance events.

Only a few top candidates of all the potentials for the executive level will get there; thus, the demonstrated performance level and achievements and reputation need to be of the highest quality. Even though the positions at the TMTs can be described with elite or privilege prefixes, those connotations would convey a distorted image of the executive women relying on participatory leadership style and constructing their lives according to eudaimonic values, specifically in Finland, where modesty is valued (section 2.5.2). The message delivered from executive women to all aspiring leaders was simple: an executive must demonstrate high performance both in the substance area and in leadership. Yet authenticity, being one’s true, unpretentious self, was seen as enough and recommended.

7.1. The methodological choice and its potential limitations

The concept of career, with its inherent notion of change or development over time (Savickas, 2001), especially as observed in managerial careers as an upward progression in an organisation

(Hall, 1996), invited an interpretivist approach for the present research. The current research has assumed that construction of career identities occurs, even in a highly individualised society, like Finland (Josselson and Harway, 2012), in social work settings (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010) that enable or prohibit the career development of women leaders, hence shaping the sense-making of their role identities. Thus, an interpretive social constructivist philosophy was adopted, as aligned with the aim to study representations of career identities and sense-making around the careers of women working in executive roles in Finland.

The social constructivist approach was suitable for the present research in generating common unifying constructs of executive women's career identities, which is now illustrated as a model (Figure 6.1). The selected three-phase qualitative data analysis provided the anticipated results required for the construction of the eudaimonic career identity model:

1. The thematic analysis of the pilot study, during the interview process and after the collection of the data, identified the emerging themes and categories of executive women's career identities;
2. The narrative analysis investigating the objective career patterns and transitions from one position to another presented the uninterrupted and upward career progression; and
3. The discourse analysis complemented the aforementioned phases by connecting the findings to the societal and cultural context in which the executive women navigated and constructed their careers.

The adopted inductive-deductive (abductive) approach resulted in the integration of new empirical evidence from the Finnish context and literature, extending the career theories with executive women's career identity model. New elements in the career model, for example, the concept of eudaimonia, were discovered during the research process (Gioia, Corley and Hamilton, 2013). The constructs of meaningfulness, authenticity and excellence, combining motivation to lead and influence and development-oriented aims for performance and achievements, emerged through the qualitative research subquestions.

The selected interview protocol supported data collection because the researcher built trust in relationships with the participants, which became evident in their openness (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015). The narrations of career experiences included highly personal examples, even traumas, to justify and explain their career construction and perceptions. A distinct feature of the interviews was the presence of openness and honesty, which itself evidences the executive women's need for—being who they are—authenticity. Moreover, a high level of rapport can positively affect the credibility and rigour of the research (Brinkmann, 2013).

The findings reflect the nature of a uniquely Finnish context. The participants worked in Finland in a Finnish business environment. Even though some companies operated globally, distinct national and local values were represented in the discourse around executive careers.

The methodological choice with the selected underpinnings has supported the achievement of the set research aim (section 1.2). The findings of the current qualitative research comprise only 17 executive women's subjective perceptions and sense-making of their careers and a pilot study containing secondary data, which limits the generalisability without more extensive samples and repeated research. However, the eudaimonic career identity model operates as a transferable concept (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) for a larger audience.

7.2. Future research

The present research opens up numerous avenues for future research. Future research utilising the eudaimonic career identity model in investigating the role of eudaimonic values in career choices is recommended based on the findings of the present thesis. Moreover, the growing population of executive women in business roles allows for explanative and quantitative research on the enablers of career success in various industries and countries.

The research was conducted only among women; thus, expanding the eudaimonic career model as a research framework to all genders would allow for a comparison and wider application of the research findings. Moreover, career resources and explanations of the elements need to be discovered in various contexts other than Finland.

The research findings evidence the lack of objective career goals and setting priorities for current achievements. The research opens new avenues for researching the resulting effects of self-efficacy with quantitative research to extend the career adaptability theory in the context of executive leaders. Career progression is constructed on demonstrated achievements, which positively affect self-efficacy, in turn influencing the willingness to take risks and accept meaningful career opportunities. To clarify the causal dynamics, quantitative research is recommended.

Moreover, the rich data contained various intriguing findings that were outside the focus of this research and, thus, only received minor attention. Among the prominent topics for future research would be fathers as leader role models (section 5.2.1) for their daughters to investigate the patterns of intergenerational occupational inheritance (Keski-Petäjä and Witting, 2016).

Additionally, fathers' role in building their daughters' self-efficacy and agency needs more empirical evidence. Thus, research attention should shift to fathers, who could be the solution to ending the steep occupational and educational segregation in Finland (section 2.2.2) that fortifies the societal structures and stereotypical gender roles and that hinder the career choices of highly educated women in the Finnish workforce.

A strong need to avoid gendering in the sphere of work emerged in the interviews (section 5.2). Similarly, the women declining to participate in the pilot study's public campaign refused to attach a gender label to their leader roles (section 2.6). Future research should let go of the binary gender thinking in leadership once enough empirical evidence has been gathered on women leaders' careers at all managerial levels. More attention should be paid to executive women's careers along the rising share of women at the TMT level.

7.3. Final thoughts

Eudaimonic career identities emphasising excellency, meaningfulness and authenticity capture today's career and leadership paradigms. The final thought on the research findings is best summed up by John Stuart Mill's famous Victorian era quote:

Those only are happy who have their minds fixed on some object other than their own happiness; on the happiness of others, on the improvement of mankind, even on some art or pursuit, followed not as a means, but as itself an ideal end. Aiming thus at something else, they find happiness by the way. (2009, p.142).

Translated into the context of the present research with eudaimonia in 2022, it would be as follows:

Those only achieve career success who have their minds fixed on some objectives other than their own career progression; on the improvement of the organisation or mankind, even daily leadership and performance goals, not as a means but as itself an ideal end. Aiming thus at something else, they find meaningful career opportunities.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Pilot study interview example (English and Finnish)

Annukka Lantto (<https://naisjohtajat.fi/henkilot/annukka-lantto/>)

born. 1968

Antell

Vice President, Board Member, entrepreneur (family business)

" I am a Master of Science (Econ) from Helsinki School of Economics and Business Administration. During my studies, I worked on various restaurant tasks and as a sports instructor. I ended up in the catering, cafeteria and bakery business of our family company Antell, first as a summer worker in a project and pretty soon after that as a sales manager in our bakery. I worked 20 years in our bakery and cafeteria companies, first in sales and marketing positions, and then approximately ten years as the managing director. When our company was reorganized to a group in 2014, I started as a Vice President."

Is there a woman who has inspired you, and how?

I have been able to work with many fabulous women. I also have many inspiring friends. Women who I respect especially are professionals who enjoy what they do and are individuals. I appreciate people who are brimming with happiness, serenity and basic satisfaction and have the ability to solve complex issues. I admire leaders who can face people as individuals and at the same time handle their tasks professionally.

Who has pushed you forward in your career?

Friends, colleagues, subordinates and my husband. Pushing forward can also mean that you get the courage to say what you don't want.

What has been most challenging during your career?

In general, planning and managing time. Working in a family business with my own brother and parents is an immense richness. But, at the same time, it is challenging to find the balance between work and free time, between family-me and professional-me.

If you could avoid one mistake, what would that be?

I can think of many professional issues that I would do differently with my current knowledge. However, those have taught me and developed me as a person. In retrospect, I would turn towards myself ever faster and braver, e.g. I would learn how to unlearn performing for the sake of performing – I could have done that earlier. And there are plenty of these examples

What goals do you have for the future?

I am interested in the connection of food and nutrition to health and wellbeing. I am inspired that I can affect other people's health and wellbeing at work through my work with food products at Antell.

Your advice to women:

Trust yourself and develop your professional skills. Be open and authentic, don't become tough and cold. Pursue enough wellbeing for yourself!

Your best hint to help everyday life:

Plan and organize, get and ask for help. Live true to your values. Communicate – also with yourself!

Appendix 1

Annukka Lantto

s. 1968

Antell**Varatoimitusjohtaja, hallituksen jäsen, perheyrittäjä**

”Olen KTM Helsingin Kauppakorkeakoulusta. Opiskeluaikana työskentelin monenlaisissa ravintola-alan tehtävissä sekä liikunnanohjaajana. Päädyin henkilöstöravintola-, kahvila- ja leipomoalan perheyritykseen Antelliin töihin ensin kesäksi projektitehtäviin ja aika pian sen jälkeen leipomomme myyntipäälliköksi. Työskentelin leipomo- ja kahvilayhtiöissämme 20 vuoden ajan ensin myynnin ja markkinoinnin tehtävissä ja sitten n. 10 vuotta toimitusjohtajana. Kun Antell siirtyi vuonna 2014 konsernirakenteeseen, aloitin Antellilla varatoimitusjohtajana.”

Kuka nainen on inspiroinut sinua ja miksi?

Olen saanut tehdä töitä useiden upeiden naisten kanssa. Minulla on myös inspiroivia ystäviä. Naisilla, joita arvostan erityisesti, on ammattitaitoa – he nauttivat siitä mitä tekevät ja ovat persoonallisia. Arvostan ihmisiä, joista huokuu onnellisuus, seesteisyys ja perustyytyväisyys sekä kyky ratkoa vaikeita asioita. Ihailen johtajia, jotka pystyvät kohtaamaan ihmiset yksilöinä ja samalla hoitavat tehtävänsä ammattitaidolla.

Kuka on työntänyt sinua urallasi eteenpäin?

Ystävät, kollegat, alaiset, aviomies. Uralla eteenpäin työntäminen voi olla myös sitä, että saa rohkeutta sanoa mitä ei halua.

Minkä olet urasi aikana kokenut haastavaksi?

Yleisesti ottaen ajankäytön suunnittelun ja hallinnan. Työ perheyrityksessä oman veljen ja vanhempien kanssa on valtava rikkaus. Samalla on haasteellista löytää tasapaino työn ja vapaa-ajan välille, perhemmän ja ammattimiehen välille.

Jos voisit välttää yhden virheen mikä se olisi?

Keksin moniakkin ammatillisia asioita, jotka tekisin nykyisillä tiedoillani toisin. Kuitenkin nekin ovat opettaneet minua ja kasvattaneet ihmisenä. Jälkikäteen menisin kohti itseäni vieläkin nopeammin ja rohkeammin, esimerkiksi opettelin pois suorittamisesta suorittamisen vuoksi – sen olisi voinut tehdä jo aiemmin. Ja näitä esimerkkejä riittää.

Mitä tavoitteita sinulla on tulevaisuudessa?

Olen kiinnostunut ruuan ja ravinnon yhteydestä terveyteen ja hyvinvointiin. Minua innostaa se, että voin Antellilla työni kautta ruokatuotteiden parissa vaikuttaa ihmisten hyvinvointiin ja työhyvinvointiin.

Neuvosi naisille:

Luota itseesi, kehitä ammattitaitoasi. Ole avoin ja aito, älä tule kovaksi ja kylmäksi. Tavoittele itsellesi riittävää hyvinvointia!

Paras vinkki arjen helpottamiseksi:

Suunnittele ja organisoi, hanki ja pyydä apua. Elä arvojesi mukaisesti. Kommunikoij – myös itsesi kanssa!

Appendix 2 Naisjohtajat Esiin! – Presenting women leaders! Campaign questions

| Question in Finnish | Question in English |
|---|---|
| Nimi | Name |
| Syntymävuosi | Year of birth |
| Yritys/Organisaatio | Company/Organization |
| Tentävänimike | Title |
| Esittely | Introduction |
| Kuka nainen on inspiroinut sinua ja miten? | Is there a woman who has inspired you, and how? |
| Kuka on työntänyt sinua uralla eteenpäin? | Who has pushed you forward in your career? |
| Minkä olet urasi aikana kokenut haastavaksi? | What has been most challenging during your career? |
| Jos voisit välttää yhden virheen mikä se olisi? | If you could avoid one mistake, what would that be? |
| Mitä tavoitteita sinulla on tulevaisuudessa? | What goals do you have for the future? |
| Neuvosi naisille: | Your advice to women: |
| Paras vinkkisi arjen helpottamiseksi: | Your best hint to help everyday life: |

Appendix 3 Pilot study: Word frequencies by questions

| Word frequencies by questions Pilot Study: Presenting women leaders | | | | | | | |
|---|-----|--|-----|-------------------------------------|-----|---|-----|
| Question 1: | | Question 2: Inspiring woman | | Q4: Challenges during career | | Question 7: hints for daily chores | |
| Work | 448 | woman | 332 | Challenge | 197 | weekday | 87 |
| Entrepreneurship | 208 | Inspire | 147 | Work | 146 | work | 74 |
| Lead, leader | 167 | Mother | 129 | Human | 54 | need | 52 |
| Finnish, Finland | 147 | Inspiration | 126 | Lead, leader | 51 | home | 45 |
| Education | 115 | Courage | 123 | Learn | 50 | Live, life | 34 |
| Career | 115 | Work | 112 | Experience | 44 | Family | 34 |
| University | 85 | Live, life | 85 | Woman | 41 | Child | 31 |
| Helsinki | 84 | Human | 71 | Situation | 37 | | |
| Marketing | 83 | Strong | 67 | Change | 36 | Question 8: Advice to other women | |
| Master | 80 | Admire | 48 | Combining | 36 | Courage | 122 |
| Different | 77 | Faith | 45 | Entrepreneur | 34 | Woman | 76 |
| International | 77 | Lead, leader | 42 | Family | 34 | Belive | 61 |
| Learn | 75 | Finnish, Finland | 39 | Young, adolescent | 30 | Work | 42 |
| Development | 73 | World | 34 | | | Competence | 39 |
| Child | 65 | Competence | 34 | Q5: One mistake to avoid | | Live, life | 36 |
| Experience | 62 | Young, adolescent | 32 | Mistake | 227 | Trust | 32 |
| Business | 61 | Grandmother | 31 | Learn | 162 | | |
| Human | 59 | Stunning | 31 | Avoid | 51 | | |
| Opportunity | 57 | | | Live, life | 49 | | |
| Interesting | 55 | Q3: Who has pushed you forward? | | Courage | 36 | | |
| Sales | 54 | Supervisor | 133 | Fear | 34 | | |
| Growth | 50 | Forward | 117 | Work | 33 | | |
| Board | 49 | Support | 113 | | | | |
| CEO | 48 | Work | 104 | Question 6: Future goals | | | |
| Change | 48 | Career | 107 | Work | 158 | | |
| Found | 48 | Belief | 89 | Target | 87 | | |
| World | 48 | Encourage | 81 | Learn | 82 | | |
| Motherhood | 46 | Spouse, husband | 72 | Lead, leader | 60 | | |
| Adolesence | 46 | Human | 69 | Human | 59 | | |
| Live, life | 41 | Challenge | 56 | Entrepreneur | 57 | | |
| Communication | 38 | Learn | 52 | Finnish, Finland | 52 | | |
| Supervisor | 36 | Friend | 52 | Growth | 45 | | |
| Technology | 36 | Family | 47 | Develop | 44 | | |
| Challenge | 35 | Man | 47 | Future | 42 | | |
| Influence | 35 | Woman | 46 | Chance | 40 | | |
| Family | 33 | Opportunity | 45 | Best | 37 | | |
| Hobby | 32 | Courage | 41 | Development | 32 | | |
| Strong | 32 | Push | 41 | Challenge | 32 | | |
| | | Parent | 40 | Wish | 30 | | |
| | | Responsibility | 35 | | | | |
| | | Colleague | 33 | | | | |
| | | Competence | 33 | | | | |
| | | Trust | 31 | | | | |

Appendix 4 Codebook of the Pilot Study

| Codebook of the Pilot Study: Presenting Women Leaders Campaign | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|--|---|-----------------|
| Themes | Category | Definition | Verbatim example quotes | Frequency count |
| Career support | | Someone who has encouraged or enabled career success. | | |
| | Supervisors | Former and current managers, bosses and supervisors encouraging and promoting in the organisations. | "My supervisors have opened new gates." "My bosses, both women and men." "The important enabler was my supervisor." | 68 |
| | Network | Friends, colleagues, mentors who give support. | "Good friends and sparring partners." "My vast network." "People who believed in a young woman." | 45 |
| | Family | Spouse, husband, boyfriend | "Support of my spouse." "Good and equal spouse." | 39 |
| | | Parents, mother, father | "My parents." "My mother." | 30 |
| | | Own family, child, children, son, daughter or childhood family members, sister, brother, relatives , supporting, | "My home troops." "My two sons." | 20 |
| Work values | | Values and goals related to career and motivational factors | "Absolutely success, but now as older and with a family, not at any cost. A title or hierarchy is not the only and not even most important measures. It is the meaningfulness of the work. I want to maintain my enthusiasm and willingness to learn new things, that is one of the best motivators." | |
| | Learning | Learning, growth and professional development | "I want to grow, learn and leave a visible positive mark." | 30 |
| | Work-life balance | Balancing with work and other spheres of life, wellbeing and happiness . | "A life besides work" "A balance between my ambition and home & nearest ones." "Be happy at work and at home." | 22 |
| | Challenges | Challenging work and more demanding roles. | "Larger business responsibility." "to develop and learn more, to go outside my comfort zone." "I enjoy challenges at work, especially leading people and | 11 |

| | | | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|--|----|
| | | | things.” | |
| | Growth as a leader | Developing one’s leadership skills and becoming a better leader. | “I want to develop myself further as a leader and a professional.” “I want to grow as a leader and be a forerunner in changing the market and doing things differently.” | 12 |
| | Work achievement | Goals related to business or achievement of organizational targets . | “I want to continue changing the world.” “I want to play part in building a growth story in a result-oriented culture.” “I would like to achieve goals before the slower ones realize what needs to be done.” | 15 |
| | Inspiring and meaningful work | Inspiring, interesting and meaningful work or work environment | “Meaningful work in which I feel valuable for other people.” “It is important to enjoy and get inspired by what I do.” | 20 |
| Personal success factors | | Factors (for example traits, competence and attitude) considered important for career success. | | |
| | Trust | Autobiography advice to other women to trust and believe in oneself and one’s competence and capability . | “Don’t undervalue your competencies.” “Be yourself and believe in yourself.” “Trust that your competence and performance are good enough.” | 60 |
| | Aspiration | Emphasis on own action , not relying on someone else. Own desire, aspiration, motivation or ambition as a booster of a career. | “My desire to swim at the deep end, in the cold water, get inspired and realize that it is worth it. “ “Ambition and need to succeed.” “A strong intrinsic motivation and a passion to do my work well.” | 50 |
| | Courage | Braveness or courage to accept and seek responsibility or new challenges. Not being afraid to act. | “Take bravely business responsibility.” “Have courage, don’t be your own obstacle!” “Planning your life is preventing the best adventures.” “Just do it and don’t be stuck in gender stereotypes or roles.” | 50 |

| | | | | |
|--|--------------------------------|---|---|----|
| | | | | |
| | Action | Active verbs indicating action and doing : grasping opportunities, avoiding perfection, taking risks and being proactive. | "Done is better than perfect since the to-do-list ends hardly ever." "Start taking determined steps." "Don't wait too long." "I have been offered splendid opportunities." "Chance has had a role too." | 41 |
| | Support to other people | Helping and supporting other people, encouraging and praising , networking | "By helping and lifting others, you lift yourself." "Ask for help and help others." "Praise your colleagues." | 30 |
| | Authenticity | Knowing who you are, goals, dreams, targets , knowing of own values and motivational factors | "Know yourself and your needs." "Think about what you want and your commitment to what it needs." "Be open about your dreams and goals." "Concentrate on the things that are important to you." | 25 |
| | Personal wellbeing | Being merciful , not demanding too much of oneself, taking care of own wellbeing | "Take care of your mental and physical wellbeing." "Be merciful to yourself." "You don't have to do everything." | 18 |

Appendix 5 Interviews, October – November 2019

| Participant number * = participant in the pilot study campaign | Current Position | Education | Born, year | Notes, earlier career | Interview date, time, place |
|---|---|---------------------|-----------------------|---|---|
| P1 | COO | Master, business | 1968 | Country Manager, marketing career | 30.11.2018, 14:00- 16:00 @office, Helsinki |
| P2 | Country Manager | Secondary school | 1971 | country manager, career in fashion and beauty industry | 9.10.2019, 17:30-19:30 @Haaga-Helia, Helsinki |
| P3 | SVP, content business | Master, business | 1968 | long career in same company / advertising | 17.10. 15:00-17:00 @office, Helsinki |
| P4 | CEO & Founding Partner | PhD, Business | 1971 | Banking business, youngest female PhD in XX university in 1996 | 23.10.2019, 17:00- 18:30 @office, Helsinki |
| P5* | Sales director | Master, business | 1971 | in current company 11 years, consultant | 25.10.2019, 8:30-10:30 @office, Helsinki |
| P6 | CFO | Master, business | 1969 | long career in the same company | 25.10.2019, 13:30- 15:00 @office , Helsinki |
| P7* | Business director | FM | 1975 | teacher 7 years, long career current company | 28.10.2019, 13:00- 15:00; @office, Helsinki |
| P8 | on sabbatical | Master, business | 1968 | CMO, ICT industry career | 30.10.2019, 10:00- 12:00 @Kallio, Helsinki |
| P9 | CEO | Master, business | 1962 | Various industries and executive positions, partner in consultancy | 1.11.2019, 16:00-17:30 @office, Espoo |
| P10* | Commercial director | Master, business | 1970 | Vice CEO, sales and marketing, Vice President, Account Management & Sales Development, Director, Global Account, Head of sales | 4.11.2019 13:00-15:00, @office, Helsinki |
| P11* | Country Director | Master, business | 1977 | Commercial director, 6 years in the company, Auditor | 4.11.2019, 16:00- 18:00, @office, Helsinki |
| P12 | MD | Master, business | 1968 | Before health care, long career in pharmaceutical industry | 5.11.2019, 14:30-16:30 @office, Vantaa |
| P13* | Director of marketing, communi- cation | KTM, MBA | 1968 | Senior Vice President- Marketing & Communications, Vice President sustainability, corporate responsibility etc. in | 31.10.2019, 13:00- 14:30 @office, Espoo |

| | | | | | |
|------|--|----------------------|------|---|---|
| | sustainability and corporate relations | | | conventional male-dominant technology corporations | changed to 7.11.2019, 14:00-15:30 |
| P14* | CEO | FM | 1960 | ICT, two banking groups | 8.11.2019, 8:30-10:00 Phone interview |
| P15* | Business director | EMBA | 1966 | leader of the year 2019 in XX experience in insurance and banking | 11.11.2019, 17:15- Phone interview |
| P16* | CFO | Master, business | 1968 | consulting | 13.11.2019, 17:00-19:00 @office, Helsinki |
| P17* | SVP Customer and Markets | M.Sc. (Tech) | 1965 | at the company since 1992 | 24.11.2019, 12-18 @Haaga-Helia, Helsinki |
| P18 | Director, Business development | M.Sc. (Tech) | 1979 | Commercial director | invitation sent 7.10.2019, autoreply on maternity leave, but sent an email 10.11., willing to participate, not agreed |
| P19 | MD | Master, business | 1981 | Mgmt team member since 2011 | invitation sent 8.10.2019 assistant replied, calendar already fully booked during the whole autumn |
| P20 | Vice President, Digital Imaging and Applications | M.Sc. (Tech) | 1965 | health technology industry | invitation sent 7.10.2019, declined |
| P21 | CFO | Master business, MBA | 1970 | vp business control | next to ask |
| P22 | EVP, Head Of Wealth Management | Master business | 1970 | Head of Fund Distribution, Country manager, board member in banking business | 2 nd to ask |
| P23* | EVP | Master, business | 1968 | rotated in all executive roles in family business, now studying for Master of Science (Health Care) | ask if needed |
| P24 | MD, Founding Partner | Master, business | 1963 | Opted out from subsidiary CEO, CFO, business unit director | |
| P25 | | Master, tech. MBA | 1968 | CDO, mgmt team member in early 2000, career in consulting etc. | |
| P26 | CEO | Master, business | 1970 | CEO, bank chief analyst... | |

| | | | | | |
|-----|--|---------------------------|------|---|--|
| P27 | Marketing Director | Master, business | 1975 | Marketing & product development director | if needed one more in marketing and communications |
| P28 | CFO | eMBA | 1970 | business director, KMPG auditor | |
| P29 | on sabbatical | Master, business | 1968 | MD, media industry management team | |
| P30 | MD | Master, business | 1971 | | |
| P31 | Business director | EMBA | 1961 | Long career, director in retail, now a headhunter | |
| P32 | MD | Lic.Sc. (Tech.) | 1961 | MD in three companies, director | |
| P33 | Director, legal | Lawer + master, business | 1953 | Long career at retail. Number of board member positions | |
| P34 | CDO | Master, business | 1966 | country director ICT, advertising | |
| P35 | EVP, paper division | MBA, master, business | 1968 | Paper industry experience, a couple of board member positions | |
| P36 | CEO | LL m law, master business | 1970 | Legal at Rovio, Nokia background | |
| P37 | Vice President, Marketing and Communications | Master business | 1973 | long career in the same company | another woman in the company exec. team already agreed for the interview |
| P38 | CEO | Master Business | 1973 | CMO, partner, FMCG industry | |
| P39 | CEO | Master economics | 1971 | long career in the company, board member ELO | |
| P40 | Board Member | Master economics | 1962 | CEO and CFO positions | unfortunately moved to board member roles only |
| P41 | Owner, Board Member | Master, food economics | 1960 | Many CEO, positions in various industries | |
| P42 | President of XX Technologies | Master, law | 1974 | Nokia 2007-, Rochier | |
| P43 | CFO | Master, economics | 1966 | CFO positions | |
| P44 | Executive Vice President, | Lic.Sc. (Tech.) | 1973 | EVP, Head of Investment Banking | |

| | | | | | |
|-----|--|-----|------|------------------|--|
| | Banking, Corporate and Institutional Customers | | | | |
| P45 | SVP, Pension Services and IT | MBA | 1961 | VP, ITC industry | |

Appendix 6 Interview Guide

Career identity and success of executive women interviews

| Interview prompts and list of possible questions by themes | Themes to cover |
|--|--|
| Opening | |
| Participant information sheet and the consent form signatures (sent already electronically in the interview invitation). Asking permission for the recording and checking that recording works properly. Recording on. | Ethics of the interview |
| Part 1: Narrative interview | |
| Career story | |
| Could you introduce yourself with a couple of sentences? Who are you? I would like to hear your career story. You may start your story at any point of your life, starting from your childhood or any later moment in your life. It is your story, so you may choose what to share and how to share it. You don't need to tell your story necessarily in a chronological order, you may jump back and forth if you find it more convenient. I try not interrupt during your story unless something happens with the recording machine. If something remains unclear we will return back to it after you have told your story. | Career identity Gender identity Leader role identity |
| Part 2: Semi-structured interview | |
| Theme: Career identity | |
| What do you consider as important factors affecting your career? How have you improved and maintained your employability? | Personal factors: ✓ characteristics, traits, competence, ✓ strengths, education ✓ gender ✓ self-efficacy, agency ✓ learning and development External factors ✓ social connections and support ✓ chance Change over time? |
| Theme: Career trajectory | |
| What are the most important events/moments of your career? Why? How did you get your jobs? What did you do? In hindsight, when you think about your career is there anything you would do differently? What lessons did you learn from these experiences? | Agency, self-efficacy career goals chance Transition to managerial level Transition to executive level |
| Theme: Career success | |
| What does success mean to you? How do you define success? How has your perception of success changed during your career?? How successful do you think you are? If needed, on scale 1-10, ten being utmost successful. How about your future, how would it look like if you had the power to do whatever you like? | Values, work values career aspirations future goals work-life balance |
| Closing | |
| Something you would like to talk about or was there something I did not understand to ask? Something else you would like to tell me? The next steps of the research. Thank you. | |

Appendix 7 Consent Form

Name of the researcher(s): Anita Pösö

Title of Study: Career Identity and Success: How Finnish women top executives in business related roles articulate and rationalise their career success

I have been given the Participation Information Sheet and/or had its contents explained to me. Yes No

I have had an opportunity to ask any questions and I am satisfied with the answers given. Yes No

I understand I have a right to withdraw from the research at any time and I do not have to provide a reason. Yes No

I understand that if I withdraw from the research any data included in the results will be removed if that is practicable (I understand that once anonymised data has been collated into other datasets it may not be possible to remove that data). Yes No

I would like to receive information relating to the results from this study. Yes No

I wish to receive a copy of this Consent form. Yes No

I confirm I am willing to be a participant in the above research study. Yes No

I note the data collected may be retained in an archive and used as part of potential academic journal articles related to this research. I note my data will be fully anonymised. Yes No

Participant's Name: _____

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

This consent form will be stored separately from any data you provide so that your responses remain anonymous.

I confirm I have provided a copy of the Participant Information Sheet approved by the Research Ethics Committee to the participant and fully explained its contents. I have given the participant an opportunity to ask questions, which have been answered.

Researcher's Name: Anita Pösö

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Appendix 8 Participation Information Sheet

Career Identity and Success: How Finnish women top executives in business related roles articulate and rationalise their career success

Researcher: Anita Pösö

Supervisors: Dr. Sylvia Snijders, Dr. Elisabeth Michielsens & Dr. Katalin Illes

You are being invited to take part in a research study on career success. The aim of the research is to contribute to the discussion around the concepts of career identity, career success and women leaders at the top executive level in Finland.

In this research career identity has been defined as a structure or network of meanings in which the individual links her own motivation, interests and competencies with acceptable career roles. Career success has been defined with both objective (e.g. status, position, power, money) and subjective measures. The concept of subjective career success means that the way how people perceive success is affected by the world around us, culture, expectations and own identity/self-perception.

The aim of the research is to explore how Finnish women executives perceive and define their own career identity and success through their career stories.

The target group of this research is limited to Finnish women executives, who are (or have been earlier during their career) in business-related roles at top management level in business organisations.

This research is being undertaken as part of the researcher's doctoral research studies for Westminster Business School faculty at the University of Westminster.

The study will involve you in:

Participating in an interview and telling your career story in your own words. Some clarifying questions will be asked if needed. The interview will take max. two hours, depending on the length of the story and replies to the other questions. The interview will be conducted in Finnish and recorded.

Please note:

- Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary.
- You have the right to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.
- Wherever practicable, withdrawal from the research will not affect any treatment and/or services that you receive.
- You have the right to ask for your data to be withdrawn as long as this is practical, and for personal information to be destroyed.
- You do not have to answer particular questions either on questionnaires or in interviews if you do not wish to do so.
- Your responses will be made anonymous and will be kept confidential unless you provide explicit consent to do otherwise.
- No individuals should be identifiable from any collected data, written report of the research, or any publications arising from it.
- All computer data files will be encrypted and password protected. The researcher will keep files in a secure place and will comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act.

- All hard copy documents, e.g. consent forms, completed questionnaires, etc. will be kept securely. Documents may be scanned and stored electronically. This may be done to enable secure transmission of data to the university's secure computer systems.
- If you wish, you can receive information on the results of the research. Please indicate on the consent form if you would like to receive this information.
- The researcher can be contacted during and after participation by email (anita.poso@haaga-helia.fi) or by telephone (+358 40 709 1388).
- If you have a complaint about this research project, you can contact the project supervisors by e-mail: Dr. Sylvia Snijders (s.snijders@westminster.ac.uk), Dr. Elisabeth Michielsens (michiee@westminster.ac.uk) or Dr. Katalin Illes(K.Illes@westminster.ac.uk).

Appendix 9 Table of the first and second coding cycles

| Executive career identity | | | |
|----------------------------------|--|-------------------|---|
| Theme | Category | Codes | Examples of words, concepts, sentences (in Finnish in vivo coding) |
| Career progression | | | |
| | Career planning | | |
| | | Career goals | 'ei oo mitään sellasta haavekuvaa siellä odottamassa' 'ei oo mitään sellasta haavekuvaa siellä odottamassa' 'haluan olla ihmisten niin kuin ihmisten johtaja ja innostaja' 'etten mä halua perinteiselle akateemiselle uralle' ' katon mitä sieltä tulee' |
| | | Interesting tasks | ' mielekkäät tehtävät' 'asiat jotka mua kiinnostaa' 'hervittävän niin ku kiinnostavana' |
| | | No career plans | 'ajauduin' 'ei sitten riittä energiaa miettiä mitä mä teen viiden tai 10 vuoden päästä' 'ei ole koskaan ollut' 'ura on tullut siihen niin kun nupiksi' ' voi kun ei ole' |
| Gender identity | | | |
| | Attitude towards gender at work | | |
| | | Gender - negative | ' kun naisjohtaja epäonnistuu niin sulla ei ole mitään ponnahduspintaa' 'sukupuoli on esteenä' 'altavastaajana' ' mä en tykkää siitä naiskiintiöajattelusta' 'ollaan tosi tosi kiinni miehisissä ominaisuuksissa' |
| | | Gender - neutral | 'tykkään työskennellä miesten kanssa' 'neutraalisti' 'ei ole omakohtaisia kokemuksia sukupuoliroolin' 'ei ainakaan negatiivisesti' 'on ne sitten miehiä tai naisia' |
| | | Gender - positive | 'pääsee ihan huonommillakin meriiteillä kiintiönaiseksi' 'tällä hetkellä tarvitaan naisia jotka ymmärtää teknologiaorganisaatioita' 'on ollut mulle etu' 'tavallaan underdogina on aika kiva olla usein' |

| | | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| | | Role models | ' istunut isäni työpaikalla hänen huoneessa pöydän (nauraa) ääressä ja sanonut että musta tulee isona johtaja' 'mun isän malli enemmänkin kun se äidinmalli' 'meidän nykyinen yrityksen omistaja niin herranjumala se on nainen' ' liiketoiminnanjohtaja ja mun suuri idolini ja sellainen kakkosisä' |
| Leader identity | | | |
| | Leadership | | |
| | | Humbleness | 'en mä oo kovan luokan tekijä' |
| | | Independence | 'Mä vaadin tosi paljon itsenäisyyttä' |
| | | Influence | 'vaikuttaa' 'viedä sitä asiaa eteenpäinä' 'pystyy päättämään mihin suuntaan asioita viedään' 'vaikuttaa isompaan joukkoon ihmisiä' 'vaikuttaa siihen tulevaan' |
| | | Respect from others | 'ihmisiä jotka arvostaa' 'arvostusta' |
| | | Supporting others | itse arvostaa monia' 'tiimiläiset pitää saada innostumaan' 'auttaa muita paljon' 'hyvinvoiva työyhteisö' ' ihanan energisoiva tunne ja tunne että on voinut antaa jollekin jotain' |
| | | To work in a nice atmosphere | 'mukavassa ympäristössä että niin kuin inhimillisten asioiden kanssa' |
| | | Meaningfulness of own work | 'mä olen onnistunut ihmisenä saavuttamaan sellaisia juttuja mitkä on mulle tärkeitä' 'tunteen oman ajatuksen toteuttamisesta' oma tekeminen liittyy johonkin isompaan yhteiseen strategiaan' |
| Definition of success | | | |
| | Objective measures | | |
| | | Money, benefits | 'mä en ole koskaan miettinyt että se menestys on että on paljon rahaa' ' mä en ole tämmönen että pitäisi olla hieno auto tai hieno titteli' ' taloudellista etua' 'korvaus siitä työstä' ' emmä koskaan saa ferraria (nauraa)' |

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| | | Position, status | 'Mä en tavoittele isompia yrityksiä' 'se ei ole aseman korkeus' 'eikä se titteli' 'mulla ei ole ollut sellainen tittelijahti' 'tota mä en ole ollenkaan titteli-ihminen' |
| | Subjective measures | | |
| | | Authencity | |
| | | being true oneself | 'älä tee niitä päätöksiä sen perusteella mitä ne muut ajattelee' 'just se että ei tarvitse olla tietynlainen' 'tärkeää että mä olen pysynyt jotenkin itsenäni' 'mä en ole tavallaan myynyt omaa sielua' 'mun ei tarvitse alkaa pelaamaan mitään kauheita pelejä' |
| | | following own path | 'vapaus' 'ylikorostunut se itsenäisyyden' 'pystyy seisomaan omilla jaloillaan ja sanomaan että mä osaan nää hommat ja tota mun hintalappu on tää' |
| | | Meaningfulness | |
| | | Enjoyment | 'oikeesti niin kuin viihtyy' 'tää on nastaa' 'koen sitä tekemisen iloa' 'kiva työ mitä tekee' 'kaiken kaikkiaan on ollut tosi hauskaa' |
| | | Feeling of professional capability, pride in own competence | 'hyvä tehdä sitä missä on hyvä ja sen pystyy skaalaamaan' 'tuomaan sinne sitä kokemusta' 'näkee että se oma työnjälki on kantanut' |
| | | Self-actualization | 'mä koen että mä saan toteuttaa itseäni' |
| | | Freedom | 'vapaus' 'yrityskulttuurissa mikä antaa vapauden tehdä' |
| | | Inspiration | 'tän innostuksen ja tän mistä saa itselle kiksi' 'se on mulle aika elinehto että ne on innostavia' |
| | | Interest | 'pysynyt mielenkiinto yllä' 'motivoi tai kiinnosta' |
| | | Living in the moment | 'mä elän tosi hyvää arkea' 'joka ikinen päivä' |

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| | | Passion | 'sitten on taas nälkäinen' 'mä ainakin teen intohimolla töitä' 'sä tarviit sen intohimon se on avain kaikkeen' 'sytyttäisi' |
| | | Development | |
| | | Being able to develop | 'kokee kasvavansa' 'uuden kehittämistä' 'kehityn' |
| | | Learning | 'opit koko ajan jotain uutta' 'opin enemmän' ' pysyn uteliaana ja oppimishaluisena' 'olen oppinut sitä työtä' |
| | | Possibility to try new things | 'kokeilla uusia asioita' 'tekemään uudella tavalla' ' myös ne epäonnistumiset' |
| | | Work-life balance | |
| | | Balanced life | 'jos perheen tekee niin miksi se sitten pitää laittaa syrjään' 'tasapainoinen' 'elämä on niin paljon muutakin kuin se työ' 'mulla on vapaa-aika omaa' |
| | | Happiness | 'olen hyvin onnellinen' 'onnellisuus' |
| | | Stability | 'vakaus ja huolettomuus' |
| | | Wellbeing | 'jokapäiväinen hyvinvointi' 'hoitamaan itsensä niin kuin tervejärkisenä' |
| Excellency | | | |
| | Performance orientation | | |
| | | Achievements, Achieving work goals | 'onnistutaan niissä projekteissa' 'tavoitteiden saavuttaminen' 'onnistumisen kokemuksia' |
| | | Ambition | 'kunnianhimo' 'työorientointunut' |
| | | Getting things done | 'tässä on vaan tehnyt duuniaan' 'aikaansaamista' |
| | | Hard work | 'raataa, raataa' 'tässä tekee ihan valtavasti töitä' '24/7 rooli' 'joutuu myös puurtamaan läpi asioita' |
| | | Results | tuloksellisuus" saavutetaan tulokset' 'pitää olla ne mittarit' |

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| | | Performance | 'mitattava tuloksellisuus' 'ahkeruutta ja mitään ei saa ilmaiseksi' 'mä teen parhaani' 'myyntiä ylös, kustannuksia alas' 'sitä todistusasiainestoa' |
| | Growth need | | |
| | | Learn and develop | 'pitkäjänteisemmin kehittämään' 'heittäydin' |
| | | More responsibility | 'hei mitä mä saan tehdä' 'pääsin etenemään ja sain lisää hommia' |
| | | New challenges | 'mä oon valmis taas tekemään jotain uutta' 'vähän isompi vastuualue rahallisesti tai ihmismäärän osalta' 'mitä muuta mä voisin tehdä' 'mielenkiintoinen haaste' |
| | | New direction | 'onko siinä jotain uutta, viekö se mua johonkin suuntaan' 'kolme vuotta ja sit pitää mennä eteenpäin' 'pitää kokeilla jotain ihan erilaista' |
| | | Self-efficacy | 'mä tiedän olevani hyvä' 'kukaan ei tiedä kaikkea' 'muthan heitettiin leijonille' 'en mä ikinä ole tuntenut että mä olisin nolla' 'olihan se ihan mahdoton tehtävä' 'pitää olla vähän niin kuin pokkaa' 'terve itsetunto' |
| | | Persistence | 'periksiantamattomuus' 'sinnikkyyttä' 'läpipuurtaja että mä olen suorituskone tietyllä tavalla' 'mä tiedän että mä olen aikaansaava' |
| | | Testing and showing own skills | 'päästä testaamaan itseäni' 'pääset näyttämään jotain kehitystä ja edistystä' 'huomasin yhtäkkiä että hei mähän osaan myydä' |
| Executive career resources | | | |
| | | Authenticity, being oneself | 'se lähtee siitä että sä oot aika sinut itsesi kanssa' 'tunneihmisenä menee vähän vereslihalle' |
| | Characteristics | | |

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| | | Being not afraid of conflicts | 'hei, tuli shit storm -kortti' 'kaikesta sitä sitten aina selviää kummasti' 'se suorasukainen tapa kommunikoida asoita' |
| | | Challenging oneself | 'mahdoton tehtävä' |
| | | Change ability | 'uusia haasteita' 'muutosjohtaja' 'tarvitsis tulla laittamaan tää liiketoiminta kuntoon' |
| | | Courage | 'kuolemanlaaksosta' 'kylmäpäisyys on se mikä on vienyt mua eteenpäin' 'rohkeita hankkeita' 'uhkarohkeastikin' |
| | | Curiosity | 'kiinnostus moneen asiaan' 'utelias' 'haluan tietää ja oppia' |
| | | Determination | 'välillä ihan röyhkeästi kilpailuttanut' 'Mä olen vähän sellainen tyyppi että kun mä päätän jotain ja mä haluan jotain niin I will get it.' 'olen ihan hirveän kova väittelemään ja pidän puoleni' |
| | | Risk-taking | 'ei ole mennyt ihan sitä perinteistä polkua' |
| | | Energetic, Enthusiastic | 'ponnari heiluen' 'mä olen tekeväinen' |
| | | Fair, honesty | 'oikeudenmukainen' 'reilu' 'umpirehellinen' |
| | | Hard work | 'jo teini-iässä töihin' 'mä mielummin olin töissä' 'pitkää päivää painettu' |
| | | Holistic thinking | kokonaisvaltainen ajattelu' 'liiketoimintaosaaminen' 'strateginen näkemys' |
| | | Leadership skills | 'aidosti ihmisistä kiinnostunut' 'mut on aina koettu sellaiseksi ihmis-ihmiseksi' 'ihminen on aina kiinnostanut' 'mä olen aika inspiroiva ja innostava. Mä olen myös malttamaton ja kärsimätön' 'vierastan sellaista autoritääristä niinkun vanhaa juttua jossa joku kokee olevansa muiden yläpuolella' |
| | | Taking responsibility | 'päätöksentekokyky ja kyky ottaa vastuuta' |

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| | | Openness | 'musta ei tuu poliitikkoa' 'umpiavoin' |
| | | Optimism, positive thinking | 'menin löysin rantein haastatteluun' 'Optimistisuus ja positiivisuus' |
| Professional competence | | | |
| | | Demonstrated achievements | 'tiimi palkittiin' 'näyttöjä' 'isommat maistiaiset' |
| | | Resilience | 'mä en enää stressaa' 'Tärkeintä on nousta aina jaloilleen' 'ihme lehmänhermo' |
| | | Decision-making skills | 'mä pystyn aika nopeesti ottamaan kantaa asioihin' 'päätöksenteko' 'mä olen liiankin hyvä välillä tekemään päätöksiä' |
| | | Sales skills | 'myyntitaidot' 'opettelin myyntiä' |
| | | Social skills | 'tosi huono tekemään yksin töitä' 'lähtökohtaisesti vaadin ikään kuin että saan työskennellä muiden kanssa' 'sosiaalisten taitojen' |
| | | Business understanding | kovanluokan businessosaamiseen' 'olen ihan liekeissä kun me saadaan hyviä diilejä' 'kyllä pitää ymmärtää miten skaalataan ja mitä luvut kertoo' 'ehdottomasti se perus niinkuin liiketoiminnan ymmärtäminen' |
| | | Numbers (business) | 'Et sä voi johtaa firmaa jos sä et ymmärrä mitä taseessa tapahtuu' 'Jokaisen johtajan pitää ymmärtää taloushallintoa ja laskentaa tiettyyn rajaan saakka' 'numerot' 'luin laskentaa' |
| | | Competence in own field | 'pitää tuntea se asia mistä puhuu' 'substanssiosaamista omalta alalta' 'Pitää ymmärtää se mikä on se kompetenssi millä sä täydennät sitä tiimiä' |
| External resources | | | |
| | | Encouragement from own family | 'isin tyttö' 'yrittäjäperheestä' 'yrittäjä' 'mä en olisi tässä ellei mulla olisi aviomiestä joka on samaa mieltä' 'voidaanko ura ja perhe yhdistää... TOTTA KAI voidaan' |

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| | | Supervisors' support | 'kollegoja ja esimiehiä jotka on uskaltanut ottaa mukaan' 'esimies on luottanut' |
| | | Personal life crisis and tragedies | 'tuonut sellaista tiettyä perspektiiviä siihen mitkä asiat on tärkeitä elämässä' 'ihan puun takaa avioero' 'mun äiti oli kuollut ja koirakin oli kuolemassa' 'paljon vaikeuksiakin' |

Appendix 10 Gender representation in careers of executive women

| | Gender as an advantage | Gender not affecting | Gender as a hindrance | Gender as a barrier to other women |
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| P1 | | | | “My family has moved along my father’s work locations. My mother has an academic degree and worked as a teacher, but she has always been the flexible one with her aspirations. I would say that it is more my father’s than my mother’s model I have adopted.” |
| P2 | | “I don’t think that gender has been a benefit nor a barrier. I have worked quite equally with men and women. I don’t know is it because I work in a Swedish company. Most of my supervisors have been always Swedish and in Sweden.” | | |
| P3 | “My own experience is that for me gender has been a benefit. There has been a certain kind of need for balancing and making sure that there surely is one woman in the executive team.” | | “[company name] was the only place in which I have experienced kind of calling me a girl type of attitude by an older man. But fairly little for my part” | |
| P4 | | “It is up to the women to just do the things they want.” | | “The CEO positions are so windy, I wasn’t either interested in becoming a CEO of a stock-listed company when I was younger. It is not nice to search for a job every other year. Who could take that! I say that women are so smart that they don’t go to that roulette. It is a gamble, especially if you have young kids and such.” |
| P5 | I have always worked in companies or teams with a woman in charge. Would the career be | | | |

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| | the same with male supervisors, I don't know...?" | | | |
| P6 | | "I'm sure there's no harm or benefit, even though all those other expats were middle-aged men with a wife at home. In that sense, I was a bit of an exception, but I can't say that it was a benefit or a disadvantage, I was only divergent. " | | |
| P7 | | "I cannot say what has been not reached due to the reason that I am named as a woman. However, I have gone far." | | "But I see a lot of discrimination through this field." |
| P8 | "Women are wanted in boards of directors nowadays, gender is a benefit." | | | "Women have more limited possibilities in changing the role to another discipline, if you work in certain function you may be promoted to the top level, but it is more difficult to get a business responsibility or CEO position. Men are able to jump from one role to another. Women cannot fail and get a new position immediately after the failure, unlike men who have their safety nets (networks)." |
| P9 | "Not definitely negatively." | "it is partly a cliché that I haven't encountered any glass ceiling or other barriers, that gender would have affected the career steps. And I think it is encouraging, that it makes no difference". | | |
| P10 | | | "When you make good results as a strong woman, you are like a red flag, unfortunately, in many businesses there are various cultures. I have been in the mechanical engineering industry in | |

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| | | | which there are only 3% women and it is not the easiest place in the world.” | |
| P11 | | | | ”Well, if you hit the glass ceiling, you have to go to another organization to break it. I mean, it is really much up to women and every individual themselves.” |
| P12 | | | ”It has an effect surely, in many ways. Often you see what kind of men are promoted to similar positions. You can see yourself that you have to be, your ‘samples’ have to be, rather big.” | ”I can see it especially when I look at my colleagues, that he demands for women is, specifically in a business responsibility, that you have to produce, produce a lot. You have to be strongly co-operational and yet firm. And get the deals done. And look, in a way that you are not bitchy.” |
| P13 | | ”I cannot possibly know how it [gender] has affected. You don’t have to be a certain kind of a woman to succeed, it is about capability and hard work.” | | ”Men in the management teams relax and start joking and talking when a woman starts her presentation in a meeting. Men are taking other men more seriously to start with, a woman must raise her voice to get the attention.” |
| P14 | | ”Gender has had no effect. People have been looking at me as a person and there has never been the need for me to prove something more.” | | |
| P15 | Definitely has an effect, definitely. Both ways. | | ”I can see situations, in which I could have been proceeded, so gender still is an obstacle.” | ”The first job after graduation is very important, it is difficult to be promoted from an assistant position.” The higher up in the organization, the more gender effects.” |
| P16 | | ”Have I ever even thought about this [speaks slowly, thinking]? The first reply is no. Yes, the answer is | | |

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| | | no. I believe that I was in the same position if I were a man." | | |
| P17 | "I am not making a number of being a woman, but I am proud of it. In our industry it is in a way beneficial, you may act differently and people remember you. I haven't missed anything, I have been myself." | | | |