

The influence of women superiors on the career advancement of their women employees

-A single case study-

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Master thesis *Strategic Human Resources Leadership*

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Abstract

Whereas there is a lot of research done on women's careers, there is a lack of literature on the role of women superiors specifically in the process of career advancement. This is why this case study considers what role women superiors play in the career advancement of their women employees. A qualitative research method was chosen for this exploratory research, using the data of semi-structured interviews. Before the direct influences were analyzed, the influence of the organizational culture and underlying processes of Kottke and Agars (2005) were examined. The organizational culture of organization XYZ was found to be family-like, pragmatic and conservative and masculine, which led to an informal process of career advancement, a low level of diversity and a stereotypical male manager in the upper echelon of the organization. Four underlying processes; social cognitions, justice, threat-rigidity and utility influenced the success of initiatives aimed at women's career advancement and hence the career advancement of women in the organization. The presence of stereotypes, respondents' identification as change agents, perceived unfairness of initiatives and the focus on short-term utility predicted unsuccessful initiatives for career advancement of women employees. On the other hand the strong feeling of membership towards the organization and the lack of threat were predicted to be beneficial for the results of the initiatives. The direct influences of women superiors were coded into four themes: affirmative action, role modelling, personal support and communication. These four themes went beyond the scope of existing literature. Because of the informal process of career advancement within organization XYZ, the role of the superior was very important and so the four found themes are quite implicit.

Keywords: Career advancement- Women- Gender diversity

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1. Introduction

On the 10th of January 2022, after a formation of almost an entire year, the new Dutch cabinet was sworn in. Even though one woman was missing in the traditional picture in front of the Noordeinde palace, due to quarantine, one noticeable thing is the number of women in the picture. Namely, half of the ministers are women. This is a big transition from two cabinets ago; having only four female ministers. When we look at organizations in the private sector, we can also spot an increase in women reaching leadership positions. The share of women in top positions in listed companies in the Netherlands is above average and also for the top 5000 companies the share of women at the top has increased in the last few years (Pouwels et al., 2019). Although this is a positive change, this change is going rather slow. Statistics show that the average increase of women in the board of directors between 2012 and 2018 was less than a percentage point and the increase in the supervisory boards was only 1.5 percentage point (Emancipatiemonitor, 2020).

The educational achievements of women are surpassing those of men in many countries (Born et al., 2018). Nevertheless, there still is a clear gender segregation present in the organizational context and women are still under-represented in leadership positions (Born et al., 2018; Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Huse, 2010). Women still seem to run into the glass ceiling (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986), although organizational research has clearly shown the advantages of having women in leadership positions. According to Catalino and Marnane (2019), women often exhibit leadership behaviors needed for organizations to tackle future challenges, such as managing diversity or sustainability. For these kind of problems, leadership characterized by creativity, inspiration and participative decision making is needed which women tend to exhibit more often than men do (Catalino & Marnane, 2019). Paola, et al. (2021) did research into the outcomes of female leadership in teams specifically. Results show that teams led by women were more effective than those led by men. Reasons for this are that the women displayed better organizational skills and there was more collaboration within the team. Nielsen and Huse (2010) concluded that the presence of women in the boardroom has a positive effect on the boards strategic control, which led to higher effectiveness of the organization. Women seemed to create a more conflict-free culture in the boardroom because they are more aware of others and tend to show more consideration. A low level of conflict in the boardroom increases the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization.

Derived from the above, it can be concluded that having women in leadership positions can be advantageous for the organization. Nevertheless, a critical side note here is necessary. The still ongoing stereotypes lead to gendered role expectations within society and organizations. Consequently, women have internalized certain behaviors that are stereotypically assigned to them by society (Paola et al., 2021), such as being caring, creative or collaborative. Only having women in the organization is not going to solve these problems, it is diversity which is desirable (Catalino & Marnane, 2019). Women still need to catch up with men in leadership context due to stereotypes of women being less qualified for leadership positions and consequently the gendered role expectations of women being more caring and less assertive and men being very assertive and direct, which is seen as being more suitable for leadership positions (Kottke, & Agars, 2005).

Apart from stereotypes and gendered role expectations, many other mechanisms influence the (lack of) advancement of women into leadership positions. The career advancement of women tends to differ from that of men. Besides career advancement of women going averagely slower, the career advancement also seems to stop sooner when women bump into the glass ceiling (Senden & Visser, 2014). Career advancement is on average more difficult for women. Already mentioned barriers are stereotypes and skepticism (Gino et al., 2015), but women also have fewer role models to look up to and also tend to have less access to mentors and sponsors. These measures help to build careers from within the organization (Ehrich et al., 2004; Hewlett et al., 2010). Both mentor-and sponsorships are seen as a ‘nurturing process’: A more experienced or skilled person encourages a less experienced or skilled person to promote the less skilled or experienced persons’ career or personal development (Anderson & Shannon, 1988). Another factor which has the potential to harm the career advancement of women is the demand from home. Women still experience more housework duties, but also caring for children or giving birth are part of this (Mišić & Andrić, 2015). This means they have a higher need for flexible work arrangements to keep up with their work and career advancement (Lyness & Judiesch, 2008). Within this research, I will go deeper into the role women leaders specifically have in the process of advancing other women into leadership positions. Research will be done into the mechanisms used by women in leadership positions and how these mechanisms are perceived by the women at which these mechanisms are targeted.

Women tend to use different leadership styles than men do (Sidani et al., 2015; Paola et al., 2021; Born et al., 2018). Women tend to use more transformational forms of leadership, whereas men show more forms of transactional leadership. Leadership behaviors typically used by women are characterized by a set of more feminine competencies (Gartzia, & van Engen, 2012). Competencies are described as “the underlying characteristic of a person that may be a motive, trait, skill, aspect of one’s self-image or social role, or a body of knowledge that he or she uses” (Boyatzis, 1982). Bass and Avolio (1990) came up with nine key leadership behaviors and concluded men and women exhibit these behaviors to different extents. Five of them are used more frequently by women than by men. According to their research, leadership behavior of women is often characterized by: (1) people development, which is enacted through teaching, mentoring and listening to the individual needs and concerns of subordinates; (2) Clear expectations and rewards, meaning the expectations and responsibilities for the subordinates are clear and rewards are given when targets are met; (3) Having role models; The female leader serves as a role model, where the emphasis is on fostering respect and taking ethical considerations into account while making judgments; (4) Inspiration; meaning the leader creates an optimistic view about future plans. Lastly; (5) participative decision making is enacted by women leaders, meaning all their subordinates are encouraged to participate in the decision making process. Men tend to use more (1) individualistic decision making behavior and control and (2) corrective action. Men and women have been shown to exhibit equal behaviors of (1) intellectual stimulation and (2) efficient stimulation according to the research of Bass and Avolio (1990)

The aim of this research is to examine what and how mechanisms are used by women in leadership positions to influence the career advancement of their women employees. Also, the research will incorporate the perspective of the employees on the use of these mechanisms by including them in my sample. The data will be gathered through semi-structured interviews with women in leadership positions and their women employees. A phenomenological approach will be followed. This is a context-sensitive approach of interpretive inquiry. It takes into account the subtleties and depths of other people’s experiences (van Manen, 2007). To create a complete image, it is important to consider how these types of support or undermining are experienced by both leaders and their employees. This means that the multiple realities of both the leaders and their employees must be taken into account. Hence, the use of a phenomenological approach is well suited. In practice, the phenomenological approach will be followed by always trying to dig deeper into the meaning of the respondents’

answers and not assuming I already know what is meant. I will compare the measures of support or undermining by women leaders to what is said by their women subordinates. An assessment will be made on whether a discrepancy can be observed between these two. This is relevant to include because it can function as an explanation for why certain measures of support/undermining are not working for the career advancement of women in that organization. Measures can be meant a certain way, but because of multiple realities the interpretation of these measures can be very different. The outcomes of the assessment of the possible discrepancy can also function as feedback for the organizations; to reassess the effectiveness of their measures.

Building on the previous, this research tries to answer the following question:

What role do women superiors have in the career advancement of their women employees?

This research is scientifically relevant because it provides insights into the roles female superiors play in the career advancement of their women employees into leadership positions. The role of people in leadership positions on the development of their employees seems to be understudied as Radu et al. (2017) pointed out. By also including the female employees in the sample, it adds a new perspective to the literature on women's career advancement into leadership positions. This in turn is also linked to the societal relevance. The conclusions of this research can function as a guideline for women in leadership positions; what are feasible ways of supporting female colleagues who are either at the starting point of their career, or who encounter difficulties reaching leadership positions. In this way, I aim to add to the development of gender equality at the top of organizations.

In the following chapters, first, an overview of the existing literature about this subject will be given. Secondly, the used methods will be explained, after which the results of the analysis will be explained. Lastly, the results will be discussed and a conclusion will be given, answering the research question.

2. Theoretical framework

This chapter proposes an overview of the already existing literature on the concepts used in this research. First, a different perspective on gender will be explained. Second, the concept of gender will be combined with organizations, I will go into gendered processes and how they

lead to the stereotyping of certain roles within the organization. Thirdly, gender and leadership will be linked and the differences between more feminine and masculine types of leadership will be outlined. Last, the antecedent for women's career advancement and the mechanisms affecting the career advancement of women will be explained.

2.1. Gender

In contemporary society, gender is a rather complex subject. People can identify themselves as fluid, non-binary, intersex or agender, instead of only as male or female (Lindqvist et al., 2021).

There are different perspectives on gender used in literature. The biological perspective is what people most often think of when thinking about gender. This perspective is based on the notion that the sex of a person is equal to their gender. This means that gender is determined by two biological factors: hormones and chromosomes (Garfinkel, 1967). As biologically there are two sexes, gender is also a binary and fixed variable: someone is either male or female and this does not change within one's lifetime. Nowadays, this perspective is seen as very conservative. Lindqvist et al. (2021) state that it discriminates against people who find they do not belong in either one of these two categories. Someone should be able to self-define their gender, so making this impossible creates unethical issues (Frohard-Dourlent et al., 2017).

During the 1990s new perspectives on gender appeared in critical studies. These perspectives defined gender as something socially constructed, in comparison to sex, which is what you are biologically born with: male, female or intersex. Gender, according to Acker (2006), is defined as "the socially constructed disparities between men and women, as well as the ideas and identities that maintain inequity" (Acker, 2006). Also, Zanoni et al. (2010) state that the social construct contributes to the formation and maintenance of uneven power relations because it is created in context-specific practices and discourses (Zanoni et al., 2010). Both perspectives acknowledge the focus on differences between men and women. When we follow these perspectives, gender also becomes an issue within organizations. An example of the differentiation between genders in organizations is the differences in opportunities and wages.

Within this research, I recognize the multiple dimensions of gender. Gender will be seen as something socially constructed. I will focus on the differences in power relations this leads to within organizations. I will focus on the male and female gender, as the literature on the intersectionality between leadership and gender is based on this distinction.

2.2. Gender in organizations

Following the previous paragraph, we follow the perspective of gender being a societal construct, which consequently is also applicable within organizations. Within organizations, the differences between the genders are still very visible (Born et al., 2018). According to Acker (2006), gendered processes account for this inequality of genders within organizations. She defines gendered processes as “the differences between advantages and disadvantages, exploitation and control, action and emotion, and meaning and identity that are found through and in terms of a distinction between males and females or the masculine and feminine”. According to Nentwich and Kelan (2014), it is because of these gendered processes jobs are seen as either feminine or masculine. Stereotypically, the jobs higher up in the hierarchy, such as top management and executive positions are seen as more masculine; jobs typically men would fulfill. Heilman (2012) explains in her research on gender stereotypes in organizations that these positions are still linked with stereotypical masculine characteristics. This view seems hard to change. Although ‘feminine characteristics’ such as interpersonal skills and the development of new talent are getting more important within leadership and management positions, good leadership characteristics are still often viewed as having good agentic characteristics, which are mainly ascribed to men (Heilman, 2012).

As the stereotypical male characteristics are still ascribed to management and executive positions, career advancement towards leadership positions is more difficult for women (Gino et al., 2015). Certain social practices keep the gender inequality intact; placing men above women. Examples of such are: formal policies and procedures; informal work practices; narratives, rhetoric, language and other symbolic expressions and informal patterns of everyday social interaction. To counter the inequality in organizations, these social practices need to be challenged and revised when necessary by all organizational members (Ely & Meyerson, 2000).

2.3. Gender and leadership

According to Eagly & Karau (2002) characteristics needed for top positions are characteristics that are often attributed to men. The role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) helps to explain this phenomenon. The role congruity theory states that a group will be positively evaluated when the characteristics of that group are recognized as being that group's typical social roles. When we put this in the context of top positions, the male characteristics are recognized as being aligned with the typical leadership roles. For women, this means there is a role incongruence: they do not fit the stereotypical standards for a leadership position and will be more negatively evaluated. This again shows the barriers women encounter in the process of aiming for a top position.

This research will focus on women in leadership positions and hence we follow a generalized perspective: men and women displaying different leadership styles. Not purely because they are of a specific gender, but rather because of the gender stereotypes that are entrenched in society and hence in organizations, which assume certain characteristics are better suited for women/men (Eagly & Karau, 2002). However, some sources claim men's and women's leadership styles are very alike because they need the same characteristics to reach a leadership position (Powell, 1990; Kanter, 1977). According to the structural interpretation of the organizational behavior theory, which is focused on the way people act in a business context when given certain empowerments (Kanter, 1977); it can be assumed men and women use the same leadership styles.

Another stream of the literature shows that men and women do display different leadership styles (Eagly & Carli, 2003a; Kramer et al., 2006; Esser, et al., 2018). To understand these differences in leadership styles, one must focus on the characteristics which are different in these two genders. Eagly et al. (2003) define communal and agentic characteristics. As described in the previous section, agentic characteristics are more often seen in men and communal characteristics in women. In professional work situations, agentic characteristics are translated into influencing others, competing for attention and/or speaking assertively. Taking these characteristics altogether, the leadership style typically used by men is a transactional form of leadership. According to Avolio et al. (1999), transactional leadership is defined by linking goals to rewards, active monitoring of the teams and correcting whenever necessary and by passive management. This means leaders only interfere in the team whenever set standards are not met.

The leadership style more often seen in women is characterized by communal characteristics. Communal characteristics on the work floor are translated into behaviors such as not drawing attention to oneself, supporting others and/or contributing to the solution of relational and interpersonal problems (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). When these characteristics are taken altogether, the leadership style more often used by women is transformational leadership. Transformational leadership is defined by intellectual stimulation, meaning creative thinking is encouraged; individualized consideration; inspirational motivation and idealized influence, meaning the leader functions as a role model. Transformational leadership is specifically focused on long-term goals (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

The study of Mc Kinsey and Company (Desvaux et al., 2008) takes another perspective on gender and leadership and deviates from the notion that men biologically have better leadership characteristics. The study “Women Matter 2: gender diversity, a corporate performance driver” is based on the research of Bass and Avolio (1990) and Eagly et al. (2003). The research was done into the nine leadership behaviors that positively affect organizational performance. Bass and Avolio (1990) proposed that each leadership behavior is linked to a certain area of organizational performance. Their conclusion was in line with that of Eagly et al. (2003), namely that women expose five out of the nine leadership behaviors more often than men do. After this, another test was run to check which areas of organizational performance men and women had the most influence on. Men applied more individualistic decision making behavior and control and corrective action, which led to an improved organizational performance in the dimension of coordination and control: control and corrective action and external orientation: individualistic decision making. Women applied more people management, expectation and rewards and role model behavior. This led to an improved organizational performance in the dimension accountability: expectations and rewards, leadership team: role model and people development and work environment and values: people development. Also, women applied slightly more inspirational behavior and participative decision making. This led to a better organizational performance in the dimensions direction: inspiration, work environment and values: participative decision making and motivation: inspiration. The leadership behaviors men and women tended to apply equally were intellectual stimulation and efficient communication, leading to an increase in the performance dimensions direction: efficient communication and innovation: intellectual stimulation. This study shows the positive impact the behavior of women leaders

can have on the organizational performance and is in contrast with the stereotypical beliefs women do not make up for effective leaders (Desvaux et al., 2008).

As set out above, there are different perspectives on whether the leadership behavior typically exhibited by women makes up for good and effective leadership. In the next section, the mechanisms influencing the advancement of women into these leadership positions will be explained and elaborated on.

2.4. Mechanisms affecting the advancement of women

In this paragraph, I try to summarize the most important factors influencing the advancement of women into leadership positions. By doing this, we claim leaders are made and not born. According to Kippenberger (1997), 70% of leadership qualities are made and not the consequence of gene transmissions. It is therefore important to research which mechanisms make up these leaders and how these mechanisms work in the case of female career advancement into these leadership positions. As we focus on the role of female superiors on career advancement in this research, we will focus on the mechanisms on which superiors can have an influence on.

2.4.1. Underlying processes

According to Kottke and Agars (2005), the foremost important thing for career advancement is understanding the underlying processes that influence the advancement of women. The four processes are social cognitions, justice, threat – rigidity and utility. Before I explain the mechanisms that directly affect career advancement I will explain these four processes in short. It is important for this research to understand the processes (are important to understand for this research) because these can function as a background understanding as to why certain organizational measures taken by female leaders do not work in the organization or just to create a better understanding of the organizational culture and the organizational measures that are (not) taken.

The first process is called social cognitions. The implementation of certain practices that can lead to career advancement are always change-based. Change is a social process and so, the social cognitions gender stereotypes and social identity need to be considered (Kottke & Agars, 2005). Gender stereotyping can result in fewer career advancement opportunities for women (Heilman, 2012). This stereotyping can be very subtle, such as certain negative

attitudes toward women in leadership positions, but stereotypes can also result in very apparent stereotyping, for example an organizational culture in which leadership is seen as something only applicable to male capabilities (Cejka & Eagly, 1999). The other social cognition, social identity affects gender advancement by women feeling a sense of belonging to a certain social group, that of the female gender. However, the organizational initiatives proposed for career advancement for women are mostly received and judged by all organizational members and so can create a sense of exclusion by people not identifying as woman. When this is the case, these initiatives will not work effectively (Kottke & Agars, 2005).

For organizational initiatives aimed at gender equality to work, these need to be received positively by the organization. For this, the initiatives need to be assessed as being fair. When the overall perspective towards the initiative is negative, initiatives will not only be ineffective but will also potentially create a hostile attitude towards women in the organization. Therefore, the initiatives need to be justified by the organizational members. It is therefore of utmost importance that the implementation of organizational initiatives is managed properly and consequently received by the organization as being fair (Kottke & Agars, 2005).

Organizational initiatives encouraging women's career advancement might feel threatening to men in the organization, more specifically a threat to their self-esteem and masculine identity. Consequences of this can be unwillingness to emphasize developmental efforts or a lack of support for new gender related policies (Kottke & Agars, 2005).

Leaders of the organization essentially make the decisions about organizational initiatives targeted at female career advancement. Every initiative proposed in a professional organizational context must be accompanied by an explanation of the utility (Cascio, 1989). Most initiatives promoting women's career advancement have not been able to show the clear economic benefits of more diverse workforces or more women in leadership positions, which makes the implementation of new initiatives difficult.

2.4.2. Direct influences

After these four underlying processes have been considered, organizational initiatives can be implemented. As not every influence on the career advancement of women can be

incorporated, I chose to focus on mentor- and sponsorship and flexible work arrangements. These mechanisms are often called primary antecedents of women's career advancement (Delrose et al., 2020; Wallace, 2001; Mattis, 2002; Orbih & Imhonopi, 2019). I will also discuss the Queen bee phenomenon. The Queen bee phenomenon can be observed when the power relations between women is unequal and have a negative effect on the career advancement of the subordinates (Derks, Van Laar & Ellemers, 2016). As this research is about female leaders and their subordinates, it is important to consider the presence of this effect. As we focus on the role of female superiors on career advancement in this research, we will focus on the mechanisms which superiors can have an influence on.

Flexible work arrangements

Flexible work arrangements are strategies by which subordinates can improve balance demands from multiple domains (Allen, 2001). Flexible work arrangements come in all forms and sizes. Examples are working-time flexibility, working-place flexibility (Vanajan, Bültmann, & Henkens, 2020), parttime work (Timms et al., 2015) or a kindergarten within the company (Mišić & Andrić, 2015). Flexible work arrangements are especially important for women. Women experience more demands from home; taking care of the housework, children or relatives and so it is more difficult for them to juggle this with their job demands (Mišić & Andrić, 2015). Lyness and Judiesch (2008) found in their research that managers who had a better work-life balance through the use of flexible work arrangements also had more chance of job advancement. Making use of the flexible work arrangements provided is therefore of importance, as is also emphasized by Brough et al. (2020).

The research of Kossek and Buzzanell (2018) studies the research- practice gap in women's careers. It is outlined that women's career advancement is positively affected by the support of work-life initiatives in the organization. This means that whenever the organizational culture approves of work-life initiatives, women tend to aspire more leadership positions because there is less work-family conflict. Whereas work-family initiatives are also positively received by men, they have a bigger effect on women's careers.

Mentorship

Women in organizations encounter a lack of mentors (Wallace, 2001). This is harmful, as mentors have the chance to shape women's careers for the better. Mentors are defined as more senior experienced individuals who provide career-related support, direction and guidance to

less experienced junior colleagues (Russell & Adams, 1997). According to Arthur and Kram (1985), the outcomes of mentorship are either related to career development functions or related to positive psychological functions. Career development functions include sponsorship, coaching, protection, exposure-and-visibility and challenging work assignments. All these functions are supposed to facilitate career advancement, which also includes a raise in pay and promotions. Despite these well-known advantages, Wallace (2001) explains that women often underestimate the power of having a mentor, supporting the meritocratic idea that job advancement will come when they deserve it.

Sponsorship

As much research proposes mentorship as the ultimate way to guide a career, Hewlett et al. (2010) take another perspective. They state that (having) a sponsor is needed to break through the glass ceiling and make a career. Sponsorship differs from mentorship. Whereas mentors coach and advice their mentees, sponsors proactively put their protégées forward in, for example, networks or job opportunities (Hewlett et al., 2010). As is the case with mentorship, women underestimate the benefits of sponsors and therefore do not have sponsorships. Besides underestimating the positive effect, women also tend to find it difficult to actively seek a sponsor as they fear they will be turned down or appear self-serving. The power of sponsorships is however very apparent, leading to fewer job opportunities and fewer job advancement than their male counterparts (Hewlett et al., 2010). From this it can be concluded that to increase the opportunities of reaching top positions, women need to invest in a sponsor. However easy this may sound; the reality is not that straightforward. Women asking for what they want is not seen as an inert feminine trait and therefore often seen as self-serving. Men asking for sponsors is seen as networking (Hewlett et al., 2010). Another factor that makes it difficult for women to find a sponsor is that these sponsors are often senior (married) men. Sponsors and protégées spending time together after work will quickly create gossip about an affair. The risks involve the man being accused of harassment and the woman getting accused of getting a promotion (Hewlett et al., 2010). As there is still a lack of women role models this complicates the process of finding proper sponsors. Huston et al. (2019) still plead for the opportunities sponsorships accommodate for women. According to Huston et al. (2019), the specific implementation of sponsorships will correct the structural barriers that lead to inequality within the organization.

Queen bee phenomenon

Lastly, as the focus is on the role of women leaders in the career advancement of women, the queen bee effect is important to include. The Queen Bee Effect or queen bee phenomenon (QBP) can be observed when women working in a male-dominated environment negatively influence the career advancements of other women in the organization (Derks et al., 2016). The women exhibiting the QBP women have been found to distance themselves from their female identity but do think of other women in the organization as stereotypically female. An explanation for this effect is the belief by women in high positions that stereotypical female characteristics do not make up for good leadership: being understanding, nurturing and more forgiving. Typical leadership characteristics are believed to be more masculine, and these women believe they do possess these masculine characteristics (O’Leary & Ryan, 1994). It is important to note that the QBP is often found to be a consequence of gender inequality. Women who show signs of the QBP behavior have made themselves accustomed to this after having experienced gender inequalities in their careers. They believe that showing mainly their masculine side has brought them to the position they are in now and that other women are too feminine for the job (Derks et al., 2011).

2.5. Conceptual model

The concepts ‘women employees’, ‘women superiors’ and ‘career advancement’ are central in this research. By doing this research, I will try to answer how women employees’ career advancement is influenced by women superiors.

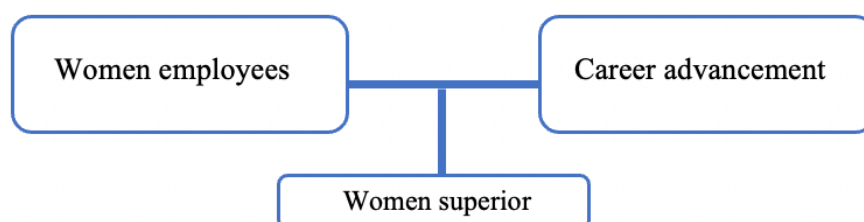


Figure 1. Conceptual model

3. Methodology

In the method section, the methodological choices of this thesis are explained and accounted for. At first, the research philosophy is explained, as this is where the research process is based on. The conceptual model is proposed to create a visualization of the research. The research design is elaborated on, as well as there is an explanation of how the data, in this case, the interviews were collected. How the data has been translated into research

conclusions is explained in the data analysis and lastly, it is explained how the research ethics were assured.

3.1. Research philosophy

The research philosophy I follow within this paper is the phenomenological approach. The phenomenological approach is the study of actual experiences. It is a context-sensitive approach to interpretive inquiry, which means that it considers the subtleties and depths of other peoples' experiences (van Manen, 2007). A phenomenological researcher is therefore concerned with characterizing a person's experience as she experiences it, rather than from a theoretical perspective (Bevan, 2014). It is important to take this into consideration in this research, as we deal with different perspectives on the same situations and practices and these situations can be experienced differently by the employees or superiors. In practice, the phenomenological approach is followed by creating an understanding of the respondents' contexts by trying to dig deeper and not by assuming to already know what is meant. Also, the focus is on the experiences of the respondents. By asking descriptive and structural questions phenomenology comes into practice according to Bevan (2014).

3.2. Research design

The main question which is answered in this thesis is *What role do women superiors have in the career advancement of their women employees?*

This question is depicted in the following conceptual model.

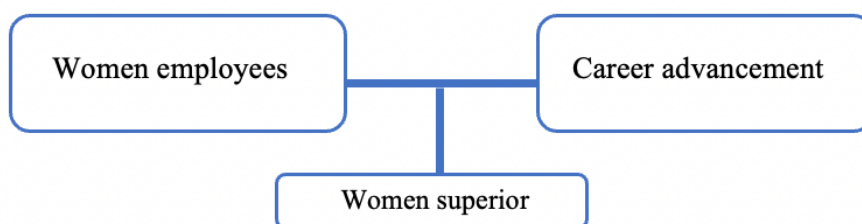


Figure 1. Conceptual model

As the aim of this thesis is explorative rather than confirmatory, I aim to explore how female superiors influence the development of women into leadership positions. Qualitative research is appropriate according to Jamshed (2014). Women in leadership positions and career advancement are the primary concepts in this research. These concepts could have been quantitative: female leadership can be quantified by creating a dummy variable and the

change between levels in the organization can quantify career advancement. However, as this research is explorative, it analyses 'how' female superiors affect the career advancement of subordinates, it is much more interesting and fitting to dive deeper into the concepts and the perspectives. Qualitative research is an adequate method to enable detailed answers, create an insight into the respondents' feelings and go deeper into the subject of the interview (Jamshed, 2014). This also suits the broadness of the concept of women in leadership: many different topics can be linked to this subject. According to Bleijenbergh (2015), qualitative data aims to collect and analyze linguistic data, so conclusions can be drawn from social phenomena. By doing semi-structured interviews there is enough room for respondents to elaborate on different kind of topics that they believe important to explain in relation to female leadership. According to Bleijenbergh (2015), interviews can provide insights into the processes used in organizations. Also, by doing semi-structured interviews I provided a safe environment where the respondent could say anything she wanted about the subject and in this way socially desired answers were avoided.

The respondents are women in leadership positions and their employees within the same organization. This means this research is a case study (Symon & Casell, 2012). A case study is defined as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 2009). A single case study was chosen because in this way, more can be understood about the influential context in relation to the career advancement of women employees.

In these interviews, the focus was on how superiors affect the processes that influence the career advancement of their women employees. The intention the superiors have with these measures might differ from how they are received by their employees. For example, a mentor program could be implemented with the idea of providing more support to advance into a top position, however the employee can interpret it as a sign of overcontrol and a lack of trust in her capabilities. For this reason, employees were also interviewed, to create a broader and clearer image of how these organizational practices are received. Organizational characteristics and the career of these women were also discussed.

After the interviews are conducted, an analysis is done on how women in leadership positions within the organization think they influence the development of female leadership and how

their subordinates think about this. A comparison is made by researching the possible discrepancy between these two.

3.3. Sample

The data used is gathered through interviews. Before doing the interviews it is important to determine the right target group. In this case the target group is women superiors and their women employees. According to Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2018) a minimum of ten interviews is enough for a reliable qualitative research and so, twelve interviews were conducted.

There were certain criteria the respondents and organization had to meet. The organization needed to be big enough to have four women in leadership positions and each of these needed to have a minimum of two women employees. Because of this I focused only on middle to large sized organizations, meaning organizations that have up to 250 employees and more than 250 employees (MKB of grote onderneming?, 2021). I aimed for an organization that has a male-dominated culture because here the relationship between women superior and employee would assumably be more focused on the advancement of women in the organization, instead of this being a standard within the organization. I reckoned these two criteria were a difficult combination to find within one organization and so I switched my focus to only large sized organizations in order to increase the chances of finding a male-dominated organization with enough women in their workforce. By reaching out to my offline network I managed to find an organization in which both criteria were present. The organization is a family-owned business and has 4,369 employees worldwide, of which only 14% are women and consequently 86% men. Because the outcomes of this research are very organization specific, but could be a bit precarious, I chose to name the organization XYZ in this research, instead of using the real name.

The superior respondents were found through my network within the organization, using purpose sampling. The criteria here was 1. having a minimum of two women employees and 2. having an executive role. Purpose sampling is known as including persons whose experience and viewpoints are crucial for a study (Anderson, 2013). All superiors but one are working in management boards in the upper three levels of the organization. Prior to the sampling I aimed to have all superior respondents present in the two upper echelons of the organization, however this seemed impossible in combination within a male dominated

organization. The superior respondents in my sample are present in management boards and executive roles and so they have enough power to have a say or to initiate policies impacting the career advancement of women in the organization. The departments in which the respondents work are primarily Finance or HR.

After having determined the women leader respondents, snowball sampling was used to reach two of their women employees. Snowball sampling is a widely used method in research, where respondents are asked whether they know someone that would also participate in the study (Parker et al., 2019). For the employees there were no other criteria's than the one of identifying as a woman and the employee-superior relation. In the table below, the composition of respondents and superior-employee relations can be found. A rather minimal description of the respondents is provided in order to protect the respondents' identities.

<u>Interview number</u>	<u>Position</u>
6	Superior
5	Employee
9	Employee
4	Superior
1	Employee
2	Employee
8	Superior
7	Employee
10	Employee
11	Superior
3	Employee
12	Employee

Table 1: Position respondents.

3.4. Data Collection

After I determined my respondents, the interview guides were set up, which can be found in **Appendix 1**. An interview guide is a schematic overview of questions and the topics that need to be explored in the interviews (Jamshed, 2014). A different interview guide was made for the superiors and employees. The questions addressed to the superiors are more focused on

the leadership behavior of the leader herself and on what she does or has done for the development of female leadership. The questions addressed to the employees are a little more less fact-based. They are being asked whether they feel supported in their career advancement. Only when employees started to talk about their superiors themselves, I asked them directly in what ways they were (not) supported by their superiors. By formulating the questions for the subordinates a little less direct, I aimed to avoid socially desirable answers. It was possible for respondents to elaborate on subjects different from the interview guide as well. Which is the reason for referring to the interviews as semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews are operated through open-ended questions. According to Boeije and Bleijenbergh (2019), open questions allow respondents to share their full experiences as they formulate their own answers. The interview guide was the same for every employee and superior in order to assure reliability (Bleijenbergh, 2015). The questions at the beginning of the interview were general for two reasons: first, to create a sense of ease in the interviews, so the respondents would feel comfortable enough to share personal information on their leadership/ career advancement. The second reason was to create a clear context about the organization, through which certain processes can be explained. Examples of these general questions are how they would describe the organization and the organizational culture. After these background questions, more in-depth questions were asked.

Four of the interviews were conducted in person, at the office of the organization. Due to busy schedules of the respondents or the respondents working abroad, the eight other interviews were done through Teams. In this way the respondents were still able to be in their own natural environment, which according to Boeije (2014) asserts the most valid data. Ten of the twelve interviews were done in Dutch. Two respondents were foreign and so these interviews were done in English. Eleven respondents were interviewed in their first language, which is preferable, as in this way they were able to express themselves more easily during the interviews and a more complete picture could be formed. The interviews took between 30 and 50 minutes, depending on the elaboration of the respondents.

3.5. Data Analysis

After the interviews were conducted, each word was transcribed. Transcribing is necessary in order to correctly analyze the interviews (Seale et al., 2003).

The data analysis entails the extraction of certain parts of the interviews. The transcripts were read again and fragments of the transcripts were extracted. These fragments were labelled with a term of what the fragment is about. This is called coding. Coding makes it possible to categorize and interpret the interviews (Bleijenbergh, 2015). The process of coding was done using the coding program Atlas.ti, which makes it possible to systematically organize the data and use the same codes throughout different documents. In this way, interviews were compared efficiently (Bleijenbergh, 2015).

There are two types of coding: inductive and deductive. Inductive coding uses the transcripts as a base to form codes, while deductive coding uses the pre-determined codes based on literature (Bleijenbergh, 2015). The underlying processes, being justice, social cognitions, threat rigidity and utility were coded deductively, as they were based on the research of Kottke and Agars (2005). The part about the ways in which superiors influence the career advancement of their employees was coded inductively. As said before, the interview guide is partly based on literature, such as the underlying processes. Although, I intentionally formed the questions as open-ended as possible in order to have an explorative research and not steer the answers of the respondents into a certain direction. I wanted to enter the interviews with few biased ideas and so be open to any answers given by the respondents. I combined the two methods by using themes based on literature and adding themes derived from the interviews (Bernard, 2011).

During inductive coding, three steps were taken: open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). First, the fragments were labelled with codes that explain what the fragments are about. These explanations could be rather elaborate, for example what a respondent thinks of the communication between her and her superior. This part of the process is called 'open coding'. The next step taken is 'axial coding'. In axial coding the codes made in open coding will be summarized into more general categories. From here a total of 50 codes were made. A list of all the codes can be found in **Appendix 4**. The third phase in coding is 'selective coding'. This is when the general categories are summarized into even more general concepts that describe the general categories and creates themes.

Connections between the axial codes are made. After this step, I concluded on eleven inductive codes. In relation to the career advancement of women, four selective codes were found: *career advancement: role manager*, *career advancement: functional factors*, *difficulties career advancement* and *communication*. The other six themes found were

ambition, diversity, HR processes, ideas for improving career advancement, leadership style, underlying processes and organizational culture. The themes used to answer the research question are: *organizational culture, underlying processes, career advancement: role manager and communication.*

3.6. Quality of the research

The quality of this research is determined by the internal validity, external validity and reliability. Internal validity is assured when the research does in fact research what it aims to research (Boeije, 2014). Because of the qualitative nature of this research, meaning the sample size is relatively small, this can be hard to determine. By assuring anonymity to the respondents prior to the interviews and asking the respondents indirect questions, I minimize the risk of socially desirable answers. Also, because of the semi-structured nature of the interviews, respondents can ask for explanations about questions and can therefore fully understand the questions and give the relevant answers. The external validity is defined as whether the outcomes of the research can be applied to people/ situations outside of the research (Boeije, 2014). By doing multiple interviews I aim to make this research applicable to as many people / situations as possible, however the outcomes will be very specific for the organizations in which the interviews were held. Therefore, the external validity in this research is limited. The reliability is measured through the extent to which the research would give the same results when it is replicated (Boeije, 2014). By having a methodology section in which every step of the research is explained I aim to maximize the reliability. Also, the interview guide provides a handbook on how to replicate the research and create the same results.

3.7. Research Ethics

There are a couple of measures that need to be taken in order to assure an ethically justified research (Iphofen & Tolich, 2018). These research ethics are based on the ethical principles to do good and to do no harm. In practice these are translated into a couple of measures; the need of informed consent, minimizing the risks of harm, protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents, avoid deceptive practices and give respondents the right to withdraw from the research at any moment (Iphofen, & Tolich, 2018). Before the interviews take place, I will send every respondent the agreement through which these measures are ensured. The agreement can be found in **Appendix 2**. In this agreement it is stated that the interviews will be recorded, no harm will be done to the respondents, respondents cooperate

voluntarily and all names are anonymized. Another article states that I am authorized to use the data of the interviews in my analysis. By this agreement, the risk of harm done to the respondents is minimized. The respondents all agreed on these statements within the interviews.

The data used in this research is based on the answers given by the respondents in the interviews. The employees are asked for their opinion about certain organizational practices by their superiors. In case their association is negative, it is important the employees cannot be professionally addressed upon this. By anonymizing the data and not giving personal details about the employees, it is impossible to link particular quotes to people.

It should also be noted that I, as a researcher, cannot be regarded as fully neutral. I agree with the subjectivist epistemology, which is part of the interpretivist approach. This states that the subject of research and the researcher cannot be separated (Scauso, 2020). Me being a woman means I might be biased in this research as my perspective may be more feminine than objective. Because I also have experience with being a woman in a professional organization and have a female manager. This could mean that I have biased ideas about the research question, which could influence the direction of the interview. By being aware of these preconceptions I aim to minimize the bias.

4. Results

In the previous sections, the outline of this research and the theoretical bases for it were explained. The research question was stated and based on this the data was collected. In this section, the collected data is analyzed to adequately answer the research question:

What role do women superiors have in the career advancement of their women employees?

The data was collected with the use of semi-structured interviews with women within the company XYZ, meaning this research is considered a case study (Symon & Casell, 2012). Four trios, each consisting of one superior and two employees, were interviewed. Before we can formulate the answers to the research question, the data is interpreted and analyzed in the following section. The results are illustrated using quotes from the interviews.

First, the organizational culture is analyzed in part 4.1., after which the underlying processes are discussed in section 4.2. After these factors have been evaluated within the organization, the other part of the analysis are discussed in section 4.3., where I elaborated on the role of women superiors in the career advancement of their employees. As ten out of twelve interviews were conducted in Dutch, almost all citations have been translated. The original quotations can be found in **Appendix 3**. **Appendix 4** shows an overview of the founded themes in the data, explained in section 4.3.

4.1. Organizational culture

It is important to create an understanding of the culture within organization XYZ, as it has the potential to affect processes within the organization (Denison et al., 2004). By creating an understanding of the organizational culture within the organization, a clearer understanding can be formed about the results in relation to the underlying processes as well as the influence of superiors on their employees. For the analysis of the organizational culture, the interviews of both superiors and employees are used, because all of them experience the organizational culture.

Despite Alvesson's (2012) argument that it is challenging to understand organizational culture, respondents' opinions on it were quite consistent. Respondents most often described the culture as; family like, pragmatic, conservative and masculine. All three facets of the culture will be elaborated on below.

4.1.1. Family company

“In the essence, we’re a family company, which is positive on the one hand as people take care of each other, but on the other hand it makes it more difficult to give feedback, for example.” (1)

“XYZ is an organization, which takes good care of its people.” (2)

In seven of the twelve interviews, the respondents mentioned that the organization is a family company. From the family nature, most of the respondents experience positive consequences, such as the care for people. As a result of this, people are very dedicated to the company and passionate about their job. This can be seen in the turnover; employees often stay for a short while or for decades. Also, the employees of Van XYZ are very loyal to each other. Because of this, multiple respondents say that the company feels like one big family. The organization

is project-based, so people who have worked together at projects are said to have bonded like siblings. This close bond between employees also creates a very tight and close family-like culture. Five respondents mentioned the downsides of this family-like culture. An example of this is explained in quote 1. As there is a culture of being intimate, people may find it hard to give negative feedback and be direct to each other. A consequence of this is that people do not dare to confront colleagues with their mistakes, but instead talk to third parties about them. A second consequence of this is that people are excused for things they would normally be negatively assessed for or to take it further, replaced or sacked for. People who may not be qualified for certain jobs stay in these positions, which leaves little room for change. Another difficulty that people have experienced is that it takes time to be fully accepted into the family. As colleagues have worked for the company for so long, have worked at projects together and as a result have formed a close bond, to newcomers it can sometimes be experienced as a clique and hard to become part of that too. This may also explain why the organization experiences a lack of diversity; people who are different from the norm have a hard time fitting in.

4.1.2. Pragmatic

“A hands-on mentality; we’re more about doing than talking” (3)

Seven of the twelve respondents describe the culture of the company as pragmatic with a can-do mentality. This results in a culture that is very focused on short-term results, but also on the solution instead of overanalyzing the problem. A term used by three of the respondents that can be linked to this is the ‘firemen culture’. This means that there is a culture of machos and of solving crises, rather than overviewing a whole process (on the long term) and preventing a crisis from happening in the first place. This way of working results into a lack of standardization, as this involves overviewing the whole process and a long-term perspective. This creates a reliance on informal processes. This is also the case for career advancement, which is described as an informal process one can get access to when one asks for it.

“Finding a solution. So I don't think that they are sitting there and just complaining. I guess there are some, but I think the broader majority is willing to find a solution for it.” (4)

The plus sides of the pragmatic features of the culture were described as working hard, dedication and result driven, but also as a lack of complaining. There are no big deals made about problems, the focus quickly shifts to finding the solution for it. This is achieved by working hard and a result driven focus.

4.1.3. *Masculine and Conservative*

“I think that because of the conservative culture the company has existed for such a long time. There is a certain appreciation of the expertise and experience, however the downside is that change happens slowly.”(5)

“We have a culture, which works along four values, but it’s very much a masculine culture: dominant, focused at skills and not so much at soft skills.” (6)

The culture is also conservative and masculine. Traditionally the culture has been masculine and through its conservatism it has stayed that way. The organization is active in a very masculine sector. People with proper masculine characteristics are the ones who make it to the upper echelons of the organizations, stay there for a very long time and for this reason create the organizational culture. This in combination with the informal process of career advancement and similarity bias, which means people hire people that are alike, this can explain for the lack of diversity at the top of the organization. As these masculine people stay in one position for so long and also because of their conservative nature, change happens rather slowly in the organization. From the superiors I have interviewed, only two said to display quite some masculine traits. Besides this, they also indicated to have developed soft skills and so, differed from the norm. The others indicated to be different from the majority of the organization and described themselves as outsiders/ change agents to the masculinity and conservatism. With time they had started to learn how to work within this masculine and conservative culture. A good thing about the conservative nature is that the organization has a very clear and determined identity. This is advantageous for (future) clients and employees fitting with the identity, because they know exactly what to expect.

The organizational culture has already been described as family-like, pragmatic as well as conservative. Other words used by the interviewees are: hierarchical, committed, and passionate.

“And also I see that the culture is changing. So I see that many young people aim for something completely different than the older ones.” (6)

As the quote explains, the organization is at a sort of turning point concerning its culture. Whereas people used to work for the company for a very long time, the new generations are less inclined to do so and so eventually there will be a higher turnover in the management positions. Also, a three-year HR strategy has been set up to tackle the lack of diversity, to set up personal development tools and to standardize more and more processes such as career paths or succession planning and so assumably the organization is due to major cultural changes in the coming years.

4.2. Underlying processes

Before the direct effects on the career advancement of women are discussed, the underlying processes by Kottke and Agars (2005) will be analyzed. These four processes are; social cognitions, justice, threat-rigidity and utility. Kottke and Agars (2005) describe that these processes influence the extent to which initiatives for career advancement of women are successful. By asking about these four processes in the interviews, I try to find out an explanation for the success/ failure of initiatives aimed at the career advancement of women. Below I will analyze the existence of all four processes one by one and elaborate on them with quotes from the interviews.

4.2.1. Social cognitions

The process of social cognitions is divided into two parts, stereotypes and social identity. These are the two most critical social cognitions in relation to the career advancement of women (Kottke & Agars, 2005).

Stereotypes

As stereotypes have a negative effect on the career opportunities for women and according to Kottke and Agars (2005) hamper the effect of initiatives targeted at the career advancement of women, is important to consider whether, according to the interviewees, stereotypes are still present within the organization. In the interviews, the interviewees were not asked about stereotypes directly, however in seven out of the twelve interviews it was claimed that there are still some stereotypes present within the organization. Multiple respondents explained that

this is because of the core business being technical and the absence of women in technical positions, especially years ago.

“You know, when I go on a business trip men ask me whether I will be able to get everything fixed at home. Then I think: “I never ask you a question like that, do I?” (8)

This quote illustrates the stereotypical preconception within the company about how family life is managed, meaning that the woman is still responsible for the home situation. Research often claims that the demands from home are much bigger for women, which makes it more difficult to create a healthy work-life balance (Mišić & Andrić, 2015). When we follow this perspective, the male colleague’s question about having everything fixed at home is not so disruptive. However by emphasizing and consequently, normalizing this traditional role, the change against this traditional perspective may even go slower. The quote shows the stereotypical ideas some employees in the organization carry about women being primarily responsible for home duties.

“Instead of taking my expertise for granted they always expect me to show them that I am good at my job.”(9)

Other cases were about women not being the stereotypical manager. Respondents indicate they always have to convince the others of being a good manager, whereas for men this is assumed. According to some interviewees it is assumed that women are generally nice and friendly creatures, but when they are critical and direct, they are seen as ‘needy’ and as a result of their likeability decreases. Because of the technical origin of the company, in the past it was mainly men who worked at organization XYZ. Back then there was even less supply of women technical graduates than now. Consequently, men advanced into leadership positions owing to their technical expertise, which meant that they were the best technical specialists, but not necessarily the best managers. The soft skills of these newly assigned managers were often not well developed. As the organization is active in such a specialist sector, there are not many other companies to switch to and so, these managers are still within the upper echelons of the organization. This means, that until this day it is mainly white men, with few soft skills who are active in the higher levels of the company. According to both the interviews and the upper echelon theory Hambrick, 2018); these people define the organizational culture. When these people create a culture where stereotypes are present, this will be perceived throughout

the whole organization. People who deviate from the norm (e.g. women/ developed soft skills) are seen as less adequate.

Important to note is that although seven out of twelve interviewees talked about something that can be counted as stereotypical behavior, almost all interviewees claimed not to be much bothered by it. Some said that this was probably because of their senior position within the organization and acknowledged the possibility of the negative influence of stereotypes on other women within the organization. This is in line with research about women in top positions. These women appear to be pursuing individual achievement by blending in with the organization's largely male culture (Kanter, 1977).

Social identity

Social identity is explained as how people see themselves in relation to certain groups (Kottke & Agars, 2005). In the interviews I asked the interviewees how they saw themselves within the organizational culture and in this way analyzed how they considered their social identity within the organization. The way in which employees see themselves within an organization, e.g. belonging to certain groups, creates an ingroup bias. This has an influence on the extent to which initiatives to improve the career advancement of women, are successful. On the other hand, a strong feeling of organizational membership has a positive influence on these initiatives (Kottke & Agars, 2005).

“ The positive side of a family company, so the warmth, taking care of each other and feeling welcome” (10)

The quotes above demonstrate the strong feeling of membership present within the company which is described as family-like; people feel welcome, there is warmth and people take care of each other. They sense a strong feeling of belonging to the ‘family’ of the organization. In seven of the twelve interviews, respondents claimed that the organizational culture is influenced by the fact that the organization is a family company. It is because of this that the organization prioritizes its employees over anything else. An example given by one respondent was that when she was on the brink of a burnout and could not carry out her job in the way she wanted, her manager assured her that there was no need for her to panic if certain tasks were not immediately ticked off. This example shows that the organization prioritizes

the wellbeing of its employees. I noticed a strong feeling of membership, although not identifying with the conservative part of the organizational culture.

“I think I have an important positions, because 1. I come from outside of the organization, 2. I am a woman and 3. I am not technically educated. Without it being thought through, I think I have the role of a change agent.” (11)

“Yes, there’s a role for me at the people side of the organization, together with some other colleagues. Also, we can bring more diversity into the teams” (12)

The respondents showed a strong social identity of being ‘change makers’, distancing themselves from the conservative organizational culture. They feel that they belong to the group of people who can ‘change’ the organizational culture. Eight out of twelve interviewees said that they were different from the majority. Most saw it as their task to change the culture to being more open to diversity. Naturally, it is a positive thing that they see room for change and are assertive to initiate that change, however it could also influence the success of initiatives in a negative way because employees who consider themselves insiders may develop antagonistic attitudes towards these initiatives (Kottke & Agars, 2005).

The presence of stereotypes, the strong feeling of belonging to a family (membership), but also the feeling of being an outsider should be considered when analyzing the interviews on career advancement.

4.2.2. Justice

Perceptions of justice about initiatives for the career advancement of women are often negative, even when these initiatives are often targeted at combatting a shortfall of justice. It is important for the initiatives to be perceived as fair by the organization, in order to assure the success of them (Kottke & Agars, 2005). In the interviews I asked to what extent new initiatives were welcomed and what reactions they triggered within the organization. As there are not many initiatives which are especially aimed at the career advancement of women in the organization, it was hard to analyze the perceived fairness towards these. However, the general openness to change already tells a lot about this.

“People really thought they had made the wrong choice by giving me the job?. It doesn’t bother me that much, but I do think it’s questionable when men say: “You only got the job because you’re a friend of X.””(13)

“At Van XYZ, we have room for any initiative, however you really should build a strong business case (14)

Although people are open to new ideas, change happens slowly within the organization, as has been stated by multiple interviewees. In quote 13 and 14 the contrast between the openness to change is shown, which makes it difficult to determine whether the initiatives had been evaluated fairly. In eight of the twelve interviews, it was declared that the organization is open to new initiatives, however almost all had side notes to this. One needs much perseverance to put these initiatives into practice as change happens slowly. It could depend on one's level of seniority whether the initiatives paid attention to and also the utility of the initiatives is an important factor for deciding whether or not to put things into practice. In 4.1.4. quotes about utility will be explained further. Considering these three factors, there seems to be some room for initiatives, however the initiatives targeted at the career advancement of women seem to decrease this room and are unjustified (e.g. quote 13). This can negatively influence the career advancement of women within the organization. To conclude, overall, initiatives aimed at the career advancement of women are perceived as unfair within the organization.

4.2.3. Threat rigidity

Rigidity towards initiatives can be formed when people feel threatened by them. According to Kottke and Agars (2005) this feeling of threat can be based on the fewer job opportunities for the rest of the organization or additional threats can be formed to the men's self-esteem or masculine identity. Although the initiatives that positively influence the career advancement of women were found to be unjustified within the organization, I could not really discover any apparent signs of threat. In one interview the interviewee acknowledged that men might feel threatened by affirmative action which makes them believe that women are appointed for the fact that they are women and not because of their qualities.

“I do have these annoying discussions when men point out certain initiatives and say they are unnecessary and ask why they are needed.”(15)

“If you want to change processes within this organization or standardize certain processes, in general this evokes much resistance.” (16)

I did find some more signs of rigidity towards initiatives. The quotes above demonstrate this. This rigidity was mainly about the women's network. This was set up 1,5 years ago and has been quite a success for women. The men, however still feel a women's network is nonsense and is not necessary within the organization. I doubt whether this rigidity has been formed because of threat. A general dislike or fear towards change in general seems to be the case. Overall I could not find many examples of threat and rigidity. This raises the question whether this is because there not enough initiatives have been implemented, because the road towards implementation is too long or whether the majority eventually bends and sees the advantages about these initiatives and changes.

4.2.4. Utility

Another factor that can make it difficult for initiatives to be implemented is that their utility must be demonstrated. The problem with diversity initiatives is that it is very difficult to make a clear utility calculation, which is why often diversity initiatives are eventually not implemented (Kottke & Agars, 2005).

“There is much room for initiatives, especially in the commercial division/department, commercial people have more room for initiative.” (17)

“I am good at making things quantitative and because of that I get people on my side here”(18)

Utility is a very important factor within the organization, as these quotes show. The organization is profit driven, so of course, utility is seen as something that needs to be guaranteed. In combination with initiatives focused on the career advancement of women, there were no results found in the interviews on how their utility was decided upon. However, as quote 17 shows, making plans quantitative helps to build a business case. This in combination with the size of the organization and its profit driven character, I would assume utility is of the utmost importance in this case. Some respondents talked about how diversity has proved to help with organizational effectiveness. This shows that employees are aware and able to show the utility of initiatives for the career advancement of women.

4.3. Direct influences

The process of coding revealed that the following themes have an influence on the career advancement of the employees: affirmative action, role models, personal support and

communication. These factors are influenced by women superiors. A policy on career advancement within the organization has not been introduced yet. There are career paths for very specific jobs, however there is not a general career plan. As this process has not been regulated, superiors can decide for themselves what role and how big of a role they play in the advancement of their employees.

4.3.1. Affirmative action

The first theme that has been identified is affirmative action. I chose to discuss this theme first because this is what predominantly and immediately leads to career advancement for more women employees in the organization. Whereas affirmative actions are well known to be negatively received in organizations (Carlsson & Sinclair, 2021; Kottke & Agars, 2005), within the organization studied, women superiors freely admitted taking affirmative action. From their perspective this traditionally male dominated organization needs affirmative action in order to get a more gender diverse workforce. However, they also acknowledged that these ways of promoting women is not received positively by everyone in organization. Mostly men claim that some women have only been appointed because they are friends with some of the women managers.

“So what I do is partly affirmative action; I pay more attention to the women who are there, when there are open vacancies.” (19)

“X plays a big role in this, she pushes actively on this subject and I think she is the biggest driver. Because of her, more women are in the higher positions, which again attracts more women.”(20)

In quote 19, the respondent explains that it is especially women whom she considers when appointing someone for a particular job. In the interviews this is said to be necessary within the organization, otherwise many women will be overlooked. Because of affirmative action, women employees become more visible to their superiors and so have a better chance of showing their qualities and consequently become better candidates for promotion.

In quote 20 it is said that the number of women in higher positions has increased due to the affirmative actions and so the benefits of these actions have been proved to other respondents. One of the superiors is said to be very active in taking affirmative action. Three of the four superiors that have been interviewed take affirmative action very regularly. The affirmative actions are not always direct and obvious. Sometimes they only consist of reminding other

managers to consider or propose a woman for an appointment. This proves to be necessary for some managers because as a result of this more women have been appointed to the higher levels of the organization. In this case, the influence of the superior is not directed at her own employee, but goes from one superior to another superior and from there to the employee.

“Right now, women get appointed to key positions within the organization. Of course it is good that women get this opportunity, but men do talk about this.” (21)

The downside of this, namely the men in the organization who undermine the qualities of the newly appointed women, has also been mentioned by employees and superiors. The word for it in the company’s jargon is ‘excuustruus’, meaning that the woman’s sole excuse for having the job is being a woman. Some respondents have had negative experiences with this, for example the need to overly prove themselves in new positions or the gossip about this subject on the work floor. These perspective of the employees was predominantly positive; having more women at top positions within the organization, however they feared for the credibility of these women from the perspective of the men. Taking the advantages and disadvantages into account, as quote 20 describes very well, affirmative action will lead to more role models for women employees and cumulatively help with the career advancement of women within the organization. This can help outrun the ‘excuustruus’ perspective of men. The next theme will go deeper into the subject of role models.

4.3.2. Role models

As there are not that many women in the upper echelons of the organization, I had expected role modelling not to play an important role in the career advancement of the employee. After the interviews I realized that, it is because of the shortage of women in the higher positions, that the women who are in the management positions are seen as important role models. The masculine organizational culture makes it even more important to have these role models, as this part of the culture complicates it for women to advance into the higher levels of the organization.

“Eventually I am rather pragmatic. I believe, more women working in top positions means more examples of successful women. This in return, attracts other women and then men start to realize that it actually works/pays to have women working in the company.” (22)

Role modelling is seen as an important and pragmatic asset that helps to increase the number of women in the higher positions of the organization. As well as being examples to women in the organization, the superior in quote 22 talks about the positive implications it can have on the men in the organization. By having more women work in the organization in general the men will become accustomed to women in top positions. In this way, they will drop their stereotypical idea of ‘think manager, think male’ (Arvate et al., 2018).

“I really see her as an inspiring example, she is very successful within the organization and she also has two kids at home.”(23)

As can be concluded from quote 23 by an employee, the work-life balance achieved by her superior is seen as an important asset for a role model. Achieving a good work-life balance is said to be a challenge, especially for respondents with children. The combination of the fast and result-driven culture and not having many standardized, flexible work arrangements makes it difficult for women to balance both home and work and at the same time focus on the next steps in their career. A superior who has experience in this field is besides being an example also seen as a teacher who can teach one how to combine work and home and still develop career wise.

“When I talk to her I immediately become enthusiastic about what we’re going to do in our department. She has so many ideas about where we should be in five years and when she talks in that way I become motivated and think; yes, this is how we will do it.” (24)

Another way of being a role model is by making employees enthusiastic about the job and by inspiring them to move forward and upward. The superior is seen as a role model because she has a strategic and long-term focus on the development of the department and because she is proactive. By sharing this, the employees take over the urge to develop and get to work. This is a great example of inspiring leadership and of using role modelling in leadership, something that women more often seem to do than men (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

“Yes, I am seen as a role model I think it’s funny, because I never look at myself in that way, but I guess I am a role model.”(25)

Not all managers consider themselves to be role models. Quote 25, the person who does not consider herself as a role model, illustrates how unaware a person may be of her role and how informal she may execute her role model role.

A concluding remark on this subject is that the shortage of role models higher up in the organization is not only because women in the organization feel they are not suitable for these leadership positions. It seems as if the men need women role models to get used to and learn to trust women in the top positions and to consequently drop their focus on gender in leadership positions. Arvate et al. (2018) acknowledge the importance of having role models; the more female individuals are seen in the positions of power, the less prevalent the male-oriented stereotype of leadership in those institutions is, and the more the cognitive structures diverge from the stereotype.

4.3.3. *Personal support*

As the processes of career advancement are not standardized in the organization, there are many measures used by managers individually to support the career advancement of their employees. As these measures vary much, they are coded under the theme personal support: a more individualistic and personal approach of superiors, helping employees with their career. This can be in the form of challenging the employee, but also by creating a secure and safe relationship between employee and superior.

“We have an event coming up which she has asked me to organize. That means I can decide on all contents of the program, and have to coordinate the stakeholder management. That is how she gives me a platform and makes sure I am not kept small.”(26)

“I am all about setting goals and I trying to make people leave their comfort zone”(27)

Above, both the employee (26) and superior (27) talk about getting out of a comfort zone. The superior challenges her employee by giving her an important and challenging assignment: organizing an event. The quotes reveal that by challenging their employees to leave their comfort zone the superiors prove to be very supportive, which is appreciated by the employees. By getting out of their comfort zone, not only do the employees become more visible within the organization, they also develop on a personal and functional level. In the interviews the superiors said that this, in combination with being up to date with their

employees' ambitions and goals, creates a viable ground for career advancement for the employees.

"My current manager is only going to stay for another month, so that will be interesting. But she makes me feel at ease, safe and unrestricted." (28)

"What really helped was that she believed in me and introduced me."(29)

The personal relationship between the employee and her superior is considered to be very effective. In nine out of twelve interviews, both superiors and employees mentioned the mutual feelings of trust, freedom to fill in the job on her own terms and support. This has a large contribution to being successful at one's job. When a good relationship is secured, employees feel they are understood and supported. Feeling supported is enough to give an employee the confidence she needs. This confidence results in her taking the necessary steps in the career that she aspires.

" Speaker 1: Could you say that she is like a mentor?"

Speaker 2: Well yes, you could say that. It's not that she coaches everyone individually, but when she recognizes women with talent, she invites them over." (30)

The approach to giving support is very personal, every superior supports in a different way. Some superiors focus on establishing a relationship with their employees, others focus on challenging their employees, but two superiors go as far as acting as an informal mentor. One superior talked about being an informal mentor for one employee specific, whereas the superior in quote 30 is known to function as a mentor figure for more employees. By getting to know the potential of the women in the organization, women can fall back on their mentor when they have questions about the job or struggle with other career related things. As the mentor has much experience and is high up in the organization, she can help women to achieve their ambitions and advance their career. The informal process of mentoring was mentioned in only two interviews, which is why it was not turned into an individual theme or why the perspective of the employees could not be explained. Not having formal mentors is probably because of the overall lack of standardization in career advancement domain. Not having informal mentors could be explained through the research of Wallace (2001), who claims that women often overlook the need for mentoring, as they still overly rely on meritocracy: they believe they will get promoted when they deserve it.

4.3.4. *Communication*

Communication was found to play an important and large role in the career advancement of women. The quality of communication between employee and superior was found to have a positive effect on career advancement. Communication is coded as an individual code group, because in the interviews a distinction was made between communication specifically about career advancement and communication about feedback. This theme also touches upon the previous theme, as the feeling of being supported seems to go hand in hand with clear communication between the superior and her employee.

4.3.4.1. *Communication about career advancement*

Communication plays a large role in the career advancement of women in the organization. One reason for this is that career advancement is a very informal, unstandardized process. This leaves the possible ways to career advancement open and makes communication about advancement much more important to keep both manager and employee engaged in the process. Most respondents do say to feel fully responsible for their own career.

“ So she really has those soft skills. I think she is a good manager because I can give my own opinion on things and I feel that she takes notice of me.”(31)

“But it’s very much about how I can lift my position to a higher level, yes we do have conversations about that.” (32)

Communication influences the career advancement in two ways. On the one hand, there are employees who say that their manager understands their needs. In quote 31, this is linked to the superior having soft skills, but she also mentions the feeling of being recognized by her superior. This underlines the positive effect a good relationship between superior and employee. The employee feels safe to share her ambitions and feels her manager listens to her and is motivated to help her achieve those ambitions. The opportunity to have an open conversation with a superior is a very important factor in order to feel supported and confident enough to advance in one’s career. As is the case in quote 32, this can also be for horizontal career advancement, where the superior functions as a sparring partner in how to develop in one’s current position.

“I want to know in which areas do I need to develop. What is good and what could be better. – I think it is rather unclear. I really have to read between the lines to understand what she means and even then I find it difficult to understand what she means.” (33)

“We do not talk about it, nor is there a plan. They do think I have potential, because I often hear that I am good at my job and that they are happy with me and want me to stay. Then I think that they should talk more with their employees/women. What they think of their job and ask them how they can be kept onboard.” (34)

On the other hand there are employees who are not satisfied with the communication about their career advancement. Quote 33 shows the respondent feels the communication about her career is unclear and she would like to have more direct and clear feedback about her points of development. This unclarity causes the respondent to feel unsure in which areas she needs to develop and that can hamper her career development and advancement. Whereas in quote 33 the respondent talks about unclarity of the conversation, in quote 34 the respondent feels there is a lack of communication. In this case it is specifically about the succession plan of positions. She feels all employees involved should be kept up-to-date about this process. This lack of communication can create misunderstandings with the employees and employees can feel left out or unqualified. Consequently, this can create a sense of insecurity, which negatively influences their career advancement. Both respondents would like to see a more individualistic approach from their manager and would like to have an open conversation.

“I want to know what their plans are careerwise and also concerning their personal life. What ambitions do they have?”(35)

“ Yes I do try to be very facilitating: ‘So, what do you need in order to execute your work satisfactorily?’ I think the responsibility in that lies with the employee” (36)

Superiors also see the need to keep up-to-date with the ambitions of their employees, for the sake of being a good manager and keeping in touch, for supporting them in their horizontal career advancement, but also so the employees can develop on a personal level and from there on get promoted. However, as can be concluded from quotes 33 and 34, this is not always how the employees see it. I believe the reason for this is that these managers often say they apply a coaching leadership style and they feel that the responsibility for career advancement lies with the employee in the first place. They want to direct their employees in the right direction, but refuse to ‘hold hands’. This may be because these employees are in the more

senior positions in the organization, where one is expected to take responsibility in one's job. Ironically, to solve this discrepancy between employee and manager, a conversation about the expectations on both sides seems to be the solution.

5. Discussion

5.1. Research discussion

In this single case study, four trios, consisting of one superior and two of her employees were interviewed on how the superior had an influence on the employees' career advancement. To give an answer to the research question, four themes have been identified after the process of coding. Also the organizational culture of the organization and the underlying processes of women's career advancement by Kottke and Agars (2005) were analyzed. The results of this qualitative research will be discussed in this section.

5.1.1. Organizational culture

According to Denison et al. (2004), family companies are likely to have a very strong culture. The results of this analysis indicate that organization XYZ has a very strong culture indeed. Respondents' descriptions of the organizational culture were very consistent, most often described as family like, pragmatic and conservative and masculine. Even the presence of two respondents from abroad, did not change this consistency.

Besides XYZ being a family business, respondents also acknowledged the culture felt like a family. This results in loyalty from the employees, who have often worked for the organization for very long. The family-like aspect is in line with the research by Vallejo (2008), who concluded that employees in family owned businesses are more loyal than employees in non-family owned businesses and there is more cohesion between employees in family owned businesses. However, this family-like feeling could also be the consequence of the project work, where employees work abroad together in small groups and depend on each other. The downsides of this family-culture are that people often avoid giving feedback and the difficulty for new employees to integrate into the organizational culture. Different perspectives of newcomers are rarely appreciated, which implies a resistance to change. These results are in conflict with the research by Gunga et al. (2017), who stated that members in family owned businesses are supported in their individuality, because it can be of competitive advantage to the organization. Another research on organizational culture by Denison et al. (2004) did acknowledge the inflexibility of the organizational culture of family owned

businesses, as well as a tendency to be conservative. The resistance to change in combination with a similarity bias of the male dominated top of the organization and a lack of standardization of the career advancement processes could explain the maintained male dominated top of the organization. Another implication of this resistance to change and conservatism is that fairly 'new' themes such as diversity are not paid much attention to. This could explain why no specific measures are taken to increase the number of women in top positions, although they aim to increase this number. The positive consequence of conservatism of having a determined identity, which is beneficial for future clients, was also acknowledged by Denison et al. (2004).

The organizational culture was also described as pragmatic. The pragmatism in combination with the dedication of the employees leads to a hardworking and result-driven workforce. It also reveals the masculinity of the company through a so called 'firemen culture'. This is explained as machos who tend to 'extinguish fires', rather than prevent crises from happening by developing a long-term perspective. This also explains the lack of in career advancement. This is in contrast with the results of Vallejo (2008), who concluded that family businesses often have a long-term focus. The short-term focus in organization XYZ is detrimental for the career advancement of women within an organization. Measures need to be taken to increase the flow of women into more senior positions, however as it is often difficult to illustrate the short-term advantages of these measures, they are often not seen as a priority (Kottke & Agars, 2005). The informal process of career advancement means that in order to make career advancement, you have to take initiative yourself. According to research this is disadvantageous for women. Women rely more on meritocracy, meaning they believe they will be promoted when they deserve it, which also implies that women will ask for promotions less often than men (Wallace, 2001). This means that in organization XYZ, it is difficult to make career advancement because of the majority of men in top positions, but also because of the informal processes that lead to career advancement. The organization should focus more on the advantages diversity can bring. More diversity can be advantageous for the organization in terms of tackling future challenges and effectiveness (Catalino & Marnane, 2019; Paola et al., 2021). By formulating career advancement policies organization XYZ should be able to decrease its turnover, as Coetzee and Stoltz (2015) discovered that professional qualified personnel are prevented from leaving the organization when they have a clear vision of their career advancement possibilities.

5.1.2. Underlying processes

The underlying processes proposed by Kottke & Agars (2005) influence the extent to which initiatives for career advancement of women are successful. All measures taken by the superiors are personal initiatives and not standardized within the organization. Nevertheless, the analysis of the underlying processes may indicate in which areas the organization needs to develop and which are good enough to support the advancement of women.

The process social cognitions has been divided into stereotypes and social identity.

Stereotypes are found to be present within the organization. Like Eagly & Karau (2002) said, women are not regarded as 'typical' managers. Even when she has been promoted to a top position, she first needs to prove her qualifications, instead of people taking this for granted. Also the idea that it is more difficult for women to work at a top positions, because of responsibilities at home, is present. The social identity of respondents was explained very similar; almost all felt outsiders, because they brought something new to the norm: good soft skills or support for diversity. On the other hand, they also felt proud that they worked for this company and I noticed there was a strong feeling of membership. Following the interviews, this feeling of membership had more to do with the organization as a system, whereas the feeling of being a changemaker concerned the majority of the workforce: male, over 50, technical background and having worked for the organization for a long time. The presence of stereotypes and the feelings of being different from the majority of the women are detrimental to the implementation of initiatives, whereas the strong feeling of membership does make up for a part and benefits the implementation of career advancement initiatives. Perceptions about justification were mixed. Some respondents explained that the organization is open most initiatives. Other respondents claimed that initiatives concerning the increase of the number of women in the organization were received with some resistance. The analysis showed that initiatives about promoting the career advancement of women, such as affirmative action were regarded as unfair, which is harmful for the career advancement of the women employees. Greenberg (1987) acknowledged that when an initiative is perceived as fair, it is often accepted. Although threat rigidity was not very apparent within the organization, a general resistance to change was. There were some respondents who explained how the women's network evoked much resistance from the men in the higher levels of the organization. Like Staw et al. (1981) said, this process is usually at group level instead of individual level. The general resistance to change was shared in all interviews and is detrimental to initiatives targeted at women's career advancement. Being able to convince

others of the utility of an initiative is considered very important within the organization and helps to build a business case. The focus on short-term results should be taken into account here, as initiatives aimed to increase diversity are often unable to present short term effect and so could be depreciated (Whyte & Latham, 1997).

Following the advice of Kottke and Agars (2005), gender stereotyping should be addressed publicly within XYZ in order to tackle it. Whereas there is a strong feeling of membership, there is also a strong feeling of being an outsider within the sample. The chances of success of initiatives could be improved if the feeling of being different was countered. When there is an overall feeling of membership in an organization, initiatives aimed at women will not be seen as a threat by other groups and the chance of success improves. The initiatives for women's career advancement that are present are regarded as unjust. In order to tackle this, the organization should clearly communicate why certain initiatives are implemented. Leaving room for feedback and discussions about women's career advancement will eventually remove possible doubts about the justice. Although a feeling of threat was not really observed within the organization, future implementations should be monitored and communicated to counter a feeling of threat. Because of the focus on short term results within the organization, it could be hard to show the utility of initiatives. According to Agars and Kottke (2004), these initiatives should be measured by different results, such as career satisfaction and a decrease in turnover.

5.1.3. Direct influences

The themes found to be influenced by superiors went beyond my scope and did not fully match the themes earlier discussed in the theoretical framework. A reason for this is the absence of standardization in the career advancement process, which led to more informal and individual influences. Because of the lack of standardization in career advancement, women superiors do have much power on the career advancement of the women employees. They are all aware of this and acknowledge the importance of promoting more women within the organization. An absence of the QBP can hence be concluded. This is in line with research of O'Leary and Ryan (1994), as the superiors stayed close to their female identity (e.g. soft skills). In comparison with the affirmative action behavior, the themes role modelling personal support and communication can be considered as more indirect effects on the career advancement of the employees.

Affirmative action was observed to have the biggest direct effect on the career advancement of the employees. Superiors pay more attention to women when a vacancy is open, which gives these employees the opportunity to advance their career. The superiors emphasized, that these women needed to have the same skills as men would need to start the job, however by shifting the focus from men to women, women were given the opportunity more often. Because of the rather conservative culture and because of the loyalty and dedication of the employees towards the organization, the upper echelons have been male-dominated for a long time. This means that the idea of “think manager, think male” is very present within these levels of the organization. Affirmative action is used to break through this stereotype and provides a start to getting more women in these positions. Employees saw the advantages of affirmative actions, but were also hesitant, as they feared for the credibility of these women from the perspective of men. According to literature and in line with this research, affirmative actions attract much negative criticism (Carlsson & Sinclair, 2021; Kottke & Agars, 2005), however they also have the potential to kickstart an increase of women in the higher positions, because it encourages women to enter the competition in the higher ranks of the organization (Balafoutas, & Sutter, 2012). As is supported by Kurtulus (2012), this supplies more role models, which increases the amount of women in top positions. This indicates that the women superiors in organization XYZ rightfully use this initiative to increase the chances of career advancement of their women employees.

Another initiative women superiors are active in, is role model behavior. It was nearly always indicated by employees, which shows that for most superiors it was an unconscious process. This proves that it is incorporated in their leadership style, which is in line with the research of Eagly et al. (2003). The work-life balance and enthusiasm about the job were the most apparent ways in which superiors showed role model behavior. Achieving a healthy work-life balance means more time can be spent on the job. This is advantageous for the development of the employee and hence her career advancement, as is confirmed by respondents and Lyness and Judiesch (2008). As there are few flexible work arrangements in the organization, employees rely more on the example of their superior how to achieve success at work and at home. Another part of the role modelling behavior is enthusiasm about the course the team/ department is going. This created a sense of proactivity and encouraged the employees to keep up the hard work, which is in line with research of Morgenroth et al. (2015), who concluded that motivating is a big part of role modeling. The motivation led to proactivity and development of employees in their job, which had a positive impact on the chances of

advancement. Only positive outcomes of role modelling behaviour were shared in the interviews, however as it is an unconscious process it could also have the potential to affect the employee in a negative way. Therefore it would be wise to make superiors aware of their role model status.

Increasing the number of women in top positions attracts more women, however it also shows the men that women working in these positions is effective. This does align with research of Arvate et al. (2018), who claims that by role modelling the cognitive structures are removed from the stereotypes. The importance of women serving as role models to men was shared by one respondent and is an important insight. Following this perspective two targets are hit with one shot.

Personal support was enacted through being challenged by the superior and perceived support from the superior. One superior was characterized as a mentor by her employees. In the research by Bass and Avolio (1990), it is said that leadership behavior of women is indeed often characterized by people development, meaning the development of the employee as a person is considered to be important. Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) find that intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration is most often exerted by women in leadership positions. Especially the individualized consideration is appreciated by the employees in this research. The focus on the development and stimulation of the employee is beneficial to the career advancement as this increases the visibility of the employee within the organization and so her chances of promotion. There were two examples of informal mentorship. The absence of having formal mentors could be the consequence of the overall lack of standardization in the career advancement domain. The absence of having informal mentors could be explained by the research of Wallace (2001), who claims that women overly rely on meritocracy: they believe they will get promoted when they deserve it. Investing in sponsors would help the career advancement of women employees even more than mentorship does.

The way the superior influences the career advancement is for her to decide, which is why the role of communication in the career advancement process is so important. This can be concluded from the results of the analysis. The employee respondents who felt that there was not enough opportunity to discuss their career, were unsatisfied. Even though these employees were in senior positions, they still very much appreciated and needed personal communication

with their superior. Their superiors often described themselves as coaching leaders; willing to guide when necessary, however the initiative is with the employee. A discussion about the expectations from both sides could help to solve this unclarity. Clear expectations about career advancement do indeed increase the chances of career advancement, because it increases the future orientation, as has been researched by Praskova and Johnston (2021). Some employees indicated that the communication with their superior had positively influenced their career advancement, for example by receiving advice on how to develop in their current job. This individualized focus on the employee is in line with research on women leadership characteristics (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In other research, it is considered that women who pursue management positions resist gender preconceptions and have similar demands, values, and leadership philosophies to males who are doing the same (Powell, 1990). This is not the case in organization XYZ. The superior respondents are appreciated for their soft skills and being better people managers than other managers in the organization. All respondents acknowledged the fact that women exert different kinds of leadership styles and on average have more regard for the person behind the employee.

To conclude, career advancement is an informal process which predominantly happens when the employee takes the initiative. Apart from the technical background of the company and its organizational culture, another argument for the shortage of women in the upper echelons could be that women do not often ask for promotion. As taking initiative is the way to career advancement in organization XYZ, this could also explain the male dominated top of the organization. The role of the superior is fourfold: taking affirmative action, functioning as a role model, providing personal support and making sure that the communication between her and the employee is open and clear.

5.2. Managerial recommendations

Although organization XYZ has declared that a new HR-strategy has been developed in which diversity is a theme, the results from this research can provide very specific insights and recommendations.

The first recommendation is to standardize the career advancement process. At present there is much uncertainty for employees regarding their career advancement. The people who initiate and ask for advancement have a big chance to make it to the top. Although proactivity is promoted, this does not necessarily filter out the best candidates, it rather filters out the bold

people with the loudest voices. Also women tend to ask less for promotion, which leaves them behind in this process. Another reason for standardizing this process is to eradicate biases. Because of the similarity bias, people often appoint people who bear a resemblance to them. At present the top of the organization is male dominated, which increases the chances of more men being promoted even though women might be just as good. If the process is standardized this bias can also be eradicated.

Another recommendation is to invest in clear communication about initiatives. As has been described in the part about the justification of initiatives to increase the career advancement of women, it is very important to communicate to the organization the reasons for implementation. This applies to women's career advancement, but can also be applied to initiatives that emanate from the diversity policy. A contemporary example is affirmative action that has been taken. As affirmative action evokes many negative comments, some women in my sample were also hesitant about it. This could just be a lack of understanding. When the reasons for affirmative action and positive implications have been communicated, the initiatives are more likely to be embraced and diversity will be seen as something positive.

The third recommendation is to invest in people management. This could mean educating the people that currently are in management positions or focusing on the skills in this area of the people who are about to be promoted. Especially the employees who advance(d) from technical positions should be educated in people management, as their soft skills are said to be underdeveloped. Having managers who are soft skilled will lead to more effective and well appreciated leaders within the organization. By focusing on these skills, more women will be recognized as potential leaders because in general their soft skills are more developed. From here, the 'think manager, think male' perspective will gradually disappear.

5.3.Limitations and recommendations for further research

As with every research, also this one is affected by some limitations. The first one being the external validity. The research is very specific, it takes place within one specific organization, which means that the results can probably not be generalized to other organizations and not at all to women in general. A suggestion for further research would be to do the same research in other or more organizations and with a bigger sample size.

Secondly, in the interviews quite some answers involved experiences. This means that the answers are very subjective to the person and all the factors that influence that person. For example, the respondent could have had an argument with her employee/superior the day of the interview, which could lead to more negative answers about the other or about the organization. On the other side, having received positive feedback could for example influence the answers positively. Future research could implement other data collection methods, such as surveys and so get a more complete picture of the experiences of the respondents, or the interviews can be done again to leave the biases of mood and time.

The final limitation relates to the inter-rater dependability. Multiple researchers can code the data and provide the rationale behind why they assigned a certain code to a quotation in order to make the study's findings more trustworthy (Boeije, 2014). Only one researcher coded the data in this study, which reduces the reliability. Future study could concentrate on making sure that several researchers code the data and communicate with one another about it.

6. Conclusion

Women's career advancement goes slower and stagnates earlier than that of men. While there is plenty of research done on the obstacles that hinder women's career advancement, or how their career is different than that of their male counterparts, the specific role of women superiors in this process is currently understudied. This case study makes a start at identifying the mechanisms used by women superiors. Because of the explorative nature of the study, in-depth interviews have been done to create a comprehensive image of the process. The analysis of these interviews answers the following research question:

What role do women superiors have in the career advancement of their women employees?

While this research is about how women superiors specifically influence their women employees' career, I observed that the organizational culture had a large effect on career advancement as well. The conservatism and masculinity leave little room for a focus on women specifically and also the short-term focus and pragmatism do not benefit the needed shift in attention to the advancement of women. On the other hand, the focus on wellbeing and cohesion between employees might lead to a feeling of urgency towards the increase of women in top positions within the organization. The organizational culture led to an informal process of career advancement, a low level of diversity and a stereotypical male manager in

the upper echelon of the organization. This meant that the dependency on the superior was bigger, because they could not rely on unbiased and meritocratic career policies. Also, four underlying processes were analyzed as they had the potential to affect the impact of initiatives for women's career advancement. The presence of stereotypes, respondents' identification as change agents, perceived unfairness of initiatives and the focus on short-term utility predicted unsuccessful initiatives for career advancement of women employees. On the other hand the strong feeling of membership towards the organization and the lack of threat were predicted to be beneficial for the results of the initiatives.

After analyzing and coding the interviews of both women superiors and employees, four direct influences were found to be used by the superiors to influence the career advancement of their women employees: affirmative action, role modelling, personal support and communication. A lot of the mechanisms used by women superiors are implicit rather than apparent, which was due to the informal process of career advancement. Affirmative action was observed to be used directly, by giving women priority on promotions and indirectly, by reminding other superiors of appointing women. The positive effect of this was indicated by employees: a direct increase in women's career advancement. A negative implication was that men would undermine the capabilities of the appointed women. Role modeling was observed to be an unconscious process, where superiors were an example in creating a work-life balance and encouraging proactivity by creating a long-term perspective. Also women role models were concluded to be important for men in the organization. The consequences of these were all positive. By challenging the employee to go out of her comfort zone, secure a good relationship between the two and in two cases functioning as a mentor, the superiors provided personal support to the employee. This was also welcomed and appreciated by the employees. Lastly, according to the employees of the sample, communication would have a negative effect on career advancement whenever there was a lack of it or when the communication was unclear. It could also have positive effect, which was explained as the superior having developed soft skills and taking the ability of the employee to take her job to a higher level because of feedback from the superior.

To conclude, the role of women superiors in the career advancement of their women employees is big and divergent, varying from applying affirmative action, being a role model, providing personal support to enabling communication between them.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interviewguides

Interview guide supervisors

1. Inleiding

Hartelijk bedankt dat u wilt meewerken aan mijn onderzoek. Het onderwerp vrouwen in organisaties speelt al erg lang. Ook binnen de wetenschap is daar al heel wat onderzoek naar gedaan. Ik vond zelf het onderwerp vrouwen naar de top erg interessant en ga me hier dus ook in verdiepen tijdens mijn thesis. Ik zal onderzoek gaan doen naar de invloed die vrouwen in leiderschapsposities hebben op de doorgroeimogelijkheden van andere vrouwen in de organisatie. Ook neem ik daar de perspectieven van de werknemers in mee. Door middel van interviews probeer ik zo veel mogelijk te weten te komen over bijvoorbeeld de initiatieven die worden genomen om de loopbaanontwikkeling van vrouwen te bevorderen.

Het interview zal beginnen met wat algemene vragen, waarna we wat dieper op het onderwerp leiderschap in zullen gaan. Het interview zal ongeveer 45 minuten duren.

Alle namen zullen worden geanonimiseerd en ook hebben wij zojuist allebei een document ondertekend, wat aangeeft dat u kunt aangeven als u bepaalde stukken van het interview niet in de analyse wilt hebben. Dat kunt u op elk moment aangeven. Ook kan ik u het transcript doorsturen om na te lezen als u dat wilt.

Het interview is semi gestructureerd, wat betekent dat er ruimte is om door te gaan op bepaalde onderwerpen. Ik wil u dan ook vragen om zeker alles te vertellen wat u wilt over de onderwerpen, hier is ruimte voor en dit zal mij dan ook alleen maar helpen met mijn onderzoek. Als iets onduidelijk is kunt u dat natuurlijk ook altijd zeggen.

2. Interview

2.1. Algemene vragen (max. 20 minuten)

Organisatie

- Zou u iets willen vertellen over de organisatie waar u werkzaam bent?
 - Hoe groot?
 - Wat voor soort bedrijf/ sector?
- Hoe zou u de bedrijfscultuur omschrijven?
- Hoe ziet u uzelf binnen deze cultuur? > social identity checken
- Op welke manier is er ruimte voor eigen initiatief in de organisatie?
 - Hoe wordt dit dan geïmplementeerd? > Utility/ Justice checken

Functie

- Zou u willen uitleggen wat voor functie u bekleedt?

- Hoe lang al?
- Mening erover
- Hoe bent u op deze functie gekomen?
 - Carrière stappen
 - Moeilijkheden ervaren?
- Kunt u iets vertellen over het team waarin u werkzaam bent?

Diversiteit

- Hoe zou u de diversiteit in de organisatie omschrijven?
 - Qua mannen en vrouwen
- Heeft u het idee dat gender op de werkvloer er nog toe doet? Waar blijkt dat uit?
- Wat is het beleid van het bedrijf op het gebied van diversiteit?
 - Hoe is dit in de organisatie te merken?

2.2. Leiderschap .

- Hoe ziet het proces van loopbaanontwikkeling tot aan een leiderschapspositie eruit in uw organisatie?
 - Word je in dit proces ondersteund en op welke manier?
- Hoe zou u uw leiderschapsstijl omschrijven?
 - Situatie schetsen waaruit dat blijkt
- Wat zijn voor u de voor-en nadelen van een leiderschapspositie bekleden?
 - Situatie schetsen waar dat uit blijkt
- Ziet u verschil in de manier waarop mannen en vrouwen leiding geven en op welke manier?
- Wat is naar uw mening de reden dat meer mannen in uw organisatie een leiderschapspositie bekleden?
 - In gaan op cultuur
- Wat vindt u hiervan?
- Zijn er binnen de organisatie initiatieven die de doorgroeimogelijkheden van vrouwen bevorderen?
- Neemt u vanuit uw functie bepaalde initiatieven om vrouwen te helpen in hun loopbaanontwikkeling?

- Voorbeelden
 - Of: waarom niet?
- Heb je bepaalde ideeën over hoe je meer vrouwelijk leiderschap zou kunnen bevorderen, maar waar je nog niet de kans voor hebt gekregen om deze in werking te stellen?

2.3. Afsluiting

Ik wil u hartelijk bedanken voor u tijd. Heeft u nog vragen of opmerkingen wat betreft het interview of over de thesis?

Interviewguide employees

1. Inleiding

Hartelijk bedankt dat u wilt meewerken aan mijn onderzoek. Het onderwerp vrouwen in organisaties speelt al erg lang, ook binnen de wetenschap is daar al heel wat onderzoek naar gedaan. Ik vond zelf het onderwerp vrouwen naar de top erg interessant en ga me hier dus ook in verdiepen tijdens mijn thesis. Ik zal onderzoek gaan doen naar de invloed die vrouwen in leiderschapsposities hebben op de doorgroeimogelijkheden van andere vrouwen in de organisatie. Door middel van interviews probeer ik zo veel mogelijk te weten te komen over bijvoorbeeld de initiatieven die worden genomen om de loopbaanontwikkeling van vrouwen te bevorderen.

Het interview zal beginnen met wat algemene vragen, waarna we wat dieper op het onderwerp leiderschap in zullen gaan. Het interview zal ongeveer 45 minuten duren.

Alle namen zullen geanonimiseerd worden en ook hebben wij zojuist allebei een document ondertekend, wat aangeeft dat u kunt aangeven als u bepaalde stukken van het interview niet in de analyse wilt hebben. Dan kunt u dat meteen aangeven. Ook kan ik u het transcript doorsturen om na te lezen.

Het interview is semi gestructureerd, wat betekent dat er ruimte is om door te gaan op bepaalde onderwerpen. Ik wil u dan ook vragen om zeker alles te vertellen wat u wilt over de onderwerpen, hier is ruimte voor en dit zal mij dan ook alleen maar helpen met mijn onderzoek. Als iets onduidelijk is kunt u dat natuurlijk ook altijd zeggen.

2. Interview

a. Algemene vragen (max. 20 minuten)

Organisatie

- Zou u iets willen vertellen over de organisatie waar u werkzaam bent?
 - Hoe groot?
 - Wat voor soort bedrijf/ welke sector?
- Hoe zou u de bedrijfscultuur omschrijven?
- Hoe ziet u uzelf binnen deze cultuur?

- Social identity

Functie

- Zou u kunnen uitleggen wat voor functie u bekleedt?
 - Hoe lang al?
 - Mening erover?
- Hoe bent u op deze functie gekomen?
 - Carrière stappen
 - Moeilijkheden ervaren?
- Welke ambities heeft u?
- Kunt u iets vertellen over het team waarin u werkzaam bent?

Diversiteit

- Hoe zou u de diversiteit in de organisatie omschrijven?
 - Qua mannen en vrouwen
- Heeft u het idee dat gender op de werkvloer er nog toe doet? Waar blijkt dat uit?
- Wat is het beleid van het bedrijf op het gebied van diversiteit?
 - Hoe is dit in de organisatie te merken?

b. Leiderschap

In dit onderzoek zien we vrouwelijk leiderschap als een persoon met een vrouwelijke sekse wie een leiderschapspositie bekleedt.

- Hoe ziet het proces van loopbaanontwikkeling tot aan een leiderschapspositie eruit in uw organisatie?
 - Word u in dit proces ondersteund en op welke manier?
- Welke leiderschapsstijlen worden er binnen de organisatie gehanteerd?
 - Situatie schetsen waaruit dat blijkt
- Vindt u het belangrijk dat er vrouwen op leiderschapsposities komen?
 - Wat zijn de voordelen/ nadelen die u hiervan ziet?
- Ziet u verschil in de manier waarop mannen en vrouwen leiding geven?
- Wat is naar uw mening de reden dat meer mannen in uw organisatie een leiderschapspositie bekleden?

- Zijn er binnen de organisatie initiatieven die de doorgroeimogelijkheden van vrouwen bevorderen?
- Heeft u het idee dat u gesteund wordt in uw ambities tot een leiderschapspositie ?
 - Voorbeelden
 - Of: waarom niet?
- Op welke manieren heeft uw leidinggevende hier invloed op?
- Heeft u zelf bepaalde ideeën over hoe vrouwelijk leiderschap zou kunnen bevordert?

c. Afsluiting

Ik wil u hartelijk bedanken voor u tijd. Heeft u nog vragen of opmerkingen wat betreft het interview of over de thesis?

Appendix 2: Statement of consent

All participants are asked to sign the following statement of consent. Since all participants are Dutch, this document regarding the participant's rights is also in Dutch.

Toestemmingsverklaring (statement of consent)

In te vullen door de deelnemer

Hierbij verklaar ik dat:

- ik op een duidelijke manier ben ingelicht over de aard, methode, doel en de belasting van het onderzoek;
- de onderzoeker mijn vragen naar tevredenheid heeft beantwoord;
- ik weet dat de gegevens anoniem worden verwerkt en dat na afloop van het onderzoek de persoonsgegevens worden vernietigd;
- Ik neem geheel vrijwillig deel aan dit onderzoek. Ik behoud me daarbij het recht voor om op elk moment, zonder opgaaf van redenen, mijn deelname aan dit onderzoek te beëindigen.
- Bij dezen verleen ik toestemming aan de onderzoeker om geluidsopnamen te maken voor haar onderzoek. Ik geef goedkeuring dat dit materiaal uitsluitend voor analyse en/of wetenschappelijke doeleinden zal worden gebruikt. De geluidsfragmenten zullen direct na het verwerken ervan, of anders na hoogstens zes maanden, worden vernietigd.
- Bij dezen verleen ik toestemming aan de onderzoeker om geluidsopnamen identificeerbaar te gebruiken voor onderzoeksdoeleinden die met mij besproken zijn. Ik behoud hierbij altijd het recht om een eerder gegeven toestemming in te trekken.

Naam deelnemer:

Datum: Handtekening deelnemer:

In te vullen door de uitvoerende onderzoeker

Hierbij verklaar ik dat:

- ik een mondelinge (indien mogelijk) en schriftelijke toelichting heb gegeven op het
onderzoek;
- ik resterende vragen over het onderzoek naar vermogen zal beantwoorden;
- de deelnemer van een eventuele voortijdige beëindiging van deelname aan dit
onderzoek geen nadelige gevolgen zal ondervinden;
- de deelnemer (indien gewenst) op de hoogte wordt gehouden van de
ontwikkelingen en
resultaten van het onderzoek.

Naam onderzoeker:

Datum: Handtekening onderzoeker:

Appendix 3: Original citations

1. Wij zijn een echt familiebedrijf en dat betekent, de hele positieve kant van een familiebedrijf dus de warmte, het voor elkaar zorgen, het, het welkom zijn het.. Maar er zitten ook de kanten aan dat lastig geven om feedback te geven. – Respondent 2, page 24
2. XYZ is een bedrijf wat goed voor zo'n mensen zorgt. – Respondent 4, page 24
3. Hands on mentaliteit, nou niet lullen maar poetsen. – Respondent 9, page 25
4. Finding a solution. So I don't think that they are sitting there and just complaining. I guess there are some, but I think the broader majority is willing to find a solution for it. – Respondent 3, page 25.
5. Ik denk dat dat conservatisme er ook toe leidt dat ons bedrijf al heel lang bestaat. Er zit ook een bepaalde waardering van vakmanschap en ervaring in en de tegenhanger is dan: ja dat de veranderingen niet te snel ja. – Respondent 6, page 26
6. We hebben een cultuur waarbij, die wel langs die vier values loopt, maar waarbij het wel echt een mannencultuur is. Dus het, het is vrij dominant, het is vrij gericht op de inhoud en niet op soft skills kant. – Respondent 4, page 26
7. And also I see there is a change in the culture coming up. So I see a lot of young people who are aiming for something totally different than the older ones. – Respondent 3, page 27
8. Ja weet je, als ik bijvoorbeeld op een tripje ga, dan vragen de mannen van: ja, krijg je dat allemaal thuis geregeld? Dat ik denk, dat vraag van jou ook niet. – Respondent 4, page 27
9. Het is m toch weer verdienen elke keer, ipv dat mensen aannemen dat je gewoon goed bent. – Respondent 5, 28
10. familiebedrijf en dat betekent, de hele positieve kant van een familiebedrijf dus de warmte, het voor elkaar zorgen, het, het welkom zijn het. – Respondent 2, page 29.
11. En ik denk dat ik wel een mooie rol heb, omdat ik nou ja, ten eerste van buiten, maar ten tweede natuurlijk een vrouw en ten derde niet technisch. Dus ik denk dat zonder dat dat de bedoeling is of doordacht is. Ik wel de rol van veranderaar heb. – Respondent 6, page 30.
12. Ja, ik denk dat er voor mij nog een rol is weggelegd om aan de aan de menskant in te brengen. Samen met wat andere spelers om ons heen. Ook diversiteit in teams in te brengen. -- respondent 7, page 30.
13. Dus men vond eigenlijk dat ze een totaal verkeerde keus hadden gemaakt. En, want dat vind ik wel heel, en uiteindelijk heb ik er geen last van hoor, maar dat vind ik dan wel bijzonder is dat alle mannen die dan ook zeggen: “Ja, maar jij bent de ?...omdat jij het vriendinnetje van X bent.- Respondent 8, page 31
14. Ja, bij XYZ zeg ik wel eens, er is ruimte voor elk initiatief, maar je moet natuurlijk wel dan ook nadenken over wat is mijn businesscase.- Respondent 4, page 31
15. maar heb ik ook altijd wel éven vervelende discussies. Want dan gaan ze allemaal een beetje op mij zitten hakken: wat een flauwekul en waarom zijn die dingen nodig? – Respondent 6, page 31
16. als je hier processen wil veranderen, of eh, dingen wil standariseren, eh, eeh, dan, dan, eeh, zit er over het algemeen veel, veel weerstand in de organisatie.- Respondent 8, page 32
17. der is denk ik juist heel veel ruimte voor, voor eigen initiatief, eh, eehm, en zeker in de commerciële sfeer hè, dus de commercie, de commerciële mensen hebben heel veel ruimte voor eigen initiatief.- Respondent 8, page 32

18. ik kan heel goed dingen financieel maken of rekenkundig maken en daarmee krijg ik heel makkelijk mensen mee. – Respondent 2, page 32
19. Dus wat ik doe is toch een stukje positieve discriminatie. Namelijk: wat extra aandacht aan de vrouwen die er zijn, voor de functies die vrijkomen. – Respondent 6, page 33
20. X speelt daar wel een rol in, die daar wel wat actiever op stuurt. Ik denk dat dat de belangrijkste driver is. Dat er daardoor meer vrouwen zitten trekt dat ook weer meer vrouwen aan. – Respondent 5, page 33
21. Nu worden op allerlei key posities, daar worden vrouwen. Dat is natuurlijk een heel duidelijk beeld nu, dat vrouwen hun kans gaan krijgen, dat is ook goed, maar ja daar hoor je dan die mannen wel over. – Respondent 9, page 34
22. Kijk, uiteindelijk zit ik er vrij pragmatisch in. Ik denk wat werkt, hé, dat zie je ook bij XYZ, als je meer vrouwen in de top krijgt, dan krijg je, als het goed is, voorbeelden van succesvolle vrouwen. Dan denk ik dat je weer vrouwen aantrekt en dat veel mannen en het werkt. Hé, dan dan ziet men dat het succesvol is. – Respondent 6, page 35
23. Ik vind haar ook wel een soort inspirerend voorbeeld, omdat ze gewoon wel lekker gaat in de organisatie, terwijl ze ook gewoon twee kinderen heeft en een gezinsleven. – Respondent 1, page 35
24. als met haar spreek word ik ook altijd gewoon enthousiast van wat we als afdeling nog van plan zijn. Ze heeft zoveel ideeën bij en ik zit vaak een beetje in mijn dagelijkse werk afwikkelen. En zij schetst dan even zo een doorkijkje naar waar ze over vijf jaar graag wil staan met de afdeling en dat vertelt ze dan op zo'n manier dat ik dan helemaal denk van 'oh ja, weet je, zo gaan we het doen'. – Respondent 1, page 35
25. ja, als rolmodel, ik vind het zelf heel gek, ik had nooit zo naar mezelf gekeken, maar dat ben ik dus wel. – Respondent 8, page 36.
26. We hebben nu bijvoorbeeld een finance event, ja, dan zet ze mij gewoon als lead op dat event. Nou, ja, dat betekent eigenlijk dat we de hele content van dat programma, stakeholder management afstemmen. Maar ja, daarmee geeft ze je wel een podium en zorgt ze dat je niet klein gehouden wordt. – Respondent 10. Page 36.
27. Ik ben ook wel echt van de doelen stellen en ja, probeer mensen altijd wel uit te dagen om uit hun comfort rond te krijgen. - Respondent 11, page 36
28. Nou, mijn huidige manager die nog maar een maand blijft, dus dat is dan wel interessant, dus ik weet niet hoe het hierna is, maar ik voel me heel erg vertrouwd en veilig en vrij en ik krijg alle ruimte.-- respondent 2, page 37
29. Dus dat vertrouwen en haar introductie van mij, dat heeft enorm geholpen. - Respondent 11, page 37
30. Nieuwe 30: Kan je dan zeggen dat zij een soort mentorfiguur is?
00:38:52: Speaker 1: Ja, ja, dat zou je kunnen zeggen. Ja, het is niet dat zij iedereen persoonlijk coacht nee, maar als zij vrouwelijk talent ziet, dan pluk ze die er wel uit en dan vraagt ze kom eens een keertje bij me langs., page 37.
31. Ja die soft skills zeg maar die heeft zij ook. Ik vind dat dat daar een goede manager. Dat je ook vrij voelt om dingen te zeggen, dat je je gezien voelt. – Respondent 9, page 38
32. maar wel heel erg hoe ik die rol naar een hoger niveau kan tillen en daar hebben we wel gesprekken over ja. – Respondent 10, page 38.
33. Ik zou dat eigenlijk nog liever weten, van dat moet je nog ontwikkelen, dat is niet goed, dat is wel goed. - Ik vind het soms een beetje wollig en dan moet ik te veel door de regels heen lezen om van die brei iets te maken en als ik eerlijk ben snap ik het dan nog steeds niet wat ze bedoelen. – Respondent 5. Page 39.

34. Er is dus geen enkel gesprek of plan of zo over. En dat vind ik dan eigenlijk wel, dan denk ik ja, volgens mij zien ze mij wel als een potential zegmaar, want altijd hoor ik van dat ik het super goed doe en dat ze zo blij met me zijn en dat ze graag willen dat ik blijf. Ergens denk ik dan, ja praat ook gewoon meer met medewerkers slash vrouwen, van hoe zie je dat dan en hoe kunnen we ervoor zorgen dat je aan boord blijft. – Respondent 1. Page 39.
35. Ja sowieso wil ik altijd weten waar mensen mee bezig zijn, ook voor zichzelf, wat hun ambitie is. Respondent 4- page 40
36. Ja, ik denk, ik probeer heel erg faciliterend te zijn. Dus wat heb jij nodig om je werk goed te doen? Ik vind dat daar een enorme verantwoordelijkheid bij de medewerker zelf ligt. -- respondent 11- page 40
37. Sowieso is feedback altijd heel belangrijk, hè. Dat je echte, de echte feedback krijgt over dingen die je goed doet, maar ook over dingen waarin je je moet ontwikkelen, daar is X heel goed in. Vind ik. –Respondent 8. Page 40.
38. Maar echt structureel gefaciliteerd. Ja mensen zijn niet eens gewend aan dat mensen gesprek aan te gaan. (38) respondent 7, page 40.

Appendix 4: Code groups

Code groups

◊ Ambition

Members:

- Ambition employee
- Ambition manager

◊ Career advancement: functional factors

Members:

- Being asked/ luck
- External placements
- Flexible work arrangements
- No bad experiences career advancement
- No distinction men or women
- Own initiative
- Quantitative experience
- Quotum
- Womens network

◊ Career advancement: role manager

Members:

- Affirmative action
- Flexible work arrangements
- Mentor
- Personal support manager
- Role model

◊ Communication

Members:

- Feedback
- Negative about communication
- Positive about communication
- Stereotypical women's communication

◊ Difficulties career advancement

Members:

- Conservatism
- Diversity
- Home life
- Little vacancies
- Negative about quota
- Old boys network
- Own responsibility
- Parttime working
- Personal insecurities
- Queen bee

◊ Diversity

Members:

- Diversity
- Ideas for increased diversity

◊ HR Processes

Members:

- Advancement system
- Assessment of employees
- Career path

◊ Ideas for improving career advancement

Members:

- Ideas for improving career advancement women

◊ Leadership style

Members:

- Leadership style differences male female employees
- Leadership style manager
- Positive things job manager

◊ Organizational culture

Members:

- Can-do mentality
- Change in organization
- Cliques
- Communication
- Conservatism
- Development career path
- Family company
- Masculine
- Passionate

◊ Underlying processes

Members:

- Justice
- Social cognitions
- threat- rigidity
- utility