The assertion of female managers facing male leadership

A comparative study between the banking, consulting and agri-food industries in France.
Bachelor Thesis Project in Business Administration

Title: The assertion of female managers facing male leadership: a comparative study between the banking, consulting and agri-food industries in France.
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Abstract

Background: Women in senior positions have been, for a long time, discredited. We wanted to study their current situation and understand how they assert themselves in their companies. We thought it would be interesting to see their link to management and leadership.

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to understand the position of female managers in organizations through the exploration of gender roles, characteristics and stereotypes.

Method: We conducted our research by reviewing literature about leadership theories, management versus leadership and gender influences over leadership. Then, we conducted a qualitative study with a comparison analysis between the banking, consulting and agri-food industries in France to update the current knowledge regarding female managers, to understand how they assert themselves.

Conclusion: The results suggest that it is still hard for women to assert themselves and reach manager or leader positions. However, this is mostly due to their own perceptions of themselves. Women tend to lack self-confidence, which is unfortunate because female managers generally use a transformational leadership style which is considered as one of the best, which means they have all the keys to become both successful managers and leaders, using androgynous characteristics. They also endure the maternity leave and tend to sacrifice their professional career for the benefit of their family life. Women simply need to be more confident and keep asserting themselves.
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1. Introduction

In this part, the background, the problem, the purpose and the delimitations of our subject are presented. Furthermore, we will define its main terms in a last sub-part.

1.1 Background

“Think manager, think male” is a paradigm said by Schein in 1973. After almost five decades, gender issues in management are still topical. These inequalities have been brought to light at the end of the 70’s with the feminist movement. If gender equality is today more than ever a global concern, we still have not reached it completely. There are still scars such as the perception of women into the workplace, feed by misogyny and stereotypes.

If management seems neutral, it has, indeed, masculine founding principle. In that sense, a leader would be someone dominant, result-oriented, strategic, risk-taker, and with control over their emotions. This is translated by some researchers as an autocratic leadership style whereas female managers are associated with a democratic style. However, the issue is more related to the perception and expectations of employees who are biased by stereotypes. If women adopt a “male leadership”, it can produce negative reactions from their subordinates because it goes against the vision of female managers. Therefore, it is not a surprise that we do not find a lot of women in top management. When they do reach a top position, they generally had to go beyond expectations, adopt a leadership style that suits to male employees, search for difficult or visible responsibilities, and have an influent mentor (Koenig et al., 2011; Saint-Michel, 2010).

Nonetheless, it is important to differentiate leadership from management. According to Bouhelal and Kerbouche (2015), leadership is about influencing a group with the purpose of developing and reaching the company’s objectives. It is based on a “legitimate” power attributed to the manager who is admired by their subordinates. Toor and Ofori (2008) have made a comparative table between the two notions where management can be
described as a set of business administration skills. They also said “in practice, many managers perform the leadership role, and many leaders do manage”. Therefore, the debate continues and the misunderstanding over the two terms persists.

1.2 Problem
As men were the first to create companies, we assume they have established the norms and codes inside organizations. If it seems that women have broken the “glass-ceiling”, being a female manager still appears to be an issue as they are underrepresented in senior positions. From the perception of their subordinates to their own, a gap filled with gender influences over behaviors and minds is present, while companies take many actions in favor of women.

1.3 Purpose
As future managers, we would like to better understand this phenomenon. Many studies have been undertaken on this subject, however, none of them has tried to understand how they can actually assert themselves in organizations. Companies are organized using the concepts of management and leadership, therefore, it seemed relevant to study these two aspects. Therefore, the purpose of our thesis was to update the current knowledge about the situation of female managers in France, and more particularly in the industry of banking, consulting and agri-food. We are curious to know if gender issues in leadership remains an important problem in companies and in which ways it still affects women.

We think it could be interesting for current or future managers to have a clearer idea about this topic, as we consider that gender does not determine how skilled someone is.

1.4 Research questions
Therefore, we would like to know: How can female managers assert themselves facing an established male leadership? With an emphasis on what gender influences have affected the dominant leadership behaviors, how women can overcome them, and how they use leadership and management to do it.
1.5 Delimitation

In our case, we do not refer to a glass-ceiling but to the part when women have successfully reached a manager’s position and have to assert themselves in the organization.

This study will focus on France - where we come from. Furthermore, we would like to know the insight of female managers in different industries. We have thought it could be more accurate to target businesses with a relative parity; thus, we have chosen: the consulting, banking, and agri-food industries. We have also judged that we should aim for companies with a broad hierarchy or which are part of a group, and therefore, with evolution’s opportunities.

1.6 Definitions of the terms

1.6.1 Gender issues

Gender issues, which are equivalent to gender differences, are to be taken into consideration in a cultural point of view. The variation of perception between women and men can lead to stereotypes (Jonsen, Maznevski & Schneider, 2010). Since the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, the place of women within organizations has improved and reached higher positions. However, it is still hard for them as they may not have the required personality traits illustrated by stereotypes e.g. strong, result-oriented, willing to take risks (Stoker, Velde & Lammers, 2012).

1.6.2 Leadership

As defined by Daft & Marcic, 2015, leadership is “the ability to influence people toward the attainment of organizational goals”. There are different theories and styles of leadership, but we will mostly focus on transformational leadership versus transactional leadership. A transformational leader inspires its followers to meet the given challenges and to inspire a feeling of loyalty and trust (Law, 2016). Conversely, a transactional leader sets clear goals for its followers and rewards or punishes when needed to encourage the respect of norms (Law, 2016; Daft & Marcic, 2015).
1.6.3 Management

Management concerns the achievement of organizational goals in an efficient manner through planning, organizing, leading, and controlling organizational resources (Daft & Marcic, 2015). Managers’ positions are determined by an established hierarchy within the organization. They apply a set of business administration skills to execute or supervise, they use them to direct, to plot something, to allocate resources, and to manage a business unit or more (Toor & Ofori, 2008).
2. Literature review

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a clear theoretical background to the topics of leadership, management and gender influences, as well as their links.

We decided to do a systematic literature review from the field of female leadership and management. We focused on peer-reviewed articles and we used very precise keywords such as “leadership female”, “leadership women”, “management women”, “gender issues management”, etc. We have chosen to mainly use recent articles from 1990 to 2019; this choice is mainly due to the recency of the consideration of women in high positions in companies.

Our literature review is composed of three sections. First, we attempt to examine the contrast between transformational and transactional leadership theories. Second, we compare management and leadership. Finally, we discuss gender influences over leadership.

2.1 Leadership theories

Through the decades, diverse leadership theories have emerged. They aim to explain how to become a leader and their behaviors towards their followers. There are some major theories which show the evolution of the concept, but we will mainly focus on two related to our topic: transformational and transactional leadership.

2.1.1 General leadership theories

Through the decade, many leadership theories have been discussed and described by several authors, the goal being to understand why some leaders are better than others and explain leadership effectiveness.

The great man theory was introduced by Thomas Carlyle in the 19th century. It refers to people being great leaders thanks to their innate skills and characteristics. The people behind this theory are researchers assuming that great “leaders are born, not made”. Thomas Carlyle added to this the trait theory. It was used to characterize powerful leaders,
who had certain innate traits and skills. It takes in consideration multiple traits such as personality, social, intellectual and physical, to differentiate leaders from non-leaders.

In opposition to the first two theories, the behavioral theory attempts to demonstrate that leadership effectiveness relies on the behavior adopted by leaders, and their ability to get their team to cooperate with them to attain a common goal. The theory attempts to analyze the specific behavior of a leader in a given situation and their ability to change the behaviors of their followers (Landis, Hill & Harvey, 2014). This led to the situational leadership theory which refers to how leaders can adjust their leadership style to fit the development level of their followers upon a certain situation and be effective. Therefore, according to Hersey-Blanchard’s model, there are no good or bad leadership style (Shafique & Beh, 2017).

The contingency theory of leadership, introduced by Fred Fiedler in 1964, states that the effectiveness of leaders depends on their ability to adapt and adjust their leadership style to a situation. According to Fiedler, “there is no best style of leadership”. This model contains three major areas: “first, recognizing the leader’s style; second, specifying the situation; and third, matching the style of a leader with the situation” (Shafique & Beh, 2017).

The contingency model is characterized by three factors (Shafique & Beh, 2017):

- Task structure: leaders happen to have more influence on their subordinates when tasks and goals are clearly defined and structured.
- Leader-member relations: leaders happen to have more influence when having good relationship with their followers.
- Position power: the degree of influence and power leaders have on their subordinates.

This theory of leadership highlights two leadership styles that are task-oriented and relationship-oriented. However, the three factors of the model have less impact on task-oriented leaders than on leaders who are relationship-oriented.
2.1.2 Transactional leadership

Transactional leaders base their leadership style on a system of rewarding and punishment, they mostly focus on results by using rewards in the form of remuneration or recognition to encourage their employees and benefits. This form of leadership is, as said in the title, based on the exchange of good performance realized by the employees and the constant support and rewarding offered by leaders. This leadership style allows effectiveness in the sense that subordinates know exactly what their tasks are, and so goals are reached (Bass, Avolio & Atwater, 1996).

2.1.3 Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership is often described as the best leadership style. This type of leadership involves leaders who inspire their followers, by sharing their vision and perception. The purpose of transformational leadership is to indeed transform the values and priorities of subordinates and motivate them to exceed their expectations (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Kark, Waismel-Manor & Shamir, 2012). It also aims to transform the organization as a whole to reach goals, by motivating the group even more. It focuses on mutual trust as well as short-term objectives.

This leadership style has four main characteristics: inspiration motivation, idealized influence, individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation. Transformational leaders have to set an example to their subordinates, to demonstrate their ability to lead and manage a team, and they play a role model for followers they are influencing and inspiring.

2.2 Management versus leadership

The key development of management into companies was during the industrial revolution, when the capitalist society started to emerge. At this time, and sometimes still today, organizations were typified by “a hierarchy of authority; impersonal rules that define duties; standardized procedures; promotion based on achievement; and specialized labor” as defined by Weymes (2004). It is only at the end of the 20th century that researchers focused on soft skills and that appeared ideas such as the total quality
management, common purpose, trust inside the organization and inter-department unity. These evolutions led to new perceptions of management.

2.2.1 Managerial skills

2.2.1.1 Managerial skill dimensions

Managers use a set of business administration skills (Toor and Ofori, 2008) that various studies organize into several managerial skill dimensions. They define these abilities as what managers must be capable of doing to be effective. Originally, they were separated into two categories: hard and soft. In one hand, hard skills are described as the traditional management, technical skills, and gather competences such as organizing, planning, controlling, critical thinking, analyzing, and problem solving. In another hand, soft skills are characterized as managerial responsibilities and can be referred as human skills. It is composed by communication, feedback, conflict management, behaviors understanding, and cohesion development (Parente, Stephan, & Brown, 2012).

Parente, Stephan and Brown (2012) describe the three managerial skill dimensions of Katz which are the foundation of a lot of following researches:

- Human competences as soft skills;
- Technical abilities are specific to a field;
- Conceptual skills as hard skills as they require analytic, integrative and diagnostic abilities.

It exists a more recent theory that adds the citizenship behavior that attempts to “capture other beneficial aspects of work behavior such as being cooperative, loyal and persistent, as said by Tonidandel, Braddy and Fleenor (2012).

2.2.1.2 Personality traits on managerial skills

One approach of personality states that some traits can be a relevant predictor of the manager’s skill effectiveness. Four major traits have been identified by Tewari and Sharma (2011):
• Conscientiousness, the ability to be vigilant and meticulous when accomplishing a task is positively related to a manager’s status, salary and promotion, and job performance.
• Neuroticism, the compulsion to negative emotions and feelings is on the contrary negatively correlated to these parameters. It has an adverse impact on performance.
• Extraversion and introversion are not necessarily positive or negative, their efficiency depends on the situation and the needs. However, extraversion is most appreciated.

It is interesting is study if these traits are more influenced by heredity or by learning, but they generally are the consequence of both.

2.2.1.3 Acquisition of managerial skills

According to Parente, Stephan and Brown (2012), there are four mechanisms that define how we learn: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. Each is a combination of an element of two main dimensions: action against thought and concrete exposition against abstraction. These have generally resulted in the choice between university learning and enterprise training. However, theory can provide a foundation for business practice (Dickinson, 2000).

Nevertheless, the typical path to develop a full range of management skills is real experience in the world of work. Traditionally, it has also been assumed that to acquire strategic management skills, work experience must be important, extensive and high-level within organizations. Through a combination of individual and collective experiences, managers acquire traditional management skills and non-technical management skills, which then form the basis upon which strategic skills are acquired (Parente, Stephan & Brown, 2012).

2.2.1.4 Evolution through age

Hermel-Stanescu (2016) has demonstrated in her study that all managerial skills showed an upward trend with age. Her research showed that personal, interpersonal and
administrative skills were positively associated with age. Aging also leads to improved management skills through personal development. This upward trend can be explained by the application of known models, according to which individuals tend to develop their interpersonal skills over time through experience and learning.

2.2.2 Differences between management and leadership

2.2.2.1 Conceptual variations

As well said by Popovici (2012) “management is a career, leadership a calling”. This means the power source of managers comes from their position, the hierarchy, and the leader’s power comes from influence (Toor & Ofori, 2008). Managers have a defined function within an organization and leaders have a relationship (Maccoby, 2000). In consequence, managers have to control and supervise daily routine to meet short term objectives and produce in an effective way, whereas leaders have a vision of a broader future to figure out needs and potential changes for growth (Perloff, 2004). Leaders are truly themselves, they have the potential to shake up teams and norms, when managers are made by a company, they produce order, standards and stability (Toor & Ofori, 2008).

2.2.2.2 Divergences in behavior and skills

Leaders and managers share some basic aspects: they both have influence over people they work with, and they work to achieve goals; nonetheless, the influence of a leader is broader, and a manager has a more authoritarian relationship with the employees (Barid Nizarudin Wajdi, 2017). If there are different styles of leadership, managers are often reduced to the function of “taskmasters” and administrators of resources in general such as human resources and more (Popovici, 2012). They plan, control, monitor and put systems and structures in place, they bring stability (Stanley, 2006). Management is necessary in any businesses while leadership is a plus. Leadership brings openness, communication, exchange and encourages new ideas, new approaches, and change (Toor & Ofori, 2008). We could almost synthetize by saying management is the mind of the organization and leadership is its heart.

2.2.2.3 The need to be a manager as well as a leader

The relationship between management and leadership is still a debate. In one hand, some researchers think of them as complete opposites and truly believe good managers cannot
be good leaders, and vice versa (Barid Nizarudin Wajdi, 2017). In another hand, others think all managers are leaders. However, not all the managers operate leadership and an individual from a team can lead without being an actual manager, whether the team has a manager or not. Toor and Ofori (2008) clearly said “in practice, many managers perform the leadership role, and many leaders do manage”. Leadership and management are similar in many ways, but that does not mean they are synonymous (Bass, 2010). Popovici (2012) adds it is unusual to be both “an inspiring leader and a professional manager” as it requires different skills. In conclusion, the real struggle for an employee is to understand when to be either one.

2.3 Gender influences over leadership

In this part, we attempt to demonstrate that the effectiveness of a leader does not depend on their gender by analyzing the relationship between leadership effectiveness and gender roles, gender characteristics and stereotypes. Finally, we will end by showing how this can affect women in their career.

2.3.1 Gender roles

It is interesting to understand what characteristics are valuable to be an ideal manager, and if those characteristics are, as they are said to be, gendered or not. As defined by Harris & White (2018), gender roles are “the social expectations attached to gender and the sanctioning of ways in which gender should be expressed through forms of dress, types of posture, and particular gestures associated with either women or men” (Oxford Reference, 2018). According to some researchers, the effectiveness of a leader relies on their willingness to voluntary place themselves in a vulnerable position to reach goals and achieve a beneficial outcome for both the leader and their followers, and their ability to influence enough their followers so they can trust them to make the right decision (Grossman, Komai & Jensen, 2015).

2.3.2 Gender characteristics

Kark, Waismel-Manor and Shamir (2012) have examined the case of whether leaders are more effective when they have feminine, masculine or androgynous characteristics. It is interesting to examine the case of androgyny, as it is now considered more and more by
leaders and researchers. Kolb (1999) thought it would be more important but also more interesting to find a balance between both feminine and masculine characteristics, rather than focusing on having a high number of both (Appelbaum, Audet & Miller, 2003). A balance between task-orientation and relationship-orientation would also allow an equality between leadership and managerial success (Bass, Avolio & Atwater, 1996).

The recent emergence of androgynous characteristics is contradicting the premises in which women weaknesses were an obstacle to reaching senior positions. Being an androgynous leader indeed implies having both male and female characteristics, which means that female characteristics are no longer a barrier for women as long as they also possess male characteristics, that is to adopt masculine behaviors (Kark et al., 2012). Women leaders tend to be more participative but also more democratic than their male counterparts (Bass, Avolio & Atwater, 1996).

2.3.3 Stereotypes

According to Koenig et al. (2011), stereotypes are known to be an obstacle for women’s progression in positions of leadership and often creates a lack of self-confidence. Cultural stereotypes make it hard for women to reach higher positions. This incongruity of role between women and the perceived requirements of leadership underlies flawed assessments of women leaders (Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell & Ristikari, 2011).

Women are said to be less competitive than men, since they are less likely to position themselves as leaders in certain situations. However, women advocate a leadership style that combines both feminine and masculine characteristics (Appelbaum, Audet & Miller, 2003).

One of the biggest stereotypes in terms of gender differences is the emotional aspect, meaning women are considered to be too emotional compared to men, and this affects women’s accessibility to leadership positions (Brescoll, 2015). However, being emotional is not a negative aspect. Women are indeed considered kinder than men, and for this reason, they are also preferred by some to work with (Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell & Ristikari, 2011). The ideal manager is described as someone who has stereotypic masculine qualities e.g. self-confidence, independence, authority, dominance, rationality, etc, while stereotyped feminine characteristics were considered irrelevant to success as a manager.
Effective leadership may not be characterized by essentially stereotypical masculine characteristics but rather by “androgyny”, a mix of feminine and masculine behaviors that can give both female and male managers more advantages and flexibility. The evaluation of women leaders in terms of gender stereotypes has revealed two types of stereotypes: agency and communality (Brescoll, 2015). An androgynous shift would permit to ease women’s role incongruity issue regarding leader positions, this includes an adjustment in women’s behaviors: women should behave in an agentic manner (i.e. masculine aspects: competitive, ambitious, independent, etc.) but also in a communal manner (more feminine aspects: empathy, kind, etc.).

2.3.4 Consequences over women

A company hierarchy is like a pyramid, from the basic employees at the bottom, to the directors’ board at the top. If there are fewer places at the top, we can see there are even less room for women. Nonetheless, it is proven that quotas do not have a strong impact on it, it is a solution which does not take care of the fundamental issue (Wang & Kelan, 2013).

Employees’ perception has a stronger effect on women’s career especially when it comes to rating them in the companies’ performance assessment. Men tend to be more critical over female managers because of stereotypes and gender perceptions. This can stop the ladders to access to promotions, and thus, negatively impact their career (Szymanska & Rubin, 2018).

Nonetheless, the real obstacle is women themselves. It has been proven they are less confident than men and are more influenced by critics. Female managers are excessively aware of their weaknesses and when being evaluated, they can self-sabotage themselves and their career (Koch, 2005).
3. Methodology & Method

A detailed description of our chosen methodology and method is presented in this part, as well as justifications for our decisions, including why these industries.

3.1 Methodology

3.1.1 Research philosophy

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016), research philosophy refers to the “overarching term relating to the development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge in relation to research”. There are various school of thought for research philosophy, but the main ones are epistemology and ontology.

The authors describe epistemology as “what constitutes acceptable knowledge in field of study”. It has two different aspects namely positivism and interpretivism (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Positivism is often related to quantitative researches as it based on the use of a structured methodology which facilitates replication, and which result is a “law-like generalization” (Saunders et al., 2016). Interpretivism focuses on understanding and interpreting social phenomenon complexity as well as individual perception by considering their emotions and feelings (Collis & Hussey, 2014; Saunders et al., 2016).

Ontology involves reality and nature and consists of two approaches which are subjectivism and objectivism (Saunders et al., 2016; Bryman & Bell, 2011). According to Saunders et al. (2016), subjectivism “holds that social phenomena are created from the perceptions and consequent actions of those social actors concerned with their existence”, whereas objectivism “portrays the position that social entities exist in reality external to social actors concerned with their existence”.

Considering we aim to have female managers’ insights about their position in their company, we think interpretivism would be the most suitable approach for our study. We want, indeed, to understand their perception of the gender gap phenomenon. It is a complex subject which involves interpreting their experiences and feelings.
3.1.2 Research approach

Three different research approaches can be considered when conducting a study, they are the deductive, inductive, and abductive methods.

The deductive approach starts from existing theories and match this theory with new empirical findings to provide a new view using their relationship (Bryman & Bell, 2011). With this aim in mind, the researcher employs ideas and hypothesis brought out by gathering previous literature. The hypotheses are, at the end of the study, affirmed or rejected thanks to the empirical findings. As it is to test theories, the common research method used is the quantitative study (Bryman, 2012).

The inductive method starts, in opposition with the deductive one, with the gathering of data, of specific evidences that enable the researcher to create a new theory (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). The aim of this approach is to add information and content; thus, it is interesting to use it to develop new or recent theories. Therefore, the inductive approach does not need any base, and researchers are more likely to employ the qualitative method to support it (Saunders et al., 2016).

What is interesting with the abductive approach is that it is a mix of the deductive and the inductive methods, it associates both the current theories and the findings. This approach can help researchers to clarify existing theories by exploring new concepts, ideas, or to create new theories (Dubois & Gadde, 2002).

Since our subject is more than never in evolution, we think we might get new views on it when conducting our research. We would like to explore the gender issues in leadership by using both current theories and our empirical findings. For these reasons, we have decided to focus on the abductive approach as it gives us more liberty in our study.

3.1.3 Research method

Regarding the research method, two different types exist: quantitative and qualitative. Bryman and Bell (2011) have emphasized that the quantitative method uses quantifiable variables and either describes them or searches links, correlations, between them; whereas the qualitative approach focuses on understanding people behaviors and perceptions. Therefore, qualitative researches contain non-numeric data that have not been quantified
in opposition with quantitative studies (Saunders et al., 2016; Creswell, 2013). The data collected from them are in-depth information which cannot be used for statistics and broad trends, but they can rather highlight new perspectives on current knowledge (Hoepfl, 1997). They enable researchers to understand complex phenomenon in addition with individuals’ motivations and reasons over their preferences, behaviors and attitudes (Malhotra, 1996).

We aim to better understand the gender issue phenomenon in the three industries we have selected. Therefore, for our method, we have chosen to use the qualitative approach as it clearly meets our needs for empirical data.

3.2 Method

3.2.1 Method analysis

Various methods exist to analyze data such as content analysis, thematic analysis, grounded theory method, discourse analysis, template analysis, comparative analysis or narrative analysis (Saunders et al., 2016). Since we have chosen to study three different industries and have interviewed managers from various companies, it seemed clear to us to use the comparative analysis method to interpret our data.

According to Rihoux and Ragin (2009), the comparative analysis is linked to the epistemology research philosophy. It can be used in each research approach and method; thus, the authors argue that it can be “very easily translated into a theoretical discourse”, and vice versa. The analysis combines both theory and empirical findings which enables the researchers to have distance over their study. In that sense, it is necessary to search for explicit connections between the cases, and not only describe them, which leads to generalizations. In addition, Riboux and Ragin (2009) emphasize the need for transparency when conducting this kind of analysis. They insist on the fact that the data should be explicitly presented to ensure a good practice of the method, as it enables “replicability, more pertinent critiques and more cumulative knowledge”.

Furthermore, we made a transcription of all of our interviewees. We, then, build a table for each industry to sum up each question and code them. This helped us to compare the
answers with each other and with the literature review, and to find links and nuances between them.

3.2.2 Data collection

As primary data, we chose to collect qualitative data by interviewing women in a manager position in three different industries in France. We wanted to search for precise information but also to let the managers speak freely, therefore we have decided to do semi-structured interviews.

Beforehand, we have built an interview guide which can be found under Appendix 1. It was divided into three themes – her vision of leadership and management, her vision of herself, and some situational questions – composed of sixteen open-ended questions. We found it interesting to firstly know their personal definition of manager and leader, and then ask them if as a manager, they think they embodied those definitions. Finally, the situational questions allow us to know how they can spontaneously react to daily issues as a manager.

The choice of open-ended questions enables us to gather a great deal of relevant information without having a strong influence over the answers. However, following a structured interview guide does not mean we have to strictly follow it. It is rather to have a continuity into the conversation and we think it is important to know when to improvise and to find new questions during the interviews if needed. As we aim to understand how women respond to their environment and to their responsibilities as a manager, we tried to highlight whether they act as a manager or a leader and if they have the ability to be both.

As secondary data, we decided to present not only the three industries chosen but also the companies of our interviewees. We think it is necessary to provide some background to understand the answers given during the interviews.

3.2.3 Sampling

We had at heart to have the insights of female managers. Narrowing our study to France was in our interest as French natives and potential future managers there. We chose to focus on three relatively mixed industries in terms of gender to compare their current
situation and development and highlight similarities or differences. We thought that it could also demonstrate a more general trend. In addition, we chose profiles which were manager for a few years, with a team of at least 10 people, and who were part of a company with a broad hierarchy or a group.

To find managers, we used our personal network as well as professional social networks – such as LinkedIn – and mainly our French university, KEDGE Business School, Alumni network platform. Our school’s platform gathers more than 80,000 graduate students. By combining these networks, we had access to not only complete curriculum vitae of female managers, but also to their email addresses and phone numbers. By using filters on the platforms, we were able to find and contact eighty-seven people. As we were in Sweden, we made all our interviews by Skype or by telephone, and we were given the authorization to record all of them.

For the banking industry, we approached in total twenty-six female managers and interviewed six of them:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewees</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Job Position</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carine Weill</td>
<td>44 y.o.</td>
<td>Multichannel Marketing Director</td>
<td>18/03/2019</td>
<td>28:11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Séverine Lenoir</td>
<td>44 y.o.</td>
<td>Wealth Management Director</td>
<td>19/03/2019</td>
<td>37:27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Axelle Vigo</td>
<td>41 y.o.</td>
<td>Head of Large Corporations Sales Cash Management</td>
<td>26/04/2019</td>
<td>38:41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fanny Finidori</td>
<td>46 y.o.</td>
<td>Project Manager and Customer Journey Leader</td>
<td>03/04/2019</td>
<td>37:04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadine Vanaud</td>
<td>47 y.o.</td>
<td>Head of Payment Solutions for Europe and Asia</td>
<td>03/05/2019</td>
<td>37:34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magaly Leygnac</td>
<td>38 y.o.</td>
<td>Head of Services Sourcing</td>
<td>03/05/2019</td>
<td>33:27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Banking industry interviewees

For the consulting industry, we approached eighteen female managers and interviewed six of them:
Lastly, we encountered difficulties for our third industry. We first had chosen the hospitality sector, but we were not finding enough profiles, eight people were contacted and none of them answered. We decided to act quickly and change to a broader industry in terms of number of profiles. Thus, for the agri-food industry, we approached thirty-five female managers and only interviewed three. The following table displays their data:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewees</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Job Position</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>45 y.o.</td>
<td>Sales Force Director</td>
<td>18/04/2019</td>
<td>41:50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eva Barlet</td>
<td>33 y.o.</td>
<td>Marketing Manager Foodservice</td>
<td>04/04/2019</td>
<td>32:20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie Campagne</td>
<td>27 y.o.</td>
<td>Product Scheduling Manager</td>
<td>16/04/2019</td>
<td>34:57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Agri-food industry interviewees

It is critical to note that all our interviewees have broadly the same kind of background, meaning they have done their master’s degree in private business schools in France. Three different campus are concerned: KEDGE Business School Bordeaux and Marseille, and ESSEC Paris. Those schools provide deep knowledge about management and leadership, which means our interviewees’ answers are influenced by their studies.
previous generations. Nonetheless, only 40% of the managers are women. In addition, in a study of INSEE (2017) about gender equality, the researchers have noticed that at same qualifications, women still have 30% smaller chance of being chosen for a manager’s position. As said in the last part, we have decided to focus on industries where the gender distribution is quite equal to understand their evolution and current situation. Therefore, we have selected the consulting, the banking, and the agri-food industries.

According to CIDJ from the French Education Ministry, a sector is mixt in terms of gender when women or men represents a share of 40 to 60%. In those industries, the share of women is respectively:
- 57% for banking industry;
- 41% for consulting industry;
- 42% for agri-food industry.

The percentage inside the banking industry is exceptionally high. However, these shares are only for the total number of employees, and we can observe disparities inside companies when it comes to the shares of managers. For example, Christ (2015) shows in her global study about women in internal consulting for IIA Research Foundation and the CBOK that only 31 to 34% of the managers are women in this sector.

3.3 Implications

3.3.1 Research ethic

Ethic was an imperative part of our process for interviews. We wanted to show respect to our interviewees by following several steps, and by adapting to their needs and requests.

When contacting potential interviewees, we decided that the best approach was by sending emails to their professional mailbox where we explained to them how we had found their personal information, why we had chosen their profile, and what was the purpose of the interview. We had decided to give them an approximation for the duration of about thirty to forty-five minutes, and to ask if they would agree to be recorded. We added that we could guarantee their anonymity in the thesis, depending on their choice. In addition, as we have a lot of free time, and being three authors, we always offered them to choose the time of the interview to fit in their schedule.
On the decided date, before starting, some of them had already read our interview guide at their request, but most of them did not know the questions. We were always alone with the interviewee and we started by introduce ourselves, our subject, and by reminding them they could choose to be recorded or not, and to be anonymous. We explained to them that the transcription of their interview would be use only to the purpose of writing our thesis, and that the ladder would be public.

3.3.2 Research reliability

According to Bryman and Bell (2011), the four criteria of Guba are the most pertinent tool to analyze the trustworthiness of a qualitative study. Those criteria are: confirmability, credibility, dependability and transferability.

Confirmability refers to the fact that the findings must depend on the interviewees’ perspective and not be affected by the researchers’ one, meaning there cannot be any bias of that kind (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As our research was regularly monitored by our tutor and since it is conducted by three authors, we had the opportunity to take distance over our work to diminish, as much as possible, bias.

Researches must ensure that the collected data is credible in their description and their explanation (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Therefore, it is necessary to have a strong support for the data such as a recording or detailed note. During the interviews, we made sure to gather all the needed information for our research by improvising new questions to develop and clarify some answers.

The dependability criterion highlights that any study should detail a clear method to enable other researchers to use it and obtain similar results. This means the data must be stable (Guba, 1981). We have made sure to have a structured methodology and method part in order that readers could understand how we conducted our study.

Transferability means that the findings can be used and applied in other conditions (Collis & Hussey, 2014). In our case, the compiled data is focused on the French market, they are clearly linked to a certain mentality which is, for example, distinct from the Swedish one. However, some countries, such as Belgium, have a close mindset. Therefore, our findings are transferable but not to any situation.
This chapter presents all the secondary data from the industries and companies as well as our primary data from the interviews. The findings are ordered according to the themes used for our interview guide.

4.1 Banking industry

4.1.1 General data about the industry

4.1.1.1 Market description

In their study about the French banking market, Rasulam and Giraud (2018) explain the current situation of the industry for the 2017-2018 period. Since March 2016, the European Central Bank keeps exceptional low rates that had a negative impact on the French banks. The ladders have developed many important cost reduction programs and most of them have announced during 2017-2019 new measures in their strategic plans for 2020. Most of those programs are successful and will enable them not only to increase their solvability but also to invest in new technologies.

Technological progress is touching the banking industry with the digital transformation that enables banks to answer to the new needs and expectations, and to increase their operational performance. It is vital for French banks to invest as new players enter the market, such as the FinTech companies or the neo-banks, for example. Recent regulations in favor of an opening to the competition facilitate their entry on the market. However, the traditional banks have already taken actions such as acquisitions or investments in new digital offers and services.

4.1.1.2 Key numbers and information

In 2017, 347 banks were counted on the French market, but 89.1% of the market shares are divided between five leaders. There were 37,209 agencies in France in 2017, but the number has slowly been decreasing for the last ten years. The cost reduction programs
are in favor of their closing, bringing about the reduction of the workforce (Rasulam & Giraud, 2018).

In France, 99% of the people have at least one account which represents eighty million bank accounts. On the loan side, 47.8% of the individuals have currently at least one loan, whereas 96% of the small to medium companies have debts in a financial institution. Finally, 14.5% of the French people revenue is saved on special accounts in banks; it is the money that serves to loans (Rasulam & Giraud, 2018).

4.1.1.3 Key players

If neo-banks and FinTech companies have entered the French market, traditional banks still dominate it. In fact, their share is so low that they do not even appear in the following graph:

![Market shares of the main players on the French banking industry](image)

*Figure 1. Market shares of the main players on the French banking industry*

As we can see, most of the main competitors on the market are pure French banks. The only strong foreign groups are HSBC and ING (0.3% of market shares) – which are respectively the eighth and ninth competitors. In addition, one interesting fact is that two competitors from the top ten are outsiders, meaning they are subsidiaries of two groups which main activity is not banking. The seventh on the graph, with 6.2% of market shares, is La Banque Postale from La Poste Group, the national post office in France. The tenth
one, with 0.2% of market shares, is AXA Banque from AXA Group, the second leader on the insurance market in France (Rasulam & Giraud, 2018).

4.1.2 General data about the companies
4.1.2.1 Companies’ background

The six female managers from the banking industry come from three different companies: AXA Banque, BNP Paribas and Société Générale. The following table compiles key information about them:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Creation</th>
<th>Employees</th>
<th>Turnover (Bn€)</th>
<th>Implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AXA Banque</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>France: 35,000</td>
<td>France: 0.2</td>
<td>64 countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Global: 95,728</td>
<td>Global: 0.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BNP Paribas</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>France: 58,000</td>
<td>France: 14.4</td>
<td>73 countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Global: 202,624</td>
<td>Global: 43.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Société Générale</td>
<td>1864</td>
<td>France: 59,320</td>
<td>France: 10.8</td>
<td>76 countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Global: 148,300</td>
<td>Global: 24.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 Companies’ key data of banking industry

As previously seen, those three competitors are in the top ten players of the banking industry. They are all part of important and global groups that are all leaders on their main activity. The three groups are part of the CAC 40, the main stock market index of the Bourse de Paris (Rasulam & Giraud, 2018).

BNP Paribas was created in 2000 after the merger of BNP (Banque Nationale de Paris) and Paribas, which were respectively founded in 1966 and in 1872. It is one of the most active French banks on the global market, which two thirds of its activity is in Europe. (Rasulam & Giraud, 2018).

AXA Banque was previously part of the Paribas Group and was created on 1994. It took its current name in 2002 when it was acquired by AXA Group to diversify its activity. It is essential to know that the main activity of the group is insurance. Therefore, the number
of employees and countries where the company is implemented concerned more the insurance activity of AXA. (Garin & Césard, 2019).

Société Générale has made valuable investments in the digital transformation as it owns Boursorama which is the leader of the online bank market in France (Garin & Césard, 2018).

4.1.2.2 Specificities about gender equality
According to the Fédération Bancaire Française, the banking sector is largely feminized with 57.1% of women. However, only 46% of the executives are women. The banks from our study have similar situations:

- AXA is composed of 53% of women (AXA Group’s annual report of 2017), while its executive committee has three women out of ten people (according to our interviewee Séverine Lenoir).
- BNP Paribas is composed of 42.6% of women, while its executive committee has two women out of nineteen people (BNP Paribas’ annual report of 2017).
- Société Générale is composed of more than 60% of women, while its executive committee has fourteen women out of sixty-one people. In addition, women represent about 40% of the executives (Société Générale’s annual report of 2017).

Nonetheless, they all take various actions in favor of women. One global action is led by the companies’ solidarity foundations which donate to several associations.

An interesting initiative is that those banks have internal programs, especially leadership ones for women. As an example, Axelle Vigo from BNP Paribas has said to us that she has been identified thanks to her skills to join her company’s program. She explained that they are coached and helped to identify their skills, weaknesses and strengths, and to learn networking. It is to encourage women to have more responsibilities and to candidate for higher positions.

Diversity networks are also an important initiative from the banks. Each one of them has their own: AXA has Mix’In, BNP Paribas has MixCity, and Société Générale has Féminin. Séverine Lenoir explained to us that their purpose is to coach women, help them change their situation, and change the norms and perceptions inside the company. In
addition, BNP Paribas and Société Générale’s networks, led by executive women, have created in 2010 the diversity network for the financial, banking and insurance sectors namely Financi’Elles.

4.1.3 Empirical findings

4.1.3.1 Interviewees’ background

Before presenting our primary data from the banking industry, it is interesting to have an outlook on the female managers we interviewed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Experience in the bank</th>
<th>Experience in the industry</th>
<th>Experience as a manager</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carine Weill</td>
<td>AXA</td>
<td>7,5 years</td>
<td>24 years</td>
<td>14,5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Séverine Lenoir</td>
<td>AXA</td>
<td>24,5 years</td>
<td>24,5 years</td>
<td>19 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Axelle Vigo</td>
<td>BNP Paribas</td>
<td>17,5 years</td>
<td>17,5 years</td>
<td>15 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fanny Finidori</td>
<td>BNP Paribas</td>
<td>23 years</td>
<td>23 years</td>
<td>5,5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadine Vanaud</td>
<td>Société Générale</td>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>24 years</td>
<td>8,5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magaly Leygnac</td>
<td>Société Générale</td>
<td>11 years</td>
<td>11 years</td>
<td>7,5 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 5. Interviewees’ experience of banking industry*

This table presents the years of experience of our interviewees in their company, in the banking sector, and as a manager. The first two sets of data are revealing as it shows that four of them have spent their whole career in the same bank and the same industry (except for Nadine Vanaud who was, at the beginning of her career, four years in BNP Paribas). Carine Weill has spent, before going to AXA, more than sixteen years in Société Générale. Finally, Magaly Leygnac started her career in various industries.

Regarding their years of experience as a manager, we can see that the numbers vary from five and a half years to nineteen. There is a clear difference between the first half of the interviewees – about fourteen to nineteen years – and the second one – about five to eight years. This can be explained by the fact that the most experienced female managers have
always worked in the same function compared to the least experienced ones who have changed during their career.

4.1.3.2 Their vision of management and leadership

When asking what a leader is for them, our interviewees all agreed to several points. They explained that a leader has a strategic vision, they bring a team together and guide them to meet ambitious goals. They have highlighted the fact that it is not necessarily someone from the hierarchy, and some of them added an idea which is well summed up there:

“It is the one who is going to take the initiative, whatever the function. They impose new ways and change perceptions.” – Fanny Finidori, BNP Paribas.

In comparison, the manager was presented as a daily administrator, someone more operational and part of the hierarchy. They are driven by and apply the objectives defined by the company.

“It is about translating the objectives into projects.” – Nadine Vanaud, Société Générale.

“They animate, coordinate, support, help and boost the members of the team.” – Axelle Vigo – BNP Paribas.

They added the fact that a manager can be a leader and they all think that they are both. They said it is necessary to have the qualities of a manager and a leader, as they need to give meaning to the work of their teams. They clarified that there are various styles which depend on the personality of the manager-leader.

Regarding specific characteristics: ambitious, combative and influent, they all think that they are not gendered. However, they explained that their form changes between men and women.

“This is because women less assert themselves, they are less confident.” – Axelle Vigo, BNP Paribas.

Those feelings are reinforced by maternity:

“We return from our leave with the feeling of being no longer legitimate on our job and we are less ambitious.” – Séverine Lenoir, AXA.
This impacts negatively the combative and influential traits as women put above themselves their own ceiling-glass (Séverine Lenoir). However, some of our interviewees said women can be more influential, but into the private sphere. In general, they all think that there is no such a thing as a “feminine management style”.

4.1.3.3 Their vision of themselves as managers and leaders

When we addressed the difficulties of being a manager-leader, they all affirmed it is not difficult per se. They expressed, in their own way, that women often self-sabotage.

“They think: ‘I don’t move forward if I don’t master.’” – Magaly Leygnac, Société Générale.

Women focus excessively on their weaknesses and their lack of skills either when it comes to being a manager or a leader. Maternity and being a mother are another obstacle as for women, it is still like having an additional function to perform. They are more in charge of the family care and tend to sacrifice their career. In that sense, they have to reassure their professional circle to not be a burden for the company (Axelle Vigo). They do not feel they have to prove themselves more, however, they tend to be more exigent and to work harder. Therefore, they do not have particular strategies except that they seek opportunities (Séverine Lenoir), they network – something that men do more naturally (Axelle Vigo), and they try to know themselves, their weaknesses and strengths. They insist that women should not try to be someone else (Fanny Finidori), and in the contrary, they have to assert themselves as they are (Carine Weill), like men do. Furthermore, they think it is important to not miss out on any sexist comment (Magaly Leygnac).

When asking about their personal values in work, every interviewee talked about the importance of the team spirit, the cooperation between the members, and the fact that they need trust. Fanny Finidori added loyalty, to her and to the company. For the two interviewees from AXA, integrity was an important value, and transparency was mentioned by all the managers. Freedom, initiative, autonomy and creativity were cited with the common meaning of letting employees evolve and learn from their mistakes. Finally, Nadine Vanaud and Axelle Vigo mentioned empathy and benevolence, for the ladder, pragmatism and being result-oriented were also important.
They all have good relationships with their employees and they are aware of their importance to achieve objectives. For this reason, they are close to them and always privilege communication.

“I am really looking for cohesion in my team, to bring people from different backgrounds together and make us work and move forward together.” – Nadine Vanaud, Société Générale.

“I am a straightforward person who likes to have direct and regular feedback. I don't like barriers, which prevents communication. I have a fairly simple and fluid contact.” – Séverine Lenoir, AXA.

Nonetheless, they affirmed it is not always easy, Fanny Finidori explained that it is a question of adaptation between the individuals. They do not feel any differences between their female and male employees as they do not do any. Carine Weill insisted on the importance of diversity in a team, saying it is a strength.

4.1.3.4 Real-life situations as manager and/or leader

To understand how they handle different situations, we have asked them to describe about three particularly difficult situations they faced as a manager-leader. They talked about company’s reorganizations (Carine Weill), handling and firing people who do not fit the job (Axelle Vigo, Fanny Finidori, and Magaly Leygnac during probation periods), downsizing measures (Nadine Vanaud), and management issues at the beginning of their career (Séverine Lenoir). What was important to them, when managing those issues, was communication, give sense to every decision and search for the employees’ feedback to understand their feelings. Three of our interviewees highlighted that it is important to rely on their superiors, or the human resources for some issues. Fanny Finidori added that managers cannot spend too much time on relationships and that sometimes, they have to learn to leave people.

To finish the interviews, we have asked two situational questions. The first one concerned an employee who would have made a strategic decision without informing the manager and with the approval of the team. They all nuanced their answer by saying the negativity of their reaction would depend on if they agree to the decision or not. They would
communicate a lot with the team and the employee to try to understand how and why it happened, they would remind to everybody their responsibilities to avoid it to happen again. Fanny Finidori explained she might try to change it if she does not agree. One interviewee also highlighted:

“In general, it is necessary to encourage initiative and risk-taking; this is what encourages innovation and change” – Séverine Lenoir, AXA.

The second situation was about applying a board decision to the team, which does not appreciate it. Nadine Vanaud explained that generally, managers are consulted before making the decision to have time to prepare. They all said they would try to understand the reasons of this decision to have some arguments to give to their team and give sense. They insisted on transparency and Fanny Finidori told us she would say if she does not agree but still apply it.

“However, if the decisions imposed are not compatible with my values, I would change my position, job or hierarchy.” – Fanny Finidori, BNP Paribas.

Finally, they would have many individual and collective meetings to listen to employees’ concerns, insecurities, and emotional reactions. Axelle Vigo added she would try to develop project around it, to help each other.

4.1.3.5 Important aspects highlighted by the interviews

All the interviewees have addressed the maternity subject as a real gap between men and women, as it has an impact on their daily life and their confidence and they feel alienated. Women tend to be less confident in general, they doubt themselves, and it impacts their evolution. Nonetheless, an interviewee nuanced by saying:

“I think women also have, at some point, no desire for a position.” – Nadine Vanaud, Société Générale.

They have demonstrated that there is no feminine or masculine management or leadership style, only stereotypes. They truly believe there are various personalities that shape the way people manage and lead. This has been built over the years of experience, even as an employee, with mentors and bad managers who influenced them positively or negatively.
4.2 Consulting industry

4.2.1 General data about the industry

4.2.1.1 Market’s current situation

The average sales revenue of consulting firms in France has risen of about 12% in 2018, this growth illustrated the positive business environment of the industry in which there are important needs in digital transformation (Berthier L. & Paturel P.2018)

The mission of consulting firms is to advise top managers, but it is also a way to reduce production costs by using external resources. Even if the scope of clients for consulting firms is broad (administrations, insurance, bank, logistic, telecommunications, etc.), most of the time “big groups” are the principal clients. The industry can be classified in six main categories:

- generalist management;
- strategy;
- audit;
- software;
- information system;
- change management;
- cost management;
- banking.

In France, the activity of the consulting industry is really centralized as the ten biggest firms owned 50% of the global sales revenue in 2018. It is mostly due to the leader’s reputation which allows a good visibility and acknowledgement of their expertise and their diversified activity. Furthermore, the sector is also geographically centralized as 91% of the salaried workforce is based in the Parisian region (where all the client’s headquarters are).

4.2.1.2 Key numbers and information

The advent of digital implies strategic transformations for companies throughout industries. The needs in management consulting have changed and the firms with an expertise in software or digital have overtaken the market (like Accenture, DXC
The advantage of these firms is that they provide a numerical expertise and an internal software solution to solve client’s issues. Some firms try to catch up by investing in new knowledge, like the Square group who redeemed Alternea (specialist of digital transformation) in November 2017.

4.2.1.3 Key players

The matrix below illustrates the turnover of the main consulting firms in France by sector of activity. We can figure out that the firms of management, IT and strategy consulting are the biggest one in terms of turnover with an average of 300 million euros per year. The most competitive fields of expertise are generalist management (ten big firms) and software (seven big firms). Furthermore, the consulting sector is made of big groups with a diversified activity.

![Matrix of main consulting firms in France](image)

*Figure 2. Main consulting firms in France*
In their study, about 152 firms registered in the commercial court, Berthier and Paturel (2018) revealed also key information about the consulting sector. In 2016, the average number of employees per firms was around 205. And, the average turnover per year and per firm was around 38 million euros. Finally, one employee generated a mean of 187,000 euros per year. With these data, we will be able to evaluate and compare the studied companies accordingly to the trend.

4.2.2 General data about the companies

4.2.2.1 Companies’ background

For the consulting sector, we had the occasion to interview female managers from 6 different firms. As the table below illustrates, almost all the different categories of consulting are represented: Software, IT, Management, Strategy, Audit and Law. This is an asset for the findings part of our study as the diversification of our interviews will represent a general trend.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Companies</th>
<th>Software</th>
<th>IT</th>
<th>Management</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Audit</th>
<th>Law</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sofren Group</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EY</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akka Technologies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diamart Group</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>InovenAltenor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bearing Point</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. Companies’ business lines of consulting industry

The table below summarize the main data about the interviewee’s companies. Four of them are big groups with an international presence. Only two of them (InovenAltenor, Diamart Group) have a turnover beyond the average of 38 million euros and a number of employees beyond the average of 205. It means that most of the interviewees for the
consulting sector come from a large and international structure, so their vision may be different from the two other managers who come from smaller consulting firms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Creation</th>
<th>Employees</th>
<th>Turnover</th>
<th>Implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EY</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>France: 5,000 Global: 260,000</td>
<td>France: 1,092 M€ Global: 28.8 Bn€</td>
<td>152 countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sofren Group</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Global: 300</td>
<td>Global: 40 M€</td>
<td>24 countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akka Technologies</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>France: 7,800 Global: 21,000</td>
<td>France: 615 M€ Global: 1.5 Bn€</td>
<td>15 countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diamart Group</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>France: 15</td>
<td>France: 289 k€</td>
<td>1 country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>InovenAltenor</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>France: 60</td>
<td>France: 10 M€</td>
<td>1 country</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 7. Companies’ key data of consulting industry*

To contextualize these data, it is also important to look further details about each company.

EY is one of the biggest audit, financial and consulting firms in the world as being part of the “Big Four”. This company had the third biggest turnover of the world in the market in 2017. EY Advisory is the French subsidiary of EY Consulting activities. EY Advisory is well established in the large accounts market and in the public sector.

Sofren Group is an international group specialized in the sector of energy and infrastructure. The company acts in the conception, construction and maintenance of the client’s equipment. It’s an independent group who combines engineering activities and technology consulting.
Akka Technologies is an engineering group and a technological consulting firm. The company is specialized in industrial and tertiary sector (especially in aeronautics, automotive, energy, rail, defense, space, information system, telecom). The group has sixty-six different affiliated societies, one of those is Akka Consulting. In 2014, the group acquired the German firm Auronik Communication to develop their consulting activity. In that sense, Akka Technologies cannot be considered as a consulting firm because it is not the main activity.

Diamart Group is specialized in the shaping of retail diamond, they divided their activity in five different subsidiaries: training in retail’s job (Diamart Academy), coaching in digital transformation (Institut du Commerce Connecté), agency in retail design and visual merchandising (UX Retail Design), retail consultancy (Diamart Consulting).

InovenAltenor was created in 2005 and was a consulting firm in management composed of sixty workers and with a turnover of 10 million euros in 2012. It has been acquired by Orange Consulting (subsidiary of Orange Business Services) in 2013. One of our interviews deals about the previous experience of a manager at InovenAltenor.

Bearing Point was initially named “KPMG Consulting” but in 2000, the subsidiary left KPMG Group and became Bearing Point. The main area of activity is management and technology consultancy. It is one of the largest firms in this field.

As mentioned, consulting firms are most of the time a subsidiary of a big group and that makes the collection and comparison of data harder. Even the terms “consultancy” can be tricky as it encompasses each area of expertise.

4.2.3 Empirical findings

The table below shows the main information about the six interviewees from the consulting sector. In average they have an experience of six years as a manager, five of them have been a manager for at least eight years and two of them between two or three years. Furthermore, the majority has been working in the consulting sector for ten to fifteen years. Through the interview, some similarities have been identified.
### Table 8. Interviewees’ key data of consulting industry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Experience in consulting sector</th>
<th>Experience as a manager</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diana Bajora</td>
<td>Sofren Group</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laure Bergara</td>
<td>EY</td>
<td>12.5 years</td>
<td>8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosanna Crepiat</td>
<td>Akka Technologies</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Astrid Faure</td>
<td>Diamart Consulting</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>2.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emilie Gerbault</td>
<td>InovenAltenor</td>
<td>11.5 years</td>
<td>9.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Géraldine Guitard</td>
<td>Bearing Point</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>8.5 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.3.1 Their vision of management and leadership

To define a leader, most of the interviewees agreed on the fact that it is someone who is inspiring and drives a team to work together. The concept of having a long-term vision and a strategy in mind is also a characteristic that four interviewees mentioned. Finally, two of them thought that being a leader is related to a state of mind and not a hierarchical position.

When defining a manager, the answers were more diverse, but each interviewee was expressing that it was about taking care of a team, a project and being in the operational side.

“They are the intermediate between the leader and the team and they can be seen as the leader’s assistant.” – Diane Bajora, Sofren Group.

“Being a manager is not an intuitive behavior to make growth and manage your team as it is more an obligation made by the hierarchy.” – Emilie Gerbault, InovenAltenor.

Regarding their vision of themselves, half of the interviewees saw themselves as both a manager and a leader. They justified this affirmation by the fact that their organizations expected them to be a leader at their position. Two of them considered they are a manager as it is their position. Finally, Géraldine Guitard considered herself as a leader as it is how
her organization sees her. Furthermore, Astrid Faure said the perception of being a manager or a leader comes from the organization or the other people’s point of view.

“Being a leader is kind of being a modern manager, meaning it is the symbol of the end of the hierarchy within a modern organization. It is a way to allow everyone in the company to be a leader in some missions and avoid barriers due to the hierarchy.” – Astrid Faure, Diamart Consulting.

The three adjectives combative, ambitious and influent received almost the same number of responses. Four out of five interviewees considered that it is a female attribute to be combative, indeed, they affirmed that it is still harder for a woman to be a manager. Four out of five thought being ambitious or influent is not a question of gender but of personality. Only one of the interviewees replied that those adjectives are not related to gender at all.

When it comes to the female management style, two of them thought that this kind of management exists. The two justifications were the fact that women are more demanding with themselves (due to the difficulty of the maternity leave), thus, as a manager they are more demanding than men. In addition, female management is due to stereotyped conditioning which affects unconscious behaviors of female managers, whereas three of them did not agree on the concept of female management. Rosanna Crepiat and Astrid Faure thought that management styles vary according to the organization you work for and not according to the gender.

“The only difference could be that women are more sensitive to men, but it does not affect their management.” – Laure Bergara, EY.

4.2.3.2 Their vision of themselves as managers and leaders

Regarding their opinion about the difficulty of being a female manager or leader, four of them thought it is harder. The justifications varied:

“It is because of the maternity leave that women have to fight more to stay a manager.”
– Emilie Gerbault, InovenAltenor.

“There are always some prejudices from senior management” – Rosanna Crepiat, Akka Technologies.
Astrid Faure and Diana Bajora felt that it is due to the mentality and stereotypes. Finally, two of them thought it is not harder to become a female manager.

When asking if they feel like they have to prove more themselves than their male counterparts, the answers were balanced. Half of them did not have the sensation to prove more than men as they see themselves as qualified for their position.

“If I am listening to some senior managers, they would say yes, they had to fight more but now it seems like the trend is reversing as the promotion of female career is really taken into consideration nowadays.” – Laure Bergara, EY.

In another hand, half of the interviewees had the sensation to show more than men. Emilie Gerbault and Géraldine Guitard thought there is still sexism in top management, and as female consultants, they have to show they legitimacy.

“I think there is always a negative prejudice or assumptions about working as a woman but when you start working and showing your capacity, this difference disappears.” – Astrid Faure, Diamart Consulting.

Regarding their personal strategies to reach their position, most of the interviewees did not have the impression of using some. They simply worked hard to achieve their personal goals. Only Diana Bajora felt she needs to be more adaptable than a man at work.

Adopting a particular attitude as a woman is a feeling shared by only two interviewees. They think women need to develop more their self-confidence to assert themselves in every situation. Géraldine Guitard did not share this idea as she thinks the consulting is an equal sector and there is no need to fight more. Some points of view are more balanced:

“Being a woman has its advantages and inconveniences, sometimes being the only woman in a men’s world allows you to have another voice and be more listened” – Astrid Faure, Diamart Consulting.

“I think you have two choices... you suffer, or you play with this difference. I chose to play with it.” Emilie Gerbault, InovenAltenor.

Their personal values as a manager-leader can be summarized in this way:

- Listening and understanding the team (four mentioned it);
• Be demanding and challenging (three mentioned it);
• Having a trust and open relationship (two mentioned it);
• Be a good communicator and transparent manager (two mentioned it);
• Be kind with the team (one mentioned it);
• Having a close or friendship relationship (one mentioned it).

The relationship with their employees can be described mainly as a trust relationship and for some, open and close. Finally, only one manager said it was a demanding relationship. Most of them did not see any difference between their male or female employees. However, some differences were pointed out:

“I realized women are really demanding for themselves and have a lot of pressure, it's important to make them relax whereas men can be less stressed, and you need to challenge them” – Emilie Gerbault, InovenAltenor.

“Women are less self-confident and maybe shyer than men. My role is to help them to assert themselves” – Géraldine Guitard, Bearing Point.

4.2.3.3 Real-life situations as manager and/or leader

Our interviewees explained how, as a manager, they faced some difficulties. The main issue, explained by three of them, was managing employees with an inappropriate behavior. Two of them used their authority to manage the situation whereas the other one emphasized the communication. Another difficulty cited by two managers was a very busy period, one managed it through the solidarity among their employees and the other one had to leave the company. Two managers also described a moment when they had to take a strategical decision (such as firing someone), they managed it by being honest and transparent. Finally, a last difficulty was described:

“After my maternity leave, when I had to come back... things had changed, and I had to adapt myself, it was complicated.” – Emilie Gerbault, InovenAltenor.

The reaction of the interviewees regarding a decision taken by their employee without the authorization was balanced. Half of them would have thanks their employee for the initiative and would have appreciated their decision. The other half would have asked the employee to justify their choices and to take the responsibility of the decision.
Regarding the last question, which was about being responsible of announcing a strategical decision to the team, four out of six interviewees would have preferred to say it individually. Three of them would have tried to take the time to listen and understand the objections.

4.3 Agri-food industry

4.3.1 General data about the industry

The food industry is the first industrial sector in France, concerning both the turnover and the percentage of employment. As said by ANIA (Association Nationale des Industries Alimentaires), the food industry in France in 2017 counted more than 17,000 companies, which together generated a turnover of 180 billion euros, and were providing almost 430,000 jobs throughout the entire country. This sector is so important in France since it has a big impact on the development and vitality of the country, as 70% of the agricultural production of France is transformed. The three main sub-sectors in France are the production of meat, dairy products and bakery/pasta.

The agri-food sector is known to be an innovative sector, in which new products are being created and introduced on the market every year by one company out of five. The goal is to transform and pack agricultural products into actual food. These food products will later be distributed and sold to consumers, then consumed (Taibi, 2015). France owes its number one position to those innovations that are very regular and adapted to the norms.

Exportations are very important for this sector, as they represent a major opportunity for French companies. Export accounts for 21% of their turnover in 2017, which represent a trade surplus of 7.6 billion euros. In 2017, France was positioned as the sixth larger exporter in the world, just after the United States of America, the Netherlands, Germany, China and Brazil.

The agri-food has known and still knows a lot crisis. There are three main tendencies in the agri-food sector that are sustainable agriculture - contributes to a cleaner agriculture, more competitive and more concerned about sustainability – then bioeconomy and robotization. Sustainable agriculture contributes to a cleaner agriculture, more competitive and more concerned about sustainability.
France is well-known for its very diverse range of food products and its gastronomy, providing and exporting good products all around the world.

4.3.2 General data about the companies
4.3.2.1 Companies’ background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Creation</th>
<th>Employees</th>
<th>Turnover (Bn€)</th>
<th>Implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>McCormick &amp; Company</td>
<td>1889</td>
<td>France: 250</td>
<td>France: 0.356</td>
<td>150 countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Global: 12,000</td>
<td>Global: 5.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danone</td>
<td>1919</td>
<td>France: 400</td>
<td>France: 1.4</td>
<td>+120 countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Global: +100,000</td>
<td>Global: 24.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonduelle</td>
<td>1853</td>
<td>France: 250</td>
<td>France: 0.125</td>
<td>100 countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Global:</td>
<td>Global:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9. Companies’ key data of agri-food industry

McCormick & Company was founded in 1889 in Maryland, USA and is the worldwide leader in flavor (spices and seasonings) and is implemented in approximately 150 countries in the entire world. In France, the company is based in Avignon, and employs more than 200 employees. The turnover for the company in France is 356 million euros.

Danone is a French company founded in Barcelona in 1919. It is one of the global leaders in this activity sector. It’s the number one leader of dairy products and products of plant origin. Danone products are available in more than 120 countries and have more than 100,000 employees working all around the world. In 2017, the company’s total turnover was 24.7 billion euros.

Bonduelle is a French company founded in 1853 and is the global leader of ready-to-use vegetables. They have offices in eighteen countries, but the brand is present in over 100 countries around the world. The company based in France has made a turnover of 125 million euros.
4.3.2.2 Specificities about gender equality

In McCormick & Company, the board of directors of McCormick is composed of three women out of ten. The company has shown its support and consideration for women, and as it is said on their website by Jan Bonnet (EMEA Category Head - Packaging, 2018): “we aim to inspire and support women in realizing their aspirations and to demonstrate the role inclusive corporations play in the drive for women’s equality”. They value gender equality through the Power of People. They even have this network named McCormick’s Women’s International Network (WIN) which gathers over 500 members in France, USA and the UK.

For Danone, the board of directors is composed of twelve people, seven of them are women. Last year, the percentage of female managers has improved at 50% (49% in 2017). Danone advocates a diversification in its personnel and they believe in equal opportunities regardless “age, race, gender, nationality, disability, background, education, religion, beliefs, thinking style, perspectives and sexual orientation”. The parity between women and men is a major concern for Danone. The CEO, Emmanuel Faber, has committed to reach a total of 30% of women executives by 2020. In 2017 was created “Inclusive diversity”, a program defining their main commitments regarding gender balance, inclusive behaviors and culture and nationalities. To this day, Danone has made a lot of progress and has been rewarded by receiving the GEEIS-DIVERSITY certification (Gender Equality & Diversity European & International Standard) in France, Italy and Singapore companies. They are also part of the Bloomberg Gender-Equality Index (GEI) for 2019 which aims to place “transparency at the forefront of their commitment” but also to prove Danone’s employees and investors all around the world that they are focusing on gender equality and that they keep working on creating an inclusive work environment.

Regarding Bonduelle, their board of directors includes a perfect gender equality, having four women and four men. In 2018, a French agreement on professional equality and quality of life at work was signed by the brand, which confirmed their willingness to promote professional gender equality between women and men. They also considered diversity in teams as a key element to both enrichment and efficient performance of employees.
4.3.3 Empirical findings

4.3.3.1 Interviewees’ background

For the agri-food sector, we have interviewed three female managers aged from 27 to 45 years old. The youngest has three years of experience in the sector and has two years of experience in team management and is currently working at Danone. Our second interviewee wished to remain anonymous but is working at Bonduelle. Finally, our third interviewee has been working in the food industry since more than ten years at McCormick & Company but her experience in team management is very recent (only a year). Our third interviewee wished to remain anonymous but is working at Bonduelle.

4.3.3.2 Their vision of management and leadership

We have asked our interviewees their definition of a leader and a manager. Generally, a leader was described as someone who knows where they are going and who manages a team to reach set objectives. However, a manager was described as a “coach” for the team, someone who will guide them and take responsibility when needed.

To the question “Do you consider yourself more as a leader or a manager?”, one of them replied that she felt more like a manager as she manages a team, but the two others said that they consider themselves as both manager and leader, even though one said that:

“It depends on the days. I think that it is imperative to be a leader at a certain level of responsibilities. Giving sense, having a clear vision, it is an obligation.” – Anonymous, Bonduelle.

We gave them three attributes and asked them if they think these are more feminine or masculine: combative, ambitious, influent. For one of them (Eva Barlet, McCormick), the three attributes are more masculine. However, the responses were varying a lot for this question between the two other interviewees. Combative appears to be a more feminine attribute, according to both Julie Campagne (Danone) and our anonymous interviewee (Bonduelle).

“As a woman, you have to know how to assert yourself in this world that still remains led by many men.” – Julie Campagne, Danone.
Ambitious is more masculine for our Danone manager, since she thought that it is easier for men to be ambitious as they can envisage the future of their careers. However, our anonymous interviewee thought that:

“Women are often either too feminine or worse than man.” - Anonymous, Bonduelle.

The attribute “influent” was also the subject of contradictions in the responses, as Julie Campagne thought it is more feminine as the word “influent” reminds her of “charismatic” which describes women at the certain level of the hierarchy in a company. On the other hand, the other interviewee thought it is more masculine, as she thought that being influential is an obsession for them.

When asking what a female management style in their opinion would be, the answers were starting by “No.” in the sense that they did not think a female management exists, as this sounds very stereotyped.

“I think that the type of management is more due to the seniority of the person than to the gender of the person.” – Julie Campagne, Danone.

4.3.3.3 Their vision of themselves as managers and leaders

For our three interviewees, becoming a manager nowadays is no longer difficult. Companies are more and more advocating gender equality, and are even programming seminars about female leadership:

“I am soon going to attend a seminar about female leadership and how to assert ourselves and face these obstacles.” - Eva Barlet, McCormick.

However, our anonymous interviewee has mentioned the fact that it is sometimes difficult for women managers to combine both professional life and private life:

“When I started, there was a lot fewer female managers as it’s hard to conjugate work and private life. Having children stop the career for the ten first years of the child. Part time is more common among women, and it slows down their career.” - Anonymous, Bonduelle.
We then asked if it is still difficult for women to become leaders. What came up the most was almost the same as the previous question’s answers, which is no, however, women tend to lack self-confidence and that is still an obstacle.

“Women tend to be less confident than men. For example, men will apply to a job position even though they only have 60% of the requirements, and women wouldn't do that.” - Eva Barlet, McCormick.

It is a fact that women generally have to show more what they can do as a manager than their male counterparts. The real issue in this is the lack of confidence of women. That is a fact, they lack confidence and have to pressure themselves more than man would do but also tend to question themselves too much.

To reach their positions, our interviewees had to set strategies. One of them simply worked a lot to get the job done correctly, another one was lucky because she had senior people helping her and she is now helping younger people. The last one did a mentoring program, with someone from the USA who helped her affirm her personality and overcome reckless obstacles.

Regarding women’s posture in a working environment, Julie Campagne thought that we cannot behave the same way with every employee and that the manager has to adapt their behavior. For her:

“There is no different posture because you are a woman, but there is a different posture to have for everyone in the work environment.” – Julie Campagne, Danone.

Meanwhile our anonymous interviewee believes in “spontaneity and authenticity”.

“I don't think someone can keep a specific attitude in work, where we spend most of our time. We have to be coherent with ourselves, correct things if necessary.” - Anonymous, Bonduelle.

For Eva Barlet, working at McCormick is different because the company is originally American, so the culture is different. According to her:

“There are less barriers, but in the highest positions, women still have to adapt their behaviors.” – Eva Barlet, McCormick.
To the question “On what values do you advocate your management?”, all of them had different responses:

“Equality in respect, whoever we are talking to, we have to behave the same way. The willingness to teach and show. It takes patience and desire to show and explain to the teams.” - Julie Campagne, Danone.


“Trust, responsibility of each and team spirit.” - Eva Barlet, McCormick.

We then asked them to describe their relationship with their employees, and if they felt or not a difference between their female and male subordinates. The Danone manager replied that at the beginning of her manager career, she was acting the same way with all her team members but then realized that they do not all react the same way and so that it is important to adapt her behavior to each person and situation. She also said that she can see a difference in treatment between male and female:

“With men, you can be direct and very open-minded, they don't get offended... but with women you have to pay more attention, to not offend them.” – Julie Campagne, Danone.

On the other hand, our anonymous interviewee said that her relationship with her subordinates is purely professional, which is also direct and collaborative, based on mutual trust. Regarding the difference between male and female, she said that the difference is more regarding the age, level of responsibility, but mostly the personality.

Our last interviewee believes in “respectful relationship and convivial mind spirit”. According to her:

“It is different in the sense that we are more in a transparent and closeness relationship between women. However, with men, there will be more a competitive spirit.” – Eva Barlet, McCormick.

4.3.3.4 Real-life situations as manager and/or leader

We asked them to describe three difficult moments they had to face in their career as a manager. Our first interviewee had to work with an employee with who she was not
having a good relationship with because he was not doing the work correctly and was not understanding his manager’s feedbacks. She had to take the decision to not extend his contract. She had to ask for help and support and think about other alternatives to fix things.

Our anonymous interviewee had to work with an employee who was not agreeing with her and who was not taking her seriously, which perturbed her a lot. Later, she took her manager role seriously and explained him that whatever the relationship they have, she is the manager and he has to do what she asks. She basically had to adapt her style and become more authoritarian, so her voice could be heard.

Eva Barlet, our last interviewee, lived difficult moments, such as being a manager with few experience. She had to gain credibility with other teams that had been here for a long time. Also, making decision to change established things was not easy for her.

We had prepared two situational questions to see how they would react as managers:

The first one was about an employee making a strategic decision while the manager is on business trip, and with the approval of the team. They all replied that it depends more or less on the situation. Julie Campagne and the anonymous interviewee replied that it could be their fault, if they could not be reached by their employees. They said that they would generally try to understand the situation, and why did they take this decision but that their reaction simply depends on the reason of why such a decision, because this should not happen too often.

The second one was about applying a tough decision from the board to the team. What has mainly been said by our interviewees is that the announcement of such a decision should be done individually and not during a meeting. It is important to assist the team members, tell them not to worry and find a solution.

“The key is to understand the decision to have the arguments to give sense. In addition, it's important to never become separated from the board to join the team because it's destructive in the long-term.” - Anonymous, Bonduelle.

Overall, the most important thing is to be there for them and guide them in this new situation.
5. Analysis

This part presents the analysis of our three cases by comparing them between each other and by using the theories previously studied.

5.1 Comparison between the banking and the consulting industries

In this part, we compare the responses of our interviewees from the banking and consulting industries. We have interviewed six female managers for both sectors. The interviewees from the banking sector have all at least more than seven and a half years of experience in the domain, and more than four years for the interviewees from the consulting sector. We had the opportunity to interview women who have been working as managers for at least two years and up to nineteen years. The results may vary depending on the years of experience in management.

5.1.1 Their vision of management and leadership

A leader was defined by both banking and consulting interviewees as someone who brings and drives a team to work together to achieve goals. Interviewees from the consulting sector added that being a leader is more related to a state of mind rather than a hierarchical position. Interviewees from the banking sector defined a manager as a daily administrator someone more operational and part of the hierarchy. This was also said by interviewees from the consulting sector, saying that a manager is someone taking care of a team and being in the operational side. According to our banking interviewees, a manager can also be considered as a leader. In the contrary, one interviewee from the consulting sector believes that a manager is more of an intermediate between a leader and their team and can be seen as a leader’s assistant. When asking if they felt more like managers or leaders, the general responses were “Both”.

Interviewees from the banking industry said that it is necessary to have qualities of both a leader and a manager. Toor and Ofori (2008) indeed clarified that very often, managers perform a role of leader and that leaders manage teams. For the interviewees from the
consulting sector, it is their organizations that expect them to act as leaders at their position. However, one interviewee from the consulting sector did not see herself as both leader and manager, just as a manager as it is the title of her position. While another one considered herself as a leader, because that is how her organization sees her.

Regarding the three adjectives we gave them, the responses were diverse. Globally, interviewees of the banking sector said that none of these adjectives were gendered, only their form changes between women and men. Nonetheless, they added the factor of maternity, which impacts badly the combative and influent traits. Some interviewees from the consulting sector considered the trait “combative” as a feminine attribute, as women have to prove themselves more to reach leadership positions. On the other hand, being ambitious and influent is not a question of gender for them, but rather a question of personality.

Overall, there is no such a thing as a “feminine management style” for female managers from the bank. However, for interviewees from the consulting sector, two of them thought that this kind of “feminine management” does exist, as women are more exigent with themselves. However, two of them thought that the management style varies depending on the organization they work for and not because of their gender.

5.1.2 Their vision of themselves as managers and leaders

Being or becoming a manager or a leader is not that difficult for women, as affirmed by female managers from the banking sector. However, they explained that women often self-sabotage in the sense that they focus too much of their weaknesses, which is exactly what Koch (2005) explained. Maternity and having a family are another obstacle for women who tend to sacrifice their career. On the contrary, four female managers out of four from the consulting sector did think that it is harder for them, due to maternity leaves, prejudices from senior manager and the mentality. The two others did not think it is that difficult.

When asking if they felt like they have to prove themselves more than their male counterparts, the responses were balanced. Women from the banking industry did not feel like they have to prove themselves more, their solution to this is to be more exigent and work harder. They also insisted on the fact that women should not try to be someone else,
but rather assert themselves as they are. For the consulting sector, half of them did not feel like they should prove themselves more as they feel qualified for the positions they are occupying. The other half did feel like they need to prove themselves. All our interviewees talked about sexism that is still present in top management but said to not miss out on any sexist comment.

When asking about their personal values at work, interviewees from the bank talked about the importance of team spirit, cooperation between team members and trust. One of them also talked about loyalty, and two others talked about integrity as an important value. They also mentioned transparency, empathy and benevolence, which correspond to a communal behavior which is typically feminine (Brescoll, 2015). On the other hand, women from the consulting sector mentioned that it is important for them to listen and understand their team, be demanding and challenging, create an open relationship based on trust, be a good communicator and be transparent, be kind and develop close relationship.

When asking them about their relationship with their employees, they said they have good relationships based on trust and are generally close to them. Women are indeed kinder than men and generally have better relationships with their team (Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell & Ristikari, 2011). They do not see much difference between male and female employees, apart from the fact that women tend to be more reserved and pressure themselves more than men. They also mentioned the importance of diversity in the team.

5.1.3 Real-life situations as manager and/or leader

When asking the situational questions, we wanted to know the way they would act in particular situations. The most important thing that every interviewee said is communication. Whatever the situation is, they would take time to understand why this happened, find a solution with their subordinates.

5.2 Comparison between the consulting and the agri-food industries

The interviewees from the two sectors are aged from 26 to 45 years old, approximately. The managers from the agri-food industry are younger than the consulting sector as the average age is 31 years old versus 36 years old. In addition, the interviewees from the
consulting sector are more experienced in management as four out of six have been
managers for eight years, whereas in the agri-food industry, two out of three have been
managers for about one year and a half. Almost all of them are working in a big
organization or group, only two managers from the consulting sector are working in a
compny with less than sixty employees.

5.2.1 Their vision of management and leadership
A leader was described by most of our interviewees as someone who has a clear vision
of the way to achieve goals, who knows how to drive a team to work together. Both
interviewees from the two sectors talked about having a long-term vision.

On the other hand, a manager was described by all our interviewees as someone who
knows how to take care of a team, coach and mobilize a team. Women leaders from the
consulting industry added that managers are in the operational side.

Regarding the three attributes that were given during the interviews, the responses were
varying. Most of the female managers from the consulting sector said that these attributes
are more feminine, while managers from the agri-food had different opinions. One of the
agri-food managers thought the three attributes are more masculine, while the two others
thought that being combative is more of a feminine characteristic, and ambitious and
influent more masculine. As explained by Appelbaum et al. (2003), an effective leader
should possess both feminine and masculine attributes, in other words, find a balance
between both and consider androgyny. One interviewee from the agri-food sector added
that ambitious tend to be a feminine attribute as well but emphasized that ambitious
women are often too feminine and can be worse than men.

When asking if there is a female management style, two of the agri-food sector’s
interviewees said “no”, justifying by the fact that the style of management does not really
depend on the gender but more on the level of experience. The other one thought that
female management includes more team spirit, and that women tend to be better listeners
than men. Female managers from the consulting sector did think that this kind of
management exists, also saying that the management style does not depend on the gender
but on the organizattion you are working with.
5.2.2 Their vision of themselves as managers and leaders

Interviewees from both consulting and agri-food sectors agreed on the fact it is no longer difficult for women to become manager or leader, except one who thought it is still a bit hard as positions are not naturally given to women which means they have to fight for it. Nonetheless, they said that the mentalities have changed, and most of their organizations are providing support and programs to help them assert themselves. One of the interviewees from the consulting sector mentioned the maternity issue. The maternity leave will, indeed, create some difficulties, which makes women work even harder and show their efficiency even more. However, to become a leader, some said that it’s still hard as women lack self-confidence and credibility compared to their male counterparts.

When we asked them if they felt like they have to prove themselves more than men, the answers were mostly “yes”. They, indeed, all had to show what they were capable of to reach their positions, but not because of their gender, the fact that they are women. Nevertheless, in a general way, women tend to work harder, to hide their lack of self-confidence.

We then wanted to know if they had to set strategies. The responses were very diverse, some said they had to be more adaptable, pay more attention to their behaviors, work harder, but they were mostly doing that because they want to do the job well. In the agri-food sector, some also beneficiated of mentoring programs, or even help from their senior managers.

In terms of values, we asked them about their personal values at work. Every interviewee from the consulting sector mentioned that listening and understanding their employees is the most important. Developing good relationship based on trust and communication are very also important, while interviewees from the agri-food sector mentioned equality in respect and in chances, trust, benevolence and team spirit.

When asking about their relationships with their employees, they generally responded that they have good and professional relationships with their employees. Most of them said they have close relationships based on trust, but also very open and collaborative. They generally did not think there is any difference between their male and female employees, they just mentioned the fact that some of their women employees are less self-
confident and tend to put more pressure on themselves. Female leaders from the agri-food sector added that the difference is more regarding the age and level of responsibility and the personalities.

5.2.3 Real-life situations as manager and/or leader

We asked situational questions to understand the way they would react in some difficult situations. What we learned from these interviews is that women managers care the most about communication, whatever the situation is. They have close relationship with their employees which allows them to take time to listen to them and try to find solutions together. They demonstrate a lot of empathy towards their employees, act in a communal way as Brescoll (2015) said and tend to adapt their behavior to the situations.

5.3 Comparison between the banking and the agri-food industries

It is important to notice that the interviewees from the banking industry are all aged between 41 and 47 years old, whereas most of the interviewees from the agri-food industry are younger. As we have seen, personal, interpersonal and administrative skills are improved through the experience and by aging (Hermel-Stanescu, 2016). Julie Champagne from the agri-food sector even affirmed this in contrast with gender.

5.3.1 Their vision of management and leadership

When comparing the definitions given by them, we noticed the female managers from the banking industry use more precise words such as “strategic vision” which corresponds to “someone who knows where they are going” from the agri-food, and this to reach objectives/goals. It is close to the definition of Perloff (2004) and reminds the transformational style. In addition, the banking sector had an insight similar to Toor and Ofori (2008) when defining a leader who brings change and new ideas. They also added the leader can be someone else than the manager (Toor & Ofori, 2008; Popovici, 2012) or the manager itself, which the agri-food industry agreed on. The definition of manager was light on the agri-food side, whereas for banking words such as “daily administrator”, “operational” and “by the company” were used (Toor & Ofori, 2008; Perloff, 2004).

The given characteristics were typical masculine or agentic ones: competitive or ambitious, for example (Appelbaum et al., 2003; Brescoll, 2015). As said by researchers,
women should find a balance between feminine and masculine characteristics (Appelbaum et al., 2003). If the women from the banking industry thought combative, ambitious and influential are androgynous, it was more nuanced on the agri-food side. The main idea from all these interviews is that it is easier for men to embrace these characteristics, and it can be an obsession for them, women have them but in another form. They all agreed women should assert themselves.

5.3.2 Their vision of themselves as managers and leaders

The interviewees from both sectors agreed that it is no longer difficult to become manager and leader. Their companies have special programs and norms are changing in their favor in general. They insisted on the fact that women are less confident and that it plays a role in their career. Koch (2005) said that women are influenced by the critics and are more self-aware which has an impact on their career as they self-sabotage. Therefore, they feel they must prove more; this is exacerbated on the agri-food industry where our interviewees feel more pressured. Interviewees from the banking industry added that maternity plays an important role in women’s career as they generally sacrifice it for their family.

In terms of strategies, common actions between the industries are networking – having mentors – and trying to know themselves, which is in accordance with the theories of the researchers Koenig et al. (2011) and Saint-Michel (2010) about women reaching top positions. If women from agri-food industry thought it is important to adapt their behavior and posture in the company, women from banking thought it is important to be true to yourself like men, but to never ignore any sexist comment.

The values they shared are more considered as feminine or communal as described by Brescoll (2015) as they are generally about being empathetic and kind to their employees with the use of “team spirit”, “trust”, “benevolence”. These skills are considered as soft skills or human competences for managers (Parente et al., 2012). Some hard skills and masculine skills were mentioned as “requirement”, “pragmatism” and “result-oriented”. Therefore, it is not surprising that they all have good relationships with their employees and make no differences between genders. They all said they adapt to the situation and to their employees, thus, it joins the notions of situational leadership and contingency model.
5.3.3 Real-life situations as manager and/or leader

What was important with these three questions was to analyze how the interviewees had or would have reacted and what they did or would have done. This part showed and confirmed our interviewees are close to their employees and seek their well-being inside the company. They are all good listeners and value communication, while influencing their team by giving sense, encouraging initiatives, keep following their values and a vision which is related to the transformational style (Kark et al., 2012). They mentioned several times that they have to adapt to the situation and be firmer for example, which follows the situational leadership (Landis et al., 2014) and the contingency model (Shafique & Beh, 2017). In addition, even if they show more feminine skills, we can see that their style tends to be more androgynous, with a mix of soft and hard skills.
6. Conclusion

This last chapter presents the final conclusion of our study along with its contribution and suggestions for future research.

The purpose of our thesis was to update the current knowledge about the situation of female managers in France, and more particularly in the industry of banking, consulting and agri-food. We decided to study the link of women with management and leadership and to understand on which they focus to assert themselves. To do so, we chose to conduct a qualitative research. Beforehand, we gathered some literature about the subjects to have a first outlook on it. It was hard, then, to clearly differentiate management from leadership, however, we build an interview guide with three themes. We interviewed in total fifteen female managers, six for both the banking and consulting industries and three in agri-food. The results of our findings were not the ones excepted but they revealed some interesting insights.

According to our interviews, it seems that if women of these industries think it is still hard for them to be manager or leader, it is due to their own perceptions, thus, it is anecdotal. Most of the companies, even if the top management is mainly composed by men, are in favor of women as managers-leaders and take interesting initiatives as diversity networks or female leadership programs to help them. Of course, there is still some progress to achieve, but the society is changing fast and affects mentalities, leading new generations to embrace diversity, and this, not only in terms of gender.

Our female managers seem to use all the managerial skill dimensions described by Parente, Stephan and Brown (2012). They focus especially on the human competences, also named soft skills, which concentrate a lot on the team’s personal and professional development and well-being. They use feminine and masculine characteristics, with a tendency to feminine ones, which make their attitude more androgynous (Appelbaum, Audet & Miller, 2003).
Their leadership style is more transformational, the one Kark, Waismel-Manor and Shamir (2012) link to women and which correspond to inspirational leaders with a vision and values they transmit to their team to motivate them. Nevertheless, they know how to adapt their style depending on the situation and to choose the most efficient one, therefore, the situational leadership (Landis et al., 2014) and contingency model (Shafique & Beh, 2017) also apply to their case. In addition, we did not have proof they have the capacity to shake up norms and bring new ideas or approaches (Toor & Ofori, 2008), but it might be because of our own negligence.

To conclude, women use both management and leadership, they switch between one another and adapt to the situation. Most of them think it is not a question of gender but of personality, thus, there is no more “male leadership”. Women need to assert themselves by working on themselves.

During this study, an interesting insight was highlighted, it concerns the study of Kock (2005) who affirms women are their real obstacle by being less self-confident than men. They are more influenced by negative critics and can self-sabotage themselves. They are so aware of their weaknesses and lack of skills that they can miss opportunities for evolution. Maternity is another obstacle, women tend to lose ambition and feel less legitimate after a maternity leave. They struggle between their professional and private lives which are both demanding and require a strong organization. Balancing the family responsibility between men and women could truly help women to evolve inside companies.

6.1 Contribution

Based on our findings, the situation of female managers in banking, consulting and agri-food is still evolving in favor of women. We have found that their position mostly depends on themselves. To assert themselves, women need to be more self-confident and gain courage to evolve knowing their weaknesses. We also found that maternity can be a cause of a lack of ambition and, therefore, can impact negatively their evolution in their career. Of course, not having children can be a solution, but the best answer would be a real balance between men and women in their private life.
6.2 Limitations

At first, we were aiming to realize a quantitative study with a survey in addition to the qualitative study to do a triangulation of data and obtain a general trend for the industries. In that sense, we expected to reach various generations to see if there were a correlation with age. However, due to the lack of time, and since we were unlucky when searching for interviewees, we decided to focus only on the qualitative part. Furthermore, our interview guide could have been broader. It seems that we have not emphasized enough on the difference between management and leadership, and on the hard skills. Our results could have been more relevant. Finally, the results of our study can only be used for France and industries with a parity between men and women.

6.3 Suggestions for future research

As a future research, it could be interesting to build a more precise interview guide and to test the questions and answers to a larger scale with a survey. The evolution of mentalities with the new generations has been addressed by some of our interviewees. It means that not only it could be a real angle for a study, but also that the results of this study are likely to be obsolete in a rather near future. Furthermore, as a lack of self-confidence and the consequences of maternity have been highlighted by most of the interviewees, it could also be another possible subject of study.
7. References


8. Appendixes

Appendix 1. Interview Guide

Good morning / afternoon Madam, I am Clara Lastennet / Ségolène Fourault- / Camille Hoffschir, currently student at Jönköping International Business School where, as part of my bachelor, I have to write a thesis. I have chosen to study gender issues into management. Our interview will last approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Do you agree to be recorded, please? The transcription will be used to write my thesis and will be seen by my examiner as well as my tutor. If you prefer, this interview can be anonymous.

Could you explain how you have reached your current position?

Her vision of leadership and management

- What is your perception of a leader?
- What is your perception of a manager?
- According to your definitions, do you consider yourself more as a leader or as a manager? Why?

In literature, leadership is about influencing a group with the purpose of developing and reaching the company’s objectives. It is based on a “legitimate” power attributed to the manager who is admired by their subordinates (Bouhelal & Kerbouche, 2015). In another hand, management can be described as a set of business administration skills, and the position of manager is given by an established hierarchy (Toor & Ofori, 2008).

- I am going to give you 3 qualifying adjectives and you will tell me if they are male or female attributes. If yes/no, please justify: Combative / Ambitious / Influent
- In your point of view, what would be a female management style?

Her vision of herself

- Do you think today it is still difficult for a woman to become a manager? A leader?
- Do you feel like you, as a woman, have to show more what you can do as a manager than your male counterpart?
- What strategies have you set up to reach this position?
- What is your opinion regarding women’s posture in a working environment?
- On what values/attitudes do you advocate your management? Your leadership?
- How would you describe your relationship with your employees? Do you feel a difference between your female and male employees?

**Situational questions**

*Questions to evaluate if, this precise case, she will be more likely to adopt her leadership style or her managerial competences.*

- Can you describe three difficult moments you have faced in your career as a manager and how you handle them?

Now, we are going to describe several situations to you and you will give us your opinion.

- Since a few months, you are regularly in business trip and you notice that every time you come back to the office, the team seems to break away from your authority. One day, you enter your office and you realize that one of your employees took the liberty to make a strategic decision without your agreement, and with the approval of the team. How would you react?

- The top management has made a decision which has to be applied to all the staff. You are the representative of this announcement to your team, but they react very negatively to it. What attitude do you adopt so they accept it?

Name:

Age:

Job position:

Company:

Years of experience: