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Women in Middle Management

in Germany, Sweden and The United Kingdom

Master's thesis within Business

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Abstract

- Background and Problem:** Stereotyping of genders and leaders has been around for ages and it is very hard to change people's perceptions and beliefs. Even though the way society perceives men and women has changed the last century, most people still prefer men as leaders. The historical background often makes it hard for today's women to be taken seriously in a management position. Nonetheless, the negative attitude some people hold against women in leadership is slowly fading away due to the increasing acceptance of women in management positions.
- Purpose:** The purpose of the thesis is to investigate how women in Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom perceive their situation as female leaders in middle management.
- Frame of Reference:** Women's historical background in Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom is discussed to give the reader a more throughout understanding of the women's situation today. The frame of reference also talks about stereotypes within gender and leadership as well as obstacles held towards women in leadership.
- Empirical findings:** Three women from each country investigated are being interviewed regarding how they perceive their situation as middle managers.
- Analysis and final discussion:** The empirical findings showed that women are still facing a lot of obstacles when it comes to being middle managers. The obstacles they face are stereotypes, Glass Ceilings and organisational structure. Some of the obstacles are universal, while others are specific for each country.

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1 Introduction

This section deals with an introduction of the thesis. It starts with a broad background that narrows down to a problem definition, which concludes in the purpose of this thesis.

1.1 Background

Even though about half of the world's population is composed of women (Wirth, 2000) and they nowadays make up almost half the workforce in Germany (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2005), Sweden (SBC, 2005b) and Britain (Wirth, 2000), women are still underrepresented in management positions (Wirth, 2000). Despite the fact that there are fewer women in management positions, the authors have not found any research that states that women are less suited for management positions. Powell & Graves (2003) and Arhén (1996) argue that leadership should not have a gender, meaning that the sex of individuals in a leadership position is irrelevant. Instead, the leader's ability to respond to the demands of the specific leadership role should be the main issue (Powell & Graves, 2003; Arhén, 1996).

While the majority of external obstacles women have to overcome to reach management positions have decreased, like laws and regulations, some inner obstacles, like stereotypes, still remain. The inner obstacles have been formed over a long period of time and have been coloured by historically difficulty and subordinate positions in society (Arhén, 1996). Unfortunately stereotyping group people together according to sex, as opposed to looking at their specific abilities. Despite the fact that the roles of men and women have changed over the years, the same stereotypes still exist. The underlying reason is that stereotypes are durable. People feel a need of categorising themselves and others into groups hence that they can compare themselves with each other (Powell & Graves, 2003). In addition Wirth (2000) argues that men have traditionally possessed the management positions and have built up networks amongst themselves which exclude women from reaching higher positions. Steiner (2006) agrees, arguing that men are not keen on recruiting people outside their own network. It can for an example be contacts from the golf club, the hunting team, or other social events. Steiner (2006) further argues that this "homosociality" results in men quoting in other men to important posts in the business world while women are kept outside. Obstacles like stereotyping and networks are called "Glass Ceiling", meaning that women have reached a barrier that prevents them from moving forward (Drake & Solberg, 1995). The Glass Ceiling can differ from company to company and from country to country. In some companies, the Glass Ceiling is closer to the top of the organisation, while in other companies it is at junior management level or even lower (Wirth, 2000). According to Woodall, Edwards & Welshman (1995), the traditional organisational structure, structured for men, has been the normative standard for judging career progress in organisations for several years. A choice to traditional male models of career is for example flatter structures, which is better suited for women. However, Woodall, Edwards & Welshman (1995) further state that there is also a need for recognition by organisations that transformational behaviours and leadership styles, perceived as feminine, are necessary for continued existence. A change of structure may lead to an explicit development of women managers and women careers in organisations.

1.2 Problem Discussion

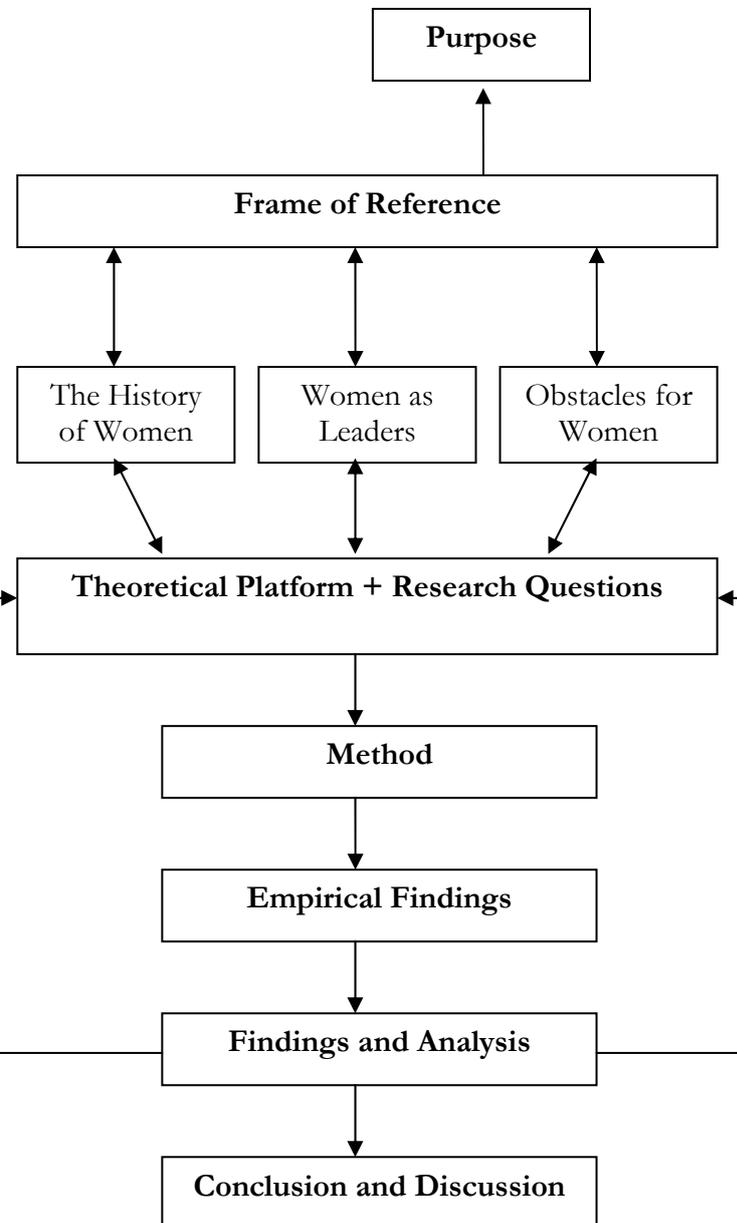
Stereotyping of genders and leaders has been around for ages and it is very hard to change people's perceptions and beliefs. Even though the way society perceives men and women has changed the last century, most people still prefer men as leaders (Powell & Graves, 2003). Nevertheless, women as leaders have recently become more common. The negative attitude some people hold against women in leadership is slowly fading away due to the increasing acceptance of women in management positions (Northouse, 2000). Sweden is one of the countries that have come a long way when it comes to accepting women as leaders. It is now established that women study at universities, apply for higher positions, and politicians are discussing expressions as 'affirmative action'¹ and 'Glass Ceiling' (Larsson, 2006). Unfortunately not all countries have come that far, and the role of women as leaders will differ around the world. Women increase in middle management positions and therefore they are a relevant group to investigate. In addition the three countries Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom (UK) is of interest since it is countries where middle managers positions for women have improved a lot.

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of the thesis is to investigate how women in Germany, Sweden and the UK perceive their situation as female leaders in middle management. This is done by investigating the challenges and obstacles women may face.

¹ Affirmative action is explained by Choen (2003) as to involve positive steps to insure truly equal protection in the workplace.

1.4 Disposition



Purpose: The purpose of the thesis is to investigate how women in Germany, Sweden and the UK perceive their situation as female leaders in middle management.

Frame of Reference: discuss stereotypes within gender and leadership as well as the history of women and women in leadership. The section also brings forward obstacles held towards women in leadership.

Method: gives the reader a more thorough understanding about the qualitative method used for the thesis and the choice of literature in order to design the empirical part.

Empirical Findings: shows the results from the interviews in Germany, Sweden and UK, about how women perceive their situation as middle managers.

Findings and Analysis: analyses the information retrieved in the empirical findings with help from the theoretical platform. The section also analyses the similarities and differences between the countries.

Conclusion and Discussion: In the last section we answer how women perceive their situation as middle managers. We also discuss the impact women in management have on their own situation.

2 Frame of Reference

To arrive at a further understanding of the reasons why women find it more challenging to have a career, and to identify the general public's difficulties to accept women as leaders, it is necessary to go back in time. In addition, to understand how women perceive their situation in today's organisations, we will discuss stereotypes within sex, gender, and leadership as well as the challenges and obstacles women may face.

2.1 Women Historically in Germany, Sweden and the UK

From the earliest recorded history women have been largely excluded from formal leadership positions, but a transformation in gender roles has taken place during the last decade (Rhode, 2003). Eleanor Roosevelt, Jane Addams, and Margaret Thatcher, are only some examples of strong and powerful women in the 20th century. Some women also became well-known queens and owners of family businesses. Despite an increase in MBAs among women in the mid 1970s, only a few women were in the cabinets and ministers around the world in the mid 1980s. Even in occupations such as teaching and nursing, where you would find women as the majority, leadership positions were still dominated by men (Bass 1990).

According to Bass (1990), women in the Western countries in the late 1980 received help to reach higher positions. Many Western countries began changing their perspectives towards the rights of women, and laws prohibiting discrimination against women were established. The trend began to accelerate, which led to women and men, together, attended universities in close proximity in equal numbers. Newspapers and commercials began to picture women as part of the workforce, which raised the general awareness of gender issues. More women embarked with taking management roles, and between 1970 and 1980 the figure grew by one-hundred percent. Despite this growth women were still only a small part of the management compared to the men (Bass, 1990).

The most significant change in leadership occurred in the 1990s when a lot of organisations started to work in self-directed teams. Working in teams led to a different kind of leadership and created better opportunities for women. Women were historically more likely to take part in smaller companies. However, now women are becoming mainly part of the largest firms because the companies offer the best development affirmative action programs and standardised promotion programs for both genders. A steady rise of women's participation in the workforce was more vivid in the 1990s (Wirth, 2000).

When looking at the Western civilizations around the world, women occupied almost half of the professional jobs during 1997 to 1998. This shows the movement for women into the workforce but it does not show the difference in occupations. When looking at women's preferences in the workforce they tend to choose jobs characterised by little financial risk, physical safety, pleasant working conditions, and no midnight shifts. Most women that take a low-paying job feel that it gives them security, achievement, and requires less stress and demand (Farrell, 2005).

By the year 2010, women's share in the labour force all over the world will be just over forty-one percent, up from thirty-eight percent in 1970. Even though this is merely a minor increase, today's women seem to have responded to the expanding opportunities and are investing themselves into the commercialized society we live in today. One of the areas where women in particular are growing is administration and finance. The Internet is also

creating new opportunities and women are increasingly taking advantage of such developments to create and run businesses. Women are often more qualified than their male counterparts, but must work harder and perform better to obtain top jobs. Unfortunately, many women enter the workforce at the same level as men, only to see their careers progress more slowly (Wirth, 2000).

Women's participation in the labour force, and especially in the management positions, has not developed the same way in Germany, Sweden and UK. Further, Germany's situation is difficult to present as a whole, considering the former divide of the country into the different regimes, East and West. In order to build a basis for the empirical part, the following part of this section will deal with the three countries independently. Due to the figures and fundamentals, which widely differ between the countries, this paper's focus is on these countries one by one. The statistics of Germany, Sweden, and the UK, aim to increase the readers' knowledge about how many women that were middle managers before, and how this has changed lately. This information is fundamental in order to obtain an understanding of how the women in Germany, Sweden, and the UK, perceive their situation today, and why this progression has not moved more rapidly.

2.1.1 Germany

In Germany the improved education possibilities for women have made the amount of educated women increase considerably in the last decades. The amount of women with an upper secondary school degree were in 2003 are significantly higher than the men's figures, measuring forty-two respectively thirty-six percent (Statistic Office of Germany, 2005). It used to be more common with a school degree for women in East than for those in West (Hülser, 1996). Not only did more women in East Germany have a higher education, they also had more jobs (Arbeitsamt online, 2000). The large participation of women with academic education is not to be mirrored in the labour market (Bundesministerium, 2004). Despite the fact that forty percent of the workforce is made up of women (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2005) they only constitute five percent of the country's manager positions in the largest companies, six percent of the middle size companies and eleven percent in the public sector. Women in top management positions in Germany are not even one percent (Maibaum, 2006).

A study made by Allensbach Institute in Germany concludes that sixty percent of all Germans are convinced that women do not have the same professional conditions as men. The study shows that in the age group below thirty years, the positions and salaries are similar between men and women, but after the age of thirty the differences are becoming obvious and the gap between gender conditions enlarges. The main reason for the gap is the birth of children, which affects women's chance for advancement (Bundesministerium, 2004).

German education is a contributing factor to why there are very few women in management positions. Women in Germany do not study less than men in general but they study less technology and science. These two academic fields are said, by eighty percent of the German companies, to be desired as a background for potential managers. The government has started a project aiming at getting more women interested in these kinds of educations (Bundesministerium, 2004). Overall, the chance for a German woman to become a leader is very dependent on what branch she is in. The highest chances are in service professions or government owned enterprises, where fifty-three percent and thirty-nine percent respectively of the managers are women. In addition, construction jobs constitute only

fourteen percent women employment. The figure below shows the segmentations of the genders in different sectors (Federal Statistic Office of Germany, 2005).

Men and Women in Employment (2004)

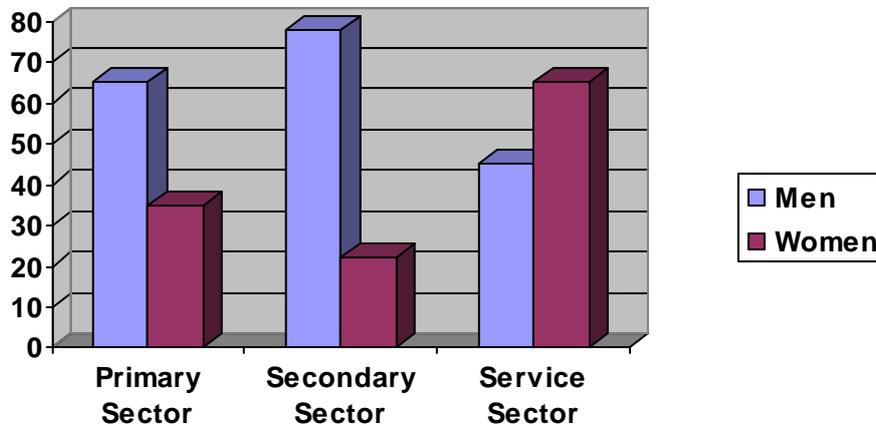


Figure 1 The figure shows the domination of males in the primary and secondary sector while females are overrepresented in the service sector (The Federal Statistic Office of Germany, 2005).

The salary level shows substantially different figures in East and West (Holst, 2001). Holst (2001) found that only about five percent of women in management positions in 2001 earned over 2500 Euro per month in East Germany compared to eleven percent in West. In addition, women’s salaries remain below men’s. In West Germany the average difference is about 642 Euro, while the difference in the East is 1100 Euro favouring the male counterparts (Statistisches Bundesamt Deutschland, 2006). The Federal Statistic Office of Germany (2005) states that the difference between women’s and men’s earnings often are due to structural factors such as size of the enterprise, line of business, length of service, qualification, hours worked, and the recruitment to managerial functions.

Earnings of Women and Men in Germany in Euro (1996 – 2005)

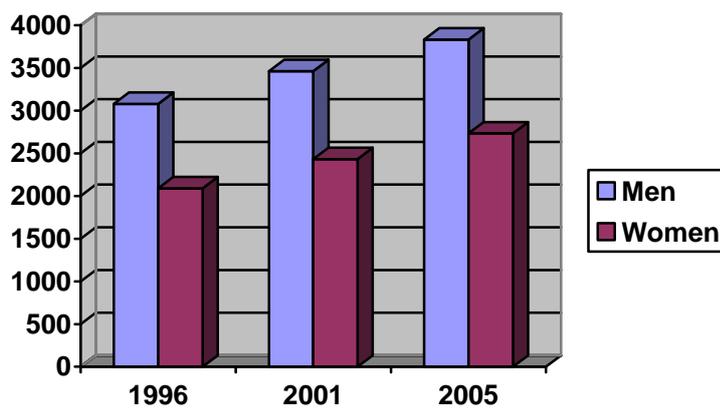


Figure 2 Earnings of women and men (in Euro) in Germany (Statistisches Bundesamt Deutschland, 2006).

2.1.2 Sweden

The perception of women in leadership has developed through the years in Sweden. The majority of the external obstacles like laws and regulations are gone, but some of the inner remain (i.e. stereotyping). The inner obstacles were formed over a long period of time and have been coloured by historical difficulty and subordinate position in the society (Ahrén, 1996). Today the percentage of educated women and men are about equal at all levels except at university educations, which compromises seventeen percent of the females and thirteen percent of the males (SCB, 2006b). Nevertheless, the Swedish market is very gender segregated. Women and men do, to a large extent, choose different educations and professions. The table below shows the amount of women and men in management positions in different sectors in 2002. The statistics demonstrate that women in Sweden are under-represented in management positions. Of all managerial positions in Sweden in 2002, only one fourth was women. In the private sector not even a fifth of the managers were women. Only in the public sector and in the municipalities more than half of all managers were women (SCB, 2004).

Women and Men in Management Positions

Occupation Sectors	Proportion of women	Proportion of men
Private Sector	19	81
Public Sector	56	44
State	35	65
Municipality	59	41
Counties	48	52
Total	24	76

Figure 3 The percentage of men and women working in management positions in the different sectors (SCB, 2004)

Only a few of the thirty most common professions hold as many women as men (SCB, cited in Ericsson, 2004). The biggest occupational areas for women in Sweden are the service- and nursing sectors while seller, purchaser, estate agent, engineer, and technicians, are the biggest occupational groups for men (SCB, 2004).

According to Larsson (2006), the amount of women in the Swedish boards and in management positions is far below that of men. The Swedish Government has set a goal, aiming to get forty percent of the boards made up by women, but there is still a long way to go before the goal is reached. A common explanation is that the boards and top positions have always been possessed by men, which has created a male friendly climate due to the network they access (Larsson, 2006). According to the Swedish newspaper Dagens Industri (2002), four out of ten governments owned boards do not meet the government criteria.

Allocations of quotas have largely been discussed in Sweden but never been put in practice. According to Larsson (2006), there is now a new discussion about using allocations of quotas since the number of females in management positions remains low. Nine out of ten CEOs are men (JämO, 2003). The Swedish companies are, from 2006, required to strive for equal gender segmentation within the board of directors, which should imply that the

companies currently are busy looking for women. However, Larsson (2006) explains that only a few owners of the companies believe in a significant increase in the amount of female board members.

It is not only the segregation in occupation that differs. The diagram below shows that there are significantly more men than women with higher salary. The group with a salary exceeding 30 000 SEK contains fifteen percent of the employed. Of them, only twenty-eight percent are women (Larsson, 2006).

Women and Men's Monthly Salary in Percentage

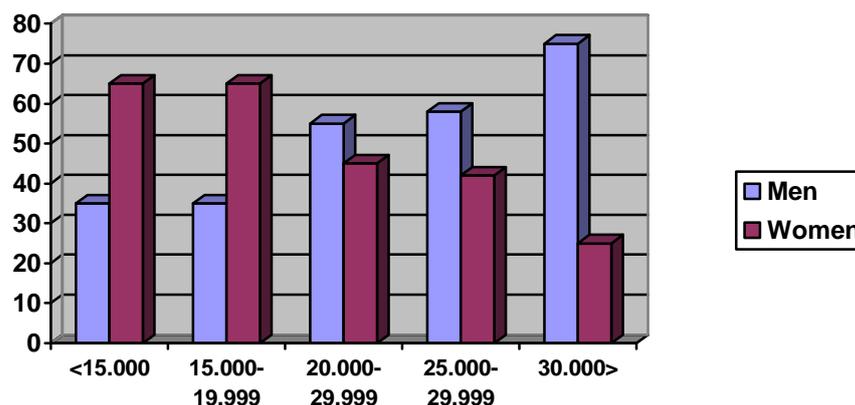


Figure 4 Women and men's monthly salary interval in percentage in Sweden (SCB, 2004).

According to Statistics Sweden (SCB, 2006a), Swedish women in general earn ninety-two percent of what men earn for the same job.

2.1.3 The UK

Women in the workforce in the UK are increasing steadily, and in 2001 women made up forty-four percent of the total working age labour force. Nonetheless, men continue to have higher employment rates than women. The 2001 Census (Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), 2003), shows that women now hold thirty-three percent of managerial jobs in the UK. Despite that a Glass Ceiling still exists at the highest levels. The women that actually are directors make out only five percent (Wirth, 2000). Many of the women managers today are part of the professional managerial class which emerged in the UK. However, despite almost thirty years of equality legislation, women remain under represented in management (EOC, 2003).

UK History of Women in Management Positions

Year	Percent of Women in Management Positions in UK
1979	19
1980	20
1985	22
1989	26

Figure 5 Percent of women in management positions in UK (Davidson & Cooper 1993).

Research shows that woman managers tend to be specialists rather than generalists (Davidson & Cooper, 1993). There are more than twice as many women as there are men in occupations as administration, personal service occupations, sales, and customer service occupation. In addition, these three occupational groups accounted for only twelve percent of employed men. Instead men take more positions than women in skilled trade occupations, process, plant, and machine operatives. Women also tend to earn less than men, which is much due to women being employed in occupations with lower salaries (Labour Force Survey, 2003).

Earnings of Women and Men in Pound (aged 16-64) 1991 – 2001

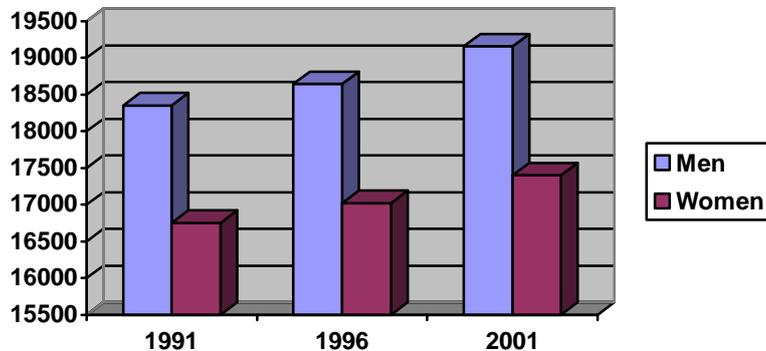


Figure 6 Earnings of women and men (in pound) in UK (Labour Force Survey, 2005)

2.1.4 A Comparison between Germany, Sweden and the UK

There are slightly more women than men in education in all of the three countries. Despite this women are strongly underrepresented in management positions. In UK thirty-three percent of the managers are women, while they only represent twenty-four percent of the managers in Sweden. The same figure is far below that when looking at Germany. Women only constitute five percent of the country's managerial positions in the largest companies, six percent of the middle size companies, and eleven percent in the public sector. To make these figures even more comparable the reader should bear in mind that the public sector consists of mostly women. Looking at Sweden as an example, fifty-six percent of the man-

agers in the public sector are women. Women in top management positions in Germany are not even one percent, while they, in the UK, count for at least five percent and ten in Sweden. The three countries are very gender segregated with men and women choosing different educations and professions. The service sector, in the three countries, does by far occupy most of the women managers. In all the three countries women's salaries are below that of men.

Women are, as just stated, strongly underrepresented in leadership positions in all the three countries. The underlying reason is that leadership historically has been seen as a position for men and has put women in subordinate positions from which they have a hard time breaking through (Wirth, 2000). In addition, Williams, 2005 argues that men are the norm and women are the exception.

The following two sections, 2.2 and 2.3, investigate the term leadership and the obstacle women may face when they want to reach management positions. Section 2.2 will help the reader understand what qualities a leader is said to have. Section 2.3, on the other hand, shows why it has taken women such a long time to progress in management positions despite that statistic shows that they have made much progress.

2.2 Leadership

The term "leadership" has been discussed for decades. According to Adair (2003) leadership is tied to situations and depends largely upon the leader having the adequate knowledge. Williams (2005) argues that leadership has very much to do with what is right for the people in a given situation. He mentions that it is important that the leader manage employees to achieve of the common task, work in harmony as a team, and satisfy each individual's needs. According to Adair (2003), it is also important in a business to select the right people to build a good relationship with colleagues and inspire their willing obedience. Further he states that every person with potential for leadership can, through education and experience, develop of awareness and understanding of the skills needed.

In addition, Ahrén (1996) states that the most important abilities a leader can possess are communication and the creation of good relationships with employees. Leaders need to be flexible and motivate its employees. This is also confirmed by Williams (2005). He states that leadership is to do what is right for the situation and the people involved in it. It is about flexibility and differentiation of response, but it is also important to be consistent with the ground rules. This is for the leader to retain its crucial source of influence (Williams, 2005). On second place, Arhén (1996) ranks efficiency and result. A leader should be result driven, have high goals, give straight forward directions, as well as be determined.

2.2.1 Sex - and Gender Differences in Leadership

People seem to have different opinions about the differences and similarities between women's and men's leadership skills. Adair (2003) is one of the people claiming everybody can become a leader, but there are also many authors, as for examples Marklund & Snickare (2005) and Larwood & Wood (1977), who stress the different leadership skills between genders.

According to Lindén & Milles (1995), the term "gender" was first used as a tool to make a distinction between biological sex and socially constructed sex. The biological sex refers to the bodies with male and female reproductive organs, and socially constructed sex is a re-

sult of upbringing and social interaction. In addition, Doyle & Paludi (1998) argue that gender – peoples' roles, norms, and identity – should be thought of as independent of a persons' biological sex, and instead refers to socially constructed sex.

According to Marklund & Snickare (2005), the differences between men and women are obviously already in childhood, where girls play with dolls and read a lot, whereas boys play with robots and toy guns and like watching sport. Marklund & Snickare (2005) mention a study that was performed in 1980 by a research centre in Boulder, Colorado, and by the University of London. Reactions of adults were observed as they saw a "baby". The very same baby was being treated differently depending on if the adults thought it was a "girl" or a "boy". When the "baby" had a pink dress the adults thought it was a girl and treated the baby very carefully with a mild voice and wanted "her" to be still and silent, preferably asleep. When they instead thought the baby was a "boy" they spoke enthusiastically, grabbed "him" and swung "him" around (Marklund & Snickare, 2005). In addition Ahl (2002) accomplished a study where men and women had to write down the first word that came to their mind when thinking about how women are and how men are generally. The conclusion was that both men and women perceived men as having the positive words while women had the negative words. Powell & Graves (2003) believe that the segmented treatment of the gender will continue for the rest of life, and depending on where people are in the lifecycle, the segmented treatment will take different shapes. In addition, Marklund & Snickare (2005) believe that the stereotyping is a huge disadvantage for women that want to make a career.

However, Arhén (1996) and Powell & Graves (2003) argue that leadership should not have a gender, meaning that the sex of individuals in a leadership position is irrelevant. Instead, the leader's ability to respond to the demands of the specific leadership role should be the main issue. This is also confirmed by Dahlbom-Hall (2004), who has educated managers since the 70s and has a special interest in women leadership. She argues that both women and men have the attributes needed for becoming successful leaders. They just need to be used in the right way and in a way that feels natural for each individual. Dahlbom-Hall (2004), stress the importance of showing happiness in a leadership position, which is something that can only be done if the leader is comfortable with their own identity and not caught in a role (Dahlbom-Hall cited in Eriksson, 2004).

According to Rosener (1991) gender differences exist due to that women are perceived to be more relation-orientated, nurturing and caring. Powell & Graves (2003) argue that women have higher skills in nonverbal communications, which includes the ability to express oneself accurately, using face, body and voice as means. Furthermore, women also have higher skills in recalling people whom they have met. On the other hand, Marklund & Snickare (2005) argue that men are easier to understand when they talk since they seem to be more straight forward, while women often formulate their opinions in questions. According to Powell & Graves (2003), when this is being analysed from a power perspective, it is clear that a man expresses himself as a leader, whereas the woman expresses herself as a subordinate. A subordinate does not have much of their own opinions and have to gain approval for what they are saying in a different way than the superior. Marklund & Snickare (2005) state that when belonging to a superior group, the leader is expected to talk clearly, while the subordinates are expected to be vague, trembling, and ask questions during their communication. Further, Marklund & Snickare (2005) state that a leader is also supposed to speak-up, which can be tough for women since they naturally use a softer voice. The language needs to be agreeable with the position possessed or wished to be possessed. Powell & Graves (1993) argues that the difficulties for women to talk and act as a manager

are more presently seen when they wish to negotiate salary. Women in general find it difficult since they are not tough enough. If they are tough enough they will be taken for a man, which can have negative effects. According to Rosener (1991) gender differences exist due to that women are perceived to be more relation-orientated, nurturing and caring.

To conclude the discussions above, there are according to *Bass & Stogdill's Handbook of leadership* (Bass, 1990), three main parts where women and men tend to differ. It is the way they deal with power, communication, and conflicts.

- *Power*: Bass (1990) argues that there are two different views of power. The more masculine view sees power as something you have over other people, which has been greatly criticized by feminists, while the feminist view shares power with others. This is also mentioned by Arhén (1996) who states that power can be seen as something that can be taught and shared. He argues that the word power used to be very negatively for women. Nonetheless, women have formed a more positive attitude towards the word and some women argue that power is a good tool to get things done the way they want it. According to Bass (1990), having a lot of power enable people to change things and be the one making the final decisions.
- *Communication Skills*: According to Case (1985), women and men often communicate in different ways. Women are seen as better communicators, but when it comes to speeches, a mix of the two sexes has the most influence on people. When making speeches women tend to be more personal and facilitative, while the men are more powerful and confident (Case, 1985). In addition, Howard & Bray (1988) concluded from a study made with A T & T managers that women are some better than men in their verbal communication skills but they are equally well on planning, organising, and decision-making. The Harvard Business Review mentions in one of its articles, "*Ways women lead*", that according to several female leaders that were interviewed, power and information is something that needs to be shared due to creating trust, but it also helps to enhance the general communication in the organisation (Rosener, 1990).
- *Conflict*: The masculine view of conflict is something negative and threatening. The feminine view on the other hand views conflict as something that is important to get resolved and understood. In that way a conclusion or compromise is easier to obtain (Maier, 1992; Bass, 1990). According to Bass (1990), the female stereotype labels women as more emotional than men and less competent.

There are also some differences between men and women that are not as frequently discussed as the three main issues previously mentioned. According to Larwood & Wood (1977), in general, women seem to differ from men when it comes to leadership in the sense of the need for achievement, fear of success, self-esteem, dependency, competitiveness, risk taking and assertiveness. These are all things that women need to be aware of when becoming a middle manager; otherwise the trait could lead to failure. But Larwood & Wood (1977) also mention the fact that these differences will disappear when women get involved and get some experience.

2.3 Obstacles for Women Leadership

According to Rhode (2003), some things women need to do to get opportunities in leadership are to have a mental toughness, be aware of their strengths and weaknesses, as well as having someone that can support them with advice. Women will see things differently, which makes the organisations' need for having woman higher (Rhode, 2003).

Most female managers have female staff and a male manager. According to Davidson & Cooper (1993) a lot of stress is put on women according to the fact that their manager is often a man and men tend to rule an organisation in a different way than women. This could make it difficult for them to work as a manager. Also prejudice and discrimination are huge factors to stress. Women managers are seen as making decisions based on relationships (David & Cooper, 1993). According to Davidson & Cooper (1993) the biggest obstacles for women are:

- Old-fashioned attitudes about the role of women
- Direct and indirect discrimination
- Absence of proper childcare provision
- Missing a flexible structure for work and careers

The old fashion attitudes, that men tend to stereotype women's behaviour and treat them as they all had the same personality and qualifications, is a huge obstacle for women, which will hindrance them to take further steps in their career. While the male leader is seen as a normative leader, a woman is supposed to fit the masculine attributes (Davidson & Cooper, 1993). For women to reach a higher position they need help from society to overcome stereotypes, break through the Glass Ceiling, and fit into the organisational structures (Rindfleisch & Sheridan, 2004).

2.3.1 Stereotypes

Stereotyping, according to Powell & Graves (2003), is the cognitive activity of sorting people into different groups based on their characteristics. This segmentation can cause problems. Prejudices and discrimination are common and would probably have been reduced if people did not stereotype each other. When we stereotype people based on their gender, we do not see what is inside, only what is on the outside (Powell & Graves, 2003). Headlee (1996) argues that people tend to look at the differences instead of similarities between men and women. She argues that stressing the differences will promote for stereotypes of men and women.

As early as in the 70s, Krusell & Alexander (1971) argued that according to a survey they did on managers, women were seen as very emotional, undependable and having a lack of career orientation. According to Powell & Graves (2003), the same stereotypes are discussed today. This despite the new roles women have undertaken in society by increasing their number in male dominant occupancies. They further argue that males are characterised as stronger and as more active than the female stereotype. While the male stereotype is seen as having needs of dominance, autonomy, aggression and achievement, the female stereotype is instead characterised by a high need of deference, nurturance and affiliation. Powell & Graves (2003) argue that the reason why the same stereotypes still exist is that stereotypes are durable. People feel a need to categorise themselves and others into groups so that comparisons between groups can occur.

2.3.2 Glass Ceiling

Statistics show that in organisations of a hierarchical nature most female leaders only manage to reach the lower management positions, if any. When women try to advance to higher positions they often come across a lot of obstacles. An expression for the barrier that is so strong women can not move forward is the concept “Glass Ceiling” (Drake & Solberg, 1995; Northouse, 2000). Williams (2005) argues that the Glass Ceiling mostly affect women that want to reach the higher positions in an organisation.

It was in 1986 that the term Glass Ceiling was used for the first time in the Wall Street Journal to describe the barriers that prevent women from reaching the top of the organisation (Headlee, 1996). In 1995 the American Government asked the Glass Ceiling Commission to publish its recommendations. The Commission stated that the barrier still was denying a number of people the opportunity to compete for, and hold, executive level positions in the private sector (Gregory, 2001). The Federal Glass Ceiling Commission was established in 1992, and a lot of different reports have been written since then (Gregory, 2001). Drake & Solberg (1995) argue that despite the fact that more women have reached management positions they still are underrepresented when it comes to having the middle and senior positions. Women often fail to reach higher positions since the Glass Ceiling stops them from getting there. It has been several years since the Commission was established but still almost nothing has changed and the invisible barriers still exist. The Commission has its focus on the upper-level in the organisation, but the problem is that most women are still in either the bottom or in the middle of the organisation. For the women that actually reach the higher levels, the question whether they are suitable for the position or not still remain (Jackson, 2001).

In addition, Northouse (2000) argues that the Glass Ceiling consists of visible and invisible as well as conscious and unconscious mechanisms in an organisation. Also, that the Glass Ceiling is made by both women and men and can be explained by the organisation’s hierarchical structure and different leadership styles based on the gender’s different background and surroundings. This refers to the social and professional ballast women and men bring with them to organisations in the form of their different gender specific socialisation. Drake & Solberg (1995) state that norms, behaviour and the way of thinking influences men’s and women’s choice of education and occupation. Therefore men and women take different steps when they meet and interact with others in an organisation.

Simpson & Altman (2004) came up with a different theory, arguing that the Glass Ceiling exists but is not totally blocked. Instead, they believe the Glass Ceiling is time bound and that the age of the person in question is the critical discrimination factor, not the gender.

When a Glass Ceiling exists a pay inequity often exists as well. Women often earn less than men for the same work and are much more likely to hit the Glass Ceiling in top-level and middle-level positions (Morrison, 1992). According to Gregory (2001), there is no data that confirm the statement that the compensation gaps between male and female workers occur as a direct consequence of career choices made by working women with children. Instead he argues that the Glass Ceiling affects young women in the workplace to a much larger extent.

According to Wirth (2000), even though women’s participation in the workforce around the world has increased up to forty percent, the share of management positions does not exceed twenty percent. Looking at more advanced senior positions, the gap between men and women is even bigger. In the largest companies in the world that hold the most power,

women only have two or three percent of the top positions. According to Moore & Buttner (1997), the term “Glass Ceiling” states that there is no reason for women to not rise to the very top as men do. Within each organisation the location of the Glass Ceiling can differ from company to company and from country to country. In some countries or companies, the Glass Ceiling may be closer to the top of the organisation, while in others it may be at junior management level or even lower. Wirth (2000) argues that the most common reason women are not reaching the top is that women often tend to be placed in career functions which are regarded as “non strategic”, like human resources and administration. Instead, it would have been a lot easier if they were in line for jobs that easily could lead to top management.

To break the Glass Ceiling requires a very high commitment from the organisation to take action in promoting people whether they are men or women. It is also important that all men strive to implement this change (Northouse, 2000). According to Wirth (2000) there is a need for increased awareness, support, and mentoring from senior leadership to help women that are confronted with career advancement barriers. She argues that women in today’s workplace are more willing to accept the responsibilities needed for higher leadership roles. However, women need to be recognized for what they bring to the table based on their knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Governments, businesses, trade unions and civil society organisations have dedicated much thought and energy to overcome troubling and constant gender inequalities. The International Labour Office (ILO) has been very concerned about the discrimination around the world that has hindered women from certain jobs and career development. The ILO claims that they can see a pattern where there are fewer women in positions with the most power. Still, obstacles like women should have the responsibility for the well-being of the family exists. This means women often need to balance family and work (Wirth, 2000). To ease the situation for women Mattis (2001) argues that companies should implement diversity programs. Diversity programs are programs that aim to promote minorities as well as women. Businesses nowadays need to be aware of diversity and the fact that mixed groups will be of advantage (Mattis, 2001).

It requires a lot of actions for women to break through the Glass Ceiling. Women need the organisation to provide them with both training and policies against discrimination. Almost all over the world, the trend of women in business and politics seems to raise with organisations actually hiring women executives for their abilities (Wirth, 2000). Mattis (2001) argues that managers have the critical responsibility for providing feedback, coaching, and evaluating their director reports, all of which are fundamental to advancement in corporations. Denial of access to these resources and opportunities contributes to disproportionate turnover of women.

2.3.3 Organisational Structure

As more women start to enter senior management, the structure and culture of the organisations need to be changed. Even though women support their commitment to equal responsibilities, they do not use their role as senior managers to change the gender structures. That is why organisations need to come up with other strategies to get women into senior management as well. Managers need to see and understand the difference between an individual’s preferences, abilities and skills and how this leads to differential outcomes for women and men in management positions (Rindfleish & Sheridan, 2004).

According to Woodall, Edwards & Welshman (1995), the traditional organisational structure, structured for men, has been the normative standard for judging career progress in organisations for several years. Nonetheless, some organisations are developing and finding other approaches to career. A choice to the traditional male models of career could for an example be to have flatter structures, which often better suits women. Even though organisations are changing to be flatter, there is also a need for recognition by organisations that transformational behaviours and leadership styles, perceived as feminine, are necessary for continued existence. A change of structure may lead to the explicit development of women managers and career opportunities in organisations (Woodall, Edwards & Welshman, 1995).

In addition Rindfleish & Sheridan (2004), argue that to be able to move around within the organisation is a very important aspect to equality. Questions regarding how work is designed, evaluated, communicated, and what opportunities are available to whom, are all based on gender assumptions such that hierarchy and gender are clearly embedded in organisation based practices. Rindfleish & Sheridan (2004), argue that to change inequalities in the workplace, both internal and external actions need to be undertaken. Internal could be to imply a mentor system in the organisation and an external system could be equal employment opportunity and affirmative action policies. A lot of women in management positions will make a difference, and the responsibility of change will rest on the shoulders of individuals.

Today a lot of the best performing organisations and firms depend on a balanced mix of so called masculine and feminine attributes. Organisations have started to understand the importance of different thoughts, and are now hiring more women to benefit from their abilities (Wirth, 2000). The best leadership is often, according to Loden (1985), when men and women work together and compliment each other. The people that are involved in the management of change and the organisational development should consider the impacts women in management have on an organisation. Loden (1985) further states that human resources need to be aware of women's way to make careers when making policies for recruitment and selection, performance management, promoting and planning, training and development.

2.3.3.1 Networks

As mentioned before, women are today still experiencing a lack of mentoring opportunities, gender role stereotyping, sexism, tokenism, and lack of access to network.

Berkelaar (1991) argues that networks can have three different shapes. They can either be informal, formal, or community based. 1) Informal networks are often consisting of like-minded people who meet up irregularly to discuss a mix of questions. 2) Formal networks are those in which members pay fees, receive newsletters and usually engage in "networking activities". 3) Community-based networks are broadly based organisations. For example that can be Church groups and other social based clubs.

According to Moore & Webb (1998), it is of great importance for people to be involved in all the three networks. Previously in the Western Countries, only a few people were lucky to be born into the powerful family networks that continue to dominate business. In the job market, these people enjoyed substantial educational, economic, social, and political advantages. They were members of the Old Boys' Club (WetFeet, 2003). Schmuck (1986) argues that it was when women started to increase in the workforce that they realised they needed something similar to the Old Boy's network since they saw how well it worked for

men. The network that women tried to build up in the 1980s was different from the Old Boys' network, much due to the fact that the men's network has existed for a long time (Schmuck, 1986).

Today there are plenty of alternative networks that do not exclude people on the basis of family background or personal finances. For example there often exists professional, alumni, and trade associations to join. Having a strong network will provide power in several ways; it boosts the reputation as a team player and it helps employees to acquire the information guidance, feedback, and social support necessary for career success. Networking has been identified as a useful process to assist women who are seeking to advance their careers (WetFeet, 2003; Moore & Webb, 1998). Moore & Webb (1998) state that women and minorities do not have the large, strong network that men have, which will give them a disadvantage in the workplace.

According to Farrell (2005) the workplace is unfortunately still filled with discrimination and according to him the Old-Boy's network still exists. That will create huge obstacles for women leaders to obtain networks but also to have the ability to access informal networks. As long as corporations and governments are mostly men there will always be an Old-Boys network. Since most men are used to work with men and most comfortable with that, they will continue to hire men that are equal to themselves (Rhode, 2003). According to one of Farrell's surveys done in twenty-two countries, both sexes prefer men as their manager, which means that women who want to be a manager need to be able to face discrimination and more psychological barriers (Farrell, 2005).

2.3.3.2 Homosociality

Lipman-Blumen (1976) calls the theory about gender segregation in organisations as homosociality. She argues that men are dominating both on the higher positions in organisations and in the society, which will lead to that men will identify themselves with other men. According to Lipman-Blumen (1976) men are homosocials and they satisfy their needs through other men. In addition, Kanter (1977) argues that men prefer men in leadership positions and this is the reason why men are dominated on those positions. She believes that men are chosen for the higher positions due to that they meet special criteria according to themselves. According to Holgersson (2003), homosociality as connected to gender is seeing women as subordinate and men as superior, which is also why men dominate the highest positions in the society and in organisations. However, Abrahamsson & Aaurum(2005) also argues that homosociality will lead to that men and women find themselves in different situations when the organisation restructure. According to him, men as middle managers will be chosen to the higher positions while women middle managers had to go back to lower positions.

According to Collison & Hearn (1994) the masculine leadership style will lead to that there is an inherent contradiction between women and leadership positions. Women are seen as insufficient when compared to the men norm. They argue that this is also that reason why men will be very sceptical towards women managers and equality.

The frame of references demonstrate that even though about half of the world's population is composed by women and they take on more management positions than before, it is still a lot of obstacles and challenges in the organisations. Gender should not make any difference according to many researches but still it seems to affect who is being chosen for higher positions.

2.4 Research Questions

Based on the frame of references our research questions were conducted. This is to help us fulfil the purpose of our thesis, which is to investigate how women in Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom perceive their situation as female leaders in middle management.

- What stereotypes do female middle managers face in Germany, Sweden and UK?
- What challenges of Glass Ceilings do female middle managers face in Germany, Sweden and UK?
- What challenges of organisational structures do female middle managers face in Germany, Sweden and UK?

3 Method & Methodology

This chapter describes how the empirical study has been performed, the choice of approach, interview technique, as well as criticism regarding the method. As stated earlier in the thesis the purpose of this study is to investigate how women in Germany, Sweden and the UK perceive their situation as middle manager. The fact that this study involves information that has to be gathered from the three countries just mentioned, will affect how we conduct this research.

3.1 Qualitative Approach

Research can be executed by two main methodological approaches; quantitative or qualitative method. The method chosen should be depending on the problem and purpose of the study. According to Stake (1995), there is a distinct difference between the quantitative and the qualitative method, while quantitative research have pressed for explanation and control, qualitative have pressed for understanding the complex interrelationship among all that exist. Qualitative research treats the uniqueness of individual cases and contexts as important to understanding. In addition, Trost (2005) argues that a quantitative method is commonly used for statistical analysis of the collected data while a qualitative method is used to gain an in-depth knowledge of the problem. As an example of the difference between the two methods it can be assumed that the quantitative method looks at the characteristics of a person, such as age, sex or education, as an entity more or less in figures, whereas the qualitative method looks at the individual as an entity with softer attributes such as feelings. The purpose of the thesis is to investigate how women perceive their situation as female leaders in middle management which relates to the managers personal views. We therefore applied a qualitative approach while it looks at the softer attributers (Trost, 2005) in an aim to give the us the possibility to understand and analyse a problem more in-depth (Patel & Davidson, 2003).

An advantage with the qualitative method is that it can look closer into informal and unstructured organisational processes to investigate the complex processes and their relationships (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). It makes it possible to see the problem in a variety of ways, get a deeper understanding and to be able to identify unanticipated connections (Holme & Solvang, 1997).

A qualitative research has to be carried out with care while the elementary thought behind qualitative research is that the sample should be representative that the event can be repeated outside the sample (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). De Vaus (2002) criticises the qualitative method, arguing that it lacks the ability to generalise hence being to subjective on the interpretations. With this in mind we have followed Mason's (1996) criteria for this kind of research. A qualitative research should be:

- systematically and rigorously accomplished
- strategically conducted, yet flexible and contextual
- critical self-scrutiny, or active reflexivity, by the researcher
- producing social explanations which are able to generalise in some way or have a wider resonance.

In order to follow the first criteria, to create our research systematically and rigorously, we began with discussing everything carefully. We decided how to accomplish our research and made sure we both were going to perform our tasks in the same way, since being in two different countries. To conduct the research strategically, yet flexible and contextual, we had structured questions that we were going to ask managers in the three countries. The questions were open-ended to allow the respondent to answer freely and emphasis questions of special interest and importance. Since we are not experienced researchers we had to encompass critical self-scrutiny and active reflexivity. We have been critical towards our own work and have gone through it several times in order to make changes to the better. Regarding Mason's (1996) last criteria, producing social explanations which are able to generalise in some way or have a wider resonance, it should be emphasised that the purpose of the thesis never was to generalise our study. We have done a qualitative study which presses for understanding the complex interrelationship between the part and the whole (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000). In our case that meant that peoples feelings and ways of thinking was investigated to get an understanding of how women perceive their situation as middle managers. The study deals with personal aspects that have been combined and analysed to create a whole picture.

3.2 Secondary Data

Secondary data has played a big role in the development of the thesis. Smith (2005) argues that almost all research projects should consist of secondary information sources. The search for valuable data should be carried out at an early stage of the research, prior to the empirical study. There are according to Smith (2005) many reasons for the outline. For example, secondary information may be adequate enough to solve the problem without any need of primary data. Additional, the cost of secondary information is just a fraction of what primary data cost, very much thanks to the Internet. Even if the secondary data is not sufficient to meet the purpose it has valuable supplemental uses.

We searched for secondary data in order to obtain a deeper understanding of the subject before we started to conduct the empirical findings. Smith (2005) stresses the magnitude of collecting accurate and relevant data to facilitate a problem solving. The situation of women in management is constantly changing which makes it hard to find accurate literature. Also, a minor drawback is that the literature is not written in the purpose to relate to our specific study. Luckily we had access to an extensive database with peer-reviewed scholarly journals. We also had access to an excellent network of people, among them women that are highly interested in the subject and in some cases also researching about it, which made it easier. The accurate data has not only helped us to obtain a deeper understanding about the situation and problem, it has also served as a platform for the empirical study.

3.3 Interpretive Approach

Hermeneutic is practiced when a researcher interprets and seeks to understand people's actions, what they say, how they say it and also what they write (Patel & Davidson, 2003). Hermeneutic is the science of interpretation, aiming at giving the researcher a full picture. Parts are combined and investigated from different angles in order to create as much understanding within the field as possible (Patel & Davidson (2003); Alvesson & Sköldbberg (2000)). Hermeneutics acts as a circle, the so called hermeneutic circle. *"The part can only be understood from the whole, and the whole only from the parts."* (Alvesson & Sköldbberg (2000), p. 53.)

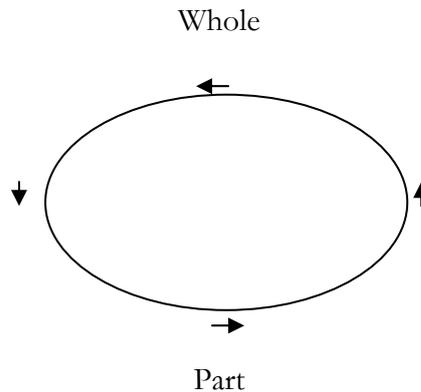


Figure 7 The hermeneutic circle: original version (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000).

We wished to understand the whole picture of how women perceive their situation as middle managers, and in order to do so we looked at the different parts. We separately interviewed women from Germany, Sweden and the UK to get their individual perceptions. The in-depth understanding we gained from these interviews were put together to create a full picture of how women perceive their situation as middle managers. When we did the interviews we had to take into consideration that there are different matters that can influence the way of thinking like for example background, childhood and education (Kylé 2004). Our capability to interpret also depended on the pre-understanding we had formed through studies of the secondary data (Gummesson, 2003). We prepared us well since we knew that the role, we as researchers played, to a large extend depended on our ability to be open to the respondent's opinions, our ability to interpret and understand the meaning of the respondent's words and how engaged we were to get as authentic answers as possible (Patel & Davidson, 2003).

According to Patel and Davidson (2003) the authentic information gathered by the author to get more knowledge in the subject is called empirical findings.

3.3.1 Qualitative Interview

Four different methods can be used to gather information; interviews, surveys, observations, and readings (Kylé, 2004). The theoretical part of the thesis has been constructed with help of readings. The readings form a base for the empirical part where we wished to gain in-depth understanding of how women in practise perceive their situation as managers. Yin (2003) argues that information assembly is an important part of a study. In order to obtain an overall understanding of the research area, information about the subject of the thesis has been gathered and studied, but due to the wide scope of material a selection of all readings have been presented in the thesis.

With the theoretical part as a cornerstone, the empirical part has been constructed through interviews with women in middle management positions in the three chosen European countries. Since the study is about women's situation in management, it deals with personal views and beliefs and therefore interviews were chosen as a method to gather the data for the empirical part. Interviews are suitable as it provides a direct contact with people daily facing the topic the thesis is investigating. Surveys lack this kind of interaction which would

make the study harder to interpret and observation is out of the scope of this study since it means observing the object in its natural environment (Lincoln & Norman, 2000).

An interview is a meeting with one or several people. The interviewer often searches for specific information, hence tries to encourage the interviewee to discuss the topic and answer questions as throughout as possible (Chirban, 1996). To achieve high quality and reduce language barriers, we did our conversations face to-face. This since it provides the best conditions to interpret a person's emotions, motivations and needs, giving the "inner view" of the interviewed person (Chirban, 1996). An interview can give the interviewer a greater understanding of the response since body language makes out a great deal of the conversation. Face to face interviews enable the interviewer to show and keep interest with help of social attributes such as eye contact and nodding. The technique enables follow-up questions that clarify unspecific and unclear answers. This decreases the risk for misunderstandings and consequently making the source more reliable (Hague, 2004). Matters that can influence our way of thinking are for example people's background, upbringing and education (Kylé, 2004). With this in mind, the questions have been designed in an attempt to make them as easy as possible to understand. Hence, then questions are designed in order to be perceived in the same way no matter of national origin, which is of great importance for the quality and trustworthiness of our thesis.

In order to get the intended information from the respondent the interview need to be designed accordingly (Creswell, 2002). Häger (2001) stresses the importance of opening the interview with the basics in order to get an overview, and then go to the problem-based part that will lead the discussion to a conclusion. That technique has to some extent been used for our thesis. Häger (2001) states that two different kinds of questions can be asked open and closed. Open-ended questions allow the interviewee to reply with extensive and describing answers whereas close-ended questions leave the interviewee with no other choice than to answer short and specific. Close-ended questions can be shattering if the interviewee is unwilling to answer. The respondent might answer short with yes or no and then move away from the subject. In most cases the interviewee will reveal less in closed interviews compared to open interviews. Thus the interviewer might become dominant in closed questions (Häger, 2001). To avoid such a scenario an opened question interview has been used. We took great notice of the fact that it is important to let the interviewees answer themselves and that leading questions should be avoided. Moreover, as discussed earlier, questions suitable for follow-up questions are preferred to be used. If an interviewer does not understand an answer fully, a follow-up question can be used to clarify (Häger, 2001). These kinds of questions enabled us to get more extensive interviews with filling answers.

3.4 Empirical Design

Since the study takes an international perspective, the interviews were made in all of the three studied countries. A sufficient amount of interviewees for the study conducted was considered to be between six and ten, which led to the fact that we did three interviews in each county. The sample was chosen through recommendations from our networks. The correspondents were preferred since they have experience and work as middle managers in big organisations, which suites the topic of the thesis very well. Using people from our network was of great advantage because it enabled us to establish good contact with the respondents and we could easily come back if we needed clarification in some of their answers. We had the opportunity to work for at least three month with our interviewees in Germany and UK. This have led to that the interviews could be followed up at any time

and the answers are therefore very accurate and precise. Since we had this great contact with our respondents we did not use a tape recorder during the interviews, instead we went in to their office or phoned them up if we were insecure about something regarding their answers. However, in Sweden we did not have the same possibility to actually work together with the women interviewed. Nonetheless, since all the managers were people from our network it was easy to make contact with them again.

In Germany two of the respondents worked at the Chamber of Commerce, where one of us at the time we conducted the thesis intended an internship. The Chamber of Commerce is a big organisation with several different departments. Our respondents worked in two different departments and had different hierarchical statuses, still both being middle managers. These two women were recommended by the head of the Foreign Trade Office and his employees. The third German interviewee was recommended by the Chamber of Commerce since she is an experienced middle manager at a big energy and water company.

Two of the Swedish respondents are friends to our families while the third is a former co-worker. Our close relationship to them made it easy to obtain access and we were welcome to phone or email them whenever we had any queries.

All the UK managers worked for Ikea. One of us did an internship there and therefore had unlimited access to the managers. All of the managers did have a history as managers from other organisations before. Nonetheless, it would perhaps have created more diversified answers if the managers in UK were not all from the same company. However we argue that their answers instead strengthens the trustworthiness.

Secondary data was used as a foundation for deciding the most relevant questions for the interviews. The interview got divided into four parts, each part containing an area covered by the frame of references. The first section deals with leadership in general. The second section goes deeper to uncover what the respondents think about their situation as women in leadership. The third part investigates the respondent's view towards sex differences in leadership, while the fourth and last part is regarding challenges and obstacles hindering women from advancing further in their career. This section investigates whether a Glass Ceiling exists in the countries and what an organisation can do about it. It also investigates whether the interviewed women fit the patterns of the stereotypes, what organisational structure they work in and what kinds of network they have. One extra question at the very end of the interview asks the respondent what kind of advice she would give a female colleague who wants to take a leadership position.

The very first interview was held in Sweden at the interviewee's home. Since she is a good friend to one of the author's family, it did not matter how long time it took, and therefore we did not do a pre-interview but used this interview as a guideline for the rest of the interviews. Most of the interviewers wanted to know how long time the interview was going to take, which we were able to say after the first interview. One interview took one hour.

The process of collecting data for the frame of references, conducting interview questions, as well as performing the empirical part was carried out in the same way independent of country. We contacted the interviewees and made them choose date and time. During our face-to-face interviews we listened carefully and took notes that were rewritten immediately afterwards in order to recall some of the details being said but not written down. Our next step was to put together the information in a presentable way and there after comparing the empirical findings with literature and drawing parallels between the interviews, within the countries as well as between the countries.

3.5 Analysing the Interviews

After the interview an analysis should be done on the communication between the interviewer and the respondent (Lantz, 1993). When analysing the interviews it is according to Alvesson & Sköldbberg (2000) important to break away from the frame of references and try to understand what the frame of reference is missing. Alvesson & Sköldbberg (2000) argue that it is mostly the other way around that the authors limit the horizon too narrowly. This makes the authors overlook important information that could contribute to a better throughout understanding.

The primary consideration of an empirical oriented study is to acquire good knowledge about a phenomenon through work with the production and cautious interpretation of empirical material. Primary interpretations are made before and during the interaction. The interviewer 'interprets' what can be asked, what have been said previously during the interview and what is being said at the moment as well as what is interesting. The interviewer also interprets if the interviewee has understood the question correctly (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000).

Secondary interpretations includes further in depth analysing of the data (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000). The information retrieved from the interviews were analysed and compared with the frame of references. We compared all interviews separately with the theory in order to find similarities as well as dissimilarities between them.

3.6 Criticism of a Qualitative Research Method

With a qualitative research method the researcher plays a major role. It is the researcher who gathers the information and does the analysis hence the ideas and thoughts of the researcher becomes the basis rather than the data itself (Patel & Tebelius, 1987). To weight up for that, we asked a lot of critical questions such as if the frame of reference was extensive and relevant enough, if there were any factors that have made impacts on the interpretations, and if there are any alternative interpretations. These questions are, according to Patel & Tebelius (1987), important for the researcher to ask her- or himself. We did this throughout the whole study which made us change the work quite a lot. To our advantage we were two and could therefore criticize each other.

According to Stake (1995), the biggest default with a qualitative method is that the qualitative investigation is subjective and that the cost in time and money is very high. In addition personal understanding can always be misunderstood both by the author and by the readers. The misunderstandings will occur because of the researcher are not aware of their own intellectual limitation and because of the weakness in methods that fail to remove misinterpretations. Stake's (1995) words of warnings have not been accurate in our case since we did not have any particular expenses related to the thesis and considering time we are students and are supposed to work academically, which takes time. Conversely, Stake (1995) might have been right in the aspect that we are not professionals and therefore might have been choosing a method that are not as suitable as others might be. However, if we were to make the study once again, we would probably have made it the same way since we think it worked out well. This does not have to mean that we chose the right method, it can as well be due to our "intellectual limitation".

3.6.1 Criticism against Interview as a Method

Since the whole empirical part of the thesis is created by interviews, it is of great importance that they are made correctly. The researcher should for example not tell the respondent too many details of the research since a respondent might feel uncomfortable if feeling too closed studied by the interviewer. If such feelings occur the respondent might answer in a different way than otherwise and might not tell the whole truth (Swedner, 1986). We did not observe any uncomfortable signs from the interviewees which makes us believe we handled this issue well. Another thing to be cautious about, according to Swedner (1978), is that the respondent may tell what she thinks the interviewer want to hear. If this happens, the results will be different from a situation where the respondent would have felt totally secure and comfortable with the situation. Women in management are a topic that created interest and enthusiasm among all our respondents. We therefore argue that it is unlikely that they have told us anything else than their real feelings and believes. However Swedner (1986) stresses another problem which is that the interviewer might take notes only in line with the own interest instead of being interested in everything the respondent says. We had already gained pre-knowledge through secondary data and designed our research and interview questions. This might have resulted in us being too focus on the answers we wanted to hear in order to take much notice of other issues the interviewees rose. However, this is just a speculation.

3.6.2 Trustworthiness

Research should be both reliable and valid. Reliability and validity are related but not the same. A research can be reliable but not valid, and vice versa. Either way, the results can not be perfectly reliable or valid, instead they need to be maximised. The researcher should critically review the work in an attempt to keep the study as trustworthy as possible (De Vaus, 2002).

The research needs to be designed so that it can fulfil its purpose and deliver a conclusion. The validity of a research depends on the definition of the concept it is designed to measure. An immense problem with the validity occurs when the answers from the interviews are to be interpreted (De Vaus, 2002).

The complexity of drawing conclusions from the answers of the interview is referred to internal validity. The more the research method can reduce optional explanations, the stronger is the internal validity (De Vaus, 2001). External validity refers to what extent the results of the study can be representable beyond the scope of the study itself. If the results from the research are limited to suit only the study, the external validity is said to be limited (De Vaus, 2001). Seale (1999) argues that qualitative researchers have difficult in accomplishing external validity.

Referred to the discussions above, we argue that both internal and external validity are accomplished. Regarding the internal validity it should be pointed out that we did not face any difficulties in interpreting the answers from the interviews, and we argue that the thesis fulfils it purpose. Regarding the external validity, it is of importance to stress that the answers from the respondents were quite similar within each county and therefore it can be assumed that the results of the study can be representable beyond the scope of the study itself. Thus, not to forget is that we are no experts within the research area which might lower the validity.

Reliability refers to the ability of the study to be reproduced time after time. If the same results are seen every time the test is run, the study is said to be reliable (De Vaus (2002); Lincoln & Guba (1985)). We have conducted a qualitative study which aims to investigate softer attributes such as feelings (Trost, 2005). We agree with De Vaus (2002) who criticises the qualitative method, arguing that it lacks the ability to generalise. However, the fact that the answers from each country are pretty similar indicates that the empirical findings from the different countries after all are reproducible.

Our interviews are seen as parts to create a whole picture. The fact that these parts, i.e. the interviews, have been conducted by two persons, each one making half of the interviews, decreases the reliability. We might have different ways of asking the questions which could lead to a different outcome than if solely one person would have conducted all interviews. We might also have interpreted the interviews differently. However, since we prepared ourselves carefully and went through how we were going to accomplish our study before we started, we argue that we have performed our tasks in the same way. We have been working together since many years back and are therefore familiar with each others way of working, which in general are very similar. Douglas (1985) argues that humans always will be unpredictable. Due to self-misinterpretations and misrepresentations the result of the interview depends on the situation. With these statements in mind, we attained high self scrutiny as well as a critical view towards the literature covering the subject. We also kept an opened mind when interviewing.

De Vaus (2002) argues that unreliability can have its source from different places. The questions might for an example be phrased in a bad way or the respondent can interpret the question different in different occasions (De Vaus, 2002). If the respondent has a lack of knowledge about the topic or no opinion at all, this can also lead to decrees in the reliability (De Vaus, 2001). The author who made the interviews in Germany faced some difficulties translating the questions between the two languages which might have resulted in some expressions being misunderstood by both the interviewer and the respondent. All the Swedish interviewees showed great interest in the interview questions. The interviews in Sweden were made in Swedish which might have left out, or misunderstood, some expressions when it was translated. However we feel secure with our translation and believe that we have understood and succeeded to translate the questions sufficiently. Also the UK managers were available and very supportive. Since they were made in the same language as the thesis is conducted we did not have any problems with translation.

Even though we faced some problems with the interviews we believe that our empirical findings have high quality, since we managed to create the full picture.

4 Empirical Framework

This section deals with the findings from the empirical study. The section shows the results from the interviews in Germany, Sweden and the UK in an aim of revealing how women perceive their situation as middle managers. The section starts off with a brief introduction of the interviewed managers.

All information in the empirical framework is from the interviews conducted in the three countries Germany, Sweden, and the UK.

The three German interviews were all chosen with help from the Chamber of Commerce in Dresden. Frau Müller (Interviewed 2006-03-13) work as a communication manager at DREWAG: Dresden's Energy and Water company. Before that she worked three years as a project manager and three years as a marketing manager. Frau Pietzschmann (Interviewed 2006-03-08) works as a department manager at the Chamber of Commerce in Dresden, and Frau Pretzsch (Interviewed 2006-03-16) is a manager director at the Chamber of Commerce in Dresden, she has nine people working direct for her.

In Sweden the interviews were conducted from our own network. Karina Lann (Interviewed 2006-03-31) is the Cash Management manager at the Swedish bank Nordea. Lisa Andersson (Interviewed 2006-01-03) is the administrative manager at the Water Purification Office and before she got this position she worked seven years as an auditor. Ann Berntsdotter (Interviewed 2006-01-02) on the other hand, worked as a doctor for ten years before she started at Previa, Sweden's leading company within corporate healthcare. She worked at Previa for one year before she got promoted to a middle manager.

In the UK all the interviews were conducted with middle managers at Ikea. To get a broader perspective on the answers, we made sure that all the managers had worked in other organisations as well. Christine Gordon (Interviewed 2006-03-02) work as the Logistic Administration Manager and Business Control Manager at Ikea and before that she was a manager at Mark & Spencer. Clare Rodgers (Interviewed 2006-02-28) is the only woman on the board at Ikea in Edinburgh and she is the Communication & Design Manager. She is a manger of twenty employees where most of them are line-managers. Before working at Ikea she was an assistant manager and an overall manager in a restaurant for eight years. After working as a supervisor and deputy manager, Lyndsey Abbot (Interviewed 2006-03-10) is today the manager over the two largest departments at Ikea, Cash Office and Bed-rooms. She also worked at Mark & Spencer before. Today she reports to the assistant store manager and are managing thirty-five co-workers and four supervisors.

Sections 4.1-4.3 will illustrate the answers from the interviews with the managers in the three countries. The respondents' answers on our interview questions are fundamental to fulfil the purpose of the thesis, how women in Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom perceive their situation as female leaders in middle management.

4.1 Middle Managers in Germany

4.1.1 Leadership

The three German managers describe a good leader as someone with clear goals, visions, sensitivity and ability to get all the employees involved and contributing. A leader needs to listen to the co-workers and acts as a leader. Frau Pretzsch, who has a higher position than the other interviewed women, also stresses the importance of strong personality and the ability to become a good role model for the employees.

All the managers are satisfied with their current position as it is interesting and they enjoy being involved in everything. The position gives them the opportunity to influence people and to be creative. Frau Pretzsch stresses that she likes the fact that she is not always in the spotlight. If she had been in a higher position this would have been necessary.

All the German women answered that they had progressively worked their way up to their current position. What drives them to take on a higher position is the fact that they all thrive on challenges and want credit for their contribution. Frau Pietzschmann wanted the position as middle manager as it enables her to be more active in the corporation. In addition, Frau Pretzsch adds that she enjoys the loyalty, the co-workers and being a role model.

Frau Pretzsch and Frau Pietzschmann could not come up with any specific example of what could be difficult in a middle manager position, whereas Frau Müller stated it is hard to pass on information from the top level to the employees.

According to the interviewees, German companies lack giving each other feedback. Frau Pretzsch and Frau Müller argued they did not get any feedback at all. Frau Pietzschmann said that she expects her manager to tell her whether she have done a good job or not, while she expects her employees to tell her if they are satisfied in the team. Neither of the managers give much feedback, although, they all said they should. Frau Pietzschmann and Frau Müller did however say that they give some constructive feedback.

4.1.2 Women as Leaders

Frau Pretzsch and Frau Müller both argue that leadership is all about your personality and should have nothing to do with gender. However, Frau Müller believes that women need to be more ambitious than men in order to succeed. She thinks that building networks with both sexes are of great importance for women that want to become leaders. Frau Pretzsch agrees with Frau Müller and adds that it is especially hard for young women to succeed because of the Glass Ceilings that exist in the companies. Frau Pietzschmann argues that a women need to have a balance between the masculine leadership style and the feminine charm. She further states that men expect women to lead like them but they do not accept women to act like them. According to her, women should not be afraid to take a step further in their career.

The women interviewed believe that women are more emotional than men and therefore they will handle personal matters better, recognise problems easier and have a better inclination of whom to choose for a business partner. They argue that women think in different ways which brings with it new perspectives. Frau Müller thinks that women are better at communicating, they can use their charm to get what they want and that a mix between the genders is needed.

Frau Pietzchmann says that some men have problems with women in higher positions and do not always accept it. When they run out of fair “play cards” they might use unfair “play cards”, like using their feminine; caring style against them. The men might say: “*But Frau Pietzschmann, do not take it so personally.*” She argues that she simply can not defend herself against this comment since she is concerned about the matter and fights hard for it. All the interviewed women believe they are supposed to act like men when in a leadership positions. Frau Pretzsch remarks that it is extra hard for young women since they take everything personally. Managers with more experience will be tougher and know how to act.

Frau Müller and Frau Pietzchmann say that they believe that the employees feel that they are always there for them. Frau Pretzsch says that she believes that her employees wish she would give them more feedback.

None of the managers believe that it is easy to combine a career with a family. There is sometimes just not enough time for both and therefore either the family or the career can suffer.

4.1.3 Sex- and Gender Differences in Leadership

According to the three managers in Germany, it does not matter if the manager is a man or a woman. Instead, the matter of importance is that the person has the ability to do the job. The differences between the genders, according to the interviewees, are that women are more sensitive and act more strategically to get what they want. They argue that women tend to express their feeling and talk more openly about issues, for example family problems. In addition they might struggle to resolve an issue if they believe that their decision will hurt or effect another person. Frau Pretzsch argue that men on the other hand are tougher, more straight forward and less emotional. All the interviewees further states that men find it easier to distinguish between what is professional and what is private, however they tend to use their power to influence and can be poor communicators. They argue that in order to achieve the best possible outcome men tend to use threats while women will seek out the best solution in order that everybody is satisfied.

Statistically, women in Germany earn far less than men. One explanation for this is, according to Frau Pretzsch, that women tend to stay within the same company all their life. They do that because they have children to take care of and do not want to leave their family for a career. Men are more career focused and may change their job to gain a better salary or for promotion. Frau Müller is the only one that states that there are not any salary differences within her company.

4.1.4 Obstacles

Stereotypes

The general consensus of risk is that you need to be able to take some risk in order to become successful. The interviewees are, however, more eager to take risks outside work than they are professionally. They would never venture from the company they work for. Frau Pretzsch, on the other hand, states that a leader should be decisive and needs to be able to take risks.

Frau Müller argues that power is a strong word and can be misused. Titles are very important in Germany and many people hide behind them. They give people orders because they

are after all their manager. When a company is performing well the managers may take all the credit and when it goes poorly, they blame the team. A great percentage of managers use more power than necessary and instead Frau Pretzsch prefers to give the employees responsibility and expects everyone to actively participate.

All the managers deal immediately with conflicts in the work place. Frau Pretzsch says conflict is something a leader will in time learn to deal with effectively.

Glass Ceiling

Frau Müller worked as a project manager for three years after her studies, she then worked three years as a marketing manager before receiving the promotion to her current job as the company's communication manager at DREWAG. The one who promoted her was her manager at the highest level in the hierarchy.

It did take Frau Pietzschmann seven years to achieve her current position as a department manager at the Chamber of Commerce in Dresden. She faced huge difficulties getting to her position. This was due to the fact that her manager at that time she worked at her first job did not give her any recognition for her work, instead he took all the credit for the work himself. She believes that the manager probably acted this way because he was afraid of losing his job. Therefore, Frau Pietzschmann never got the opportunity to take the next step in her career. After a few years she decided to act on this and asked the highest manager herself. Today she has six people working directly for her.

Frau Pretzsch on the other hand only had to wait two years until she received her promotion. She was asked by to become a manager director at the Chamber of Commerce in Dresden. She has nine people working direct for her.

All the German women notice that there exists a Glass Ceiling in German organisations. A manager is more likely to hire a man in front of a woman. The reason for this is that women are more likely to have a family, which means they will therefore be entitled to maternity leave and there is also a possibility that they may not return to full time employment. According to the interviewees, a woman that is single, will still not be hired because of the fear that she might be involved in a relationship which may result in her choosing to move away to accommodate her partner. All managers agree that these, unfortunately common views, build up Glass Ceilings towards women.

All the women state that Germany is a male dominated country and that women have difficulties gaining promotion before a certain age. Once that age is passed it can be easier. The age between 30-40 years is particular hard, Frau Müller argues. This is due to the fact that with young women there is the possibility of them starting a family. Frau Pretzsch states that women need to work their way up professionally. A woman has to be very determined in order to success. Frau Pitezschmann believes that men tend to choose men. "*It's like its genetic or something!*" she says.

Organisational Structure

Frau Pretzsch says that the company can, in order to relieve the barrier, hire young women internally when a post is free, instead of externally. She explains that when Germany was divided into East and West, the situation was different in East Germany. Child support was available to everyone, which encouraged all women to work. Frau Pretzsch further states that it would be a great thing to introduce back in to today's system, which would encourage more women to work. Companies could help women by for example offering kinder-

garden. Frau Müller argues that some kind of personal mentor could also be of great help for women and instead of going away on seminars, where you learn everything in theory, it would be better to have a personal mentor to assist women in their place of work.

Frau Müller explained that companies in Germany are hierarchy built which makes managers lose their personal contact with the employees, resulting in managers being a bit left alone. Thus meaning that an employee can not say “you” to the manager and the manager can not say “you” to an employee. Instead she explain that they use their titles to communicate with each other. This is a very polite way of speaking, which people also use when they talk to strangers. Among co-workers it is acceptable to say “you”. Frau Müller also explains that due to this hierarchy, it is also expected that the manager will keep a professional distance from the employees and keep everything on a strict professional level and choose not to discuss personal matters.

Network

The interviewees believe that younger female managers sometimes feel even more excluded, not because of their gender but because the lack of knowledge and experience. Frau Pietzschmann feels excluded when she attends business meetings where everybody, accept her, knows each other. Despite that she believes that she gets hold of all her information while chatting to people at work. Frau Pretzsch does not feel that there are any meetings, places or discussions where she is excluded.

Frau Müller has many friends that also are managers, most of them are in higher positions than she is. This works to her advantage since it gives her the opportunity to talk about her problems in her management role. She also has a network with her management colleges. Frau Müller works in a big company which has a large range of managers where she will on occasion attend breakfast meetings. Frau Pitezschmann says that she has a great network with other leaders. They all meet once a year to discuss issues and problems. She says that it is great as all are in the same positions but in different organisations. Hence there is no rivalry between them. She can freely speak about her concerns and problems and receive suggestions from the others. Frau Pretzsch says that she has many professional networks in her position, for example she has one network for the city Dresden, one for the region Sächsischen Schweiz, one within the business and one network only for woman.

Frau Müller’s manager acts like a mentor for her and gives her support, however, she also talks to her friends to gain support and advice.

4.1.5 Advice

Advice from the managers in Germany to other women:

Frau Müller: *“Always do a good job and the right tasks. One has to think twice if one is capable of the job as a manager. Networking is important to.”*

Frau Pretzch: *“Consider if you have what it takes to become a manager. Do you have the right personality? Can you act as a role model? You need to handle both positive and negative things and be able to cope with setbacks. You need to have a goal and be good with professional contact.”*

Frau Pietzschmann: *“Fight without being too frustrated! Hide your disappointment and make sure your work will be seen! Try to be on the same level as everybody else, do stick out and believe that you are better. Be honest and be a woman!”*

4.2 Middle Managers in Sweden

4.2.1 Leadership

All the Swedish managers believe that good leadership is about having straight forward communication with the employees and communicating clear goals that are easy for everybody in the organisation to understand. Karina Lann adds that leadership is about making strategic decisions and creating guiding stars within the company. In addition Ann Bernsdotter adds attributes as being accessible and able to delegate.

Karina Lann says that she is satisfied with her position at the moment but some weeks during the year involve excessive working hours, reaching up to fifty-five hours per week. Lisa Andersson² states that she is satisfied with her position today and she does not believe that she will aim for a higher position, since a higher positions would involve more work which she feels she already has too much of. Her family suffers which have made her turn down other higher management position offers. Ann Bernsdotter wants to reach higher positions and she has already had a few other opportunities made available to her, but she will stay with her company for a little longer to increase its growth.

Lisa Anderson believes the reason behind women striving higher are their new and demanding working tasks, the opportunity to make a difference, the desire to progress, the higher salary and the benefits.

Karina Lann worked a few years within Cash Management before she was asked to take on a leadership position. She had highlighted her interest to her manager earlier but since she was not prepared to relocate it took a long time for her to get a chance for advancement. Lisa Anderson believes she has advanced progressively while Ann Bernsdotter argues that she has advanced due to the fact that she always aims higher and enjoys the feeling of making progress.

Ann Bernsdotter and Karina Lann face the same challenges in their job. They believe it is hard to make it right for the persons above and below their position. Karina Lann mentions that the hardest task is to support the employer in decisions and then being able to deliver the decision in a way that makes the employees feel that they were involved. On the other hand, Ann Bernsdotter further believes that the hardest challenge is to create a strategic goal-oriented plan where she involves employees in order to make them work efficiently together as a team.

The third manager Lisa Andersson can not see any direct challenges with being a middle manager. Her job involves the opportunity to influence the decision making process in most areas and the most challenging task is to make the right decisions.

All the three Swedish managers expect to get regular, honest and constructive feedback from both their manager and their employees and they argue that the feedback should bring up both good and bad criticism. Lisa Andersson believes that she lacks some negative feedback from her manager. He gives her a great deal of feedback, but it is always positive. She does not believe that she always does everything right and she would want to know ar-

² Lisa Andersson is a fictive name for the interview at the Water Purification Company, since she wants to be anonymous.

as that she needs to improve. In addition all manager wish they would receive more spontaneous feedback from their employees.

4.2.2 Women as Leaders

Ann Bernsdotter and Lisa Andersson answered that there are no specific strategies to help women become leaders. Instead they argue that it is all about their personality and their individual interest. Karina Lann answers that women have a natural ability to lead and plan. She believes that many women have become managers due to the fact that they like to organise and are perfectionists. She argues that women often find it hard to distinguish between work and spare time which results in them often taking the work home with them to finish it. Many women find it hard to let go of the demands that they believe the surroundings have on them. She refers to the need of being successful both at the job and at home.

Ann Bernsdotter and Karina Lann answered that there are no advantages being a woman in management while Lisa Andersson thinks women have a better instinct than men for knowing when and how to do things.

Lisa Andersson argues that the most difficult challenge that a leader faces is conflicts that occur in the workplace. She further states that being a woman often leads to other women being critical towards you, and she believes it is due to jealousy. Ann Bernsdotter and Karina Lann do not believe there are any specific female issues, while Lisa Andersson argues that women are more vulnerable which could make it more difficult to be a leader.

Ann Bernsdotter and Karina Lann believe that the employees perceive them as always available and quick decision makers. Lisa Andersson believes that the men see her more as someone with masculine attributes when it comes to her leadership.

The Swedish managers believe that it is hard to manage both a family and a career and that either of them will be suffering. Karina Lann on the other hand has the privilege to decide herself what hours to work and plan her working week in order to avoid conflicts between her family life and work. Ann Bernsdotter's does not have any kids and she believes that if she did she would have prioritised her family first. She believes that there would have been more women in leadership positions if they did not have kids. Lisa Andersson states that her family has been suffering quite a lot and she has turned down offers for higher positions due to her family commitments.

4.2.3 Sex- and Gender Differences in Leadership

On the question of what different feelings the interviewees have towards having a woman versus a man as a manager, Ann Bernsdotter argues that in her experience men and women leaders are different. In addition she prefers the male leader since males have a clearer management style than females. Karina Lann agrees and further adds that men are more honest, less fussy and they are not jealous of each other. In her opinion she believes that men can wish her good luck and do not perceive her as a threat. Lisa Andersson argues that gender does not matter, its all about personality, ability and knowledge.

Karina Lann argues that there always exists salary differences within an organisation, and often they depend on how many times you have changed position within the company. Her salary is on par with her male counterparts and also with the average salary of managers leading the same amount of people. Ann Bernsdotter and Lisa Andersson argue that sala-

ries are individual depending on skills and performance but also have a great deal to do with how you have negotiated your salary and both of them agree that men are better at negotiating than women.

4.2.4 Obstacles

Stereotypes

All three managers perceive power as something positive and Karina Lann tries to use it within her team. She believes that knowledge to some extent is power which needs to be used to create teamwork in the organisation. In addition Ann Bernsdotter says that you need to be risky sometimes in order to win.

A leader needs to make uncomfortable decisions and believe in them. According to the managers, conflicts have to be dealt with immediately and it is the manager's duty to talk directly with the involved parties to solve any issues.

Glass Ceiling

The managers that promoted the interviewees did not have the same positions in their organisations. Lisa Andersson was promoted by a board director, while Ann Bernsdotter was promoted by two of her managers. Karina Lann on the other hand, answered that she got promoted by her manager, the region manager, and the human resource manager together.

It took Karina Lann six years to become a manager from the day she decided to take a step further in her career. The reason it took so long was due to the fact that she had small children and was therefore not prepared to work in other cities where she was offered the position. She also turned down some other opportunities in closer areas while she perceived the organisations as being too small.

Lisa Andersson worked seven years as an auditor and one year within the Water Purification Office before as she was promoted to become the administrative manager. In total, 200 people work for the company.

Ann Bernsdotter worked as a doctor for 10 years before she started at Previa, Sweden's leading company within corporate healthcare. She worked one year for Previa before she was promoted, and she immediately saw her chance to advance further in the organisation.

Ann Bernsdotter and Karina Lann can not identify any kinds of Glass Ceilings within their companies. According to Lisa Andersson, men in the higher positions do not understand women and they argue that some men feel threatened by women since they can not relate to the behaviour of a woman. The managers responsible for recruitment prefer to hire somebody like them and therefore they tend to hire men. There are simply too few women in higher positions.

Organisational Structure

Lisa Andersson argues that an increase of women in higher positions will lead to more women being hired. Moreover, women need to have more role models to get inspiration and feedback from. Lisa Andersson does, however, not want to blame everything on the board, since she argues that women need to improve their own self-confidence. According to her, a lot of women have the mistaken believe that a management position includes

working much more hours than other positions and that it is impossible to combine such a position with a private life.

To contradict, Ann Bernsdotter believes that the board has a very high responsibility. She argues that it is up to the board to choose the right people. The board decides much of the company's culture when hiring the staff and they need to choose people from both sexes.

Karina Lann argues that leaders need to encourage women to take part in the available courses and support them to take a step further in their career. There are mentor programs available for women, but it is up to the women to take the next step to actually join them. It is her role as a leader to recognise the employees' career plans and help them to consider a future career.

Network

None of the managers feel that they have been excluded from meetings, places or discussions. Neither do any of them participate in any direct networks, except from the one they have gained through work. Lisa Andersson meets the other administrative managers from all the other technical administration units, as well as managers within the large cities in the Nordic countries. She argues that contacts are essential. Karina Lann still has a few networks with group members from her earlier leadership courses. She also participates in networks on a Nordic level, but all of them come from the Cash Management-organisation. Karina Lann says that it is an advantage to have a few different networks since it enables her to discuss and share problematic and successful experience. Ann Bernsdotter does not have any networks at the moment but used to be engaged in a network for female doctors when she worked at the hospital.

4.2.5 Advice

Advice from the managers in Sweden to other women:

Karina Lann: *"Take a step forward. Confess what you are truly good and that you can do it! You will succeed as soon as you leave the Swedish so called "Jantelagen"³ behind you"*

Lisa Andersson: *"Have a humble attitude to begin with but show how you would like things to be done. A manager needs to be intelligent and listen to the co-workers. Since a manager can not handle everything alone, it is important to get all the employees involved. When listening to the employees and get them enthusiastic about your ideas, there is a lot to win.*

Ann Bernsdotter: *"I would like to dedicate this to everybody, despite gender. Be yourself; be honest, available, and listening. A manager needs to be goal oriented and make decisions even though everything does not always turn out the way they were supposed to."*

³ Jantelagen is a concept from Aksel Sandemose. It is ten rules that is built on the belief that no one is better than me, and no one can teach me anything.

4.3 Middle Managers in UK

4.3.1 Leadership

When it comes to defining leadership all the managers interviewed want to see leadership skills as leading by good values, being objective, fair and being a good listener who actually hear what people say. Christine Gordon argues that it is also important that a leader will be there for the co-workers. According to the three women interviewed a leader needs to be able to pay attention to new ideas and change their minds when needed.

Christine Gordon further argues that leadership skills are abilities that certain people already have, but also a good leadership profile needs to be built up through recognition and trust. It is about what the leader achieves and how it is achieved that matters. A leader needs to stand out from the crowd and have the capability to motivate people. Respect is also something that needs to be gained and earned. According to Lyndsey Abbott a good leader needs to understand that all people are different, and even though people have the same skills and strengths, they will accomplish tasks differently. The general consensus feels that leadership skills depend on your personality and not on gender.

All three managers in the UK want to advance to a higher position in the future, but at the moment they are all feeling satisfied with their positions. This is due to the fact that their current work is rewarding, challenging and inspiring. Clare Rodgers needs to feel productive and happy and it is important that her employees are satisfied and work hard. If the employees are not working hard it is difficult for her to feel motivated and to work hard also.

All of the three managers have their own goals for where they want to be in the next five or ten years. Why the interviewees want to strive higher is of course due to a higher salary but also because they need to feel challenged. All three feel that they are very ambitious and need to have a job that excites them. According to the interviews, promotion is evidence that they are capable of doing more and that they want to make progress in their career. Lyndsey Abbott's goal, for example, is to become the store manager. However, none of them would ever take a job due to the fact that they are women; the managers need to be seen and judged for who they are and how good they are, despite gender.

According to Clare Rodgers, for a women being a middle manager the hardest barrier is to manage the different needs between what senior manager's demand of them, and what their employees can actually accomplish. This can create a conflict of interest. She feels that middle managers need to deliver what is expected from them as a manager at the same time employees need to be happy and get enough time to complete the tasks. It is also to achieve a balance between tasks and development of others, and development of oneself. According to Christine Gordon it creates a conflict between what you must do and what you believe is humanly possible. Lyndsey Abbott believes that a leader also needs to have the right negotiation skills. She believes that a manager needs to be able to convince both the senior manager and the employees about a new idea and get everyone involved in it.

Ikea conduct yearly development talks that give everyone feedback, managers as well as co-workers. According to Christine Gordon, the feedback from managers will not differ because of gender but due to personalities. People are different and tend to give feedback in different ways. All the interviewed women want to have regular day to day feedback and they all think that they get that. Clare Rodgers argues that it is important to identify a per-

sonal leadership style. Every leader has a different style and it is also essential for a leader to see the person for who he or she is, not all people wants to be dealt with the same way. All of the interviewees try to give day-to-day feedback since that is what they expect from their managers. Christine Gordon says that it is important to give both good and bad criticism, but it is vital to remember to also be positive. The development talk should not bring up any surprises according to her.

4.3.2 Women as Leaders

All the three managers agree that there are no particular talents that are held by only men or women, instead ability can differ due to diverse personalities. Clare Rodgers believes it is only minor differences between men and women, if any, and that is why she does not believe that women need any special strategies to become managers. Christine Gordon says *“Leadership is about the need to deliver what you are told to deliver or what you have planned to deliver”*. The only minor skill that Lyndsey Abbot could think of as a difference between the genders are that women can be more emotional than men, however that ability will often help women to bring something new to the discussion. In addition to that, Clare Rodgers argues that women tend to build stronger relationships with other women which can be dangerous to the team if not handled carefully. Moreover, women tend to over-analyze every now and then.

The three managers in UK think that one advantage of being a woman is that women often have a greater knowledge of people’s feelings. Women often become closer to people and have a greater empathy. Lyndsey Abbott feels that it is easier to ask people for favours as a woman, but apart from that there are only disadvantages of being a woman in management, especially if you have children.

The hardest thing about being a woman according to Christine Gordon, is not being given the respect deserved, or when they do not see women’s capabilities. Lyndsey Abbot does, however, believe that the problem has more to do with age than with gender. She is only 28 years old and therefore the youngest manager at Ikea. She feels that it is more difficult to be a manager when you are young. According to her, problems can occur when older co-workers do not take her seriously as they have kids of her age.

All the managers feel that most of the co-workers perceive them as effective leaders that are fair, good listeners, open, trusted, supportive and direct. Plus they take the time to truly get to know them. None of them feel that they are looked upon differently since they are women.

Lyndsey Abbott is the only one of the three managers’ interviewed that is married and she can not see any conflict in having both a family and a career. According to her, Ikea is very good at helping people to get back to their current position or even getting higher positions after having kids. Clare Rodgers is living alone and is often perceived as working too hard. However, Christine Gordon tries to see the difference between working for Ikea and working for your own company. *“In that way you will realise when it is time to go home”*, she says. *“It does not matter if you have a family or not, everyone need some time for themselves”*.

4.3.3 Sex- and Gender Differences in Leadership

At present Christine Gordon only has men above her in her position, and she actually prefers it that way. In all positions in her career she feels that it is easier to work with men than women due to the fact that men are not as complicated and do not over-analyze. Women leaders can also be unpredictable, due to having their period. But in the bigger picture she does not believe there is a difference. When Christine Gordon worked for Mark & Spencer, women dominated the company on a lower level, but in the manager positions there were far more men. According to Lyndsey Abbott there will always be some people that can feel that it is unusual and strange to be led by a woman. All three interviewees agree that it should not matter if they had a man or a woman as a manager since it is all about personalities, but despite that everyone prefers to have a man as a manager.

When it comes to differences in salary the managers argue that it does not tend to be any differences in retail, but there maybe are more differences when looking at the highest positions in sectors like finance and IT. The difference in salaries that Lyndsey Abbot is aware of are that salaries are built upon experience and how long you have worked within the company. She further states that this can make unfair distinctions since a specialist might have almost the same salary as the managers.

4.3.4 Obstacles

Stereotypes

When it comes to how risky women are as managers they all seem to be very over-analysing and do not take a great number of risks. Clare Rodgers states she will take more risks when she feels completely confident in her position. Right now the job is new to her and therefore it will take her some time before she will take more risks.

Clare Rodgers and Christine Gordon relate to the word power as a negative word. Both of them know that they have power, although they prefer to see it as having responsibilities and influencing people to follow them. Lyndsey Abbott on the other hand thinks of power as a positive word. She claims that managers have power due to their knowledge, skills, experience, and personality. Further she states that with power people can manage to control and take advantage over others. But it is important to realize that power should be handled in the right way since too much power can be very frightening.

When problems and conflicts occur in the workplace all of the managers interviewed agree that it needs to be dealt with immediately. Their suggestion is to ask the ones involved to solve the problem themselves and then come forward with a solution. If that is not possible the manager need to discuss it separately with the people involved.

Glass Ceiling

On the question of who has been promoting the women through their career, their answers differ. Christine Gordon has been promoted by several people on different levels in the hierarchy, while Clare Rodgers has only been promoted by men from the board through a mutual conversation. In addition, all of Lyndsey Abbott's promotions have come from her gathering the board to tell them her plans, goals and visions.

It took Christine Gordon eleven years to become a manager for Mark & Spencer where she stayed for six years before applying for a manager position at Ikea. She is now the Logistic Administration Manager and Business Control Manager.

Clare Rodgers on the other hand advanced after three years due to re-structuring of her current department. She is now the Communication & Design Manager and has worked five and a half year for Ikea. She is a manger of twenty employees where most of them are line-managers. Before working at Ikea she was an assistant manager and an overall manager in restaurant for eight years.

Lyndsey Abbott became a manager after three years with Ikea when she was only twenty-five years old. After working as a supervisor and deputy manager, she is today the manager over the two largest departments at Ikea. She reports to the assistant store manager and are managing thirty-five co-workers and four supervisors.

It does not appear that any of the managers have experienced any Glass Ceiling in the companies they have worked for. In Ikea for example seventy percent are women in the middle manager positions. It is when looking at positions higher up that the differences is more obvious. Clare Rodgers is a part of the board and she is more or less the only woman. Christine Gordon claims that in almost any sector you will see the difference between the number of women in middle managers' positions and senior managers positions, and often she believe that women have chosen that themselves.

Organisational structure

What organisations can do to help women to take on higher positions is in Christine Gordon opinion to be more flexibility in positions of authority. At the moment almost every position above a co-worker is fulltime. In addition Lyndsey Abbot argues that maternity leave could be handled better. As it is today it is up to the individual managers to decide how flexible he or she wants to be when it comes to helping women that come back from maternity leave. Clare Rodgers believes that it should be the same for everyone and that the decision should be made by someone higher up in the organisation

Network

Clare Rodgers argues that there are for the most part women in similar position as her in other stores. However, since she is the only women on the board and two of the managers have worked together for many years now, she can feel a little left out. In Lyndsey Abbott's position where there are a lot of women in the same position, however, she can feel that some of the women managers make decisions without involving her. If this happen she always tells people that she needs to be involved and argues that if people do not speak up and tell them what they think, it is their own fault if decisions are made without them.

Christine Gordon claims that the Old-Boys network does exist and it can be very difficult to be a woman trying to get involved in it. She gives the advice of trying to build up an individual relationship with every single person so that they will feel guilty if they do not tell everything to everyone. Women need to blend themselves into the men's network instead of building up their own. None of the women have ever had a mentor. They see their manager as their mentor, but also other people in the same position or even friends outside work.

4.3.5 Advice

Advice from the managers in UK to other women:

Christine; *“Do not avoid tackling issues, since they will only get bigger the longer you wait. Explain everything that goes on to your co-worker so that they will feel more dedicated to work. The longest journey starts with a single step!”*

Clare; *“Work hard, be honest & straight forward and see the bigger picture, it is not only about managing your department, it is about seeing the whole store.”*

Lyndsey; *“Have clear goals and be determined!”*

5 Analysis

When analysing the empirical material collected, we try to see the similarities and differences between the empirical framework and the frame of references in order to create a picture of how women perceive their situation as leaders.

5.1 Middle Managers in Germany

5.1.1 Leadership

In accordance to how a leader should be the German managers mention a wide range of the same attributes as Adair (2003), Arhén (1996) and Williams (2005), such as having clear goals, visions, sensitivity and ability to get all the employees involved, but they also stress Arhén's (1996) second ranking of the wished attributes, efficiency and result. We are not surprised that the German manager mentions efficiency and results since this very much belongs to the German culture.

Mattis (2001) stresses the important of feedback from the CEO in order to make it easier for women to reach management positions, as well as mentoring others to guide and prepare them for leadership positions. The German interviewees state that they lack feedback and Frau Pretzsch and Frau Müller argue they do not get any feedback at all. Neither of the managers give much feedback, although, they themselves said they should. We asked ourselves if the lack of feedback makes it harder for the German managers to advance in the organisations. This is a question we will come back to later on in the analysis.

5.1.2 Women as Leaders

Frau Pretzsch and Frau Müller both argue that leadership is all about personalities. We agree with the managers and Arhén (1996) when stating that leadership should have nothing to do with gender. However, Frau Müller believes that women need to be more ambitious than men in order to succeed. She thinks that building networks with both sexes are of great importance for women that want to become leaders. Moore & Webb (1998) argue that networking has been identified as a useful process to assist women who are seeking to advance. Networking is also a topic that we will discuss more in depth later on in the analysis. Frau Pietzschmann argues that a woman needs to have a balance between the masculine leadership style and the feminine charm. The men expect women to lead like them but they do not accept women to act like them. This theory is supported by Marklund & Snickare (2005).

Case (1985) states, along with the German managers, that women are seen as better communicators. Frau Müller further believes that a mix between the genders is needed. In addition, Loden (1985) and Wirth (2000) argue that the best leadership is often when men and women work together and compliment each other, giving the company a balanced mix between the feminine and masculine attributes.

We believe that there are still a lot of challenges in the workplace, this is also argued by Wirth (2000). One obstacle is for example that women should have the responsibility for the well-being of the family. This means that women need to balance family and work, which all the German managers consider as a difficult task. There is often not enough time for both and therefore either the family or the career will suffer.

5.1.3 Sex-and Gender Differences in Leadership

The German managers differ from Farrell's (2005) conclusion, stating that both sexes prefer men as their manager. Instead they argue that it does not matter what sex their manager is and the matter of importance is whether the person has the ability to do the job. In the frame of reference we statistically showed that there are far less women than men in leadership positions. We believe that the German women wish there were more women in leadership since that most likely would ease their situation as female managers.

The main differences between the sexes, according to all the three interviewees, are that women act more strategically to get what they want and are more sensitive and emotional. Krusell & Alexander (1971) also argue that women are more emotional.

According to Case (1985), women and men often communicate in different ways. Case (1985), Howard & Bray (1988) and the German managers all argue that women are better communicators. The Harvard Business Review mentions in one of its articles, "Ways women lead", that according to several female leaders interviewed, power and information need to be shared to create trust, but they also help to enhance general communication in the organisation (Rosener, 1990) which the German managers agree with.

5.1.4 Obstacles

Stereotypes

The German managers view risk in two ways, one professionally and one personally. The interviewees are, however, more eager to take risks outside work than they are professionally. They would never venture from the company they work for. This is also stressed by Larwood & Wood (1977) who argue that women are not as keen on taking risk as men are. Frau Pretzsch, who has most experience and the highest position among the German interviewees, does however state that a leader should be decisive and needs to be able to take risks.

As Ahrén (1996) argues is typical, the German managers view power negatively. The hierarchy in Germany makes people look just at the titles and obey thereafter. This is also something that we noticed when working in Germany. Also the German manager fall under Maier's (1992) theory that the feminine view conflict as something that is important to get issues resolved and understood. All the managers deal immediately with conflicts in the work place.

Glass Ceiling

Drake & Solberg's (1995) definition of Glass Ceiling as visible and invisible as well as conscious and unconscious mechanisms is very much present in the German society, according to the three managers. The interviewees agree that the society depend on, as Wirth (2000) also argues, the woman's responsibility for the well-being of the family. This can clearly be seen when living in Germany. The interviewees state that German managers are afraid of hiring a woman due to the fact that she might be away from work due to family issues. The Glass Ceiling Commission stated that the barrier still was denying a number of people the opportunity to compete for, and hold, executive level positions (Gregory, 2001), which is confirmed by the interviewees.

Simpson & Altman (2004) argue that the Glass Ceiling is time bound and that the age of the person in question is the critical discrimination factor, not the gender. The interviewees agree that age matters but not that gender is irrelevant. Being older and already having children seems to be a calming factor for the employer. A German woman with grown up children is more attractive for higher positions due to her stable situation, says Frau Pretzsch.

Morrisson (1992) argues that when a Glass Ceiling exists a pay inequity often exists as well. Women often earn less than men for the same work. It is statistically clear that pay inequity exists between women and men in Germany, which the interviewees also confirmed.

Organisational Structure

Mattis (2001) argues that the CEO of the company should be engaged in getting more women to the management posts. Frau Pietzchmann states that this is definitely not the case in her big organisation. She argues that her manager will choose a man for the higher management posts. According to her, everybody knows that is the truth. Rindfleish & Sheridan (2004) argue that a very important aspect to equality is the ability to move around within the organisation. Frau Pretzsch suggested that her company can, in order to remove the Glass Ceiling barrier, replace the posts from retired employees internally by younger women to give them a chance instead of recruiting externally.

Mattis (2001) also mentions the importance of mentoring and feedback for advancement, which were other aspects discussed by the interviewees. They all wished they both gave and received more feedback. As mentioned earlier, the lack of feedback might be of bigger importance than the managers are aware of. To us, it does not seem like the Germans are getting any support at all, which might hinder them from advancing in their career. If employees never hear that they are doing a good job or in what areas they can improve, they are unlikely to advance in their careers. In order to improve the situation for women, Frau Müller suggests that a personal mentor could be used to assist them in their place of work instead of sending them on seminars, where you only learn the things theoretically. This is also mentioned by Rindfleish & Sheridan (2004) who argue that internal actions such as to imply a mentor system in the organisation can be one step to reduce inequity.

Network

Moore & Webb (1998) state that women do not have the large, strong network that men have, which will give them a disadvantage in the workplace. The German managers do feel excluded in many networks. This is however due to the hierarchy that separates managers from employees. Also younger female managers sometimes feel even more excluded, not because of their gender, but because the lack of knowledge and experience.

Among the German managers, informal and community-based networks, described by Berkelaar (1991), can be found. The interviewees view these networks as of great importance since it gives them the opportunity to discuss management as well as other issues and hopefully get some advice. In addition, they say that the networks provide them with good and perhaps essential contacts. WetFeet (2003) and Moore & Webb (1998) agree with the German managers about the importance of networks. According to all of them, strong networks will provide power in several ways.

Frau Pietzchmann expressed the same concerns as Rhode (2003). While most men are used to work with men and are most comfortable with that, they will continue to hire men that

are equal to themselves. Frau Pitezschmann expresses her frustration with the exclamation: “*It’s like its genetic or something!*” We argue that the homosociality is big in Germany and prevent women both from belonging to network and from being promoted.

5.2 Middle Managers in Sweden

5.2.1 Leadership

The Swedish managers’ argument resembles that of Arhén (1996) and Williams (2005) in that the most important abilities a leader can possess are communication and the creation of good relationships with employees. The Swedish managers also stress Williams’ (2005) arguments about flexibility and differentiation of response, and that it also is important to be consistent with the ground rules so that the leaders retain their crucial source of influence. In addition the Swedish managers also stress that a leader should be result driven, have high goals, give straight forward directions, as well as be determined.

Regarding the earlier discussions about how Mattis (2001) stresses the importance of feedback, the Swedish managers expect to get regular, honest and constructive feedback from both their manager and their employees. The feedback should be both about positive and negative. According to the interviewees themselves, they constantly give their employees constructive feedback, both when it is good and bad. According to us, feedback is part of a typical Swedish working environment.

5.2.2 Women as Leaders

Two of the Swedish managers, Ann Bernsdotter and Lisa Andersson, also support the Arhén (1996), Dahlbom-Hall (2004) and Powell & Graves (2003) theory, arguing that there are no specific strategies to help women become leaders. Instead they argue that it is all about personality and individual interest. However, there are some specific characteristics a manager needs to possess. Karina Lann states that women have a natural ability to lead and plan. She believes that many women have become managers due to the fact that they like to organise and want everything to be perfect. Karina Lann’s theory goes against Howard & Bray’s (1988) who argue that men and women are equally well on planning, organising, and decision-making. Ann Bernsdotter and Karina Lann argue that there are no advantages of being a woman in management while Lisa Andersson thinks women have a better feeling than men for knowing when and how to do things. This might be due to, as Rosener (1991) argues, that women are more relation-orientated than men.

In the literature we have not found any support that women would be a problem for other women in management. However, Lisa Andersson argues that being a woman often lead to that other women become critical towards you, and she believes it is due to jealousy. We believe that this is one of the biggest obstacles for women to overcome, that women seem to prefer men as their managers instead of women. Rather, the old fashion attitudes, that men tend to stereotype women’s behaviour and treat them as they all had the same personality and qualifications, is otherwise argued as being a huge obstacle for women (Davidson & Cooper, 1993). Ann Bernsdotter and Marklund & Snickare (2005) argue that it is harder for women in management positions while they have to be tougher than they of nature are, which might go against their personality. Dahlbom-Hall (2004) argues that it is very important that an individual is comfortable with themselves in a position. Dahlbom-Hall (2004), stresses the importance of showing happiness in a leadership position which is something

that can only be done if being comfortable with ones identity and not caught in a role (Dahlbom-Hall, cited in Eriksson, 2004). The Swedes argue like the Germans and Wirth (2000), that family and career are hard to combine. The managers think that there is not enough time for both.

5.2.3 Sex-and Gender Differences in Leadership

Like most other managers Ann Bernsdotter and Karina Lann prefer a man as a manager while Lisa Andersson argues that gender does not matter, instead personality, ability and knowledge make a good manager. In addition, she argues with Powell & Graves (2003) that when stereotyping people because of their sex we stop looking at people as the individuals they are. We argue that it can be dangerous to look at stereotypical issues instead of the individual itself, since the opportunity of hiring the right people could be foregone.

5.2.4 Obstacles

Stereotypes

The Swedish managers do not think negative about the word power as Ahrén's (1996) argues is common among women. All three managers perceive power as something positive. Karina Lann tries to use it within her team believing that knowledge to some extent is power which needs to be used to create teamwork in the organisation. In addition, we believe that the word power can not be used as a way to stereotype women, since it seem to differ with personality.

The Swedish managers argue that as a leader, you need to make uncomfortable decisions and stand behind them. Conflicts have to be dealt with immediately and it is the manager's duty to talk directly with the involved person to solve issues. Maier (1992) states that viewing conflict as something important and getting issues resolved and understood is a feminine perspective. We argue that conflict is one of the few stereotypes that actually exist in Sweden, women do seem to view conflict as something important that need to be taken care of.

Glass Ceiling

Lisa Andersson is the only one of the Swedish managers that believes that a Glass Ceiling exists. According to her, men at the higher positions do not understand women and she argues that some men feel threatened by women since they can not recognise themselves in the behaviour of a woman. Lisa Andersson argues that often the hiring managers prefer to hire somebody like themselves and therefore they tend to hire men. This is also claimed by Davidson & Cooper (1993), who argue that men tend to stereotype women's behaviour and treat them as they all had the same personality and qualifications, which will hindrance women to take further steps in their career. If this is the case, then it is not hard to understand why women are underrepresented in management positions.

According to Statistics Sweden (SCB, 2006a), Swedish women in general earn ninety-two percent of what men earn for the same job. The Swedish managers argue that salary differences depend on professional experience and negotiation skills. Ann Bernsdotter and Lisa Andersson argue that women are often bad at negotiating, worse than men.

Organisational Structure

According to Larsson (2006), a common explanation for the lack of women in higher positions is that the boards and top positions have always been occupied by men, which has created a male friendly climate due to the shared network they access. Ann Bernsdotter believes that the board has a very high responsibility. She argues that it is up to the board to choose the right people. The board decides much of the company's culture when hiring the staff and they need to choose people of both sexes. Rindfleish & Sheridan (2004) states that a lot of women in management positions will make a difference, and the responsibility of change will rest on the shoulders of individuals. We agree with Lisa Andersson that women in higher positions should act as role models and encourage more women to take on management positions. She does however not want to blame everything on the board, since she argues that women need to improve their self-awareness. She states that it is not just that women do not have enough belief in themselves, but also that a lot of women also believe that a management position includes working much more hours than other positions and that it is impossible to combine such a position with a private life. Rhode (2003) argues that women must be aware of their strengths and weaknesses, have a mental toughness, and have someone that can support them with advice, in order to get opportunities in leadership.

A key way to get more women in management positions is, as Mattis (2001) discusses, to have a mentor. The Swedish managers strongly agree with this idea. They believe that a mentor encourage women to take the step to become a manager. Karina Lann argues that leaders need to encourage women to take part of available courses and support them to take a step further in their career. There are mentor programs for women available, but it is up to the women to take the next step to actually join them. It is in her role as a leader to recognise the employees' career plans and help them to consider a future career. We feel very optimistic about the fact that the managers are so positive to mentorship. We believe that it will ease women's situation and increase the amount of women in management.

Network

According to Moore and Webb (1998), it is of great importance for people to be involved in all networks. They argue that women do not have the large, strong network that men have, which will give them a disadvantage in the workplace. Neither of the Swedish managers participates in any direct networks, except from the one they have gained through work. It is obviously enough since none of the managers feel that they have felt excluded from meetings, places or discussions.

They all argue that networks are an advantage, since it enables them more possibilities to discuss issues, get new inputs and receive feedback. According to Moore & Webb (1998), having a strong network will provide power in several ways; it boosts the reputation as a team player and it helps employees to acquire the information guidance, feedback, and social support necessary for career success. Networking has been identified as a useful process to assist women who are seeking to advance their careers.

5.3 Middle Managers in the UK

5.3.1 Leadership

According to Adair (2003), Arhén (1996) and Williams (2005) a leader should be a motivating team player with great communication who chooses the right people to work with the right tasks. Overall, the authors' view of leadership is the same as the UK managers', who said that they see leadership skills as leading by good values, being objective, fair and being a good listener who actually hears what people say.

The UK managers also stress the importance of the leader standing out from the crowd and doing things others are not capable of. A leader should be natural born but also needs to work hard to earn the respect needed for the position. Adair (2003) agrees that a leader should have some kind of special potential and that the person has to work on his or her profile to attain the right standard but the UK managers' argument that a leader needs to stand out from the crowd add to the frame of references.

The interviewees say that Ikea conducts yearly development talks to give everyone feedback. All the interviewed women agree with Mattis (2001) regarding the importance of feedback to guide and prepare them for leadership positions. They wished to have regular day-to-day feedback and they all think that they get that. They stated just like Dahlbom-Hall (2004) that it is important to identify a personal leadership style. Since the interviewees expect managers to give day-to-day feedback they practice it themselves with their employees.

5.3.2 Women as Leaders

With support from Arhén (1996), Dahlbom-Hall (2004) and Powell & Graves (2003) the UK managers argue that there are no particular talents that are held by only men or women, instead ability can differ due to diverse personalities. The only minor difference in Rosener's (1991) argument, is that gender differences exist in that women are more relation-orientated, nurturing and caring. The three managers in UK believe that this is to the advantage of women, since that enables them to have a greater knowledge of people's feelings. Lyndsey Abbott feels that it is easier to ask people for favours as a woman, but apart from that there are only disadvantages of being a woman in management, especially if one has children. Wirth (2000) argues that there still exist obstacles for women to combine career and family. This is being denied by the managers in UK who argues that Ikea is very good at supporting people's private life.

5.3.3 Sex- and Gender Differences in Leadership

According to the interviews, most female managers have female staff and a male manager. Davidson & Cooper (1993) argue that a lot of stress is put on women according to the fact that their manager is often a man and men tend to rule an organisation in a different way than women. This could make it difficult for them to work as a manager. Also prejudice and discrimination are big factors to stress. Farrell's (2005) survey, done in twenty-two countries, concludes that both sexes prefer men as their manager. We believe that one of the biggest differences between men and women are that men favour their own sex for leadership positions, while our interviewee prefers men. Despite that, the women argue that it should not matter if they had a man or a woman as a manager since it is all about

personalities. Christine Gordon argues that she prefer a man due to the fact that men are not as complicated and do not over-analyze. According to Lyndsey Abbott there will always be some people that feel that it is unusual and strange to be led by a woman who, according to Davidson & Cooper (1993), depends on the old fashion attitudes that men tend to stereotype women's behaviour and treat them as they all had the same personality and qualifications.

5.3.4 Obstacles

Stereotypes

Larwood & Wood (1977) argue that women are not as keen on taking risks as men are, however these differences will disappear when women get involved and get experience. This statement fits very well with the UK managers working style; they are over-analytical and do not take risks. Clare Rodgers states she will take more risks when she feels completely confident in her position.

Arhén (1996) argues that the word power used to be perceived as a very negative word by women but that they are forming a more positive attitude towards the word. Nonetheless, Clare Rodgers and Christine Gordon still have negative associations with the word power. Both of them know that they have power, although they prefer to see it as having responsibilities and influencing people to follow them. According to Arhén (1996) and Bass (1990) when one has a lot of power, one is able to change things and make final decisions. Lyndsey Abbott believes that power is a good tool to get things done the way she wants and she thinks of power as a positive word. She claims that managers have power due to their knowledge, skills, experience, and personality.

Maier (1992) states that in the masculine view conflict are something negative and threatening, while according to the feminine view conflict is something that is important to get issues resolved and understood. The UK managers supported this statement, all arguing that problems and conflicts that occur in the workplace needs to be dealt with immediately.

Glass Ceiling

Wirth (2000) argues that almost all over the world, there seems to be a rising trend of women in business and politics with organisations actually hiring women executives for their abilities. This has had a good effect in the UK because it does not appear that any of the interviewed managers have experienced any Glass Ceiling in the companies they have worked for. In Ikea for example, seventy percent are women in the middle manager positions. We believe that the managers at Ikea might give somewhat misleading answers compared to the whole UK since they are run as a Swedish organisation. The interviewees further argue that the differences are more obvious when looking at positions higher up in the organisation. This is also confirmed by Wirth (2000) who states that the gap between men and women is even bigger at the higher positions.

Morrisson (1992) argues that women often earn less than men for the same work. The UK interviewees claim that when it comes to the differences in salaries there does not tend to be differences in retail. Also here we argue that this might be the case due to that the interviews were all within retail and that other figures will be found when looking at other sectors. The Labour Force Survey (2003) states that women tend to earn less than men due to women being employed in occupations that have lower salaries.

Organisational Structure

The UK managers argue with Rindfleish & Sheridan (2004) that managers need to see and understand the difference between an individual's preferences, abilities and skills and how this lead to differential outcomes for women and men in management positions. The UK managers argue that for example maternity leave could be handled better since it is the biggest challenge for women.

Network

The UK managers agree with Moore & Webb (1998) that women have a disadvantage in the workplace since they do not have the large, strong network that men have. The managers from UK sometimes feel that they are left out. They agree with Farrell (2005) that the Old-Boys network does exist and that it can make it very difficult for them. Moore & Webb (1998) stress the importance of having a strong network since it will provide power in several ways. Networking has been identified as a useful process to assist women who are seeking to advance their careers. In order to get access to such a network Christine Gordon gives the advice of trying to build up an individual relationship with every single person so that they will feel guilty if they do not tell her everything. But instead of creating their own networks, like Schmuck (1986) states women started doing in the 80s, Christine Gordon argues that women need to blend themselves into the men's network.

5.4 Parallels between Germany, Sweden and the UK

All the managers interviewed mention attributes on a leader as having a vision, a good relationship with its employees, a strong personality and being a role model. They argue that feedback is very important, however the Germans argue, in contrast to the others, that they lack feedback.

Managers in all three countries argue that leadership should not have a gender, instead leadership is about personality and capability. All managers interviewed agree that it should not matter if a man or a woman is the manager because personality decides the issue, but despite that all the managers in UK together with Ann Bernsdotter and Karina Lann from Sweden prefer to have a man as manager.

In general, the managers perceive their most challenging task as middle managers as managing the balance between corporate needs and the well-being of the employees. This can create a conflict of interest. Neither the Swedish nor the UK managers could see any specific drawbacks about being a woman in management positions. The German managers did however argue that there are lots of Glass Ceilings hindering them. All managers agree that the advantage of being a woman in management positions is that women are more emotional than men and therefore they will handle personal matters better. They also argue that it is good to have a mix between the genders since men and women think differently which brings in new perspectives for both partners.

The Swedish and German managers find it hard to combine a management position with work while the managers in UK do not see it as a conflict. All of the women managers notice the importance of belonging to networks and wants to be part of it, however, both the German and the UK interviews sometimes feel excluded. In addition they argue that women have a disadvantage in the workplace since they do not have the large, strong network that men have. Controversies, neither of the Swedish manager feels that they have been excluded from any meetings, places or discussion.

A lot of statistics from the three countries show that women earn less than men, which is also stated by the German managers who argue it is due to a stereotypical view of women. The managers in Sweden and UK, on the other hand, argue that the salary is based on experience.

The managers in UK and Germany argue that their companies could be more supportive with family issues such as maturity leave and child support in order to ease the burden for women in management positions. Both the German and Swedish managers were keen on having a mentor system to help women. None of the managers have a mentor but they do have networks, which they state are very helpful.

The managers in the three countries believe that conflicts should be dealt with at once. While the Swedish managers view power as something positive the managers in Germany and UK view it as negative, except for Lyndsey Abbott from UK. The managers in Germany and UK professionally avoid risk while the Swedes believe it is part of the job.

5.5 Concluding Discussion

What we have found is that women are still facing a lot of obstacles when it comes to being middle managers. The obstacles are for example, as stated in our research questions, stereotypes, Glass Ceilings and organisational structure, all being discussed below.

- **What stereotypes do female middle managers face in Germany, Sweden and UK?**

When looking at the female stereotypes and comparing them with the answers from our interviews we could not get a straight answer if the managers fit the female stereotype or not. It seems to us that the attributes mostly differ with personality. Nevertheless, some stereotypes are actually accurate as women are not so keen on taking risk since being over-analyzing and they also perceive conflicts as something that needs to be dealt with immediately. For the German managers, power is perceived as a strong word that needs to be treated very carefully. Controversy, all the Swedish managers perceive power as something positive if handled right. The UK managers have different perceptions about the word. Two of them perceive the word power negatively and one positively. We believe the German women are having a more difficult situation to gain respect and be accepted. Overall it appears to us, when comparing the three countries, that Germany is further behind when it comes to equalities between the genders.

- **What challenges of Glass Ceilings do female middle managers face in Germany, Sweden and UK?**

We can conclude from our interviews that a Glass Ceiling definitely exists in Germany but also to some extent in Sweden. The German managers view this as a huge problem. They strongly agreed that they were in a disadvantage due to their sex and the stereotypes formed in the society, seeing men as the natural leaders and women as subordinate. This hinders them from both getting hired and promoted, at least until they are too old to have children. The homosociality was brought forward as a Glass Ceiling both in Germany and Sweden. UK was the only country which stated that a Glass Ceiling does not exist. Whether this is dependant on the fact that the managers work for Ikea, which is well known for its nice environment, or that work environments in the UK is different compared to other countries, is at this point not determinable.

▪ **What challenges of organisational structures do female middle managers face in Germany, Sweden and UK?**

All the women face challenges as lack of mentoring and support in the organisation. It seems like the board does not take the responsibility needed for supporting women. According to both the frame of references and the women interviewed, the boards and top positions have always been occupied by men, which have created a male friendly climate that is hard to change. Another important issue when talking about organisational structure is the lack of networking amongst women. These subjects opened up for discussion several years ago, however, the matters are still huge in today's organisations. While women in Germany are still struggling in very hierarchical organisations with great Glass Ceilings to fight against, middle managers in Sweden and UK seem to have advanced further. Feedback is fundamental to advancement in corporations and natural for the managers in Sweden and the UK. However the German managers stated that their companies lack this which possible is another contributing factor to why it is harder for women to advance in Germany.

Helping women to come back to work again after maturity leave is also something that organisations need to improve to attract women to higher positions. As it is today, a lot of pressure exists on women in middle management, not only at work but also at home.

Below is a table showing how the countries fit into Stereotyping , Glass Ceiling and Organisational Structure.

	Germany	Sweden	The UK
Stereotyping	When it comes to <i>Risk</i> , <i>Power</i> , and <i>Conflicts</i> , the German managers perfectly fits the stereotypes mentioned in the frame of references.	The Swedish managers do only fit the stereotypes when it comes to dealing with <i>Conflicts</i> . They want to solve conflicts immediately.	<i>Risk</i> and <i>Power</i> are viewed differently by the UK managers. However regarding <i>Conflicts</i> their answers is in line with the other countries, fitting the stereotype perfectly.
Glass Ceiling	Women in Germany face huge barriers within the organisations.	There are no obvious Glass Ceilings in Sweden.	There are no obvious Glass Ceilings in the UK.
Organisational Structure	Homosociality between men and the lack of support and mentoring seem to be present.	Homosociality between men and the lack of support and mentoring seem to be present.	Homosociality between men and the lack of support and mentoring seem to be present.

Figure 8 Summary of the obstacles women in middle management face.

6 Conclusion and Discussion

The final section provides the reader with conclusions of the analysis. This is followed by a discussion of the results and the section is enclosed by suggestions for further research and criticism to the study.

Our purpose was to investigate how women in Germany, Sweden and the UK perceive their situation as female leaders in middle management.

We have found that the women we have interviewed perceive their situation as middle managers differently in the three countries. While the Swedish and UK managers believe that they are fighting on somewhat equal premises as men, German managers often feel excluded and have a completely different situation in the organisation. Although the women have different opportunities, they all agree that men belong to more networks and that homosociality is an important concept that still exists. Women still perceive their workplace as treating them based on stereotypes and not on their abilities. This even though women have changed their way of thinking and acting away from most of the traditional stereotypes.

Our most unexpected discovery is that it is not only men that prefer men as their manager but also women that prefer men. This might be the reason why women have not advanced more in middle management positions.

6.1 Discussion

What came to us as a surprise was the fact that almost all the interviewed women said they would prefer having a man as their manager. If women continue to have this vision and perceive men as better leaders it will take a lot of time until more women will reach middle manager positions. For us it appears that homosociality exist only among men. We believe that it is not just men that stereotype women but also women having the same stereotypes towards other women. It seems like the successful women in management positions look at themselves more as men with masculine attributes. The women we interviewed did not think there should be any differences in career opportunities between men and women. They were very enthusiastic about the topic *Women in Leadership* and it seemed like they were keen on getting more women to become managers. However, all of them seemed to stereotype themselves in some ways. Their unconscious stereotyping of women is a threat to the women's future within management.

Statistics and history from the three countries show that women always have been a minority in management positions. The amount of women in management has been increasing but if women prefer men as their manager the figures might bring to a standstill in a near future. That could cause the level of women in management positions to remain the same for ever. We strongly argue that more research and awareness needs to be created within this field. People need to understand that we sometimes stereotype unconsciously as well as consciously and how badly that affects women's chances to advance in their careers.

Men and women obviously need to work together to solve this issue. It is not enough that only one of the sexes changes attitudes and behaviour, it takes both partners to demolish the barriers. Affirmative actions, such as allocations of quotas, have been the topic for intensive discussions during the last years, but so far almost no country has chosen to implement it. However, since the beginning of the discussion noticeable more women have reached management and board positions, likely due to the publicity and awareness the dis-

cussion created. The women managers we interviewed were all against allocation of quotas, stating a person should get the job due to personal attributes, not because of their sex. The problem is just that there are more men in management positions and they act homosocial. Women need to be as forward as men which involve taking risks and building networks. Women should no longer tolerate to be subordinate and believe that everything is in order when a man is chosen instead of a woman. We now know that it is not due to that the men possess better qualification or personal attributes, it is more likely to be due to homosociality and stereotypes. Men of today's organisations need to be aware of this and work in order to improve the situation. Above all, the CEO need to be more engaged in the situation and help women supportively, for an example through mentoring. Also women need to help each other and act more homosocial.

If women want to be managers in the future we believe that we have to be very goal oriented. As a woman you need to strive and fight to get what you want. However, building networks early in the career will definitely help. In addition, building network as a manager is also important as it will help to get men and women to appreciate each other better and understand the importance of being diverse. We do not believe that you need to be masculine to become a good leader. It is instead important to show that you are a woman with different thoughts and that is why you are valuable to the organisation.

To conclude this study we want to give some advice to women that want to become leaders around the world, as for ourselves:

- Start to work in countries that have come further when looking at Glass Ceilings, as for example Sweden and the UK.
- Be focused and believe that you have the right attributes to become a leader.
- Involve yourself in all kinds of networks and do not be afraid of joining the men's network.
- Appreciate diversity in the workforce, listen and learn from each other.

When you finally have reached a position you feel satisfied with, do not forget to help other women to do the same. Most importantly; do not stereotype!

6.2 Criticism to the Study

The result of our study is based on middle managers in different companies in the three countries Germany, Sweden and UK. Therefore the results can not be generalized for the whole Europe although, the purpose of our study was not to create a general conclusion.

The major criticism against our study is the fact that some of our sample was built on too close related sectors. Despite the fact that all the managers at Ikea also had been managers somewhere else before, it turned out that their positions were mostly within retail. In addition this could lead to that the answers from UK to some extent are biased. Controversially, the study could have been based on interviews from the same types of companies in all three countries. We chose interesting women in different kinds of companies, however the analysis might have been easier if they all worked within the same type of company considering that differences might be due to different branches. In addition, the results from Germany might have been affected due to the fact that they only were collected in East Germany. Attitudes and career opportunities differ in East and West Germany, which

we explained in the frame of references. More time could also have helped us to use a larger sample which could have given the study more depth and broader knowledge in the subject.

6.3 Recommendations for Further Research

The thesis has investigated how women perceive their situation as middle managers. Since women slowly are advancing to also possess the higher positions it would be very interesting to investigate how they perceive their situation as women in senior management position. We assume that they face pretty unique circumstances, being a woman where men clearly dominate.

Another area that has caught our interest is the fact that sexes is being treated differently throughout the whole life, which we argue is the reason why stereotypes are being created and maintained. We are curious to find out how much this segregated sex treatment affects women, especially when it comes to them acting as leaders. Would it be easier for women to reach higher positions and get more respect if both sexes were treated exactly the same to the extent it is possible?

The big surprise with this thesis was the result we got from the empirical part, that most of the women favoured a man as manager. It seems like men help their own sex advancing but that women do the controversy. Further studies could investigate why women prefer a man as a manager instead of a woman, and also why women do not act homosociality, i.e. choosing women in front of men, which probably would help more women advance to management positions.

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Appendix 1

Questions

Leadership

- What is good leadership to you?
- Are you satisfied with your position today? Why, why not?
- What makes you strive to reach higher?
- Why did you choose to become a middle manager?
- What challenges do you perceive as middle manager?
- What feedback do you want and expect from your managers and employees?
- What feedback do you give other people?

Women as Leaders

- What specific strategies help women become leaders?
- Give examples of when you think it is good to be a female leader
- What is the hardest thing being women and leader?
- What conflicts exist between career and family?
- How do you feel that your employees perceive you?

Sex Differences

- What different feelings do you have towards having a woman vs. man as a manager? What do you prefer?
- What do you think is female leadership style - what is masculine leadership style? What differences would you say exists - give examples?
- How do women and men employees see you as their leader?
- Do you think there is a difference between your salaries compared to males at the same position?

Obstacles

Stereotypes

- How do you perceive risk?
- How do you relate to (the word) power (pos. alt. neg.)? How do you use your power?
- How do you solve (employee/personal) conflicts that might occur?

Glass ceiling

- Who asked you if you wanted to take one step further in your career? Your manager or a manager higher up in the hierarchy?
- Give examples of a Glass ceiling in your company?

Organisational structure

- What can your organisation do to help women to reach higher positions?

Network

- Are their meetings, places or discussions when you feel excluded?

Appendix 1

- In what networks do you participate – benefits / drawbacks? (Do you feel that it is difficult to get hold of all the information available?)
- Who is your mentor?