ENABLERS AND BARRIERS FOR WOMEN'S CAREER PROGRESSION INTO EXECUTIVE POSITIONS: CASE OF LATVIAN HIGHEST VALUE JOINT STOCK COMPANIES

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Abstract

The authors used the narrative approach method to research the enablers and barriers for women to progress in their career advancement into executive positions in Latvian highest value joint-stock companies. A total of 20 interviews were conducted with women in an executive position within the TOP 101 of 2019 Latvian highest value companies. The research is divided into four sections: (1) governmental level, (2) societal level, (3) corporate level, and (4) individual level. Barriers and enabling factors are determined for the sample women within each of these sections. Most important of the enabling factors observed were networking, flexible work, and family support, while barriers highlighted were inadequate childcare facilities and gender stereotyping. Interestingly, motherhood was viewed as a neutral factor or even as an enabler.

JEL Classification Number: J16 Economics of Gender / Non-labor Discrimination

1 Introduction

Gender equality and women in leadership is an important and relevant topic that has attracted the attention of researchers, businesses, and legislators. As a result, government policies have been adjusted and implemented to aid women's career advancement. The European Union (EU) has set targets for minimum gender balance on corporate boards, while countries like Norway, Germany, and France have adopted them fully (European Parliament, 2020). Despite the progress made in 2019, only 37.1% of managers in the EU are women (Eurostat, 2020); 18% of senior executive positions and 28.4% of board members positions in Europe's largest publicly listed companies are occupied by women (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2020). Notably, Latvia is ranked first in the percentage of woman managers (54.8%) in the EU and is currently the only member state where women dominate this position (Eurostat, 2020). However, within the largest publicly listed companies in Latvia, only 28.6% of executives and 31.7% of board members are women ranking respectively 4th and 8th among EU states. Countries that are ahead of Latvia in the percentage of women board members have implemented a gender quota system for enterprises (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2020).

Gender equality is seen not just as a social issue but also an economic one; thus, it is crucial to emphasize the added benefit women can bring to a company and on a larger scale - to the whole economy. The effects of diversity within company boards are positive, mainly seen in areas like oversight quality, performance during crisis, return on equity, fewer instances of scandals, and overall financial performance (Quayle & Gao, 2019). A positive relationship is also observed in several studies between a company's performance and the proportion of women in board positions and top management (Carter et al., 2010).

Most of the studies within the field have determined the impact of having a gender-diverse corporate board. The observed positive relation for gender diversity combined with the statistics of women's representation in Europe has persuaded the authors of this research to identify which factors and barriers contribute to women's advancement to executive positions. This research paper focuses on women in top management and board positions. Publicly listed companies have a two-tier board system meaning that these companies have a management board and a supervisory board. While LLC companies usually have one board of directors, the board systems are depicted in Appendix A, which is based on information from the European Institute for Gender Equality (2020).

Based on the literature review, the authors divide the factors and barriers into four levels: (1) governmental, (2) societal, (3) corporate, and (4) individual. Under each level, several barriers and respecting enabling factors, which affect women as leaders and, therefore, executives, are listed. The authors have firstly examined the existing social policies and structures related to gender equality in the EU and Latvia as well as women attitude towards these policies. Then, societal perceptions of men and women in the context of work-life are reviewed. The societal norms, cultural practices, work-life balance practices and sexism are explored as possible factors that impact women's career advancement. Thirdly, the corporate level is examined, focusing on masculine and collectivistic corporate culture, ideal worker concept, and access to networks and mentoring and opportunities. Lastly, the authors direct their attention to the individual aspects like leadership style, risk aversion, and ambition.

The authors have conducted semi-structured interviews with women in top executive positions in the Latvian highest value joint-stock companies to understand their experience. Based on their carrier progression, the authors determined barriers and factors contributing to them having achieved their current positions. This research aims to help women aspiring to reach managerial positions to understand the enablers and barriers they may face in future career advancement. The additional benefit would be to the company management, who seek to improve corporate governance practices as well as to achieve their long-term sustainability goals and policymakers to determine the critical elements for future social policy changes.

The paper answers the following research question: **What are the enablers and barriers for women to progress in their career advancement into executive positions in Latvian highest value joint-stock companies?**

2 Literature review

To determine what role barriers and enablers play in women's career progression into executive positions, existing literature on the issue is reviewed. The literature discusses the topics that are found to have an impact on the senior management position distribution between men and women. The literature review consists of four main sections – governmental, societal, corporate, and individual level. Firstly, the existing social policies and structures related to gender equality in the EU and Latvia are reviewed. Then gender differences on a societal, corporate, and individual level are identified to uncover the enabling factors and barriers specific to women in their career advancement. Leadership and senior management-specific literature are discussed in each of these levels. Finally, barriers and enablers for women to progress in their career advancement into board member positions are summarized.

2.1 *Gender Diversity and Company Performance*

In this section, the research on gender-diverse boards of directors will be discussed. Research conducted on what impact does the presence of women have in boardrooms will be examined, and factors that facilitate gender-diverse boards will be identified.

The topic of the board of directors is essential because of the impact they have on the companies. The board of directors has a duty and the legal responsibility to supervise and direct the corporate activities to protect and act in the best interests of the company's shareholders (Fama & Jensen, 1983). The board has the authority over top management, review of corporate performance, approval of strategic decisions, etc. The board is intended to be an oversight mechanism to reduce agency costs created by friction between shareholders and a company's management (Jensen, 1993).

Previously done research has listed the benefits and positive aspects a gender-balanced board of directors has. Ethical and social issues are the most obvious ones; at the same time, it has been stated that the perspective and values brought by women in the boardroom have the potential to enhance company performance (Byron & Post, 2016; Joecks et al., 2013) or improve reputation (Bear et al., 2010). The importance of gender represented boards has been highlighted by prior studies stating that gender and ethnically diverse boards enhance the quality of decisions made since more perspectives had been presented due to the diverse characteristics and viewpoints (Carter et al., 2003; Jackson et al., 2003). Many more studies have explored the relationship between diversity and company performance, with most of them concluding to have a positive effect. However, some are contradictory and have not found any significant relation (Geiger & Marlin, 2012; Solakoglu & Demir, 2016; Tinsley et al., 2017).

Extensive research has been done on the characteristics that woman executives convey. Researchers have found that women exhibit a "questioning attitude" (Van Ees et al., 2009), a process-oriented working style (Huse, 2005), and they are introducing change into board processes, especially in terms of conflict resolution and development (Joecks et al., 2019; Nielsen & Huse, 2010).

In terms of appointment to the board of directors, there is a higher likelihood that a woman in a US-based company is appointed if the seat has been vacated by a woman (Tinsley et al., 2017). Additionally, the firm size has a positive relation of women being in a board position (Carter et al., 2003). A study in the Turkish market provided evidence that the positive relationship between boards that are gender-diverse and company performance was more robust for firms focusing on the local markets and for firms that were family or block-owned (Solakoglu & Demir, 2016).

2.2 Governmental Level

In this section, the literature is focused on governmental-level influences on gender diversity and, subsequently, on women's career advancement opportunities. The usefulness and experiences of a gender quota system for company boards is discussed as well as the impact on other social policies like maternity leave is reviewed

2.2.1 Economy type and legal systems

Based on the institutional characteristics of the world's developed economies a division can be made between Coordinated Market Economies (CME) and Liberal Market Economies (LME) (Soskice et al., 2003). Countries like Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, and Latvia are classified as coordinated market economies since they are associated with robust labour relations and extensive business networks. Countries like the USA and UK are recognised as liberal market economies because the market is the major influencer for balancing institutional relations (Porter et al., 2003). Mandel and Shalev (2009) argue that institutional factors like maternity leave and other similar social policies tend to increase employers' costs to hire women professionals. Additionally, these aspects tend to enforce the model of full-time employment that benefits the male workforce. Since these social policies are more present in CME countries, Mandel and Shalev (2009) state that there should be more women representation on boards in LME countries than CME. However, a study by Grosvold and Brammer (2011), which examines the institutional factor impact on gender diversity on corporate boards, concludes a lack of significant difference between CME and LME.

A similar distinction, as mentioned before, can be made between countries depending on their legal structure. Flores and Reynolds (1989) suggest the division into common law and civil law origins. Most European countries have strict labour protection laws that are characteristic of civil law orientation, while nations like the UK and USA are examples of common law legal systems (Flores & Reynolds, 1989). The two bundles can be subcategorized further: French, German, and Scandinavian legal systems are subsets of the civil law family, while most English origin nations are under common law. Grosvold and Brammer (2011) have studied the legal system impact on gender diversity on company boards and found that Scandinavian and English origin counties have significantly higher women boards representation compared to German and French origin nations. These findings are somewhat contradictory to those of Botero et al. (2004), who state that legislation ensuring employee protection as well as a more developed social system are factors that should reinforce women's employment and professional carrier development.

2.2.2 Social policies and board quotas

The European Union's policy debates surrounding women's relation on boards have been a significant talking point for several parliamentary terms (Seierstad et al., 2017). Seierstad et al. (2017) have identified key actors driving the gender diversity agenda for several European countries. They state that women actors who are politicians and managers are the ones that consistently are leading the agenda for gender diversity within their countries. Furthermore, these actors in Germany, Norway, and Italy have advocated for implementing the quota system. Simultaneously, actors in the UK have been less active and tend to be sceptical regarding the quota system; however, the view has been changing in the most recent year of their research. Highlighting Norway's data, the authors state that the male actor participation in driving the policy agenda has been an essential factor for the gender quota system implementation. Male participation has been considerably less present in other countries mentioned in their research (Seierstad et al., 2017).

As a solution to achieve more gender-balanced boardrooms, some European countries have implemented a system of mandatory gender representation on boards. Germany, Italy, Belgium, France, and the previously mentioned Norway, have implemented the gender quota system (Quayle & Gao, 2019). Quayle and Gao (2019) state that Norway has the strictest policies and penalties for not having 40% of the board members of publicly listed companies being women. While other countries, including France, have the same 40% threshold, but the enforcement is more flexible. A Harvard University study has found several benefits to the

quota system. One of them is that the process of nominating a board member becomes more robust and competent, regardless of the candidate's gender (Wiersema & Mors, 2016). Better corporate governance is stated as the most crucial benefit of having a gender-diverse board by the authors.

2.2.3 *Maternity leave*

First international legislative attempts directed towards improving new parents' lives were made as early as 1919 and 1952 by the International Labour Organization, highlighting the necessity and reasoning for maternity leave. At the end of the 20th century, by the European Union directive, the minimum paid maternity leave in the Member States was made 14 weeks (Akgunduz & Plantenga, 2013). Many factors have driven the evolution of parenthood protection, especially the positive correlation observed by Ruhm (2000) that maternity leave has positive effects on infants' health. Furthermore, Akgunduz and Plantenga (2013) study concluded a positive effect between maternal leave and women-to-population employment ratio. However, they highlight that extended parental leave tends to decrease mothers' wages when they have returned to employment.

Additional labour force participation factors for women are accessibility and external childcare flexibility (Baizan et al., 2016). The quality of work-life balance is also strongly connected with the childcare options for the mother. Arpino & Luppi (2020) found that the highest satisfaction levels are reached when the childcare can be split 50-50 between paid and unpaid; an example would be a split between kindergartens and grandparents, respectively.

Factors that aid the career safety of new mothers include maternity leave and balanced work-life balance practices.

2.3 **Societal level**

In this section, differences between societal perceptions of men and women's characteristics in the work-life context will be discussed. The literature on leadership will be used as leadership is one of the main components for career success in leadership positions (Appelbaum et al., 2003). On a societal level, there are different norms and cultural practices and different work-life balance practices that impact women's choice to start a career, the career path they choose, and decisions made during their career. Also, sexism affects women's course of a career and the perception of women as good leaders.

2.3.1 Norms and cultural practices

Norms and cultural practices vary across countries. Culture impacts gender representation in senior leadership positions and shape the perceptions of what good leadership looks like. The effect of culture will be examined through cultural dimensions introduced by G. Hofstede in 1980. This paper will consider masculinity, individualism, long-term orientation, and power distance dimensions as a relationship with gender-related questions have been discussed in the literature.

According to Hofstede Insights (n.d.) Latvia scores low on masculinity and is more on the low side for power distance but scores high on individualism and long-term orientation dimensions. Table 1 describes cultural differences relevant to gender and leadership, which will be used to discuss research related to gender and board membership.

Dimension	Description of low score	Description of high score
Masculinity	- minimal differentiation between gender roles in emotional and social realms, - work and family life are more balanced	- gender roles are pronounced, - traditional work-role models are reinforced, - men are expected to be assertive and tough, but women to be modest and tender - men become more attractive by career success, women less
Power distance	- authority based on secular-rational arguments, - inequality in society should be minimized	- authority based on tradition, - there should be an order of inequality
Individualism	- emphasis on belonging: membership ideal, - traditional authorities are accented	emphasis on individual, initiative, and achievement: leadership ideal
Long-term orientation	- respect for traditions, - quick results expected	- adaptation of traditions to new circumstances, - long-term target setting

Table 1: Description of Hofstede's cultural dimensions relevant to gender and leadership. Source: Created by authors based on Hofstede (2001, 2011).

Low masculinity and low power distance predict that gender roles are not that pronounced. Authority is based on rational arguments, not tradition, and there is a preference for equality in society. According to Carrasco et al. (2015), similarly scoring countries are expected to have a higher proportion of women on corporate boards. A high score on the individualism dimension means that society emphasises individual, initiative, and achievement and does not promote traditional authorities. Consequentially a higher representation of women on boards can be forecasted (Carrasco et al., 2015; Whelan & Humphries, 2020). Scoring high on the long-term dimension means long-term target setting, and that country more easily adapts its traditions. A high score is associated with a higher percentage of women on boards (Whelan & Humphries, 2020), and gender diversity is seen as an advantage in companies with a long-term view (Singh et al., 2007).

It has been recorded in the literature that cultures have contrasting assumptions and attitudes regarding behaviours that add to exceptional leadership (Ardichvili & Kuchinke, 2002). Yet, cross-cultural comparison of literature highlights that the majority of senior executives and managers, regardless of their cultural background, favour stereotypical man behaviour as more resembling good leadership than stereotypical woman behaviour (Schein, 2001). Nevertheless, in feminine cultures, women in leadership positions are not expected to show masculine behaviour to receive support from society (Hofstede, 2001). In Latvia in 2014, 83% of survey respondents agreed that only professional skills are important for leadership roles and not the gender, 79.6% that women in leadership positions can handle their tasks as well as men, and 78% agree with the statement that it is good to have both sexes represented in leadership positions (Latvijas Fakti, 2014).

All four dimensions discussed in this section – masculinity, power distance, individualism, and long-term orientation suggest that in Latvia percentage of women on boards is expected to be relatively higher. All of the cultural dimensions that have been found to have relationships with gender equality favour women being represented more in leadership positions. Regarding leadership style, the literature suggests that masculine characteristics are favoured across all cultures, but for feminine countries, such as Latvia, masculine characteristics are not a must to receive support.

2.3.2 Work-life balance practices and motherhood

One factor that significantly affects women's career advancement is work-family balance (Gabaldon et al., 2016). The involvement of women in company boards increases when work-life balance practices are improved (Desvaux et al., 2007).

In a study in the US, it was found that 25% of successful career men of this study did not have children as opposed to 33% of women, which means that women have a different trade-off when choosing between having children and career opportunities (Hewlett, 2002). Data from the US suggests that women with children are more likely to be unemployed or work fewer hours, but men with children tend to work more hours (Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 2000). In 2019, the employment rate in Latvia of men was 5.8 percentage points higher than that of women (68.1% and 62.3%, respectively) and 6.4% of working men and 9.2% of women were part-time employees (Centrālās statistikas pārvaldes datubāze, n.d.).

Raley et al. (2012) argued domestic work and childcare tasks are the ones that women are more often responsible for in the family setting. Career women, who are also mothers, often struggle with pressure and conflict in their mother and earner roles (Timurtürkan, 2020). To find the balance between work and home, women more often than men take sick days and work part-time or even leave work. (Hewlett, 2002 as cited in Hoyt, 2010, p. 488) Consequently, women have less work experience, stability, and growth than men (Hoyt, 2010).

Team leaders experience spillover from home to work, and these effects are more harmful to women as they have more domestic responsibilities (Gratton et al., 2007). According to Latvijas Fakti (2014), Latvians think that most domestic responsibilities and childcare tasks are women's responsibility. It was found that various household responsibilities, such as housekeeping, cooking, and childcare, are performed relatively more by women. Still, men are responsible for home repairs and the family's material provision. According to Latvijas Fakti (2014), 66.1% of respondents believe that women having many household responsibilities are why they cannot fulfil their work responsibilities as effectively as men. And Latvians believe that the main reason for fewer women in leadership positions (28.9% of respondents) is that they have more household responsibilities and spend more time caring about children. It supports the idea that women spend more time on household responsibilities compared with men. Women's domestic responsibilities add to preserving gender bias in organizations (Acker, 2006), and women acknowledge that work-home conflict is an obstacle to career advancement (Van Vianen & Fischer, 2002).

Women who have children find it harder to balance household responsibilities and childcare with work. Still, even for women with no children, more household responsibilities can impact their career progression.

2.3.3 Sexism

Prejudice is an emotional bias towards an individual, stereotyping is a cognitive bias and a quick way to use the information to make decisions, but discrimination is a behavioural bias upon which you act on a stereotype (Fiske & Taylor, 2013). Sexism is "the unfair treatment of people, especially women, because of their sex; the attitude that causes this" (Honby, 2005, p. 1391) or its prejudice, stereotyping, or discrimination based on sex. Gender stereotypes and gender-role prejudice is a part of our thinking process (Fiske, 2012). Stereotyping and prejudice against women can affect how they are thought of or interacted within the workplace and, consequently, impact their career progression.

When looking at Latvia statistics, discrimination based on being man or women is seen to be a problem only by 20% of respondents, which is one of the lowest in the EU (European Commission, 2019). The same report states that 82% of Latvians would be comfortable with having a woman elected in the country's highest elected political position. It is one of the lowest rates in the EU and gives some information on women's acceptance in leadership roles.

According to Glick and Fiske (1996), ambivalent sexism is a theoretical framework that assumes that sexism has two sides – hostile and benevolent. The first one targets women who intimidate men's dominance, and these women are seen as competent but not nice. In contrast, benevolent sexism supports women who obey the traditional gender power relations. Hostile sexism predicts negative stereotypes and attitudes against women (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Women in leadership positions are affected by it in the workplace (Fiske & Taylor, 2013; Glick et al., 1997). On the other hand, benevolent sexism can shift women towards the idea that they are incompetent, and they start to doubt their abilities, which in turn affects their performance (Dumont et al., 2010). These two types of sexism show that women are perceived as either likeable and inexperienced or experienced but unlikable (Catalyst, 2007).

According to (Fiske & Taylor, 2013), people establish mental models that attribute specific characteristics to workers. The framework to assess women's capabilities in leadership positions is limited (Lee & James, 2007), and therefore often stereotypes are used. Stereotypes in these situations are established using traditional gender roles, assuming that women take up roles such as wives and mothers and their respective attributes, contrary to good business leaders' assumed characteristics. It is believed that the female gender role is less compatible

with leadership than the male (Eagly, 2005; Eagly & Karau, 2002), and society assumes that men possess leadership abilities and are easier accepted as leaders. To be appointed to leadership positions, assertiveness and agency are seen as characteristics needed to achieve success (Ibarra et al., 2013). Still, the prejudice against women is a burden to them to get appointed to these positions (Eagly & Carli, 2003). Nevertheless, it should be added that in feminine cultures, such as Latvia, it is more accepted that women occupy higher-level positions. In these cultures, women are not necessarily expected to show masculine characteristics to be accepted as leaders (Hofstede, 2001).

According to Latvijas Fakti (2014), survey respondents believe that for women, it is more important to be well-groomed and beautiful (40,1%), care for family (37.7%), and support their spouse or partner (20,5%), but for men it is most important to materially provide for themselves and family (41.2%), to occupy a high position in society (32%) and fulfil their professional dreams (17.8%). Also, 85.8% believe that men have to take up more responsibility about family's financial welfare. Gender stereotypes are present in Latvia. Furthermore, 84.9% of respondents believe that professions can be divided by gender.

It is important to note that there is a motherhood penalty for women in the workplace; women are recognized as less qualified and are less often promoted to leadership positions (Correll et al., 2007). Oakley (2000) presents evidence that stereotypes and prejudice are a part of explaining the low numbers of women in board member positions. Gender-emotion stereotypes predict that women have to be aware of how much and what emotions they display. Women in leadership positions can be penalized when they express more emotions or do not express them - they are seen as too emotional because they are women or fail to fulfil their role as a woman (Brescoll, 2016).

Because of sexism, it is harder for women to get appointed to leadership roles. Women in the workplace might face assumptions that they are incompetent, they might feel not competent enough, and they might not be recognized as a good fit for leadership roles. But feminine culture might put women in Latvia in a better position for attaining leadership roles.

2.4 Corporate level

In this section, differences between men and women in the context of corporate culture will be discussed. There are different opportunities for women's career progression concerning masculine and collectivistic corporate culture. There is an ideal worker concept on the corporate level, which is much harder to live up to for women. The gender-biased parenting duties tend to violate the concept more for women than men. One of the consequences of that

is a restrictive environment for re-entry. For career advancement, networking and mentorship are essential, but access to them is different for both genders.

2.4.1 Organizational culture

Organizational culture embodies values, norms, and beliefs that are incorporated in the everyday life of organization's members and form their behaviours and attitudes (Schein & Schein, 2017). Two dimensions of organizational culture will be discussed – masculine and collectivistic – as Jandeska and Kraimer (2005) suggest that they play a role in the value attributed to men and women in organizations. The ideal worker norm will be looked at and the concept of overwork culture considered.

The importance of organizational culture cannot be underestimated when it comes to women's representation on company boards. An often-observed argumentation that a significant factor hindering a diverse board is the organizational culture within the company itself (Joecks, 2020). Furthermore, it has been argued that the management's culture is conceivably subjected to masculine norms and values since most of the senior management and board members are male and naturally exhibit more masculine values (Van Vianen & Fischer, 2002).

A study by Desvaux et al. (2007) found that one of the initiatives that had the most significant effect on women's involvement in company boards was an introduction of means to improve work-life balance. Gabaldon et al. (2016) suggest that work-family policies are a crucial part of career advancement and should be endorsed by the companies' culture. The additional factor for increasing women's participation in the boardrooms is women-friendly culture (Joecks, 2020).

In most organizations, structure and culture are coordinated as if a person's job is their only, or at least the primary, commitment in life (Acker, 1990). According to Bravo (2007), in organizations, explicit and implicit rules require workers to work long hours, restrict flexibility, and usually require travel and relocation (as cited in Hoyt, 2010, p. 488). There are differences in the number of domestic responsibilities men and women have (Raley et al., 2012). Therefore, women, especially mothers, are not as inclined to pursue the expected ideal worker full-time dedication to work (Hynes & Clarkberg, 2005). Eagly and Carli (2007) point out that spending a lot of time at work is an essential factor for receiving higher wages and further promotions. Additionally, women are held to higher standards for promotions in the workplace (Lyness & Heilman, 2006).

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It is much harder for women, especially mothers, to fulfil the expectations that organizations have for ideal workers; thus, they do not receive the economic benefits from it.

2.4.2 Company Diversity Policies

To improve company culture and boost diversity, around 95% of Fortune 1000 companies have implemented policies and training programs that focus on diversity management (Chavez & Weisinger, 2008). The diversity within a company, especially its boards, has been recorded to benefit the business in terms of increased creativity, productivity, and innovation (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996). However, studies state the benefits might have been overestimated (Noon, 2007). Nevertheless, the continuing adaptation of diversity programs within the corporate environment remains to have a positive trend. Firms that have committed to diversity beyond the basic requirements tend to increasingly move toward diversity as a crucial part of their mission statement and the company's strategy (Cole & Salimath, 2013).

The effects of diversity within company boards are positive, mainly seen in areas like oversight quality, performance during crisis, return on equity, fewer instances of scandals, and overall financial performance (Quayle & Gao, 2019). One of the main benefits of gender diversity within company boards is avoiding the so-called "groupthink" (Quayle & Gao, 2019). This phenomenon is when directors who are like-minded and have similar backgrounds tend to achieve decisions that lack robustness. Diversity is how "groupthink" can be avoided; it is possible to present evidence that the company's performance is increased as the board is more diverse, which includes the presence of women board members (Quayle & Gao, 2019).

A company's performance in a time of crisis has also been stated as an argument for diversity within company boards. A study was conducted for 2007-2012, where two indices were compared: the Parisian stock index and a separately created Femina index comprising companies with 35% women board members. During the mentioned period, which included the financial crisis of 2008, the Femina index lost 5.28% compared to Parisian index losses of 34.7%. The stark difference is an advocation for more diverse company boards (Ferrary, 2013).

More empirical examples can be found in private research done by institutions like MSCI. Their 2015 research found evidence that companies with women board members can achieve a better return on equity. The study suggests that the difference is around 36% compared with companies that lack gender diversity within their boards from 2010 to 2015 (MSCI, 2015). One-year older research from the same institute found that there are corporate governance benefits because of diverse boards. They state that companies that have more

women on their boards have a lower number of scandals regarding corruption, bribery, and fraud. Additionally, the corporate strategy and management ratings regarding environmental and social governance were significantly higher-rated (MSCI, 2014).

In this segment, the impact of company diversity policies on women career advancement was discussed. These policies have a beneficial impact on company performance, diversity improves decision making and presents more perspectives on a subject.

2.4.3   Re-entry opportunities

The re-entry opportunity topic is related to the previously discussed ideal worker norms since opting out to care for children is received as a signal of the ideal norm breach (Weisshaar, 2018).

The combination of fulfilling the ideal worker norm and having a work-life balance seems to be a contradiction. The majority of people hope to have an ideal work and family balance (Stone, 2007; Williams et al., 2006). However, this might be not easy to achieve as the workplace and employers seek a workforce that can fulfil the ideal worker norm by having a total commitment to their workplace obligations (Davies & Frink, 2014). Having to opt-out of the work obligations is a direct violation of these norms; furthermore, this signals to the employers that the dedication to the work obligations is lower and can negatively impact the person's re-entry efforts to employment (Weisshaar, 2018).

The process of opting out from work due to childcare is gender biased. The rate for women having to opt-out from work to perform childcare duties is 18%-20% in the last two decades, while for fathers, the figure is only 2%. It reinforces the gender-biased opting-out process (Flood et al., 2019). It is emphasized by a more general factor that employers tend to be influenced by stereotypes and assumptions regarding a person's characteristics to make employment decisions (Spence, 1973; Stiglitz, 2002).

The re-entry opportunities are connected with the ideal worker norm, which is harder to achieve for women than men. It is partly due to the fact that the opt-out decision has been gender-biased towards women.

2.4.4   Networking and mentoring

An important factor for career advancement is social relationship building, which allows people to acquire contacts, and with that comes information, resources, and opportunities of mentorship (Seibert et al., 2001). Selecting directors has traditionally been a closed process in which networking plays a major role (Associates, 2009).

Social relationship building in the workplace takes away time from performing domestic responsibilities and often requires entering already established networks in organizations, which is more challenging for women than men (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Linehan & Scullion, 2008). Also, when women have established social relationships in the workplace, they tend to use this network for social and emotional support, but men use it to reap benefits associated with career advancement and getting the job done (Morrison, 2009). Women have fewer career advancement opportunities than men do: they are given not as many responsibilities being in the same positions as men, are less likely to receive reassurances and training, and it is more difficult for them to be part of key networks (Lyness & Thompson, 2000; Ohlott et al., 1994). Women executives have reported that establishing relationships are an important career enabling factor (Lyness & Thompson, 2000).

For women, it is more challenging to establish mentor relationships, which are important for career advancement (Linehan & Scullion, 2008). Mentors' support is associated with positive outcomes such as higher compensation and promotion opportunities (Seibert et al., 2001). Research suggests that lack of mentoring is one of the reasons that prevent women from getting appointed to multiple board positions (McDonald & Westphal, 2013).

It is harder for women to join important networks that could support their career progression and, therefore, more challenging to gain mentors. As networking and mentor acquisition is related to career success, it could be a factor that hinders women's career progression or, in contrast – accelerates it.

2.5 Individual level

In this section, differences between men and women in leadership style, risk-taking and ambition will be discussed. Effectiveness of leadership style is a crucial factor to advance career in leadership positions. Women are often seen as more risk-averse and less ambitious than men, which might be a factor for not striving and therefore not getting promotions at work.

2.5.1 Leadership style

According to Eagly et al. (1992), there is no difference when looking at men and women regarding their leadership styles and capabilities as leaders. Differences only lie in people's beliefs concerning gender and leadership style (Kolb, 1999). On the other hand, many researchers argue that men's and women's leadership styles are different (Appelbaum et al., 2003; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Oshagbemi & Gill, 2003).

Leadership styles can be characterized as feminine and masculine style. These styles are linked with gender roles, and the masculine style is identified as task-oriented, but the feminine style as relationship-oriented leadership (Oshagbemi & Gill, 2003). Men are more assertive, but women show more integrity, but the difference in styles is slight, and none of the styles is better than the other (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Feingold, 1994). According to Trinidad and Normore (2005), as men dominate in leadership positions, masculine leadership style is cherished; therefore, any person with a more feminine leadership style would be hindered as they might be evaluated by gender and not by facts.

Another way to characterize leadership styles is to divide them into transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire styles. As described by Eagly et al. (2003), people with transformational style, which is considered most effective, get across values, purpose, and importance of organization's aim, they set future goals and are optimistic about achieving the plans, they empower and encourage others and are mentors by recognizing individual's needs. Transactional leadership, which is also effective, is described as rewarding others for good work, correcting the failures, and waiting for issues to become severe before intervening. Laissez-Faire style is defined as frequent absence and inability to complete managerial duties. There is a slight difference between women and men's styles - women's styles gravitate towards transformational leadership, but men tend to be the less effective ones – transactional and laissez-faire (Eagly et al., 2003). It indicates that women tend to possess more effective leadership styles.

It has been argued that the difference between leadership styles is that women are more democratic and participative, but men are autocratic, and each of these styles is seen as effective under some circumstances (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Van Engen & Willemsen, 2004). Each leadership style brings forth its benefits for men and women (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Feingold, 1994). Appelbaum et al. (2003) argue that women's leadership styles are more effective in team-based organizations. A study by Eagly et al. (1995) shows that both genders are equal in terms of effectiveness. However, women are less effective in masculine leadership positions such as the military but are more effective in less masculine roles such as social service institutions, government, and education (Eagly et al., 1995).

The examined literature, which suggests that men's and women's leadership styles differ, discuss that women's careers might be hindered where masculine leadership style is preferred. Regards effectiveness, it is argued that women and men each have their advantages and that women might even have a slight advantage by possessing a more effective leadership style.

2.5.2   Risk-taking

It could be argued that women are more risk-averse than men and therefore do not take risks in career settings, which are needed to achieve higher positions. This subsection looks at when women and men differ in risk propensity and what effect it has on career advancement.

Research about risk and gender looks at three categories: health and physical safety, finance, and decision making in work settings. Women are more risk-averse when health and physical safety is considered (Harrant & Vaillant, 2008; Harris et al., 2006). Researchers agree that decision-making about investments differs depending on the context for men and women (Beckmann & Menkhoff, 2008; Charness & Gneezy, 2012; Fellner & Maciejovsky, 2007). He et al. (2008) suggest that women are more risk-averse in the context of losses but men in the context of gains. This difference might exist because both genders have different ways to estimate the probability of losses and gains (Fehr-Duda et al., 2006). No risk propensity difference is found in investment management in Europe (Barasinska et al., 2011), insurance judgments (Schubert et al., 2000), risk-taking of entrepreneurs (Sonfield et al., 2001), and situations of managerial planning (Castillo & Cross, 2008; Maxfield et al., 2010). Furthermore, Adams and Funk (2012) suggest women in director positions are a bit more risk-loving than men.

In work-related settings, women are more risk-averse as they do not seek risks as often as men in situations such as asking for promotions (Bowles & McGinn, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2009). They avoid negotiation to reach higher leadership roles because they have a smaller tendency to do it (Small et al., 2007). Women do not self-promote and talk proudly about their achievements (Ridgeway & Tannen, 1996 as cited in Maxfield et al., 2010, p. 594). These are essential activities to reach high leadership positions, but women face a negative response if they choose to engage in those actions (Rudman & Glick, 2001) and are recognized as less appealing, less socially attractive, and less employable (Bowles et al., 2007). In situations when women do talk about their accomplishments, they might use the word "we" even if they have done it alone; thus, the credit of successful risk-taking is not seen as theirs (Tannen, 2000).

There is no difference between men's and women's risk propensity in managerial planning settings, but women are more risk-averse in the context of losses, but men – gains. There is some evidence that women executives take more risks than men. The hurdle in women's career advancement could be that they do not ask or negotiate about promotions and do not self-promote when they have accomplished something.

2.5.3   Ambition

Research by Van Iddekinge et al. (2009) proposes a close relationship between one's motivation and their active attempts to be promoted to leadership positions. Individuals with high motivation to achieve positions of power more often pursue opportunities to attain experience and qualifications by taking part in training and establishing relationships with coaches and leaders. These individuals show higher endurance while performing leadership tasks (Chan & Drasgow, 2001). The efforts to acquire competence and to have ambitions play a crucial role in organisations' promotion choices (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005).

When it comes to ambition to reach top-level leadership positions, gender differences in values and beliefs could make a difference in desires and motivations (Eagly, 2005). Successful women themselves attribute their career success to their personality and hard work (Yewchuk et al., 2001). Yet, women, more often than men, doubt their abilities and therefore do not achieve career success (Sandberg, 2013). Some researchers argue that men and women in equivalent positions are similarly devoted to their jobs and equally motivated to be in leadership positions (Catalyst, 2004; Eagly & Carli, 2007). Other researches show that women are overall not as hard achievers (Adams & Funk, 2012), are less ambitious (Van Vianen & Fischer, 2002), and are less motivated to achieve positions of power (Schuh et al., 2014). Fiebig (2008) suggests that ambition to occupy leadership roles for women diminishes during adolescence. Women do not expect to achieve leadership positions, and therefore they also often do not (Sandberg, 2013).

Self-selection for leadership roles of women is very important to attain board member positions (Joecks, 2020). Women might often not be attracted to leadership positions and deliberately choose not to take them (Mohan, 2014). Catanzaro et al. (2010) suggest that men have stronger preferences for a competitive environment than women.

2.6   *Framework of barriers and enablers*

In the literature review, barriers and enablers affecting women's rise to leadership positions were discussed and, in this section, they have been collected in a framework. The relevant factors are divided into four levels: (1) governmental, (2) societal, (3) corporate, and (4) individual. Under each level, several barriers and respecting enabling factors affect women as leaders and, therefore, executives are listed. This framework will be used to create an interview guide. It will help to explore barriers and enablers of women's careers during the interviewing process.

Level	Barrier	Enabling factor
Governmental	Inadequate labour laws & regulations	Effective labour laws & regulations
	Lack of adequate work-life balance policies	Adequate work-life balance policies
	Lack of adequate information about existing diversity policies and practices	Adequate information about existing diversity policies and practices
	Lack of adequate parental leave and benefits	Adequate parental leave and benefits
	Lack of childcare facilities	Accessible childcare facilities
Societal	Obstructive general norms and cultural practices	Enabling general norms and cultural practices
	Unsatisfactory work-life balance practices	Satisfactory work-life balance practices
	Motherhood as an obstacle	
	Sexism	
Corporate	Masculine corporate culture	Inclusive corporate culture
	Lack of company leadership commitment to diversity	Company leadership commitment to diversity
	Lack of acceptance of the use of diversity policies and practices	Acceptance of the use of diversity policies and practices
	Lack of flexible work solutions	Flexible work solutions
	Lack of adequate "re-entry" opportunities	Adequate "re-entry" opportunities
	Lack of networks	Sufficient networks
	Lack of mentoring	Access to mentoring
Individual	Lack of efficient leadership skills	Efficient leadership skills
	Risk aversion	Risk-taking
	Lack of ambition	Ambition

Table 2: Framework of barriers and enablers to women's rise to positions of leadership.

Source: created by the authors using the articles discussed in the literature review.

3   Methodology

The framework of the enabling factors and barriers to women's rise to leadership positions (Table 2) in the literature was used as the basis for the structure of semi-structured in-depth interviews with women in executive positions in Latvian highest value joint-stock companies. When interviewing participants, the framework developed from literature helped determine which factors mentioned in the literature are also applicable for women in leadership positions in Latvia.

3.1   Research design

A qualitative approach using semi-structured in-depth interviews and thematic narrative analysis is employed to determine the factors that enable women to progress in their career advancement into the board member positions and the barriers for them.

A qualitative approach was selected as it is usually used to learn about a particular problem or issue from a personal perspective and what meaning is assigned to it (Creswell, 2014). This research is based on interviewee understandings and perceptions; therefore, the answers could not reveal the entire situation about the existing barriers and enabling factors. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were chosen as they offer guidance but allows more flexibility to adjust questions and ask follow-up questions (Myers, 2013). Thematic narrative analysis was selected as it enables participants to tell their stories and experiences, which can be analysed by comparing and contrasting findings across them and linking them to theory (Saunders et al., 2016). The narrative approach looks for patterns across participants' stories; then, they are documented and conceptualized (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

3.2   Data collection

Primary data was gathered by conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews. An interview guide (Appendix B) was developed based on the framework of the enabling factors and barriers to women's rise to leadership positions (Table 2). First of all, interviewees were asked open-ended questions about themselves, their careers, barriers, and enablers that they have experienced in the context of their professional life. Afterwards, opinions toward factors not originally stated by the interviewees, but perceived to be important from the literature were addressed. Interviews were conducted in the Latvian language and took place online. One interviewer conducted interviews to ensure consistency. During the interviews, the participants were observed as there was a video recording, and observations were incorporated in the analysis. However, for some interviews, it was not possible. The interviews were from 32 to

67 minutes long. Interviews differed in the number of questions asked depending on how detailed the answers of interviewees were. The number of questions asked varied from 11 to 73, and in some interviews, not all of the topics were discussed due to time constraints.

The interviewees were nine women who are management board members and eleven women in executive positions who are not part of the management board in Latvia's most valued joint-stock companies. Three women had additional positions as management or supervisory board members in one or several other companies. Women in executive positions were chosen because new board members are most often chosen based on prior executive experience (Orbach, 2017). Having higher and lower-level executives allows one to gain better insights into not only enablers but also barriers of the women's career progression as almost all of the women can still reach higher level – managerial or supervisory board positions.

Firms were chosen using TOP 101 of 2019 Latvian highest value companies by Nasdaq Riga and "Prudentia" (2019), which use enterprise value or equity value for banks and insurers to rank the companies. Joint-stock companies were chosen from the list as (1) many limited liability companies have only 1 or 2 board members, (2) for joint-stock companies, board members change more frequently, and (3) it is essential to look at joint-stock companies as there is a proposal from European Commission of a directive that companies listed on stock exchanges should diversify their boards in terms of gender.

Interviewees were chosen using purposive sampling based on two criteria – (1) they work in selected companies, (2) they are in executive positions. Women in executive positions who are not board members were chosen by their position titles or by inquiring about suitable candidates to board members or the company's public relations representatives. Interviewees were contacted via LinkedIn directly or through their colleagues. The number of interviews was chosen following the idea that an interviewing process should be finished when interviewees start giving the same answers (Baker et al., 2012).

Interviewees were aged from 27 to 63. Most of them were living in Riga; however, two other cities and two villages were also represented. Some participants have lived and worked outside of Latvia in the past. Participants were working in the following industries – Forestry, Rail, Aviation, Logistics, Utilities, Industrial Manufacturing, Consumer Goods Manufacturing and Trade, Consumer Services, Financial Services, Professional and Business Services, and Real Estate Activities. There were interviewees with relationship status – single, living with a partner, married, divorced, and widowed. Women with and without children were interviewed. Interviewees were chosen purposefully, and this research looks at a relatively small number of

specific cases but provides some diversity. Thus, the sample is not representative of the whole population, and therefore results obtained cannot be generalized.

3.3   *Ethical considerations*

Ethical considerations need special attention as narrative research is based on people's personal stories about their lives and themselves (Frost, 2011). According to Bell et al. (2019), receiving informed consent from the interviewees is crucial. Interviewees were informed about the research topic and purpose, the nature of their involvement in the research, what will happen to the data and that the participation is voluntary. Interviews were anonymous – participants' names, ages, and companies they work in are not mentioned. Industries and positions will also not be indicated to protect the identities of participants. Pseudonyms are given to the interviewees. Also, any information that is discussed in interviews and could point to the interviewees' identities is not included in results and discussion. The videos and audios will be disposed of after the research. Transcribed interviews will be kept, but the interviewee names and companies will not be mentioned in them.

3.4   *Data analysis*

The interviews were transcribed from audio files in Latvian. As suggested by Frost (2011), transcription was done in two rounds. Firstly, the draft of the interview that includes all words and pauses, emotions are created. Secondly, the text is rechecked, and utterances and notes on intonation are added. The thematic narrative analysis used and deductive approach was chosen. Analysis began with a set of codes based on the theoretical framework from the literature review. During the coding process, inductive codes were developed and added to the code list. Each interview was coded at least two times to ensure that all codes are marked consistently across all interviews. Coding was done using NVivo 12 Pro software. As suggested by Saunders et al. (2016), after coding, patterns and relationships across the codes were searched to develop themes that will categorize them. Themes were put in a coherent order to establish a structure in which interviewees' stories can be told and compared. Quotes used in the results were translated to English.

4 Results and discussion

In this section, interviewees' stories will be discussed, compared to each other and conclusions about what is and is not in line with the literature will be drawn. The division in four levels – governmental, societal, corporate, individual – will be kept, but the subsections will be adjusted to outline our case's most important topics.

4.1 Governmental level

In this section, the authors analyse the respondents' answers to questions regarding the governmental level's impact on their carrier advancement. The opinions on the availability of information, government benefits, gender quota system, maternity leave, and childcare are summarised.

4.1.1 Information and government benefits

Overall, the respondents felt that they would be able to find information regarding gender equality if needed. Most of the respondents indicated that in their view, this topic was sufficiently discussed in society. Tīna was confident that lack of awareness was not an issue:

"I have heard and talked enough about this topic; therefore, I don't see that lack of awareness would be a problem." (Tīna, January 21, 2021)

Krista had a similar opinion that there is a sufficient amount of information available; however, she provided more insight into the government legislation, stating that there was room for improvement. Simultaneously, Krista also highlighted the importance of having an awareness of the benefits available.

"In my experience, you get the benefits you apply for." (Krista, January 20, 2021)

"There is a lot of literature. […] In Latvian regulatory base the principles could be clearer and more extensive." (Krista, January 20, 2021)

Other respondents reviled their understanding of legislation and their rights by providing examples where they had utilized the support and benefits available to them.

"When I got pregnant, I switched to full-time employee status, as I was motivated by stability and the benefits." (Rasa, January 29, 2021)

"Under the Latvian legislation, the employer is not allowed to ask personal questions in job interviews." (Vika, January 22, 2021)

"I feel confident that when I give birth, I will have the benefits and be provided for." (Tīna, January 21, 2021)

Within the European Union and subsequently Latvia, a system of paid maternity leave is available to the new parents (Akgunduz & Plantenga, 2013). Despite this program, many of our interview participants revealed that they had returned to work before the maternity leave had ended. Many participants such as Vika and Zane revile that it was their personal choice to return to work, and there were no fundamental factors that had forced them to do that.

> "I didn't remain at home for long since both times I was invited to come back. [...] At the same time, it is not in my nature to stay home, I need, and I like my job" (Vika, January 22, 2021)

> "I had an understanding boss, and I didn't really bother with the full maternity leave. My firstborn was six months old when I returned, and the second only eight weeks, unfortunately. As soon as my sick leave ended, I returned without taking maternity leave at all. But that was my own personal choice." (Zane, January 21, 2021)

Other women depict a different scenario, where they had to return to work due to fear of losing the position:

> "I didn't really use maternity leave; I was working in parallel. [...] I was interested in continuing my work [...] honestly I was also afraid I might lose this job opportunity" (Alise, January 29, 2021)

While Tīna had observed that women after maternity leave are especially venerable to losing their jobs, however, she does note that such risk is more distinct for jobs that do not require some specific skillset or qualities.

> "It seems that you are newer welcomed to come back, and the problem is that it seems quite easy to let go of people who have just returned from maternity leave. [...] This situation, however, is more pronounced for positions that are more generic and easily replicable." (Tīna, January 21, 2021)

While discussing the topic of childcare, the interviewees highlighted the importance of having support from family members and childcare professionals. Some even stating that otherwise, they might not have been able to combine their work and family obligations.

> "I wouldn't have been able to work if not for the help from my family and also the nanny. Of course, that meant me paying the nanny while kindergarten was not available." (Māra, January 28, 2021)

> "In our case, we had granny as the main person to look after the children" (Krista, January 20, 2021)

Some respondents had difficulties finding a qualified and trustworthy person to help out with the childcare obligation. Laine had also come up with some suggestions like creating a certified childcare specialist network.

"We had a nanny to look after the children. I didn't rely on the kindergartens provided by the state. […] The nanny system could also be improved […] I had to choose mine without any guarantees and rely on my own intuition. […] A network of certified and reliable nannies would be useful" (Laine, January 27, 2021)

The interviewees were convinced that the availability of information regarding government policies of gender equality was not an issue. Most of them felt that the issue was discussed widely in society and that they knew of the policies relevant to them. The women were able to access and use the government benefits provided; however, they had to rely on family and paid labour in many cases to help with childcare.

4.1.2 Gender quotas

The gender quota system for company boards has been implemented in various European countries (Quayle & Gao, 2019). The respondents gave their views on whether this system would be desirable and appropriate for the Latvian business landscape.

Most of the women had a negative attitude towards the suggestion of gender quotas, while some did see some merit in the system. The main cons of the idea were that the job position should be filled by a person that is best qualified for the position.

"I have a negative attitude towards gender quotas. […] A position has to be filled with a person that is best qualified regardless of the gender." (Zane, January 21, 2021)

"I am against the quota system. I don't think any systems need to be put in place. Quota systems do not solve the issue, but rather lower quality." (Rasa, January 29, 2021)

Additionally, some women felt that such a system would dismiss their achievements and carrier advancements as they would happen due to artificially created circumstances.

"I am quite dismissive of the idea since it could create an opposite effect. I have never wanted to feel that I have been chosen for the position or achieved success because I am a woman and not a professional in my field." (Laine, January 27, 2021)

Some women did seem to advocate for the gender quota system, despite admitting that it is not a perfect solution. Many of these women had their own suggestions and condition for the system if it was to be implemented.

"Maybe initially to achieve equality, the quotas could be implemented, but afterwards they should be cancelled." (Laine, January 27, 2021)

"I think they could help, maybe in the government level. [...] In business very much would be dependent on the industry." (Alise, January 29, 2021)

Arta best summarised the cautions attitude towards the quotas and the fact that they would have to be implemented carefully:

"The quota system would be a synthetic and a little forced approach to dealing with the issue. However, since I doubt that there is a better way, I support the idea, but it has to be implemented very gradually." (Arta, January 21, 2021)

Regarding the gender quota initiative, most of the women from the interviews had a negative referring to arguments that positions should be filled by the most qualified candidates and that such a system would dismiss their achievements because of artificially created circumstances. Women who saw merit in the idea mentioned conditions under which they would support the idea. Mainly they were that the system should be implemented gradually and that it should be cancelled once the balance is reached.

4.2 Societal level

Regarding societal norms and practices, almost all interviewees brought up the topic of gender stereotypes in the context of work-life; thus, the sections will be merged. Then we turn to the role work-life balance practices and motherhood play in women's career progression.

4.2.1 Societal norms and sexism

It was suggested by Latvia's low score in masculinity and power distance dimensions that the society accepts gender equality (Hofstede, 2001). Interviewees had an overall positive outlook on Latvia's situation even though they could point out that gender stereotypes exist. The positive line of thought can be described with the following quotes:

"I think that Latvia is a great country for women. [...] We in our society have no pressure to be one or the other. Everyone is free to choose where they work, how they work, how they live." (Tīna, January 21, 2021)

"I doubt it that someone still thinks that a woman has to sit at home and take care of the children and the house. We have the dual view that women do both; they also work and progress in their careers." (Signe, January 18, 2021)

"If I have to compare the attitude between how it was when I began my career and what the attitude is now in the work sphere between men and women, now this topic is discussed a lot. [...] Society accepts this equality between men and women more and more." (Anna, January 20, 2021)

About a fourth of the women also outlined opposing opinions to gender-equal society. In their view, gender role distinction persists in some parts of society, and some occupations are gendered:

> *"It is dependent on which part of society you spend your time in, yes? Because there is a distinct society of men who do not value women, but there is a part where it is not important what gender you are." (Ieva, January 19, 2021)*

> *"I feel that in our society, there are these views of what women can be and what women cannot be, which in my opinion is old." (Marta, January 19, 2021)*

When focusing on the topic of sexism, there were two distinct groups of women. Half of the women have not felt sexism or just have chosen to ignore it; therefore, it has not affected their career. But the other half pointed out that they have encountered sexism and said it had affected their career progression.

As the framework to assess women's capabilities in leadership positions is limited, often stereotypes are used (Lee & James, 2007). Stereotypes assuming that women take up roles such as wives and mothers and their respective attributes are used. About half of the interviewees have felt that their ability assessment is based on stereotypes:

> *"Sometimes there is a feeling that women are given softer qualities, so a priori assumes that there are things a woman cannot do." (Anna, January 20, 2021)*

Furthermore, when management's leadership style preference was discussed, some interviewees' experience was in line with the cross-cultural comparison done by Schein (2001). They acknowledged that stereotypical male behaviour is preferred for leadership positions:

> *"Mostly when they are looking for a diligent performer, it is a woman as an assistant. When we talk about men, they can be entrusted to lead, manage, make decisions." (Olga, January 21, 2021)*

Also, Eagly (2005) argues that it is assumed that leadership is more compatible with the male than the female gender role. A couple of women have felt this gender bias against women as managers. Una herself revealed that she, as a board member as well as her team, choose to use gender as a criterion for some specific managerial positions:

> *"I have some experience that there are positions where a man would work better. These are positions where you have to take more risks and be able to manage them." (Una, January 24, 2021)*

It also was mentioned by Arta and Rita that men are the ones who are in positions of power, and they prefer to work with men and evaluate candidates based on gender:

"At present, those in high positions are mostly men, and they value and expect from their subordinates' attitudes based on their units of measurement and perception." (Arta, January 21, 2021)

"Men want to work with men, and also male subordinates are not happy when women are in management." (Rita, January 28, 2021)

On the other hand, many women mentioned that expectations for men and women are the same when they already occupy managerial positions:

"As you climb the career ladder, these expectations become very equal. Then you are expected to be as "business", as objective, as rational, and as fast-minded as anyone else in this position." (Laine, January 27, 2021)

Examples of both types of sexism – hostile and benevolent were mentioned during interviews. Some women mentioned feeling negative stereotypes and attitudes against themselves because of the leading position they occupy – hostile sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Some women had felt benevolent sexism which made them doubt their abilities (Dumont et al., 2010). Examples of hostile sexism were mentioned by Tīna and Alise, but benevolent sexism by Signe:

"A man is like a tractor that can break walls, which I as a woman can't do. [...] If I'm insistent, it may sound whiny or aggressive. [...] For a man, it would be interpreted as good quality that he is self-confident or dedicated." (Tīna, January 21, 2021)

"Often, women in management positions are stamped as careerists, which is with a negative undertone. [...] In my team, I have occasionally heard some remarks that are not flattering to women. [...] It is rated badly if a woman is in a leading position. My marriage also broke down because I was in a higher position, and my husband couldn't really accept it. (Alise, January 29, 2021)

"At that moment, it [stereotyping] contributed to such insecurity ... As soon as you remain insecure, you are also unable to look at things more broadly, more strategically, to exclude emotions. There is always the uncertainty about myself that I will come up with something out of the ordinary now, and it might fail." (Signe, January 18, 2021)

There were some perks that women mentioned they had because of their gender at the workplace. Māra said that sometimes when working with men, gender difference plays a positive role in finding solutions and compromises. Tīna acknowledged that it is easier for her to achieve some things because men in power feel less intimidated by women. Laine mentioned that it is easier to stand out between men. Elza thinks that she might have gotten some job opportunities because most men were in management and accepting a woman could make

management more diversified. The perk brought up by Alise is that women receive flowers on the company's anniversary.

Most of the interviewees had a positive outlook when it came to the overall situation in Latvia regarding societal norms even though they had encountered instances of gender stereotyping. When asked about sexism specifically, half of the respondents had not felt sexism or had chosen to ignore it, but half said they had their career advancement affected because of it. Hostile and benevolent sexism examples were given by the interviewees. Nevertheless, some positive outcomes due to the gender difference in the workplace were also highlighted.

4.2.2 *Work-life balance practices and motherhood*

Regarding work-life balance practices, almost all women acknowledged that housework workload is equally spread across their family members. Interviewees, as suggested by Van Vianen & Fischer (2002), recognize that work-home can be an obstacle to career advancement, but they have family support which enables them to succeed in their careers. A balanced amount of domestic responsibilities for women decreases the gender bias in organizations (Acker, 2006). Some examples of women's stories:

> *"We always divide [housework] by how much [work] load we have at that moment. [...] It has definitely helped the career growth." (Laine, January 27, 2021)*

> *"[Housework workload is] very democratic. We don't have any specific things we do, our cooperation is very cool, and we just feel each other. Who does more, who does less. In general, it is 50 to 50 percent." (Signe, January 18, 2021)*

> *"I have a very understanding and supportive family. I am not asked for what I can't provide." (Krista, January 20, 2021)*

A few of the women outlined a situation of having more household responsibilities or finding it hard to find a positive work-family balance. According to Gabaldon et al. (2016), this factor has a great effect on women's career advancement:

> *"I think that women, in general, have a heavier burden of household responsibilities than men, and that ability to combine it with the work is not always easy." (Rasa, January 29, 2021)*

The positive work-life practices for part of the women are due to the outside help they receive. They pointed out that they use services to take care of household chores:

> *"Of course, I wouldn't be able to deal with both housework and a career on my own. I do less at home because I am in a responsible position; I need rest. And I can afford to hire someone to do those practical things." (Alise, January 29, 2021)*

Household chores are not the only responsibility for which our interviewees seek help from outside. Half of the women recognize that caring for children would be a disabling factor for career growth if they would not have outside help – nannies or family members:

> *"If you start to take any such managerial positions [...], it's volume and pace, and it's all very big. So, it's probably important that you have some support at home so you can leave those sick children with your grandmother." (Vika, January 22, 2021)*

> *"Working and being active, I've always had someone to help me, well, let's say a babysitter for the girls." (Zane, January 21, 2021)*

Most of the women acknowledged that they had made decisions so that life at home does not impact their career (more discussed in the corporate-level section). Their decisions are contrary to those suggested by Hoyt (2010) – women sometimes value work life as much as family life and choose to gain experience and grow in their careers:

> *"A career is not just a job; it is already a way of life. [...] This effect is quite the opposite; work affects children's upbringing and not the other way around. (Rita, January 28, 2021)*

> *"Well, for professional life, of course, it [motherhood] was a lot of stress, so the focus has to be divided between the child and the work. The work sometimes took more than it should, and I took that attention away from the child." (Alise, January 29, 2021)*

Career women, who are also mothers, often struggle with pressure and conflict in their mother and earner roles (Timurtürkan, 2020). A notable part of the women mentioned that it is true for them, and they have to choose to focus most of their time on one or the other. Some feel that choosing work over kids is a hard decision:

> *"When I returned to work, I had a feeling that while the children are young, this is like violence against a woman. When a woman has to return to work, but also think about how the children feel." (Anna, January 20, 2021)*

> *"Because, on the one hand, I really enjoyed my job, because I'm a workaholic, I like and am interested in work, but I always have a conscience that I don't spend as much time with my children as I might like." (Arta, January 21, 2021)*

Most women didn't see motherhood as a barrier to career growth and said it had no negative effect. Surprisingly more than a third of women said that childbirth had a positive effect on their career. Guna received promotions and a salary increase after the births of both her children. Rita remarked that having children has a positive impact on society's perception of her. Anna and Vika said that they became more mature when they had kids. Zane and Krista highlighted the positive side of having children and its effect on career:

"The birth of a child greatly raises the level of responsibility. [...] When the level of responsibility at home increases for you, it will also increase at work at the same time." *(Zane, January 21, 2021)*

"In fact, it is a much bigger responsibility and a pretty big motivator to go ahead, to achieve some financial stability, also some stable career situation to provide to family, to ensure a successful upbringing of children." (Krista, January 20, 2021)

Regarding work-life balance practices, there was a mixture of results. Most of the women admitted that work-life balance was a concern, but the majority had family support systems to rely on. Women in executive positions admitted that they have felt extra pressure when trying to combine private and work obligations. When addressing motherhood as a factor, the majority of women did not see it as a barrier to career growth. Some interviewees revealed that childbirth had a positive effect as they felt more mature and sensed that societies perception of them had also changed.

4.3   Corporate level

In this section, the authors use the interview answers to examine what barriers and enabling factors women have experienced on a corporate level. A subdivide into corporate culture, company diversity policies, flexible work solutions, re-entry opportunities, as well as networking and mentoring is used.

4.3.1   Corporate Culture

Organizational culture embodies values, norms, and beliefs that are incorporated in the everyday life of organization's members and form their behaviours and attitudes (E. H. Schein & Schein, 2017). We examine those behaviours and attitudes as represented by the answers given in the interviews that were conducted.

The interviewees mentioned that the company corporate culture depends on several factors. The difference between private and state-owned enterprises was highlighted, stating that large private and most state-owned enterprises have a well-developed culture while the opposite can be observed in smaller businesses:

"State-owned enterprises are big companies, and they pay a lot of attention to inner company policies and the working environment. [...] Regarding the private sector, especially in the small and medium enterprises, the situation is much more complex." (Signe, January 18, 2021)

The culture also depends on the sector for example Public Relations, as mentioned by Signe, are dominated by women and therefore the culture there is as well.

> *"Mostly the people employed depend on the sector they are in. For example, in PR there are more women in general and therefore our PR is also mostly staffed with women." (Signe, January 18, 2021)*

The management's role in shaping the corporate culture was highlighted by Māra she also added an important observation that was further strengthened by Vika that the managements views can be changed by women actors. This observation is in line with that made by Seierstad et al. (2017) who state that women actors are important factors that drives the agenda for gender equality.

> *"It really depends on the management, currently my boss has quite a stereotypical view, however, it has started to change as he sees the positive examples of women being able to do a lot and in high quality." (Māra, January 28, 2021)*

> *"I personally have ensured that there is no discrimination, not only toward gender but religion and nationality as well." (Vika, January 22, 2021)*

The corporate culture within the companies represented by the interviewees was characterised as positive and accommodating. The examples of corporate culture within the companies are seen below:

> *"Our corporate culture is based on mutual respect; this also includes any topics regarding discrimination." (Vika, January 22, 2021)*

> *"Our corporate culture is very successful since they allow everyone to patriciate in creating it." (Signe, January 18, 2021)*

> *"When evaluating candidates for new positions we ensure that they have similar salary as their peers, that way we sort of ensure equal treatment." (Tīna, January 21, 2021)*

> *"We have a very highly regarded corporate culture, there are no stereotypes or biases that a woman can't do something." (Olga, January 21, 2021)*

At the same time, some interviewees seem to reduce the importance of corporate culture that was intended to achieve gender balance, stating that some industries are naturally dominated by men and artificially creating a culture to change that would not be beneficial.

> *"We have a very masculine field, there is no need to artificially create some gender balance. […] My industry is quite technical and is dominated by men. […] Some discussions tend to be rough and with no nonsense, but it is completely normal, it is how we achieve results." (Alise, January 29, 2021)*

The interviewees presented many factors that influenced the corporate culture itself and therefore their experience regarding this aspect was inconsistent. They mentioned that state-owned enterprise and large companies tend to have a well-developed culture, while smaller businesses tend to struggle with it. The sector and industry also influenced the corporate culture. Notably, there were examples where women were able to change the culture within the company due to their action or initiatives.

4.3.2 Company diversity policies

In this subsection, the authors review the answers to the questions under the company diversity policies segment.

Many participants revealed that they do not have any specific policies regarding diversity, nor do they see the need for them. The bureaucracy and the existing gender balance were mentioned as reasons for their views.

> *"We have quite an informal environment, we try to limit bureaucracy where possible."*
> *(Tīna, January 21, 2021)*
>
> *"We do not have any specific goals or policies, since we think that we have achieved equality already." (Marta, January 19, 2021)*
>
> *"We have 50-50 gender split within the company. [...] There is no need for any policies." (Arta, January 21, 2021)*

Rasa did allude that even though there were no specific gender balance policies in the company, she would see the benefit of them on a board level. Māra did also suggested that there would exist a benefit from more gender-balanced boards. One of the positive aspects of having a gender-balanced board as concluded by Quayle and Gao (2019) is the avoidance of the so-called "groupthink".

> *"We do not have any specific policies. [...] In our executive board there is one woman, and the supervisory board is all male. Maybe they should have some policies on that level." (Rasa, January 29, 2021)*
>
> *"Gender has never been a real criterion for board positions; it is more of a bonus if there is a woman as a board member." (Māra, January 28, 2021)*

As observed by Chavez and Weisinger (2008) large corporations tend to have a well-designed and structured corporate policy. These findings are supported by answers from Guna, who works at a multinational organization:

"We have our social responsibility policy since we are a company within an international group. Our policies for treating everyone equally and against discrimination are very strict." (Guna, January 20, 2021)

Company diversity policies results were aligned with the answers from the corporate culture segment. Larger and more international enterprises tended to have strict and developed policies while smaller and more local ones did not.

4.3.3 Flexible work solutions

A study by Desvaux et al. (2007) found that one of the initiatives that had the most significant effect on women's involvement in company boards was an introduction of means to improve work-life balance. A flexible work solution is seen as a way of achieving a better work-life balance by many of the interview participants:

"I think it is a super good solution. [...] It helps to create a work-life balance, it is especially important for new mothers and those who have small children. [...] It is no longer a limiting factor for women. The current [Covid] situation has definitely helped reduce discrimination if there was any before." (Tīna, January 21, 2021)

"It gave me a good support for my carrier advancement since with the flexible arrangement I was able to work more. I was saving time on a commute, therefore, I was able to have more time for work." (Krista, January 20, 2021)

"In the home environment there might be more tasks and more intensity, but I get tired less." (Dina, February 5, 2021)

"Women tend to do more chores at home. [...] We [women] are more capable of multitasking. [...] I think this flexible arrangement gives women more opportunities." (Māra, January 28, 2021)

Despite the positive impression for a flexible work solution, many interviewees did mention that it is sometimes difficult to arrange them and that it largely depends on the industry and the position you are in. Māra notes the factor of industry, while Una's and Rasa's quotes depict the job titles' impact.

"It really depends on the company culture. [...] In one of the Ministries you had to work late and if necessary, at the weekend. While in my current company there has always been a divide between work and private time and space." (Māra, January 28, 2021)

"It is easier for managers and specialists, not so much for others, regardless of the gender." (Una, January 24, 2021)

"In a management level the work intensity depends on the period. When there are budgets due you cannot take time off." (Rasa, January 29, 2021)

Davies and Frink (2014) state that employers seek a workforce that can be fully committed to the workplace obligations. Some interviewees admitted that the flexible work arrangement might hinder their productivity and limit their commitment.

"Those who might not like this idea are those who have small children at home and do not have a dedicated space for office where they could work at peace." (Dina, February 5, 2021)

"I have observed that productivity has decreased during Covid and the subsequent working from home. [...] You have to determine for who the flexible arrangements are working and for whom they are not." (Olga, January 21, 2021)

"It requires a supervisor who trusts its employees and it requires some sort of control mechanism, more than just the hours worked." (Rasa, January 29, 2021)

Generally, flexible work solutions were seen as a good way to improve work-life balance. Some women did see some disadvantages to flexible work, namely reduced productivity, lack of supervision and unequal opportunities for employees since the availability of such solutions would largely depend on the position you occupied in the company. Despite some negative opinions, most of the respondents had a positive attitude to flexible work. The supporting arguments were that it would allow for better time management, time saved on a commute, more time with family and contradictory to previously mentioned increased productivity.

4.3.4   Re-entry opportunities

Opting out to go on maternity leave can be seen as a violation of the ideal worker norm and tends to send a negative signal to the employer (Weisshaar, 2018). Some of the women interviewed expressed an opinion that coincides with the literature. Stating that they either do not trust the employer to maintain their position or that they would not be able to combine their work obligations and a big family.

"A company cannot promise what will happen after a year. Even if they did I would not believe them." (Alise, January 29, 2021)

"If I was a manager of a company and wanted a large family, it would be quite difficult to leave and have someone to replace me. If that was to be the case, I would step back from the position altogether." (Rita, January 28, 2021)

Despite these previously expressed opinions, most of the interviewees had little or no concern that the re-entry opportunity for them would be denied. They expressed trust in the system and the employer.

> *"I was quite lucky in a sense that I was able to get hired when I was already four months pregnant, the company did have a Scandinavian manager though." (Elza, January 28, 2021)*

> *"We try ensuring that there is a possibility to come back. Sometimes it is not that easy to arrange the same position, if not there we try to ensure other positions are available within the company." (Laine, January 27, 2021)*

> *"In my workplace, I have not seen anyone worry that they might not be able to come back after maternity leave. It is quite the opposite if the person is good professional, in that case, they are very eager and welcomed for them to come back." (Arta, January 21, 2021)*

Most of the women had trust in the system and were confident that the employment position will be retained; however, some women had concerns.

4.3.5   Networking and mentoring

It has been discussed in the literature that it is more challenging for women than men to establish networks or enter the existing ones in the workplace (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Linehan & Scullion, 2008). Nevertheless, almost all women noted that they do not have problems with networking.

Most participants of our study reported the same as women executives in the study by Lyness and Thompson (2000) – establishing and maintaining relationships is a meaningful career enabling factor. Most women agreed that good relationships with colleagues help them get the job done more efficiently and even help achieve career goals. It goes against the arguments of Morrison (2009) that women use these relationships primarily for social and emotional support.

> *"And it [networking] really helps in my work, because sometimes there are issues you've never encountered, but you need to solve. And it's always good to discuss with someone who has already experienced it." (Dina, February 5, 2021)*

> *"Definitely feedback from market participants helps, from key people in the industry with whom I had worked before. No employer will take a person for a managerial position if he has not got any feedback from industry professionals." (Olga, January 21, 2021)*

Some exceptions found it harder to enter already established networks in the company. Rasa, Alise, and Laine expressed their thoughts about the existence of men networks and that they feel that having access to them might give them some benefits:

"Yes, probably men form groups, get involved in some sports events and the like. Yes, it happens. [...] Would being in such an environment had given me something... Well maybe... Probably yes." (Rasa, January 29, 2021)

"Well, in some ways, men in management positions like to communicate with men; they have such a community there. [...] Well, probably, if my goal was to grow up the career ladder, then the fact that I don't go to bars and don't drink with them, maybe it deprives me of some opportunities." (Alise, January 29, 2021)

"[...] Association Council consisted just from gentlemen, and I will say that it always felt like I was interrupting their conversations because it is a closed circle of gentlemen. [...] It is challenging to enter such a place and moment." (Laine, January 27, 2021)

Some women mentioned having networks of women in their company or across managements of different organizations:

"The bubble of women leaders is also developing in Latvia; it could be said, it is where this support is formed. There are many women, and I would say that they are delighted to cooperate with each other." (Rita, January 28, 2021)

According to Linehan and Scullion (2008), mentor relationships are essential for career advancement, but it is harder for women to establish them. Almost all women, both who have had a mentor and those who have not, agree that mentorship benefits career progression. Most of the women in our sample have had at least one mentor and did not find it hard to establish those relationships, but the stories differ.

Dina has not had a mentor and does not want one because she does not see the benefit from these relationships. Zane does not wish to be mentored because of personal reasons:

"It seems to me that Latvia is so small, I don't want to share my psychological thoughts with anyone, even if he can help me be more influential." (Zane, January 21, 2021)

The other women who have not had a mentor would have wanted one in the past and thinks it could have helped them. Rita shared her thoughts about her last promotion:

"I didn't have any mentors, no helpers, I formed myself as a company manager. [...] But I needed a mentor, it's clear... From both the psycho-emotional and the knowledge baggage, it was just necessary." (Rita, January 28, 2021)

Some women said that they had had mentors officially appointed from the company or by a business incubator. These mentors helped to learn the basic tasks, but women did not describe them as having a significant impact on their careers:

"In general, mentors are a good thing, but not every mentor fits. As a psychologist or psychotherapist, however, there must be such an emotional connection and such a high level of trust in one's mentor." (Arta, January 21, 2021)

Most of the women had a great experience with mentors they have found themselves – colleagues, managers, and role models outside of the company. Mentors have helped with career and personal decisions to develop professionally and personally. Also, it was mentioned that they might have helped to gain promotions.

"I have always been looking for, say, some kind of business cases for women and men in companies who, in my perception, are great leaders who have some qualities that I admire and that I wanted to develop in myself." (Marta, January 19, 2021)

"People who with their such wisdom and such great experience in work, profession and life and their openness to tell and help in some difficult situations ... So their openness, their judgments, and stories." (Vika, January 22, 2021)

"What kind of people have been around me definitely [helped], my managers, my work teachers, who also helped me choose the right path at some point and definitely nominated me for positions." (Laine, January 27, 2021)

Most of the interviewees considered networking and good relationships in the workplace as a crucial part of getting the work done efficiently and that it might enable career progression. They did mention that sometimes men tend to form their inner circles and that it can be hard to get included in them. At the same time, the fact that existing female managers were creating their own network was highlighted as well. Regarding mentoring, some participants did see merit in having a mentor, the majority of the opinions were that these factors had not played a crucial role in their career advancement.

4.4 *Individual level*

Under this segment, the authors consider the individual factors that might influence women career advancement. The type of leadership style is considered, risk-taking preferences are examined and lastly the level of personal ambitions is looked at.

4.4.1 Leadership style

Many researchers have argued that men's and women's leadership styles are different, this statement tends to represent the views of the majority of the interview participants. (Appelbaum et al., 2003; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Oshagbemi & Gill, 2003). There are some participants, like Signe, who disagrees. In her opinion, the leadership style is dependent on personality and not gender. Her statement is supported by Eagly et al. (1992), who states that there is no difference in leadership style between men and women.

"I feel that the leadership styles depend on personality, not gender." (Signe, January 18, 2021)

There are researchers like Oshagbemi and Gill (2003), who created a division of masculine and feminine styles. It is stated that the masculine style is identified as task-oriented, while the feminine style as relationship-oriented leadership. This division is strongly supported by most of the interview participants. They state that their focus is mainly on their teams and the relationships within them and the interactions they have with individual employees.

"My only instrument is my employees. I have to find solutions to make them loyal." (Zane, January 21, 2021)

"Women feel when something nice needs to be said. You cannot take everyone for granted. […] Women more often than men express praise and say thanks." (Tīna, January 21, 2021)

"For women, it is more important to find the right approach to people." (Vika, January 22, 2021)

"I am very supportive of my team. It is extremely important for me to monitor the internal climate within the team" (Krista, January 20, 2021)

"Men are a little more rational when making decisions, it is important for them what the results are going to be primarily." (Māra, January 28, 2021)

Eagly et al. (2003) found that people with transformational style empower and encourage others, he also notes that women are the ones who tend to move towards and become transformational style leaders. This view is coinciding with information gathered from the interviews.

"You have to help your employees to advance their professional development. […] I help my employees set goals and provide opportunities that will help them move up the career ladder." (Marta, January 19, 2021)

Many women saw the different leadership style as a benefit to the company. Anna and Dina alluded to the benefit of the phenomenon called "groupthink". It is stated that having

diversified boards and management helps to introduce new solutions, ideas, and perspectives (Quayle & Gao, 2019).

> *"When there are crisis situations, if a woman is involved in the search for solutions the results are often better." (Anna, January 20, 2021)*
>
> *"The leadership styles cannot be the same when you are in upper management, you need people with a different mindset." (Dina, February 5, 2021)*

The leadership styles of the interviewed women largely corresponded to those explored in the literature review. Interviewees tended to have relationship-oriented leadership styles, additionally, they considered the needs of their employees and were helpful regarding their professional development. The benefits of having a mix of leadership styles within company management were also mentioned.

4.4.2   Risk-taking

Regarding risk-taking, all of the women who mentioned physical risks said that they are risk-averse. It supports the findings of Harrant and Vaillant (2008) and Harris et al. (2006) that women are more risk-averse when health and physical safety is considered. Those women who mentioned that they are risk-averse in work-life said their position or industry requires risk aversion and mitigation. Castillo and Cross (2008) and Maxfield et al. (2010) suggest that when it comes to risk propensity in work-life settings, women do not avoid risks. It can be seen in our sample of women – almost all women said that risk-taking is essential for career development, and they choose to take them when they are necessary and can be justified.

> *"Anyone can run a stable process, but it is clear that if a company wants some growth, it must take risks." (Una, January 24, 2021)*
>
> *"I think it's more of taking responsibility, which of course involves some risk because you often have to go beyond something usual." (Vika, January 22, 2021)*
>
> *"Well, every day, I take risks because there are so many things in business that you can't afford not to take. [...] There are risks, big risks from all sides. I am used to risks because when you are a member of the board, you have risks, any risks." (Dina, February 5, 2021)*

Research suggests that women do not seek risks as often as men in situations such as asking for promotions (Bowles & McGinn, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2009). Half of our sample has asked for a promotion or salary increase at least once, but half have not ever done it. It is suggested that women do not self-promote and talk proudly about their achievements (Ridgeway & Tannen, 1996 as cited in Maxfield et al., 2010, p. 594). It was the case with most

of the women. The reason was mentioned by many is because they see it as work well done and not as achievements:

> *"I would like to hope that I am more modest, and I do not boast about my achievements. I do not see them as achievements, I see them as work well done." (Zane, January 21, 2021)*

> *"There are various projects where it is clear to everyone that I have done the project from A to Z. [...] I really like to present and tell something that has been done. [...] When I have to get praise from colleagues, in the end, I don't like that praise because I thought it was already my job; I was paid for it." (Anna, January 20, 2021)*

According to Tannen (2000), when women talk about their accomplishments, they might use the word "we" even if they have done it alone. Only a few women said they do not do it or cannot remember an event like this. The reasons for the choice to present individual work as teamwork were different – (1) giving a sense of ownership to other people, (2) teaching a lesson to others, (3) helping others out, (4) management will see who has done the work, (5) ownership does not matter.

Rudman and Glick (2001) and Bowles et al. (2007) suggest that women's self-promotion leads to negative response from co-workers and employers, but none of the women argued that it is why they choose not to engage in these actions.

Regarding risk-taking most of the women saw it as a necessity for career development, citing that increased risk corresponds to greater growth of the company and therefore positively reflects on their performance. At the same time, only half of the women had asked for a raise or promotion during their career and most of the women referred to their accomplishments as teamwork even if they have done the work by themselves.

4.4.3 Ambition

According to Van Iddekinge et al. (2009), there is a close relationship between motivation and active attempts to be promoted to leadership positions. It might have played a role in the interviewees' career success. Most of the women described themselves as ambitious, or their statements about their future aspirations were perceived to be ambitious by the researchers:

> *"Of course, it has always been important for me, let's say, from a purely personal point of view, to develop a career. Of course, I would like to go even further, and I would see myself as chair of the management board, and perhaps around sixty years, I would like to see myself as chair of the supervisory board." (Marta, January 19, 2021)*

"I'm not the person who sets some particular, measurable goal for myself for the future, […] I try to see any opportunity for further development." (Krista, January 20, 2021)

Eagly (2005) argues that gender differences in values and beliefs could make a difference in desires and motivations for ambition. This research cannot assess these differences, but it can be noted that some women described their ambition as a wish to develop their team, develop other people, or do something socially meaningful. Some women said they find it essential to have an exciting job, not to have a higher position.

"I want to be with the best HR team in manufacturing companies in Latvia; that is my ambition." (Vika, January 22, 2021)

"My ambition is to transfer knowledge as much as possible and to provide knowledge to the people I work with so that they will be stronger in the future." (Rasa, January 29, 2021)

"I do not have a goal to get higher positions; it is important for me that I have the opportunity to implement projects that are interesting to me, make my own decisions, develop. Those positions are not important to me." (Guna, January 20, 2021)

Māra and Ieva mentioned that they do not desire to reach higher positions and have chosen not to accept these kinds of offers which is in line with the research of Mohan (2014). They have chosen to do so to maintain the balance between professional and private life.

"Well, there is no particularly higher [ambition]. In my opinion, then, it would be difficult to maintain private and professional balance." (Māra, January 28, 2021)

I have simply given up a number of positions that would be challenging for my career, and I would learn a lot. […] I personally want to balance my work with my personal life, so I don't want to change anything anymore. (Ieva, January 19, 2021)

Most of the women described themselves as ambitious. A significant part of women at this point of their career was not ambitions purely for promotions, but regarding becoming better professionals in their fields and doing something meaningful.

5 Limitations

Firstly, unwillingness to respond to interview questions honestly is a limitation to interviews with personal questions. It was crucial to assure participants that the audios and videos will be seen only by the researchers and disposed of after the research is complete. The interviewees' personal information such as name, age, company, and position will not be mentioned in the research paper. Anyway, complete honesty cannot be assured.

Secondly, qualitative research results could be biased due to the researchers' attitude towards the topic. The data collection, analysis, and presentation are done with a neutral view on the topic as possible to mitigate the bias. Both researchers coded the data, and there were regular consultations with the supervisor to maintain objectivity.

Thirdly, there were time restraints that limited the length and the number of interviews. It was not possible to discuss all of the topics with all of the interviewees during the interviews. The follow-up interviews would have given the possibility to ask additional questions that raised during the data analysis. To acquire the most amount of information, the interview guide consisted of many possible follow up questions. Also, it eliminated unnecessary pauses and used the interview time most efficiently. Nevertheless, a nonsufficient amount of information about leadership style and corporate culture was gathered during the interviews.

These limitations provide grounds for further and more extensive research of the topic.

6   Conclusions

The authors used the narrative approach method to research the enablers and barriers for women to progress in their career advancement into executive positions in Latvian highest value joint-stock companies. A total of 20 interviews were conducted with women in an executive position within the TOP 101 of 2019 Latvian highest value companies. The research is divided into four sections: (1) governmental level, (2) societal level, (3) corporate level, and (4) individual level.

On a governmental level, the authors observed that almost no interviewees alluded to inappropriate labour laws or regulations regarding gender equality. It was also evident that information regarding said laws and regulations were available if needed to the participants. Therefore, no barriers were observed that would correspond to government policies or the availability of information. Some women highlighted that they would have had trouble achieving their carrier goals if they did not have extra childcare support. Many had help from parents, or they hired someone to take care of children. This has indicated a barrier of inadequate childcare facilities in Latvia while the help of family members can be viewed as an enabling factor.

For the societal level, the authors explored the gender norms and cultural practices, work-life balance, motherhood, and sexism as possible areas for barriers or enablers for interviewee carrier advancement. Most women admitted that they had encountered gender stereotyping in the workplace and society; some gave examples of hostile and benevolent sexism from their experience. Overall, they did not see cultural norms and sexism as a barrier to carrier advancement. The work-life balance was described as challenging; some had enlisted paid help to manage household chores and obligations. The women who had balanced household chore division between them and their family members did not see these responsibilities as barriers. Regarding motherhood, it was seen as a neutral factor. Furthermore, some women saw it as an enabler for their career advancement.

In the third segment, the authors focused on corporate culture and practices within the companies where the interviewees are employed. The women highlighted that in their experience, company culture varied a lot depending on the size of the company, management, and whether it is a state-owned or private business. The interviewees presented examples where they were able to be the drivers of change and contributed to the adjustment of the corporate culture of their companies. Most of the women also mention flexible work solutions as an enabling factor for their careers, stating that they could be more productive and plan their time

better, which had also improved their work-life balance. When asked about re-entry opportunities in the workplace after maternity leave, almost every woman cited no issues; however, some mentioned possible problems for non-executive women employees. Networking was seen as an enabler for career advancement as it improves job efficiency. There were some instances where it was difficult for the interviewees to be included in some pre-existing male circles. In their opinion, it might be a barrier to their career advancement. Finding mentors was not a problem for our interviewees, but these opportunities were not seen as a crucial enabler for career development.

On an individual level, the authors focused on three topics: leadership styles, preferences for risk aversion, and ambition. Most women admitted that there existed a difference between leadership styles depending on gender; however, there was no consensus on whether one style was better. Instead, some saw the benefit of having different leadership styles; they were convinced that it helped avoid "groupthink". When asked about their specific leadership styles, the interviewees noted that they focused on creating relationships with fellow employees and subordinates to achieve results. Regarding risk propensity, the women saw risk-taking as a necessary factor for career advancement, and most of the women said that they are not risk-averse. Despite this opinion, only half of the women in our sample had asked for a promotion or pay raise, and most of them agreed that they often referred to their accomplishments as teamwork even if they have done the work by themselves. Most women saw themselves as ambitious, which according to literature, is an enabling factor for women's career advancement.

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8   Appendices

8.1   *Appendix A. Management and board structure diagram*

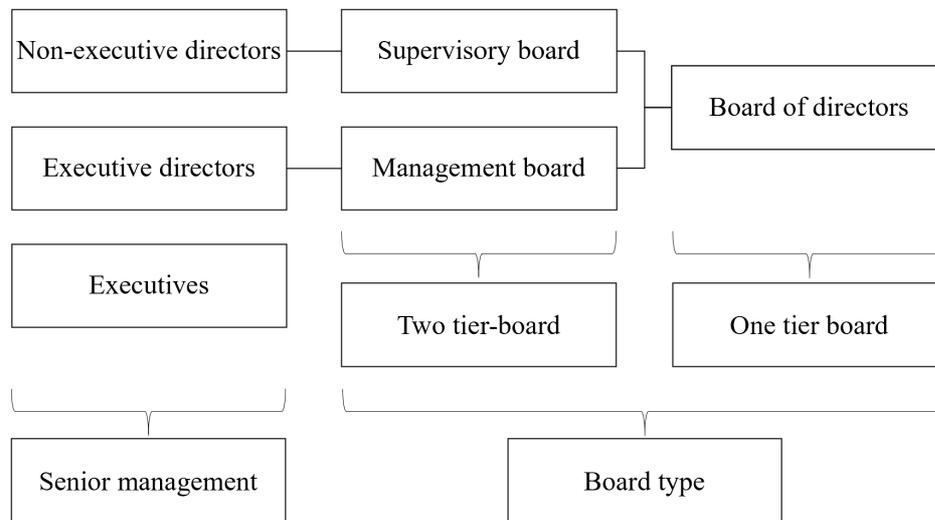| Non-executive directors	—	Supervisory board	
			Board of directors
Executive directors	—	Management board	
Executives		Two tier-board	One tier board
Senior management			Board type

Diagram A. Management and board structure. Source: Created by authors using the information of the European Institute for Gender Equality (2020).

8.2   *Appendix B. Interview guide for the interviews with women in executive positions*

Introduction

About us and the topic of the thesis

> This interview is a part of writing a bachelor's thesis with the topic: "The enabling factors and barriers for women to progress in their career advancement into board member positions in Latvia's highest value joint-stock companies". Today you will be interviewed by me, Agnese Blūmane, and I am writing my bachelor's thesis together with my classmate Toms Timpars.
>
> With this work, we want to understand the berries and enabling factors for women to enter high positions in companies and, consequently, improve the representation of Latvian women in leading positions in organizations.

Topics discussed

> We will start today with a set of questions about you, followed by general questions about barriers and enabling factors. Then we will discuss 4 sub-themes: impact of factors in government, society, company and individual level.

Technical details

The interview will be anonymous, and a pseudonym will be used for references. The company you work for will not be mentioned.

The interview will be recorded, but the recording will not be passed on to others.

The interview will last one hour.

Introductory questions

- o Tell us about yourself and your career!

- o How did you start your career?

- o What sector do you work in? Have you always worked in this sector?

- o What is the name of your current position in the company and long have you been in this position?

- o What is the title of your prior position and was it in the current company?

- o What is your age?

- o In which city do you live? Have you lived anywhere else before? Where?

- o What is your current relationship status?

- o Do you have children? And if yes, how many?

About barriers and enabling factors

- o Tell us more about your current position! How do you feel in your current position?

- o How did you reach the current position?

- o Which aspects or factors helped you to reach this executive/board member position?

- o Which factors would you, however, describe as hindering your career advancement?

- o Please elaborate on any occasions/ events you would characterize as unsuccessful during your career!

Factors framework

This part of the interview will address factors that are said to play a role in career advancement or are considered to be barriers to obtain leadership positions.

Governmental level

Labour laws & regulations

- o How informed are you regarding the Labour Laws in Latvia?

- o How large an impact Labour Laws in your country has had on your career advancement?

- o What is your opinion regarding the gender quota system?

Work-life balance policies

- o What has been your experience with work-life balance policies?
- o How large an impact work-life balance policies has had on your career advancement?

Availability of information about existing diversity policies and practices

- o How easily do you have access to information on gender equality policies and laws if it is needed?
- o How much impact has the accessibility factor had on your career development?

Parental leave and benefits

- o What has been your experience with parental leave and benefits?
- o How large an impact parental leave and benefits has had on your career advancement?

Childcare facilities

- o What has been your experience with childcare facilities?
- o How large an impact availability of childcare facilities has had on your career advancement?
- o How frequently have you used relatives or friends to help with childcare while you were at work?

Societal level

General norms and cultural practices

- o What has been your experience with societal norms and culture in the context of gender equality?
- o How do you feel about the gender role divide in Latvia?
- o How much have societal norms and culture had an impact on your career development?
- o How do expectations vary for both genders?
- o How do you feel about it regarding your professional life?
- o Do you see a difference between the leadership styles of men and women?
- o *If yes:* What are the differences?
- o *If yes*: Which one is favoured in Latvia?
- o Who are better leaders – men or women?

Work-life balance practices

- o What has been your experience with work-life balance practices in Latvia?
- o How large an impact work-life balance practices in Latvia has had on your career advancement?

- What is the division of household chores between you and your family members?
- What impact does the amount of household chores you have had on your professional life?

Motherhood

- *If has kids:* What impact having kids has had on your professional life?
- *If has kids:* Has having kids been an obstacle in any way for your career progression?
- *If does not have kids:* What role has your professional life had in the fact that you do not have kids?

Stereotyping and prejudice

- What has been your experience with stereotyping and prejudice of women?
- How large an impact stereotyping and prejudice has had on your career advancement?
- Could you recall some specific situations when you have felt stereotyping and prejudice?
- How would you most likely be described by your colleagues?

Corporate level

Corporate culture

- How would you characterize the culture in your company?
- How large an impact corporate culture had on your career advancement?

Commitment to diversity from the company's leadership

- Are there any diversity-related targets or policies in your company? What are they?
- Has the commitment of company management to gender equality had an impact on your career development?
- Are there any set goals for the women to men ratio for executive or board positions in your company?

Acceptance of the use of diversity policies and practices

- How are the policies received by employees of your company?
- How large an impact the acceptance of the use of diversity policies and practices had on your career advancement?

Opportunities for critical work experience and responsibility

- What has been your experience with opportunities for critical work experience and responsibility?
- What kind of impact has opportunities for critical work experience and responsibility had on your career advancement?

- Have you felt that having or not having some opportunities has had to do something with your gender? Any examples?

Flexible work solutions

- Did your workplace offer any flexible work solutions before the start of the pandemic?
- What kind of solutions has been implemented since the start of the pandemic?
- What kind of impact has flexible work solutions had on your career advancement?

"Re-entry" opportunities after maternity leave

- What has been your experience with "re-entry" opportunities after maternity leave?
- How large an impact "re-entry" opportunities after maternity leave has had on your career advancement?

Networks

- What has been your experience with networking in your company?
- Have you had an experience when your gender has impacted your networking abilities?
- How large an impact networking has had on your career advancement?
- How would you describe your relationships with colleagues?
- Does your relationship with colleagues have a specific purpose, such as socialization or promoting work interests?

Mentoring

- Have you had a mentor?
- *If yes:* What relationship do you and your mentor have?
- *If yes:* How large an impact mentoring has had on your career advancement?
- *If yes:* Have you had trouble establishing mentoring relationships?
- *If no:* Would you like to have a mentor?
- *If no:* How could a mentor affect your career development?

Individual level

Leadership style

- How would you characterize your leadership style?
- How big a role leadership style plays in achieving leadership positions?
- Do you consider yourself a good leader?

Taking risks

- When was the last time you did something risky and what was it?

- o Do you consider yourself to be a risk-taker or risk-averse and what role it has played in your career advancement?

- o Have you ever asked for a promotion? How did it work out?

- o Do you talk proudly about your achievements at your workplace?

- o Have you ever attributed success to teamwork even if you have done the task alone? How did you feel about that?

Ambition

- o What are your ambitions in your professional life?

- o What do you generally want to achieve in your life?

- o What is more important: professional or personal life? Why?

Closing

- o What would be your advice for a woman who aspires to reach a high-level position in a company?

8.3 Appendix C. Interview guide for the interviews with women in executive positions in Latvian

Ievads

Par mums un darba tematu

Šī intervija notiek bakalaura darba ietvaros ar tēmu: "Veicinošie faktori un šķēršļi sievietēm virzīties uz priekšu karjeras izaugsmē valdes locekļu amatos Latvijas augstākās vērtības akciju sabiedrībās". Šodien Jūs intervēšu es, Agnese Blūmane, un bakalaura darbu rakstu kopā ar kursabiedru Tomu Timparu.

Ar šo darbu vēlamies izprast šķēršļus un veicinošos faktorus sieviešu nokļūšanai augstos amatos un līdz ar to uzlabot Latvijas sieviešu pārstāvniecību vadošās pozīcijās uzņēmumos.

Intervijā apspriestie temati

Mēs šodien sāksim ar ievada jautājumiem par Jums, kam sekos vispārīgie jautājumi par barjerām un veicinošajiem faktoriem, un tad tiks apspriestas 4 apakštēmas - ietekme valdības, sabiedrības, uzņēmuma un individuālajā līmenī.

Tehniskā informācija

Intervija būs anonīma un darbā atsaucēm tiks izmantots pseidonīms. Uzņēmums, kurā strādājat, netiks pieminēts. Intervija tiks ierakstīta, taču ieraksts netiks nodots citām personām. Intervija ilgs vienu stundu.

Ievada jautājumi

- o Pastāstiet par sevi un savu karjeru!
- o Kā Jūs uzsākāt savu karjeru?
- o Kādā sektorā jūs strādājat? Vai vienmēr esat strādājusi šajā sektorā?
- o Kāds ir Jūsu šī brīža amats uzņēmumā un cik ilgi Jūs esat šajā amatā?
- o Kāds bija Jūsu iepriekšējais amats un vai tas bija pašreizējā uzņēmumā?
- o Kāds ir Jūsu vecums?
- o Kurā pilsētā Jūs dzīvojat? Vai esat dzīvojusi iepriekš kur citur? Kur?
- o Kāds ir Jūsu pašreizējais attiecību status?
- o Vai jums ir bērni? Un ja jā, tad cik?

Par barjerām un veicinošajiem faktoriem

- o Pastāstiet vairāk par savu šī brīža amatu! Kā Jūs jūtaties savā amatā?
- o Kā Jūs nonācāt šajā amatā?
- o Kuri aspekti vai faktori palīdzēja Jums sasniegt šo vadošo / valdes locekļa amatu?
- o Pastāstiet veiksmes stāstus, kas notikuši karjeras izaugsmes laikā, ko varat atcerēties!
- o Kurus faktorus jūs tomēr raksturotu kā tādus, kas kavējuši Jūsu karjeras izaugsmi?
- o Pastāstiet par kādiem gadījumiem, ko uzskatāt par neveiksmīgiem Jūsu karjeras laikā!

Faktoru sistēma

Nākamajā intervijas daļā galvenā uzmanība tiks pievērsta dažādiem literatūrā minētajiem faktoriem, kuriem ir nozīme karjeras izaugsmē vai kuri tiek uzskatīti par šķēršļiem, lai iegūtu vadošus amatus.

Valdības un valsts līmenis

Darba likumi un regulas

- o Cik informēta esat par darba likumiem Latvijā?
- o Cik liela ietekme darba likumiem un regulām dzimumu līdztiesības jautājumos ir bijusi uz Jūsu karjeras izaugsmi?
- o Kāda ir Jūsu attieksme pret dzimumu kvotu sistēmu?

Darba un privātās dzīves līdzsvara politika

- o Kāda ir bijusi Jūsu pieredze ar darba un privātās dzīves līdzsvara politiku?
- o Cik liela ietekme darba un privātās dzīves līdzsvara politikai ir bijusi uz Jūsu karjeras izaugsmi?

Informācijas pieejamība par pašreizējo dzimuma līdztiesības politiku

- o Cik viegli pieejama Jums ir informācija par politiku un likumiem, kas saistīti ar dzimuma līdztiesību, ja tā ir nepieciešama?
- o Cik liela ietekme pieejamības faktoram ir bijusi uz Jūsu karjeras izaugsmi?

Bērnu kopšanas atvaļinājums un pabalsti

- o Kāda ir bijusi Jūsu pieredze ar bērnu kopšanas atvaļinājumiem un pabalstiem?
- o Cik liela ietekme bērnu kopšanas atvaļinājumiem un pabalstiem ir bijusi uz Jūsu karjeras izaugsmi?

Bērnu aprūpes iespējas

- o Kāda ir bijusi Jūsu pieredze ar bērnu aprūpes iespēju kontekstā?
- o Cik liela ietekme bērnu aprūpes iespējām ir bijusi uz Jūsu karjeras izaugsmi?
- o Cik bieži esat izmantojusi radiniekus vai draugus, lai tie izpalīdzētu ar bērnu aprūpi, kamēr esat darbā?

Sabiedrības līmenis

Sabiedrības normas un kultūra

- o Kāda ir bijusi Jūsu pieredze ar sabiedrības normām un kultūru dzimumu vienlīdzības kontekstā?
- o Kā jūs jūtaties par dzimumu lomu dalījumu Latvijā?
- o Kāda ietekme sabiedrības normām un kultūrai ir bijusi uz Jūsu karjeras izaugsmi?
- o Kā atšķiras tas, ko sagaida no abiem dzimumiem?
- o Kā jūs jūtaties par savu profesionālo dzīvi saistībā ar šo aspektu?
- o Vai redzat atšķirību starp vīriešu un sieviešu vadības stiliem?
- o *Ja jā*: Kādas ir atšķirības?
- o *Ja jā*: Kurš no tiem tiek uzskatīts par labāku Latvijā?
- o Kas ir labāki līderi - vīrieši vai sievietes?

Darba un privātās dzīves līdzsvara prakse

- o Kāda ir bijusi Jūsu pieredze darba un privātās dzīves līdzsvara praksi Latvijā?
- o Cik liela ietekme darba un privātās dzīves līdzsvara praksei Latvijā ir bijusi uz Jūsu karjeras izaugsmi?
- o Kāds ir mājsaimniecības darbu sadalījums sarap Jums un Jūsu ģimenes locekļiem?
- o Kādu ietekmi uz Jūsu profesionālo dzīvi atstāj Jūsu mājsaimniecības darbu apjoms?

Mātes loma

- o *Ja ir bērni:* Kāda ietekme bērnu ienākšanai Jūsu dzīvē ir bijusi uz Jūsu profesionālo dzīvi?

- *Ja ir bērni:* Vai bērni ir kādā veidā atstājuši negatīvu ietekmi uz jūsu karjeras izaugsmi?

- *Ja nav bērnu:* Kādu lomu jūsu profesionālā dzīve ir spēlējusi tajā, ka jums nav bērnu?

Stereotipizēšana un aizspriedumi

- Kāda ir bijusi Jūsu pieredze ar stereotipizēšanu un aizspriedumiem pret sievietēm?

- Cik liela ietekme stereotipizēšanai un aizspriedumiem ir bijusi uz Jūsu karjeras izaugsmi?

- Vai Jūs varētu atsaukt atmiņā kādas situācijas, kad esat izjutusi stereotipizēšanu un aizspriedumus?

- Kā, visticamāk, Jūs raksturotu Jūsu kolēģi?

Uzņēmuma līmenis

Korporatīvā kultūra

- Kā Jūs raksturotu korporatīvo kultūru Jūsu uzņēmumā?

- Cik liela ietekme korporatīvajai kultūrai ir bijusi uz Jūsu karjeras izaugsmi?

Uzņēmuma vadības apņēmība ievērot dzimumu līdztiesību

- Vai Jūsu uzņēmumā ir mērķi vai politika, kas saistīta ar dzimuma vienlīdzību? Kādi tie ir?

- Kāda ietekme dzimumu līdztiesības politikai ir bijusi uz Jūsu karjeras izaugsmi?

- Vai uzņēmumā ir nosprausti mērķi, kas saistīti ar dzimumu attiecību vadošos amatos un valdē?

Dzimumu līdztiesības politikas akceptēšana uzņēmumā

- Kā dzimuma vienlīdzības politiku un mērķus uztver Jūsu kompānijas darbinieki?

- Cik liela ietekme dzimumu līdztiesības politikas akceptēšanai uzņēmumā ir bijusi uz Jūsu karjeras izaugsmi?

Darba pieredzes un attīstības iespēju iegūšana

- Kāda ir bijusi Jūsu pieredze ar darba pieredzes un attīstības iespēju iegūšanu?

- Kāda ietekme darba pieredzes un attīstības iespēju iegūšanai ir bijusi uz Jūsu karjeras izaugsmi?

- Vai esat izjutusi, ka, iespēju trūkums vai tieši iespēju iegūšana, ir kaut kā saistīta ar jūsu dzimumu? Kādi piemēri Jums nāk prātā?

Elastīgi darba risinājumi

- Vai jūsu darbavieta piedāvāja elastīgus darba risinājumus pirms pandēmijas sākuma?

- Kādi darba risinājumi ir ieviesti pandēmijas laikā?

- o Kāda ietekme elastīgiem darba risinājumiem ir vai būtu uz Jūsu karjeras izaugsmi?

Darba atsākšanas iespējas pēc grūtniecības un dzemdību atvaļinājuma

- o Kāda ir bijusi Jūsu pieredze ar darba atsākšanu pēc grūtniecības un dzemdību atvaļinājuma?
- o Kāda ietekme darba pārtraukšanai uz grūtniecības atvaļinājuma laiku ir bijusi uz Jūsu karjeras izaugsmi?

Sakaru dibināšana uzņēmumā

- o Kāda ir Jūsu pieredze ar sakaru dibināšana uzņēmumā?
- o Vai esat pieredzējusi, ka Jūsu dzimums ir ietekmējis Jūsu sakaru dibināšanas iespējas?
- o Kāda ietekme sakaru dibināšanai uzņēmumā ir bijusi uz Jūsu karjeras izaugsmi?
- o Kā Jūs raksturotu savas attiecības ar kolēģiem?
- o Vai Jūsu attiecībām ar kolēģiem ir kāds noteikts mērķis, piemēram, socializēšanās vai darba interešu sekmēšana?

Mentorings

- o Vai Jums ir bijis mentors?
- o *Ja jā:* Kādas ir Jūsu attiecības ar mentoru?
- o *Ja jā:* Cik liela ietekme mentoringam ir bijusi uz Jūsu karjeras izaugsmi?
- o *Ja jā:* Vai Jums ir bijušas grūtības iegūt mentoru?
- o *Ja nē:* Vai Jūs vēlētos mentoru?
- o *Ja nē:* Kā mentors varētu ietekmēt Jūsu karjeras izaugsmi?

Individuālais līmenis

Vadības stils

- o Kā Jūs raksturotu savu vadības stilu?
- o Kāda loma vadības stilam ir līderpozīciju iegūšanā?
- o Vai Jūs uzskatāt sevi par labu vadītāju?

Riska uzņemšanās

- o Kad Jūs pēdējo reizi savā dzīvē darījāt kaut ko riskantu, un kas tas bija?
- o Vai uzskatāt, ka Jūs uzņematies vai izvairāties no riska un kāda tam ir bijusi nozīme Jūsu karjeras izaugsmē?
- o Vai esat kādreiz lūgusi amata paaugstinājumu? Kā tas izdevās?
- o Vai Jūs ar lepnumu apspriežat savus sasniegumus savā darba vietā?
- o Vai esat kādreiz panākumus pasniegusi kā komandas darbu, pat ja uzdevumu esat paveikusi viena pati? Kādas bija Jūsu sajūtas par to?

Ambīcijas

- o Kādas ir Jūsu ambīcijas profesionālajā dzīvē?

- o Ko Jūs dzīvē vispārīgi vēlaties sasniegt?

- o Kas Jums ir svarīgāks - personīgā vai profesionālā dzīve? Kāpēc?

Noslēgums

- o Kāds būtu jūsu padoms sievietei, kura vēlas sasniegt augsta līmeņa amatu uzņēmumā?