

**OVERCOMING CHALLENGES IN FEMALE LEADERSHIP:
CASE STUDY COMPANY X**



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TIIVISTELMÄ

Tämän opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena on määrittää ja analysoida haasteita, joita naiset kohtaavat urallaan, samalla etsien menetelmiä, miten haasteet voitaisiin voittaa. Naisten asema on parantunut useiden tutkimusten mukaan viimeisten vuosikymmenien aikana Suomessa. Tämä opinnäytetyö tutkii Suomen tämän hetkistä tilannetta kolmen suomalaisen naispäällikön silmin. He ovat kaikki samasta media-alan yhtiöstä, ja tämä tutkimus kuvaa heidän kokemuksiaan erilaisista haasteista urallaan. Tutkimuksen teoreettinen kehys sisältää tutkimuskysymyksen, naisjohtajien kohtaamat haasteet ja niihin liittyvät perspektiivit. Laadullista tutkimusmenetelmää sovellettiin tutkimuskysymyksen vastausta selvitettäessä. Tämän opinnäytetyön tärkeimmät aiheet olivat naisjohtajuus, merkittävimmät naisten kohtaamat haasteet. Opinnäytetyö sisältää kolme seikkaperäistä haastattelua sekä naispäälliköiden tutkimustuloksien analysoinnin ja yhteenvedon. Johtopäätös naisjohtajien tutkimuksesta oli se, että naiset kohtaavat haasteita urallaan, mutta he ovat myös löytäneet keinoja päästä niiden yli, hyödyntäen esimerkiksi mentorointia ja omien kykyjen kehittämistä. Tämän opinnäytetyön yhteenvetona oli, että tutkimus vastasi tutkimuskysymykseen ja tutkimus tavoitteet saavutettiin.

Avainsanat Johtajuus
Haasteet
Lasikatto
Teemahaastattelu

Sivut 49 sivua, joista liitteitä 5 sivua

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to determine and analyze the challenges women encounter while climbing their career ladder, whilst discovering methods how to conquer them. The position of women has been in a steady growth for the past decades in Finland. This thesis will research the current status of three Finnish female managers from a media corporation and how they have experienced different challenges in their careers. The framework of this thesis contains the research question, the challenges that the female managers have encountered in their career and different perspectives that were associated with them. A qualitative research method was utilized to find answers to the research question. The thesis contains subjects such as female leadership, the main challenges women encounter, three in-depth interviews, and the analysis of the research results of the female managers. The outcome of the female leadership research was that women do face challenges in their careers and they have also found ways to conquer them, by utilizing mentoring and developing one's strengths. The conclusion was that this thesis was able to answer the research question and the objectives were reached.

Keywords Leadership
Challenges
Glass Ceiling
Semi-Structured Interview
Focused Interview

Pages 49 pages including appendices 5 pages

CONTENTS

| | | |
|-------|---|-----|
| 1 | INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| 2 | FEMALES IN LEADERSHIP | 2 |
| 2.1 | The Main Challenges | 3 |
| 2.1.1 | Glass Ceiling | 3 |
| 2.1.2 | Lack of Mentors..... | 4 |
| 2.1.3 | Family Life | 4 |
| 2.1.5 | Pay Inequity | 5 |
| 2.1.6 | Stereotypes and Perception of Women as Leaders..... | 8 |
| 3 | QUALITATIVE RESEARCH ABOUT FEMALE MANAGERS | 9 |
| 3.1 | Framework, Purpose and Aim..... | 9 |
| 3.2 | Research Method | 11 |
| 3.3 | The Collection of the Data..... | 161 |
| 3.4 | Before the Interviews..... | 12 |
| 3.5 | Practical Implementation Plan | 13 |
| 3.6 | Processing of Data..... | 164 |
| 3.7 | Reliability of the Research..... | 15 |
| 3.8 | Commission Company X..... | 16 |
| 4 | CASE: THREE FEMALE MANAGERS AND THEIR STORIES | 17 |
| 4.1 | Background Information about the Participants | 17 |
| 4.2 | Background Information about the Interview | 18 |
| 4.3 | The Results | 19 |
| 4.3.1 | Theme 1 Females in Leadership..... | 19 |
| 4.3.2 | Theme 2 Challenges..... | 22 |
| 4.3.3 | Theme 3 Glass Ceiling..... | 26 |
| 4.3.4 | Theme 4 Mentors..... | 28 |
| 4.3.5 | Theme 5 Pay..... | 30 |
| 4.3.6 | Theme 6 Females in Working Life..... | 33 |
| 5 | ANALYSIS OF THE IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS | 35 |
| 5.1 | Analysis..... | 35 |
| 5.1.1 | Theme 1 Females in Leadership..... | 35 |
| 5.1.2 | Theme 2 Challenges..... | 36 |
| 5.1.3 | Theme 3 Glass Ceiling..... | 36 |
| 5.1.4 | Theme 4 Mentors..... | 37 |
| 5.1.5 | Theme 5 Pay..... | 37 |
| 5.1.6 | Theme 6 Females in Working Life..... | 37 |
| 5.2 | Factors that Influenced the Results | 38 |
| 5.3 | Self-Assessment | 38 |
| 5.4 | Recommendations | 39 |
| 6 | CONCLUSION | 40 |
| | REFERENCES..... | 41 |

Appendices

Appendix 1 Cover Letter for Interview Request

Appendix 2 Interview Questions

Appendix 3 Excel Spread Sheet: Index of Wage and Salary Earnings (Figure 2.)

Figures

Figure 1 Model of Glass Ceiling Creating a Challenge in Proceeding in Career Ladder

Figure 2 Index of Wage and Salary Earnings

Figure 3 Theoretical Framework

Figure 4 The Basic Information of the interview

1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze and determine the challenges women encounter in their careers and how can women conquer those challenges while climbing the corporate ladder.

Determining the methods of conquering challenges in the course of women's career is essential for them but also for the next generations. This thesis topic is exceedingly relevant for women in the future to minimize the challenges and maximize the success.

Women in management positions have not been a typical sight in corporations throughout the history. Matters such as Women's Suffrage in 1906, Women's right to stand for election in 1907 and The Equal Pay Act in 1987 have been vital in the process of having women in the leading positions today. (Lähtenmäki, 2000, p. 229, 259 & 269)

Due to the history of women staying at home taking care of the children and men being at work for the sake of paying the bills, it has been more than a challenge for women to earn their position in organizations alongside with their male colleagues. (Maitland & Thomson, 2014, p. 26)

As Michelle Obama, one of the most admired women in the modern days said; "You should never view your challenges as a disadvantage. Instead, it's important for you to understand that your experience facing and overcoming adversity is actually one of your biggest advantages." At City College of New York commencement in 2016. (The White House, 2016)

The goal of this thesis and the qualitative research conducted is to determine and analyze the challenges with the aim of discovering methods for conquering them, while enabling a steadier climb for the future aspiring women in their career ladder.

In the following, the researcher displays the research question that this thesis aims to find an answer to;

How can women overcome the challenges they face while climbing the career ladder?

2 FEMALES IN LEADERSHIP

In the mid-1980s around 50 percent of university graduates were women. Women alongside with their male colleagues were entering the workforce with same achievements and expectations. Shortly thereafter, the career paths and corporate experiences were beginning to divide between the two genders. (Davidson & Burke, 1994, p. 1)

Alison Maitland and Peter Thomson (2014) argued that “The biggest component missing from leadership today – especially in the corporate world – is women. If diversity in the leadership team really is a strategic objective, as more and more business leaders claim it is , then the requirement of ‘total commitment’ will undermine it .”

The prior studies will support the findings in this thesis and bring perspective to the research conducted. Statistics Finland generated results from Quality of Work Life Survey in 2013, where the opportunities in proceeding in one’s career was measured and the differences between men and women were examined. The best chances of proceeding in one’s career had men employees. The predominant trend that can be easily seen is that men are more likely to proceed in their careers in every measurement year. The other trend is that the chances of both men and women proceeding in their careers increased every year. (STAT, 2018, p.62)

The Quality of Work Life Survey also generated information about employees, whose job description included managerial responsibilities. Between the years of 1984 and 2013 men had approximately 10 percent more employees in managerial duties than women. In other words, in 30 years men have always been more likely to have managerial responsibilities in their job description. (STAT, 2018, p.62) In the same survey Statistics Finland had also researched the percentage of employees, who had a female manager between the years of 1984-2013. According to the results, arguably the majority of women have had women managers, but only 5-15 percent of men have had women as their manager throughout the years. (STAT, 2018, p.63)

On the contrary, it has been suggested that a good leader can be either man or a woman, and the gender does not exclude either of them. On the other hand, if the leader is not effective or efficient, the gender issues may arise. (Malinga, 2011)

The prior studies and statistics demonstrate the females’ status in working life. It may be argued that females have had challenges in proceeding in their careers in the past. Which makes one wonder; why is it so difficult for women to achieve leadership positions, and what are the challenges they encounter that may prevent them from proceeding in their careers?

2.1 The Main Challenges

In the following chapter, the author will display a few major challenges that women can encounter, while pursuing higher in their careers. The questions this thesis aims to answer is; how women can overcome those challenges and how those challenges could be minimized or prevented for the future generations. These following challenges were chosen from prior studies and sources concerning this research topic.

2.1.1 Glass Ceiling

It is not unusual for women to hit the glass ceiling while climbing up the career ladder. The glass ceiling is defined to be a barrier to some extent, which is inhibiting women from rising to the higher positions, which can be seen in the Glass Ceiling Model (Figure 1.). (Coleman, 2011, p.1)

The figure displays the pyramidal shape, which represents the possibility of several glass ceilings, depending on the extent of the progress the woman is able to make inside of the organizational structure. A qualified woman with great competences looks up through the glass ceiling and sees what she is capable to reach, but the invisible barrier prevents her from breaking through it. (Wirth, 2001, p.25)

The cause for the glass ceiling is identified to be gender stereotypes, and the expectations of how women do their work, provide and how should they act. (Heilman, 2001, p. 657– 674.)

The challenges and unseen barriers in women's career are described as glass ceiling. The recurring exposure of women to gendered norms and the advancement barriers can indeed have an influence on women's decision making, aspiration, motivation and eventually the achievements during their careers. (Paludi, 2013, p. 67)

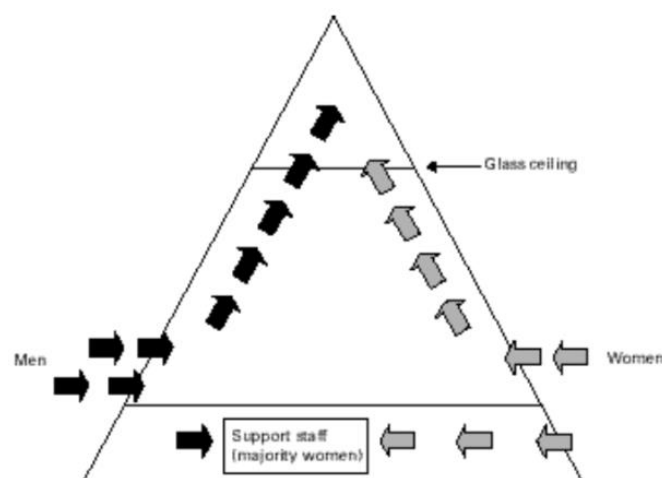


Figure 1. Model of Glass Ceiling Creating a Challenge in Proceeding in Career Ladder. (Wirth, 2001)

2.1.2 Lack of Mentors

A negative affect to women's willingness to achieve certain roles in organizations can be caused by underrepresentation of women in certain career areas. This can be a consequence of lack of mentors, and more specifically lack of female mentors. This is unfavorable for women, since there are fewer female leaders available to mentor them to begin with. (Paludi, 2013, p. 67)

Mentors can also be seen as significant part of the development in women's career. Feelings such as, fear and insecurity are often experienced during a career path, but with the help of mentors those feelings can be conquered. In fact, when insecurities and fears are understood, and women are able to relax, and they will be able to operate more assertively. This will also bring sense of security, which can convey one's self-confidence to her peers. (Kaufmann, 2008, p. 122)

2.1.3 Family Life

"Employees shall be entitled to take leave from work during maternity, special maternity, paternity and parental benefit periods... At the end of a leave... employees are in the first place entitled to return to their former duties." (Employment Contracts Act 55/2001 Chapter 4, Section 1 & 9.)

In the 1980s and 1990s the transition towards more 'family friendly' employment started by changing attitudes towards work. Men were not maintaining work by themselves anymore, and women were able to have both career and family. It was possible for women to take maternity leave and be able to return their former position. Unfortunately, there were some challenges in that as well. The legislation that ensured fairer treatment for women was also a reason behind emphasizing old stereotypes. The maternity leave gave women special treatment so that they could take a break from work to have children. Albeit, men had the opportunity to take paternity leave, it was still seen less generous and shorter. This reinforced the idea of women having the children, not women and men together, which led to a disadvantage in the eyes of employers', when considering hiring women who are in childbearing age. (Maitland & Thomson, 2014, p. 27)

2.1.4 Pay Inequity

The Equal Pay Act legislated in 1986 to prevent discrimination between women and men, to promote equality and improve women's status in working life. (Finlex, 2016)

The most meaningful statements in law concerning this research topic:
"In all their activities, authorities must promote equality between women and men purposefully and systematically and must create and consolidate administrative and operating practices that ensure the advancement of equality between women and men in the preparatory work undertaken on different matters and in decision-making."
(Act on Equality Between Women and Men 609/1986 Section 4.)

"Every employer must promote equality between women and men within working life in a purposeful and systematic manner. In order to promote gender equality in working life, the employer must, with due regard to the resources available and any other relevant factors,

- 1) act in such a way that job vacancies attract applications from both women and men;
- 2) promote the equitable recruitment of women and men in the various jobs and create for them equal opportunities for career advancement;
- 3) promote equality between women and men in the terms of employment, especially in pay;
- 4) develop working conditions to ensure they are suitable for both women and men;
- 5) facilitate the reconciliation of working life and family life for women and men by paying attention especially to working arrangements; and
- 6) act to prevent the occurrence of discrimination based on gender."

(Act on Equality Between Women and Men 609/1986 Section 6.)

The aforementioned Acts have been legislated to generate pay equality, in the contrary, factors such as stigma, stereotypes and incivility can generate pay inequity. It has been suggested by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2011 that the obstacles women encounter are more overwhelming compared to ones that men do, such as being paid less than men for the same work. (Paludi, 2013, p. 66-67)

The statistics of European Commission provides an insight of the pay equality between men and women in Europe and in Finland. According to the European Commission in 2017, women in the EU earned on average 16% less per hour than men. The difference in average gross hourly earnings between men and women in Finland 2017 was 17%. (European Commission, 2018) Nevertheless, the gender statistic database reports that the pay gap has decreased from 20% (2007) to 17% (2017) in Finland. (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2019)

When the existence of pay gap between men and women is acknowledged, it is important to know, what does it consist of. The study conducted by Juhana Vartiainen in 2001 focuses on Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition, where the pay gap is divided into explanatory variables and unexplained variables. This approach explains some explanatory variables such as different competences or effectiveness. The remaining unexplainable pay gap will not be able to interpret with these variables. This gap embodies the difference in treatment between the sexes in labor market. (Vartiainen, 2001)

Statistics Finland affirms the claim of unequal pay with their Index of wage and salary earnings in 2016. The index demonstrates the average earnings of employees in all sectors between the years of 2000 and 2016. Without exception men have earned in average more than women every year. Men earned in average around 550 euros a month more than women did. (STAT, 2018, p.66)

The following figure 2. the Index of wage and salary earning demonstrates the regular wages of male and female's in private sector, municipality, and government vacancies. The figure 2. displays the development of pay gap from 2000 to 2019, where the year 2019's value was an estimate. The values of the figure 2. can be found from the Appendix 3.

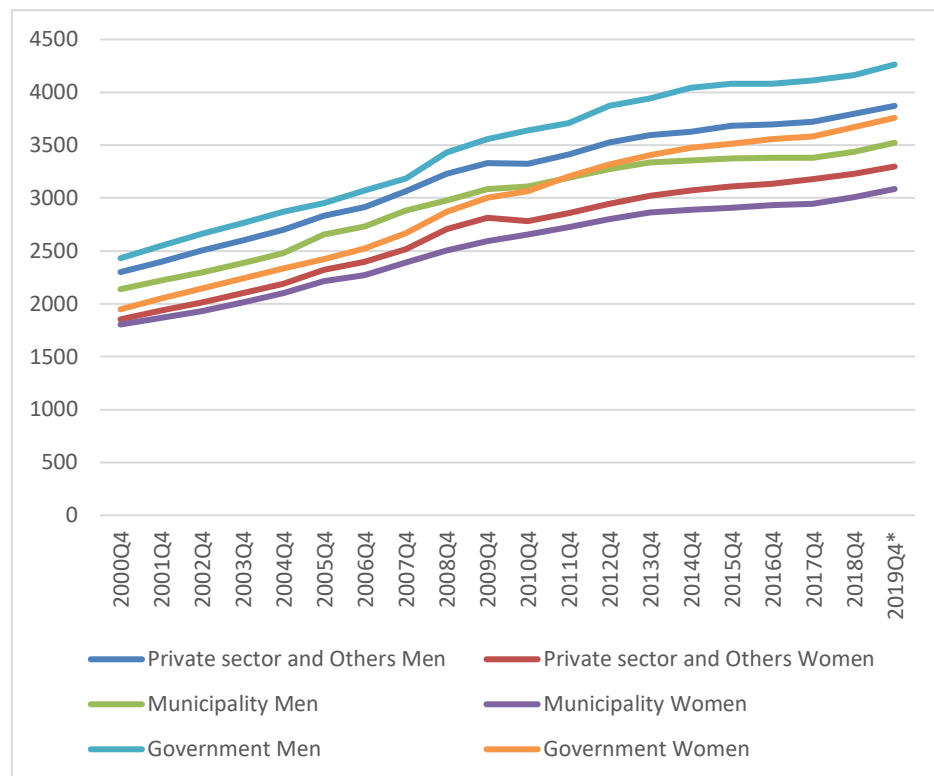


Figure 2. Index of wage and salary earnings. Source: Statistics Finland.

The main information that can be concluded from this index is that in all sectors considered, the percentages of women's wages are between 80,1 and 88,2 percentages out of men's wages. The index also demonstrates that the trend of wages have been increasing during the course of 19 years. One exception in private sector at the turn of the year 2009, which is expected to be due to the financial crisis in 2008.

In private sector and others, women's wage out of men's wage was in average 83,2 percentage.

In municipality vacancies, women's wage out of men's wage was in average 85,1 percentage, which is the closest value compared to 100 percent in all sectors. And finally, in government vacancies the women's wage was 84,2 percentage out of men's wage.

This concludes that when all sectors are considered, women earn around 84% of the same job as their male peers. The numbers also indicate that without exception the difference in wages has grown smaller in all sectors between the years 2000 and 2019. It can also be noticed that in government and municipality vacancies, the difference between women and men's wages are smaller than in private sector. The upward trend in the index displays the increase in women's wages, but simultaneously increase in men's wages can be seen as well.

2.1.5 Stereotypes and Perception of Women as Leaders

In addition to pay, women's career aspirations and goals can be affected by experience with aspects like stigmatization and stereotypes.

Aforementioned aspects can modify women's opinions about their own competences and abilities, which can influence their occupational goals and aspirations. (Paludi, 2013, p. 67)

Physical characteristics are one of the easiest ways to categorize people. This automatic categorization can consciously and unconsciously lead to activating gender-based stereotypes. Social role theory and the lack of fit model are theoretical explanations, which are explaining the reasons why stereotypes tend to link women and the workplace together. Social role theory is known for the idea of people obeying the behavior they are expected to reflect through stereotypical gender roles. It also proposes that characteristics such as helpfulness and nurture are assumed from women and characteristics such as assertive and controlling are qualities assumed from men. There is a controversy between what are naturally assumed characteristics from women and the leadership role characteristics, such as assertive and controlling, can create negative treatment for women. The lack of fit theory is known for comparing the assumed characteristics of the employee and the assumed characteristics of the job role and creating the perceived fit by analyzing the success of the employee in that specific job. The assumed characteristics vary between women and men, which is why in job roles that are characterized by masculine attributes can be seen as incompatible for women. (Paludi, 2013, p. 72-73)

It has also been studied that in different types of managerial positions the perceptions of women vary. In a study in 2006, Lyness and Heilman found that females that worked in a masculine-typed leadership position, such as line management, created negative judgement. The study also displayed that females in less masculine-typed leadership roles, such as staff jobs, received less negative judgement. (Paludi, 2013, p. 72-73)

3 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH ABOUT FEMALE MANAGERS

In the following chapter the author displays different perspectives, which have led into the qualitative research. Also, the methods, background information and the analysis of the collected data will be displayed as a part of the practical side of the implementation plan.

3.1 Framework, Purpose & Aim

The aim of this thesis is to determine and analyze the challenges that women may encounter in their careers, with the aim of discovering methods for conquering them. This research question is important for the benefit for the future aspiring women by enabling steadier climb in their career ladder.

The framework of this thesis consists the research problem and the challenges that women in managerial positions encounter. This research question will be interpreted by different reliable sources in the theory part of this thesis. The challenges occurred will be determined and refined by the interviews of the female participants. The qualitative research method was specifically chosen for this thesis topic, for the purpose of studying the research question, by utilizing the data acquired from the three in-depth interviews.

In the following theoretical framework in figure 3., the researcher demonstrates one main theme and two sub themes. The main theme consists challenges women encounter during their climb in corporate ladder, and the sub themes are females in leadership and the challenges. The sub themes are utilized in the process of finding answers and perspectives to the main theme. The perspectives used are gender and age, defining characteristics, women and management, discrimination, glass ceiling and pay inequality.

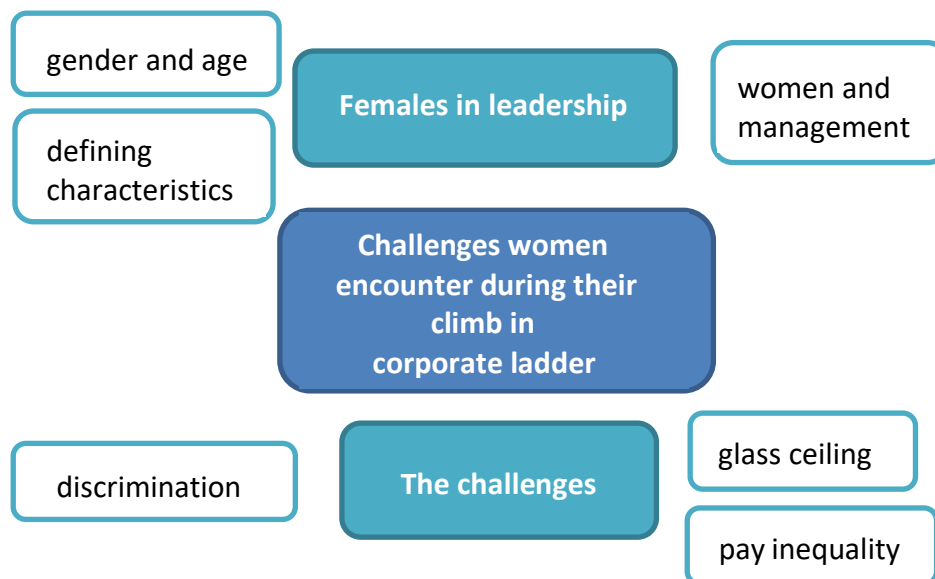


Figure 3. Theoretical Framework

This theoretical framework was created to help determine the research and improve the understanding of the study, therefore theoretical framework is a comprehensive and appropriate review for this research. The research topic was examined within the framework, and the theory part in qualitative research was significant, since it summarized the main issues of the research.

(Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2009, p.141; Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2003, p.17)

The set themes for this theoretical framework were important, since the framework needs to be suitable for the content of the research question. This framework seeks to define the thesis as accurately as possible. (Vilkkä 2005, p.130) The researcher has defined the thesis with words such as; leadership, females in leadership and challenges. This research in question focuses on the defining characters for females in leadership, their gender and age, women and management, discrimination, challenges such as glass ceiling and pay inequality. All aspects mentioned do not have the same significance to the research and the affects can be both positive and negative.

3.2 Research Method

Qualitative research is described to be the basis for describing the real world as holistically as possible. The real-life events that happen constantly, are influencing each other while forming multidirectional connections. The aim for qualitative research is more so to discover and expose facts than reinforce the existing statements. (Hirsjärvi et.al., 2009, p. 160)

Qualitative research is suitable for this thesis, since it allows authentic opinions of the participants to be displayed and enables the interview to get as much data as possible, by simultaneously having the freedom of getting the most authentic answers. The research method chosen gives the interviewee an opportunity to reflect the answers with participant's own experiences alongside with aspects of development in the future. When considering the social activities, the qualitative research was the most suitable option because the research is focused on individuals and interaction. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008, p.27) The method chosen highlights the aim to not define quantity but to understand the research topic and find solutions to research question. (Heikkilä, 2014)

3.3 Collection of the Data

The data collected was relatively small, as a result of selecting only a small group of women to this in-depth interview as participants, to display their personal perceptions, experiences and opinions on the research topic. The research was conducted as an interview, where the achieved in-depth information outweighed the statistical representativeness. For that reason, only few participants were required. (Hennink et.al., 2020, p. 10,16,17)

The collection method was semi-structured interview. It was conducted in an interview manner, while the researcher led the conversation with beforehand provided question. The questions were same to all participants and the questions were asked in the same order. There were no set answer options and the participants had the freedom to form their answers. (Aaltola & Valli, 2010, p.26-28)

For the purpose of more structured collection and analysis of the data the researcher chose a focused interview, where the themes were created in advance. It was important that all set themes are covered in all interviews. (Aaltola & Valli, 2010, p.26- 28)

The focused interviews did not determine the number of interviews nor how in-depth the interview themes were covered. The main factor in focused interviews were to proceed according to the fixed themes. This allowed the participant's opinions, interpretations and meanings to come through in the most authentic way. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008, p.47-48)

3.4 Before the Interviews

The collection method was chosen to help the researcher in the process of answering the research question. The research question was: *How can women overcome the challenges they face while climbing the career ladder?*

By utilizing themes, the researcher had formulated the interview questions (APPENDIX 2):

- Theme 1 – Females in Leadership
- Theme 2 – Challenges
- Theme 3 – Glass Ceiling
- Theme 4 – Mentors
- Theme 5 – Pay
- Theme 6 – Females in Working Life

The interviews contained twenty-three (23) interview questions. Before the interview the participants' age, family status, education, duration of the employment in the company X and duration of current job role were surveyed for the purpose of maximizing data analysis. The researcher introduced the research ethics to the participants, and permission for recording was asked in advance. In the focused interviews the participants were able to specify the themes with their own personal experiences and perceptions. The main interview questions were formulated beforehand, but the researcher was able to ask additional, more specific questions if it was considered necessary. The researcher had the opportunity to also deepen the dialogue if it was required by the interest of the research. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008, p. 66-67)

The female participants were chosen from the commission company X due to their managerial positions. Participants were chosen from same commission company in the interest of comparing the data and making assumptions on that basis. The underlying reason for choosing female managers was their higher-level position in corporate ladder. Therefore, their relatively long experience and perspectives from working life were valued highly, which made them the ideal sample for the research.

In the beginning of the research, the researcher defined the participants and formulated a summary table of their contact details. The amount of data was expected to be relatively small, since there was only three participants, but the amount of qualitative research data did not have a direct influence on the success of the research. The referred literature did not determine a specific rule for the quantity of research data. The researcher had to determine by individual basis, when the collected data was adequate and could provide an answer for the research question. (Eskola & Suorana, 2008, p.61-63)

3.5 Practical Implementation Plan

The researcher approached these female participants by email in the timespan of 1 to 2 months. First the researcher agreed to do an interview with one of the participants, however the data would have been much less than desirable, therefore two more participants were included. The interview requests were sent to three potential participants, and all of them voluntarily agreed to have an interview. After agreeing to do the interview, the researcher discussed with each participant about the practical matters, such as the date, time and place for the interview, and also, what interview method participant preferred. The interview order was determined by jointly agreed interview dates. The researcher sent the interview questions to the participants in advance so that they could familiarize themselves with the questions before the interviews, to make the interviews more time efficient and to get the best possible end results.

Originally, all the interviews were meant to be face-to-face interviews presumably at the participants work place, but due to Coronavirus and its preventative measures, all interviews were decided to have either as telephone - or email interview. The interview dates and times were agreed so that the interviews were able to conduct uninterruptedly.

The researcher chose to have individual interviews, which is the most common interview mode. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008, p.61)

The duration of the interview was challenging to estimate, and that was the reason why the researcher was prepared considerably large variations in duration. The flexibility in duration was important due to the half-structured interview, in which the beginning of the interview resembled a regular conversation, which then shifted into more structured interview, where the researcher led the conversation with questions that were fixed in advance. The interview questions had been formulated so that brief answers could be avoided, and the researcher would be able to collect as much data as possible. The conversation leading into the interview was important so that the researcher and participant could become acquainted with each other and establishing trust. The chosen interview method due to its personal nature did not allow the conversation to end as soon as the researcher had collected the data needed. Due to the gained trust, it was essential for the comfortability of the participant to finish off the interview when both parties were happy with the end result and all the themes had been discussed. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008, p.73-75)

3.6 Processing Data

The research conducted for this thesis had three Finnish female participants in managerial positions from the same company. The qualitative research method was chosen to utilize the flexibility of the method and to increase the adaptation of the interaction between the researcher and the study participants. More specifically, the method chosen was in-depth interviews, which enabled honest opinions, personal histories and experiences to be expressed and discovered. In-depth interviews were the best suited method for obtaining this specific type of data for this research. (Mack et.al., 2005, p. 2,4)

The interview questions were deliberately formulated to correspond the research question in the best possible manner, and potentially, finding an answer to the research problem. The interview questions and research ethics were translated to Finnish and the interviews were conducted entirely in Finnish.

The interview was divided into six different themes; females in leadership, challenges, glass ceiling, mentors, pay and females in working life. These aforementioned themes brought structure to the interviews, while enabled more effortless data analysis. The results of the data was also displayed by utilizing these themes. The six themes mentioned, were set before the interviews; therefore, they may not be the predominant themes throughout the research.

By utilizing the aforementioned themes, the researcher was able to manage the data more effectively and efficiently. The focused interviews were optimal in processing data. The researcher organized the data, so that the answers from different participants were sorted into themes. This helped the data analysis, and the analysis process was done by one theme at the time. The analysis process included examining and analyzing the content of the answers received in the interviews. (Aalto & Valli, 2010, p. 43)

3.7 Reliability of the Research

The reliability and competency were significant part of analyzing the results. This generated trust and credibility for the thesis. It was crucial that participants understood the questions in a same way that the researcher posed the question. Moreover, it was important for the researcher to ensure that the methods and practices used in the research were compatible with the conclusions of the research. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara, 2013, p. 232)

The description of reliability is described as the repeatability of the research results. The data will be considered reliable, when the research results of different sources provide the same answers. In qualitative research, the reliability of the research will be increased, when the researcher explains the research results, while conducting the research. For instance, the circumstances, environment and duration of the interviews, as well as researcher's own evaluation of the interview situation. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara, 2013, p. 232)

The researcher decided to give the interview questions to the participants in advance to maximize the data and to guarantee that they understood the questions in the sense the researcher posed the question. By giving the participants the questions in advance the researcher also gained trust, which might have benefited the research later. The participants might have felt more comfortable and relaxed in the interview situation, when the questions were not entirely new to them, which also increased reliability.

The reliability of the research was displayed by demonstrating the interview process for instance, how the participants were acquired and the duration of the interviews. The researcher aimed to display the data in the analyzing process as accurately as possible. To increase the reliability, the researcher included direct quotes from the participants answers.

Sources of error and the time required are considered interviews' disadvantages. The interview situation, participants and interviewer may have created sources of error. Aspects that reduced reliability were socially accepted answers and information which was not relevant for the research. These aspects may have diminished the data that is significant for the research. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara, 2009, p. 204-207)

3.8 Commission Company X

The commission company for this thesis is a big Finnish media corporation, which employs a great deal of people around the nation. The participants work in a managerial position in this corporation in question. They have all reached a higher-level position in the company X, yet they work in different units of the company.

This specific company X was determined by the first female manager's workplace. When the researcher decided to expand the interview participants from one to three, the researcher wanted to utilize the opportunity of a case study and find those other two participants from the same company.

Since the commission company is one of the biggest media corporations in Finland, the participants requested the researcher to utilize anonymous policy. Due to the recognizability of the company, the anonymity of the company was important to maintain to secure the identity of the participants.

4 CASE: THREE FEMALE MANAGERS AND THEIR STORIES

Qualitative research is a coherent whole, where the collection of data and analyzing data cannot be distinguished. A specific example can be the reliability question of the study, which includes the idea of what should be included to the research study to be considered as reliable. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2013, p.68-69)

In the following chapter the researcher displays background information about the participants and the interview, and finally, the research results.

4.1 Background Information about the Participants

The participants were carefully chosen for the research in question. All participants are females from managerial positions in the company X, which is known to be one of the biggest media corporations in Finland. The participants will be displayed anonymously, therefore their job descriptions will not be displayed either. If the job descriptions were to mention, the identity of the participants would be evident, since the company in question is a national public company. The family status and education of the participants are solely mentioned.

The participants are between the ages of 45 to 61. The participants educational achievements are bachelor of Culture and Arts, executive Master of Business Administration, Master's degree in Social Science, university studies and specialization studies in management, which concludes that the participants are well educated.

The participants have relatively long, over 20 years' experience from working life, but simultaneously relatively short experiences from their current job roles. The longest experience from their current job roles was two years and the shortest was just 6 months. Albeit, two of the participants have worked in the company over 20 years.

Two of the participants have families with children. The manager B was divorced and did not have children. The family status of the participants were surveyed to support the data analysis and discover possible associations between family life and career challenges.

4.2 Background Information about the Interview

All the female participants were acquired in timespan of 1 to 2 months. The potential participants were contacted by emails. The researcher sent them interview requests while explaining basic information of the upcoming research. All three potential participants voluntarily agreed to have the interview in the first email exchange. The interviews were held between 23.3.2020 and 6.4.2020. The interview times were altered due to the current pandemic from the originally set dates.

| Participants | The Interview Date | The Length of the Interview (min.) | The Interview Method |
|------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Female Manager A | 23.3.2020 | 63 | Telephone Interview |
| Female Manager B | 6.4.2020 | - | Email Interview |
| Female Manager C | 3.4.2020 | 43 | Telephone Interview |

Figure 4. The Basic Information of the Interview

The overall length of the interviews were 106 minutes. The average length of the interview was 53 minutes. Two of the interviews were conducted through telephone conversations, and one was through an email conversation. Since one of the interviews was an email interview, the overall length of the interviews is relatively short. The interviews were conducted through electronic devices; under the circumstances both the researcher and participant were at their own homes during the interviews. It was extremely important for the researcher that the research ethics were obeyed, which included ensuring the safety of the participants and also minimize all potential risks. Due to corona virus, the company that the participants work for was transferred to remote working as well.

The research ethics were discussed before the interviews, as well as the anonymous policy, and the permission for recording was requested. The researcher decided to record the interviews to capture and obtain as much data as possible from the interviews.

Since, the research method was in-depth interviews and aim was to achieve information about personal experiences, opinions and perceptions from the participants, for that reason it was crucial to establish the research ethics, which can be found from the APPENDIX 2. It helped in the process of gaining trust and furthered the ethical principle of ensuring no harm was done, which included securing the data collected and making the data anonymous. The integrity of the research was assured by embracing the research ethics mentioned. (Hennink et.al., 2020, p. 71-72)

4.3 The Results

In the following chapter the researcher displays the data received from the in-depth interviews and analysis the data utilizing the aforementioned themes. The interview questions are displayed in themes, correspondingly as they were in the interviews. The researcher has utilized direct quotes of the participant's answers to increase the transparency of the research.

4.3.1 Theme 1 – Females in Leadership

What is it like to be a woman in a leadership position in today's work community?

Since women leaders are more common nowadays, how do you think it will help and affect the younger generations in their careers?

Participants described their managerial job role to be normal. They did not feel any differing treatment and did not link any gender issues to their everyday working life.

"Working in a managerial position is normal, it is just one of many job roles. I have not pursued specifically towards a manager's job role, the job is convenient, it is the most important thing. I want to learn new things and my employer has enabled to offer me new opportunities, when I have been willing to tackle new challenges, which has been a sign of a good employer. I needed the courage to say it out loud that I need and want new challenges, and after that they have been offered to me and that way, I have been supported in progressing in my career. I do not recognize any difference or differing treatment to other colleagues." (A)

"It's exciting but challenging. The challenge does not stem from being a woman, but the expectations of being a manager in challenging situations. It's sometimes challenging to keep up with the changing world and still being able to inspire the employees to develop, be motivated and to stay on top of the changes." (B)

"I do not see a gender issue in my current job role. Maybe in the past job roles, but nowadays Finland is in a forerunner role. When I got recruited into my current job role six months ago, diversity was highly considered in the recruitment process." (C)

The participants agreed that the progress of having more women in leadership positions today is a positive change. That was a reference to the fact that there are more women amongst men, rather than having more women than men in leadership positions.

"The fact that there are more women in leadership positions is a positive change." (A)

"It is a positive change to have more female managers, but it is also a matter of discrimination." (C)

"The fact that there are more women managers proves to younger generations both men and women that the most suitable person will get the job, it is not determined by the gender. Younger generations find things more natural. Finland is one of the top countries in equal rights, and consequently an example for other countries. Our president was woman, we have women in our parliament and our prime minister is a woman. Due to globalization, in many job roles you may face different cultures and that way find that it is not that natural to have females in higher positions, on the contrary to Finland." (A)

"I believe that providing examples for younger generations will help them in their career advancements. When I had my first managerial position in media field it was unheard-of. A 32-year-old women as a manager. For a long period of time I was the only female representing the younger generation. Today, having a young female as a manager in media field is the rule rather than the exception. I believe that with my own example I have helped other young females to courage and accept new challenges. Now, the highest glass-ceiling has shattered, since the CEO of a media corporation is a female." (B)

"The fact that female leaders are more common nowadays, it will create new horizons to younger women and show that everything is possible and the work life is not arena of men. Having female role models it will of course affect to their mindset and increase motivation." (C)

"Since there are more women leaders it enables for women to have role models or mentors from successful women, who are a living example. Everybody can go after a career and job role they feel passionate about and it is not defined by gender." (A)

The Association for Women in Science described the mentoring as follows: "Mentoring is among the most effective ways to bring about change, because it reaches across institutions, fields, and even generations. Mentoring unifies women, validates their experience, provides inside information about the system's workings, trains group of individuals to challenge the system, and provides the basis for generations of outsiders to both enter the system and, as insiders, demand needed changes." (Townsend, 2002) Mentors and role models will be covered more comprehensively in the theme 4.

The difference in managements styles between men and women was discovered by manager C.

"Women have different aspects to offer to leadership styles than men, softer. Women have different perspectives when it comes to managing a team and maintaining good spirits in teams. They also have different types of management models and ways of managing their teams. Women are known of being nurturing, it brings a different kind of caring culture into managing, which does not eliminate the fact that women would not be able to make decisions or lead. Considering Finland's current management culture, I think that females have more to offer than men." (C)

A study showed that female managers are more likely to see their strengths in personal characteristics such as interpersonal skills, hard work and personal contacts. They also tend to associate themselves with transformational leadership, which is known for getting subordinates to transform their personal interests into the interest of the team, to achieve the greater goal. It can also be called interactive leadership, which consist of sharing power and information, enhancing people's sense of self-worth, and maintaining excitement towards their work inside of the team. (Rosener, 2011, p.120)

4.3.2 Theme 2 – Challenges

What challenges have you faced in your career?

- How did you overcome those challenges?
- Have aspects like motherhood or family life had an effect to your career?
- Has any of the challenges you have faced had anything to do with your gender?
- Have you ever faced gender discrimination or noticed it at any point of your career?

What is the biggest challenge for a woman in today's work life?

The participants agreed that the job description itself created the biggest challenges.

"The challenges never associated with the fact that I am a woman. The challenges have always been related to the specific stage in that job role. For instance – an employee co-operation negotiation, which was an emotional battle, place of learning and difficult situation. I had to learn communication skills and still remember humanity." (A)

"I have struggled with Impostor syndrome, which is not that unusual amongst female managers. Doubting your own competences and skills, when realizing it is silly. I still have to remind myself that I can do this and I am experienced. I have worked abroad and managed to deal with challenging situations..." (B)

"I have certainly been underestimated, overlooked, and downplayed even. Nevertheless I have experienced more curiosity and interest towards my knowledge and competences." (B)

"The challenges that I have encountered have been the ability to adopt and learn new things with the demanded phase. The gender has not been a barrier in my career. The challenges have been related to my own learning and in my managerial duties such as challenges inside of my team and things that I do not have control over. The challenges inside of the team is part of the job, they are taking into consideration and resolved." (C)

Mentoring was in a big role in overcoming challenges for the participants. The most significant aspects about mentoring was support, guidance and sparring.

“The aspects that have helped me overcome challenges have been personal growth and discussions with myself; why am I doing this, what is the outcome, with what time span, to who, and in which stage? My mentor has also helped me to overcome challenges. She guided me through the process and helped me to express my feelings and experiences. She was a big help.” (A)

“Peer support and the significance of sharing your challenges, and not be alone with them. In a managerial position you have to make decisions on your own and the more you discuss with people and look for peers, who you can share your perspectives and realize that it is not unique, it is universal. Mentoring has helped me in coping with workload. I have reached out when I have felt the need for sparring during difficult times. It is important to recognize your own exhaustion under workload.” (C)

The manager B also prioritized updating her own competences and keeping up with the new technology.

“I have learned to overcome my challenges by making sure that my competences are updated and fill in the gaps of knowledge if needed. I have also consciously accepted challenges and jumping into new jobs, which at first did not feel at home. I have tried to avoid staying in one job for a long time. It has been my leading line that you have to always learn new things. I preferably learn new things through a new job role. Lifelong studying is not for me, I like to learn new things in practice.” (B)

It was recognized by the participants that having kids and family life had an effect to their careers, but in different ways. The participants had their children in different stages of their lives, which also affected their experiences. Participant B had not experienced any challenges from family life to her career, though she did not have children of her own.

“Already in the 90’s, I thought about, what would be the optimal time to have children considering work life. I do recognize that young women will inevitably consider what would be the optimal time to have children, in today’s periodic employment era.” (A)

“I have raised two children by myself during my career, which have limited my time. It was a positive thing also, because you will work as much as possible if there is nothing to limit that. When it was time to pick up the children from daycare, I needed to intensify my work. I was lucky that my job and my employer were flexible and I have been able to have an impact to my own working hours.” (C)

“When you feel good in your day-to-day life, you will also feel good at work life. Work-life balance is important.” (C)

“My family life has not affected my career. Only me being a conscientious employee it has affected to my relationship with my life-companions. I have been married, but the relationships foundered due to my work-oriented life style. I have also experienced jealousy from my partner who worked in the same field. I do not have children so that aspect has not brought any challenges either ” (B)

Considering the participants comments, it can be said that their gender has not been related to the challenges they have encountered in their careers. The participant B have had couple incidence which could be determined as gender discrimination, but she does not think they have affected to her career to a great extent.

“My gender has not had an effect to the challenges I have had. The challenges have been related to the job description.” (A)

“In our company there is no discrimination. In some workplaces you might need to prove your expertise more than a man would.” (C)

“Not significantly. I recognize some incidence, where I have been overlooked, because a confident and load man was applying for the same job role. This has happened to me maybe once or twice in my career.” (B)

The participants have not faced nor noticed gender discrimination in their careers.

"I have not faced gender discrimination. I have always received encouragement from men and women in new job roles." (A)

"I have not experienced gender discrimination at the level that it would need to be addressed. The incidence I mentioned are the rare cases where I could have recognized it, but in those cases, it would be quite hard to prove that it was evidently discrimination." (B)

"I have not faced or noticed gender discrimination. Different valuation maybe, but I do not directly associate it with gender issues." (C)

The participants agreed that self-efficacy issues were the biggest challenges for young females in the beginning of their careers. Work-life balance and some external factors may also bring challenges.

"Nowadays the biggest challenge is to believe in yourself. I recognize a characteristic in women that they do not consider themselves adequate. They feel as if they should educate themselves more to be adequate for applying that job role. Men do not think like that. Women need to recognize their competences better and believe in them. Work life is utilizing the gained knowledge, lessons and experiences." (A)

"Being able to balance family and work life could be the biggest challenge. Also the increased pressure and expectations from social media can bring additional stress. I believe my generation got off the hook in this regard. Back then the pressure from the media was far apart from today's world, and social media was not even a thing. I have recruited a lot of people for different job roles and I recognized a unifying factor that females are more afraid of facing new challenges in work life, because they doubt their own ability to cope. Some also want different thing from life than breaking their back in work or managerial positions. (B)

"The biggest challenge for most of young females are attitude and self-esteem. You have to start believing in yourself! Of course there are strong young females that have a great self-esteem and professional pride, but the greatest challenges are usually between the ears." (C)

4.3.3 Theme 3 – Glass Ceiling

Have you ever heard the term ‘glass ceiling’?

- What does it mean to you?
- Do you agree that at some point women will hit the glass ceiling and it takes increased amount of work and effort from them to break through that glass ceiling, which causes cases where not all will ever break through it? What is the reason for it/What has caused it?
- Do you have any suggestions how to avoid glass ceiling or how to break through it?

All the participants were familiar with the term *glass ceiling*. The participant A stated that Finland can be seen as an example country, when the matter of equality is considered.

“There is no glass ceiling in Finland, and if there is in some organizations, then I do not have any knowledge of them. Finland is a great example of equality globally.” (A)

The participant C agrees that Finland is an example country but recognizes that there are still work in the process.

“I think that females experience more barriers in their careers than men. I realize and agree that there are glass ceilings, although in today’s world less. Finland is a forerunner. We have examples in summit level with having a female president and a female prime minister that everything is possible. However, we still have conservative corporations in Finland, where there are glass ceilings, and women have to fight their way through them.” (C)

In a study conducted by Lyness and Thompson in 2000 they studied the barriers that prevent women from reaching higher level managerial positions and being successful, while comparing them to the barriers men were facing. The study suggested that women face more obstacles, while taking more time to reach the higher-level positions than men that are in the same leadership levels within the organization. The obstacles were for instance not being able to match the male-dominated culture, exclusion from the informal networks inside of the company and difficulties in job development. (Paludi, 2013, p. 30)

The challenges that can be attributed to glass ceiling and its effects were recognized by the participants. However, participant B believed that glass ceilings are not as big of an issue as they have been before.

“Glass ceiling is invisible but tough barrier; which women cannot break through into the highest-level positions.” (B)

"In today's world I do not see that glass ceilings would a matter of concern for all females everywhere. During the past 5-10 years glass ceilings have shattered at least in media field. Of course, for example in economic world it is harder for women to break through the glass ceiling. I don't think that all women should break through the glass ceiling. If they are great, they should break through it. But, they don't need to express that they are evidently better than men in order to break the glass ceiling." (B)

"I believe that there are these conservative structures and so-called 'guy networks', where men recruit their friends from a group of equal applicants. Now that there are starting to emerge 'female networks', it is important that they wouldn't do this either. Of course it is also part of being human to want to recruit somebody you know over a stranger. I hope that this would not happen anymore, but I know it does." (C)

"Females also encounter a challenge with starting a family and dealing with maternity leave. Despite the fact that maternity leave can be flexible, you still need to be out of work life for a year. Today the parenting roles are now shared between men and women, but there could still be ways to work on the matter of parental leave to improve the situation." (C)

The participants had quite different perspectives of breaking through the glass ceiling. Participant A felt like there should be some self-evaluation done if you would not be able to break through the glass ceiling, and the participant C encouraged to be persistent.

"If you do not manage to break through the glass ceiling in Finland, it means that the employee does not believe in her own competences and abilities adequately." (A)

"Men are usually naturally good to create a bit of fuss about themselves and their competences. They go into new situations big-headed and full of confidence. I think this is also a cultural question, which has been changing and still keeps changing. The starting point is equal upbringing, rewarding good performances, and encouragement. I believe that girls and young women may achieve things in a different way than our generation." (B)

"When a female reaches the glass ceiling, there is not that much they can do about it, but to persistently prove their expertise. There must be an open dialogue between yourself and the higher position managers. You cannot give up, even if you feel unfair treatment or to be overlooked." (C)

4.3.4 Theme 4 – Mentors

Do you think that lack of female mentors have ever affected you in proceeding in your career?

- If it has, how has it affected you?

How do you think it will affect young women if they have female mentors?

How has mentoring affected dealing with challenges in your career?

The participants have had mentors throughout their careers, and never have experienced lack of them. They also acknowledge that mentoring goes both ways.

“When I had my first managerial position, there were already mentors. I do not think I have ever had a proper mentor. But, I do recognize that every time my job role has changed especially in managerial positions, there has been a woman, a mentor some may say, that has been a part of it. They have been a women colleague, sometimes even outside of our company, who has been sparring me. Part of every career move I have had has included sparring from both men and women. But every time especially a woman has been a part of my experience. Particularly, in my recent managerial positions the female mentor has been outside of the company I work in.” (A)

“I have been lucky because almost all of my bosses have been women, and they have also been supporting and encouraging me to proceed. A few male managers have been pushing me forward as well. I also have experiences from different types of bosses, both men and women, where the circumstances have been more competitive than encouraging. But somehow, I have been able to bypass those situations quite effortlessly.” (B)

“Female mentors have had a great influence on my career. I had a really good female mentor, who gave me a lot of encouragement, knowledge and support. Mentoring is one of the best methods to share knowledge, to uplift people, and to give insights of work life. Mentoring goes both ways, it is not just a lecture to the younger partaker. I am a mentor myself, and I have learned a lot in both roles.” (C)

“I have consciously and unconsciously had couple female role models during my whole career. They have done their job well, and I remember times where I have asked myself what they would do in my position. These female role models have thought me a lot.” (A)

“Mentoring goes both ways. I have had experiences where me and my colleague have been supporting and encouraging each other, while utilizing both of our strengths. To be able to share things, to understand and value each other’s opinions is important.” (A)

Participants believed that female mentors are significant for a young female in the beginning of her career.

“Mentors are a good thing, I have been a mentor myself. It goes both ways, I have always learned a lot from my mentoring interactions. It does not necessarily need to be mentoring between two females. Mentoring is great in general, but female mentor to a young female at the start of her career is significant.” (A)

“I think that mentor can be either man or a woman. I don’t see the gender as a key issue. Yet, it can be that in my own career there has not been that much of a discussion about mentors, and it can be that the phenomenon has come later. I would emphasize the importance of example. If you have great female managers relatively close-by that has at least for me, been a matter of encouragement, even though they have not been mentors in the proper sense of the word.” (B)

“The existence of female mentors creates new horizons and important sparring to young females in shifting into working life. They bring support and power. Early on in young women’s career, a mentor is able to generate answers to many questions that can be great concerns in the mind of young prospering females.” (C)

In the following, Alicia E Kaufmann confirms the statements that the female managers had; In the business life managers have a part in encouraging young employees in proceeding in their careers while being a mentor to them. For women especially, mentor is important as a support during their careers. (Kaufmann, 2008, p. 58)

The participants recognized that mentors have had a great affect in dealing with challenges in their careers. The most important things have been support and guidance by their mentors.

“Mentors have helped me in the technical details of the job, also being as a tangible support and guidance in new job roles. My mentor recognized the importance of processing things afterwards, what did I learn and what were my feelings. I valued the moral support the most.” (A)

“Mentoring has helped me in overcoming challenges. When I was having a hard time at work, I discussed about the problems with my mentor. She gave me another perspective to things and guidance. She helped me with complex matters and was able to tell me that I am not alone with this problem, other people deal with this too, and this is how its handled.” (C)

4.3.5 Theme 5 – Pay

The saying ‘Men’s Euro is Women’s 80cents’ is often heard in conversations. Even though, the matter is more generally spoken nowadays, it has been the perennial problem around the world.

- What do you think about the pays between men and women?
 - o ...do you think they are equal in today’s society?
- Have you ever witnessed unequal pay in your work environments?

Have unequal pay or the pay women get ever affected to your career?

All participants agreed that the same job roles needs to have an equal pay, but do realize that it is a complex matter.

“Every job role needs to be paid appropriate salary. If in some organizations or industries have inequalities in pay, the concern must be dealt with and fixed. I have not experienced unequal pay and for me it is obvious.” (A)

“The same work needs to be paid the same salary without a doubt. And if somebody does their job exceptionally well, she or he must be rewarded with a bonus etc.” (B)

“There are terms in Equal Pay Act, but the matter is not that simple. Fundamentally, I think that everybody should be paid equally from the same job role, while considering their experiences and other factors. But in today’s world it is hard to specify what job roles are the same in work life. Maybe in some perform professions, but when it comes to experts and consultants then it is more complex.” (C)

“There could still be more effort made towards the equal pay.” (C)

There are regulations in the law concerning this matter.

“The pay survey is used to ensure that there are no unjustified pay differences between women and men who are working for the same employer and engaged in either the same work or work of equal value. If the analysis of different employee groups of the pay survey, which are defined on the basis of competence, duty or some other ground, reveals clear pay differences between women and men, the employer must analyse the reasons and grounds for these differences. If the workplace has established pay systems in which wages consist of pay components, the central components are inspected in order to clarify the reasons for the differences noted. If there is no justification for the pay differences, the employer must take appropriate measures to rectify the situation.”
(Act on Equality Between Women and Men 609/1986 Section 6b.)

Participants agree that the equal pay is a complex matter and suggests that it would be important for companies to prioritize this matter and work towards more equal pay.

“The statistics states that women’s euro is still 80 cents, which brings us to the conclusion that the salaries are not equal, and this applies for managerial positions as well.” (B)

The figure 2. in Females in leadership chapter demonstrated the same outcome.

“There is still more work to be done in equal pays. Part of the problem is that women tend to gravitate to minimum-wage industries. There needs to be more effort inside of the corporations.” (C)

“20 years ago, men demanded better wages, which led them getting better wages from the same job roles. Over time, some developed their expertise, some did not, this creates distortion today.” (C)

There are studies conducted to support the suggestions of these female managers. The studies show that approximately half of the reasons behind pay gaps are explained by concentration of women in low-pay jobs. After considering explanatory variables such as education, experience and effort, the remaining unexplainable pay gap is approximately six percent from men’s average wage. According to the results of the study the predominantly male duties are payed higher wages than same level duties by predominantly female employees. It was discovered that the duties are treated differently depending on what gender is in charge. (Korkeamäki, 2012)

The participants did not experience unequal pay in their company, but manager B agrees that she has witnessed unequal pay in her career.

“There is no unequal pay in our company, I do not know about the situation in other companies.” (A&C)

“I have witnessed unequal pays in my career. I have been in a managerial position and seen the wages and the structures of my team and unequal pays does happen. I have tried to moderate the difference between the pays as far as possible by utilizing the personal pay raises.” (B)

It can be stated that the participants of this research have not been affected by unequal pay during their careers.

"The unequal pay has never had any affects in my career." (A)

"The unequal pay has not affected to my own career. I know that for instance in this moment, I am probably one of the highest paid managers in my peer group. In the beginning of my career during my first managerial position I accepted that I had a lower pay than some of the more experienced colleagues of mine. I felt like I had room for improvement in many areas." (B)

"The unequal pay has never affected to my career. I know my competences and therefore I am able to negotiate myself a solid pay. It is important to provoke a discussion and ask if the pay could be considered. I have also encouraged younger people that you have to ensure that you are paid appropriately and to have discussions actively." (C)

The female manager C encourages women to be more demanding, on the issue of pay. She also explained that by being more demanding and knowing your worth was important factor in her career. That was also a way for her to make sure that unequal pay did not affect to her.

"Early on in my career I noticed that women are much more modest to demand higher pay. I have tried to encourage other females to ensure that they get the pay that they deserve and that they would recognize their own expertise. Men, especially younger men, are proudly asking for a better pay." (C)

4.3.6 Theme 6 – Females in Working Life

How do you think your gender has affected to your career?

How can women be successful in their careers?

Participant B found her gender as a positive thing. She also recognized that different genders have had an effect in her career.

“Strangely enough, my gender has mainly been a positive thing in my career. I have been lucky, I admit that. I have been able to look for experiences in both domestic and international media houses, which has reinforced my credibility as a manager. However, once again, I have been in a situation where I felt like men went past me because they were men, back then the manager making the decision was a woman.” (B)

The other participants agreed that their gender has not affected to their careers. They believed that they would have achieved the same things, and also would not have achieved more, if they were a man.

Self-efficacy was the most important factor in being successful according to participant A. She also emphasized the importance of females supporting one another.

“The most important thing is to believe and trust in your competences and skills. It is also important that females cheer and support each other. It is necessary for women to recognize the situations, where we can spar and encourage each other.” (A)

The participant C emphasized self-knowledge and self-esteem. She also encouraged young people to face new challenges, learn for the mistakes and gain experience.

“Know what you want, what are your strengths, where do you still want to develop. Remember to display your competences and improve yourself. Have conversations with peers. Self-knowledge and self-esteem are important” (C)

“Do not think that ‘I cannot do that yet, I need to learn more.’ You should go and face the challenges and learn while you are doing. You cannot wait around for too long, today, the world is changing so fast that you cannot wait and see until you feel like you are ready. Young adults are so smart and quick to learn, they should just go for it.” (C)

“Women need to stop belittling themselves and develop their own competences. Management and emotional intelligence are women’s strengths and they should use it boldly. Females have the opportunity to shine now.” (B)

It was confirmed by the qualitative research conducted that females do face challenges during their careers, but they do not necessarily associate them with their gender. In the context of conquering the challenges female managers emphasized mentoring, and more specifically support, encouragement and guiding that mentoring can provide. The participants also highlighted the importance of self-efficacy, in the extent of courage, confidence, and self-knowledge. Especially for aspiring young females these aspects mentioned are extremely valuable. In the beginning of young females' career supporting and having support from female peers is important, but also having a mentor in the early stage of your career can be a great help in providing answers to one's questions, and indeed, in a sense of support and guidance.

The data received from the qualitative research did provide an answer for the research question. The suggestions from female managers may provide a steadier climb for future generations in their career ladder. The challenges that females encounter in their careers were distributed in the research into six themes. The female managers' answers about challenges and how did they conquer them, provided answer to the research question. The participants had different ways to cope with the challenges they had encountered. By giving advises how to conquer challenges and how to be successful the female managers aimed to provide insight into the work life and possibly enable steadier climb for the future generations. The research results highlighted factors, such as mentoring and self-efficacy issues, which can be utilized in practice. By focusing on these factors, it can be suggested that it will benefit young aspiring females.

5 ANALYSIS OF THE IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

The six themes were utilized in the process of data analysis. The content of the participants' answers were examined and analyzed by themes.

5.1 Analysis

5.1.1 Theme 1 – Females in Leadership

The participants agreed that Finland can be considered to be a model country, in terms of equality. It was recognized by the participants that there is still some work to do due to this matter, but it has been recognized and there has been improvement during the past decades. An example that participants mentioned was the fact that Finland has had a female President and now we have female Prime Minister, which provides an example for younger generations that everything is possible, and Finland is definitely an example country.

It was also agreed by the participants that none of them felt that they were treated differently because they were women in their current managerial position nor recognized any differing treatment by others. The female managers did not consider their gender as a challenge, and it has not been related to the challenges they have encountered. The participants agreed that their biggest challenges stemmed from their job descriptions and the challenge of learning new things fast enough. Mentoring was considered meaningful in the process of overcoming challenges. The support, guidance and encouragement were aspects in mentoring, which were the most significant to the participants.

The research result was that having more female leaders will create more horizons for younger women and it consequently creates more female role models and mentors. The experienced female managers believed that by having role models and living examples, it will help younger females in their career advancements. They also emphasized that work life is not arena just for men, and by having female role models, it will affect positively to young females' mindset and increase their motivation.

5.1.2 Theme 2 – Challenges

The importance of work-life balance was recognized amongst the female managers. They also agreed that family-life and having children does have an effect to career, but a good employer and flexible working hours can bring significant relief and easement to the matter. The participants concluded that having children and being a working mother is not considered as a negative thing. The participant C emphasized that family life does not rule out work, and work life does not rule out family life.

Monique Valcour (2007) described a good work-life balance “an overall level of contentment resulting from an assessment of one’s degree of success at meeting work and family role demands.” (Abendroth, 2018)

Workplace Employment Relations Survey from 2011 confirms the female managers statements about a good work-life balance, and how it does in fact, increase the wellbeing amongst the employees. Aspects such as, job satisfaction and flexible working arrangements will support better work-life balance. (Wood, Daniels & Ogbonnaya, 2018)

The female managers agreed that self-efficacy issues were most likely the biggest challenge that young females encounter in the beginning of their careers. They also encouraged young females to believe in themselves, have a good attitude and self-esteem.

5.1.3 Theme 3 – Glass Ceiling

The participants had different opinions about glass ceiling. They all agreed that there are, or might be glass ceilings in Finland, but fewer than before. They also acknowledge that glass ceilings are barriers that women encounter, and women also do encounter more barriers in their careers than men.

Due to different opinions about the glass ceiling, there are difference in opinions on breaking through it. Aspects that were emphasized in breaking through the glass ceiling were; believing in one’s own competences, encouragement, rewards from good performances, and the importance of not giving up. It was agreed that employees working in the same job roles needs to have an equal pay, however the participants do realize that pay is a complex matter and for instance, in expert and consultant jobs it is more challenging to define ‘the same job’.

5.1.4 Theme 4 – Mentors

The participants have found mentors exceptionally important, and they recognize that female mentors have been present in their career advancements. The participants also agreed that they have received mentoring from both men and women. It was also agreed that mentoring goes both ways. The participants have learned a lot from being a mentor and from having a mentor. Participant C concludes mentoring; *'Mentoring is one of the best methods to share knowledge, to uplift people, and to give insights of work life.'*

Due to the findings of this research, it can be determined that previously mentioned challenge; lack of mentors can be cancelled out. The female managers were certain that they have not had any lack of mentors nor female mentors.

5.1.5 Theme 5 – Pay

The female managers agree that Finland, is once again, a forerunner compared to many other countries in equal pay but do still recognize that there are still more work to be done to this matter and there could still be more effort made. Personally, none of them had experienced unequal pay during their careers.

All of the female managers from the company X agreed that there is no unequal pay or discrimination in their company, and therefore most of the participants had been working in the company over 20 years.

5.1.6 Theme 6 – Females in Working Life

The most important factors in being successful were self-efficacy, including self-knowledge and self-esteem. The female managers also emphasized the importance of females supporting one another, having courage to face new challenges, and developing one's own competences.

Survey conducted by Talouselämä in 2013 confirms the female managers suggestion. The survey examined women's attitudes and the effects on proceeding in their careers. Women's own attitudes were found to be one of the most significant obstacles in their careers. The survey results demonstrated that women tend to have lack of confidence and will power. Therefore, lack of confidence could prevent women from achieving higher-level positions or make one to not even try to proceed.

5.2 Factors that Influenced the Results

Due to the situation in Finland, the face-to-face interviews were forced to conduct remotely by utilizing electronical devices. Factors that might have affected to the research were the phone – and email interviews, since it can be argued that the amount of data was decreased due to these interview methods. If the interviews would have been able to conduct in a face-to-face situation at the participant's workplace, it can be assumed that the in-depth interviews would have been even more extensive. Also, by having one interview via email, consequently erased the opportunity to ask additional questions, which were utilized in the phone interviews.

Additionally, one manager was unsuccessful to familiarize herself with the interview questions before the in-depth interview, which may have affected to the amount of data received.

5.3 Self-Assessment

The researcher believes that the research question and topic were convenient and it is particularly timely, since females in leadership is constantly covered in the news.

The preparations for the research proceed seamlessly, until the Corona virus pandemic, which had a slight affect to the quality of the interviews. In retrospect, the participants chosen were a great choice for this research. The participants embodied versatile perspectives and experiences from managerial positions.

After conducting the research, the researcher considered whether the research results would have been altered, if there would have been more participants. It can also be argued that the prior studies found might have been biased, since contrary perspectives were limited.

The six themes intertwined with the interview questions seamlessly and covered the thesis topic. The common element in all research results was mentoring. Due to this finding, the researcher considers studying this topic even further. This thesis topic and the results of this research enable numerous opportunities for future studies.

5.4 Recommendations

One of the researcher's recommendation to the research topic is related to pay. Despite the fact that three female managers in this research did not recognize any issues in their current job concerning their pay, it was evident that they did recognize that there are still problems with equal pay in Finland. The pay gap that cannot be justified with experience nor effectiveness embodying the difference in treatment between the men and women in the labor market. The Equal Pay Act was legislated to protect and emphasize equality in pay. The companies should prioritize pay issues more, since it can be argued that there are still problems in that matter. Companies and their HR departments need to take responsibility and closely consider pay in recruitment situations and amongst current vacancies, and for instance, try to moderate differences in wages with pay raises.

The glass ceiling was a challenge that all participants acknowledged but had difference in opinions whether or not there still are glass ceilings and how should they be shattered. The common goal is to decrease the level of glass ceilings and eventually completely get rid of them. It would be ideal for future generations to not identify the term glass ceiling. To reach that goal, it is highly important that companies emphasize their focus towards discrimination and diversity. Concurrently, women need to keep shattering glass ceilings and not giving up on their goals.

McKinsey & Company conducted a study in 2007, which confirms the researcher's opinion about focusing discrimination and diversity. The study suggested that having more women in management will in fact improve the organizational and financial performance in a company. The organizational performance was measured by nine criteria; leadership, motivation, vision, capability, accountability, work environment and values, coordination and control, external orientation and innovation. The research results suggested that companies with three or more women in management, do in fact, perform better in every criterion considered, compared to those companies, which does not have any women in management. Criteria such as, vision, work environment and values had the highest positive increase generated by gender diversity. (Women matter 2007, p.12)

The research results suggested that young aspiring women should prioritize developing their strengths and self-efficacy. It was also suggested by the female managers to have role models, living examples and mentors, who can help them proceeding in their careers and give the needed guidance and support.

6 CONCLUSION

Women do encounter more challenges in their careers than men, which is an indication of discrimination and lack of diversity. As mentioned, Finland is a forerunner country in comparison to other countries, but there are still issues that need to be dealt with. Equal rights and - treatment need to be self-evident in working life in the future. The situation of women has been improving throughout the years, thus the researcher does not consider the increasing improvements unattainable in the future.

The aim of this thesis was to provide answers for younger aspiring women and their careers, by displaying the challenges the experienced female managers had encountered and the ways they had conquered them. Along with providing inside information on how to be successful. This thesis was able to answer to the research question and the objectives were reached. Specifically, the female managers suggested that young aspiring females should focus on self-efficacy and developing competences by building up one's strengths. These aspects will support them while proceeding in their careers and becoming successful. The female managers also emphasized the importance of mentors.

As a matter of fact, mentoring was considered to be one of the most significant things in the participants' careers. Role models, dialogue with peers, peer support and being an example were all associated with mentoring, and therefore considered important as well. The main challenges that the research participants had encountered were associated with their job description or the need to learn new skills fast enough. This thesis provided suggestions, advices and valuable insights for young aspiring women for them to utilize in their future careers.

The female managers agreed that the world is changing fast, and so is the management culture. They believed that females have competences and characteristics that men does not, which will give females advantage in the future, because the culture is changing. They suggested that the characteristics that females have, will be greatly valued in the future.

Due to the findings of this thesis topic, the researcher is interested in extending the research further. The research could be modified to examine mentorship and its effects to mentees more specifically, which could generate more fascinating findings.

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COVER LETTER FOR INTERVIEW REQUEST

Hello!

I am a third-year International Business student from Häme University of Applied Sciences. I am about to start writing my final thesis, which covers subjects such as female leadership and what kind of challenges women encounter, while climbing the career ladder.

The aim is to conduct a qualitative research, which will be the basis for my final thesis. The method for qualitative research will be in-depth interviews, which can be conducted either through telephone, email or face-to-face.

May I interview you?

I would be delighted and grateful if you would have time for my interview.

Best Regards,

Heidi Runsas

HAMK

heidi.runsas@student.hamk.fi

Research Ethics

The participants will be respected and their comfort will be taking into consideration during the research. The researcher will assure with one's own actions that the participants will be treated professionally with good manners, and they will attend to the research voluntarily with sufficient information. The participants have the right to refuse participation at any point of the research without having any negative consequences.

The researcher is committed to maximize the benefits of the research and to minimize all potential risks that may affect participants. The researcher will also ensure that the research will be conducted in a fair manner, while protecting the collected data and identity of the participants.

The age of each participants was confirmed to ensure they were eligible of making their own decision about participation. The authorization to display the age, family status and education level of participants is desired, to provide maximum utilization of data and reflection to theory. (Hennink, Hutter & Ajay, 2020, p. 71)

The Authorization

The name or the specific job title will not be mentioned in the research to protect the identity of research participants.

Thus, if the participant allows the general term 'manager' will be used, since the research topic is linked to 'females in managerial positions'.

- May the term 'manager' be used when described the work status of participants?

The researcher desires an authorization to display participants family status, for the purpose of being able to analyze the data in the perspective of family life; and if it has affected to one's career. The authorization to display the age of participants will bring depth to the analysis for the duration of one's career and their current employment.

- May your current workplace be identified in the research?
- May your age be displayed in the research?
If you are not comfortable with mentioning your age, is it possible if researcher will utilize age distribution, for instance 40-50 years old.
- May your family status be displayed in the research?
- If the interview will be either face-to-face or through telephone, may the interview be recorded to maximize the collection of data.

Please answer the questions honestly and answer like you want to answer not like you think you should answer or what would be the right answer.

| Participants | Age | Education Level | How Long Have You Worked In Your Current Workplace? | How Long Have You Worked In Your Current Job? | Family Status |
|----------------------|-----|-----------------|---|---|---------------|
| Female Manager A/B/C | | | | | |

The Interview Questions

Theme 1 Females in Leadership

What is it like to be a woman in a leadership position in today's work community?

Since women leaders are more common nowadays, how do you think it will help and affect the younger generations in their careers?

Theme 2 Challenges

What challenges have you faced in your career?

- How did you overcome those challenges?
- Have aspects like motherhood or family life had an effect to your career?
- Has any of the challenges you have faced had anything to do with your gender?
- Have you ever faced gender discrimination or noticed it at any point of your career?

What is the biggest challenge for a woman in today's work life?

Theme 3 Glass Ceiling

Have you ever heard the term '*glass ceiling*'?

- What does it mean to you?
- Do you agree that at some point women will hit the glass ceiling and it takes increased amount of work and effort from them to break through that glass ceiling, which causes cases where not all will ever break through it? What is the reason for it/What has caused it?
- Do you have any suggestions how to avoid glass ceiling or how to break through it?

Theme 4 Mentors

Do you think that lack of female mentors have ever affected you in proceeding in your career?

- If it has, how has it affected you?

How do you think it will affect young women if they have female mentors?

How has mentoring affected dealing with challenges in your career?

Theme 5 Pay

The saying 'Men's Euro is Women's 80cents' is often heard in conversations. Even though, the matter is more generally spoken nowadays, it has been the perennial problem around the world.

- What do you think about the pays between men and women?
 - o ...do you think they are equal in today's society?
- Have you ever witnessed unequal pay in your work environments?

Have unequal pay or the pay women get ever affected to your career?

Theme 6 Females in working life

How do you think your gender has affected to your career?

How can women be successful in their careers?

Do you have anything to add, concerning the research topic?

May the researcher contact you if specifying questions are needed?

var doctype = "xls";

Average wages by sectors and genders

2000Q4-2019Q4* (* = preliminary information)

Employees' Monthly Wage

| | Private Sector and Others | | Municipality | | Government | |
|---------|---------------------------|-------|--------------|-------|------------|-------|
| | Men | Women | Men | Women | Men | Women |
| 2000Q4 | 2300 | 1853 | 2138 | 1804 | 2431 | 1948 |
| 2001Q4 | 2399 | 1937 | 2221 | 1865 | 2550 | 2049 |
| 2002Q4 | 2503 | 2012 | 2297 | 1932 | 2660 | 2145 |
| 2003Q4 | 2600 | 2102 | 2384 | 2014 | 2761 | 2238 |
| 2004Q4 | 2697 | 2190 | 2481 | 2100 | 2869 | 2337 |
| 2005Q4 | 2834 | 2323 | 2657 | 2213 | 2954 | 2421 |
| 2006Q4 | 2917 | 2398 | 2733 | 2274 | 3075 | 2521 |
| 2007Q4 | 3064 | 2516 | 2880 | 2388 | 3187 | 2669 |
| 2008Q4 | 3227 | 2707 | 2979 | 2506 | 3433 | 2873 |
| 2009Q4 | 3332 | 2815 | 3084 | 2593 | 3556 | 3004 |
| 2010Q4 | 3323 | 2783 | 3112 | 2654 | 3639 | 3067 |
| 2011Q4 | 3413 | 2859 | 3191 | 2725 | 3710 | 3207 |
| 2012Q4 | 3523 | 2945 | 3275 | 2798 | 3872 | 3317 |
| 2013Q4 | 3596 | 3023 | 3340 | 2863 | 3941 | 3405 |
| 2014Q4 | 3626 | 3069 | 3358 | 2889 | 4042 | 3476 |
| 2015Q4 | 3684 | 3113 | 3375 | 2906 | 4081 | 3511 |
| 2016Q4 | 3695 | 3137 | 3383 | 2933 | 4081 | 3557 |
| 2017Q4 | 3722 | 3180 | 3383 | 2945 | 4111 | 3582 |
| 2018Q4 | 3795 | 3231 | 3435 | 3009 | 4161 | 3669 |
| 2019Q4* | 3872 | 3298 | 3523 | 3086 | 4263 | 3759 |

Income level index

Unit: Euro/month

Source: Statistics Finland / Income level index