

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF MALE AND FEMALE PERCEPTIONS IN  
DIFFERENCES IN THE WORKING AND DOMESTIC SPHERE:

A comparison of the French and Finnish cultures.

Master's Thesis  
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Intercultural Communication  
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Spring 2015  
University of Jyväskylä

## JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

Tiedekunta – Faculty Humanities	Laitos – Department Department of Communication
Tekijä – Author FLORA GALY-BADENAS	
Työn nimi – Title A qualitative study of male and female perceptions in differences in the working and domestic sphere: A comparison of the French and Finnish cultures.	
Oppiaine – Subject Intercultural Communication	Työn laji – Level Master’s Thesis
Aika – Month and year May, 2015	<b>Sivumäärä – Number of pages</b> 88
<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>This thesis presents a comparison between two culturally different countries in terms of gender differences causing inequality in the working and domestic life. France, one of the pioneer countries in terms of fighting for women’s rights, but at the same time strongly paternalistic and chauvinist as a result of its Latin culture, is compared to Finland, considered as an example for gender equality.</p> <p>The research was conducted among private French and Finnish companies, where interviews were conducted of male and female employees holding different positions in the hierarchy.</p> <p>The thesis presents two articles.</p> <p>1) The first one focuses on the reproduction of a social structure by the organizational structure through gender roles. To do so, the article is based on the social role theory and on the gendered organization theory. The main results of this study show that regardless of a more women-friendly culture, stereotypic gender roles are visible in the domestic and the professional spheres in both countries.</p> <p>2) The second article describes the degree of readiness an organization has towards women accessing managerial positions. It is examined through male and female managers’ perception of organizational readiness. The paper is based on the organizational readiness for change theory. The main findings indicate that regardless of a more women-friendly culture, women face a strong masculine corporate culture.</p>	
Asiasanat – Keywords Social role theory, organizational readiness theory, gender, cross-cultural communication, France, Finland.	
Säilytyspaikka – Depository	University of Jyväskylä, Department of Communication

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## THESIS PRESENTATION

### 1. Introduction

The distinction between men and women, depending on one's sex, has a long history, and under various forms, is present in all societies. Since the appearance of human beings on earth, physical differences and abilities have played a role in this distinction. Indeed, due to their greater physical strength, men were usually in charge of hunting and of other outdoor activities which required more strength (Eagle, 1987). On the contrary, women, who were considered weaker, and with the physical capability of bearing children, were consequently in charge of less physically demanding tasks such as picking berries, taking care of the household or rearing children (Eagle, 1987). Throughout centuries, masculine and feminine roles have become standardized. Today, men and women are expected to follow certain behaviors that are considered specific to one's gender. In this sense, in today's interconnected societies, sex-differentiated roles and behaviors seem more globally established.

Gender roles are considered by scholars to be social constructs that start at birth (Eagly, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000; Epstein, 1988). Children grow up and assimilate into a normalized feminine or masculine gender, influenced by family, mass-media, and teachers. Feminine and masculine gender roles are then reproduced throughout an individual's life. Furthermore, masculine characteristics are globally more valued, favored, and preferred over feminine characteristics, which leads to sexism (Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011). However, the degree of female undervaluation appears to change depending on the country. Accordingly, some societies may not give similar rights and opportunities to girls

and women - such as education, health care, nutrition or employment – that they give to boys and men. In the case of the European Union, laws make it obligatory to have equal treatment between men and women in all aspects of life (European Commission, 2013). However, despite the illegality of gender discrimination, unequal treatment towards women carries on in many facets of social life. In this regard, an interesting question is whether discrimination is different and of variable intensity depending on the culture of a country. Furthermore, to what extent can a specific culture influence people's perception of gender roles, and how do inequalities link to those roles, remain as significant questions. Do expectations toward males and females vary depending on a country's culture? Do one's perceptions of stereotypical gender capabilities and roles change depending on one's own culture?

This thesis compares the differences in inequality in the work environment and the domestic sphere resulting from the cultural gender differences of two different countries. A cross-cultural analysis compares France to Finland. France, a chauvinistic and paternalistic country (Bennhold, 2010; Lambert, 2001) which has valuably contributed to improving women's rights, is compared to Finland, a recognized fair and open-minded country that believes gender equality is an advantage for the whole society (Katila & Eriksson, 2013). The study focuses on males and females in private companies from managerial positions upwards. The choice of focusing on individuals with different levels of managerial responsibilities is drawn from the argument that managers have a more global vision of an organization. In this sense, managers belong to middle or higher management of the private companies. Thus, they have subordinates but

also superiors which confer them a broader vision and experience of different types of relationships. In addition, managers should have the knowledge of the various legal obligations an organization has to reduce discrimination between men and women and to promote gender equality. This thesis equally considers the opinions of both men and women. Researchers tend mostly to take into account the visions and the opinions of the minority or of the disfavored group. This thesis aims at giving equal importance to both men's and women's experiences and opinions. First of all, this is because men and women may have different visions of how discrimination occurs. Secondly, some differences might be observed or experienced by one gender and not by the other. In addition, both sides need to be studied and listened to if a common ground is to be found for a fairer and for a more gender equal society. This thesis alone does not aim at finding, but rather contributing to the discussion of gender equality by bringing up perspectives from different cultural backgrounds.

A great deal of research on gender inequality and discrimination in various aspects of the society has been done. However, the topics studied are mainly related to the gender pay gap, job segregation, and the glass ceiling. Such topics have, for many, been studied from the employees' and organizations' perspective. This thesis intends to observe how cultural differences may influence one's perception of gender differences and inequalities that result from it. Furthermore, even though France has been studied in various ways, Finland has been less researched and mostly in the context of the Northern Countries. Moreover, both countries appear to have not been directly compared to one another on these matters.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### **Social role theory**

In order to study this topic, the present thesis is divided into two parts. The first part is an article on how an organizational structure reflects the social structure.

The study is based on the social role theory (Eagly, 1987), which argues that individuals assimilate a gender role depending on their sex and behave according to this role in the society.

Some scholars believe gender roles are the result of a socialization process starting in early childhood and developing during adolescence (Eagly, Wood & Diekmann, 2000). This is consistent with the liberal feminist thought that through family, school and media, society supports and encourages the development of specific skills and qualities that facilitate the assimilation of social roles (Epstein, 1988). Once rooted in individuals, gender roles are applied to domestic and working life, and reproduce from one generation to another.

Sex-division of labor goes back historically when male strength was required for outdoor activities such as hunting; and women were seen as more fragile and assumed domestic responsibilities (Eagly, 1987). However, such characteristics lose their relevance in today's post-industrial societies. Based on sex-differences in social behavior, expectations towards men and women have differed. Through the reproduction of these expectations from generation to generation, social behavior has deeply influenced both genders and has led to sexual stereotypes (Eagly, 1987; Eagly et al., 2000). Hence, the stereotypes of social roles rule male and female behavior. In this respect, men develop "agentic" characteristics such as assertiveness, independence and competence that are in line

with male social role expectations. In contrast, women develop “communal” characteristics such as friendliness, generosity, kindness and compassion that are consistent with female social role expectations (Eagly 1987). Consequently, based on such traits, men are considered breadwinners and women homemakers (Diekman & Goodfriend, 2006).

This theory is complemented by the gendered organization theory (Acker, 1990) that argues that the organizational structure is gendered based on stereotypical masculine traits. In other words, scholars suggest that the organizational structure has been created by men in order to suit male characteristics and to favor them. The development of each theory is further developed in the social role article.

### **Organizational readiness for change theory**

The second part of this thesis is another article that discusses the extent to which an organization is ready to let women access managerial positions. To this purpose, the organizational readiness for change theory is used as basis for this study. Armenakis, Harris and Mossholder (1993) defined it as the influence a change agent has on the behavior of the members of an organization (Armenakis, Harris & Mossholder, 1993). Based on organizational climate research, organizational readiness refers to employees’ perception of how ready their company is to welcome change. In this line, Clement (1994) argued that leadership is the key factor for successful change. More specifically, the example should come from the top of the hierarchy and in this sense, open communication, as well as visible and constant support from top managers is considered crucial to successfully achieve a change. Furthermore, various stereotypical discriminations



occurring at a managerial level are developed through three additional theories: 1) Social Role theory (Eagly, 1987), which has been previously defined. 2) Tokenism theory (Kanter, 1977), which suggests that women are considered as tokens when female managers are little represented within an organization. 3) Contact Hypothesis theory (Allport, 1954) suggests that an increased contact with a minority, in a neutral way, results in a decrease of negative stereotypes and an increase in positive attitudes toward the minority.

### **3. Method**

The main motivation for this study is to examine how cultural differences influence perceptions of gender inequalities. For this purpose, the study is based on three research questions:

- How are gender roles perceived in Finland and in France?
- To what extent does the organizational structure mirror the social structure through work division?
- How do French and Finnish managers perceive organizational readiness to be managed by women?

This section provides an overview on the methodological choices made to complete this research.

Conducting interviews was assumed as the most appropriate and efficient way to explore these research questions. As pointed out by Silverman (2006), interviews are the most commonly used method for qualitative studies, and they are also relatively economical in terms of time and resources. Moreover, while allowing relative flexibility, interviews above all enable a more in-depth

examination of the topic than any other method does (Burgess, 1980). They also enable researchers to observe non-verbal communication, which can be more revealing than words. Among various possible forms, semi-structured interviews were considered as the most adequate to serve the purpose of this study. In this sense, semi-structured interviews propose a set of specific questions interviewees are expected to answer, but they also leave a certain freedom to drift away from the original questions (Rowley, 2012). In the scope of this research, interviews were conducted on a face-to-face basis. Given the personal aspect of this research, individual interviews were assumed to be the most appropriate way to put the interviewees at ease and to reach a relaxed and a trustful atmosphere needed to talk about one's opinions and personal experiences (Mertens, 1998). Additionally, interviewees chose the place and the time of the interview.

The questionnaire was first developed in English, and approved by the thesis supervisor before being translated into French by the author (a native-French speaker). Once translated, the French version was read by two other native-French people and compared to the original one to ensure that the questionnaire kept its intended meaning while being at the same time appropriate to the French way of thinking. Once considered ready, the questionnaire was tested on two other native-French people to ensure questions were correctly understood and would bring the expected answers. The questionnaire was composed of 12 questions that are visible in Annex 1.

Interviewees were contacted differently in France and in Finland. French interviewees were contacted through acquaintances. After a first round of interviews, interviewees were asked if they knew people who would match the

required profile. This resulted in a few more interviews. As for the Finnish interviews, purposive sampling was used (Silverman, 2010). LinkedIn was used as the primary way of searching for potential interviewees. All in all, 16 interviews were conducted with nine female and seven male interviewees. Interviewees' profiles will not be developed here, as they have been further detailed in the method sections in both articles.

After all interviews were conducted, they were transcribed with the help of the software "f4". Interviews were transcribed in the language they were conducted in, that is in French and in English. Data from each country was first analyzed separately. Thematic analysis (Gibson & Brown, 2009) was used, and thus repetition of certain themes was sought. Already during the interviewing process, some repetitions were noticed, and consequently, certain themes were already expected. For instance, in the Finnish data, the idea that ones' characteristic is due to ones' personality rather than to ones' gender as a potential theme was already noticed when conducting interviews. On the contrary, other themes were discovered during the analysis process. Finally, once all data was analyzed, data of each country was compared with one another. For this purpose, a simple double entry table was drawn. Such a table was used as it appeared that a visual presentation would ease the process and make it clearer (Silverman, 2006). Themes were listed vertically on the left side, while countries were horizontally written at the top of the table. Themes were then compared between France and Finland. Lastly, useful French quotations were translated into English by the author. Results and conclusions are presented in the next section.

#### **4. Results and Conclusion**

In general, the hypotheses in both articles appear not to be supported. In essence, Finland does, indeed, have a more gender-equalitarian culture but, despite this, gender stereotypes still seem present in the observed aspects of society, and appear to have more impact than expected. The main findings of both articles are summarized below.

Findings from the first article show that regardless of the culture, work division is thought through stereotypical characteristics. Analyzed in two parts, results show that even though Finns first argued that characteristics are specific to an individual's personality and not one's gender, stereotypical features end up being given to one gender rather than the other one by both the French and the Finns. Women were described to better fit into certain job positions due to stereotypical characteristics. Furthermore, a "right way" – or a more gentle way - to treat women was expressed in Finland, whereas cautiousness towards behaviors wrongly interpreted as seduction by opposite gender were pointed out in France. Findings are consistent with previous studies that state that jobs considered feminine require social interactions and taking care of others - characteristics considered to describe mothers. Additionally, even if tasks are divided in a more convenience-related way, a hierarchy is visible within the domestic sphere. The stereotype of women as mainly responsible for the household and for raising children seems to be still embedded in both cultures, even though younger men tend to participate more in such responsibilities. However, a well-balanced work-family life seems more easily reachable in Finland than in France, as Finns tend to both equally value and encourage activities outside work.

Results of the second article show that even if in theory Finns appear positive about having women as superiors and French have nothing against it, the structure of both the organizations and the societies do not seem adapted to women's various responsibilities. Perception of readiness was discussed at three levels; personal, interpersonal, and contextual. The personal level shows that while French female interviewees did not find their minority position to be positive, Finnish women considered that it made them more visible, and to some extent, it favored them. However, the fact of being in a male-dominant environment stressed the need for women to prove their competence and to work harder to reach an equal level with their male counterparts. Additionally, the age of both female managers and employees seemed to influence the perception towards women holding positions with responsibilities. In this line, it is believed that, especially in France, the arrival of a younger generation, raised with a more gender-neutral culture, will reduce the importance of gender and put everyone on an equal ground. The interpersonal level pointed out how Finnish female managers seem to be more positively perceived than French female managers. However, this did not seem to lead to an easier career progression compared to their French counterparts. A confirmation point was shown, which was that sexism appeared rather strongly present and visible in French workplaces, whereas respect towards women was more noticeable in Finland. Finally, the contextual level highlighted that the scope and sector of an organization influences women's evolution and acceptance. Importantly, a masculine management style is apparent in Finland, as well as a positively seen military training culture. Finally, a network favoring men was described in both countries as a springboard for fast career

evolution. Therefore, a paradox was found in Finland with a general gender-equality mind-set on one hand, and a strong masculine corporate system on the other.

### **5. Evaluation of the study**

Given how opinions and perceptions from individuals with different cultural backgrounds were studied, a qualitative research appeared an appropriate method for the study. Consequently, 16 interviews were conducted (9 in France and 7 in Finland). Finding suitable interviewees who would accept to participate in the project proved more challenging than expected, regardless of the country.

However, data collection in France was easier due to contacting people through acquaintances. In contrast, Finnish interviewees were mainly found on LinkedIn and then contacted through email. As a common scenario, out of 20 emails sent, four were answered, mainly by women and usually negatively. Finnish men were particularly difficult to get in touch with, but eventually interviews were conducted and a majority of the men answered. Furthermore, it is arguable that the small number of participants could limit the scope of the results. However, it did not prevent from collecting adequate opinions and experiences from the participants, nor did it prevent from getting a distinct perception on the issue. Yet, with the interviewer being a woman, female interviewees might have felt more comfortable sharing experiences and talking about such a subject than the male interviewees. Furthermore, it is also possible that men felt more threatened by such a topic, especially when approached by a woman. In this sense, it was observed that interviews, which lasted from 20 minutes to over an hour, tended to be shorter with men on average.

Interviews went smoothly and were well received by interviewees. Most interviewees, both men and women, showed a genuine interest toward the research, and some reported to have actively informed themselves and researched the progress made in this area before being contacted for the interview. It is worth mentioning that only women reported it. Nonetheless, some men and women admitted to have done some research on the topic after being contacted, while others mentioned they had not researched at all before the interview. A pre-research on the topic prior to interviews was not asked from interviewees, and questions were not sent beforehand, with the exception of one person who asked for them. However, some interviewees reported some questions difficult to answer without having read them beforehand. Finally, several interviewees expressed their interest of being informed of the results and of reading the thesis once the study is completed.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the article on organizational readiness for change was co-authored. The co-author contributed in finding an adequate theory for this paper and participated in the research to build the basis for the review of literature. In this sense, the co-author contributed to the author's understanding of the theory by providing an already written, but unpublished, review of literature on organizational readiness for change. Based on this review of literature, the author was able to find relevant authors and articles to build the review of literature of the present paper. Furthermore, the co-author reviewed the article several times at various stages of its development and provided helpful insights that enabled the author to refine the paper.

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**MONOGRAPH: SOCIAL ROLE ARTICLE**

Social and organizational structures: A qualitative analysis of social role in France  
and Finland

Flora Galy-Badenas

**ABSTRACT**

In today's interconnected world, gender roles appear deeply and widely rooted into the global culture. In this regard, the social role theory (Eagly, 1987) and the gendered organization theory (Acker, 1990) consider gender roles as social constructs. Furthermore, the gendered organization theory considers gender differences at work to be the consequence of a masculine organizational structure. Based on these theories, the present paper examines the extent to which these gender roles influence organizational and domestic structures. The study compares France – a pioneer in women's rights but also a paternalistic and a chauvinistic culture – to Finland – considered as exemplary in terms of gender equality. The comparison of the cultural impact on gender roles' perception in these two countries has not been researched. To investigate this, 16 men and women were interviewed in France and in Finland. Findings showed paradoxes in Finland. Despite a certain gender-neutrality present in Finnish interviews, interviewees from both countries clearly attribute stereotypical characteristics to each gender. Results also suggest the presence of a hierarchical structure in domestic duties depending on whether a man or a woman performs these duties.

*Key words:* social role theory, gender, cross-cultural analysis, France, Finland

## INTRODUCTION

A clear distinction is typically made between human beings depending on their sex. The masculine sex has a history of being considered superior. Although this has tended to evolve towards a more neutral vision of both sexes in some societies, women are still broadly underestimated compared to men (Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011). About 70% of the work worldwide is done by women, but when considering compensation, they receive only 10% of the global earnings (Gardette, 2014). Women work more than men but earn less or nothing since domestic duties are not recognized as work. In this regard, women still undertake the majority of domestic tasks, regardless of the country (Eagly & Cali, 2007).

Globally, gender inequalities in the labor-market have decreased in the past decade, but seem to have significantly increased as a reaction to the 2008 economic crisis (ILO and UN Women Report, 2012). Inequalities between genders are numerous, and differ from country to country. As an example, in 2012 in the European Union, female gross hourly earnings were on average 16% below those of male's, even though laws exist against this inequality (Eurostat, 2014). In 2012, females represented 21% of senior managers and 9% of CEOs worldwide (Grant Thornton International Business Report, 2012). Furthermore, stereotypical gender differences resulting in inequalities can also be imperceptible such as differences in characteristics, behavior, or communication. Considered a social construction by some, gender stereotypes occur in other places than work, such as home and in other parts of society.

The current study observes the extent to which the role division at work and the organizational structure reflects the domestic task division and the social structure in France and in Finland. Despite a long history of feminism and movements in favor of women's rights and gender equality, France does not seem to stand out as a female friendly country. A representative example is the 2007 French Presidential Elections during which Ségolène Royale, a presidential candidate then, was rhetorically and politically attacked for her gender. While males in her own political party were concerned about the welfare for her four children as she was campaigning, others argued the French presidency was not a beauty contest (Wyatt, 2006). More recently, a female member of the French Parliament was whistled at for wearing a dress when entering the Parliament. France faces chauvinism and patriarchy, which has repercussions for male and female professional and domestic lives. On the contrary, like other Nordic countries, Finland gives a strong image of gender equality and is presented as a model to follow (Katila & Eriksson, 2013). Indeed, in this regard, Finland does better than France as Finns have elected a woman as the President of the Republic. Furthermore, the representation of women in government is exemplary (Singh & Terjesen, 2008). However, statistics portray another picture about gender equality in the Finnish society.

This research is based on the assumption that Finland is generally more female friendly, and is more favorably disposed towards gender equality than France. Many studies have been conducted on gender discrimination at work, but fewer researchers have studied the relationship between professional and domestic inequalities in France and Finland. Research has shown that Finns are more

inclined to fairly divide and share domestic tasks. Moreover, it is thought that Finns are less likely to rely on sex-differentiated behaviors than their French counterparts. Thus, this study explores these assertions by focusing on females and males from the management level upwards who are employed in private organizations, in both France and Finland.

### **SOCIAL ROLE THEORY**

« On ne naît pas femme: on le devient [...] c'est l'ensemble de la civilisation qui élabore ce produit [...] qu'on qualifie de féminin »<sup>1</sup> (de Beauvoir, 1949, p. 13). Gender roles as social constructs are at the core of the social role theory (Eagly, 1987). It is believed individuals assimilate to a specific gender and to the social roles and behaviors expected of it through evolving in society. This learning process starts in early childhood and carries on afterwards. Gender stereotypes are seen as resulting from the labor division based on sexes. In essence, women are ascribed “communal” traits (kindness, nurture, support, expression), which are associated to a homemaker role, whereas men are ascribed “agentic” traits (assertion, independence, competence), which are associated to a breadwinner role (Eagly, 1987; Eagly, Wood, & Diekman, 2000). Singh and Terjesen (2008) echo this notion by arguing that such a division is the result of a masculinized social structure that is a “gendered social system, where work has been designed by men for men, and where patriarchy defines work roles by gender, leading to direct discrimination and stereotyping” (p. 56). Thus, gender stereotypes are seen as influenced by the social reality. An alternative assumption

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<sup>1</sup> “One does not born woman: but becomes it. It is the civilization as a whole that produces this creature [...] which is described as feminine”.

is proposed by Jussim, Cain, Crawford, Harber and Cohen (2009) who suggest that stereotypes, instead, reflect the social reality. Critics and limitations of the theory were pointed out in terms of its narrow scope and single design (Koenig & Eagly, 2014). Additionally, the validity of the theory was questioned as it was argued that some changes had occurred in gender roles, but that gender stereotypes were not seen to have evolved alongside them (Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Glick, & Phelan, 2012). Relatedly, Koenig and Eagly's (2014) study retorts that when a social group is assumed to change, stereotypes are then influenced by the future roles assumed of the group and not by its current stereotypes. Hence, it is suggested that stereotypes change along social group evolution.

In today's society, a majority of women have paid jobs and evolve in the same work environment where men do. However, despite working together, differences occur between men and women, and women oftentimes experience workplace discrimination (Koenig, et al., 2011). Women are disadvantaged in job interviews and in hiring negotiations (Rudman, et al., 2012), are hired for stereotypically "feminized" positions (Insch, McIntyre, & Napier, 2008), are underpaid, and have fewer opportunities to access the highest hierarchical ladders compared to their male counterparts (Ashcraft, 2006; Eagly et al., 2000; Stivers, 2002). Researches have shown that paradigms like "manager equals male" or "think leader-think male" are common (Hoobler, Wayne, & Lemmon, 2009). In this sense, women's capabilities as leaders are questioned. Firstly, as men mainly occupy leadership positions, people assimilate "good" leaders with masculine characteristics such as risk-taking and result-orientation (Stoker & Velde, 2012). Consequently, leader traits are inconsistent with stereotypical female

characteristics attributed to women, and therefore women are negatively perceived for these positions (Eagly et al., 2000). Moreover, men tend to discredit women's leadership abilities, which in consequence can have negative influence on women's accession to positions of authority since most of the decision-making positions are held by men (Koenig, et al., 2011). However, the study also suggests that an increase of female leaders might change the current view on leadership characteristics (Koenig, et al., 2011). Former research shows that women who access top positions are more likely to behave like men (Sorenson, 1984). A complementary study of Davies-Netzley (1998) on female executives outlined that women adapt to the surrounding masculine environment, and tend to exaggerate masculine characteristics such as authority. Paradoxically, while some behaviors and male traits are tolerated and expected of men, same behaviors and traits are proscribed and negatively perceived in women (Eagly et al., 2000; Rudman, et al., 2011). Women in such situations experience criticism, sexist comments and discriminatory terms such as "bossy" (Acker, 2012; Rudman, et al., 2011). Gherardi and Poggio (2001) resumed this paradox by saying that women in male-dominated positions are expected to be both a man and a woman at the same time.

Secondly, women are primarily seen through their reproductive role, which in many ways seems to influence and to dictate their domestic and working lives. The possibility of motherhood seems to accentuate the stereotypical feminine role. Lewis (2001) sees the separation of work and home as fundamental in the traditional male model of work. Men are assumed free of any family/domestic duties, and therefore that all women have caregiving responsibilities. However, not all women ensure such duties. Indeed, women who focus on their careers are



less likely to have children or at least less children (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000; cited in Hoodler et al., 2009). Yet again, before pregnancy, women are seen as potential future mothers, and - once parents - women appear less committed and less available to their jobs (Smithson & Stokoe, 2005). An extensive literature on work/family relation exists. Research shows that even though women have paid jobs, and men contribute more and more to the domestic life, women are still the main responsables for domestic and child rearing duties (Eagly, & Cali, 2007). Many studies were conducted on work/family conflict, and a specific research on welfare and Nordic countries shows that Finland experiences a very low level of conflict compared to other countries (Öun, 2012). To explore work/family relation from a more positive perspective, Greenhaus and Powell (2006) developed a theoretical model of work/family enrichment. Their study suggests that work and family can be allies, and thus participation in one sphere (work or family) may enrich the quality of life in the other one (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). However, further research appears to be needed. Complementarily, Bryon's (2005) research brings a new dimension to the theory by suggesting that both men and women experience similar levels of interference between work and family.

### **GENDERED ORGANIZATION THEORY**

Unlike the social role theory, which ascribes gender discrimination to sex-differentiated behavior, the gendered organization theory rather considers it is due to the organizational structure that is gendered (Acker, 1990). Acker's claim opposed Sorenson's (1984) view that saw organizations as gender-neutral. Acker's argument is that organizations are built to fit the characteristics of a standardized worker, portrayed as a white male with features of "men's bodies,

sexuality, and relationships to procreation and paid work” (1990, p. 139). A recent study argues that even though more than one “ideal” worker probably exists, depending on organizations, the “ideal” worker is always masculine (Benschop & Doorewaard, 2012). An example of a standardized worker can be the different perceptions of what family and a job represent for men and women. In this regard, men perceive jobs as a full-time and a life-long activity, whereas women see jobs as a remunerated activity alongside other legitimate responsibilities (Acker, 1990). The current organizational structure considers extended working hours as normal. Consequently, this personification of job and family has an effect on how others perceive men and women for a job. Therefore, having a family has a different meaning in an employer’s eyes, as it is a sign of stability for a man but a lack of commitment for a woman (Caceres-Rodrigues, 2011). This has consequences from a hierarchical angle; those who can dedicate themselves to their jobs on a full time basis are “naturally more suited to responsibility and authority [...than] those who must divide their commitments” (Acker, 1990, p. 149). Moreover, recent studies highlight the fact that women are disadvantaged in terms of receiving promotions in both male and female dominated jobs. Indeed, Dahlkild-Öhman and Eriksson (2013) outlined that even in professions that are considered female-dominated, such as social and health care services, men find their way to the leading positions more easily.

Gendered organization echoes Kanter’s (1977) argument that gender differences in organizations are due to the organizational structure rather than to each individual characteristic. In a previous study, Acker (1988) explained that gender and class are inextricably linked in the organizational context, “class is

constructed through gender and that class relations are always gendered” (Acker, 1990, p. 145). Although this remains right in a majority of organizations, gender and class appear not perfectly related anymore. Instead, gendered and sexualized assumptions are seen to influence men’s and women’s situation in the organizational context (Acker, 2006). Moreover, instead of focusing on gender only, recent studies have researched the combination of gender, class and race in workplace inequality, which is described as “intersectionalism” (Acker, 2006; Acker, 2012; Benschop & Doorewaard, 2012). Additionally, it is argued that original concept of gendered organization was based on a traditional organizational structure that has changed a lot in the past decades. Researches show that while organizations are still strongly gendered, mechanisms that reproduce inequalities have evolved (Williams, Muller, & Kilanski, 2012). In this sense, the new economy is linked with team working, career mapping and networking. However, the change of economy and of organizational model brings new questions for further research. In today’s society, organizations are built based on different models; cooperatives enhance a more egalitarian system whereas some more old-fashioned companies carry on with the traditional bureaucratic model. Also, nowadays, many companies outsource labor to cheaper countries. Therefore, what counts as an organization, and how can the gendered organization theory be adapted to the current diversity of organizational model are examples of questions that result from the change of economy (Acker, 2012).

**WORKPLACE CONTEXT AND WORK CULTURE – FRANCE vs  
FINLAND**

Through its Southern Mediterranean location, France is strongly influenced by Latin culture and chauvinism has always been a part of the French culture (Bennhold, 2010; Lambert, 2001). Although mentalities tend to change with new generations, many French people have grown up and lived with such cultural references. In order to break gender stereotypes, the former Minister of Women's Rights, Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, planned to take the problem upstream. The "ABCD de l'égalité", a school curriculum, aimed at making it mandatory for teachers to instill such respect and egalitarian vision to young children (Ministère de l'Education Nationale, 2014). The ultimate goal was to durably change mentalities starting in early childhood. The curriculum went through a trial period, which was shown to be a success. However, many opponents protested against it and blamed the minister of establishing a "gender theory" that would result in dismantling gender stereotypes, essential for children to construct themselves.

In France, the first reference to gender equality goes back to 1946, when the principle of equality between men and women in all sectors was added to the preamble of the French Constitution. Furthermore, the current control center, the Haut Conseil à l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes<sup>2</sup>, was created in 1995, and aimed at evaluating politics on women's rights and gender inequality in economics, politics, society and cultural fields. Along with the legal framework and national monitoring center, some initiatives were launched to aim at emphasizing laws. On this specific point, organizations employing more than 50 people have a legal obligation to present a yearly written report comparing women's and men's situations, and an additional action plan for further steps in

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<sup>2</sup> The High Council for equality between women and men.

gender equality has been required since January 2012 (Ministère du Travail). By December 2013, only 25% of corporations had given their action plan.

Finnish society is based on the ideas of individualism, egalitarianism, double earner families, and public child care facilities. Finns consider gender equality as natural and beneficial for society (Katila & Eriksson, 2013). In general, Nordic countries reluctantly acknowledge discrimination processes within their societies, a principle that goes against Roberson and Kulik's (2007) argument that the most efficient way to diminish the impact of stereotypes is to discuss and acknowledge them. Saari emphasized that "the ideal of gender neutrality that is cherished in Finnish working life and collective bargaining can easily result in gender-blindness" (2013, p. 51). That is to say, male norms prevail in a society that does not admit differences between men and women. However, Finnish women are highly respected: they are seen as strong and usually represented as 'wife, mother, provider, participant, opinion leader' (Katila & Eriksson, 2013, p. 73). In short, Finnish women are super-women who could "have it all" without facing any issues.

The first general gender equality act was approved in 1986, and was then completely reformed in 2005. The Finnish gender equality legislation states that employers must encourage equality within their organization. In addition, companies employing 30 people or more are required to create an annual plan promoting gender equality in co-operation with personnel (Act on Equality between Women and Men, 1986).

Like Finland, France has a fairly high male employment rate of 74% (Eurostat, 2013). However, Finnish women seem to be better employed than their

French female counterparts with female employment rates being 72% and 66%, respectively (Eurostat, 2013). In 2013, the number of French women working part-time due to parenting reasons was at 31% while the figure was only at 17% for Finnish women. French men rated at 6% while the number for Finnish men was too small and hence unreliable (Eurostat, 2013). Grant Thornton's report outlined an interesting fact: 89% of Finnish businesses offer flexible work schedules, but only 54% do so in France (2012).

To sum up, gender stereotypes appear to remain rooted in today's culture, and seem to influence individuals' behavior. Accordingly, the sex-division of paid work and domestic tasks appears to be made based on these gender stereotypes. A different approach is proposed by the gendered organization theory, which argues that gender differences at work are the result of the organizational structure created based on male standards, and are therefore masculine. Based on these theories, this study researches gender roles in Finland and France and explores the extent to which these gender roles influence organizational and domestic structures.

*RQ 1:* How are gender roles perceived in Finland and in France?

*RQ 2:* To what extent does the organizational structure mirror the social structures through work division?

## **METHOD**

To investigate the research questions, interviews were carried out in France and Finland. Nine interviews were conducted in France during summer 2014, and a second set of seven interviews were conducted in Finland during September and October 2014. French interviewees worked in five different private companies in the surroundings of Castres and Toulouse. All organizations were from different

fields and varied from medium sized companies to large firms. In total, six women and three men were interviewed, of which five were managers; one was a senior manager, one was a vice-director, and finally, two were managing directors. French interviews were conducted in French, and then the needed parts were translated into English.

The seven Finnish interviewees were from five different private companies located in the surroundings of Jyväskylä and in South-West Finland. All companies were from different sectors, and ranked from small sized companies to large firms. All in all, four men and three women were interviewed, of which five were managers, one was a Head of Department and one was a Vice-President. Interviews in Finland were conducted in English.

At first, interviewees were asked to fill in a short questionnaire on their personal information, such as educational background, estimated percentage of women and men employees in their firm, number of executives in their companies, marital status and children. Then, interviews were made up of 12 semi-structured questions, which gave interviewees more freedom in their answers. In order to create a more trusting atmosphere that would ease the opinion and experience sharing (Mertens, 1998), participants were interviewed individually and at a place of their choice. On average, interviews lasted between 20 minutes and an hour. Afterwards, all interviews were transcribed in the language in which they were conducted. French and Finnish interviews were then analyzed separately by following the thematic analysis process (Gibson & Brown, 2009). Themes were established by looking for repetitive topics. Finally, themes were compared between France and Finland with the help of a double entry table (Silverman,

2006). The next section contains the analysis of the claims, experiences, and opinions of interviewees.

## ANALYSIS

### France

Based on the social role theory, the gendered organization theory and the research questions, the analysis is divided in two parts. First of all, the different behaviors and qualities associated to each gender are explored. Then, the division of work at the workplace and at home is compared. First, although some argued qualities are not distinctive of a man or a woman, in general, French interviewees considered women to be softer than men in their relation to others. A female manager (FFr #1) supposed women may manage conflict in a smoother way. The interviewees stated:

I think that generally women are more accommodating and softer. I think that if a conflict occurs in a team, the approach might be smoother, let's say, when it is a woman than when it is a man<sup>3</sup>. FFr #1

A woman has a bigger sensitivity...I don't know. In any case, it is sure that we approach problems differently. MFr #1

French interviewees were considered generally to behave in a similar way with their co-workers regardless of their gender. Like reported above, women are seen as softer and more indirect when addressing others. Moreover, the question

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<sup>3</sup> All French transcriptions were translated by the author.



of possible seduction occurring when men and women interact was brought up by one male manager. They said:

I treat in a similar way my male and female co-workers. I put a lot of distance between me and my coworkers, maybe even more with my female colleagues because there can always be this seduction attitude that I forbid myself to have. MFr #2

There are, maybe, things that are done differently depending on the gender. For instance, communication, we (women) try to say things in a softer and less direct way. But, it also depends on people's temperament. FFr #1

Unanimously, interviewees reported that in the majority of the cases, only women were employed in supporting service departments, such as human resources and financing. This is, for instance, presented by a female manager (FFr #2). On the other hand, only one interviewee, a male director of a department (MFr #3), acknowledged one man belonging to the human resource team, which lead to a rather unequal ratio of men and women working in such a department.

They said:

We have one man for five women at the human resources department. So, indeed, it is a bit more of a feminine department. But still, the trend is that more and more women do the same work as men. MFr #3

There are the supporting services like human resources and financing which are mainly composed of women. They are more like secretaries, and secretaries in our company are women. FFr #2

The domestic division of tasks appears more related to the time spent in the professional workplace than to gender. However, women seem, for the most part, to be in charge of cooking, unless there was a specific occasion in which case men would take part in the cooking. As an example, both MFr #1 and FFr #1 have teachers with less working hours as partners. However, in both cases, women are in charge of the daily cooking regardless of the profession. Moreover, as explained by a male (MFr #1) and a female manager (FFr #1), the one having the most time at home does most of the domestic and children related tasks. In some cases, the family pace changes depending on the weekday and the weekend days. The male head of department (MFr #3) explained that both are doing everything during weekdays due to living in separate locations, but are dividing tasks during weekends. In some other cases, one of the parents gave up their job in order to take care of children, and on the same occasion, took the domestic duties in charge. They explained:

He is a teacher so he spends less time at work than me, therefore during the week he spends more time with our daughter and does more domestic tasks than me. However, cooking and grocery shopping are my responsibilities. FFr #1

My partner is a teacher and works fewer hours than me. She takes care of most of the domestic duties. Cooking and cleaning are mostly hers to do; however, grocery shopping and kid's stuff are more or less divided between us. MFr #1

During the week days I live and work in a different city, so I take care of everything, at the exception of Wednesday when my wife joins me. She usually does some grocery shopping and cleaning. During weekends I help her cleaning, I like vacuum cleaning. She cooks, unless it is a barbecue kind of thing. I do the outside related tasks, and she does the laundry. MFr #3

To sum up, women are described as softer, which seems to make them more legitimate in conflict resolution situations. In addition, women are regarded as having higher expectations for a well-balanced family and professional life. Finally, professional work and domestic duties appear stereotypically divided even though the latter seems more flexible and more availability related than gender related.

### **Finland**

Finns believe in gender equality, or more in gender-neutrality (Saari 2013), and most of the time, it is visible in the interviews. First of all, like in France, women generally appeared softer and more people-oriented, whereas men are described as more target and subject oriented. Additionally, women seem to be

more able to admit vulnerabilities than their male counterparts (Rudman et al., 2012). A female manager and a male vice-president explained:

I think that women are naturally more "human" oriented, so that they take the individuals better into consideration. So I think that this is the positive thing of the favor for women that they take individual better into consideration than men. Men are more that kind of target or subject orientated people. MFi #1

Women are little bit softer, and maybe women like to talk a bit more and listen to others. Men maybe are more tough, and maybe men think that they know everything, but I can say that "no I don't know that", so I can ask to somebody else. [...] It is more difficult for men to say that they don't know. FFi #1

Oppositely, few interviewees argued men and women do not have gender specific characteristics or behavior, and instead, they feature differences that are personality related. This was explained by a male head of department and a male Vice-President. They said:

I don't see any. It's because of the personality. You cannot say some generic stuff that female managers are all like this and male managers like that. MFi #2

The communication is the same between men and women, we are quite equal. MFi #1

Even though men and women are said not to have specific characteristics or different behavior while interacting with one gender or the other, some behaviors toward men are considered as inappropriate toward women. It is explained:

In my previous workplace, there was a couple of that male managers that...they were very target orientated, and couple of time there were women that were having that kind of face to face meeting with them, they came back crying from the office saying "he said so badly"...and there are things that you can say with the men, that you argue with the men, but then if you treat the women in the same way that is not the right way to do it.

MFfi #1

Similar to France, all interviewees noticed that women were mainly managing human resources departments. Some argued it could be because women are more social and people-oriented than men (MFfi #1), while some others saw it as a result of their choice of field of study (MFfi #3). They said:

I have noticed in our company that the human resources manager is a woman, and in quite many companies in Finland, the human resources managers are women. I think it is coming from the fact that they are taking both women and men better into consideration as individuals. MFfi #1

For some reason all human resource managers have been female here in this company. I don't know if it is just that female are going more in this

direction in studies. [...] The CEO is a man and most of head of departments are men. MFi #3

Like their French counterparts, Finns seemed to divide domestic duties based on who has the time, and who is spending the least amount of time at work. Even though some couples divided in a gender differentiated way (FFi #3), most of the interviewees reported having a fair and practical task division. Interviewees emphasized not having roles divided in a stereotypical way. While men appear to take part in all different indoor home related tasks, some women were also reported to share more manual tasks with their male partners. All interviewees reported that both they and their partner cooks, however similarly to France, women are presented as cooking on a daily basis, whereas men cook during weekends and for special occasions. Unlike noted in France, household chore division was not said to change between working days and weekends. However, adjustment seems to be done when one partner is on a business trip, or when unexpected events occur. They shared:

We divide, we both do. Regarding cooking it is usually that my husband cooks during weekends because he is capable of doing some finer things, but then I usually take care of this everyday cooking. [...] I am happy that I have a husband who participates so much to the family life as he is. FFi #2

Normally I do longer days at work than she does. It's a practical division. But if she does to business trip or has to stay longer at work then I arrange

my day so that I can continue working from home, and pick the kids or what else is needed. MFi #3

She has always done the laundry, but on the other hand she is the person who knows the most about cars. [...] In the summer time I think I cook more, because I like to barbecue. I think it is in this traditional way we have mixed roles, she has some roles that are usually for men and I have some roles that are usually for women. MFi #4

To sum up, women appear softer and more frank about their vulnerabilities, although interviewees are always emphasizing the fact that no characteristic can be attributed to one specific gender. Similar to the French-role division at work, women are more present in supporting service departments. Finally, Finnish couples seemed to divide the domestic tasks in a practical way rather than in a sex-differentiated way. However, daily cooking remained women's main responsibility.

## **DISCUSSION**

Based on both the social role theory and the gendered organization theory, this study discussed the ensuing inquiry: how organizations' structures mirror social structures through gender roles and work division. This section develops elements which resulted from the interviews. First of all, the gender stereotypic characteristics in each culture are discussed. Then, work division on professional and domestic levels is developed as one way to analyze the reproduction of the social structure at work.

### **Characteristics differences**

According to the interviews, Finns attribute characteristics such as interpersonal communication skills to women, whereas French highlighted characteristics like softness and sensitivity. On the contrary, men were described as target oriented and more self-confident, especially in Finland. Such portrayals echo the gender specific traits depicted by Eagly (1987). Furthermore, the idea that male traits are tolerated in men but proscribed for women, and female characteristics (e.g. vulnerability) are tolerated with women but proscribed for men, (Rudman et al., 2012) seemed consistent with the Finnish interviews. In this sense, men are depicted as less likely to admit weaknesses than their female peers (FFi #1). It can be argued that admitting not knowing something might reveal men as vulnerable and not in control, and consequently they would not fit male characteristics (e.g. dominance). However, curiously, Finnish interviewees were keen at first to claim that different characteristics are the result of individuals' difference of personality, before attributing stereotypic feminine or masculine characteristics to one gender. Even though the impression of gender equality was highly noticeable in all Finnish interviews, specific qualities were still assigned to one gender rather than to the other one. French interviewees considered softness an asset in conflict management, arguing women have a smoother way of passing messages across. Additionally, these stereotypic feminine traits were considered as a possible reason why a higher number of women work in supporting services departments than men. Therefore, stereotypical feminine and masculine features look as if they are used to support and emphasize the legitimacy of one gender to specific positions compared to the other gender, regardless of the more gender-



equality friendly culture of Finland. This is consistent with Rudman et al.'s (2012) argument that to some extent, individuals with more gender-equal views continue showing evidence of gender stereotypes.

According to the literature, in addition to specific characteristics, certain behaviors can be expected of individuals depending on their gender. Interestingly, based on the Finnish interviews, no specific behavior appeared expected of one gender rather than the other. In this sense, all Finnish interviewees claimed behaviors are a matter of one's personality and were not gender related. However, it was mentioned a few times that men tend to communicate with women in a more gentle way, as women appear less capable of taking in comments spoken in a more brutal way. It was also argued that it is not the "right way" to treat women (male Fi #1). Such actions are quite paradoxical. Both genders are carefully said to be treated equally and to not have features or behaviors that could be associated with one specific gender, but practically it appears to be otherwise. This is an interesting observation, as it appears that Finland's promotion of gender equality relates more to gender-neutrality than to equality. It echoes Saari's (2013) concept of gender-blindness, that is the refusal to acknowledge any differences between men and women and, as a consequence, the given gender-neutral image of male's norms and characteristics prevail. Similarly in France, men and women interviewees claimed to behave in the same way whether they interact with a male or a female counterpart. However, it did not seem to always be the case. As expressed by one male manager, interactions with the opposite gender seem to be done more cautiously as it can be interpreted as seduction. Although not

unexpected in a Latin country where seduction is part of the local culture (Bennhold, 2010), it was surprising that it was mentioned so few times.

### **Domestic and professional work division**

An interesting observation can be made when looking at the work division. First of all, as mentioned above, French and Finnish interviewees reported human resource departments and secretary positions to be composed primarily of women. Both positions predominantly consist of interacting with other individuals. Moreover, secretaries, for the most part, deal with paper work and phone answering, tasks which can be considered as repetitive and unchallenging. This specific point was argued by Connell (2006), who pointed out that women's jobs are more monotonous, less demanding, and more people-oriented than men's jobs. Furthermore, "women's jobs", such as those in the human resources department, require lots of interaction with people and to some extent taking care of others. In this sense, such female-dominated jobs mirror and borrow skills commonly attributed to mothers. Another interesting point is found in the hospitality industry. The hospitality industry is mostly considered a feminine-dominated field, yet chefs are usually men. Dahlkild-Öhman and Erikson's (2013) findings pointed out the fact that men who evolve in female-dominated professions make their way to the top of the hierarchy more easily. However, a curious fact is that even though most cooks in restaurants are men, on an everyday cooking basis, women are the ones responsible for the most part of the cooking. Based on the French and Finnish interviewees, men and women taken together, it is interesting to see that even in the domestic sphere women take the everyday meal in charge, whereas men participate in this activity on specific occasions such as during

barbecues or finer meals. The basic cooking appears as a repetitive and less challenging task than a finer dish that is more sophisticated and requires more skills and therefore looks more demanding. In this sense, it can be interpreted, consistent with the previously mentioned argument, that men have a higher status than women, which consequently seems to create a hierarchy at home in favor of men.

An interesting observation made based on the interviews is that in France and in Finland domestic work seems to be divided on a convenience basis. Both men and women were more or less equally sharing home related duties. Some Finnish women were reported to be doing more manual tasks, usually considered to be more masculine - such as changing a car tire - than their French counterparts. In the Finnish interviews, emphasis was put on the fact that women also participate in task traditionally considered to be masculine, and that men also take part in stereotypical feminine duties. This compliments Öun's (2013) findings that individuals who live in countries that promote gender equality through policies are more sensitive to unfair division of household labor. However, what was observed as practice among interviewees is that the one spending less time at the office, and thus earning less, is the one in charge of most of the domestic tasks. This point is in line with former studies, which outlined a relation between free time, income and household chore division (Brines, 1993 and Shelton & John, 1996 read in Poortman & Lippe, 2009). Although expected, it was noticed that a few French women were to carry on with their career after pregnancy, while their partners stopped working to become stay-at-home fathers. Similar situations were not observed among Finnish interviewees, yet generalization cannot be made.

However, on a different basis, Finnish men were more likely to arrange their working schedules and their career plans based on their family. For instance, almost all Finnish male interviewees had taken the maximum paternity leave and a part of the parental leave. In addition, they had used all opportunities to spend more time with their newborn and family offered by their organizations. On the contrary, some French male interviewees took part in the paternity leaves, while others had no idea whether they were entitled to do so. Within the scope of this study, the results suggest that Finnish men are more concerned about and more willing to take part in child care duties than their French male counterparts. Furthermore, some Finnish men explained to have refused career growth opportunities that would have required them to travel more, and consequently to spend less time with their families. Interestingly enough, Finns seem more protective of their free-time than their French counterparts. Indeed, it appeared so that Finnish working hours are more adapted to possible hobbies, whereas French working hours seem more extended and the free-time more limited than in Finland. Acker's (1990) point that men see their jobs as a full-time and a long-life activity, whereas women see it as a paid activity alongside other legitimate ones, seems consistent with French male interviewees' comments but not with the Finns' comments. Finnish male interviewees give the impression of equally valuing their job, family and non-work related activities. Finnish interviewees' professional activities do not seem to take precedence over other aspects of one's life as much as it appears to do so for French interviewees.

## **CONCLUSION**

The research is based on the belief that Finns, who live in a more gender-equal country, would be less likely to rely on gender-differentiated behaviors than their French counterparts. The results show a mixed answer. On one hand, Finns, indeed, reluctantly differentiate genders in a stereotypical way, and in that sense they go along the belief of acquired gender equality. However, on the other hand, they do use stereotypical characteristics as justification for work division on a professional level. Furthermore, behaviors are said to be gender-free and similar between men and women, yet, in practice, women are treated more gently in some circumstances. On the other hand, in the case of France, interactions with the opposite gender are more reserved to avoid interpreting them as seduction. On a different level, some aspects of a mother's role are also found in "women's jobs", along with a certain hierarchy. As shown in the cooking situation example, women cook on an everyday basis but men become chefs for special or more important events. However, task division at a domestic level appears fairer in Finland, but more traditional in a professional context. Whereas in France, work division appears quite traditional both at work and for the most part at home, too. However, due to the qualitative nature of this study, results should not be generalized and extended to the whole French and Finnish population as it consists of only 16 individuals. Nonetheless, it does show some trends that could be accentuated and analyzed deeper with a different methodological approach.

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**ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS ARTICLE**

Men and women in positions of responsibility: A qualitative analysis of  
organizational readiness in France and Finland

Flora Galy-Badenas, Stephen M. Croucher

**ABSTRACT**

This paper examines managers' perception of organizational readiness to accept women in managerial and higher level positions from a cultural perspective. The study is based on a comparison of France - strong Latin and chauvinist roots - and Finland - considered as a model in gender equality. The research is based on 16 interviews with individuals in different managerial positions in 10 private companies located in France and Finland. Findings indicate that regardless of the country and of the cultural backgrounds, organizations appear unready to let women climb the hierarchical ladder the way men do. Results also show that despite a positive mind-set toward gender-equality, Finnish women still face a masculine corporate culture. Some cross-cultural studies have been done on organizational readiness, especially in terms of access to managerial positions for women, but none have directly compared France to Finland.

*Keywords:* Organizational Readiness Theory, cross-cultural communication, France, Finland, gender, management

## INTRODUCTION

For decades, women have been one of several target groups of discrimination within the work force, as in other aspects of society. Married women were often denied employment until recently. In 1919, in Finland, and later on in France with the *Loi du 13 Juillet 1965*, women were granted the right to work without the approval of their husbands. Even so, right to employment did not guarantee equality. Among various forms of discrimination, job segregation, gender pay gap, and job stratification are the most common ones. Women encounter more difficulties accessing leadership positions than men (Eagly et al., 2000; Ashcraft, 2006). More and more women enter the work force, yet for many it means being over qualified and having few opportunities. There are very few women who climb the hierarchical ladder, and for most, hitting the glass-ceiling seems to be a usual scenario (Katila & Eriksson, 2013; Gornick & Meyers, 2008). Furthermore, women are highly underrepresented in senior level management positions. Indeed, worldwide, 21% of the senior managers are women and only 9% of CEOs are women (Grant Thornton International Business Report, 2012). Additionally, only 5.1% of large companies are directed by women and 14.6% of all top leadership positions are held by women (Catalyst, 2014). A possible reason for this inequality is that women are less likely to ask for a promotion than their male counterparts (Babcock & Laschever, 2003). Sheryl Sandberg (2013), Facebook's COO, echoed this point, highlighting how women lack the confidence to reach for opportunities. Thus, women are often represented as lacking assertiveness, which is usually considered a masculine quality (Eagly & Wood, 1991).

From a legal standpoint, equal treatment at work for both men and women is a legal obligation in many countries, but statistics point out troubling issues. The right for equal treatment at work between sexes within the European Union is presently stated by article 157 of the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union (2012). Furthermore, the 2006/54/EC Directive stipulates that direct or indirect discrimination between men and women is forbidden in various areas, including promotion, recruitment, and dismissal. Therefore, all European countries should have taken initiatives to counterbalance inequalities. Unfortunately, despite these juridical initiatives, women seem to be left behind in many areas. As pointed out in the ILO and UN women's reports (2012), gender inequality in the labor-market has significantly increased since 2008, as one of the consequences of the economic crisis. Therefore, a question is raised as to whether individuals and organizations are ready to give women the place they rightfully and legally deserve.

To explore this issue, two nations, with differing social perceptions, histories, and policies regarding gender equality are examined: Finland and France. Specifically, this paper examines male and female managers' perception of organizational readiness in French and Finnish companies. Even though the latter is recognized as female-friendly and as a model of gender equality (Saari, 2013), statistics and reports show that this belief is incorrect. On the other hand, through the initiatives taken by the French government, it is implied that women are discriminated against (Bennhold, 2010; Fisher, 2012), especially in managerial positions. Furthermore, culturally speaking, France and Finland hold different roots on gender equality (Grésy & Dole, 2011; Öun, 2012). Many studies have

looked at gender discrimination in the workplace from a quantitative perspective, but less have focused on employees' perceptions of organizational readiness to accept women in leadership positions from a cultural perspective. Moreover, no study has been conducted directly comparing France to Finland on this issue.

### **ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS FOR CHANGE**

As noted by Armenakis, Harris, and Mossholder (1993), the concept of readiness to change is similar to Lewin's (1951) concept of unfreezing - the process of adjustment of employees' beliefs, attitudes, and intentions regarding a possible change that makes the change perceived as needed and therefore more likely to be successful. Armenakis et al.'s (1993) concept is defined as the attempt of influencing an organization's members' "beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and ultimately the behavior" (p.682) in order to reduce the possible resistance to the change. Based on organizational climate research, the concept of readiness for change can also be understood as how employees perceive their organization to be ready to let a change happen on a large-scale (Schneider, 1975; Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2011). In this regard, three variables are looked at: individual's experiences within the organization, social dynamism and group work, and environmental and structural factors (Eby, Adams, Russell, & Gaby, 2000). In other words, the three variables are personal, interpersonal and contextual.

Organizations are constructed of multiple levels that are the basis for organizational change (Weiner, 2009). Therefore, in order to be successful, several factors should be looked at when attempting organizational change. In this regard, Clement (1994) pointed out the importance of working with the already existing culture of an organization; since resistance to change depends on the



strength and depth of the organizational culture. Organizational culture is too strong and deeply rooted (Schein, 2010) to be the only focus of organizational change. The organizational power structure as well as its relationships to politics should be observed. However, Clement (1994) considered leadership as the key factor in successful change. His point was that examples should be set and shown by the top management through an open and participative communication and that there should be a visible support for change. The process of change cannot go on or work if all levels of an organization and its staff are not fully involved and committed (Armenakis et al., 1993). In this sense, organizational readiness for change is a collective and participative process.

### **Management stereotypes**

Considered as the key factor to organizational readiness to change by Clement (1994), management is also the area where gender discrimination increases alongside the hierarchical ladders. Although the number of female managers has significantly increased in the past few decades (Ayman, Korabik, & Morris, 2009), they are still underrepresented in different management positions. Multiple factors and reasons lead to such disadvantages encountered by women as described by the following theories. The social role theory considers how women are disadvantaged based on discrimination related to gender and managerial stereotypes – that is to say the image of a “good” manager (Eagly, 1987; Eagly, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000). Eagly (1987) presented two managerial stereotypes; the “agentic” or masculine leadership – represents characteristics as task-oriented and willingness to take risks – and “communal” or feminine leadership - characterizes

features like people-orientation, nurture, and help. The masculine leadership features are usually identified as the ones required from a “good” manager.

As stated by Clement (1994), a change is more likely to be successful if an example is set by the top of the hierarchy. However, in today’s managerial system, women are a minority in the leadership positions. Kanter’s (1977) tokenism theory states that women are considered as tokens when an organization has very few female managers. Tokens are visible, which increases the pressure of performing better than others. In addition, they are expected to behave accordingly to their gender stereotypes, and thus the differences between dominants (men) and tokens (women) are accentuated. Stoker and Velde (2012) argued that when female managers are tokens, men have stronger managerial stereotypes. A similar argument can be drawn from Allport’s (1954) contact hypothesis theory; an increased contact with a minority, in a neutral way that does not reinforce stereotypes, decreases negative stereotypes and positive attitudes towards the minority raise. To compliment these theories, Lortie-Lussier and Rinfret’s (2002) study shows that when individual employees have experienced a woman as a superior, the employees appear to have a more favorable attitude towards women managers.

### **FRENCH AND FINNISH CULTURAL AND WORK CONTEXT**

In France, one of the first laws to ensure equality at work, the Génisson law (2001), stated men and women must have equal salary, promotion, and access to training and to jobs. However, despite such attempts at equality, French women were still struggling to evolve, and as a result, the Copé-Zimmermann law (2011) was approved. The law requires a minimum quota of women and men to be

respected, in order to ensure a balanced representation of both genders at the board of directors and at supervisory boards. In addition to the legal framework, organizations of above 50 employees are legally required to report men's and women's situation within the company, along with a yearly action plan for gender equality (Ministère du Travail, January 2012).

As seen with the various laws and in the statement by Bennhold, "courtesy of the French state enables women to have it all, multiple children, a job, and often, a figure to die for" (2010), France seems to provide an ideal environment for gender equality. However, what French women seem to lack is the actual equality. France appears Nordic in terms of percentage of employment (66% of French women employed for 72% in Finland), but remains Latin in its state of mind. In this sense, Grésy (2009) pointed out that the French Latin roots are not only a matter of a culture of seduction, but also of extended working hours. She referred to the French work environment as "a patriarchal corporate culture" faced by women. Although it is unquestionable that French women have ideal living conditions and laws to support them, gender stereotypes remain very much intact and deeply rooted. France appears like a paradox; credited for its feminist thoughts and broadly recognized for its active movements to support women's rights, France struggles to live up to its historical status of a pioneer. Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning that ranking 46<sup>th</sup> in 2010 in the world for gender equality, France reached 16<sup>th</sup> in 2014 (World Economic Forum, 2014). This can be explained by the numerous laws and initiatives taken by the French government within the last few years.

In the case of Finland, the Finnish gender equality legislation stipulates employers must promote equality within their organization. The legislation was first approved in 1986, before a complete reform in 2005. Similarly to France, the Equality Act requires companies of 30 or more individuals to co-produce, together with employees, a yearly action plan on how to manage inequalities between genders (Act on Equality between Women and Men, 1986).

Like other Nordic countries, Finland is perceived, internally and externally, as being a step ahead in terms of gender equality. Many Finns believe general gender equality is closed to being reached in Finland, particularly in the work environment (Korvajärvi, 2002). Therefore, the problem is seen as solved and as not needing further consideration. Furthermore, Nordic countries tend to be unwilling to consider the processes of gender discrimination as ongoing (Saari, 2013). However, statistically speaking, equality is far from being reached. Indeed, women represent only 27% (24% in France) of senior managers and represent only 9% (15% in France) of the CEOs in Finland (Grant Thornton International Business Report, 2012).

Unlike the fragile vision of French women, Finnish women are considered strong and described as “wife, mother, provider, participant and opinion leader” (Katila & Heriksson, 2013, p.73). While France has more of a patriarchal state model, Nordic countries have more of a partnership state model (Leira, 1992). In this sense, Windebank (2001) stated that Nordic women have been empowered so well that it would be difficult to associate Nordic countries as patriarchal. Therefore, it might be easier for Finnish women to access managerial and higher positions.

To sum up, it is arguable that both countries do rather poorly on the issue of females in management and leadership positions, despite the women-friendly culture of Finland. In spite of various attempts to solve the issue, each country clearly faces different problems. Thus, it can be questioned to what extent is the cultural background of a country in line with its inhabitants' perception of gender equality in the work place. Furthermore, it questions the connection between what the societies promote as gender equality and what is really happening. Such questions are attempted to be discussed in this research upon the following research question.

*RQ:* How do French and Finnish managers perceive organizational readiness to be managed by women?

### **METHOD**

Interviews were conducted in France and in Finland in 2014. The French interviews were conducted in the summer of 2014. All in all, 12 people were interviewed in France. However, due to a misunderstanding of the required profile, three interviewees were removed from the study. The final 9 people were employed in 5 different companies, all located in Toulouse and its surroundings. Companies were from different fields and of various sizes from over 10,000 to less than 500 employees. In total, 6 women and 3 men were interviewed. Hierarchical positions of the interviewees ranged from a manager up to a managing director. French interviews were all conducted in French, and the needed parts were translated into English afterward.

The Finnish interviews were conducted in September and October, 2014. Seven people were interviewed with all employed in 5 different companies located

within the Jyväskylä and Turku areas. Companies were from different fields. The companies' sizes varied from 3,000 to less than 300 employees. In total, three women and 4 men were interviewed. Interviewees' positions extended from a manager to a Vice-President. Interviewees' age ranked from 30 to 60 years old. On average, Finnish interviewees were slightly younger than the French ones.

Interviews consisted of 12 questions. Participants were interviewed individually, as Mertens (1998) pointed out it has the incontestable advantage of easing the atmosphere, which is necessary when talking about one's opinions and experiences. Moreover, a self-reflection was expected. On average, interviews lasted between 30 minutes to an hour. All interviews were transcribed in their original language. Then, French and Finnish interviews were first analyzed separately before being compared with the help of a double entry table (Silverman, 2006). Interviews were analyzed by looking for repetitions of certain themes (Gibson & Brown, 2009). The next section contains the analysis of interviewees' own opinions, claims, and experiences.

## **ANALYSIS**

### **France**

Based on the organizational readiness for change theory, the analyses are interpreted on a personal, interpersonal, and organizational level (Eby et al., 2000). To begin with, all men reported being well perceived by subordinates and being seen as tolerant, respectful, open-minded and fair, as explained by a male director of a department (MFr #3) and a male senior manager (MFr #2). They said:

I feel like I'm well perceived because I respect people. I respect individuals whether they are men, women, laborer; I greet everyone in the same way<sup>4</sup>. MFr #3

I think I'm perceived like someone humane but firm. [...] I think women, especially if they have had a former manager who was not necessarily tolerant with the aspects of compatibility with the family life, can better appreciate certain of my qualities than men. MFr #2

Even though generally positively seen, women interviewees reported different stories. A senior executive and managing director (FFr #4) expressed being seen as a "curiosity" by her subordinates. She explained:

We are curiosities. The question of "how women like us reached such positions" is more likely to be asked than if they were men. This is not normal. Then, it arouses curiosity for subordinates to know what difference being managed by a woman will make. [Researcher: Do they talk of it with you?] Yes!

A female vice-director (FFr #5) illustrates it through telling a colleague's experience with employees and suppliers when taking over her husband company. She told:

When she took over her husband's company, all [employees] were used to be managed by a man, and at a specific moment they started being managed by a woman. All those employees left! They did not bear the change, to be managed by a woman.

Even the relationship with suppliers was tricky. When she was meeting them accompanied by her father-in-law [also employed within the

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<sup>4</sup> All translations from French to English have been done by the primary author.

company], suppliers always addressed to her father-in-law and never to her. They considered her more as a secretary than as supervisor of the company. That is discriminatory!

A majority of the interviewees agreed that men and women have fairly equal opportunities for career evolution, but only until a certain level. A senior manager, MFr #2, explained:

I think that fundamentally, in the French culture and tradition, women who graduated from an engineer school or a master's degree, have more or less similar career opportunities than men, but only up to a certain level. I feel that at the next level, it is thought women won't have the same degree of investment than men.

The age of employees and managers was expressed by a young female manager (FFr #1). She observed older men seemed less willing to accept being directed by a woman. However, she expressed doubt as to whether it was due to her age or gender. She said:

To be honest, within the team, some male subordinates are very misogynous, and it is more difficult for me to manage men. However, I don't know if it is because they are older than me, because I am the youngest after all. It also plays a role. But I think I have a little bit more difficulties, compared to my male counterpart, to manage those three-four people. People whom...let's say...whom, don't exactly have specific problem with women, but who do not appreciate that a woman tells what to do and how.

As already observed, the weight of gender role stereotypes seems to be very present still. A female managing director (FFr #6) emphasized this



stigmatization of the female secretary by reporting a usual end of decision-taking meeting. She said:

In a decision-making situation, if the structure needs to be engaged, a man is simply asked “What is the decision” whereas a woman is told “You will refer it to your hierarchy”. And I think this is a habit to consider that women are more, in our field, technician than in a decision-making position.

All female interviewees reported feeling they need to work harder and prove their competences in order to be considered at a same level as their male counterparts. Women and a few men interviewees said that the female superiors they had were excellent at their job, whereas they have had both good and bad male superiors. FFr #6 combined both ideas by explaining:

Some men are incompetent in their managerial role, whereas women are not. Female managers have to prove their competences more than men. This is a notorious difference that still applies today.

A male manager explained that working with women made him realize they are as capable as men. MFr #2 said:

Personally, I feel it is rather my open minded personality, frequent contact, the fact of frequently working with women; it is all this that made me realize women are men like the others.

On a more general level, the sector of an organization seems an important factor. To this point, FFr #6 explained how the acceptance of a woman as a superior is a field and cultural matter. She said:

It is also a matter of field. In some professional sectors, jobs, rather reserved for men, such as mechanical and construction industry. It really is a matter of sector, and therefore it becomes a cultural matter.

Network appears to play a certain role and to benefit only a closed group of people situated at the top of the hierarchy. A nearly 60 year old male director of a department (MFr #3) and a nearly 40 year old female manager (FFr #1) explained their experience and vision of the network and the importance of knowing the right individuals:

Like in any company there is a little mafia. Let's say, one needs to be part of a certain network. There are groups and the difficulty if to be seen, to have the right contacts and the right network. There you go; one needs a good network to rely on the right people. MFr #3

For those positions (CEO) it is more about relational and networking. It is true, let's be honest, that those positions are really windy. I leave one company to start in another one, and the one that leaves from the other company...well they kind of exchange their posts. Therefore, if there are almost only men, when exchanging posts we always get back to having only men directing companies. FFr #1

As an external factor, interviewees had a reserved opinion on the Copé-Zimmermann law's (2011) relevancy. Even though the law has a positive impact on women who wish to take further responsibilities (FFr #6), it is a cultural matter and therefore the law has a superficial influence (MFr #2). They say:

[The recent parity law has created] a visible minority. I think women who aspire to integrate board of directors should make themselves known and

visible, as nowadays, they are being looked for. Therefore, when you are visible, you are highly requested.

I think that this is mainly a cultural matter, and I indeed believe that legal constraints are always helpful. But I think it is difficult to command people to think differently.

To sum up, men still appeared more widely accepted at the top leadership positions. Educational level, sector of an organization and age of employees and managers seemed to play a role in how female managers are perceived and accepted (or not). Furthermore, some employees reacted negatively to a female superior. Additionally, women felt a sort of a pressure to perform better in order to be recognized as equal to their male counterparts. Finally, networks and good relations with influential people seemed to be beneficial factors to promotion.

### **Finland**

All Finnish female interviewees reported being well perceived as managers and appreciated. They all explained receiving positive feedback. Furthermore, stereotypical female characteristics as softness, compassion, and openness are described as a possible reason for why they are appreciated as managers. They said:

Well I've got good feedbacks about that [being a manager] by everyone except one. (FFi #2)

I think that...one of our sales men said that I am the best supervisor that he has ever had, so I am very glad about that. I think that because I am female I understand a little bit more, and I want to talk more with my team

compare to a male manager. Maybe I'm a little bit more soft than a man with my colleagues, other manager or sales men. (FFi #1)

A need to work harder for equal recognition is also expressed by Finnish women. The female manager FFi #1 explained how age plays a role in perceptions towards women's career evolution. To some extent, it also explains the role gender plays in the perception of jobs that women are more likely to have in a male-dominated industry. She said:

When you are female in a car company, everybody thinks that you are working in office or are secretary or something. It was so much difficult when I was younger, but now I'm maybe so old that they understand that I can be a manager. Females have to do so much work to be better than male, because it is not quite ordinary to be female manager in car company.

Female manager FFi #2 added that the company's sector might influence the accession to managing positions for women, but also the need for a woman to prove that she is as capable as a man. She explained:

I don't have encountered any [difficulties in current company], but if I think back at H [former company] time, then I would claim that maybe the fact that I am a woman could be a barrier for aiming at manager position. Because it's an engineering company, and when I was working there I felt that if there was 3 colleagues, me and two men and we were having same positions and doing the same job, I had to prove that I am as qualified as they are. It is just something in the company's atmosphere.

Additionally, a male manager mentioned how the scope of the company matters, and how women cannot be responsible for some customers. MFi #1 said:

[Gender] is a favor because I'm working mainly in the industry for a shipyard [...] and it pretty much depends on the country of the customers, where you are dealing with your customer. In the Arabs countries that there are no women at all in the business, so it is only men that you are dealing with. But of course, in Norway, there are women you are dealing with, but it is mainly men. And it pretty much depends on the country of your customers.

A difference seemed to be made between big and small companies but also between recent and older ones. Interviewees, both men and women, who worked in larger companies, recognized the difference of atmosphere, bureaucracy, and the importance of networking. One female manager (FFi #3) explained how networking worked in her previous company - one of the largest in Finland - and why women are excluded from it. She reported:

I think it [previous company] was quite old fashion or conservative company. There were a lot of old men, and [...] they have a lot of this thing like "good old brother network". There are some networks, usually they are men and they are arranging good positions and stuff. They were promoting each other. I think there was something like that they were going to play golf together or that kind of things. So how do you ever get in that circle? But I think that it was more obvious there how this works. And when the company had to reduce people I think in those cases it also works like who you know and whose friends you have.

Of course it's easier for men. It has always been, and still is. I think it starts from, I don't know where, but men are one big group with friends, they go to army and stuff like this. They know each other, they have their own circles and own network. I think it starts somewhere there in very early stage. And then when someone knows somebody and somebody, it

works like that. I have seen in this company (current one). I think there are a couple of managers (male) that have reached their position just being a friend to some members of the board. And when you think about their experience in this area they don't have any real experience or education. And it is quite interesting that they have quite high positions.

With a contrary opinion, a male manager (MFi #2) of a fairly large recent company felt that all the networking described above is old fashion and does not apply to today's way of doing business. He said:

Of course that's the old tradition in Finland (about network importance). Now it is kind of an old story, the big guys with cigars and cognac deciding who is going to be CEOs and those kinds of things. Now it is totally different, as I see it. Now it is the facts, who has the best profile, experience...that's the way how it goes nowadays.

Without exception, all Finnish interviewees argued people's experience, personality, and capability should take precedence over everything else. All agreed that gender does not play any role in promoting or in hiring. They explained:

We have a job profile, pure professional knowledge. Of course when you interview a person you can see how she or he behave so it is good you can see who would fit better. But it is a question of personality again and not gender. MFi #2

I really think that what matters is the personality, competences and results, what you have achieved in your work. FFi #3

The main difference is how eager to are to get further in your career, and it is not something to do with gender. It is how you do your job and how you would like to get more responsibilities, it's up to you. MFi #3

Family still seemed to play an important role in Finland, and the tradition of women in charge of the household still applies to some families. FFi #2 explained the importance and impact of this tradition on women's careers. She stated:

The situation is that female managers are still fewer than male managers. But the work change [...] some work issues change very slowly, and I this this is one issue that is taking their time to change. Its moving forwards, but the tradition wants that when you are a woman you are also a mother and maybe you work, but you are the one keeping the house hold and children, and that side is ok. It is still that in Finland. It is very few women that focus on their career. And if there are, then other people are looking that they are weirdoes.

Another female manager added that the higher the position, the less personal time, which seemed to be valued by Finns, there is. Personal time, separated from usual working hours, is to have hobbies or to spend time with family and appeared important to Finns, as it was reported by most of the interviewees, male and female. They explained:

I also think that the higher the position the more work it needs. Women usually give more attention to family, and they don't even want to get into those positions because it takes a lot of time, and free-time is too precious for them. FFi #3

The main problem is that it would require traveling again, because it would be within EMEA area. Basically, not traveling much is what's holding me here in this position. Because, otherwise, I'll have to travel more. It's basically; [...] I have other job and stuff to do outside the company. Like stuff I like to do that is not work related. MFi #3

Although Finland does not have similar laws, Finnish interviewees were asked for their thoughts on the Copé-Zimmermann law (2011). The two following statements express the opinions of all interviewees. Even though it can be seen as positive, as the first quotation shows, it is also considered to lead into some problems, as expressed in the second statement.

It's a good things that it is required, but it also lead to the problem that some companies don't find enough female for the board to fulfill the law requirement. MFi #3

There has been a lot of discussion related to your law, adapting the same kind of law here in Finland. [...] Well I don't think it is a good idea to have these kind of thing that you have to have a certain number of women, it cannot be gender related but capabilities related, what you do, what you know and what you are capable of. FFi #2

To sum up, despite the positive feedback received, female interviewees reported feeling the need to work harder and to prove themselves. Furthermore, sector and scope of an organization seemed important factors of perception and acceptance of women managers. Similarly, the size and maturity of an organization seemed to define the influence a network and “good old brother clubs” have. A general line of thinking was that experience, personality and capabilities are what matters when promoting and hiring. Lastly, the cultural



pressure on women to take charge of the household and children related duties appeared to have a strong influence.

## **DISCUSSION**

Based on the organizational readiness for change theory, this study aims at answering the following question: how French and Finnish managers perceive the readiness to be managed by women within their organization. This section further discusses the elements that resulted from the interviews. That is to say, perception of readiness at an individual – which includes individual's characteristics or, again, the pressure of performance -, interpersonal – which develops the perception of managers, gender role stereotypes - and finally, at a contextual level – which focuses on organizations' characteristics and the role of the family.

### **Personal level**

According to the interviews, female managers feel more visible due to little representation. This echoes with Kanter's (1977) tokenism theory. However, what is to be observed is that, unlike what Kanter (1977) argued, women do not strictly consider it as a negative aspect. In this sense, Finnish female managers indicate benefits that come with being visible, such as clients remembering them more easily. When it comes to French female managers, visibility is reported differently. Being part of the minority was more described as having negative consequences, except when it came to the parity law, which as a result, eased women's accession to boards of directors. Yet, a general negative result seemed to follow from such visibility. In this regard, women highlighted the need to work harder to prove their competences when the same competences are assumed of men. Hence, being part of a minority seemed to create a need to demonstrate and

to prove that women can do as well as individuals belonging to the majority, if not better.

Lortie-Lussier and Rinfret's (2002) argued that age and educational background influence one's attitudes towards female managers. The observations from both French and Finnish interviews endorsed this statement. Interestingly, age seemed to have an impact only towards women. As reported by female managers, they estimated having more difficulties managing male employees, especially older ones, compared to their male counterparts. Furthermore, more experienced female managers felt more legitimate being managers now than when they were younger. This point seemed to be visible especially in the attitudes of male employees towards them. Although the educational background was not openly expressed, it was implied when referring to sectors of an organization.

Furthermore, all Finnish interviewees, male and female, claimed that experience, personality, and abilities take precedence over gender when hiring or promoting. Even though it is consistent with the belief that gender equality is promoted in Finland, it does not support the non-encouraging statistics, which show that women are far from being promoted and employed on a similar basis to men. The image of gender equality promoted in Finland affiliates more with gender-neutrality than equality, and the reality appears to be quite different. This draws closer to the concept of gender-blindness; defined as refusing to recognize the differences between men and women, and therefore enabling male norms to prevail (Saari, 2013). In this perspective, by failing to acknowledge current discrimination in career evolution and by advocating a gender-neutral image, stereotypically male characteristics are supported. A similar statement was

claimed by some French interviewees, who conceded both men and women have similar career opportunities, but only up to a certain level. After which, they are not considered to invest the same amount in work. It underlies that once women get a family, they will have less time to invest in work, which does not seem to be of concern in the case of men. A comparable argument was claimed by Finns that women are less represented in leadership positions because women are less ambitious due to family responsibilities. Therefore, the representation of women as mothers clearly disadvantages women entitled to promotion, and demonstrates that gender is a valid factor taken into account in career evolution related issues.

### **Interpersonal level**

An interesting difference observed is that Finnish female managers seem to receive more positive feedback from both superiors and subordinates, and attribute it to stereotypically feminine characteristics, such as attention. Considering how all Finnish female interviewees might be considered as tokens, Stoker and Velde's (2012) argument, that male employees dislike female leadership characteristics in organizations where female managers are tokens, does not seem to apply to the Finnish case. One reason could be that in the Finnish society, women are more respected and seen as more equal to men. Therefore, male employees would be more likely to have a generally positive attitude towards a female superior, even though it does not mean women would get promoted more easily. Furthermore, words like misogynous or sexism were used several times by French interviewees, both male and female, to describe behaviors towards women within an organization. It represents awareness that sexism is present and visible in France at various levels, even in the work place, and it seems to have an impact on how

women are perceived, treated, respected, and accepted. Such terms were not reported by Finnish interviewees.

Interestingly, French male interviewees expressed high satisfaction, respect and positive critiques about the few women they had as superiors. Furthermore, one stated that working with various women during his career led him to see women as “men like any other one” (MFr #2). That is a curious choice of words which, first of all, give women male characteristics along with depriving them of their own female characteristics. In this perspective, women are not considered as women for work related purposes, but instead, are seen as men. This could be aligned with the outcome that women should show masculine characteristics in order to be integrated (Davies-Netzley’s, 1998). Second, contact with female managers seems to create a positive reaction, which is consistent with Allport’s (1954) contact hypothesis theory. Having more women managers, and in top leading positions regardless of the sector of the organization, should reduce prejudices and lead to a wider acceptance of female managers. This also compliments Clement’s (1994) argument of the role model behavior coming from top executives as key to successful organizational change. Therefore, top leading positions should be held by more women in order to initiate the change and extend it to the whole organization.

### **Contextual level**

According to the French and Finnish interviewees, the sector of an organization appears to strongly influence the perception towards female managers. Indeed, employees in some specific fields, like construction and mechanical industries, were described as less likely to accept being directed by a

woman. Such industries usually are predominantly male dominated. This is seemingly consistent with Stoker and Velde's (2012) finding that female managers are less likely to be positively perceived in organizations where they are tokens. Additionally, the scope of an organization contributes to inequalities. A company operating in countries where women do not or are not allowed to conduct business has no interest in sending a female representative there.

Interestingly, management style seems to play a more important role in Finland than in France. The Finnish management style is defined as target-oriented, action-oriented, production-oriented, and focuses on operational and technical efficiency (Katila & Eriksson, 2013); it is also referred to the management by "perkele" by some interviewees. These management characteristics mirror the masculine features, which means the Finnish management style suits men better. An interesting fact outlined by a female interviewee was that this specific management style seems to ensue from military training. In Finland, military training is mandatory for male teenagers, and seems highly appreciated by companies hiring for managerial positions, as they value the goal oriented and straightforward attitude (Katila & Eriksson, 2013). However, by having a military service mandatory for men and optional for women, a difference between the genders is created. In this regard, women start their professional careers with a disadvantage compared to their male counterparts. Nevertheless, this difference would not be the basis of discrimination if companies were not to implicitly favor such characteristics. This is consistent with Eagly's (1987) social role theory, which argues that women are disadvantaged based on gender and managerial stereotypes. Indeed, women who are described as sensitive, caring,

warm and people-oriented by both French and Finnish interviewees do not fit the description of such a management style. Therefore, there are expectations of how women should be that are inconsistent with the vision of a good leader. As a consequence, women are expected to fill specific types of jobs, and if they are managers, they are more likely to be expected to be a part of specific departments (Stoker and Velde, 2012). All interviewees noted human resources departments are commonly directed by women because they are more skilled in interpersonal relationships. Confined to such positions due to their suitable skills, men get better opportunities and less competition to access the highest positions.

Another resistance for women to access the highest positions seems to come from the top of the hierarchy, and from the so called “network” or the “good old brother clubs” in Finland (mentioned several time by Finnish interviewees). Networks and good relationships were described by French and Finnish interviewees as good springboards for higher positions. In Finland, the military service was described as a sort of a cradle to the “good old brother club”, and to the professional relationships that result from it. Consequently, women are less likely to benefit from such networks. However, this was presented as being more common in long-running organizations and not as practiced in recently created ones. Therefore, this tradition seems to be disappearing with time. In the case of France, such a network was affiliated to a sort of a mafia ruling at the top of the hierarchy. In any case, men holding leadership positions tend to favor other men rather than women. Research showed that individuals tend to like and favor people who share similar characteristics (Byrne, 1971), which seemed to be the case in these interviews.

### **Change agents**

Some external factors may boost, or handicap readiness for change. In the case of this study, all interviewees were asked whether the Copé-Zimmermann law (2011) – gender quota for boards of directors – was a good idea and whether it would improve women’s condition. As seen in the analysis part, results were lukewarm. While French women admitted it made them more visible and eased their way to such positions, the majority of all respondents claimed it was not doing any good to the organization because gender would take precedence over qualification. Furthermore, it was pointed out that women would be devalued, as it would make them look like they were chosen for their sex and not for their capabilities. It seemed that the Parity law, while positively changing statistics, only addresses the problem on a superficial manner, as it appears to be a deeply culturally rooted issue. Nonetheless, the Parity law has the advantage of highlighting that discrimination exists in France, and that actions are initiated. Acknowledging discrimination is the first step to reducing its impact.

### **CONCLUSION**

Organizational readiness for change does not only concern individuals, but also the organizational structure itself. On the surface in Finland, it appears as though women are well perceived as superiors and are considered as equally capable of directing a team or an organization. Adversely, such gender neutrality may result in a standardization of masculine requirements. However, inequalities are present. The fact of being more open-minded and a female-friendly country does not seem to favor women. On the contrary, it seems to hide the possible on-going discrimination under the mask of a female-friendly state that has yet to reach

gender equality. In the case of France, the chauvinistic culture remains deeply rooted in masculine mentalities and behaviors that make it challenging for women to climb hierarchical ladders. Even so, French managers highlighted the bright side that discrimination towards women is mainly a generational issue and would tend to disappear with time. As noted, the resistance to equal accession to managerial positions for women can also stem from the organizational structure. Both the French and the Finnish organizational structures were tailor-built to fit men's characteristics and way of living (Kanter, 1977), and are still ruling today's structure. Therefore, cultural background is not the only factor of readiness for female managers; the structure of the organizations has a strong impact on gender differences and does not give the impression that it is adapted for female characteristics and / or way of living. While Finland seems to have the right mindset on gender equality, France appears aware of the problems and more willing to tackle them.



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### **Annexe 1: Interview questions**

1) Tell me about your background and how you reached your current job position.

2) Have you encountered difficulties and/or barriers on your way to your current position?

- In your opinion, why have you encountered these barriers/difficulties?

3) In the case of you wanting to advance in your career and evolve, which difficulties could you encounter?

4) How do you communicate and behave with your colleagues (men and women), and vice versa?

- What do you observe from people working around you? (e.g. language differences...)

5) Do you consider your gender (sex) to be in your favor or disfavor for your job?

- How does this occur?

6) During your career, have you seen the attitude towards female manager change?

- Do you think parity laws (e.g. loi Copé-Zimmerman in France) would have a positive impact for and is in favor of women aiming at top leading positions?

7) Have there been different expectations for female manager than for male manager?

- How have they shown?

8) What are the characteristics of female and male managers?

- In your opinion, are there specific differences?

9) Do you think male and female employees are on the same line regarding:

- work dynamic (e.g. gender roles talked about within company, department with more women or men...)

- task

- salaries / benefits / promotions

- time flexibilities...

10) How do you think you are perceived by your subordinates? Do you feel your colleagues (men and women) are perceived in a similar way?

- According to you, how does the gender factor influence this perception compared to the one's own character factor?

11) Nowadays, in general and in your company, do you think it is easier for a man to get promoted and access the highest positions than for a woman?

- How does this show?

12) How do you organize / divide domestic duties?