

**Reasons for Underrepresentation of Female Leaders and
Figureheads in Finland according to Male Sport
Executives**

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ABSTRACT

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Scarcity of female leaders in sport organizations has been recognized as a worldwide dilemma. This research focuses on its prevalence specifically in Finland. Although women in Finland in general are quite fortunate to be able to enjoy a relatively high level of equality in most aspects of life, the blatant underrepresentation of female leaders and figureheads particularly in sports is somewhat mysterious and is worth investigating further. In the last two decades, more women have been appointed to sport leadership positions in Finland, but the highest and most influential positions are still occupied mainly by male.

Qualitative data was used as a research method, and collected in a form of semi-structured interviews. The sample comprised of seven influential men and one female who have years of experience working in key leadership positions in the field of sport. The goal was to gain an understanding of how men sports executives perceive women as potential sports leaders and to find out their level of willingness to welcome more women into the industry. The study aimed to identify the main reasons for the slow progress of women gaining a stronger foothold in the top managerial positions in sports in Finland. Most previous studies have examined the topic from the female point of view. Hence, this study approached the theme mainly from a male standpoint to fill in the gap in the literature.

The results strongly indicate that men see women just as capable sports leaders as their counterparts, but they believe women's journey all the way to the top is decelerated or entirely precluded by various foreseeable barriers. Family-related issues were named most often as the biggest reason for women's scarcity in the top-level positions, but nearly as often the phenomenon was explained by the reasons related to old structures and prolonged male hegemony. Women seem to also be reluctant to actively apply for the sport leadership positions which is believed to be caused by the lack of courage and confidence, but also because women are believed to value other aspects of life, such as parenting, higher than sports per se. Women are thus lacking the adequate level of passion which is one of the most essential driving forces in sports management.

My suggestion for future research would be to examine the level of passion of women in the middle management to find out whether the previous claim holds true. Furthermore, my observations during the research left me wondering if the high level of education within organization could explain the unprejudiced and positive attitude towards gender neutrality and female leaders. Therefore, as my other suggestion for future research is to examine the level of education in different sport organizations and conduct a comparative analysis of how it relates to number of female executives in those particular organizations.

Key words: Sports, leadership, gender equality, female leaders, male hegemony, stereotypes, diverse teams

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1. INTRODUCTION

There is a scarcity of female leaders in sport organizations which has been recognized as a worldwide dilemma. Finland is no exception in this equation even though it was ranked third in The Global Gender Gap Index in 2015 (World Economic Forum 2015). The purpose of the index was to analyze the level and the development of gender equality around the world in the field of economics, politics, and education and health. Finland occupies one of the top three spots in all the other areas but drops into eighth place in the Economic Participation and Opportunity sub index. Finland along with Iceland outperformed all the other 143 countries included in the Index e.g. in the Political Empowerment sub index by having closed over 60 percent of the gender gap (World Economic Forum 2015).

The conclusions from the Global Gender Gap Report (2015) indicate that, women in Finland in general are quite fortunate to be able to enjoy a relatively high level of equality in most aspects of life, which is why the blatant underrepresentation of female leaders and figureheads particularly in sports is a bit mysterious and worth investigating further. There are a handful of women that have successfully climbed their way up in this male-dominated industry, but a few exceptions to the rule do not justify the prominent gender imbalance in sports. Although, in the last two decades more women have been appointed to sport leadership positions in Finland, the highest and most influential positions are still occupied mainly by male. Aalto-Nevalainen (2011) rightfully states that there are only a few cracks in the "glass ceiling" and that the number of women in top management is still not reflecting the high number of women and girls participating in sports and physical activities. It calls for serious actions and changes in attitudes and cultural mindset to reach the state where women are genuinely given the equal opportunity to be part of the consideration process (and to be chosen) for high profile jobs in the industry. I hope we are able to make such changes that those capable women desiring leadership roles can be pulled out from behind the scenes into the spotlight and giving birth to some affluent female figureheads alongside with male counterparts such as Kalervo Kummola, Hjallis Harkimo and Mika Kojonkoski.

I also hope that the findings of the study will help women in the sport sector in Finland struggling with the gender bias to understand where the problem lies because when you get to the bottom of it, it's easier to get fixed. Furthermore, raising the awareness of the dilemma (especially among men) and accelerating the change in the cultural mindset of men ruling the world of sports will hopefully speed up the promotion of gender equality and the

empowerment of women. In the best case, this study will generate public discussion on the topic and emphasize the fact that women are as good of leaders as their counterparts, and that equal balance of women and men leaders affects positively the entirety of sports and the society as a whole.

1.1. Personal interest

The topic of my research was clear to me right from the start because I personally have a deep interest in it. In fact, I recommend anyone who is pondering the topic for his or her master's thesis, to choose a theme with a personal interest in it because it will make the arduous project much more intriguing and increases the likelihood of finishing the project on time.

For already two decades, I myself have dreamed of being a sports leader due to which I am extremely interested in the topic I chose for my master's thesis. I wanted to find out what men's attitudes towards women leaders truly are and what are the possible reasons for women's scarcity in the leadership roles in sports. Also, I possess quite extensive networks in the field of sport so I knew it would help me to get interviews from people in the most influential positions in Finland. My interest in the topic initially arose from empirical observations which I have made in the last ten to fifteen years. This interesting phenomenon, men ruling the world of sports, has resiliently occupied my mind for years and has caused me to follow it through the mass media.

My approach to the topic is not feministic in nature but rather originates from a genuine interest and curiosity to hear out what men have to say about the issue of gender imbalance in the leadership positions in sports. They, after all, are still the ones who primarily oversee the selection process and decides on the recruitments for the sport leadership positions. Furthermore, instead of making conclusions and claims merely on the basis of statistics and previous studies, I think it is important to give men the fair opportunity to elucidate the phenomenon from their point of view since that has not been given enough scope in the past. We cannot automatically point fingers at men and exclusively blame them for the scarcity of women in sport leadership positions because there might be some underlying reasons that even men themselves do not acknowledge. For instance, men might not simply realize that there, in fact, are also women who really are willing, and capable, of

taking over top-level management positions in sports. Additionally, even if men were aware of the gender imbalance, they do not necessarily think that women are not fit for leadership positions, but men simply remain passive and ineffectual about making a difference and improving the situation. I believe this holds true at least to some of the men, but I also believe that there still are those backward thinkers who recognize only men to be eligible and capable enough of acting as leaders in sports. Truthfully, I am afraid women are still facing, conscious and unconscious, bias from their counterparts, which keeps them out of these leadership roles. Thus, women may have added pressure and they may need to work twice as hard to be recognized for their accomplishments and take credit for their performance, and ultimately to be valued as a potential leader material. I expect that a common trait for the successful women in sports, or in the business world in general, is that they do not let the prevailing preconceptions and resistance, evident or hidden, deter them from pursuing their dream career and taking their place in boardrooms.

1.2. Structure of the thesis

This thesis is comprised the following components: introduction, theoretical focus and relevant findings from previous literature, research task, implementation of the study, results and discussion. After the introduction, in the theoretical focus section, I give the reader an overview of how women's status in the area of sports has been improved in the last century, globally and specifically in Finland. The chapter summarizes the previous research which I have examined and the results I have discovered, and which I want to investigate further.

After the background information is presented and the reader has gained an understanding of the topic, I familiarize him or her with the research task itself; what is the aim and purpose of the study and what research question I want ultimately to be answered. In the section that is dealing with the implementation of the study, I explain in detail how I carried out my research. I discuss the research methodology I chose, the structure of the interviews I conducted, the process of data analysis and the data analysis method I found the most appropriate for this case. In this section I also introduce the participants and explain why I selected these particular individuals to share their opinions and insights with me.

In the last two sections, I reveal the results and key findings from my data analysis. After revealing the results, the thesis moves on to deliberating the means which could create

more favorable circumstances for women sports leaders. I conclude the study with a discussion section and give suggestions for future research.

2. PROLONGED ABSENCE OF WOMEN IN SPORTS LEADERSHIP

If we take a look at how women's status in the area of sports has improved in the last century, we can state that the first concrete step in the development process was to enhance the numerical equality of men and women in elite level sports, which meant an increased number of disciplines women could compete within as well as an increase in the number of women participants in multi-sports events such as the Olympics (Jevtić & Juhas 2011).

Today these numbers are quite equal, but it has taken decades, and numerous obstacles has been overcome, to get to this point. Women have successfully fought against the medical belief that physical activity and sports would be harmful for women's health, and female athletes have encountered dismissive attitudes and difficulties to be viewed as real hardworking athletes and to get themselves decent training facilities. Women's share in key leadership roles in sport organizations' upper management, however, has progressed at a much slower pace than the numerical equality regarding the gender representation in the Olympic Games. I believe we can partly blame men for not proactively supporting and making it easier for women to enter the "men's world", but I would also point fingers at women themselves for being passive and lacking passion for high-level positions in sports. Perhaps majority of the people do not even find an issue in this equation - perhaps it is just me and a few other women aspiring to sports leadership positions who consider the gender imbalance in sports management an issue after all.

2.1. It is a man's world

This study incorporates four theories or paradigms that explain the superiority of men in the world of sport. Firstly, *hegemonic masculinity*, which occurs when the masculine characters are preferred over the feminine ones and which will lead to superiority and empowerment of men (Wadesango *et al* 2011). Historically and traditionally, sport has always been seen as a masculine domain in which aggressiveness and competitiveness, among other masculine traits, are prevailing. This persistent imagery of sport maintains the male hegemony in sports arena.

Secondly, interconnecting with hegemonic masculinity, women's absence in leadership positions can be explained by a *role congruity theory* of prejudice toward female

leaders. Eagly and Karau's (2011) role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders argues that the salient discrepancy between the commonplace conception of a conventional leader and women's expected social role result in two types of bias. Firstly, women are perceived unfit to hold a leadership position due to a handicap associated with their gender, and secondly, when a woman enacts as a typical leader and comply with the agentic, or should I say manly, characteristics in her leadership style, her behavior is perceived negatively (because that type of behavior is not, as though, appropriate for a woman). In other words, being self-confident, courageous, tough, and power-loving leader is totally acceptable and even expected from a man, but such behavior is banned from a woman leader.

Women are not believed to be suitable for leadership positions because stereotypical woman do not possess the masculine characteristics of a stereotypical leader, and this is especially true in *male gender type positions* of which sports is a perfect example. It has been studied that women are prone to rather negative responses in nontraditional roles but to more positive reactions in roles that fit in to the traditional realm of females (Eagly & Karau 2002). Perceivers want to see women as warm and empathic care-givers rather than senseless, ruthless and ambitious despots. That is how it has always been and that is how it should remain. These gender-related perceptions drastically deteriorate women's position as potential leader candidates and their chances of building successful leadership careers.

The *homologous reproduction*, for which sport is one of the most favorable environments, serves as the third theory, which in this instance means that men are systematically promoting each other ("old boy" networks) into the leadership positions to guard their territory (Wadesango, Machingambi, Ashu & Chireshe 2011).

As my fourth theory, I will use the concept of *gender passivity* (of both genders) in trying to make things better for women (Claringbould & Knoppers 2012). Both, women and men, are either in a belief that men dominating the key positions is completely normal (because it has always been like that) and do not really see a problem in the arrangement, or even when they recognize the issue of gender imbalance, they justify their passivity by not being able to achieve a positive change alone, or they believe the change will eventually happen by itself (Claringbould & Knoppers 2012). Moreover, the significant gender divide, men being highly over-represented, alone leads to a belief that women may not be the right kind of employee (Sartore & Cunningham 2007). Those women who are consciously aware of the existing dilemma are probably somewhat reluctant to bring up the issue as they might be afraid of ruining their own careers by doing so and by perhaps appearing as feminist. I

argue, and I get support also from one of the interviewees, that overtly feminist behavior tends to irritate many men and therefore is apt to water down its primary purpose. I will incorporate the practices of gender passivity into my study and explore the level of its existence in Finland.

2.2. Underrepresentation of women leaders in sports – worldwide issue

One of the main contributors for achieving the numerical equality was International Olympic Committee's (IOC) decision (1994) to take the lead in the international movement, with the objective of implementing gender equality in sport (Jevtić & Juhas 2011). Since then the IOC has systematically taken steps towards changing the prevailing attitudes and promoting “the participation of women at all levels, encouraging National Olympic Committees (NOCs) and International Federations (IFs) to enhance the presence of women in sport” (IOC 2017). As noted by the IOC in 1994, the movement is lacking women; and it decided to establish a working group named “Women and Sport” which is now called the Women and Sport Commission of the IOC. Two years later the IOC held its first conference devoted to women related issues, and one of the most significant outcomes was a launch of an initiative that at least 10 percent of the decision-making level jobs in all sports organizations belonging to the international Olympic movement should be occupied by women by 2001, and 20 % by the end of 2005. (Jevtić & Juhas 2011).

Research has shown that if an organization has a vision and it wants to make substantial changes in the way things are, whether it regards to attitudes or policies and procedures, the best impact can be achieved when the recommendations come from the highest authority, which in this case would be the IOC. Furthermore, the highest authority would also have to implement the desired changes into its own actions and cascade them from the top down through the entire system. The IOC has been active in trying to make changes but the results, however, have been relatively modest. The first signs were promising since even though the goal which was set for 2001 was not fully achieved, respectable 70 percent of all the National Olympic Committees (NOC) at that time had 10 percent of female members (with some decision-making power), and approximately every fourth NOC had even more than 20 percent of women in their upper management positions (Jevtić & Juhas 2011). Fifteen years later, in 2015, a survey with 135 participating NOCs,

revealed that 27 of them had 30 percent or more women on their executive board (IOC 2017). Eleven of them had even selected a woman as their president and thirty of them had a woman secretary general. The numbers indicate clear progress in some countries but if we look at the other side of the coin, 62 NOCs or close to half of them had less than 20 percent of female on their executive boards and some countries did not have any.

Currently, the IOC Executive Board comprises of fifteen members of which only four (27 %) are women. Some improvement can also be seen in the composition of the 26 IOC commissions as seven (27 %) of them are chaired by women. The gender balance in the International Sports Federations (IFs) reiterates the same pattern as 26 percent of the top management comprises of women. If we look at figures provided by the Sydney Scoreboard, a global index for women on sport leadership, “at a national level, based on 38 countries and 1,599 National Sport Organizations (NSOs), the average percentage of women directors increased from 19.7 in 2010 to 20.7 in 2014, and at an international level, based on 76 international sport federations, the average percentage of women directors increased from 12 in 2012 to 13.3 in 2014” (The Sydney Scoreboard 2017).

If the variances in percentages between countries worldwide were to be analyzed in search of explanations for the underrepresentation of women in the decision-making bodies in sports organizations, it would be interesting to see if some explicit commonalities could be identified in them. The general belief might be that the gender equity is highest in countries where strong social democratic ideology is prevailing, and lowest in countries where religion has traditionally been the “agonist” in forming the hierarchies of the society. As a political ideology, social democracy is often associated with and even referred to as the “Nordic Model” which is common especially to the Nordic countries; Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, and Iceland. All these countries have adapted so called Nordic welfare model, which aims at higher democracy, egalitarianism and solidarity in their societies, and where gender equality is emphasized and promoted more strongly than in many other countries. The country-specific numbers regarding female board directors in NSOs prove the latter statement to be true since they show that Norway, by its 37 percent, is clearly a forerunner in implementing and realizing the gender equality in sports. Finland, on the other hand, show figures only slightly above the global average and has in fact taken a few steps backwards as the percentage of women has dropped from 24 % in 2009-2012 to 23 percent in 2013-2014 (The Sydney Scoreboard 2017). While women in Finland have made progress

in equalizing the gender balance in almost every aspect of the business and political world, their presence in the key positions in the field of sports remains very low.

2.3. Underrepresentation of women in leadership roles in sports organizations in Finland

The number of women on boards and holding executive positions has slowly increased in recent years. According to the most recent survey by the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (2015), 19 percent of the corporate board seats in the unlisted companies in Finland are held by women (Teräsaho & Kupiainen 2015). In 2014, the Finnish Chambers of Commerce published a study that revealed that in the listed companies the number was higher, as 23 percent of the board members were women. Three years later, in 2017, the number of women on boards and executive teams hit an all-time high with 27 percent, but already in a consecutive year, in 2018, the record was broken again as women's share of board seats was ascended to 29 percent in all the listed companies in Finland (Keskuskauppakamari 2018).

These mentioned figures, however, are the overall figures all the industries included. When the women representation in boards and executive teams are scrutinized by industry, it can be found that the gender equality has not progressed at the same rate in all sectors and industries. According to the Seventh Women Directors and Executives Report 2017 (Finncham 2017) women have made the largest headway in the management positions in the healthcare sector with 28,6 percent. The consumer goods and services sector as well as tourism and recreation come in second with 22,5 percent. The lowest share of female executives can be found in the industrial sector (2,9 %). These numbers do not directly provide us any information regarding the gender distribution in management positions in sports organizations since they are not listed companies but I merely wanted to show that even though the number of women in boards and executive positions in overall has doubled in the past ten years in Finland (Finland's figures being one of the highest in the world) it does not mean that all the different sectors can give themselves a tap on the shoulder.

While women have made progress in attaining positions of power and influence in almost every aspect of the business and political world, their presence in the key positions in the field of sports remains very low. In 2015, *Urheilulehti* (Finnish sports magazine) listed the 100 most influential people in sports in Finland, and only 23 women made it to the

overall list. However, in the top ten there were only two women (20 %) and in the top thirty there were only five women (16,6 %). Most importantly, approximately half of the 23 women were ranked in the bottom twenty (80-100). In other words, in the top 80 there were only 13 women. (Kupila, J. & Top 100 Work Group 2015). In 1995-2009, women's share of the managing directors in over hundred Finnish sports associations that were members of Finnish Sports Confederation¹ rose from 13 percent to 24 percent (Aalto-Nevalainen 2011). Furthermore, when we look at 2011 figures for governmental bodies of various organizations, such as the Finnish Sport Federation (SLU) community administrative board and the administrative boards of National governing bodies, and their executive directors, women account for approximately 25 percent.

However, much more rarely a woman acts as a chairperson in these organizations; their share varies between 11 percent and 15 percent (Turpeinen, Jaako, Kankaanpää & Hakamäki 2011). This supports the argument that the highest, often elected, leadership positions in sports are generally handed to men. Similarly, men continue to reign the most influential positions in the highest rank sport organizations such as the Finnish Olympic Committee (FOC) (Aalto-Nevalainen 2011). On the other hand, in the municipalities the work towards gender equality has progressed in much faster phase as 31 percent of the leading municipal officials and 48 percent of the members of sports councils are female (Turpeinen *et al* 2011).

In the political field the advancement of women, and nearly complete gender balance in some sectors, is a result of well-practiced law of equality. In the light of these statistics, the gender imbalance in the leadership positions in sports is quite evident as they suggest that women are still seen as an afterthought and might have let into the board rooms only to meet gender quotas. Women have become more visible in sport organizations but the progress of narrowing off the gender gap has been only marginal. If the changes continue to develop in such a slow motion, I have to concur with the worry made by Aalto-Nevalainen (2011) on that the world will have to wait for next thirty years to reach the point of coequal leadership - and that, would not be economical, rational or even acceptable.

¹ Finnish Sports Confederation was called SLU (Suomen Liikunta ja Urheilu ry) in 1993-2012, after which it was called VALO (Valtakunnallinen liikunta- ja urheiluorganisaatio ry) until 2016. As of 1st of January, 2017, VALO was merged into the Finnish Olympic Committee.

Taking another analytical look at the progress of women leaders in the listed companies, the Finncham's report (2017) states that the improved situation of the gender distribution has been achieved by companies' own self-regulation and will to abide by the corporate governance code as opposed to quota legislation. Since 2008 the corporate governance code has included a specific recommendation that both genders should be represented in the board. The Finnish Corporate Governance Code from 2015 (Securities Market Association 2015) states it as follows:

“The company can decide the extent in which the principles concerning diversity are disclosed. However, the information disclosed shall always include at least the objectives relating to both genders being represented in the company's board of directors, the means to achieve the objectives, and an account of the progress in achieving the objectives.”

Since its introduction in 2008 the number of women in boards in listed companies has risen from 12 percent to the current 29 percent, and no less than 98 percent of the listed companies in Finland comply with the recommendation (Keskuskauppakamari 2018).

2.4. Differences in female representation in different sports and sport organizations

If we take a closer look at International Sport Federations (IFs), women's representation in the boards is surprisingly low as the average percentage of women directors was only 13 percent in 2014 (The Sydney Scoreboard 2017). Sports disciplines which have always been perceived as more feminine than masculine, such as gymnastics and skating, stand out from the crowd. As of last year, in 2016, the International Gymnastic Federation (FIG) had over 33 percent female board directors and the International Skating Union (ISU) 36 percent respectively (The Sydney Scoreboard 2017). However, neither of these federations had named a woman as their CEO or Chair of Board. Furthermore, the trend in the progress of women leaders in the ISU has been going downwards since women's share in the ISU was as high as 45.5 percent in 2014 so it has dropped over nine percent in two years.

If we examine sports that are considered highly masculine, such as football and ice-hockey, one expects that women are entirely excluded from the top management in these organizations. This presumption holds true for the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) as only 4.5 percent of its board directors are women, but when it comes

to International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF), the role of women is much stronger than expected and higher than the global average as 14 percent of the board directors were women in 2016. (The Sydney Scoreboard 2017). In the latest issue of its publication, FIFA states that it “has for many years been actively promoting women’s football and women in football, and this was one of its four areas of reform that were approved at the Extraordinary Congress in Zurich on 26 February 2016. The FIFA Conference for Equality and Inclusion, which was held for the third time at the beginning of March, was part of this initiative” (*FIFA 1904*, 1917).

Still, in the light of the statistics mentioned earlier, it makes one contemplate why these beautiful intentions and initiatives do not actualize. It certainly shows some progress when the umbrella organization is bringing forth the issues of equality, but it requires one further step to inspire and instigate the national organizations to put them into practice. In the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa, the government’s main objective was to promote the country as a peaceful nation where racial issues have been eliminated and children have better opportunities to engage themselves in sports (Clark 2011). Apparent issues with gender was not discussed in any way but was rather hidden behind the curtains. Most leadership positions in the organization were handed to men whereas women occupied heavily the administrative positions. The few women who shook the traditional male domain by breaking into decision-making positions remained faceless and were excluded from all type of media coverage. (Clark 2011).

Based on the statistics from the IOC, it can be concluded that the numerical equality regarding the gender representation in the Olympic Games has progressed at a faster pace than women’s share in the key leadership roles in the upper management in the IOC, NOCs, and IFs. Even though the IOC clearly wants to manifest and speak for the gender equality also in leadership positions and is active in creating policies and recommendations to improve the gender balance, the implementation phase has been very slow or in some areas close to non-existent. It seems as if “the current process of changes is moving from woman to woman” or from one organization or agency dealing with this issue to another (Jevtić & Juhas 2011). In the last decades women all over the world have united their forces and developed networks as well as arranged seminars and conferences to find tools and push for actions towards better gender equality in the world of sports.

Reasons for success in closing the gender gap in the number of sport disciplines as well as male and female athletes participating in sporting events may be either manifold or

very simple. Perhaps it has simply been easier for the society, particularly men, to accept this numerical equality because even though men and women compete in the same sports and same events, they are still two separate groups who compete in their own categories and thus do not “interfere” with each other. Working together in sports organizations, on the other hand, means going a step further and letting women enter the “men’s world”, sharing ideas with them and ultimately taking even orders from a female boss. That has been a process which has hit a few more bumps in the road than enhancing the equality of female athletes.

Some might think that in certain countries women’s absence in sport leadership positions can easily be explained by religious or ideological factors. Perhaps these factors can explain it partly, but certainly not solely. To further support this, a study examined the female representation in the decision-making bodies in the Olympic and elite sport organizations in two contrasting non-Western contexts, which included selected Muslim countries and China (Chin, Henry & Hong 2009). They chose these two geographical areas “because they reflect contrasting contexts in which the role of women is seen to be embedded in very different ideologies, often referred to simplistically as a religious and a political ideology respectively” (Chin *et al* 2009). As opposed to pure religious (Islamic) or political (China’s communism which tends to be egalitarian in its nature) reasons, findings from the study indicated that the local cultural context seems to play even bigger role than religion or political ideology in determining women’s role in leadership positions in these societies. In these two cases, the highest authority in religion and political arena has historically been in the hands of men and is expected to also remain as such. Thus, women’s inferiority to men is explained more so by patriarchal causation than by religion or politics per se. (Chin *et al* 2009). In other words, based on these findings, this suggests that secular male hegemony is one of the most common and at the same time also the most influential factor in explaining women’s weak representation in the leadership roles in sports organizations worldwide.

3. RESEARCH TASK

Herein, I present the aim and purpose of the research as well as the relevance and importance of it. I also introduce the research questions which I formulated to best provide insights to the area of concern. Right after this, in the following chapter, I will familiarize the reader with implementation of the study, after which we will get to the actual results and main findings of the research.

3.1. Aim and purpose of the research

In comparison with other industries and politics, the presence of women in the key management positions is very low in sports. Politics in Finland has similar history with sports in that originally only men had the right to be active in politics and political decision-making. Politics, however, has evolved and transformed into an advanced domain in which both men and women are equally represented and enjoy equal rights. Both, politics and sports, share similar type masculine origin but what explains the giant leaps towards perfect gender balance in politics. Equality and tolerance were already mentioned in the Sports Act 1999, but why is it so that the progress towards these goals is so slow or almost nonexistent.

The main purpose of this study was to identify the reasons for the slow progress of women gaining a stronger foothold in the top managerial positions in sports in Finland. There are several previous studies focusing on the issue but most of them have been conducted from a female point of view. Therefore, I wanted to approach the theme from a male standpoint to fill in the gap in the literature but also because of personal interest. As a starting point for further discussion of the issue I wanted to first find out how the interviewees would describe an “ideal” sports leader. The primary aim was to gain an understanding of how men sports executives and influencers perceive women as potential sports executives and to find out their level of willingness to welcome more women into the industry. In the same context, I also inquired the interviewees what added value they believe women could bring to the table. Furthermore, I discovered some means to create more favorable circumstances for women sports leaders. Lastly, based on the findings, I provide recommendations for action to further enhance the empowerment of women in the sport system of Finland.

3.2. Research questions

The goal of the research was to get a clear picture of how men sports executives and influencers perceive women as potential sports executives. And whether they genuinely think that there should be more women in top positions. The main purpose of the study was to identify the possible reasons or biggest barriers for the slow progress of women gaining a stronger foothold in the top managerial positions in sports in Finland.

1. Why are there so few female sport leaders and what are the reasons for the slow progress of women gaining a stronger foothold in the managerial positions in sports?
2. How do Finnish men sports executives and influencers perceive women as potential sports executives?

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STUDY

I selected the research topic of my master's thesis already in 2016, and right from the beginning it was clear to me that I wanted to do a qualitative research. My initial thought was to conduct semi-structured interviews with both men and women leaders or alternatively compose a couple of case studies of women leaders who have had an eclectic journey to the top and have an interesting story to share. However, after examining previous researches and noticing the lack of male viewpoint in the material, I decided to focus on men leaders. Regardless, I still felt that the study required additional support and evidence also from the female point of view, which is why I determined to include one female interviewee in the sample. It enabled me to see whether the answers from the male interviewees differed, and to what extent, from the answers from the female interviewee. For the sake of validity and reliability of the research, I wish I had the opportunity to interview three to five women sport leaders, but given the time constraint, I had to content myself with only one. In the following chapters I will describe the implementation of the study in more detail.

4.1. Research methodology

In this research project, I used qualitative data which I collected in the form of semi-structured interviews. Qualitative data was used as a research method, and it was collected in a form of semi-structured interviews. Sherman and Webb (1988, p. 7) conclude that “‘qualitative’ implies a direct concern with experience as it is ‘lived’ or ‘felt’ or ‘undergone’”. (In contrast, ‘quantitative’ research, often taken to be the opposite idea, is indirect and abstracts and treats experiences as similar, adding or multiplying them together, or ‘quantifying’ them.). In other words, the primary goal of qualitative research is to construe an authentic picture of interviewees’ or participants’ experience about something and their feelings associated with it (Sherman and Webb 1988, p. 7).

I selected semi-structured interviews as the methodology for my research because I believed it to be the most suitable approach for the carefully chosen interviewees. Since I basically know all the interviewees personally, I argue I had a higher chance of getting an appointment for face-to-face interviews than enticing them to response to a questionnaire sent to them by e-mail. I was also confident that I would be able to generate very open

discussions with all the selected interviewees as well as get truthful answers from them. A quantitative research method in a form of a questionnaire for a wider sample would have been another possibility but I am afraid I would not have been able to gain such in-depth and truthful knowledge of the issues related to my research questions had I chosen the survey as my research method.

I find that there were a lot of advantages in using the face-to-face interview as my interview method. Since the communication in face-to-face interview occurs in synchronization, the interviewer (and the interviewee as well) can benefit from social cues, such as body language, facial expressions, hand gestures and tone of voice which most often supplement or even complete the spoken answer (Opdenakker 2006). Interpreting the social cues is especially useful in my case because all the interviewees are themselves in the heart of the issue and actual subjects in the case which is why the way they say things or express themselves, tells me more than mere words. One has to remember, however, that social cues work both ways. Therefore, the interviewer has to be very vigilant of not using social cues to direct or mislead the interviewee to a certain direction. Another benefit with face-to-face communication is that the answer following the question is instant and spontaneous (i.e. likely authentic and therefore worthy of belief) and it also allows both parties to immediately counter react on each other's comments or gestures (Opdenakker 2006).

The challenge with the unstructured or semi-structured interview is that the interviewer has to be able to reformulate questions or formulate new questions if the conversation does not follow the anticipated pattern of questions. Therefore, the interviewer has to really know his or her subject area very thoroughly to be able to instantly produce logical follow-up questions.

4.2. The structure of the interview

The main goal of the interviews was to discover men's general opinion regarding women, their capabilities and strengths as well as their perceived opportunities to take leadership roles in the sports industry. Furthermore, the aim of the study was to examine men's take on the possible reasons for the slow progress of women gaining a stronger foothold in the managerial positions in sports. The aim was to create an open and honest discussions with the interviewees about the research topic and to get answers to all the questions which were

prepared prior to the interviewees for smooth and logical conversations. I believe that the fact that I knew most of the interviewees personally helped me to reach both of these objectives with each interviewee. I divided my interview questions into five themes of which each included 3-8 questions (appendix 1).

The themes were:

- I. Ideal sports leader (*included 3 individual questions*)
- II. Women as leaders (*included 6 individual questions*)
- III. Working with women: personal experiences (*included 8 individual questions*)
- IV. Male dominance (*included 7 individual questions*)
- V. What type of leadership is needed now and in the future? (*included 3 individual questions*)

I estimated that an adequate time for an interview will be 30-60 minutes. The duration of the shortest interview was approximately 28 minutes and the longest interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. The average duration of all the interviews was 35 minutes. I started all the interviews with a couple of generic warm-up questions which were not related to research itself because I wanted to create a relaxed and confidential atmosphere where it was easy for the interviewee to freely share his or her truthful thoughts and opinions. After some warm-up questions and creating a relaxed atmosphere, I provided the interviewees the outline of the process and gave a brief description of the topic as well as handed them the consent form to be signed (Appendix 2). I assured the interviewees that everything they say will be fully confidential and that they will remain completely anonymous unless they wanted otherwise. Some of the interviewees found the anonymity very important to be able to give completely honest answers without the fear of being judged by the readers, and some interviewees would not have minded being presented in the research with their own name. I also asked for permission to tape record the interview, and no one declined.

During the interview process, if there were some questions to which I felt I did not get a completely honest answer, or the answer was only partial, I followed up with more detailed probing questions and continued the discussion on the specific topic until my question was fully answered. Also, there were several occasions where an interviewee was not first able to give an answer to some specific question, or gave initially a different answer,

but on a later stage of the interview when more questions regarding the same issue were asked, the interviewee was eventually able to formulate an opinion, or radically (but unwittingly) changed his initial answer. For example, I asked the interviewees, whether they believed there are differences in strengths of female and male leaders, and a few of them initially refused to see any differences between the two genders, but towards the end of the interview, they however clearly named a few superior capabilities which they think are more typical amongst women than men, and vice versa. Therefore, it is worth mentioning that even though some of the questions in the questionnaire somewhat repeat themselves, they can become crucial in getting the most truthful answers from the interviewees. Furthermore, if I had doubts about what the interviewee was saying or if the interviewee did not express himself clearly or concretely enough, I asked further questions to get a better understanding of his reckoning.

Another technique which I decided to occasionally use to get more than just mere 'yes' or 'no' answers was that I intentionally spoke out loud findings from previous researches and my personal experiences, to encourage the interviewee to express also his take on the issue. That may be considered as directing an interviewee to a certain direction and at its worst, potentially putting in jeopardy the reliability of the interview. However, given the circumstances of me knowing the interviewees personally and the transparent nature of the discourse, I can state with a degree of certainty that each interviewee answered the questions with their own voice and stated clearly their own opinion on each question or topic. I personally believe that too many simple 'yes', 'no' or 'I do not know' answers would have limited the amount and quality of information for my research which is why, in some rare occasions, I chose to foster the dialogue and stimulate thought of the interviewees with some supporting questions or statements.

4.3. The data collection and analysis

Seven interviews with male participants and one interview with a female participant, were conducted during the months of May to August of 2017 (Table 1).

Table 1. Interview timetable and pseudonyms

Interview: Gender & Location	Pseudonym	Date of the interview
Interview 1: Male - Helsinki	Don	18.5.2017
Interview 2: Male - Helsinki	Peter	18.5.2017
Interview 3: Male - Helsinki	Paul	13.6.2017
Interview 4: Male - Helsinki	Carl	13.6.2017
Interview 5: Male - Helsinki	Mark	14.6.2017
Interview 6: Male - Helsinki	Robert	15.6.2017
Interview 7: Male - Helsinki	Mike	19.6.2017
Interview 8: Female - Jyväskylä	Sarah	31.8.2017

I first thought of sending the interview questions to the interviewees prior to the interview but I was afraid that this would pose a risk of getting premeditated rather than spontaneous answers from them. I wanted to give myself the opportunity to hear out the unrehearsed response completed with elements of authentic body language. All the interviews were conducted in person, and the meeting place was suggested and chosen by the interviewee himself or herself. As seen in the table 1 above, seven interviewees took place in Helsinki and one in Jyväskylä. As mentioned in the previous chapter, all the interviews were tape-recorded. The advantage of using the tape recorder was that I did not have to write out notes throughout the entire interview, but I could rather focus on internalizing what the interviewee was really saying and be ready to produce follow-up questions when necessary, e.g. if I did not really get an answer to my question or I noticed some inconsistencies in the answers.

One of the possible disadvantages of relying on a tape-recorder or any other technical device is that there is always a risk of malfunction. I minimized the technological risk by recording the interviews also with my cell phone. Another downside of using the tape recorder is the time-consuming process of transforming the interviews into a text format, that is transcribing them. It has been estimated that an hour of tape recording requires five to six hours of transcribing (Bryman 2001, p. 93). Furthermore, this will result in a huge amount of text and information which the researcher will have to go through and be able to organize and analyze it.

After conducting all eight interviews, I started to transcribe the tape-recordings and produced all together 75 A4-size pages of text (Times New Roman 12, spacing 1.5). Then I went through the material, extracted the essential parts of the texts (the information that truly has some relevance to the research question itself) and combined them into a new text file. My next step was to wade through the material again to organize and categorize the answers by main interview questions and appropriate themes. I ended up with 63 A4 pages of text which then served as the basis for my data analysis.

There are numerous various approaches to analyze qualitative data, but one of the most commonly used data analysis method is so called thematic analysis (Bryman 2001, p. 578). I selected thematic analysis as my data analysis method because I found it to be the most appropriate and coherent approach to processing my transcript material and present the findings in the most ideal way. According to Maguire and Delahunt (2017) thematic analysis “is the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data” which in this case corresponds to the interview material. It enables the researcher to find commonalities in opinions on a specific topic or research question (Braun & Clarke 2012). Meaningful or otherwise interesting themes or patterns found from the data will be used to answer the research question. One might mistakenly think that thematic analysis is somewhat merely summarizing the data, but when it is done well, thematic analysis truly interprets and transforms the qualitative research data into a comprehensible form (Maquire & Delahunt 2017).

Congruent and explicit information on how researchers typically identify and extract key themes from data cannot be found from previous research. It can probably be explained by empiricism and the fact that identifying a theme encompasses often intuition that is challenging to be described (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen & Snelgrove 2016). I followed the six-phase guide by Braun & Clarke (2006) to conduct my thematic analysis (see Table 2).

Table 2: Six phases of doing thematic analysis. Braun & Clarke (2006).

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarising yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking in the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells; generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

I began the analysis by reading the transcripts of the interviews and making notes of relevant or otherwise interesting observations. I was using different colors as codes to mark similar answers from the interviewees, and I collated and arranged the similarities into distinctive themes. In addition to colors, I also made notes on the marginals so that it would be quicker to skim through and categorize the material. When a good citation caught my attention, I copied it to a separate text-file which eventually comprised of all the citations which I wanted to use in the final report. Although I had divided the original questionnaire already into themes, I remained flexible towards any new distinct themes that emerged during the interviews.

4.4. Participants

Right from the start it was clear to me that I wanted to approach people who possess a strong experience and have a high rank or status in the field of sports in Finland. I selected the interviewees, seven males and one female, from various Finnish sports organizations and associations. They all are currently, or have been within a few years, in key leadership positions in some sports or sports related organization in Finland. In addition to male respondents, I included one female sports leader into my sampling because I wanted to find out whether she shares the same views with the male counterparts.

Most of the interviewees preferred to remain anonymous which is why I decided not to reveal even the names of their organizations to hide their identity best possible way. I coded the verbatim of the participants by using pseudonyms (made-up names) which were listed in Table 1.

5. FEMALE SPORTS LEADERS – OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES

In this chapter, I will present the results of the study. I begin to unwrap the results by first defining an ideal sports leader; how it is described in the previous literature and how the respondents define it (what is the “official” as well as respondents’ definition of it). Then I will reveal male respondents’ perceptions of women as leaders as well as their distinct strengths and weaknesses. That will be followed by male leaders’ thoughts about whether there should be more female counterparts in the industry, and about the potential added value they believe women could bring to the table. I continue with a discussion of whether there is a certain female type that seems to have better chances of making way into the executive roles in sports, and whether a previous successful sports career is a prerequisite for a career in sports. Thereafter, I will converse on the reasons for the slow progress of women gaining a stronger foothold in the managerial positions in sports in Finland, and name the major barriers standing in women’s way in reaching those positions. Lastly, I will deliberate the means to create more favorable circumstances for women sports leaders in the future.

5.1. Ideal sports leader

Before further discussing whether women are perceived as capable sports leaders as their counterparts, it is essential to first define an ideal sports leader. Furthermore, before reflecting on leadership in sports in particular, the chapter begins with a short elucidation of how perceivers have traditionally envisioned leaders.

Most studies (e.g. Schein 1975), which have examined leadership, specifically from gender perspective, demonstrate that the attributes associated with a leader are very much the same than what people traditionally ascribe to a stereotypical man. Men are stereotyped as possessing primarily so-called *agentic characteristics* such as authority, assertiveness, confrontationality, and self-confidence, which are same type of attributes also associated with a leader (Eagly & Karau 2002). Thus, men are perceived inherent leaders, whereas women, with minimal agentic characteristics, are stereotypically believed to lack the leader qualities and are therefore disdained as potential candidates for executive positions. Women, in general, are traditionally perceived as representatives of so-called *communal characteristics*, which include attributes such as kindness, helpfulness, gentleness, and

sensitiveness (e.g. Eagly & Karau 2002; Heilman 2012). In other words, women tend to have a genuine concern for others, whereas men look at things from more individualistic perspective where personal interest overrules the interests of others.

Based on the interviews the variety of skills and capabilities required from a good leader was quite extensive (Table 3) – perhaps even more so than in case of a business leader. An ideal sports leader is a *versatile multi-tasker* who must be capable of handling tasks and issues in all the possible functions in the organization. He or she must be a *generalist* who understands the broader picture and how different pieces of a puzzle fits together. A good leader needs to be good with numbers and *understand finance*, and he or she must have *experience with marketing* (knowing at least the principles) as well as talent to manage and oversee these two crucial functions.

One of the interviewees was worried about the lack of openness in Finnish sports organizations. To him a good leader is someone who *cultivates a culture of open communication* – even when things go wrong (e.g. organization is struggling with financial issues or lousy athletic success) the unpleasant matters should openly be shared with the employees and other stakeholder groups. He believes that organizations withhold negative news because they are afraid of them harming their public image. In today's information society even the darkest truths will eventually see the daylight, so it can be very short-sighted to sweep the bad news under the rug. Proactivity in communications is unquestionably a less harmful option than being purely reactive. According to studies (e.g. Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt & van Engen 2003), women have a higher tendency to practice transformational leadership style, which is typically associated with traits such as extroversion and openness (Zopiatis, & Constanti 2012), from which it may be presumed that women are better able to rise to the challenge of proactive communication.

Carl: "...and what concerns me about the leadership in (sport) associations is that there isn't enough open discussion. Negative things are not brought up...they are just telling that the situation is now this, and from this point on we're just trying to head to the right direction... as if they were a bit afraid of how it might affect their public image. To some degree they should get themselves into a direct interaction with the external audience..."

"...ja mä oon huolestunut järjestöjohtamisen puolella siitä, että ei lähdetä niinku avoimeen keskusteluun riittävästi. Ei tuoda niitä negatiivisia asioita esille...että kerrotaan vaan, että hei, tilanne on nyt tämä, että nyt me vaan pyritään hyvään suuntaan tästä eteenpäin...että pelätään vähän, että mitä tämä tekee julkisuuskuvalle. Jollain asteella pitäisi päästä sellaiseen välittömään vuorovaikutukseen niiden ulkopuolistenkin kanssa..."

Mark: *"...in today's world openness is emphasized all the more as well as working together and searching for that team spirit, and also good communication with various stakeholders...to mention at least a few...as in the past, leadership has been quite authoritative and imperative and people follow the direct orders, probably across various fields, but today it is probably more like, at least that's what I want, that people themselves create their own work within the framework agreed upon and one (leader) should rather try to encourage and positively move it in that direction ... without having any control over it..."*

"...Ja kyllä se semmoinen avoimuus korostuu tänä päivänä ja semmoinen yhteishenkeä hakeva ja yhdessä tekeminen ja hyvä kommunikointikyky erilaisten sidosryhmien kanssa ja tota niin nuo nyt on ainakin semmoisia...et varmaan se et jos aikaisemmin johtaminen on ollut ehkä käskemistä ja sit tehdään sen mukaisesti, varmaan alalla kun alalla, mutta tänä päivänä se on varmaan enemmän semmoista, että ainakin minä haluan, että henkilöt itse luovat sen oman työnsä niissä yhdessä sovituisissa puitteissa ja ennemminkin/mieluummin pyrkii kannustamaan ja positiivisesti viemään sinne suuntaan sitä eteenpäin...ilman, että mitenkään valvois sitä..."

Carl: *"A good leader is able to handle also finance, so if the finances are not in order, it causes ill-feeling amongst owners and members as well as amongst employees and the board. The whole situation may flare up if the organization is facing financial issues. And one has to be open even with the finance related issues, that hey, this and this has happened...that you have to be proactive in communication and understand that there are such alternatives and that e.g. one is able to build different scenarios of what is the worst possible scenario in the economic sense and what is the best one and one needs to be realistic about it."*

"Hyvä johtaja hallitsee myös talouden eli jos talousasiat ei ole kunnossa, niin silloin se aiheuttaa niin pahaä närrää niin omistajissa ja jäsenissä kuin työntekijöissä ja hallituksessa. Se koko tilanne tulehtuu, jos talous on heikoissa kantimissa. Ja taloudessa pitää olla myös avoin, että hei, täällä on tämmöistä ja tämmöistä tapahtunut...et se tarkoittaa et tässä viestinnässä pitää olla proaktiivinen ja ymmärtää, että tällaisia vaihtoehtoja on olemassa ja että esim. osaa rakentaa erilaisia skenarioita siitä, että mikä on niinku pahin mahdollinen skenaario talousmielessä ja mikä on paras mahdollinen ja olla realisti siinä."

Several respondents stated that a good sports leader must be able to *acquire additional resources*; negotiating financial resources from partners and sponsors as well as attracting human capital, especially volunteers. Two of the interviewees emphasized that sports leaders, particularly those in very prominent positions, must be willing and must know how to *deal with media*. During successful times it can be an enjoyable, even divine, duty but when times are bad it can turn into an excruciating and even unbearable mission. Over time there have been many sad examples of sports leaders being crucified in the media after a

disastrous athletic success or ambiguous usage of funds. When athletes for example fall short of expectations in major competitions and return home empty-handed, a good leader must have *the guts to stand in the front line and take the bullets from the media* and success-crazy Finnish people. In sports, emotions very easily overrule rationality. This brings its own challenges to sports leaders, and this is an issue that was brought up also by most of the interviewees. As the remedy for coping in the industry filled with emotional burdens, the respondents emphasized the importance of leaders' *people skills*. When working in sports, one has to be able to deal with all types of people and be ready to confront and overcome, both fair and unfair, criticism.

Mark: *“You have to be able to get along with various type of people. And you have to be flexible in many ways, because this is not a regular 8-16 job but the working hours center very often around weekends and late evenings. I personally just recently worked every day of the week for several consecutive weeks, but eventually it levels off at some point though.”*

”No kyllä mun mielestä ainakin se, että pitää osata tulla toimeen monenlaisten/erilaisten ihmisten kanssa. Ja sitten pitää olla monella tapaa myös joustava, että tähän ei ole mikään 8-16 työ vaan virka-aikahan painottuu monesti viikonloppuihin ja iltoihin ja itselläni just keväällä on ollut sellainen, että monta viikkoa ollut joka päivä töissä, mut kyllä se sit tasoittuu jossain vaiheessa.”

Furthermore, three interviewees emphasized that a good sports leader understands what is happening in the *international* field. Sports is nowadays very global in nature and therefore it is not enough that one knows what is going on inside the country boundaries. Sport leaders also need to be aware of global trends, for example regarding new technologies or training methods, and well-proven practices has to be adapted and deployed in order to keep up with the world and to make success achievable.

Mike: *“It no longer is a playground for only one or two countries but it is very....if something in the world is global, it is music and sports.”*

”Se ei ole enää niinku yhden maan juttu tai kahden maan juttu vaan se on hyvin...jos joku on maailmassa globaalia, niin se on musiikki ja urheilu.”

Paul: *“And you have to have enough vision and perhaps even experience of sports, but also of the world around you, because you see, sports is not, and perhaps has never been, an*

isolated component of the society which means that you have to have a good idea of what is happening nationally, but also internationally...so you have to be sort of sophisticated and possess common knowledge...”

“Ja sit pitää olla riittävä näkemys ja ehkä kokemukkin urheilemisesta, mutta myös sitten ympäröivästä maailmasta, että urheilu ei ole, eikä ehkä koskaan ole ollut, mutta vielä vähemmän nykyään niinku irrallinen osa yhteiskuntaa, jolloin sulla pitää olla hyvä käsitys, mitä tapahtuu kansallisesti, mutta myös sitten niinku maailmanlaajuisestikin maailmassa ja tällöinen yleissivistynyt...”

One of the respondents stated that it would be a mistake to think that all the wisdom lies within one's own country. Certainly, there is a lot of world-class knowledge and competence in Finland, but rest of the world, traditional sports countries as well as numerous newcomers, seems to be advancing in much faster phase. That is if we measure success in terms of number of medals won in the Olympic Games and World Championships. Finland used to occupy the list of the top ten countries in the medal table in the Summer Olympic Games up until the Helsinki Olympics in 1952, and the following thirty years Finland was typically found in the places 11-20, but since then the drop in the ranking has been dramatic. In the most recent Summer Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro in 2016, Finland won only a bronze medal and placed 78th in the medal table, which is historically by far the worst ranking from the team of Finland. Regarding the Winter Olympic Games, the trend has been quite similar, albeit not quite as dramatic.

The competition is tightening and if we want to keep up with the race instead of falling more behind, we must cross our borders and be willing to acquire new knowledge and adopt new technologies from abroad. Networks need to be extended to abroad and cooperation with other countries has to take place. More national cooperation is also needed between different sport disciplines in Finland. I learned from a distinguished Finnish sports coach that for instance in Norway, all sport disciplines work closely together in terms of using centralized research department and testing laboratory. Findings and extensive knowledge database are used to create practices and technologies to be utilized in all the different sports. If we look at Norway's success for example in cross-country skiing, ski jumping and long-distance running, close cooperation has proven to be extremely fruitful. Skills that help the leaders to better cope with these types of challenges consist of good language skills, interpersonal and cooperation skills and he or she needs to understand

different cultures. In later chapters, I will reveal some research findings that demonstrate the superiority of women in these specific skill areas.

In addition to previously mentioned attributes, many of the respondents emphasized that to be a good leader he or she must have *passion for sports*, and he or she has to possess at least a moderate level of *understanding* of it, either through one's previous sports career or some other type of involvement with sports. If the person in leadership position is missing the passion, it will be difficult for him or her to bear the pressure from media and from public and put up with irregular working hours.

Mike: *“Sports is a unique field. If you do not have a genuine passion for it, you can forget about it. It requires passion to be able to work in this field. If you do not have the passion...you have not played or done any sport...I, for instance, have played hockey, but I also understand the passion people have in other sports. You must be able to understand athletes, you need to understand coaches, and you need to understand the core of things.”*

”Urheilu on niinku niin täsmä ala, että jos et sä ole niinku passion siihen urheiluun, niin se on ihan turha tänne kokeilla. Se vaatii sen passionin, että sä voit tätä tehdä. Jos sulla ei ole sitä passion siihen urheiluun, jos sä oot jotain lajia harrastanut tai pelannut...mä oon itte entinen jääkiekkoilija, mut mä ymmärrän sit kuitenkin muidenkin lajien sen passionin et sulla pitää olla se passion siihen urheiluun, ymmärtää sitä urheilijaa, ymmärtää sitä valmentajaa, ymmärtää niitä asioita.”

Robert: *“When we talk about sports leaders, they should possess at least a moderate understanding of the sport they are heading. Delegation skills...understanding the big picture...at the end of the day, it is not a question of gender. It has nothing to do with it. Some people are born leaders, some are not. We are different.”*

”Urheilujohtajista, kun puhutaan, mun mielestä niiden pitäisi tuntea se laji kohtuullisesti, delegointitaito tietysti, mutta kokonaisuuden hahmottaminen on tärkeä ja tottakai niitä johtajaominaisuuksia voi myöskin kehittää, mutta toisaalta niin kun toiset on johtajia luonnostaan, jo melkein syntyessään, ja toiset ei, toisista ei tuu kaikkea...että me ollaan erilaisia, mut mun mielestä se ei ole, tota niin, sukupuolesta kiinni niinkään.”

The only female interviewee of this study pointed out a very important and perhaps the largest single difference between a sports leader and a business leader. In addition to so called paid or permanent employees, sport leaders must be able to manage and motivate also (unpaid) volunteers whose share of the entire workforce in sport related organizations is typically by far the largest. When the source of motivation is not based on monetary compensation, the leader has to be able to find other ways to inspire his or her employees to perform their duties to their best ability. In this, people and communication skills –

understanding what motivates who - and creating a bigger vision that everyone believes and follows, play a crucial role. Here, the motivational and inspiring skills come into play, and several studies (e.g. Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt 2001; Eagly & Carli 2003) show that women tend to have better such skills than men do. This is a clear implication of one of the favorable aspects of having more female leaders.

Table 3. The skills and qualities of an ideal sports leader

	Skills and qualities named by the interviewees	% of the interviewees naming the attribute
1.	Versatile <i>multi-tasker</i>	100 %
2.	<i>Generalist</i> who understands the big picture	100 %
3.	Understands <i>finance</i> and has experience with <i>marketing</i>	100 %
4.	Ability to <i>acquire funds and other resources</i>	90 %
5.	<i>Passion for sports</i> and at least a moderate level of <i>understanding</i> of it	40 %
6.	Cultivates a culture of <i>open communication</i>	40 %
7.	Willing and able to <i>deal with media</i>	25 %
8.	<i>Internationally minded</i>	25 %
9.	Ability to <i>lead and motivate the volunteers</i>	12,5 %

5.1.1. Leadership styles of men and women

What leader characteristics and qualities are valued and respected the most, is certainly dependent on the context and situation in question as some leadership roles are defined with more feminine terms and some with more masculine terms. Potential prejudice and undermining attitude toward female leaders are also dependent on the perceiver's disposition and general worldview (Eagly & Karau 2002). From my own experience in a business world, I can argue that different type of leadership style or leaders are needed in different economic situation or company's financial position. Furthermore, "softer" issues, such as company culture, as well, has an effect on what is perceived or experienced as great leadership at the time.

The world is constantly changing and the operational models of businesses, leadership included, along with it. The impressive rate of technological change and advancements as well as globalization forces companies to reform and consequently, also different type of leadership is needed. The researchers have found out that in contemporary organizations where the globalization has dramatically tightened the competition and has built up the diversity of the personnel, “the Powerful Great Man model of leadership” needs to give way to a more coach-like management style (Eagly 2007). The authoritarian style where one person holds the exclusive right for commands has outlived itself. Today, people tend to change jobs much more easily and more often than in the past, and bad leadership is certainly not one of the slightest reasons for the takeoffs. Exemplary leader is now more often described as a mentor who inspires his or her subordinates to continuously develop their talent and who creates an environment where creativity and innovativeness blossom (Eagly 2007). That means providing freedom and flexibility and doing things together, and therefore good leadership is now very often contrasted with a successful sports coach who unites and fires up his or her team into superb achievements.

Paul: *“I like to look at leadership more widely as through sports. A good leader is a coach who wants his or her subordinates to discover their own goals and helps them to achieve those goals ...so this type of coaching-like leadership is my ideal thought of good sports leadership.”*

”No kyllä mä siis ajattelisin ehkä laajemminkin johtamista niinku urheilun kautta. Hyvä johtaja on valmentaja, joka pyrkii siihen, että johdettavat löytävät sen oman tavoitteensa ja sitten johtaja on se, joka auttaa sinne tavoitteisiin pyrkimiseen...että tällöinen valmentava johtajuus on mun ainakin tämän hetkinen ihanne ajatus hyvästä urheilujohtamisesta.”

Paul: *“...and I think that when you think about what is a good coach, then that it's pretty close to what is a good leader, but you will also have to have good understanding...since you have to coach several people, understanding different type of people, and to me this type of enriching community is extremely important, and I hope that, for instance in my own team, there would be a lot of diversity because that creates something new and all this homogeneity is withering and deteriorating.”*

”...ja mun mielestä just se, että jos ajattelet, että mikä on hyvä valmentaja, niin siinä ollaan aika lähellä jo sitten, että mikä on hyvä johtaja, mut sit se, että sulla pitää olla ymmärrys...tietysti ku valmennat, niin sä voit valmentaa useita ihmisiä, niin siinä erilaisten ihmisten niinku ymmärtäminen ja mulle tällöinen rikastava yhteisö on hirveän tärkeää ja mä toivon, että esim. mun tiimissä olisi paljon erilaisuutta, koska sen kautta syntyy uutta ja kaikki semmoinen homogeenisuus on kuihduttavaa ja heikkoa.”

Collaboration and active employee engagement combined with great communication and interpersonal skills, are some of the key elements for good leadership in modern organizations. According to leadership related research (e.g. Eagly 2007; Heilman 2012) and also based on the interviews of this study as well as my personal experience, men have a higher tendency to practice autocratic and imperative leadership style, whereas women like to emphasize cooperation, mentoring, and collaboration.

Paul: *“My experience is that, and as you said stereotyping can be a bit dangerous, but I would say that perhaps the decision-making ability, that men are a bit more straightforward, and more generous or ambiguous which many times is a good thing, they are not sort of perfectionist, so sometimes I feel that women get stuck in the details, they cannot make decisions and want to do everything perfectly, while men are more generous...with the attitude that now we just go and then we’ll see what will happen. Maybe that kind of courage is part of the manhood. Well, now I err on the side of stereotyping, but this sort of thoughts.”*

”No siis mun kokemus on se, että niinku sanoit pelkistyksset voi olla niinku vaarallisia, mut ehkä sit kuitenkin sellainen päätöksentekokyky, että miehet on vähän suoraviivaisempia, vetää vähän leveämmällä pensselillä ja joka monta kertaa on niinku hyvä asia, eivät ole niin perfektionisteja, et joskus musta tuntuu, että naiset vähän juuttuu yksityiskohtiin, ne ei pysty tekemään päätöksiä ja haluaa tehdä kaikki täydellisesti, kun taas miehet on enemmän suurpiirteisiä eli että nyt mennään ja katotaan mitä tapahtuu. Ehkä sellainen sitten rohkeus myöskin liittyy niinku tällaiseen miehisyyteen. Nyt mä yleistän, mutta tän tyyppisiä.”

Although it can be argued that different type of situations and domains require different type of leadership styles, I believe that communal or feministic style serves as the most effective style in most situations. Therefore, I think it is quite righteous to assume that women will be more in demand for leadership roles in contemporary organizations.

Paul: *“Perhaps the strength and the future of women will be lie in, in which you just referred to, emotional intelligence, and when these hierarchies gradually disappear, we’ll need a new kind of leadership which is based on the coaching-like leadership ... emotional intelligence, empathy, that type of things, so I believe that’s where women’s strengths will come into play.”*

”Ehkä se naisten vahvuus ja tulevaisuus tulee olemaan just tässä niinku viittasit tähän tunneälyyn ja ku nämä hierarkiat vähitellen katoaa, niin me tarvitaan uudenlaista johtajuutta, joka liittyy just tällaiseen valmentavaan johtajuuteen...tunneälyyn, empatiakykyyn, sen tyyppisiin asioihin, niin mä uskon, että naisilla on niinku siellä vahvuuksia.”

The abundant literature and business articles about future leader types support the prediction of brighter future for leaders with communal leadership style. One no longer see articles that praise the leadership skills of despots but quite the opposite. For instance, one study conducted in the USA, revealed, already back in 2005, that the most successful companies were “led by CEOs who inspire respect, loyalty, and even affection, rather than fear. They are, if you will, “Aquarian CEOs” - farsighted, tolerant, humane, and practical” (Tischler 2005). Sisodia et al (2014, p. 3) declared that survivors of the future will consist of humanistic companies, or “firms of endearment”, that are managed by leaders who truly value company’s stakeholders, such as workforce and clientele, and are able to create a positive emotional bond with them. A company that succeeds to show its appreciation and value-creation, whether it is financial, spiritual, ecological and whatnot, to its various interest groups, appears as a good and responsible corporate citizen who people enjoy working for, feel good about investing in, and feel secure buying from (Sisodia *et al* 2014, p. 3).

5.1.2. Challenges of sport management

I wanted to start my interview process by first finding out how current leaders describe an ideal sports leader. Against that I would then be able to reflect how significant, or insignificant, of a role gender plays in becoming or being a successful sports leader. I also wanted to examine the potential challenges sports leaders are currently, or will be, facing, and to elaborate whether more active involvement of women in leadership positions could potentially bring some alleviation into the equation.

Interviews reveal a few challenges that are prevalent specifically in the field of sports. As mentioned in the previous chapter, most interviewees think that a good sports leader must have genuine passion for sports, but one of interviewees, Don, named it also as one of the biggest challenges in sports leadership. He said that the passion turns into a flaw when leaders have too much of it and they sort of become fans. This applies particularly to leaders of sports teams. They are either fans before even starting as a leader of the team or sports club (which may even be their main reason for applying for the job in the first place) or they become fans during their employment even if they had no prior emotional connections with the team. Don has witnessed such incidents and he stated that when this happens, the focus will steer in the wrong direction. The managing director will start paying

too much attention to the performance of the team or individuals and by doing so loses the main focus which should be strictly in the actual governance and effectively managing the day-to-day business operations.

I fully understand Don's point or concern since managing directors are not coaches and thus tend to have very little possibility to influence on the performance side of the team. Therefore, they should set emotions aside and focus on their core responsibility which is to keep the business profitable and ensure its longevity. Since women are typically perceived as not passionate about sports as men, it could be assumed that women are more capable of staying focused and not letting emotions to take over and potentially disrupt their rational decision-making.

Don: *"...then the focus is in a wrong place, when they start to think more about the sport performance itself and they start to follow it more intensively and they lose the focus on the leadership and the finance and they do not see them as important, but other than that sports leadership is normal management, just like in any other field."*

"...silloin se vähän suuntautuu väärään kohtaan, kun sitä ne alkaa miettiä, että...sitä urheilusuoritusta ja sitä ne alkaa liikaa seuraamaan sitä urheilua ja sitä ne ei enää keskity siihen johtamiseen ja siihen taloudenpitoon ja ne ei näe sitä niinku yhtä tärkeänä, mut kyllä se on niinku normaalia johtamista."

Carl: *"...must be a pretty damn good relationship with the financiers and sponsors, and one must be able to say also no to those sponsors if the potential cooperation is not in harmony with your own vision and strategy...there certainly are a lot of temptations to do something totally different than what would be truly relevant and fostering from the perspective of the organization and sport itself. One must be able to concentrate on the right things also financially. And what, for example, we have done in our vision and strategy...we have included there a clear statement that says that we are getting involved with projects and certain affairs with our partners only if they support our strategic goal. Because otherwise there will be too many meanderings and then the focus will be lost."*

"...pitää olla ihan hemmetin hyvät suhteet rahoittajiin, ja pitää osata sanoa myös ei niinku niille rahoittajille, jos se ei kohtaa niitä asioita mitä se oma visio ja strategia sanoo...että täällähän olisi hirveästi houkutuslähteitä tekemään jotain ihan muuta kuin mitä tämän järjestön, tämän urheilun, tämän liikunnan eteenpäin viemiseksi olennaista. Pitää osata keskittyä oikeisiin juttuihin niinku sen rahoituksen puolelta. Ja mitä me ollaan esim. tehty, meidän visiossa ja strategiassa...me ollaan tehty sinne selkeä lause, että me lähdetään hankkeisiin ja tiettyihin yhteistyökumppaneiden kanssa tehtäviin asioihin mukaan vain jos se tukee sitä meidän strategista päämäärää. Koska muuten tulee liikaa rönsyjä ja sitten se fokus häviää."

Carl: "...in sports, feelings are running high...which can easily blind also the leader...that some financial decisions may cause more negative emotions at a later stage than the positive emotions the decisions have created on the spot when more money was spent than what the organization had available. So, the emotions took over and led to a wrong decision or action and has consequences for several years to come."

"...et urheilussa tunteet on niin paljon pinnalla...että mennään enemmän eteenpäin siinä tunnejutussa...että se (talouteen liittyvät ratkaisut) aiheuttaa kuitenkin myöhemmin enemmän negatiivisia tunnelatauksia kuin mitä se on tuonut hyviä tunnelatauksia ehkä siinä tilanteessa, kun sitä rahaa on käytetty enemmän kuin olisi ollut tarjolla. Eli se tunnelataus on johtanut vääränlaiseen päätökseen tai toimintaan ja sillä on seurauksia useiksi vuosiksi sillä päätökselle."

One interviewee, Mike, strongly believed that the largest problem in Finland are the complex organizational structures. Compared to business entities or corporations, sports sector is suffering from having unnecessary middlemen, sort of cabinets, that are slowing down the operations and thus affecting negatively to organizations' efficiency. The organizational structures should be much lighter and the actual sports leaders, not the boards of trustees or cabinets, should have the highest authority in making the decisions on the most fundamental issues. Sports leaders are the ones with the first-hand knowledge and thus are most capable of making wise decisions. According to Mike, these redundant layers in structures should be eliminated.

5.2. Women as sports leaders

Defining an ideal sports leader in previous chapter provides a good ground for finding answers whether women are believed to be as capable as men to live up to the expectations set for an ideal sports leader. Researchers have examined whether there are differences in leadership styles between men and women, and some claim the differences are only minor, but some argue the styles tend to be quite different. As Eagly (2007) points out, the relatively small differences in styles can be explained by the fact that the expectations for leaders are the same regardless of leader's gender. However, very often women are confronted with a struggle of trying to be women and leaders at the same time. On the one hand, women may avoid using too agentic type of leadership style due to a fear of appearing non-feminine or being proclaimed as a "bitch" as they are aware that both demeanors often lead to negative reactions by the perceivers. And then on the other hand, which I have personally witnessed,

women may exaggerate some of the “expected” masculine leader qualities such as toughness and directness, even if it is against their own nature, to gain trust and authority. Therefore, women leaders find themselves “between a rock and a hard place” when they are trying to find a management style that is concurrently acceptable and efficient (e.g. Eagly 2007).

Furthermore, research shows that women with outstanding accomplishments, at a male gender-typed task in particular (such as sport leader positions), are perceived very differently than their successful counterparts. Female leaders with undeniable achievements tend to be judged as less pleasant human beings as equally successful male leaders or less successful female leaders (Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs & Tamkins 2004). Another research indicates that when a woman leader indulges herself in agentic or masculine personal conduct, she is very easily penalized for such behavior in the forms of social rejection (from both women and men) and/or exclusion from promotions and other rewards (Eagly & Karau 2011). The same dilemma, negative reactions toward successful women, does not transpire in roles that are traditionally occupied by women (Heilman *et al* 2004). Thus, in sports management, which has traditionally been very masculine in nature, women’s chances to be selected to influential leader positions is very marginal. Even if she manages to fight her way to the boardroom, she must go an extra mile to substantiate her skills and capabilities – and she has to do that in a manner that does not irritate her male, and female, colleagues.

These learned gender roles sit so tight in our minds that it has significant effects on women’s chances in gaining high leadership positions. However, research substantiates that in contemporary organizations women’s typical management style has proven to be more effective than the leadership style men tend to comply with. Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell & Ristikari (2011) found out that women leaders have a higher tendency to practice so called transformational leadership style which comprises of attributes such as showing care for the subordinates in terms of inspiring and supporting them in their career paths.

In the name of gender equality, it was very encouraging to find out that all the seven male interviewees think that women, in overall, have what it takes to be a good sports leader. In fact, most of them emphasized that it is not about gender at all but more so of hiring a person that fits best for the position in question. Offhandedly most of the interviewees could not even see much of a difference in leadership skills between men and women. Therefore, I tried to avoid too glaring generalization when discussing the differences between the characteristics of males and females but since one of my intentions was to point out the advantages of having both genders in the organizations’ executive roles and in the

management boards, it required at least moderate generalization to bring forth the traits and characteristics which often are more dominant or more distinct amongst one of the genders.

Paul: "I believe that it may be that many men fall into practicing some old-school leadership style, and hopefully women do not demean themselves by doing the same but rather use their own strengths which lie in emotional intelligence and empathy as well as in the knowledge of human nature, these sort of humane features which I think are especially important in sports management, because after all this is a pretty soft world, and this is mainly about working with people and voluntary work, and in that the inner motivation plays a huge role in every level, so finding that motivation also here in sports management (like in sports itself) is vital. And I believe that women might be, and I am sure they are, even better at understanding and exalting that inner motivation and leading by means of it."

"Mä uskon, että saattaa olla, että moni mies sortuu siihen, että ne lähtee vetämään jotain vanhanaikaista johtamisen roolimallia ja toivon mukaan naiset ei sorru tähän samaan sitten vaan käyttävät juuri niitä omia vahvuuksia, jotka on täällä tunneälyn ja empatiakyvyn puolella ja ihmistuntemuksessa, tämmöisiä niinku inhimillisiä piirteitä, jotka mun mielestä ennen kaikkea urheilujohtamisessa on tosi tärkeitä, että tämä on kuitenkin aika pehmeä maailma ja tämä on niinku ihmistyötä ja ihmisten kanssa toimimista ja vapaaehtoistyötä ja se sisäinen motivaatio ratkaisee niinku joka tasolla, niin niinku sen löytäminen ja täällä urheiluorganisaatiossa niinku urheilussakin, niin on se kaiken a ja o. Ja mä uskon, että naiset varmaan ovat, ja ovatkin, jopa niinku parempia ymmärtämään sitä sisäistä motivaatiota ja kaivamaan sitä esille ja sen kautta niinku johtamaan."

In today's society we are almost forcedly trying to diminish stereotypes and reach the gender equality, as complete as possible. It appears as if we no longer want to have men and women, but rather just persons. People apparently believe that when we stop talking about men and women, and we no longer make distinctions between the two, we will eventually also reach the gender equality. Certainly also in the ideal world, both men and women have equal opportunities to live their lives and to reach their dreams, whether it is advancing in one's career or getting equal pay for equal work, but I do not think that we should force the two genders to become one. Diversity enriches the society, and as I have mentioned earlier, abundant research show that it also improves business performance if utilized wisely. Cloverpop (2017), for instance, discovered in its research that highly diverse teams make better business decisions and are more innovative, and thus improve the overall performance of the company. The research revealed that teams, as opposed to individuals, are able to make better business decisions, and moreover, "compared to individual decision makers,

all-male teams make better business decisions 58 percent of the time (Figure 1), while gender diverse teams do so 73 percent of the time” (Cloverpop 2017).



Figure 1. Diverse teams make better decisions (Cloverpos 2017)

Today’s society is constantly aiming to go into more gender-neutral direction, and consequently stereotypes are slowly being eradicated. This is good in many respects, but at the same time, however, we should also cherish the characteristics and qualities of different sexes, because diversity (whether it is in viewpoints, management methods, and whatnots) enriches our lives. Thus, the society should not impose a single model on people. In other words, women should not have to try to be like men (unless it is natural to them), and men should not have to force themselves to behave like women. Even if we dream of full gender equality, we must not play off our natural gender identities against it, but we need to find other means to solve the issues regarding e.g. equal pay and equal career advancement opportunities.

Paul: “I think it is a mistake to think that women should somehow compare themselves to men so that when a woman becomes like a male leader, she is finally accepted...I would rather think that there is now room for female leadership, since nowadays it’s all about emotional intelligence and coaching-like approach, empathy and anti-hierarchical

leadership. In my opinion, women should just come here but with their own strengths and to dare to challenge. It is probably so that boldness and courage play a crucial role here...that a woman dares to come challenge this manly and perhaps even a bit old-fashioned world. And not so that women should somehow adapt or learn from men in order to do well but rather so that women utilize their own strengths...but if I had to say one thing (that would help women) I would say that there needs to be courage. Even that is courage that a woman is aspiring to this masculine world and then begins to change things through her own strengths, rather than aping the behavior of men and confining herself to what is considered normal and acceptable around here.”

”Mun mielestä on virhe ajatella niin, että naisten pitäisi verrata jotenkin miehiä, että sitten kun naisesta tulee miesjohtajan kaltainen, niin sitten se kelpaa vaan, että jotenkin mieluummin mä ajattelisin niin, että tässä ajassa on nyt tilaa nimenomaan just naisjohtajuudelle, jossa kysymys on just tunneälystä ja tämmöisestä valmentavasta otteesta, empatiasta ja ei-hierarkkisesta johtamisesta. Mun mielestä naisten pitäisi tulla tänne vaan niinku omilla vahvuuksillaan ja uskaltaa haastaa. Varmaan tässä on...tässä tulee uskallus ja rohkeus aika tärkeäksi, että uskaltaa tulla haastamaan tätä miehistä maailmaa ja ehkä vähän vanhanaikaistakin maailmaa. Että ei niin, että naisten pitäisi jotenkin mukautua tai oppia miehiltä, että ne pärjäis vaan että omilla vahvuuksillaan, mutta jos pitäisi yksi sana sanoa, niin varmaan, että pitää olla rohkea. Jo se, että pyrkii tällaiseen miehiseen maailmaan ja alkaa sitten muuttamaan asioita niinku omien vahvuuksien kautta eikä niin, että peesaamaan, että kuinka täällä nyt kuuluisi olla.”

Although, research from twenty years ago (Diekman & Eagly 1999) indicated that people already back then believed that women’s stereotype will evolve and adopt more agentic or masculine characteristics along time. In other words, women were believed to become more like men with regards to demeanor and personality, and this in turn would then improve women’s chances in conquering space from male-dominated fields.

5.2.1. Women’s perceived strengths and weaknesses

In a gender-neutral world we would not even consider comparing the differences between men and women but in today’s world of sport the gender balance in the executive positions is still so blatant, that we cannot ignore looking at reasons for the situations from the gender perspective. Therefore, I intentionally and even a bit exaggeratedly examined typical differences in the traits and behavior between males and females. Before going any further, I want to emphasize that over half of the interviewees stated that they do not want to lapse into stereotyping males and females. They think that selecting a person for a job should not

have anything to do with what type of sex chromosome the person was born with. Personality traits can and should be compared and used as a ground for selecting the most fit person for the job, but automatic gender-based stereotyping should be avoided. If the interviewee stance was true also in practice, it would indicate that the dilemma investigated here should not at all be explained by the gender issue per se, but the reasons for women's absence in the top positions should instead be found elsewhere.

Don: *"...I am not even able to discuss such a thing that they (men and women) would be somehow different...I do not see any difference. There is way too much talk about it and talk about feminism and whatnot...it's totally unnecessary. It's not about gender, it's about the person himself or herself."*

"...en mä pysty edes keskustelemaan sellaisesta asiasta, että ne (miehet ja naiset) olis jotenkin erilaisia. Siitä puhutaan ihan liikaa ja keskustellaan ja puhutaan feminismistä ja kaiken maailman...se on ihan hössötystä mun mielestä. Se on jokaisesta itsestä kiinni."

Mark: *"...I think it should not make any difference whether you are a woman or a man...because there really isn't much of a difference between women and men, that a man is more stupid than a woman or vice versa...or that there is a certain brain capacity depending on the gender...I think the most important thing is that both genders are reasonably well represented (in boards, etc.) because it brings different perspectives and simply even due to the fact that the athletes represent both sexes quite equally which is why it is important that the sports leaders and decision makers also represent both sexes. And what comes to these differences, I do not really think that women have any qualities that men would't have, and at least not the opposite, that men would have some qualities that women do not...at least I am not aware of such thing..."*

"Mä näen, että sen pitäisi olla yhdentekevä asia, että onko nainen vai mies...että ei naisten ja miesten välillä sillä tavalla ole eroa, että mies olisi tyhmempi kuin nainen tai toisinpäin...että siellä olisi joku tietty kapasiteetti pääkopassa että...mun mielestä olis tärkeintä se, että molemmat sukupuolet on edustettuna kohtuullisen kattavasti, koska se tuo erilaisia näkökulmia ja johtuen jo pelkästään siitä, että urheilijoista sitten on huomattava osa toista sukupuolta ja senkin takia on tärkeää, että ne urheilujohtajat ja päättäjät on molempia sukupuolia. Ja sit näistä eroista, niin en mä siihenkään oikein välttämättä oikein usko, että naisilla olis jotain ominaisuuksia, joita miehillä ei ole tai ainakaan niin päin, että miehillä olis jotain mitä naisilla ei...siitä mulla ei ainakaan ole mitään tietoa, että miehillä olisi..."

Less than half of the interviewees, however, were able to name some traits and features which they believe are more common amongst women than men. Moreover, during the interviews also those respondents who initially were unwilling to categorize men and women

by their characters, imperceptibly named some strengths (and weaknesses) which they have experienced to be more typical for women than men. Over half of the respondents, four interviewees to be exact, mentioned three same attributes which they think are distinct strengths of women; *commitment*, *persistence*, and *work ethic*. According to these respondents, women tend to give their everything when they get on with something and do not give up until the task is completed. Other mentioned strengths were *punctuality*, *orderliness*, *emotional intelligence*, and *motivational skills*. Additionally, one interviewee thinks that many times women expect or *demand*, and rightfully so, much more from the subordinates and the work environment than men do. One respondent also thinks that especially younger female generation is more *internationally oriented*, more *skillful*, and has better *language skills* than their counterparts.

Don: *“Punctuality. A woman is very punctual. And many women are very committed to their jobs and give their everything when they go about it. Those are two things that I like.”*

”Täsmällisyys. Nainen on tosi täsmällinen. Ja monet naiset on tosi sitoutuneita siihen hommaan ja ne antaa kaikkensa, kun ne lähtee siihen. Ne on ne kaksi asiaa, joista mä tykkään.”

Mike: *“I think women are more sensitive about detecting and interpreting the emotional signals, and they are not so, how would I say it, corrupted is a wrong word, but they do not participate in the foul plays which have recently been an issue in Fifa, IIHF and some others. Women, in my opinion, are not prone to this type of activity but merely advocate their personal task at hand. And also, I think younger women nowadays are very international, skilled in languages, capable, and there really are great talents out there.”*

”Mun mielestä naiset on herkempiä lukemaan niitä emotionaalisia asioita ja ne ei ole niin, miten mä sanoisin, korruptuneisuus on väärä sana, mutta mennä mukaan semmoisiin peleihin mitä on ollut tässä, Fifasta ja kansainvälisestä jääkiekkoliitosta ja kaikista muistakin, niin ne ei ole niinku mun mielestä mukana semmoisessa vaan ne ajaa puhtaasti sitä omaa asiaa. Ja sitten mun mielestä nuoret naiset tällä hetkellä todella kansainvälisiä, kielitaitoisia, osaavia, ja niitä niinku löytyy taustaltaan ihan loistotyyppejä.”

Mark: *”...and often women require a great deal from the work environment. Male leaders work and operate more alone, but female leaders demand much more from the team and the environment. They really do, and why would not they.”*

”...ja usein naiset vaatii ympäristöltä tosi paljon. Miesjohtajat menee ehkä enemmän yksin ja tekee, mutta naisjohtajat vaatii tiimiltä ja ympäristöltä paljon enemmän. Oikeasti vaatii, ja niin pitääkin vaatia.”

Even though it is very promising that all the seven males in my study, personally think that the gender is totally irrelevant in the recruitment process (and the final selection of the candidate), and even see many strengths and great qualities in women, they nonetheless believe that the most evident obstacle to women's progression into leadership positions is still the commonplace prejudice against women in the world of sports. The prevailing attitude is changing but it is doing so very slowly. In the later chapters I will discuss how the change will happen and what could be done to speed up the change.

Peter: "Prejudice and discriminative attitude still exist for sure. It relates also to the fact that very often female leaders can be found in women sports such as figure skating, gymnastics... I mean of course they are also men's sports, but usually they are associated with girls. Sports in Finland really longs for something...Maija Innanen as the Managing Director of the Stadium Foundation...okay, a good start, but before we get like 10-15 female leaders into these kind of key associations, key organizations, the situation cannot normalize, because the prejudice will not disappear until that happens, because the visible work that women are doing now is so diminutive...I come across this very often, that in today's Finland no one is so stupid that would e.g. publicly criticize or denounce women's doings, but when I talk to the guys out there, I am referring to athletes, they pretty much undervalue and play women down as if the work they are doing (in/for sports) is just a hobby for them."

"Onhan sitä (ennakkoluuloja ja asenteellisuutta) edelleen. Se liittyy myös siihen, että kun naisjohtajat on aina sitten sellaisissa naisten lajeissa...ne on taitoluistelussa, voimistelussa...siis onhan ne myös miesten lajeja, mutta leimallisestihan ne on tyttöjen lajeja. Että kyllähän meidän urheilu kaipaisi jotain...Maija Innanen Stadionsäätötoimitusjohtaja...okei, hyvä alku, mutta ennen ku me saadaan tällaisiin niin kun avainliittoihin, avainjärjestöihin sellainen, että 10-15 naisjohtajaa, niin sitä ennen se tilanne ei voi normalisoitua, koska sitä ennen ennakkoluulot ei häviä mihinkään, koska niinku se työmässä, jota he tekee, on niin pieni...että mä törmään tosi paljon just siihen, että eihän kukaan nyky-Suomessa nyt niin hullu ole, että julkisuudessa vaikka menis arvostelevaan ja haukkumaan naisten tekemisiä, mutta sitten kun tuolla juttelee jätkien kanssa, ihan puhutaan urheilijoista, niin on se aika semmoista niin kun että mitä toikin tuossa puuhastelee."

5.2.2. Future and the benefits of the women leaders

Many studies (e.g. Hunt, Layton & Prince 2015; Hunt, Prince, Dixon-Fyle & Yee 2018), have shown advantages of teams which are diverse in terms of skills, age, culture, personality and, and gender. Women, for instance, are praised for their outstanding people

skills and multi-tasking abilities, which are partly owing to their double duty as a mother and an employee. Their added value and effectiveness as leaders materialize also in the forms of new ideas and energy as well as different perspectives and ways of thinking, which women have developed through their personal experiences, which, in turn, are very often different than those of men. Diverse teams, when well led and right people have been placed in the right positions, are more innovative and creative and at the end, essential to a company's success.

According to a study by Moore, Carlson, Whitten & Clement (2008), male executives tend to perceive the value of women leaders very differently than women executives themselves do. Women leaders value women's contributions, from performance as well as from gender perspective, to companies more beneficial than their male counterparts do. In this chapter, I will unfold the thoughts of the male leaders I interviewed for my study, about whether there should be more female counterparts in the industry. In the same context, I also inquired them what added value they believe women could bring to the table. All seven male interviewees think that the field of sports management calls for more women leaders. Six of them are strongly in favor of bringing the female talent into the board rooms and only one interviewee, Don, is a bit cautious in his statement. Don surely welcomes skillful women into the industry but would not obsessively start searching for them. However, he also states that he would like to see the traditional masculinity of the industry to sink away and adds that that if he had two well-matched applicants, a man and a woman, he would rather choose the woman because he believes she would be more capable of carrying out the job.

Don: *“Well, I am not a spokesperson for equality or something like that, but I think that if there are good women out there, they can certainly become sports leaders and there is nothing bad about that, but I do not think we need to intentionally start looking for them.”*

”No en mä ole mikään tasa-arvoajattelija tai tuommoinen, mut mun mielestä, jos on hyviä naisia, niin ne voi tulla urheilujohtajiksi ja siinä asiassa ei ole mitään huonoa, mut ei semmoisia nyt etsimällä kannata alkaa etsimään.”

Don: *“Yes, it is pretty much a tradition, but I want it to change. I do not see any difference between them (women and men), so if I had two equal candidates, a man and a woman, I'd rather take the woman... because I know she is more capable of doing the job.”*

”Niin, se on se perinne, mutta haluan, että se muuttuu. En mä näe niissä (naisissa ja miehissä) mitään eroa eli jos mulla olis kaksi tasavahvaa, mies ja nainen, niin mä ottaisin mieluummin sen naisen...koska mä tiedän, että pystyy paremmin hoitamaan sen homman.”

Many of the interviewees emphasized that women’s emotional intelligence and their ability to look at things in a more multidimensional way are qualities that could bring some added value into the equation. Also, one of the interviewees see that increase in the number of female leaders would benefit the entire sports culture as it is quite evident that women would further develop the conditions and gain more support for girl and women athletes, and as a result of this, sports would be more of a nation's thing than it is now.

Mark: *“Well, women are associated with the perception of being capable of looking at things in a more multidimensional way, and perhaps this type of stereotypes, that women can maybe analyze certain things more softly and handle some issues in more multi-faceted and subtle manner...and men do not necessarily even realize or acknowledge these things or signals...”*

”No kyllä naisiin liittyy mielikuva siitä, että naiset pystyy ehkä jollain tavalla moniulotteisemmin katsomaan asioita ja ehkä tällaiset stereotyypiat, että naiset pystyy ehkä pehmeämmin arvioimaan jotain asioita ja moniulotteisemmin tai ehkä hienotunteisemmin ottamaan jotain asioita...ja miehet ei välttämättä tajua ollenkaan, että mistä on kysymys...”

Peter: *“That would only benefit our sports culture. It would go through the entire field and all the levels (coaching, etc.)...it would be more of a nation's thing than it is now. And especially, when more and more women become more visible in leadership positions related to top-level sports, smart women that is, and on the basis of merit, it would certainly be a mere benefit.”*

”Sehän olis koko meidän urheilulle vaan hyödyksi. Se menis koko kentän läpi (valmennus, ym.)...se olis enemmän koko kansan juttu ku se on nyt. Ja varsinkin niin, että kun huippu-urheilun yhteyksissä alkais näkymään enemmän ja enemmän naisia, fiksuja tietysti, ja päässeet ansioillaan siihen, niin tottakai siitä olis pelkkää hyötyä.”

Paul: *“Of course. When I worked in Sweden, half of my time there I had a woman as my manager, and I was really happy. Perhaps the strength and the future of women will be lie in, in which you just referred to, emotional intelligence, and when these hierarchies gradually disappear, we’ll need a new kind of leadership which is based on the coaching-like leadership ... emotional intelligence, empathy, that type of things, so I believe that’s where women’s strengths will come into play.”*

”Tottakai. Se aika, kun mä olin Ruotsissa, mulla oli puolet siitä ajasta esimiehenä nainen ja mä olin tosi tyytyväinen. Ehkä se naisten vahvuus ja tulevaisuus tulee olemaan just tässä niinku viittasit tähän tunneälyyn ja ku nämä hierarkiat vähitellen katoaa, niin me tarvitaan uudenlaista johtajuutta, joka liittyy just tällaiseen valmentavaan johtajuuteen...tunneälyyn, empatiakykyyn, sen tyyppisiin asioihin, niin mä uskon, että naisilla on niinku siellä vahvuuksia.”

Mark: *The premise of our board is that both genders should be represented...because it truly makes sense. We just recently hired a woman into a top-level coaching position, and as in that area all the other coaches are men, I was very happy that we chose a woman into this position. Gender wasn't a recruitment criterion, but because all the other coaches are men and still half of the athletes are women, it is good that there is now also a female in the coach community.*

Kyllä meilläkin lähdetään hallituksessa siitä, että pitää olla tietty osa tai halutaan, että molemmat sukupuolet on edustettuna...että ku se on järkevää. Ja nyt ku mekin palkattiin meille nainen korkeatasoiseen valmentajan tehtävään...ku se paikka oli avoimena ja ku meillä on kaikki valmentajat miehiä, niin mä olin todella iloinen, että saatiin palkattua siihen naishenkilö. Vaikka se sukupuoli ei ole rekrytointiperuste, mut ku kaikki muut valmentajat on miehiä ja kuitenkin niistä urheilijoista puolet on naisia, niin on se hyvä, että siinä valmentaja yhteisössä on niinku toista sukupuolta.

Peter: *It is now so that, for example, the media... in fact, it is quite surprising how much it has influence on men's attitude when a woman becomes a media expert of a significant sport...there will be a first female expert in track and field next summer. And then there has been women's national team coach in football, Marianne Miettinen...Virpi Sarasvuo in cross-country skiing, which is a quite manly sport...so this is kind of one way to soften attitudes...but they (women media experts) are often under a lot of pressure, because there's always a risk of them not succeeding in their role and if that happens the attitudes go ten steps back.*

Nythän on niin, että esim. mediaan...itse asiassa yllättävän paljon muuten miesten asenteisiin vaikuttaa se, että merkittävän lajin media-asiantuntijaksi tulee nainen...nyt tulee yleisurheiluun ensimmäinen ens kesänä. Sitten on ollut jalkapallossa naisten maajoukkuevalmentaja, Marianne Miettinen...Virpi Sarasvuo hiihdossa, aika miehinen laji...niin se on tavallaan yks reitti pehmittää asenteita...mut niillä on usein kovot paineet, sillä siinä on aina riski, että jos ne ei onnistu siinä roolissa, niin sitten asenteissa mennään taas 10 taaksepäin.

Various research (Noland, Moran & Kotschwar 2016; theBoardlist 2016; Catalyst 2014) also supports the claim that women leaders may have a positive effect on company's performance. For instance, a quite recent global survey of close to 22,000 firms from 91 countries construed that “for profitable firms, a move from no female leaders to 30 percent representation is associated with a 15 percent increase in the net revenue margin” (Noland

et al 2016). Furthermore, theBoardlist (2016) went through different sources and enlisted five well-grounded reasons why companies should seriously consider adding more women into leadership positions (see Table 4).

Table 4. Five reasons why having female leaders benefits the entire company (theBoardlist 2016)

	Female quality	Benefit for the company
1.	More women = better problem-solving	Time and time again, researchers find that diversity of thought leads to better problem solving—when we collaborate with people of different genders, sexual orientations, ethnicities and race in our workplace, we all do better work.
2.	Female leaders are trusted	More American workers perceive female executives as being honest and ethical than they do male executives. Pew’s “Women and Leadership” surveyed Americans in 2015 and found that 34% say women are better at this, while only 3% say men are better at it (64% say there’s no difference).
3.	Women leaders are more collaborative	
4.	Women make terrific mentors	While studies have shown women have a more difficult time finding mentors than men, 30% of those surveyed by Pew Research felt women made better mentors than men—while only 5% felt men were better mentors than women. Mentorship and sponsorship can be incredibly important for career growth and job satisfaction, so having increased supply “on the bench” in your company can give your employees an edge.
5.	Millennial women are more educated than men	Today’s young women are starting their careers better educated than men. A more educated workforce is essential for implementing innovative techniques, challenging the status quo and introducing new business approaches. If women are more educated, women are critical tools to ignite the growth of a company.

These findings imply that it would be rational and forward-looking to get more and more competent women into prominent positions, in sports or whichever industry, in which they would succeed and which, in turn, would then substantiate women’s capabilities as great leaders. This would inevitably be an effective way to open more eyes, men’s in particular, and break the gender stereotypes associated with a typical leader.

5.2.3. Is there a certain woman type that has better chances in being successful?

It is universally agreed upon that it has not been made easy for women leaders, particularly in male dominated domains, to pull through the obstacles standing their way when working up the ladder to the top management and gaining enduring acceptance from male, as well as female, colleagues. But is there a certain woman type that appears to be more successful in

the masculine playing fields, or do women have to enact in a certain way, even against their own nature, to gain approval and authority?

Previous research on leadership suggests that more communal characteristics will increase their importance in good leadership (e.g. Eagly & Carli 2003), but abundant literature also claims that managerial success will be difficult to achieve without including the traditionally valued agentic qualities such as unscrupulous determination and cold-bloodedness into one's leadership style (e.g. Moore *et al* 2008, Heilman 2012). Various studies demonstrate that top-level female leaders manifest more masculine features than inferior women managers (Moore *et al* 2008, Carlson & Whitten 2008). In fact, the stereotype of a woman has been and will continue to transform, and one of the changes has been the increase in the adoption of agentic features (Diekmann & Eagly 2000). It can be concluded that women, who desire to succeed as leaders, ought to be notably tough, resilient, and competent. They have to be able to cope with potential underestimation and misjudgment, along with discomfort and even distress.

The findings from the interviews supported both visions; most interviewees strongly believe that women should be able to be themselves and use their innate strengths (such as emotional intelligence, empathy, and mentoring skills), but others were afraid, and felt that it is a pity, that women, in fact, have to enact more like men counterparts if they want to gain leadership positions from the top.

Peter: *“I am afraid they (women) have to be (like men), but I think it's a pity, if it really is so. But I see somewhat brighter future for women, because the selection of these salary directors is made by the highest-ranking elected officials, and inevitably in time, these officials are getting younger (and their way of thinking is very different from the representatives of the current generation in charge).”*

”Mä pelkään, että pitää olla, mut musta se on vähän sääli, jos pitää olla. Mut mä näen tietyn valoisamman tulevaisuuden siinä, koska nämä palkkajohtajien valinnanhan tekee luottamusjohtajat, niin väistämättähän niinku luottamusjohto nuorenee.”

Paul: *“I think it is a mistake to think that women should somehow compare themselves to men so that when a woman becomes like a male leader, she is finally accepted...I would rather think that there is now room for female leadership, since nowadays it's all about emotional intelligence and coaching-like approach, empathy and anti-hierarchical leadership. In my opinion, women should just come here but with their own strengths and to dare to challenge. It is probably so that boldness and courage play a crucial role here...that a woman dares to come challenge this manly and perhaps even a bit old-fashioned world. And not so that women should somehow adapt or learn from men in order to do well but*

rather so that women utilize their own strengths...but if I had to say one thing (that would help women) I would say that there needs to be courage. Even that is courage that a woman is aspiring to this masculine world and then begins to change things through her own strengths, rather than aping the behavior of men and confining herself to what is considered normal and acceptable around here."

"Mun mielestä on virhe ajatella niin, että naisten pitäisi verrata jotenkin miehiä, että sitten kun naisesta tulee miesjohtajan kaltainen, niin sitten se kelpaa vaan, että jotenkin mieluummin mä ajattelisin niin, että tässä ajassa on nyt tilaa nimenomaan just naisjohtajuudelle, jossa kysymys on just tunneälystä ja tämmöisestä valmentavasta otteesta, empatiasta ja ei hierarkkisesta johtamisesta. Mun mielestä naisten pitäisi tulla tänne vaan niinku omilla vahvuuksillaan ja uskaltaa haastaa. Varmaan tässä on...tässä tulee uskallus ja rohkeus aika tärkeäksi, että uskaltaa tulla haastamaan tätä miehistä maailmaa ja ehkä vähän vanhanaikaistakin maailmaa. Että ei niin, että naisten pitäisi jotenkin mukautua tai oppia miehiltä, että ne pärjäis vaan että omilla vahvuuksillaan, mutta jos pitäisi yksi sana sanoa, niin varmaan, että pitää olla rohkea. Jo se, että pyrkii tällaiseen miehiseen maailmaan ja alkaa sitten muuttamaan asioita niinku omien vahvuuksien kautta eikä niin, että peesaamaan, että kuinka täällä nyt kuuluisi olla."

Robert: *"I think that women do not probably want to put themselves forward, most of the women in the industry, who I personally know, are relatively saucy...who have the courage and who dare."*

"Se on se, et naiset ei varmaan tuo itteään esille kans silleen, et kyl nää useammat ainakin, mitä mä tunnen, on suhteellisen räväköitä...jotka uskaltaa."

The female interviewee, Sarah, stated that it is purely impossible for women to get into the board rooms out of nowhere. Majority of the current female sports leaders have advanced in their career through their own sport, either as a former elite athlete or as a coach. Typically, women's path to influential positions in national level and cross-sectional sports organizations starts from her own successful career as an athlete. The ones who, after their sports career, decide to continue their career within their sport as a paid employee or in a position of trust, specifically in female dominated sports have a good chance to climb to the top of the hierarchy. As they have first made headway within their own sport and preferably reached the highest position in the rank there, they are in very good position when the national or international level sports federations need female members in their boards or executive councils to meet the requirements of gender quota. In other words, women leaders in so called women's sports have so far had the most success in gaining ground in top positions in Finland's sports system. Sarah's notion is supported by Paul's personal observation he had made in his workplace.

Paul: "I have noticed that one of our female leaders has to deal with some disrespect, because she does not have a background as being an elite athlete, so this may be one of those hidden curricula in sports management...in order for a woman to be a credible leader, it is expected that she is a former elite athlete. But if we want our sports community to reform, I think it would be good... again we come to this diversity thing...that we get more people from outside the sport industry, who yet understand it (sports), but who appropriately look at it from the outside...and that's where I've noticed some underestimation and disdain but it stems more from this...that one does not possess strong enough background in sports...so gender per se it's really not the issue here."

"Olen huomannut, että yksi meidän naisjohtajista joutuu hiukan kokemaan pientä dissausta, koska hänellä ei itsellään ole huippu-urheilutaustaa, niin tämä voi olla urheilujohtamisessa yksi sellainen niinku piilo-opetussuunnitelma, että jotta sä voisit olla niinku uskottava naisjohtaja, niin odotetaan, että sin pitäisi vähintään omata huippu-urheilijatausta. Kun juuri, jotta urheiluyhteisö uudistuisi, niin vois just olla hyvä tai ainakin mä koen...taas tullaan tähän diversiteettiin, että me tarvitaan entistä enemmän urheilun ytimen ulkopuolelta tulevia ihmisiä, jotka ymmärtää sitä asiaa, mutta jotka katsoo sitä sopivasti ulkopuolelta ja siinä mä oon huomannut niinku sellaista aliarviointia ja dissausta enemmän just siitä näkökulmasta ja se ei mun mielestä liity tähän sukupuoleen vaan et sä et ole riittävästi urheilutaustainen."

5.3. Biggest barriers for women to gain top-level positions in sports in Finland

In this chapter, I will reveal my findings regarding the actual research question. This is the question which has interested me already for years and into which I have keenly wanted to find factual answers. My desire is to work in the top executive position in sports in the near future, so I have a strong personal interest in finding explanations into the current situation as well as possible solutions that would help myself and other women in progressing in their career. Majority of the previous research has focused on female standpoint, but the purpose of this research was to gain an understanding of how men sports executives believe are the possible reasons or biggest barriers for the slow progress of women to gain top-level positions in sports industry.

Hovden (2010) studying Norwegian sport organizations points out the prevailing negative images of female leadership as well as the positive differences in skills that the female leaders possess compared to their counterparts. Despite the women's complementary and alternative leadership skills, such as their ability to maintain a good collaborative atmosphere and their tendency to value more team work, recognized by most of the interviewees, the female leaders are seen to lack the most crucial leadership skills, such as strategic competence and the ability to make tough decisions, and therefore are not viewed

as ideal leaders. (Hovden 2010). In addition, simply the fact that men outnumber women so significantly within sport organizations has led to the misconception that women are not the suitable kind of employees (Sartore & Cunningham 2007).

5.3.1. Family-related reasons

In addition to the masculine characteristics, an ideal leader is a person who is highly available and has the possibility to dedicate most of his or her time to work. In Pfister's (2010) study on the gender hierarchies in Danish sports organizations, most leaders, regardless of sex, explained the gender imbalance to be a result of personal choice. In other words, women must basically choose between a family or a career. Similar results were seen in the study of top female sport executives in South Africa as some of the interviewees felt that the commitment level of female sport administrators in general is not very high which might be one of the main reasons for the absence of women leaders in sport positions (Titus 2011).

The aforementioned findings support the general believe that the amount of time spent at work corresponds to a person's loyalty and commitment. All this implies that women with families have a very little chance in getting a leadership role in the field of sports. However, although numerous previous studies have pointed out that parental duties compose barriers for women in their career advancement, the Pew Research survey (2015) indicates rather opposite results as "only about one-in-five say women's family responsibilities are a major reason there aren't more females in top leadership positions in business and politics (Pew Research Center 2015). There are also differences in how men and women deal with and counterbalance the obligations at home and work, with women experiencing it much more difficult than men (Carlson & Whitten 2008).

Five out of seven male interviewees imminently named family related issues as the biggest single reason why women do not advance in their careers in sports. Also, one of the two interviewees (Carl) who initially hesitated to explain women's absence by family related issues had to take his opinion back. His uppermost thought was that there are not many female sports leaders simply because they do not apply for the jobs.

Carl: "...I think it's because there are so much less women applying for those positions...so that's the bigger reason why they are not being chosen...not because they are women. I have been involved in the selection processes, and almost every time in regard to these leadership roles, more than 80% of the applicants are men and less than 20%, maybe even 10%, are women...so already the initial situation is this. What leads to it??..."

"...enemmän se on mun mielestä sitä, että naisia on vaan niin paljon vähemmän hakemassa niitä paikkoja...että se on enemmän siitä kiinni kuin siitä, että heitä ei valita. Olen ollut valintaprosesseissa mukana, niin lähestulkoon aina näissä johtajatehtävissä, niin yli 80 % niistä, jotka hakee, on ylipäättänsä miehiä ja sitten on se alle 20 %, ehkä 10 %, naisia, niin jo pelkästään siinä hakutilanteessa tilanne on tämä. Mikä siihen johtaa??..."

However, as we started to deliberate possible reasons for the phenomenon, also he assented that family related issues slow down women's career development. In other words, all the interviewees except for one, believe that women with young children or young women (below 30) without offspring who are around that age when children are typically made, often experience discrimination in the recruitment processes.

Carl: "I do not think this has nothing to do with the leadership per se, but okay...the pattern might be such that you did not get the job because you were a woman in your thirties or under thirty and the employer ended up choosing a man for the position because they were afraid of the risk of you getting pregnant and taking a maternity leave already after a year. So, the path does not sort of continue for her since she wasn't selected for the position."

"Siinä johtajuusjutussa en näe sitä, mutta okay...tässähän voi päästä siihen, että siinähan menee polku, että sä et ole päässyt ensinnäkään siihen tehtävään jossain vaiheessa sen takia, että sä olet ollut kolmekymppinen tai alle kolmekymppinen naishenkilö ja sit on pelätty sitä, että otetaanpas tähän suorittavan tason tehtävään mies sen takia, että pelätään, että se [nainen] on vuoden kuluttua äityislomalla. Niin sit se polku ei tavallaan jatku siitä ku sitä ei ole valittu siihen tehtävään."

Being a woman with children per se or simply just being a woman do not have an effect on not being selected to executive positions, but there are two other explanations why family related issues come to the play. Firstly, if young women decide to have children quite soon after their graduation, let's say at the age of 25-30, they will automatically be out of the game for a few years (in most cases) and at the same time their career development is being put on hold. At the same time, their young male counterparts take their first entry-level positions and advance in their careers without a few-year pause. In other words, women's development path stops, and when they return to the work life, experience wise they are already at a disadvantage compared to their male counterparts in the recruitment process.

Additionally, even those women who decide not to have children tend to experience same type of discrimination due to recruiters' concern of them anyhow having children in the near future. As one of the interviewees (Don) states, a company or an organization cannot be run without a leader and if the leader is absent for several months or years and in more than one instances, it undoubtedly risks the operations. Therefore, it is riskier to hire a woman than a man, but it has nothing to do with the gender itself, it is rather the fact that women tend to have bigger role and obligations in raising the offspring which often means more absences from work. However, by the same token, the interviewee also thinks that the culture is slowly changing in the direction where it is not automatically the mother who puts her career on hold and takes care of the upbringing. Stay-at-home dad is not an unforeseen phenomenon, but one cannot say that it has yet become a part of the Finnish culture. I personally believe that as long as the gender pay gap remains as prominent as it is now, that women are typically being paid far less than what men are paid, the number of fathers taking up more of the caregiving responsibilities will not rise.

Don: "Many times the problem of women is that they have long breaks when they give birth to children. So that's an issue but there are highly passionate women who won't stay away for the whole 9 months but rather only 3 months and they arrange things in a way that the return to work is possible. And that is, for sure, a weakness of women, because the company cannot operate without its managing director for 9 months all of a sudden. Interviewer: So, the family reasons can be considered the biggest obstacle? Don: Unfortunately yes, although it has recently evened out a bit as also men have started to take care of the children, but one cannot say that it's already an integral part of the Finnish culture. So, in my opinion, this is very often the obstacle to women's success...for instance, if there are, let's say, 3 children, there will be three longer breaks in the working life and that will affect the opportunities for advancement. It's just a fact, and we should not even bother to try to tell otherwise or try to deny it."

"Naisten ongelmahan tulee monta kertaa siitä, että niille jää pitkät tauot, kun ne synnyttää lapsia, niin siinä ne tulee, mut sit semmoiset kauhean intohimoiset naisjohtajat ei ole 9 kuukautta pois vaan 3 kk ja ne järjestää ne asiat jollain muulla tavalla. Sehän on tietysti naisten heikkous, että et sä voi olla ilman toimitusjohtajaa yhtäkkiä 9 kk. Haastattelija: Eli perhesyyt on se suurin este? Don: Se on valitettavasti, että nythän se on vähän tasoittunut, että miehetkin hoitaa niitä lapsia, mutta ei se Suomen kulttuurissa ole vielä päällä. Että se on mun mielestä monta kertaa esteenä naisten menestymiselle...eli jos on esim. 3 lasta, niin tulee kolme isompaa taukoa siinä työelämässä ja se vaikuttaa niihin etenemismahdollisuuksiin. Se on vaan fakta ja sitä on ihan turha niinku kiertää tai kieltää, etteikö näin olis."

Another reason why the interviewees think that family related issues have a retardant effect on women's ascending career, is that women value the time spent with their children so high up in the rank that sports become less meaningful. They like working within sports but their level of passion or willingness to chip in some extra time is not necessarily as high as men's. As one of the interviewees explained women's take on sports; it (sports) is not utmost important in the wholeness of this universe. There are more important and meaningful things in the world than who runs fastest a hundred meters or throws the javelin the farthest.

Peter: "...I have a feeling that sports as a phenomenon does not really interest women enough, other than maybe through their own career, to which they regardless have given their all. Do not get me wrong, I am not saying that women do not have passion for sports, but it's different...they may have passion for their own career, their own sport, and when I think of Finland in this way...so that if women were excluded from our sport, our competition organizations would not be able to operate anymore...because it is women who are running the show in the junior competitions...it's women who do all the work there...so there is passion but it's different."

"...jotenkin musta tuntuu, että urheilu ei niinku ilmiönä myöskään välttämättä tavallaan kiinnostanut naisia riittävästi kuin ehkä sen oman uran kautta, jolle kyllä on annettu kaikki. Siis älä ymmärrä väärin, ettei naisilla olisi paloa urheiluun, mut se on erilaista...niillä on ehkä paloa siihen omaan uraan, omaan lajiin ja jos mä ajattelen Suomea niin ku näin, että jos naiset otettaisiin pois meidän urheilusta, niin eihän meillä ole kilpailujärjestöissä enää...ainahan naiset on junnikilpailuissa ne, jotka tekee siellä ne hommat...eli se on erilaista se palo."

Mike: "The biggest obstacle (for women) that still exists in Finland is this family thing and the kids and so on...if you look at someone like Katarina Staggelberg, who is a leader at Coke, so she was on a maternity leave for 4-5 months and then came back, so that kind of people...and I am not saying that women should immediately come back from the maternity leave, but I am just saying that people should give their all if they want to succeed in the path they have chosen...but it is still very typical that a woman stays at home and a man...although, it has already somewhat changed, but the fact that sports management is 24/7 job...it is what it is...neither are business leaders no longer working from eight to four, but this (sport management) is especially time consuming."

"Yks mikä Suomessa on vielä esteenä on kuitenkin tämä perhe juttu ja lapset ja muut että...jos sä katot vaikka joku Katarina Staggelberg, joka on Cokiksen johtaja, niin oli 4-5 kk äitiyslomalla ja tulee takaisin, että tuon tyyppisiä ihmisiä...enkä mä nyt tarkoita, että heti pitäisi heti tulla äitiyslomalta, mutta se että ihmiset sit satsaa siihen omaan juttuun eikä...että kyllä tämä vähän on vielä sitä, että nainen on kotona ja mies...vaikka kyllä se on muuttunut jo, mutta että urheilujohtaminen on 24/7...että se on vähän semmoinen juttu, että se ei ole ihan niinku...vaikka yritysjohtajakaan ei ole enää niinku kahdeksasta neljään, mutta tämä varsinkin on hyvin aikaa vievää."

Mark: "...somehow I see it (sports) as being a bit like our society in overall, that... that especially the world of sport associations...that on average it is somewhat more masculine and therefore it may appeal more to men than to women. So, there is something very primitive about it... and one cannot say that sports per se is extremely important in the world... that there are many more important things in the world... in the big picture, it does not matter who runs one hundred meters fastest or throws the javelin the farthest..."

"...mä jotenkin näen sen niin, että se on niinku ehkä vähän samantyyppinen kuin meidän yhteiskunta muutenkin, että...että varsinkin tämä urheilujärjestömaailma on...että tämä on jossain määrin maskuliinisempaa keskimääräisesti, että se ehkä vetoaa enemmän miehiin kuin naisiin. Että jotain siinä on sellaista alkukantaista...ja ei vois sanoa, että urheilu on hirveän tärkeää maailmassa...että maailmassa on paljon tärkeämpiäkin asioita jollain tavalla...kokonaisuutena, että ei sillä ole merkitystä, että kuka juoksee sataa nopeiten tai heittää keihästä pisimmälle..."

In other words, many women are lacking the same type of passion than men tend to have. It can perhaps be explained with the bigger role which women more often than men have with raising their families. It could also be explained with a difference between the natures of the opposite genders. Men have a bigger tendency to be very competitive in nature, what sports, to a large extent, is all about. It is about competing and being the best. Women, on the other hand, do not think that competing is the most important aspect of doing sports.

Irregular working hours is very typical for the sports industry. Especially in higher positions it is not usually from eight to four job, but one has to "sacrifice" late evenings and weekends to do the job. Half of the interviewees think that these irregular working hours makes it more challenging and less appealing to women to get involved in higher level positions which require working in the evenings and weekends.

Mike: "...women do not go after them (positions) very aggressively, even if they had the same talents than men, but perhaps they have not wanted to sacrifice as much of their lives as it requires..."

"...naiset ei hyvin aggressiivisesti tuu, vaikka niillä olis kykyjä ihan samalla tavalla kuin miehillä, mutta ehkä eivät ole halunneet antaa elämästään niin paljon ku se vaatii..."

5.3.2. Masculinity of the sports industry

In the earlier chapters I explicated the three theories related to masculinity which I originally believed could best explain the superiority of men in the world of sport. A good leader is expected to possess traits such as self-confidence, assertiveness, independence, and

determination, which are characteristics commonly associated with men. Persistent stereotyping of men and women may be one of main factors that diminishes the opportunities and possibilities for women in sport organizations in a sense that women are traditionally believed to lack the leadership capabilities. These learned and internalized stereotypes may also cause women themselves to doubt their skills and capabilities, and consequently, they fail to view themselves as adequate and fit leaders (Sartore & Cunningham 2007).

However, Burton, Grappendorf & Henderson (2011) discovered in their study that men and women are in fact seen equally competent and believed to possess equal potential for success in any of the senior management positions in sports. Women's absence in top management positions in sports is rather explained by *role congruity theory* which means that some positions are being perceived purely as men's roles (e.g. athletic director) and some positions purely as women's roles (e.g. life skills director) which leads to a general belief that females are less likely to be chosen for "men's jobs", and also vice versa (Burton *et al* 2011). Eagly's and Karau's (2002) analysis of a role congruity theory of prejudice toward women leaders suggests that "perceived incongruity between the female gender role and leadership roles leads to two forms of prejudice": women are not being seen to possess sufficient leadership skills and qualities, and additionally or as a consequence, women leaders are facing authority and credibility issues. As a result, women are not perceived as good and potential leaders as their counterparts, and this certainly slows down women's attempts to gain possession of top management positions and moreover, to be viewed successful in them (Eagly & Karau 2002).

Eagly and Karau's argument is further supported with a very recent study by Vial and Napier (2018) who discovered that albeit both genders perceive or describe an ideal leader quite similarly, the findings also revealed that women value more the communal or feministic traits, and conversely, disapprove negative attributes, such as stubbornness and arrogance, which are typically ascribed to male. Vial and Napiel concluded that since "men in particular tend to devalue more communal styles of leadership—and men are typically the gatekeepers to top organizational powers of prestige and authority" male-dominance in the highest executive positions and board rooms will be prolonged. The difference in men's and women's perceptions of a qualified leader can be explained by men's lesser experience with women bosses (Eagly & Karau 2002) and men's greater social power, which easily induce them to evaluate women according to their gender stereotype instead of focusing on individual characteristics of a woman (Goodwin, Operario & Fiske 1998).

The findings of my study support strongly these theories. Family-related issues was named most often as the biggest reason for women's scarcity in the top-level positions as six out of seven interviewees believed so, but nearly as often the phenomenon was explained by the reasons related to *male hegemony*. Historically and traditionally, sport has been seen as a masculine domain and this persistent imagery of sport continue to foster the male hegemony in sports arena. None of the interviewees denied the fact that sports is still very male-dominated playground. They, however, do not think that it should stay that way but rather welcomes more women into the field. I will discuss this further in later chapters.

Two of the interviewees believed that some women might be hesitant to enter the sports industry because they perceive it as a field characterized by male chauvinism. Also, they have a higher threshold to apply for jobs where so called *old boy networks* are still in power. A qualified practitioner of emotional intelligence, Laura Berger, who has counselled leaders at Fortune 500 companies for over twenty years, writes in her column in Forbes (2018) that "unconscious bias also undermines recruiting efforts and employee development, which can be destabilizing to an organization". She states that these defects are worsened by "the fact that the majority of mid- to high-level placements in an organization are sourced through referral and that "the underlying like-likes-like dynamic can create a compounding, degenerative effect on an organization's diversity". I do not think I am wrong in saying that the public opinion is that this type of behavior is or at least has been very typical in sports.

It would require some further examination what it is about the masculine environment that keeps women away from it. Is it a fear of being treated with contempt and not having equal opportunities for career advancement compared to men or could the reason be as simple as discomfort that women might experience when working in an environment occupied mostly by the opposite sex. Over half of the interviewees said that the old structures and the prolonged masculine culture of sports organizations slow down women's appearance in the top-level positions. One interviewee speculated that sports field, and specifically the operational environment of sports organizations, is more masculine than other industries in average, and that there is something very primitive about it which is why he believes it appeals more to men than women.

Mark: "...Somehow I see it (sports) as being a bit like our society in overall, that... that especially the world of sport associations...that on average, it is somewhat more masculine

and therefore it may appeal more to men than to women. So, there is something very primitive about it...”

”...mä jotenkin näen sen niin, että se on niinku ehkä vähän samantyyppinen kuin meidän yhteiskunta muutenkin, että...että varsinkin tämä urheilujärjestömaailma on...että tämä on jossain määrin maskuliinisempaa keskimääräisesti, että se ehkä vetoaa enemmän miehiin kuin naisiin. Että jotain siinä on sellaista alkukantaista...”

In the late nineteenth century, the benefits of exercise and the importance of being in a good physical condition were realized to enhance nation's military power (Halila 1959, p.16-17). For this reason, it is quite logical and even understandable that the first sports clubs were established and led by enthusiastic men. But still, let's say 30 or 20 years ago, leaders and figureheads of the sport organizations were, without exception, men, and women were not welcomed nor were they interested in working in that manly world of sport. It seemed that women were not even considered being part of the (management) team because it was much easier and more fun to work and make decisions with your buddies. We all have surely heard about the male bonding activities such as sauna evenings and beer nights which were often orchestrated by the leaders of sport organizations in addition to their official job duties. Thus, a potential woman member would have required excessive arrangements (e.g. separate sauna shifts) and hence would have substantially disrupted the dynamics of the group. Several interviewees believe that this has been an issue for decades but has changed drastically in the recent years. Sauna evenings and other extra-curriculum activities have almost completely disappeared.

Another significant difference that has taken place over time is that decades ago women were not only seen to ruin the male bonding rituals but even more so, they were simply considered as unfit to work in sports which was an environment of masculinity. In other words, women were experiencing distinguishable condescendence and discrimination from their counterparts, but based on my interviews, today women are no longer seen unsuitable for the industry. Quite the opposite in fact; women are believed to have a lot of potential and much to be given in leadership roles in sports, but the old culture is still so deeply embedded in our society that attitudes change but they do so very slowly.

All the interviewees stated that they do not have anything against women and having them as colleagues or having more women working in sports, which they believe is also the general opinion amongst men. They, however, believe that bias toward women still occur, but most of it has changed from conscious to unconscious. An honest statement from one of

the interviewees (Peter) provides clear proof of the existing disregard for women in the sport industry, despite his firm belief in women and their capabilities as leaders.

Peter: *“I am now being very direct and honest...so, if I want to now have a very in-depth discussion on sports in Finland with someone, it is never a woman. They cannot do it. They do not know the history of sports...they do not...I somehow feel that even sports as a phenomenon does not really interest women enough...”*

”Mä sanon tämän nyt ihan suoraan...niin, siis jos mä nyt haluan puhua urheilusta Suomessa niinku tosi HD tasolla jonkun kanssa, niin ei se ole koskaan nainen. Ei, ei ne pysty siihen. Ne ei tunne urheilun historiaa...ne ei siis...jotenkin musta tuntuu, että urheilu ei niinku ilmiönä myöskään välttämättä tavallaan kiinnosta naisia riittävästi...”

Whether we want it or not, deep subconscious attitudes tend to have an effect on our behavior. Whether we want to admit it or not, they tend to also influence the decisions we make in recruiting or promoting people.

Paul: *“I do not think that, at the level of consciousness, there are any barriers. Today there aren't sports leaders or people who would question the possibilities of women to be sports leaders or leaders per se, but what I find interesting is that what kind of hidden curricula or maybe cultural things there are what men do not even realize. Or perhaps a very cliché like example would be the old boy networks. But, they can be good and positive communities or they can be very negative ones, but regardless, the fact is that men are accustomed to agreeing on things among themselves, and sometimes it's a good thing, but at least in the long run it's can be a bad thing, so letting women into that network or being part of the core conversations that men have been accustomed to carry on themselves, can create some subconscious barriers (for women) that men themselves do not even notice. Well, the old classic thing, that things are discussed and solved in sauna or while jogging together or wherever... and that's not the type of world women like and it's a sort of cultural thing which probably none of us, including myself, do not immediately admit, but if we start to delve deeper into the issue, there can probably be found a lot places where women are not welcomed.”*

”Mä luulen, että niinku tietoisuuden tasolla ei ole mitään esteitä, ei tänä päivänä ole urheilujohtajia tai henkilöitä, jotka niinku kyseenalaistaisivat naisten mahdollisuuksia olla urheilujohtajina tai missä tahansa, mut sitten se, mikä mun mielestä on mielenkiintoista, et minkälaisia tavallaan piilo-opetussuunnitelmia tai ehkä sellaisia kulttuurillisia asioita täällä on, jota me miehet ei itse edes tiedosteta. Tai ehkä semmoinen helppo, ehkä kliseemäinenkin, esimerkki on hyvä veli -verkostot. Siis, ne voi olla hyviä ja positiivisia yhteisöjä ja sitten myöskin hyvin negatiivisia, mutta kuitenkin se, että miehet ovat niinku tottuneet keskenään sopimaan asioista, joskus se on hyvä asia, mutta ehkä vähän pidemmällä aikavälillä ainakin on huono asia, niin siihen sitten ikään kuin naisten päästäminen niinku siihen verkostoon tai sitten niinku keskustelujen ytimeen, jota on niinku totuttu siinä verkostossa viemään eteenpäin, niin siinä voi tulla sellaisia niinku tiedostamattomia esteitä, että miehet itse eivät edes huomaa. No se vanha klassinen juttu,

että saunassa tai lenkillä tai jossakin missä lie, niin tota porukalla asioita punnitaan...niin se ei ole niinku naisten maailma ja se on niinku sellainen kulttuurillinen juttu, joka meistä ei varmaan kukaan, niinku en minäkään, ei heti myönnä, mut sit jos sitä alkais kunnolla perkaamaan, niin on varmaan paljon sellaisia paikkoja, joihin naisilla ei ole asiaa.”

5.3.3. Scarcity of women applicants

So far it has become apparent that women's stronger engagement with family duties and responsibilities as well as the old structures and traditional masculinity of sports organizations are some of the main reasons for paucity of women in upper management positions in sports.

The third reason, which received equal amount of support from the interviewees, is the **women's reluctance to apply for the leadership roles** in sports. All the interviewees except for one said that it is challenging to hire women if only 10-20 percent of the applicants are female. It is quite evident that if eight or nine out of ten job applicants are men, it is more probable that a man will be chosen for the job. Women's absence in job-hunting is very evident but it was much more difficult for the interviewees to give underlying reasons or explanations for the phenomenon. It was mainly explained by women's lack of experience (which again leads to family related issues) and lack of courage. These two can be closely related but not necessarily. Lack of experience understandably deteriorates one's self-confidence and believe in oneself, but it has been studied that the causation of this is much stronger with women than men. Furthermore, even if two applicants, a man and a woman, have equal amount of experience and same type of skills, women tend to underestimate themselves. The female interviewee, Sarah, illustrated it perfectly; even when a male applicant possesses only one or two skills listed in the requirements, he does not hesitate to apply, whereas a female applicant is hesitant to apply for the position if she possesses all but one of the required skills. In their article, Kay and Shipman (2014), brought forth an internal study which Hewlett-Packard conducted several years ago to find out how they could attract more women into the highest-level executive positions. The study revealed that “women working at HP applied for a promotion only when they believed they met 100 percent of the qualifications listed for the job” and “men were happy to apply when they thought they could meet 60 percent of the job requirements” (Kay & Shipman 2019). I can personally agree with Kay & Shipman (2014) when they say that “Underqualified and underprepared men do

not think twice about leaning in. Overqualified and overprepared, too many women still hold back. Women feel confident only when they are perfect. Or practically perfect.”

These findings strongly suggest that women’s self-esteem is an important factor that explains their absence in top leadership positions. I argue that especially women with weaker self-esteem and women who lack passion and determination are more prone to give in and may even perceive the male hegemony as a normal and ordinary arrangement. Women with high self-confidence and fierce ambition do not let the persistent underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in sports defeat or stop them from pursuing their dreams of eventually sitting in the board rooms making decisions and seen as equivalent to men leaders. Those women who genuinely aspires to reach the executive level in sports should step up and unleash the unnecessary modesty. Probably it is easier to said than done, but that would be the fastest vehicle or at least an attempt to alter the gender imbalance. The interviewees suggested also a few other, more from the ground up type, solutions to regenerate more female sports leaders. I will discuss these further in the next chapter.

Other reasons why the male interviewees believe women are afraid to apply for top-level positions is their **shallow ambition or interest level**. Three of the seven interviewees think that women do not take sports as seriously or as passionately as men do. Their analysis is that women consider other aspects of life, such as parenting children, more important than spending late evenings and weekends taking care of one’s job duties.

Mike: “For one, old structures...everyone has kind of held on to their positions. Secondly, women do not go after them (positions) very aggressively, even if they had the same talents than men, but perhaps they have not wanted to sacrifice as much of their lives as it requires.”

”Yks, rakenteet, vanhat...tavallaan kaikki on pitänyt niitä positioitaan. Toinen, että naiset ei hyvin aggressiivisesti tuu, vaikka niillä olis kykyjä ihan samalla tavalla kuin miehillä, mutta ehkä eivät ole halunneet antaa elämästään niin paljon ku se vaatii.”

Sarah: “Well, the fact is that you need to also actively want there...so that you are searching for that right path...and you sort of have to be able to take up some punches, and that you are not immediately discouraged if that door closes, then you just need to look for another door... you are sort of seeking the path that enables you to advance...so, you kind of have to have a pretty good self-confidence, but of course men do too...”

”No kyllä se, että pitää sinne aktiivisesti myös haluta...et hakee sitä väylää ja sitten pitää olla pikkuisen että...pitää osata ottaa vähän sitä iskua vastaan, että ei ihan heti lannistu, jos toi ovi menee kiinni, niin etsii sitten toisen oven...et hakee tavallaan sit sitä, että mistä se eteneminen olisi mahdollista...et pitää olla aika hyvä itseluottamus, mut täytyyhän toki miehilläkin...”

The findings of a recent USU-gallup² poll (Vanninen 2018) on Finns' public opinion about the government financial aid to elite sport supports this claim. The respondents were asked whether they would reduce, raise, or keep the amount of financial aid to elite sport the same than before, and the results show that majority (60 %) of the Finns would either keep the amount the same or raise it. The findings, however, reveal significant differences between male and female respondents. According to the poll, 38 percent of men would raise the financial aid and 28 percent would keep it the same, whereas only 20 percent of women respondents would raise it and 34 percent would keep it unchanged. Furthermore, as ten percent of male respondents would significantly raise the support amount, only 2 percent of women think alike. These findings support my earlier claim that women do not find sport as meaningful as men do. Also, the Head of Finnish Olympic Committee, Mikko Salonen, analyzes the results in a similar way.

“Traditionally, men have been more “sports-crazy” than women, and maybe also “success-crazy”. Sports seem to be more important and meaningful to men than to women”, Salonen says. (Vanninen 2018)

”Perinteisesti miehet ovat olleet enemmän urheiluhulluja kuin naiset, ja ehkä myös menestyshulluja. Urheilu vaikuttaa olevan miehille merkityksellisempää kuin naisille”, Salonen sanoo. (Vanninen 2018)

Additionally, a leading expert from Research Institute for Olympic Sports (KIHU), Jari Lämsä, estimates that women would probably be more inclined to support the grassroots level in sports clubs (Vanninen 2018). Many of the male respondents in my study also share this same view. They believe that although there are not many women in prominent positions in elite sport, there are a lot of women in managerial positions in grassroots sports such as in sport clubs. My assumption is that women are more drawn into grassroots sports because

² USU-Gallup is executed by Uutissuomalainen which is a joint newsroom established by 15 Finnish newspapers in 1.2.2017. News produced by Uutissuomalainen are published by Aamuposti, Etelä-Suomen Sanomat, Iisalmen Sanomat, Itä-Häme, Karjalainen, Keskisuomalainen, Keski-Uusimaa, Länsi-Uusimaa, Savon Sanomat, Uusimaa, Helsingin Uutiset, Länsiväylä, Tamperelainen, Turkulainen and Vantaan Sanomat.

their involvement enables them to provide support for their own children's hobbies. In the article (Vanninen 2018), Salonen addresses his concern regarding the implications this may have on elite sport.

Mikko Salonen: "We need to be able to develop the elite sports in a way that it would interest more and more women as well. Sporting events must be attractive to women and the visibility and position of women's sport must be significantly improved." (Vanninen 2018)

Mikko Salonen: "Meidän pitää pystyä kehittämään huippu-urheilua sellaiseksi, että se kiinnostaa enemmän ja enemmän myös naisia. Urheilutapahtumien pitää olla houkuttelevia naisten näkökulmasta ja naisurheilun näkyvyyttä ja asemaa pitää parantaa merkittävästi." (Vanninen 2018)

Also, I learned from the interviewees that sport management has always been very hierarchical and authoritarian where the orders are dictated only from top to bottom by a leader who enjoys superior status in the organization. This pursuit of gaining high status in sports tend to appeal more to (alpha) male than women.

Paul: "...But the current sports leadership is still lagging behind e.g. in agility compared to many businesses...that we are still a bit hierarchical and slow, and this kind of status means a lot here (in sports) and it may not be the world of women."

"...mut tän hetkinen urheilujohtaminen vielä laahaa perässä niinku esim. monia yrityksiä ketteryudessa, että me ollaan vielä vähän sellaisia niinku hierarkkisia ja hitaita ja tämmöinen status merkitsee paljon täällä ja se ei ole ehkä naisten maailmaa."

One of the interviewees (Mike) also think that the **fear of publicity** may scare women off from leadership positions.

Mike: "And then one thing is, I am not quite sure and I have not studied it, but one thing is the publicity, that is, there aren't many women who want to bask in it."

"Ja sitten yks juttu on, mä en ole ihan varma enkä ole tutkinut, mutta yks on kans tuo julkisuus eli on hirveän vähän naisia, jotka haluavat paistatella siellä."

Very often sports leaders are also public figures who are obligated to face with media and comment on issues related to their sport or sport organization, in good and in bad. When things go wrong, for example athletes failing in an important competition or lack of clarity in money spending, it is the head of organization who is taking the bullet for everyone in the

public eye. In the past decade or two, Finland has not enjoyed great international sports success, despite of ice hockey, javelin throw, cross-country skiing, and few other sports, for which reason we have evidenced numerous sports leaders being openly “crucified” by the sports-crazy Finnish public. It takes a thick skin to handle the public pressure and not being offended by the criticism. Perhaps it is not the fear of public pressure per se but perhaps women rather think that all that uproar so often affiliated with sports management is not worth the loss of good night's sleep. Resignation of the latest Head of the Finnish Olympic Committee’s Elite Sports Department, Mika Kojonkoski, is one of the most recent examples of a case where public pressure and harsh criticism seemed to become too heavy burden to bear. Below statements given by Kojonkoski in two separate newspaper articles, elucidates the issue.

“That constant critique did not naturally feel good. It deteriorated my public image”, Mika Kojonkoski, 55, says. (Lempinen 2018)

“It wasn’t easy to make and manage changes under the pressure from hundreds of thousands of Finns who considered themselves experts. Reasonably good results meant that in the public eye you were still crappy. But on the other hand, all that hardship and grievance strengthened my character.” (Lempinen 2018)

“There were also other mistakes I made. I, however, learned a lot from them. As a son of an engineer, I believed I will get what I deserve, but I could have never guessed how significant of a role communication nowadays plays.” (Lempinen 2018)

“...My leadership and the reputation of the Elite Sport Department was put into a bad light. It took away tools to make things happen. I no longer had that kind of reputation and image that would enable me to do my job in the best possible manner.” (Eskanen 2018)

” Things are not as they are, but they are what they seem to be. One certainly has to be critical and analytical. There might be an element of truth in the criticisms, but the emotional involvement messes up the rationality. I wondered every day what things I could have done better. I gave my all and my commitment was 100 %. I did everything I could for the Finnish sport.” (Eskanen 2018)

”Se jatkuva kritiikki ei tietysti tuntunut hyvältä. Se ränsisti julkista kuvaani”, Kojonkoski, 55, sanoo. (Lempinen 2018)

”Ei ollut helppoa rakentaa muutosta satojentuhansien asiantuntijoiksi itsensä kokeneiden ihmisten paineen alla. Kohtuullisen hyvä tulos tarkoitti, että olit julkisuudessa paska. Toisaalta se kova prässi vahvisti luonnettani”. (Lempinen 2018)

"Muitakin virheitä tuli tehtyä. Opin niistä kuitenkin paljon. Insinöörin poikana uskoin saavani, mitä ansaitsen, mutta en olisi arvannut, miten järkyttävän suuri viestinnän merkitys nykypäivänä on." (Lempinen 2018)

"...Johtajuuteni ja huippu-urheiluyksikkö maalattiin huonoon valoon. Se vei pois työkaluja asioiden tekoon. Minulla ei ollut enää sellaista mainetta ja imagoa, että voisin tehdä työtä parhaalla mahdollisella tavalla." (Eskanen 2018)

"Asiat eivät ole niin kuin ne ovat, vaan ne ovat niin kuin näyttävät olevan. Varmasti kriittinen ja analyttinen pitää olla. Osassa kritiikissä on olemassa asian juurta, mutta kyllä tunnepitoisuus sekoittaa järjen. Mietin joka päivä, mitä asioita olisin voinut tehdä paremmin. Kaikkeni annoin peliin ja sitoutuminen oli 100-prosenttista. Tein kaikkeni suomalaisen urheilun eteen." (Eskanen 2018)

The key findings of the reasons for the slow progress of women gaining a stronger foothold in the top managerial position in sports have been summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. Summary of the reasons for the slow progress of women gaining a stronger foothold in the top managerial position in sports

Family commitments

- Discrimination from the employer side
- Several long-term absences
- Career paths cut short in early stage
- Irregular working hours

Attitude and passivity of women

- There are more important things than sports (no interest, no passion)
- Fear of publicity
- Reluctant to apply for the leadership roles

Historical reasons

- Masculinity of the industry
- Old structures and culture (tradition)
- Men assume women do not want there
- Do not possess the required experience and skills (family commitments)

6. MEANS TO CREATE MORE FAVORABLE CIRCUMSTANCES FOR FEMALE SPORTS LEADERS

A few decades ago, sports arena was seen a playground only for men. Men did not want women into the field because women's place was at home raising up children. Politics in Finland has similar history with sports in that originally only men had the right to be active in politics and political decision-making. Politics, however, has evolved and transformed into an advanced domain in which both men and women are equally represented and enjoy equal rights. Both, politics and sports, share similar type masculine origin but what explains the giant leaps towards perfect gender balance in politics. And could same means be leveraged also in the field of sports. I believe strong-willed women and gender quotas have been the main factors that initiated the advancement in the political field.

In the following chapters I discuss the interviewees' deliberations on the subject. Most support received the thought that women themselves have to be more active and have the courage to apply for the open leadership positions. However, the interview process itself made many of the interviewees realize that one problem lies also in men's passivity in improving the situation. It has not been intentional disregard toward women, but it is just the fact that men have not realized the issue. It is certainly clear to all parties, also men, that women's share in upper-level positions in sports is a fraction of their counterparts, but men have not acknowledged the gender imbalance as a problem. It has been believed to be women's own choice. The interviewees were able to come up with a few means that could help the industry to attract more female leaders.

6.1. Gender quotas – blockage or contributor?

It is important that we fight for the gender equality in every aspect of life but some of the studies indicate that women do not want to be selected to the executive positions as token members but rather based on their hard work and their own merits. The gender quotas as such, if it is just to gloss over the statistics and to appear as a good corporate citizen, should not be the solution to the issue at hand, because the best person, regardless of his or her gender, should always be hired for the job. Women, however, should be given equal

opportunities to land the front-office management jobs in the male-dominant industry of sports.

In the last few decades China has taken significant steps towards increased freedom and has effectively improved the status of women in its society. However, despite these concrete actions, such as quotas, Chinese women are still experiencing discrimination in sports organizations and in very rare cases advance into key leadership positions. In Chinese system such quotas seem to “be treated as maxima rather than minima, thus the appointment of one woman to the top flight of state appointments militates against the likelihood of a second female candidate being recruited“ (Chin, Henry & Hong 2009). In other words, one might argue that quotas, when practiced this way, in a broader sense rather slows down than enhances the career opportunities for women since as soon as the obligation of minimum quota has been achieved, the rest can be forgotten.

The thoughts of Debbie Jevans, the CEO of England Rugby 2015 and the most influential woman in UK Sport, are very much like mine as she writes in her blog in the Guardian (2014) that “For most of my life I have actively disagreed with targets and quotas for women but where a target can be helpful is that it shows ambition. And that is important” and she continues that “I am absolutely not saying give women jobs for the sake of it. I would never advocate that. But I do think we need to create the opportunity for women to shine”. Jevans refers to the fact that the number of women in the top executive positions in the UK sport had gone down in the first three years of this decade and as a corrective action “the UK Sport and Sport England set a target for all sports governing body boards to be made up of 25% female directors by 2017” (Jevans 2014). Although it might sound too good to be true, in Jevans’ own organization, in the Rugby World Cup team, half of the employees are female. Out of all the sports, in Rugby – who would have thought. Jevans explains that this admirable gender balance was achieved by including a wide variety of people, both men and women, in the interview process and then simply selecting the best person for each position. This shows the truth to the fact that women are every bit as capable of being good leaders as their male counterparts - in some areas perhaps even better and vice versa – but achieving a better gender balance calls for a change in the cultural mindset of men ruling the world of sports.

Gender quotas, which were first used in politics to strengthen the voice of women in the core of political decision-making, and later, also in the business world to bring more women into the management boards to remediate the gender imbalance and its ramifications.

Such quotas might be considered coercive and factitious in nature but especially the composition of today's political arena, where both genders are equally represented and equally treated as well as perceived, shows the effectiveness of them. For sure, no woman desires to be so called "quota woman" because it may be experienced as degrading, both by men and women themselves, as if she is not there because of skills but rather as a mere proof of execution of a commandment. However, when all the other means have turned out to be powerless, gender quotas serve as the last remedy.

Essentially, six out of seven interviewees were strongly against gender quotas because they think that the best person for the job should always be selected, whether it is a woman or man, and any type of quotas may prevent this from happening. Nevertheless, one of these six interviewees, who firmly resist all types of quotas, thinks that in sports, however, gender quotas are imperative to begin with. He reckons that ball games and ice hockey, specifically, are still so manly by nature that without gender quotas men's overall attitude toward female leaders and their belief in women's capabilities as board members will never change. He gave an example of an international sports confederation which adopted the concept of gender quotas already over ten years ago and hoped that the quota requirements could be removed after a few years when women in the board were seen as standard practice. Today, the quota of two women in the management board is still in place due to slow change in men's attitude. If the quota was now removed and women had to fight for a seat in the management board through the same election with men, they would never be elected. His prediction is that it takes twenty more years (in ice hockey) to be in a situation where gender genuinely does not matter, and the quotas can be abolished.

Mark: *"I would not use them. I'd like to think that organization should have such high morals and ethics and common sense that they are, as a rule, trying to look for versatile leaders, whether they are men or women or old or young...instead of automatically trying to find a certain number of both men and women."*

"Mä en käyttäisi. Mä lähtisin jotenkin siitä, että sillä organisaatiolla pitäisi olla niin korkea moraali ja etiikka ja järki, että he pyrkivät jo lähtökohtaisesti siihen, että ne hakisivat niinku monella tapaa omaavaa henkilöä johtoonsa, että oli ne sitten miehiä tai naisia tai vanhoja tai nuoria, että ei niin, että jotain pitäisi olla joku tietty määrä automaattisesti jompaa kumpaa."

One interviewee (Paul) stood out from the rest as he, unlike the others, thinks that tough measures have to be taken into use if that is the only way to bring about change. After gender is no longer an issue, quotas can be dismissed. One of the interviewees, who in principal opposes quotas, mentioned that their organization has just recently added a rule in their guidelines that states that at least 40 percent of the board members should be represented by another sex. He clarifies that it is not mandatory, but he would rather call it as an aspiration. It is not obligatory because they are strong believers of the paradigm of selecting the best person for the job. Furthermore, it is not only a question of gender and bringing female perspective on the table but more broadly, it is about composing boards and management teams of representatives of different minority groups (whether it regards for example to gender, language or ethnicity) and different functions in the organization. Their guiding principle is that the more diverse the management team, the more multidimensional and better the results.

Paul: “...when you want to make a change, you have to make hard decisions and stick to them, and then they’ll become a habit and things normalize. I believe that such hidden curricula, which are related to manhood, that when they are recognized, it is worthwhile to do quite drastic measures even so that things can really change...when they are made visible.”

”...kun muutosta halutaan aikaan, niin välillä pitää tehdä kovia ratkaisuja ja että tästä pidetään kiinni ja sitten siitä tulee tapa ja se normalisoituu. Mä uskon, että tällöisiä piilopetussuunnitelmia, jotka liittyy miehisyyteen, et ku niitä tunnustetaan, niin aika rajujakin toimenpiteitä kannattaa tehdä, että se sitten oikeasti muuttuu, kun tehdään asia näkyväksi.”

Robert: “...I am against all quotas...and I believe that most women, at least smart ones, oppose them ... but yes, the sports world has to make such quotas at the beginning...”

”...mä vastustan kaikkia kiintiöitä...ja mä uskon, että suurin osa, ainakin fikset naiset, vastustaa sitä... mut kyl tota niin, kyllä urheilumaailman on pakko tehdä semmoiset kiintiöt alussa...”

6.2. Mentoring and creating a career path

The female interviewee, Sarah, stated that generally speaking, men do not intentionally disregard women, but they are in a belief that women do not want there (to leadership positions). In other words, it is not men’s bad will but rather their thoughtlessness. Since

they have not considered women's absence an issue, they have never stopped to ponder what to do with it. The interview process itself was quite eye-opening for some of the interviewees as it made them, for the first time, to realize the existence of the issue. They think that this type of discussion and making people, especially men, more aware of the issue must happen before corrective actions and improvements in the gender imbalance can take place. My personal feeling during the interviews was that all the interviewees genuinely welcomed more women into leadership roles.

Without a proper career development path, it is extremely difficult if not impossible for a woman to gain highest-ranking leadership positions in the field of sports. One of the male interviewees agrees strongly with this statement but adds that also the importance and valuation of education has clearly increased in sports arena in recent years. If this is a true claim, it insinuates that there is a growing demand for more professional or business-like management style in running sports organizations. Especially, majority of the sports clubs are still run in a very amateurish way which very often leads to poor financial performance, and at worst the entire existence of the club is put in jeopardy. Appreciation of education is good news to women because the implication of it would be that the top positions are no longer automatically handed to members of the inner circle (which very often includes only men), but rather to candidates with most relevant job experience and education. In other words, knowing the right people or hanging out with the ones in power loses its relevance.

One of the male interviewees, Mike, was able to name a few females who he sees have all the potential to be future female sports leaders. They are in their late twenties or early thirties and possess a very successful sports career but are also highly educated. However, in the current situation with old structures and masculine mentality still in place, even with successful sports career, high level of education and suitable personality traits, it is very difficult for a woman to gain highly influential positions in sports. The first question is whether women really want those top-level positions, and if that type of desire and passion amongst women truly exists, Mike suggests that the best cure for the dilemma would be a mentoring program. Mentoring and finding mentors who genuinely want to contribute to giving way to capable and ambitious young female talents are prerequisites for change. Systematic mentoring programs will result in an abundant number and a steady flow of blooming female sports leaders, but without such intervention tactics, we must settle for a status quo.

In 2018, the Finnish Olympic Committee (FOC) launched *Lead Like a Woman* -program which is a first ever sports leadership program solely for women. One of the most important and fruitful elements of the program is the mentoring part in which every participant gets a personal mentor with strong experience in top leadership positions in Finland's sports world. For instance, Harri Nummela, Chairman of the Finnish Ice Hockey Association is one these high-level mentors. FOC has taken a big role also in the international *New Leaders* - Sport Leadership Programme in which the biggest aim is to promote good governance, increase the number of women in decision-making positions in sports and implement the gender equality recommendations set by the International Olympic Committee. The CEO of the Finnish Olympic Committee, Mikko Salonen, states that "Promoting equality is important to us because in sports it is not at the level we want it to be or where it should be. Work towards a more equal sports culture should be continued in Finland and worldwide". (Suomen Olympiakomitea 2018).

Mike: *"There should be mentoring programs, mentoring is the most important thing. We should now take these female leaders and put them on mentoring programs and find those people (mentors) who really want to help them to advance in their careers, and then one day there will be a plenty of them out there, but we are currently in the middle of such a transition period that it won't happen without mentoring."*

"Niihin pitäis saada ohjelmat, tärkeintä on mentorointi. Nyt pitäisi ottaa näitä naisjohtajia ja mentorointiohjelmat ja sellaiset ihmiset, jotka haluaa auttaa niitä, että ne pääsee (eteenpäin) ja sitten se jonain päivänä niitä sit tulee ihan yllin kyllin, mutta ollaan sellaisessa murroksessa, että ei tuu ilman mentorointia."

Mike: *"That new "you" should find new ways to reform this industry...without these (cumbersome) structures and whatnots. And now we are talking about many different levels...the clubs, the youth sports, the competitive sports, the fitness sports, and so on... so you can just choose the area on your interest and where you feel like you are good at and then just do it....and we can forget about the "managing from the sports cabinets"... it's so last season."*

"Että uusien "teidän" pitäisi löytää uusia tapoja tuoda/luoda näitä asioita ilman näitä rakenteita ja muita ja auttaa sitä tekemistä. Nythän puhutaan monesta..seurat, nuorten liikunta, kilpaurheilu, fitness-urheilu et mitä vaan...eli mitä aluetta, missä sä olet omimmillasi ja haluat auttaa eteenpäin eikä sitä, että meillä on niinku urheilukabinetti johtaminen...se on ihan hyvää yötä."

Sarah: “...and then they (male sports leaders) say that she is not as good (as the male candidate)...well, how can she be as good if she is sort of coming out of nowhere and no one has helped her prepare for taking those next steps...so in a way, they are right about that...that there aren't good women candidates available but for this specific reason, men are extremely important in this equation because if they want, they are the ones who can get those women up there...otherwise the doors won't open.”

”Niin ja sit ne sanoo, et ei se ole ihan yhtä hyvä...mut miten sä voit olla yhtä hyvä, jos sä tulet ikään kuin sieltä puskista eikä kukaan valmistanut sua niille askelmille eli ne on tavallaan oikeassakin siinä, että kun ei ole, mut sen takia ne miehet on todella tärkeitä...niiden täytyy haluta nostaa ne naiset sinne ylös...muuten ne ovet ei aukea.”

I summarized the means which, based on my research findings, could create more favorable circumstances and provide better success for female sports leaders (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Means to create more favorable circumstances for female leaders

7. DISCUSSION

When we look at leadership from the aspect of gender equality, women are prisoners of their social role. Being a woman and holding a minority group membership, the probability of her being successful is much smaller as compared to a man. Before improvement is viable, there are two things that need to take place. Firstly, people should not be judged and evaluated by the stereotype attached to a specific group, women in this case, and secondly, leadership as a construct should be redefined (it should include both, agentic and communal, traits), not only in paper but more so in the mindsets. Several signs in today's society clearly show that it is, in fact, heading that direction, but because beliefs and attitudes tend to transform very slowly, it takes time before the change is truly visible, let alone a new norm.

Although the study conducted by Burton *et al* (2011) repeated the common finding that certain positions are perceived, at least to some extent, as masculine and some as feminine, it also provided a somewhat promising finding by showing that men and women are seen equally competent and having equal potential for any of the senior management positions in sports. However, having said that, such observation has no value if the leadership roles in sports remain to be tightly linked to masculinity and supposed masculine traits such as assertiveness and competitiveness, and for that reason disqualifies women from the race to the top. *Machismo*, males being superior to females by showing bravery, wisdom and good leadership, was understandable and even advisable in historical societies. Nonetheless, in most cultures today, both men and women are sharing a lot of the same attributes and skill sets, and therefore it should be more and more difficult to make a factual distinction between masculine and feminine traits. Since it seems to be difficult to release some of the positions from the gender-related attributes, perhaps it was easier to focus on emphasizing the fact that many women possess as many masculine or agentic traits than do their counterparts and thus are as fit for the highest leadership positions as men.

Studies have indicated that the benefits of having women in top level management positions and involving them in the decision making and policy making procedures outweighs the gains of exclusion of women from such activities (e.g. Wadesango *et al* 2011). Furthermore, more transparency should be required of the criteria expected from the suitable candidate for the top-level positions. Also, the composition of the selection bodies should be made clear to ensure that it is not the "old boy" networks that oversee all the most important recruitments. However, there are certain sports that have already long traditions

of having a female leader heading the organization. For instance, the Finnish orienteering federation had a long-term female chairperson in 2008-2015. In 2015, Timo Ritakallio was selected as a new chair, but he had to step aside quite soon after his selection since he was named the chair of the Finnish Olympic Committee. Ritakallio's successor is again a female. I just recently discussed with a representative of an orienteering organization and he stated that they are probably the most equal sport in Finland and referred to the manner in which their approach the issue of diversity. They find it totally irrelevant whether one is a female or a male, or young or old, because everyone is always be treated the same way and with the same level of respect. That goes with leadership as well, since already for years, the most suitable person has always been selected for their leadership positions and gender has never played any role in it.

I am sure there are also many other sports organizations out there that share similar values with the orienteering organization, and these are the organizations that should be made more visible to encourage and inspire also others to follow their example. Women should be given equal opportunities to land the front-office management jobs in this male-dominant industry but achieving a better gender balance calls for a change in the cultural mindset of men ruling the world of sports. Things change; it's not only men that are crazy about sports. Women want to play that game too. There are a lot of women who are highly talented and passionate about sports and want a career in it but who aren't being given the same opportunities than their counterparts. Finnish sports is not living its golden time, to say the least, so it is about time to start thinking outside the box and open our arms for changes by starting to utilize women's capabilities better.

7.1. The future outlook for sports management and leadership in Finland

Expectation for the future outlook is very similar among all the interviewees. They all believe that the old structures will eventually collapse as the original primordial squad retires and the new generation with more modern worldview steps in. The leadership style will change from hierarchical to people management, and the culture or working methods from secretive to open and transparent. Also, the importance of equality and the value of diversity of the personnel will be understood better in the future. We are already witnessing that some of these changes are starting to take place in certain national level sports organizations such

as the Finnish Olympic Committee (FOC) – at least on paper. In their new guidelines FOC, for instance, it is stated that they will base all their communication of their operations to openness and truthfulness, and that “equality is the cornerstone of our operations and decision-making” (Suomen Olympiakomitea 2018). Furthermore, the guidelines promise that all male panels will no longer be organized and that raising the diversity of their work community should be one of the goals of their recruitment department.

Due to its vague practices (or that is how it appeared to the general public), the Finnish Olympic Committee has been subjected to harsh criticism in the media in recent years, and its image was badly affected. Subsequently, major positive changes have taken place in the organization. I want to discuss this further here because I believe this particular case serve as a great example of change of direction, which will most likely be adopted also by other sports organization in the near future. I want to take this under more in-debt scrutiny also because the Finnish Olympic Committee is the highest and most influential institution in Finland’s sports arena. That is why it is crucial – to make positive changes possible – that the FOC acts as the trailblazer and “mannequin” to all the other sports organizations as well as to the entire society. I am very pleased to see that in its new guidelines (Suomen Olympiakomitea 2018), the FOC is tackling basically all the deficiencies that have so far been rampant in the Finnish (and international) sports system. Exemplary guidelines alone do not make a difference, they are purely nice words on paper, but it requires some serious efforts to truly put them into action. Yet, these renewed guidelines are definitely a great starting point, and I genuinely believe that if there is enough willpower and understanding (of the benefits of diversity), they can successfully be put into practice, and as a result, the changes that will smooth out women’s pathway in reaching top management positions in sports. After the FOC has successfully implemented the new guidelines, I am quite confident that their example will step by step be followed by others in the field.

The most visible structural change concerns organization’s composition. The Finnish Sports Confederation (VALO) and the Finnish Olympic Committee merged and started as a single entity, as the new Finnish Olympic Committee, in the beginning of 2017. In this context, I am not going to reflect on the benefits (or potential disadvantages) of the structural reform but given the subject of my research I want to rather focus on the exemplary policies and guidelines announced by the Olympic Committee in March of 2018. The interviewees of my study believed that transparency of operations will increase and hoped that more women will be selected in leadership positions in the future. The guidelines of the Olympic

committee take into account both of these aspects. The current CEO of the Finnish Olympic Committee, Mikko Salonen, has a strong background from the business world, certainly from sports as well, and it has come to the attention that he is admirably open-minded, more so than his predecessors. So, it is difficult to say if we should thank Salonen for these progressive and forward-looking new guidelines, but be that as it may, I believe they reflect his way of thinking. Since his teenage years Salonen has been extremely active and passionate about orienteering. The Finnish Orienteering Federation has long traditions of having a female chairperson and the level of education of the workforce is probably the highest or at least one of the highest in orienteering compared to most other sports. I firmly believe that the fundamental principles or philosophy, practiced by orienteering, is strongly reflected on the guidelines followed by the Finnish Olympic Committee today. Extracts from the Finnish Olympic Committee's "We Play Fair - Sustainability Compass – Handbook for the personnel and the board (2018) are listed in Table 6 and Table 7.

Table 6. Good governing practices of the Finnish Olympic Committee (2018)

The Finnish Olympic Committee's efforts for ensuring a value-based culture and good governing practices are centred around four themes:

1. Transparency

2. Economic efficiency

3. Non-discrimination

4. Fair play

Table 7. Finnish Olympic Committee’s “We Play Fair - Handbook (2018)

Extracts from the Finnish Olympic Committee’s “We Play Fair - Sustainability Compass – Handbook
We communicate openly, equally and truthfully about our operations in accordance with the principles of confidentiality.
We are committed to independent decision-making without pursuing personal interests.
We have a zero-tolerance policy for discrimination, harassment and bullying.
We ambitiously promote non-discrimination in order to make sure that nobody is discriminated against based on their age, gender, ethnic origin, ability to function, language, religion, sexual orientation or other personal characteristics.
Equality is the cornerstone of our operations and decision-making.
We adhere to the principle of ethicality, transparency and gender equality in government elections. According to the rules of the Olympic Committee, at least 30 % of the members of the Board are men or women. Our goal is to have at least 40 % representation of both genders in the Board and in every work group in 2020.
In the first qualifying phase of the recruitment process, candidates are compared without information on name, sex and age.
In recruitment, our aim is to increase the diversity of our work community.
We do not organize all male panels.
In our communication we strive to dispel all kinds of stereotypes.
We ensure equal opportunities for both genders to work and progress on different levels and in different jobs. The goal is also to take into account people of different ages and in different life situations and provide them equal opportunities to work e.g. in the form of flexible working hours and remote work.
Our pay system supports parity and equality.
We carry out an equality survey for our staff every two years and identify the most important development targets based on the findings.

In this research it became apparent that men do not intentionally disregard or segregate women but are in a belief that women (in the sports industry) do not have the desire and the passion to even reach the highest-ranking positions in sports organizations. They said that studies such as the one of mine as well as public and open discussion about the issue are great ways to open men’s eyes and make them aware of this common misconception.

Furthermore, it was invigorating to hear that all male interviewees were welcoming and even hoping for more female leaders into sports. They think that in overall the leadership abilities have nothing to do with gender per se. In other words, they see women as capable leaders as their male counterparts. Although interviewees aimed to avoid any type of generalization, on several occasions, discussions revealed that men think very highly of certain qualities which are more typical for women than men. Based on their personal experiences, women tend to be more diligent, committed and persistent and equipped with better emotional intelligence than the opposite sex. Respondents bemoaned the women’s reluctance of applying the leadership positions in sports, but I believe this worry will fade away as younger generation steps in. They have grown up in a completely different kind of

environment and compared to the old generation, their world has been much more sophisticated, broad-minded and egalitarian. In their world gender does not define people – at least not as blatantly as it used to.

7.2. Limitations of the study and future research

My main concern regarding the study was that I would not get entirely honest answers from the male interviewees, regardless of the complete anonymity promised in the beginning of the interview process. I was afraid that the interviewees would provide me with somewhat tampered truth to appear as modern leaders who fully support the promotion of gender equality in all aspects of life. However, I felt strongly that all the interviewees spoke very openly and honestly about the issues and gave me as truthful answers as they could with the information or knowledge they had. I knew some of the interviewees already beforehand which I believe contributed positively to the creation of a very genuine and easy-going atmosphere.

Initially my plan was to interview the same amount of men and women sport executives to be able to compare the possible gender differences in the way the opposite genders see the current situation; whether they agree on the issues related to research dilemma or whether they, in fact, see them very differently. This could have given me a broader and more comprehensive view of the real reasons behind the gender imbalance in the top-level leadership positions in sports. However, as I noticed that the previous studies lacked a clear male standpoint, I decided to change the focus from both genders to solely on men. Therefore, I believe that seven male interviewees and one female interviewee is an acceptable sample composition as opposed to being a limiting factor in my research.

Referring back to the research findings, several interviewees argued that women are reluctant to actively apply for the sport leadership positions. This is believed to be caused by the lack of courage and confidence, but also because women are believed to value other aspects of life, such as parenting, higher than sports per se. Women are thus lacking the adequate level of passion which is one of the most essential driving forces in sports management. My suggestion for future research would be to examine the level of passion of women in the middle management in sports organizations to find out whether the previous claim holds true.

During my research process an interesting point caught my attention when I was examining different sport disciplines. For instance, in orienteering, the level of education of the workforce is probably the highest or at least one of the highest compared to most other sports. As it happens, their chairperson is a woman (has been for years) and their overall attitude toward women seems to be astonishingly egalitarian. This makes me wonder if the high level of education within organization or association could explain the unprejudiced and advanced attitude towards gender neutrality and female leaders. Therefore, as my second suggestion for future research, I think it would be extremely intriguing to study the level of education of different sport organizations and conduct a comparative analysis of how it relates to number of female executives in those particular organizations.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview questions

	Theme	Interview questions	Linkage to the thesis
I.	Ideal sports leader	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do you define a good leader and good leadership in sports? 2. Could you name some skills and characteristics of a good leader? (<i>Can both men and women possess these qualities?</i>) 3. Could you name some great leaders? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Leadership styles ✓ One aim of the research is to define an "ideal" sports leader
II.	Women as leaders	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What do you think are the general perceptions and attitudes towards women, and especially women leaders, in general and in sports specifically? (<i>Or do they really even differ from men?</i>) 2. How do you personally perceive women as potential sports executives? Could you name any women sports leaders? 3. What is an ideal woman sports executive? What is the ideal personality type for women surviving and blossoming in the male dominant world of sport? (<i>Do they perhaps possess some of the same characters than men?</i>) 4. Do you think women have what it takes to be a top leader in the industry that is perceived very masculine? 5. Do you think there should be more women leaders in sports? Do you think women could bring something new to the table? If so, what? (<i>e.g. new/different viewpoints, better motivational skills, emotional intelligence</i>) 6. What are the biggest obstacles for women? Why there aren't more women leaders in sports? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Women's leadership style ✓ Stereotypes ✓ Masculinity ✓ Conscious/unconscious bias ✓ Women's strengths ✓ Diverse teams ✓ Reason's for women's slow progress
III.	Working with women: personal experiences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What kind of experiences do you have from working with women? 2. How do you think women differ from men, or do they? 3. What do you think are women's strengths, and weaknesses? (<i>Do they differ from men</i>) 4. Do you rather work/deal/negotiate with men or women? 5. Is there conscious/unconscious bias toward women (they don't know anything about sports, they are humorless, going strictly by the books, etc.)? 6. Have you ever witnessed a situation where you have felt that a woman has experienced injustice or discrimination? 7. Have you ever been involved in a recruitment situation where there have been both men and women candidates? What are the main differences between men and women candidates, or are there any? And have you ever hired a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Stereotypes ✓ Women's strengths and weaknesses ✓ Conscious/unconscious bias ✓ Discrimination ✓ Equality ✓ Role congruity theory
		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. What type of jobs/positions in sport do you think suit best for the women? Or do so called "women's jobs" and "men's jobs" even exist anymore? 	
IV.	Male dominance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gender-role meanings and stereotypes: sport has traditionally perceived very masculine domain and may thus function to limit the capacity of females within the sport context. Do you think it will remain as such also in the future? Do you think it should stay as such? Or do you see the existing gender imbalance a problem? 2. Old boy networks: do they exist? And what do you think of them? 3. Do you think men tend to hire and promote men (rather than women)? If so, why do you think that is? 4. How about women, how do you think women treat each other? Are they trying to promote other women or do they rather guard their own territory? Or are they quite neutral about it (as if there isn't a problem with the gender equality/balance)? 5. How about morality and corruption issues, would there be less of that if more women were in charge? 6. Females within sport organizations may fail to view themselves as adequate and appropriate leaders thus preventing them from acting as such. Do you think women doubt themselves and for that reason don't even want to try to advance in their career? Or do you think most women just simply don't want to work in top management (because it's a men's world, family obligations, etc.)? 7. What do you think about gender quotas? Should they exist also in sports? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Stereotypes and gender-role meanings ✓ Old boy networks ✓ Homologous reproduction ✓ Masculinity ✓ Passivity of women ✓ Women's self-doubts ✓ Gender quotas
VI.	Current situation: What type of leadership is needed now and in the future?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do see a problem in the current situation when it comes to leadership? <i>What is good about the current situations? What are the challenges?</i> 2. What type of leadership and leaders are needed now and in the future? 3. Why do you think there is such a significant (weakest) gender imbalance in sports (unlike in politics and other industries)? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Gender equality ✓ Gender imbalance ✓ Male hegemony

SUOSTUMUS

Suostun vapaaehtoisesti osallistumaan Susanna Ruotsalaisen suorittamaan haastatteluun, jonka perimmäinen tarkoitus on löytää syitä *naispuolisten johtajien ja keulakuvien vähyyteen suomalaisessa urheilussa* sekä myös yrittää määrittää ideaali urheilujohtaja. Haastattelu on osa Susanna Ruotsalaisen Jyväskylän yliopiston liikuntatieteellisen tiedekunnan Sport Management and Health Promotion -maisteriohjelman pro gradu -tutkielmaa.

Minulle on selvitetty, että minusta kerättäviä tutkimustietoja käsitellään luottamuksellisesti ja tutkimusaineiston säilyttämiseen ja tietosuojalainsäädäntöön liittyviä voimassaolevia ohjeita noudattaen. Haastattelumateriaalia tullaan käyttämään pro gradussa, kuitenkin niin, että yksittäinen vastaaja ei ole yksilöitävissä tai tunnistettavissa. Haastateltaville ei ole odotettavissa kielteisiä seuraamuksia tutkimukseen osallistumisesta.

Annan suostumukseni haastattelun tekemiseen ja sen nauhoittamiseen yllä mainituilla ehdoilla. Voin keskeyttää osallistumiseni missä vaiheessa tahansa.

Aika ja paikka

Allekirjoitus

Nimenselvennys