

Men and women in positions of responsibility

A qualitative analysis of organizational readiness in France and Finland

Flora Galy-Badenas and Stephen M. Croucher

University of Jyväskylä - Finland

Abstract

This paper examines whether male and female managers hold different opinion on women in managerial and higher level positions, depending on their different cultural background. Furthermore, the paper deals with managers' perception of organizational readiness to accept women in managerial positions. The paper is looking at this aspect from a cultural perspective, by comparing France to Finland. The research is based on 16 interviews, 9 from France and 7 from Finland, with individuals in different managerial positions in 10 private companies located in both countries. Findings indicate that regardless of the country and of the cultural backgrounds, organizations are not ready to let women climb the hierarchical ladder as men do. Results also show that despite a positive mind-set toward gender-equality, Finnish women still face a strong masculine corporate culture.

Keywords: *Organizational Readiness Theory, Cross-cultural communication, Gender-equality, France, Finland*

Introduction

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

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

To explore this issue, two nations, with differing social perceptions, histories, and policies regarding gender equality are examined: Finland, a recognized fair and open-minded country that supports gender equality as an advantage for the whole society (Katila & Eriksson, 2013), and France, a chauvinist and paternalist country (Bennhold, 2010; Lambert, 2001), which has valuably contributed to improve women's rights. Specifically, this study examines male and female managers' perception of organizational readiness in French and Finnish companies. Even though the latter is recognized as female-friendly and as an example of gender equality (Saari 2013), statistics/reports show this belief is incorrect. On the other hand, through the initiatives taken by the French government it is implied that women are discriminated against (Bennhold 2010; Fisher 2012), especially in managerial positions. Furthermore, culturally speaking, France and Finland hold different roots on gender equality (Grésy & Dole 2011; Öun 2012). Many studies have looked at gender discrimination in the workplace from a quantitative perspective, but less have focused on employees' perceptions of organizational readiness to accept women in leadership positions from a cultural perspective. Moreover, no study has directly compared France to Finland on this issue.

Organizational Readiness for Change

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

Organizations are constructed of multiple levels that are the basis for organizational change (Weiner 2009). Therefore, to be successful, several factors should be looked at when attempting organizational change. Clement (1994) pointed out the importance of working with the already existing culture of an organization; since resistance to change depends on the strength and depth of the organizational culture. Organizational culture is too strong and deeply rooted (Schein 2010) to be the only focus of organizational change. The organizational power structure as well as its relationships to politics should be observed. However, Clement (1994) considered leadership as the key factor in successful change. His point was that examples should be set and shown by the top management through open and participative communication, and visible support for change. The process of change cannot go on or work if all levels of an organization and its staff are not fully involved and committed (Armenakis et al. 1993). In this sense, organizational readiness for change is a collective and participative process.

Management stereotypes

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

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

French and Finnish cultural and work context

In France, one of the first laws to ensure equality at work, the Génisson law (2001), stated men and women must have equal salary, promotion, and access to training and jobs. However, despite such attempts at equality, French women were still struggling to evolve, and as a result the Copé-Zimmermann law (2011) was approved. The law requires a minimum quota of women and men to be respected, in order to ensure a balanced representation of both genders at the board of directors and at supervisory boards. In addition to the legal framework, organizations of above 50 employees are legally entitled to report men's and women's situation within the company, along with a yearly action plan for gender equality (Ministère du Travail January 2012).

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

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

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

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

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

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

Data collection and method

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

In Finland, seven people were interviewed all employed in 5 different companies located within the Jyväskylä and Turku areas. Companies were from different fields. The companies' size varied from 3,000 to less than 300 employees. In total, three women and 4 men were interviewed. Interviewees' positions extended from manager to Vice-President. Interviewees' age ranged from 30 to 60 years old. On average, Finnish interviewees were slightly younger than the French ones. More thorough participants' information is available in Annex I.

Interviews consisted of 11 questions. Participants were interviewed individually, as Mertens (1998) pointed out it has the incontestable advantage of easing the atmosphere, which is necessary when talking about one's opinions and experiences. Moreover, a self-reflection was expected. On average, interviews lasted between 30 minutes to an hour. All interviews were transcribed. Then, French and Finnish interviews were first analyzed separately before being compared. Finally, interviews were analyzed by looking for repetitions of certain themes. The next section contains the analysis of interviewees' own opinions, claims, and experiences.

Analysis

France

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

I feel like I'm well perceived because [...] I respect individuals whether they are men, women, laborer; I greet everyone in the same way[1]. MFr #3

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

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

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

A female vice-director (FFr #5) illustrates it through telling a colleague’s experience with employees and suppliers. She said:

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

Even the relationship with suppliers was tricky. When she was meeting them accompanied by her father-in-law [also employed within the company], suppliers always addressed to her father-in-law and never to her. They considered her more as a secretary than as supervisor of the company.

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

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

The age of employees and managers was expressed by a young female manager (FFr #1). She observed older men seemed less accepting to be directed by a woman. However, she expressed doubt as to the reason. She said:

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

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

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

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

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

Complementary, a male manager (MFr #2) explained that frequently working with women made him realize they are as capable as men; that “women are men like others”.

On a more general level, the sector of an organization seems an important factor. Some professional sector (mechanical, construction industry), jobs appear reserved for men. FFr #6 explained that because the acceptance of a woman as a superior is also a sector issue, “it becomes a cultural matter.

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

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

For those positions (CEO) it is more about relational and networking. It is true that those positions are really windy. I leave one company to start in another one, and the one that leaves from the other company...well they kind of

exchange their posts. Therefore, if there are almost only men, when exchanging posts we always get back to having ⁵ only men directing companies. FFr #1

As an external factor, interviewees had a reserved opinion on the Copé-Zimmermann law's (2011) relevancy. It was explained that even though the law has a positive impact on women ("visible minority") who wish to take further responsibilities (integrate board of directors) (FFr #6), it is a cultural matter and therefore the law has a superficial influence (MFr #2). FFr #6 added women willing to take on such positions are being highly looked for.

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

Finland

All Finnish female interviewees reported being well perceived as managers and appreciated. They all explained receiving positive feedback. Furthermore, stereotypical female characteristics as softness, compassion, and openness, better understanding and more talkative were described as possible reasons for why they are appreciated as managers.

A need to work harder for equal recognition was also expressed by Finnish women. The female manager FFi #1 explained how age plays a role in perceptions towards women's career evolution, and also, to some extent, the role of gender in the post a woman was more likely perceived to have in a male-dominated industry. She said:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Of course it's easier for men. It has always been, and still is. [...] Men are one big group with friends, they go to army and stuff like this. They know each other, they have their own circles and own network. And then when someone knows somebody and somebody, it works like that. I have seen [it] in this company (current one). I think there are a couple of managers (male) that have reached their position just being a friend to some members of the board. And when you think about their experience in this area they don't have any real experience or education. And it is quite interesting that they have quite high positions.

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

Of course that's the old tradition in Finland. Now it is kind of an old story, the big guys with cigars and cognac deciding who is going to be CEOs and those kinds of things. Now it is totally different, as I see it. Now it is the facts, who has the best profile, experience...that's the way how it goes nowadays. 6

Without exception, all Finnish interviewees argued people's experience, personality, and capability should take precedence over anything else. They all agreed gender does not play any role in promotion or in hiring.

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

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

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

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

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

Although Finland does not have similar laws, Finnish interviewees were asked their thought about the Copé-Zimmermann law (2011). All interviewees had a similar line of thought. Even though it was seen as positive to some extent by some interviewees, most of them considered the law as leading to more problems than solutions. The main issue addressed was women would be recruited because of their gender and not based on their qualifications, which is essential, as expressed above.

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

Discussion

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

Personal level

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

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

Furthermore, all Finnish interviewees, male and female, claimed experience, personality, and abilities take precedence over gender when hiring or promoting. Even though it is consistent with the belief that gender equality is promoted in Finland, it does not

support the non-encouraging statistics, which show women are far from being promoted and employed on a similar basis than men. The image of gender equality promoted in Finland affiliates more with gender-neutrality than equality, and the reality appears to be quite different. This draw closer to the concept of gender-blindness; defined as refusing to recognize the differences between men and women, and therefore enabling male norms to prevail (Saari 2013). In this perspective, by failing to acknowledge current discrimination in career evolution and by advocating a gender-neutral image, stereotypical male characteristics are supported. A similar statement was claimed by some French interviewees, who conceded both men and women have similar career opportunities but only up to a certain level. After which, both are not considered as having the same degree of investment at work. It underlies that once women get a family, they will have less time to invest in work, which does not seem to be of concern in the case of men. A comparable argument was claimed by Finns that women are less represented in leadership positions because women are less ambitious due to family responsibilities. Therefore, the representation of women as mothers clearly disadvantages women entitled to promotion, and demonstrates that gender is a valid factor taken into account in career evolution related issues.

Interpersonal level

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

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

Contextual level

According to the French and Finnish interviewees, the sector of an organization appears to strongly influence the perception towards female managers. Indeed, employees in some specific fields, like construction and mechanical industries, were described as less likely to accept being directed by a woman. Such industries usually are predominantly male dominated. This is seemingly consistent with Stoker and Velde's (2012) finding that female managers are less likely to be positively perceived in organizations where they are tokens. Additionally, the scope of an organization contributes to inequalities. A company operating in countries where women do not or are not allowed to conduct business has no interest in sending a female representative there.

Interestingly, management style seems to play a more important role in Finland than in France. The Finnish management style is defined as target-oriented, action-oriented, production-oriented, and focuses on operational and technical efficiency (Katila & Eriksson 2013); it is also referred to the management by "perkele" by some interviewees. Those management characteristics mirror the masculine features, which means the Finnish management style suits men better. An interesting fact outlined by a female interviewee was that this specific management style seems to ensue from military training. In Finland, military training is mandatory for male teenagers, and seems highly appreciated by companies hiring for managerial positions, as they value the goal oriented and straightforwardness attitude (Katila & Eriksson 2013). However, by having a military service mandatory for men and optional for women, a difference between the genders is created. In this regard, women start their professional careers with a disadvantage compared to their male counterpart. Nevertheless, this difference would not be the basis of discrimination if companies were not to implicitly favor such characteristics. This is consistent with Eagly's (1987) social role theory, which argues women are disadvantaged based on gender and managerial stereotypes. Indeed, women who are described as sensitive, caring, warm and people-oriented by both French and Finnish interviewees do not fit the description of such a management style. Therefore, there are expectations of how women should be that are inconsistent with the vision of a good leader. As a consequence, women are expected to fulfill specific types of jobs, and if they are managers, they are more likely to be expected to be a part of specific departments (Stoker and Velde 2012). All interviewees noted human resources departments are commonly directed by women because they are more skilled in interpersonal relationships. Confined to such positions due to their suitable skills, men get better opportunities and less competition to access the highest positions.

Another resistance for women to access the highest positions seems to come from the top of the hierarchy, and from the so called "network" or the "good old brother clubs" in Finland. Networks and good relationships were described by French and Finnish interviewees as a good springboard for higher positions. In Finland, the military service was described as a sort of a cradle to the "good old brother club", and to the professional relationships that result from it. Consequently, women are less likely to benefit from such networks. However, this was presented as being more common in long-running organizations and not so practiced in recently created ones. Therefore, this tradition seems to be led to disappear with time. In the case of France, such a network was affiliated to sort of a mafia ruling at the top of the hierarchy. In any case, men holding leadership positions tend to favor other men

rather than women. Research showed individuals tend to like and favor people who share similar characteristics (Byrne 1971), which seem to be the case in these interviews.

Change agents

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

Conclusion

Organizational readiness for change does not only concern individuals, but also the organizational structure itself. On the surface in Finland, it appears as though women are well perceived as superiors and are considered as equally capable of directing a team or an organization. Adversely, such gender neutrality may result in a standardization of the requirements as masculine. However, inequalities are present. The fact of being more open-minded and a female-friendly country does not seem to favor women. On the contrary, it seems to hide the possible on-going discrimination under the mask of a female-friendly state that has yet to reach gender equality. In the case of France, the chauvinist culture remains deeply rooted in masculine mentalities and behaviors that make it challenging for women to climb hierarchical ladders. Even so, French managers highlighted the bright sight that discrimination towards women is mainly a generational issue and would tend to disappear with time. As noted, the resistance to equal accession to managerial positions for women can also stem from the organizational structure. Both the French and the Finnish organizational structures were tailor-built to fit men's characteristics and way of living (Kanter 1977), and are still ruling today's structure. Therefore, cultural background is not the only factor of readiness to have female managers; the structure of the organizations has a strong impact on gender differences and does not give the impression to be adapted to women's characteristics and way of living. While Finland seems to have the right mind-set on gender equality, France appears aware of the problems and more willing to tackle it.

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Annex: Interviewees information

France	MFr #1	FFr #1	MFr #2	MFr #3	FFr #2	FFr #3	FFr #4	FFr #5	FFr #6
Age	35-50	35-50	50<	50<	35-50	35-50	35-50	35-50	35-50
Diploma	Master 1	Master	Master	Master	Master	Master			
Position	Study director of toxicology	Study director of toxicology	Sales & customer relation manager	Director of department	Project Manager	Former CEO, now quality specialist manager	Senior executive + managing director	Vice director	Managing director of 2 companies
% men & women[2]	42% m / 58% w	42% m / 58% w	90% m / 10% w		60% m / 40% w	90% m / 10% w	80% m / 20% w	50% m-w	50% m-w
% male & female managers[3]			95% m / 5% w		70% m / 30% w	95% m / 5% w	40% m / 60% w	20% m / 80% w	20% m / 80% w

Finland	MFi #1	FFi #1	FFi #2	FFi #3	MFi #2	MFi #3	MFi #4
Age	50<	50<	35-50	30>	35-50	35-50	35-50
Diploma	Master	Second level education	Master	Master	Bachelor	Bachelor	Master
Position	Vice president (then), CEO (now)	Former managing director (inheritance), now manager	Team manager	Team manager	Head of customer project department	Quality manager	Hotel manager
% men & women:1	86% m / 14% w	90% m / 10% w	50% m-w	70% m / 30% w	90% m / 10% w	90% m / 10% w	30% m / 70% w
% male & female managers²	83% / 17% w	99% m / 1% w	80% m / 20% w	80% m / 20% w	80% m / 20% w	80% m / 20% w	30% m / 70% w

About the Authors

Flora Galy-Badenas (MA, 2015, University of Jyväskylä) is a Doctoral student in the Department of Communication at the University of Jyväskylä.

Stephen M. Croucher (PhD, 2006, University of Oklahoma) is a Professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Jyväskylä.

Authors' Address

Please direct all correspondence regarding this article to
Stephen M. Croucher
PO Box 35, L-230
Department of Communication, University of Jyväskylä
Jyväskylä
Finland 40014

[1] All translations from French to English have been done by the primary author.

[2] Percentage of men and women working in the company.

[3] Percentage of male and female managers in the company.

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