

## **Underrepresentation of Women within the Cyprus Corporate Hierarchy**

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### **Abstract**

**Purpose** – *The main purpose is aimed at exploring the possible reasons for women, who are unrelated by family, being underrepresented at the top of the corporate hierarchy in Cyprus. The research is targeted at the development of a possible model to alleviate the problem by providing steps for women who are striving to climb the corporate ladder. It may, also, produce factors that other stakeholders may consider to be of value in the development of a diversified Board of Directors.*

**Design/methodology/approach** – *The research design included in depth literature review of secondary data sources and a qualitative primary data instrument: the utilization of semi-structured interviews with women in senior management positions in Cyprus and the United Kingdom.*

**Findings** – *The outcomes indicate that despite the perceived perceptions and assumed behaviours, there are steps that may be taken by women, organisations and governments. A model is presented that indicates the importance of the steps to be taken by all stakeholders. Additionally, these steps determine a joint effort aiming to change the norm, “think leader, think male’ to an equal opportunity for all talented men and women.*

**Practical Implications** – *The model provides a methodology for those women who wish to aspire to the highest level in the corporate hierarchy and gives guidance to organisations and governments on how this wealth of talent may be best facilitated to achieve.*

**Originality/Value** – *No evidence could be found of this type of research being undertaken in Cyprus, consequently this is creating unique and new knowledge within the Cypriot environment, and may be used by those organisations wishing to develop women managers.*

**Practical Limitations** – *Since there are only a few senior managers/directors who are unrelated, by family, in the Cyprus context only a small sample was available.*

**Key Words:** Women, corporate hierarchy, strategy, equality, success model.

### **Introduction**

“Woman must not accept; she must challenge. She must not be awed by that which has been built up around her; she must reverence that woman in her which struggles for expression.” Margaret Sanger. (<http://www.sapphyr.net/women/women-smquotes.htm> date accessed, 28/05/2010). The juggling of work and life balance is a way of life for all working women but inevitably becomes harder and harder as women move up the ladder of the corporate hierarchy. Longer hours are needed, last minute meetings, greater responsibilities, best behaviors, and still have time left for their children and family. It would appear from reviewing the statistics (In Business, 2009) the majority of women in top management positions in the Cyprus context have two similarities: they are related, by family to the Chairman or other members of the board, and many are employed within the public sector. The authors felt that it would be of value to attempt to present a model of best practice to alleviate the problem within the Cyprus context mainly for corporations in the private sector.

The European Commission collects data from the largest listed corporations in European countries regarding gender balance in decision making bodies for the Business and Finance sectors, annually. The data collected in August 2009 has shown that in 606 organisations of the 27 countries only 11% of board members are women (89% are men) and 3% of Presidents of the board are women (97% are men). (Data taken from: <http://www.ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=777&land=en&intPageId=675>, date accessed 27/05/2010). Women and leadership is one of the most discussed and surveyed topics (see Cormier 2007, Schein 2007, Desvaux et al. 2007, Catalyst 2006, Catalyst 2010, Pollitt 2008, and Book 2000). The “glass ceiling effect”, work life balance, stereotypes and the fact that the corner office is a ‘boys place’, have been addressed by both women and men. The need to work efficiently and effectively, to be flexible and adjustable to changes and be able to change and transform, is today’s most needed strategic tools for any corporation to survive and win in the business battlefield. In such times corporations need top leaders, the best person for the job. Why miss out half of the most suitable candidates, just because of their gender? Why look for the best man for the job, instead of the best person for the job?

### ***The Nature of the Study***

Four main questions for the research will be assessed:

- To consider and establish the gender differences in leadership style
- Who makes a better leader? Gender Stereotype limitations
- Are women sacrificing their work-life balance for business success?
- How can the norm - “Think Leader, think Male?” may be changed? Women who succeeded as examples may be used as role models for other women who wish to follow

### **Gender Leadership Styles**

Macgregor (2000) has defined leadership in traditional Masculine and Feminine styles. She has outlined these differences are:

Dimensions	Masculine Style	Feminine Style
Characteristics	Competitive, strategic, analytical, and often unemotional	Cooperative, empathic, collaborative
Teamwork	Traditional boy games teach them to win or loose One person, one team is at the top is what is important	Cooperative games and networking One person is at the centre and not at the top
Problem Solving	Collecting data and information that is measurable is their way of solving problems	Working with people, analyzing the situation and its effect on others. Allows them to have innovative ideas and think out of the box
Outcomes	Decision making is not shared and neither is accountability as they see it as a threat of power.	Encouragement of participation and shared accountability. Personal power used than title power

Table 1: Adapted from Macgregor’s (2002) Leadership Styles

The standardized view that male leaders behave in a traditional masculine style and women leaders in a traditional feminine style is also shared by authors such as, Cook and Rothwell (2000), Book (2000), Eagly and Johnson (1990), Bass (1990). Bass’s (1990) research indicates that females are seen to be more; gentle, caring and affectionate, considerate towards others and have both greater verbal and non-verbal communication skills thus establishing good relationships and bonding. Men, however are seen to be more; competitive, independent, self reliant, and task oriented as success is their mean for power and high self-esteem. A similar view is argued by Cook and Rothwell (2000), stating masculine qualities as: action and target orientation, competitiveness, risk taking, desire to be the best, focus on structure and hierarchy. Feminine qualities are: relationship orientation, listening, multitasking, focus on people’s achievements and interpersonal connections despite the hierarchical structure. Eagly and Johnson (1990) in a meta-analysis of gender and leadership style have compared a) Interpersonal style, b) Task style and c) Democratic vs. Autocratic style between the sexes and found the strongest evidence of gender differences to be in the latter. The evidence of the study, showed that there was a tendency for females to act in a more democratic and participative style and males to act in a more autocratic and directive style.

Alternatively the evidence indicated that when in similar positions in the organisation, where duties, tasks and roles are defined the differences between the sexes become smaller, probably because of the training, job fit, and selection process preceding the hiring of the successful candidate. Their findings further suggested that when both men and women were in a leadership role regarded as compatible with their gender, both sexes emphasized task accomplishment and orientation.

Sonnenfeld (1995) and Epstein (1990) they argue that to accept the differences in the leadership style of men and women and to claim that women bring better or different qualities and skills to the workforce, there is an admission and recognition that there is a standardized feminine style of leadership. They claim that reality is different and that many of the qualities attributed to female leaders also apply to male leaders. They support their claims by giving examples of women leaders such as Margaret Thatcher whose leadership style was far from the typical feminine style. They also criticize that if it is accepted that there is a characteristically feminine style of leadership attributed to women then it is to deny female leaders the right to be different in style from each other, and an assumption of a homogenous style for each gender.

Mansbridge (1991) argues that even if there is an admission that there are differences, they are so small that they become statistically insignificant. She claims that there are more pronounced differences between leaders of small versus large companies or young versus old managers than of gender. The conclusions that may be drawn have indicated that there are conflicting findings from researchers. In examining these findings there is a need to determine whether these differences are assumed due to gender stereotype perceptions that exist. Do corporations assume behaviors when screening for leaders, based on gender or do they evaluate based on personality, skills, qualifications, capabilities and consequently chose the best “man”, person for the job?

### **Gender Stereotype**

Gray (1992) explores the differences of men and women as they are assumed to have come from different planets. His work outlines some main differences such as:

- Men obtain their sense of self from achievement. They tend to be task-oriented, and being self-reliant is important to them. Women however receive fulfillment from their sense of self from relationships. Their connections to other people are most important. Instead of prizing self-reliance, they tend to be inter-dependent, enjoying the connectedness to other people.
- Men usually focus on a goal; they want to reach the ‘bottom line’, to finalize the process. Women tend to enjoy the process, this is not to say that reaching a goal is not important, but they like achieving.
- Men are more competitive and like to win to prove their competence whereas women are more cooperative than competitive
- Men separate the different parts of their lives. Each part is in a different compartment i.e. work in one, sports in another, relationships in another and so on, whereas women tend to connect each part of their lives.
- Men tend to be linear. They tend to focus on one thing at a time but women are often jugglers between tasks; i.e. multi-tasking.

The authors considered Gray’s (1992) work to highlight that although there are differences between men’s and women’s behaviours, it may be seen as complementing one another rather than opposing each other. Tyler (2002) suggests that we need “complementarity”.

She quotes:

“We need both halves of humanity to run a business, build a community, coexist on the planet.”  
([http://homepage.mac.com/sampriya/Company\\_of\\_Women.pdf](http://homepage.mac.com/sampriya/Company_of_Women.pdf), date accessed 24/04/2010)

Hofstede (2001) argued that women bare children and take care of people as this fits their biological role in society. Men are concerned with economic achievements and have a dominant role in society. He suggests that this role of dominance and achievement in society, for the male is also applicable in business life as they have tasks and goals to be achieved. When examining the gender stereotypes is the supposition of gender differences actually based on assumed perceptions of gender stereotypes or real life facts.

### **Assumed perceptions**

Gender stereotyping leaves women with limited, conflicting and often unfavourable options for their business life (Catalyst 2006). This report focused on the consequences of gender bias and three specific “double-bind dilemmas”, frequently experienced by women business leaders.

- a) Extreme perceptions. Due to expectations for a female leader’s behaviour, usually women are caught in the middle. If they act according to their gender stereotype behaviour they are perceived as too soft whereas if they act against it, they are perceived as too tough. If a woman leader speaks softly, nobody will listen, if she speaks loudly then she is too pushy. But by playing safe women do not maximize their potential.
- b) The high competence threshold/lower rewards. Women tend to work harder assuming that by doing so they will be evaluated and rewarded accordingly. But according to Frankel (2004) nobody was promoted only because of their hard work. Factors like socializing, networking, being a team player, strategic thinking and bonding are also important when an individual wants to succeed.
- c) Competent but disliked. If a female leader focuses only on achieving the task, on goals and performance, then by default she will be disliked. Assertiveness does not match the expectations of people around her. She might be disliked but respected. Yet, if women try too hard to be liked, they might be judged as incompetent.

Campbell and Storo (1994) studies indicates a tendency to see gender as a predictor of someone’s behaviour, abilities and interests. Differences between individual girls are far greater than those between the average girl and the average boy. There are biological differences but no other indicator facilitates the statement of gender stereotype. In modern societies both girls and boys have equal opportunities and education. Even when perceptions are transferred to the workplace, it might be seen that there are women who overcome the odds and reach the top in male dominant professions or industries. In the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, much progress has been made. Women can vote, own property, work, become educated and can leave the home. Since women and men have the right to choose their education field and thereafter their career path, they should have equal opportunities and support to rise within the corporate hierarchy.

### **Work life balance**

Work Life balance (WLB) is defined by the United Kingdom’s Department of Trade and Industry as being: “...about adjusting working patterns regardless of age, race or gender, so everyone can find rhythm to help them combine work with other responsibilities or aspirations” ([www.dti.gov.uk/work-lifebalance/what.html](http://www.dti.gov.uk/work-lifebalance/what.html), date accessed, 02/05/2010) .

The term includes many factors such as how long people work, when they work, where they work, whether there is support and breaks from work. Schein (2007) states that as most executive positions have been and still are occupied predominately by males, these positions have been designed to fit the assumed gender based division of labour. The job demands and requirements are assumed as a necessity for the success of the organisations. Corporate life involves deadlines, last minute projects, unscheduled late night meetings, targets to achieve at any cost, all of which can monopolize time spent after normal working hours and thus put a burden on anyone’s work-life balance. She also states that often, performance is evaluated on the basis of time spent at work; i.e. how early one arrives at work and how late they leave the office, another burden with work and family responsibilities. Women differ in how they manage the interface between work and family roles over their careers. Issues of balance, connectedness, and interdependence, in addition to issues of achievement and individuality permeate women’s lives. At any point in her career, a woman may choose to place a greater emphasis on work or on family, or she may strive to achieve a balance between the two. (Powell and Graves 2003)

McKinsey & Company (2007) performed two studies concerning women in top management positions. In these studies the combination of work and domestic responsibilities is called “double burden” syndrome. The authors suggest that this model is inherent in our model of society and wonder how compatible the double burden is with the demands associated with senior management. The perceived dominant model in the business world, they suggest, equates leadership with unfailing availability, and total geographical mobility at all times. It is defined as “anytime, anywhere” and leaves no space for career breaks (maternity), or rejection of geographical mobility (I have children to take care of). In the latter study (2008) there are suggestions of measures to facilitate work-life balance such as flexible working hours (e.g., remote working, part-time working, and flex time) but also career flexibility and support during breaks.

When corporations can offer personalized career paths, only then they can choose the best candidate for the job regardless of gender. Hewlett and Luce (2005) suggest that employers are writing off women once they have had children. Her research shows that 37% of professional women will drop out at some point in their careers, either to look after children or parents, and another third will probably work part-time for a while. If these women try to "on-ramp" again, they "get lost on re-entry", by receiving less remuneration and a lower position, which she considers as "fines" for temporarily leaving the corporate life based on a male competitive model.

De Cieri, et al., (2005, p.90) quote:

"Work life balance, from an employee perspective, is the maintenance of balance between responsibilities at work and at home".

By shifting the role conflict for working mothers and fathers, allowing them to spend quality time with their families, they are expected to be more productive at work, motivated, loyal and committed, as if they are repaying the granted benefits (Maxwell and McDougal, 2004). The same authors comment that employers benefit from offering work-life balance by retaining valued employees. One would expect reduced employee turnover, improved productivity, loyalty, and dedication. Needless to say when people are not faced with conflicting dilemmas and stressful decisions of fair time allocation between work and personal life, they are expected to feel committed and satisfied thus more dedicated and productive. The question of whether a balance can be retained remains. Are women sacrificing their personal life for a successful career?

### ***Can women have the best of both worlds?***

Hewlett (2002) quotes in her article:

"There is a secret out there—a painful, well-kept secret: At midlife, between a third and a half of all successful career women in the United States do not have children. In fact, 33% of such women (business executives, doctors, lawyers, academics, and the like) in the 41-to-55 age bracket are childless—and that figure rises to 42% in corporate America." <http://hbr.org/2002/04/executive-women-and-the-myth-of-having-it-all/ar/1>, (date accessed 25/04/2010)

In a survey conducted in 2001 in America, she found some painful truths. She claims that the results showed that for many women, the cruel demands of top careers limit their chances of having children. Although high flyer men seem unaffected by difficult tradeoffs, as 79% of the men interviewed wanted children and 75% had them, and 76% are married, the picture changes for the high flyer women. 49% of these women are childless and only 60% are married.

Men and women struggle in the arena of the corporate world and balancing work and personal life seems a burden for both genders. The former chief executive of the Equalities Rights commission in Britain, Nicola Brewer (cited in Bennett and Ahmed, 2008) suggested that:

"...it was an inconvenient truth that giving women a year off work after the birth of each child - soon to be paid throughout - was making employers think twice before offering a job or promotion."

<http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/law/article4327438.ece> (date accessed 19/4/2010).

Are women paying a much higher cost than men by taking advantage of the initiatives granted for balancing the work-life responsibilities? Are women becoming less attractive for the corporate arena? Extended maternity leave, flex time and part time offerings are supposed to be steps towards a better balance between work and family life. Could these mean a new battle emerging not between the sexes but between women themselves? A 'Queen Bee' syndrome as suggested by one of the interviewees in this research. Gender stereotype and assumed perceptions, leadership styles and career paths differ so greatly between women of the newer generation in Europe. The working mothers versus full time mothers, the working mothers versus the childless females, the career mothers versus the non career mothers is a new division probably created by the equality rights and tries of men and women. There are the women of course who have had enough of the corporate world and the hardships of unfair and unequal treatment, stressful timetables and the "glass ceiling" effect and prefer to work on their own terms as entrepreneurs, but this is beyond the scope of this paper.

### ***Summary***

The authors have examined the reasons behind the unbalanced representation of gender in decision making bodies and the burdens women face when aiming for the top. Gender leadership styles, gender stereotypes and work life balance can be limitations for women who want to succeed in the business world.

How can women overcome these obstacles and still enjoy a successful career and how considerable these obstacles are is yet to be considered. A survey conducted by the UK Government Equalities Office in March 2010 indicated that 60% of people believe that there are not enough women directors in large companies. The UK government has asked the Financial Reporting Council to consider including a new principle in the Corporate Governance Code requiring companies to report on steps taken to increase the number of women in senior management positions.

([http://www.equalities.gov.uk/media/equality\\_bill\\_completes\\_parlia/women\\_on\\_boards\\_public\\_want\\_q.aspx](http://www.equalities.gov.uk/media/equality_bill_completes_parlia/women_on_boards_public_want_q.aspx), date accessed, 02/05/2010). It seems that the pressure for more women participating on Boards is increasing and people are recognising that diversified Boards are more efficient, more customer friendly and have a fair share of talented leaders according to this survey.

The real life scenarios of women who have succeeded against all odds and managed to hold positions at the top of the corporate hierarchy enable conclusions to be drawn of best practice, role modelling and behaviours for other women who wish to pursue their career to the top. Real life paths are drawn on choices people have and how they take advantage of the opportunities and choices. Women face limited opportunities even if they choose to pursue their career and companies miss out on talented women by limiting their candidates.

### **Methodology**

The research activities primary purpose was to examine several significant issues reflecting the shortage of representation of women with the corporate structure with particular reference to the Cyprus context.

The following research objectives were created to reflect this purpose:

1. Analyze the different variables affecting the lack of women's representation at the top of the organizational structure.
2. Identify the qualities, traits, style, skills and behaviours of women who have succeeded
3. Identify the difficulties women face with the work – life balance
4. Derive suggestions for a change plan for both women and organizations

The research design employed included an extensive literature review of secondary data sources with specific importance to the areas under consideration and a qualitative primary data collection instrument: the application of semi-structured interviews with women in senior management positions. As the authors were concerned about the process, the journey of the participants' career paths and not the statistics underpinning them, this method was determined to be the most appropriate, as it enabled the interaction with women leaders and thus extract behaviours together with 'real life' experiences that create possible paths to success.

This methodology produced a series of questions, semi structured formulated, from which potential qualitative data collection methods and likely outputs can be identified. This approach is developed from Morse's (1994), comparison of qualitative strategies. The intention is to provide a framework that will encourage organisations to explore the considerable changes that may be necessary. As such, the use of a qualitative approach in a planned and systematic way was employed. Five interviews were undertaken so as to obtain ideas and useful information for the construction of advice and guide for all women who wish to succeed but who also wish to retain their work life balance.

The authors decided to select three women who had been reviewed in an article from The "In Business" Magazine (2009), presenting the 100+ Powerful Women of Cyprus. Two additional interviews were undertaken by telephone with business women in the UK, who are both in male dominant areas, the heavy vehicle truck manufacturing sector and a professional body representing the motor industry, in order to provide an alternative perspective to be able to determine a possible model that may be applied to the corporate environment in Cyprus. The method to be used was to send, electronically, to our sample, a discussion guide, which outlined the reasons for the research. The guidance note included the issues to be explored and requested a time when these conversations could take place. On acceptance by the interviewees, the authors sent electronically the interview questions to prepare them for the interview. A face to face interview was arranged, with the women leaders, in Cyprus and telephone interviews with those in the UK, aimed at exploring the potential to use a qualitative approach and determine the hurdles to be overcome in the real life situation, together with the desire to understand the complexity of the issues. The data collected was in the form of written transcripts of interviews in which the emerging themes could be identified and coded. The authors believe it is important to adopt an approach that would be transparent to the women leaders.

In this way it helped to build confidence in the interview and attempt to elicit responses that reflect the 'real life' experience. The analysis of the data was manual/interpretive process as outlined by Tesch (1990). It began with working with each individual interview, using themes stemming from the literature and research interest, and as new themes emerged from the data, adding these. The emerged themes then tested against the remainder of the data. The limitations of any qualitative research are the small sample used but this size was determined by the small number of women leaders in the private sector in the Cyprus economy, who were not in any way related, by family, to other members of the Board, and the limited accessibility of women in UK. The sample was determined from the population of women who have succeeded and thus did not taking into account the ones who have not, the reason being that the authors wanted to examine the positive outcomes and use them as examples for all women who may wish to follow.

### **Findings**

#### **Suggestions for women who wish to succeed in the corporate world.**

Engaging in a decision to advance to the top of the corporate world is a choice taken by individuals whose ambitions are set high and are seeking a job satisfying their self development and aim for the self actualization needs (Maslow, 1943). It is not the purpose of this research to examine why different people have different needs but the authors suggest, from both the primary and secondary research considered that this is due to personality, character, and upbringing. To ensure a successful journey to the top, the authors are suggesting a model of best practice that can be explored by each and every woman, who may wish to attain a top position in the business hierarchy.

#### **Steps needed by women**

Steps and actions needed by women are suggested in order to create a supply side, sufficient enough, to eliminate the assumption made by the corporate world that the problem is not on demand, but by the fact that there are not enough women who wish to strive. The themes that emerged following the analysis were:

**Performance** as defined in this research is based on someone's achievements. It is the a portfolio of their work, it is the goals they have fulfilled, the experiences they have gained along the way, the targets they have met, and their talent in managing people. It is a result of long working hours, hard work, focus and dedication. Interviewees suggested multitasking, discipline and good time management as well as stamina as the necessary skills needed to cope with the demanding road to success. An individual must show initiative, take up opportunities, and take advantage of their skills and expertise. Qualifications obtained are not necessarily academic ones, as observed by one participant. Performance is usually outstanding when people do what they enjoy most, what they are good at. Passion was the word used by all participants when describing how they felt and still feel about their role.

**Image** is defined as how people project themselves and how other people see them. The participants pay attention to their dress code. It must be smart, definitely not provocative but also not too dull or too formal. It must promote, what they defined as, their professional image. Being a good communicator and a team builder are essential for promoting a balanced workplace. A balanced workplace works efficiently, creates innovation, donates a pull of ideas, produces constructive feedback and allows the leader to view the process, the details and not just the outcomes. Women should take advantage of their emotional intelligence attributes which are assumed to be more intense but also try to keep a healthy balance between emotions and logic. Being too emotional can damage a professional image and being too logical can be seen as being distant and masculine.

Confidence comes high on the participants' listing. Women often are more competent than confident, so they need to build their confidence. A mentor can assist and support a woman, in building her confidence. She can be someone who has already succeeded and may act as a role model who can provide constructive feedback, encouragement and experiences. She is not there to solve problems or provide answers but to challenge the mentee to find the courage, the inner strength and the confidence to realise their potential, in an action learning approach.

Management of the office politics is another issue difficult for women. Office politics are the unwritten rules of the game and unless an individual plays by these rules they may miss out on 'winning the game'. Respect for others and gain the respect of them in return. A woman should never expect favours just because of her gender, as there is a danger of not been seen as equal. If people are treated with respect regardless of their position or power, then they are expected to act respectfully.

Interviewees reported that they felt like a hostess with customers, employees and other stakeholders. Guests are treated with care and attention and this is how a woman should treat her co-workers. Branding or making a name of the individual may link into the following category of exposure but a woman who manages to build a brand around her name, then she is seen as a knowledgeable, capable and also looks the part. A good brand creates expectations and defines the values, personality and abilities of the person.

**Exposure** is concerned with networking. Connections and contacts can assist in support, hints and tips that can be useful for managing a woman's career. As mentioned by the participants, men have the advantage of informal networking, but women should put an effort into going everywhere except the men's toilets and golf! Socialising inside and outside the office can add value and allow a person to sell or promote their brand. It always feels safe, especially for women, to stay in their "comfort zone". Staying behind a desk and just doing the work, as interviewees suggested, damages self development. The career game has borders but it is up to women how to expand these borders and exploit their full potential. As the interviewees reported, they still do not feel at the top, since they view an open horizon, full of challenges and opportunities to be gained.

The ability to manage upwards as well as downwards is an essential element. Women manage people well as they process skills learned by running a family: anger management, negotiation skills, motivation skills, flexibility and pragmatism. What women often find hard to do, is manage their superiors, the people who should notice them, as they are too modest. Confidence and passion can be their aid to look forward and refrain from looking over their shoulder. These suggestions and experiences are possible steps for women who wish to achieve a successful career path to the top. It is about "selling" a product. First there is development with characteristics and qualities followed by the packaging and the name/brand coupled with the display and the availability for "sale". A cake for instance with its ingredients, the shape and lastly the icing.

### **Steps needed by companies**

The economic crisis, the fall of financial institutions and corporations, there has emerged the need for companies around the globe to shift from bottom line results to the triple line performance. Profits alone cannot ensure sustainability of companies, as investors are not only interested in share value but on the environmental and social value of their stock. By adopting such policies, corporations ensure a healthy attraction of all stakeholders. Their customers, their suppliers, their investors and their human resources will probably stay loyal, committed and offer the company a competitive advantage in today's unstable economic environment.

The research indicated that companies should have unbiased recruitment appraisal and promotion criteria. They should adopt such human resource policies which promote gender equality and treatment of all employees as equal. Even when that means a shift of their corporate culture to accept women and men as equal, the initiative driven by the top management may lead to outstanding performance, innovation, competitive advantage and ensure sustainability for the company. If companies want to attract and retain talented people they should monitor programmes which do not exclude women or make them feel unwanted. Such programmes may be career development programmes targeted at women, which involve group work focusing on specific gender issues, career planning and confidence building by executive coaching. Other issues needed to be addressed are childcare and work-life balance, flexibility as well as career and life balance aspects.

Child caring programmes may assist in removing the stress and strain of a woman who is the middle of an important meeting but still has to care for her son or daughter for a few hours until the family support becomes available. Child caring programmes ensure loyalty, commitment, and retention of career women who may "fall" of the ladder just before reaching the top. From the research, most interviewees relied on family support including parents and partners. When both members of the couple work full time and have young children, taking care of them, their responsibilities and often domestic work may put a heavier burden on women who wish to sustain their career and make progress. In engaging a company to promote gender equality, the change requires commitment from the top. Leaders must sponsor and actively support the efforts as a cultural shift of any company cannot be facilitated unless it is directed by the leaders who can set a personal example of the shift required.

### **Steps needed by governments**

According to the themes that emerged Governments also play an important part in promoting equality and fair treatment for women at all levels of the corporate hierarchy.

In 2008 the Cyprus Gender Equality Observatory was formed to:

“... Elaborate Cypriot European and international policies on equal opportunities and to remove all discrimination against women in economic and social life, in the labour market, in education, in the family etc. To monitor results, surveys and studies on gender issues on the local, regional, national and international levels. To evaluate the data and to develop various activities. To submit proposals relating to undertaking positive action, aiming at the principle of equal opportunities for men and women.” (<http://www.pik.org.cy/mainen.htm>, date accessed 26/05/2010).

The authors believe, from evidence gained through the interviews and personal experience, that there is insufficient awareness of any support initiated by governments probably because they do not offer extensive coverage and information. Governments need to take actions and initiate gender equality programmes incorporated in education, in the labour market of both the public and the private sectors and society in general. Domestic and social roles of the genders are formulated from an early age and this is where action should be taken. Promoting equal domestic roles, promoting girls to feel equal to boys can benefit society and households. All day schools were a theme that emerged that can provide a more stable environment for children where both parents work.

It was felt that governments can perform frequent checks on employment policies adopted by companies and require a better disclosure of equal treatment for employment, pay, appraisal and promotion of employees.

The model of success is dominated by actions and steps needed from governments and society, from companies and by women themselves. All three play an active part in developing a safer, smoother path for women who wish to succeed. Personal development through steps women can take plays a more important role but it is more manageable at a personal level, though without the contribution of company policies and government support, the process will be slow and probably unsuccessful.

### ***Discussion and Implications***

Peter Bakker, CEO of TNT (cited in Thomson, et. al., 2005, p.119) commented on the appointment of a woman to their board in 2005:

“Marie Christine has been on the board for over a year now and the egos have left the room. Board meetings have a much better tone and feel about them now”

Almost always, women are the ones trading off career for family, even temporarily, instead of offering them support, training, consulting, and assisting in re entering the work force or promoting them, the corporate game created by men and played by men for centuries now has rules written and unwritten that exclude half of the population. A game as such, described by Thomson et al., (2005), as a game of tennis, is often won by men, as women do not use all the court available to them for fear of hitting the ball out of bounds. A fear of asking and demanding, a fear of being ambitious, a fear of never being good enough, a fear of taking risks, a fear of exploring their full potential, a fear of taking up opportunities are all reasons for holding women back and limiting the supply side of women in leadership positions. Taking the example of the interviewees, who are women to be admired, who can be role models and mentors for others, all have demonstrated an inner strength, will power, passion, dedication, confidence, professionalism, and values. All have succeeded in male dominant professions, by never pretending to be a man, or adopting men’s behaviour.

Women should be themselves, as they have valuable leadership attributes and skills and they can contribute to a better diversified board balance. One interviewee quoted:

“Some would say that Lehman Brothers would not have the success they did if they were Lehman Sisters, but then again maybe they wouldn’t have gone bankrupt either as women are more careful and less risk takers.”

The UK interviewees did not have a plan or a view to the top, but they did succeed by taking full advantage of the opportunities and challenges they faced and by proving they were the correct person for the role. For the Cypriot interviewees it was a choice they took and a natural progression of their professionalism. For all women though it is a fulfilment of their ambition, it is self development and a choice they were allowed to make. A model of best practice may be drawn by combining the efforts needed by women, by companies as well as by governments to ensure a safe, unbiased, with no leakages in the “pipeline” (Thompson et al., 2005) to succession for women’s choice to achieve.

The model chosen is a pyramid comparing it to a corporate hierarchy by placing steps to the top, in doing so it was the authors' intention to indicate the importance of these women's steps together with the low percentage of women who actually achieve climbing them.



Figure 1.1. Model of Best Practice

A brief summary of steps needed shows the weight given to government as they define societies culture, regulations and behaviours, then the importance of companies which define their culture and need to change their journey running on “automatic pilot” heading only for profits and the urgency to take action by changing their direction to a more diversified board. In this way companies can ensure their sustainability and add value to their shareholders' stocks by not only achieving profits but by being politically correct and socially responsible. Lastly, are the women's which define the traits needed to achieve top management positions. They describe the skills, behaviour and direction, as outlined by the interviewees, which may be followed or explored by any woman aiming for the top of the corporate hierarchy.

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