Coping patterns of female managers in male dominated industries - Differences within a minority group

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ABSTRACT

Numerous studies have disclosed a multitude of factors that make it difficult for female managers to make it to the top. Among the most cited factors figure the lack of mentors and role models and the exclusion from powerful networks as well as work-life balance issues. Very few studies have looked at these factors in combination. This work looks at 50 female middle managers in male dominated professional service firms (PSFs) such as consulting, audit and banking. Using in-depth interviews we study how these women deal with the above mentioned challenges. We find that the networking strategies and the ways these female managers deal with mentors and role models as well as how compatible they find their work with outside work activities form coherent interdependent yet distinctive patterns that holistically describe how women cope with their minority status. We find two distinctively different configurations of coping mechanisms. Our study describes these prototypes and discusses their implications for future research and practice.

Introduction

Throughout the Western world female managers are greatly underrepresented in middle and higher level management positions. While on the entry-level most companies indicate that about half of the positions are held by women, only up to 20 % of senior managers and up to 10 % of the board of directors are female (Zahidi & Ibarra, 2010). Female managers plateau at lower and middle management levels with only very few managing to overcome existing barriers and obtaining executive jobs on corporate levels: Less than a third of the leading 1,500 US companies have even a single woman among their top executives (Deszõ & Ross, 2007). Within the EU, women comprise only 11% of the membership of governing bodies such as boards of directors and supervisory boards (Desvaux, Devillard-Hoellinger, & Meaney, 2008).

Professional service firms (PSF) are a particular context for career progression. They are characterized by an 'up-or-out' system (Morris & Pinnington, 1998), which means that those not promoted to the next organizational level within a specified time period are required to leave the company (Galanter & Parlay, 1991; Baden-Fuller & Bateson, 1991; Waldman, 1990; Nelson, 1988; Wholey, 1985). Typical career steps within these knowledge intensive firms include junior staff, senior staff, manager, and partner. Those career steps usually unfold in strictly defined time frames. Due to the small percentage of partner positions available new recruits have only a limited expectation of becoming partner (Rousseau & Wade-Benzoni, 1994). This makes professional service firms a highly competitive work environment (Maister, 1993; Wholey, 1985). Research has shown that women have more difficulties reaching senior level positions in professional service firms (PSFs) despite similar educational levels, years of service and job performance (Burke & Nelson, 2002; Powell, 1999; Tharenou, 1999). As a consequence women account only for a rather small minority at middle and top levels of PSFs: While they account for over 40% of all accountants and solicitors in England and Wales as well as 30-40% of a starting cohort in management consulting, the number of female partners is between 7% and 14% in professional service firms in the United Kingdom and about 14 % of all partner positions at the 25 largest U.S. accounting firms (CPA, 2004). In 2009, women represented 46% of associates but only 19% of partners in U.S. law firms (Collins, 2009). Looking beyond the numbers Burke's (1995) study revealed that women had less feedback from partners than men and were less satisfied by their job. His study also showed that women with partners and families were facing

additional obstacles to promotion to senior management and partnership, regardless of the on-the job developmental opportunities (Burke, 1995).

Gender scholars as well as management scholars have come up with explanations for women's underrepresentation in leading management positions. Among the most prominent explanations are the limited access or exclusion from informal networks (Ibarra, 1993) leading to difficulties to access information and to form alliances (Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990) and the lack of mentoring support (De Janasz, Sullivan & Whiting, 2003, Dreher & Ash, 1990, Linehan & Walsh, 2001) and role models (Linehan & Scullion, 2008) combined with difficulties to manage work-life balance challenges.

What has been much less discussed however is whether women can be seen as a homogenous group or whether we may find considerable differences in terms of behavioural coping strategies to deal with the additional hurdles of working in a male-dominated industry. In a similar vain Hampton et al. (2009) indicate that research should focus more on successful strategies and dynamics of female managers, especially in male dominated industries. In line with this research deficit the aim of this study is twofold: In a first step we want to investigate how female middle managers in professional service firms cope with the documented barriers for career advancement. Drawing on these findings we want to identify if there are different coping patterns within this group and if so, describe how these patterns look like and differ from each other. We will structure our literature review as well as the results of the empirical investigation according to the factors that have been identified as major barriers in female careers: networking, mentoring, role models as well as the management of work-life balance.

Previous findings on advancement barriers for female managers

Networks and networking

Network building behaviours have been shown to be associated with higher job performance ratings by supervisors (Thompson, 2005), higher concurrent salary and salary growth rate of over time (Wolff & Moser, 2009) as well as a higher number of promotions (Forret & Dougherty, 2004). Apart from these objective measures of career success, networking has also been shown to be positively correlated with career satisfaction (Wolff &

Moser, 2009) as well as perceived career success (Forret & Dougherty, 2004). Bickle et al. (2005) even state that networking is *the* most robust predictor of career success.

Previous studies have well documented that gender matters when it comes to networking (e.g. Brass, 1985; Ibarra, 1992; Forret & Dougherty, 2004; Linehan & Scullion, 2008). Women's exclusion from informal networks that are traditionally composed of men (Ibarra, 1993; Vinnicombe & Colwill, 1995; Crampton & Mishra, 1999; Selmer & Suutari, 2003) is often named as the prime reason why women are underrepresented in top management positions (Linehan & Scullion, 2008). Gender differences in networks can be found at a structural and behavioural level. First, network structures have been shown to differ among genders. Second, men and women show to some extent different networking behaviours and as a consequence men and women have been shown to reap different benefits from their networks.

On the structural level Brass's (1985) early work on women's and men's networks demonstrated that women were not well-integrated into men's networks which had a significant negative impact for promotions as promotions were significantly related to centrality in departmental, men's, and dominant coalition networks. Due to the failure of being well-integrated into these mostly informal networks women tended to use informal organizational networks less frequently than men and instead rely on formal organizational structures (Brass, 1985). A few years later Ibarra (1993) demonstrated that the organizational context produces unique constraints on women in terms of their interaction networks. As a consequence, the composition and characteristics of females' network relationships differ from white males in that women's networks are less homophilous (Ibarra, 1992) and more differentiated in the sense that women draw on female contacts for social support and refer to male colleagues for instrumental purposes instead of having one contact to fulfil different needs. As homophilous relationships imply fewer barriers to connect with others based on a greater similarity this finding implies some considerable disadvantage to access networks if the context places women in a minority position. Adding to the structural dimension of gender differences in networks, McPherson & Smith-Lovin (1982, 1986) found that men have larger networks and are more likely to occupy higher status positions within their networks. At the same time men's network contacts tend to be of higher status than women's (Campbell, 1988; Ibarra, 1992) which may prove critical for resource acquisition as well as effective use of power. Additionally, women's networks have a smaller range, i.e. they tend to know contacts

in fewer occupations than men (Campbell, 1988) and are less diverse (Torres & Huffman, 2002). Looking at the relational content of networks Klein et al. (2004) add an interesting aspect to the observations on gendered network structure reporting that gender is significantly related to friendship centrality. Also, individuals whose gender is similar to their teammates' are likely to gain centrality in their team advice network (Klein et al. 2004). As a consequence of these findings we can conclude that if women represent the minority gender, they will occupy less central positions than their male counterparts.

When it comes to networking behaviours, Forret & Dougherty (2001) confirm that men are more likely to engage in socialising as part of networking behaviours than women. Findings of gender focused network studies provide evidence that qualifying a networking strategy as "the most appropriate" may even be gender related. While Burt (1992) reports that a weak tie network strategy seems best for men in general, Lee (2003) finds that for women the strong tie strategy worked better. Bevelander & Page (2011) add an interesting aspect to this stream of research with their findings that the way males and females build trust may be one of the core underlying mechanisms that influence network formation. While women showed a preference for same gender networking for social activities and task related issues, compared to men women tended to trust each other less in a risky professional environment and therefore preferred to network with men in a high risk professional context. Interestingly female MBA students experienced a greater decline in their network density at higher risk levels than their male counterparts.

Finally, men and women reap different benefits from networks and networking. Forret and Doughtery's (2004) study on different components of networking behaviours shows that men derive much greater benefits from networking than their female colleagues. While interestingly on a subjective level increasing internal visibility was significantly related to *perceived* career success for women, and not for men, increasing internal visibility was significantly positively related to the number of promotions and total compensation for men, but not for women. Also, the relationship between engaging in professional activities and total compensation was negative for females and positive for males. Burke's (1995) study concurs with these findings when he concludes that although women and men report similar levels of on-the job development and continuous learning opportunities, these get translated into promotional opportunities and more challenging work for men but not for women.

Only little research has been done on identifying and contrasting intra-gender differences in networking behavior of professional women (e.g. DeWine & Casbold 1983, Brodsky 1993, McGregor & Tweed 2002, Hampton et al. 2009). DeWine and Casbold (1983) investigate professional women's networks and find that disparities in networking activities are linked to differences in the psychological gender. While 'masculine' women focus more on external contacts, 'androgynous' individuals particularly concentrate on the frequency of contacts (DeWine & Casbold 1983).

Approaches to mentoring

An important aspect of networking is the identification and use of mentor relationships. Empirical findings show that the overall amount of assistance received by mentors accounts for protégés' objective long-term career success such as increased career opportunity, organizational retention or higher promotion rates (Higgins & Thomas, 2001; Ng et al., 2005; Mobley et al. 1994) as well as subjective career success such as job satisfaction, advancement expectations and turnover intentions (Singh et al. 2009; Mobley et al. 1994).

While mentoring is a critical factor for career advancement for any employee, multiple studies underline its particular importance for women: Female managers report a limited opportunity to socialise with influential individuals who could help their career development (Ragins & Cotton, 1989; Chi-Ching, 1992). De Janasz et al. (2003) point out that due to the greater organisational, interpersonal, and individual barriers to advancement women miss important developmental career experiences such as direction and guidance towards new career opportunities or support against overt or covert forms of discrimination if they do not have a mentor (Burke & McKeen, 1994; Mobley et al. 1994; Flood, 2005). Yet, a dilemma comes into play: Although mentoring relationships may be particularly important for the advancement of women, there is a smaller supply of mentors available to women compared to men (Linehan & Walsh, 2001). The root cause of this dilemma is twofold: On the one hand there is a scarcity of senior female mentors (Linehan & Scullion, 2008) that could potentially serve other women as mentors compared to the number of men available. On the other hand women are not as likely as men to get access to a mentor as a key element in the mentor-mentee selection process is the degree to which the mentor identifies with the protégé and perceives the protégé to be a younger version of himself (Megginson et al., 2006). As a

consequence, women are less likely than men to develop these relationships (McDowall-Long, 2004) and hence to report less supervisory mentoring behaviour and lower job satisfaction compared to male colleagues (Goh, 1991).

Another well documented consequence of the smaller mentor availability is that women are more likely to rely on a diverse constellation of different input providers who vary in organizational affiliation, status, and personal characteristics compared to white men (Kram & Hall, 1996; Maniero, 1994). This mentor "patchwork" may be efficient in terms of sourcing different types of inputs needed. Yet the lack of multiplexity, i.e. the degree to which actors are linked by more than one type of relationship comes at the expense of closeness and trust. Research has suggested that multiplex relationships are safer (Brass, Butterfield, & Skaggs, 1998) and less likely to suffer from decay with the passage of time.

Different role models

Gibson (2004, p. 136) defines a role model as a "cognitive construction based on the attributes of people in social roles an individual perceives to be similar to himself or herself to some extent and desires to increase perceived similarity by emulating those attributes." In contrast to mentoring, there is no involvement or participation of the role model required (Sealy & Singh 2009). The lack of female role models is considered to be one of the major barriers to the career success of women (Catalyst/Conference Board 2003). Despite its relevance, only little research has been done on the role of gender and its implications for role modelling in business settings (Sealy & Singh 2009). An exception is the study of Gibson & Cordova (1999) who examined gender differences of managers in professional service firms and the effect of availability of female senior managers on role model identification patterns. Results suggest that women are more likely than men to find a cross-sex role model. However, they are less likely to choose one particular individual, but rather create a theoretical composite role model (Gibson & Cordova 1999). Likewise, Singh et al. (2006) find that young female managers select single attributes and behavioural elements from a variety of role models from different contexts. Ely (1994) even found that women in male-dominated industries do not consider senior women as attractive role models as membership in the minority female group is incompatible with the more promising membership in the more powerful group of male managers. In contrast, Ibarra & Petriglieri (2007) found that

female professionals have a need for female role models because they do not believe that imitating male behaviour would generate positive outcomes for them. Instead, role models that are similar to them in character, value and lifestyle choices are more attractive. The authors therefore conclude that seeing senior female managers use their feminine characteristics in their working lives is necessary for the development of an 'ideal' self for their own future career (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2007). As for mentors the rather small numbers of senior managers to possibly identify with make it harder for females to find such role models.

Perspectives on work-life balance

Extensive research has been conducted on work-family conflicts of professional women and the negative effects on their careers (Ng, Fosh & Naylor 2002). Windsor and Auyeung (2006), for example, examined the effect of gender and dependent children on the management advancement of accountants and discovered a negative impact for female but not for male accountants with children. Additionally, in male dominated industries women face specific disadvantages associated with the long hours norm. Working hours are commonly taken as indicators for work commitment making it particularly difficult for women to advance their career (Bacik & Drew 2006). Guillaume & Pochic (2009) identify three different strategies of women dealing with extensive availability norms in organisational culture. (1) Women follow the rules of the career and adapt to the long hours norm, e.g. postpone maternity, delegate housework. These women do not want to get preferential treatment and expect other women to make the same sacrifices. (2) Women give priority to family life and adjust working time to family constraints. They are in a conflict of roles and feel guilty when they go to work instead of taking care of their children. Working part-time in a position of expertise instead of a leadership position is common. (3) Women managers with children who want to have both a career and family life. These women mostly work full-time and pursue a successful career. They use their working time efficiently by focussing on competence, performance and results.

More recently research focus shifted from 'work-family-conflict' to 'work-life balance' considerations (Gregory & Millner 2009). Emslie and Hunt (2009) used a qualitative approach to examine not only the differences between men and women on work-life balance experiences, but to take a closer look at the heterogeneity among men and women. Here,

females (aged 50-52 years) could be categorised by the extent to which they construct themselves in relation to their families. While the so called 'female carer' perceives high caring responsibilities in work as well as family life, the 'independent woman' is not that focussed on family issues. Instead the 'independent women' seeks to reduce working hours in order to have more time for herself and personal projects (Emslie & Hunt 2009, p. 163-164).

Our literature review has demonstrated that access to powerful networks, the availability of mentors and role models as well as particular considerations for work-life balance issues make it more difficult for women in PSFs to advance compared to their male counterparts. The literature review has also revealed that there is little consideration for differences *within* the group of female managers who are mostly assumed to be a coherent group exhibiting similar characteristics when it comes to networking, mentoring, role models and work-life balance. Also, the great majority of studies has focused exclusively on one or sometimes two of these factors, yet there has not been an attempt to look at these four well-documented barriers for advancement at the same time. The aim of the following empirical part is therefore to describe how female managers in PSFs deal with the documented advancement barriers. We put particular emphasis on the question if we find considerable differences in these managers' approaches and if we can detect any patterns across these differences.

Methodology

To allow a great level of depth and detail (Lamnek, 2005; Mayring, 2002) we conducted semi-structured interviews. Data was collected from in-depth interviews with 50 senior female managers from PSFs with the objective of identifying whether and to what extent their coping strategies in male dominated PSFs differed. All female managers were at a middle management position comparable to project manager in the consulting and audit sector or vice president in the banking sector. The semi-structured face-to-face interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Different persons conducted the interviews ensuring that there was no systematic bias caused by the person of the interviewer (Mayring, 2002). The semi-structured interview guideline comprised questions regarding the following aspects identified as relevant in the first part of this paper: demographic data (i.e. age, marital status, position, area of expertise); how the women went about developing their relationships and networks; if

they had any mentoring relationships and role models, how these had developed and what influence mentoring and role models had on their career as well as their attitudes about work-life balance issues. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were imported into NVivo in order to organize and group the qualitative data. The material was read step by step using open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Citations describing similar aspects/topics were grouped together into categories. These categories were refined and interrelated in the axial coding phase. The purpose of this analysis was to detect sense structures that give insights in the various strategies of female managers rather than to quantify results.

Our data analysis adopted the quality criteria of qualitative research aiming for external and internal validity (Meyrick, 2006). Each step of the data coding and analysis was documented (procedural validity, see Flick, 2007; Mayring, 2002). A validation consensus between both authors was obtained for all coding decisions. In case of coding deviations a third researcher was consulted as a co-interpreter. Last but not least, our findings were discussed with some of our interview partners (Mayring, 2002; Wrona, 2005).

Results

Approaches to networking

Looking at the patterns emerging from the interview transcripts we could identify two broad categories, type A and type B, of how female managers in male dominated industries approach networking. Type A can be characterized as a need based more passive approach to networking. While type A recognizes that networking may be useful, there is a strong sense that doing one's job well is the most important priority combined with the conviction that good results will speak for themselves. Additionally, type A managers strongly felt about separating their work and professional lives from their private lives and therefore tried to establish clear boundaries in their networking activities.

This can be illustrated by the following citations:

"I am not really a big person to actively network (…) I mean, I come to work I do my job and I do it well which is the most important I think, and get involved with training and things like that but don't get involved in any of the social aspects at all (…) I come to work and go home,

so these networks have actually developed around people being proactive rather than me being that." (Female senior lawyer)

"(…) I have got professional contacts that some I still see socially outside of work, but I also do have a home life that is separate from work. In terms of marketing, and networking, this is really a product of me in no way being proactive, other than through interacting within the working environment, so my potential to establish a network was probably tenfold beyond this, but obviously I need a life outside of work." (Female audit manager)

[About branching out to people in other areas] "Your specialisation tends to be your group. …. you don't speak about advice or things like that to your corporate people really. I think it's important for your everyday happiness at work but I think you sort of deal mainly with the people in your practice really for kind of questions and advice." (Female senior consultant)

"I'm not that concerned about networking which also means less work for me because I don't have to promote myself all the time; I just think it's a bit silly." (Female senior lawyer)

In comparison, type B managers tended to be much more active and planned networkers. They exposed a very deliberate sense of networking intertwining professional, advice and social aspects of networking reaching out to contacts inside and outside the organization and at different levels of hierarchy as illustrated by type B comments:

"I've worked on a bunch of like special projects so I know a lot of the Partners at this office location, I think you just need to work on committees and these special projects and just try to like get your face seen and do like this I guess kind of outside work, not outside work but additional to client responsibilities I think that's what kind of gets you noticed to other partners that aren't your engagement partners. (…) I am very involved in running holiday parties in our office and like end of busy season parties just different kind of like social events.… I'm like the audit manager contact for the University that I went to so whenever there's interviews or we go up on campus I always go and I continue my relationships with some of the professors up there just to you know keep in contact with them and find out what is new in the University and who are the good students." (Female senior audit manager)

"I have tried to develop relationships with a couple of the other partners who run one of the other practice groups within the department and one of the partners has accepted me into his practice group, even though I am not doing any work for him (…) I've tried to keep a hand in, what I didn't want to happen was that my profile within the rest of the department diminished, so I have tried to keep my profile with other partners and other associate partners so I would say that internally my profile is fine and actually I have a good network within the department, I know most people." (Female senior lawyer)

"There is something else that I got involved with once I became a manager, it's an outside accounting profession, like an accounting organisation, it's a not for profit organisation that – it's all for women actually, and I actually hold a board position with that so through that I have got to know several women from the other big accounting firms in the city. So I am beginning to build relationships through that as well." (Female senior audit manager)

Approaches to mentoring

We also find considerable differences between Type A and Type B female managers. Type A managers have a difficult time finding a mentor and often end up with an assigned mentor. This has two consequences. First, they may not find this mentoring relationship to be very useful, either because the assigned manager is objectively less skilled and powerful within the organization himself or because of a lack of closeness. Second, type A managers find that they can cover specific types of issues with this mentor, e.g. get task advice or ask questions about career progression yet, this mentor relationship is rarely multiplex and therefore less efficient and less intense as they do not get input on a variety of topics from the same person.

"Yes every six months you meet with this partner who's supposed to be your godfather that you can speak to and I don't think that works, I would never go to him and say I think I'm having problems…. I don't think this is someone that you can really say if there are things that you are not happy with." (Senior female lawyer)

"I do have a partner counsellor who is assigned to me. I have only met with him twice but the way it is supposed to be set up is that, you know, you can tell him everything." (Senior audit manager)

“The same thing with my counsellor (…) she is very busy but if I have like a personal question I can go to her. If I have a technical issue I guess it depends. Because once I had a technical question on insurance which is kind of her area of expertise (…) so I went to her. But I went to her, for me it was more a counselling thing, but her response was, you should go to Audrey, Audrey is the partner on that job. So I felt like I don’t know if something else comes up again in terms of professional questions, if I can go to her because she told me to go to the other partner.” (Senior female auditor)

“It depends who your counselling manager is. I mean some counselling managers are very good and take their job very seriously. If you’ve got a counselling manager who himself has got a good network of contacts then obviously it helps you. But if your – my counselling manager is fairly – has always worked in this small group and hasn’t got a particularly wide network of contacts then he wouldn’t be much help to me at all. (...) I get on with him quite well but I’ve never really asked him for any career advice.” (Female senior audit manager)

On the other hand type B female managers have various mentors they rely on. Most of the time their key mentor relationship has been initiated by themselves through approaching an influential person they have already met before. As a result, it is also much easier to develop the initial mentor relationship into a multiplex relationship.

“(…) he’s I guess another type of mentor for me. (…) I have a bunch of different people that I go to and some of the partners that I work for too now (…).” (Female senior auditor)

“I chose one of the partners to be my godfather. I had worked for him in the past and I really liked his style and he is very influential within our group so I just approached him and asked him if he would be willing to be my godfather, and he was.” (Senior female lawyer)

“He really is like a kind of friend in the office (...) he’s always brought things to my attention like I worked with him on a really big proposal to get a client, and he helped me to get me on different jobs.” (Female senior auditor)

“He is a partner as well as my counsellor who I also have a relationship with outside of work so it’s not just work. (…) we’ve gone to the movies, like a bunch of us. (…) I’ve sought out

from Robert, “what do I do? Am I doing anything that I need to improve on?” I’ve always asked my counsellors or mentors, “is there anything else I can improve upon?” (Senior female auditor)

“As a trainee I developed a very good relationship with the first person that I sat with, so my first manager who took on a very much a mentoring role with me (…) totally voluntary, it was never formalised (…) we then kept contacts throughout all my other seats and that is where I’ve now gone back and I’m working with him now so from that perspective you network maybe but you get a sort of confidant that’s more senior, higher up (...) that’s great and I’m getting really good experience on this case because of this sort of mentor figure, let’s call him a mentor figure I’m being given really good work. (...) his contact with the partners is greater and he is going forward by virtue of what he’s giving me, the fact that he trusts me and thinks I’m good and they are therefore seeing that.” (Senior female lawyer)

“Andy has become more key, he has been instrumental in my profile in the department with my joining the other practice group. For some reason he has taken me under his wing a bit and I think he is slightly concerned about the fact that I am pigeon-holed on one case and he has been taking it upon himself a bit to get me involved in the other team.” (Female senior consultant)

Different role models

Female managers showed considerable differences in the construction of their role models. “A type” managers searched for one ideal female role model that is able to cover all aspects relevant for identity development, including the management of family issues. As male managers are not confronted with comparable hurdles concerning work-life balance issues they were thus excluded as potential role models. The rather holistic approach can be illustrated by the following quotes:

“(…) So she has a great work ethic, she is a great organiser, she balances things very well. She is very good to look up to and model. She also has great relationships with her staff and partners. She is a role model that I would say that I would like to strive to and I still go to her when I have things to talk about. It is easier to relate to the women from a life standpoint. It is

very difficult, especially in client service and public accounting, to have a life outside of work as a woman. I mean very few – just like the one that left – they have children, they leave. It is very difficult to do both. ….I have actually met a female partner who has children, who has been a partner for at least 10 years and has been able to do everything. So she now is my formal counsellor, this partner with the children who also is a great person." (Female senior audit manager)

"I tend to stick with women just because these are like senior managers, partners, these are like the women I aspire to be like you know they're married, they have kids and that's something that I want to have together I want to have a career, I want to have a family too so yes I make them you know once you work with them and they're good I like try to stay with them so can learn more from them. Emily, she is my role model because she is married, she has a four year old kid, you know, and when we used to work she used to make time for him and manage her time well, like she used to try and leave by five, five-thirty so she could go home and be with her kid. And I like that, you know she would encourage more life-balance." (Female senior audit manager)

"B-type"- women on the contrary pursued a different approach, namely looking for inspiration in role models independent of their gender. They actively constructed an image of a role model using a variety of attributes from different men and women with a specific purpose in mind. This construction involved complex cognitive processes because female managers needed to translate the attitude and behaviour of their male colleagues, adapt to them und figure out whether it worked for them too (Gibson 1999, 2004). An example would be the following:

"I can think of probably about four [role models] at partner level. I have been particularly inspired by those that manage the work-life balance, those that have managed to keep their priorities in perspective– I have really clung to those that have managed to stay human and treat people with respect and still do an excellent job. So I guess they are very impressive, both, yes, people management, client management, the number of hours they are doing. When it matters they will do the work but they just seem to strike the balance better." (Female senior lawyer)

“I am just as inspired by a man really, as a woman, because I think both can make the mistake of sacrificing too much and both can make a success so no, gender hasn’t been that influential.“ (Female senior consultant)

“If I had to pick someone - each one has a different aspect they would be a role model for. Like, Harry from a speaking in public standpoint and Karen from working part time and with a family and then partner. And Andrew, being a very young partner being promoted. So there’s different aspects of all of these partners….So there’s definitely - you see differences in each of the partners. ..What I see - each one has an aspect. I don’t think there’s one specific role model“ (Female senior consultant)

Different approaches to work-life balance issues

Similarly, we found different approaches to work-life balance of women working in professional service firms in our sample. On the one hand we found managers (A type) who defined the priorities in their lives towards family issues. In line with the description of the second type of women by Guillaume & Pochic (2009) these female managers assumed that pursuing work and life/family issues at the same time was hardly compatible in their type of jobs. The following quotes illustrate this:

“I mean work is important but at the end of the day I think, you know, your partner is important too because thirty years from now this partner is going to be around and your job – you need someone to grow old with.(…) I feel I am at a stage where I would prefer my personal life, I want to get married, I want to have kids and you know, being a senior manager isn’t as important right now as building more this part of my life.” (Female senior auditor)

“(...) there aren’t many female partners but I think that is more because females don’t want to become partners, you know, I personally don’t want to be. (...) Just because of the hours. I mean basically you are giving your life to a job. (...) It’s just you’ve got to be able to drop things for work and I couldn’t do that, I mean my husband works long enough hours as it is and we couldn’t both work long hours and have a family. (...) I mean women want to have children and it’s not really a job that suits that sort of lifestyle.” (Female senior consultant)

On the contrary, B type managers had a high work commitment, but were nevertheless not willing to sacrifice their life for the career. They were convinced that it was possible to maintain a work-life balance by an efficient use of work time and by delegating and prioritising the work load. This can be illustrated by the following quotes:

"Apparently, I have a very good work life balance.(…) Because I am the sort of person when they try and give me too much, I'm not afraid to say this is a joke (...) I do think the firm is trying to make it like a work-life balance and trying – I do feel they are looking after their people a bit better – I didn't think that when I first joined, I used to think that – I can even remember a specific comment that one of my friends got told by an old partner, saying if you have come here to have children you are in the wrong job. Whereas that now is not the case at all – I mean they do encourage – you know, don't worry about it, have a career break, you can work 3 or 4 days a week. So that's ok." (Female senior audit manager)

"I think this year, one of the changes I've noticed in myself is I don't do as much overtime as I used to, and I tend to say that if it's not done now then, you know, I prioritise and just move to delegate to someone else, I do work long hours, but a lot better than last year, absolutely, my quality of life has improved." (Female senior consultant)

The table below summarizes the differences we have found between the two types of female managers on the four dimensions examined. What seems to be of particular interest is the fact that we do not only find considerable difference on *each* dimension but the pattern emerging *across* these four dimensions as the positioning on each dimension does not seem to exist independently but as part of a holistic type we describe. Looking across all our interview transcripts we could categorize each interviewee as type A or type B manager.

	Type A	**Type B**
Networking approach	Need based, focused, private-professional divide	Planned, conscious, broad (across internal and external boundaries), private – professional overlap
Mentoring approach	▪ Passive: being assigned to mentor, more formal mentoring ▪ One mentor ▪ Lack of trust/distance => not perceived as useful	▪ Active: Approach and choose mentor themselves, formal and informal mentoring ▪ Multiple mentors ▪ Multiplex relations, efficient use mentors
Role model	Female-focussed, holistic approach	Not gender-dependant, Patchwork of different aspects

		drawn from different role models
Work-life balance perspective	Problematic compatibility of family-life and career Family priority	No perceived incompatibility Maintain work-life balance through delegation, prioritisation

Summary: A and B type female managers

Discussion

Our study shows that female managers in male dominated PSFs choose one of two distinctively different coping strategies which comprise different approaches to networking, mentoring, role models and work-life balance. On each dimension we find considerable differences in terms of how female managers cope with their minority status and deal with the specific barriers. This finding helps to shed light on some of the apparent contradictions in previous research. Our two configurations each describe a distinctively different way of constructing role models which have been described in the literature before: While B configuration types use cross-gender role models composed of single attributes from a variety of role models as described by Singh et al. (2006) and Gibson & Cordova (1999), our type A configuration accounts for the seemingly contradictory finding of Ibarra & Petrigliegi (2007) that women choose female role models that are similar to them in terms of life-style choices and values. This dichotomy can also be found in the different types described by Emslie & Hunt (2009) in terms of work-life balance positioning with A types resembling the "female carer" and B types resembling the "independent woman".

The different positioning of A types and B types can also be discussed in the light of previous suggestions how female managers in minority positions should deal with this barrier. It seems that B types through their actions and choices create a greater perception of similarity with the majority (Westphal & Milton, 2000) and are better prepared to "borrow social capital" by teaming up with men (Burt, 1998, Brass et al. 2004) than A types. What is interesting is that this positioning seems to work for some of the female managers but not for all who either by choice or by their nature take a distinctively different positioning. Future research should look at the antecedents of the two configurations to tease out to what extent belonging to one configuration is rooted in personality differences.

The second major contribution of this study is the finding that the four dimensions that have previously been featured and examined as separate barriers blocking female managers' way to the top are not independent from each other but coincide to form specific

configurations which fit together into inherently consistent types. It is therefore not enough to focus on one factor separately. The implications of these findings are important for research as well as HR practice. Future research should have a closer look at the interplay of these four dimensions, how they are correlated and influence each other. From a practical point of view it seems clear that effective support of female managers on their way to the top cannot just focus on working on one dimension. HR professionals and policy makers will have to consider putting together specific "measure packages" tailored at the specific needs of these two types of female senior managers. Changing one element/dimension may not have a great impact as such as networking or access to role models and mentors are part of an overall bundle of attitude and activities.

Our study clearly suffers from some limitations. The collection of our data is restricted to 50 interviews which is appropriate for an explorative study yet does not allow any quantification about how big each configuration type is. While our study lacks objective career outcome indicators such as salary levels or promotion speed our results may suggest propositions to be tested in the future. As self-initiated mentoring has been shown to predict mentoring received as well as career ascendancy in terms of income and hierarchical position (Bickle et al. 2009) we may predict that B type managers will have a greater and faster career progression than A type managers. Previous findings also confirm that if women are successful in establishing a close male mentor relationship they benefit over-proportionally from such a relationship compared to male colleagues (see Hilmer & Hilmer, 2007; Ramaswami et al. 2010). Again, this should put B types at an advantage compared to A types. Future research should investigate the interaction and potential causality of the four factors we investigated.

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