

“What Future Worlds of Work do Women Executives aspire to and how might they be accomplished?”

An Exploratory Study within Banking and Professional Service Companies in London and New York

SAMANTHA LILLIAN COLLINS

London Metropolitan Business School

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ABSTRACT

This research approaches the questions “to what future worlds of work do women executives aspire, and how might these aspirations be accomplished?” This is undertaken through a futures study within the banking and professional services industries, in which, despite over 30 years of organisational initiatives, legislation, research and social change, there are few women in executive positions.

During the course of the study fifty women working mainly in London and New York as executives in banking and professional service firms were asked to visualise the nature and character of their preferred future world of work, and how this might be achieved.

A qualitative research methodology, within a pragmatist/academic orientation and a social constructionist research epistemology provided a means by which to consider how women executives make meanings and construct personal narratives of their future world of work. Discourse analysis, abductive reasoning and concepts of interpretation and sense-making provided a robust analytical approach. Research methods included in-depth interviews, a Delphi study, focus groups, scenario-building, incasting, factional story writing, backcasting and route-mapping.

Three evocative, authentic, credible and impactful scenarios were constructed for the future world of work for women executives, entitled “The Business Case World,” “The Change Agents World” and “The Entrepreneurial World”. They originated from an analysis of the data emerging from a Delphi study and subsequent focus group, were then developed through telephone interviews and in their final version took the form of three interlinking stories of “a day in the life of” three women executives in the future. Practical route maps to support the achievement of each of these scenarios are then presented, following a series of focus groups.

Through the creation of these scenarios and route maps to their achievement, this study provides a career-planning tool for women executives, a development and

retention tool of women for organisations and a process through which researchers can conduct a future study for women executives.

AUTHOR PROFILE: Samantha Lillian Collins

Samantha Lillian Collins holds a degree in Business from Liverpool John Moores University and a first class Masters in Training and Human Resources Management from the University of Leicester in the UK.

Samantha is the founder of Aspire, one of the few female-focused coaching and leadership development companies in the United Kingdom. She was named “One of the Top 10 Coaches in the UK” by The Association for Coaching and The Independent on Sunday in 2003, and one of the UK's “Top 200 Women to Impact Business and Industry” by Her Majesty The Queen in 2007.

Samantha has worked with women executive clients from global banking and professional services companies such as Lloyds TSB, KPMG, BDO Stoy Hayward, JP Morgan Chase, Ernst and Young, and PA Consulting.

She trained as an executive coach at the Coach Training Institute (CTI). Based in San Francisco, USA, CTI is one of a select group of coach training schools in the United Kingdom that is accredited by the International Coach Federation, the leading standards and accreditation body for coaches worldwide.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction – ‘Packing the Bags’

This research approaches the questions “to what future worlds of work do women executives aspire, and how might these aspirations be accomplished?” This is undertaken through a futures study within the banking and professional services industries, in which, despite over 30 years of organisational initiatives, legislation, research and social change, there are few women in executive positions.

My interest in the topic arose from my practitioner experience of working as an executive coach for women executives in the banking and professional services industries. Working in a number of different corporate organisations, many of which are considered “male-dominated,” added to my knowledge and curiosity about the future of women in executive positions within these industries.

This research project was set in motion soon after the establishment of my executive coaching business, which specialises in working with women, in the City of London, UK in 2002. There was a conspicuous lack of women in executive positions within the companies I worked with, and I found myself asking the question: “what can be done about it?” Taking on this research prompted me to take action and come up with some ideas.

From my reading of the literature, I was aware of the reasons for the lack of women’s executives. Indeed, the topic of why women do not reach executive positions has been a hotly debated one in recent years. However, rather than a further discussion on the reasons for the lack of advancement, I wanted to build on earlier research by taking more of a future- and solutions-focused approach, what could the future look like? and what needed to change? This was achieved by asking women to visualise the nature and character of their preferred future world of work, and how this might be achieved, that is the journey of how to get there.

I use the analogy of a journey throughout this study, as the concept of a journey captures the imagination. We want to know what it was like, how it felt, and what happened next. Along the journey, we are changed by the experience and perhaps

will never be quite the same again. I approached this journey by taking a “road less travelled”, which is a recurrent theme in my life and work. I chose to conduct a futures study with little idea, initially, of what this actually entailed, or that, as Nolan (2000, p. 8) stated,

“Making sense of the future possibilities for work and employment remains one of the most challenging intellectual tasks of our time.”

This meant that the approach to this study was something new and as yet unknown, something I had not experienced before. At the same time though, I perceived it as a positive, if somewhat risky, enterprise. For me, this was the right way to approach the research questions that were also unknown territory within the literature.

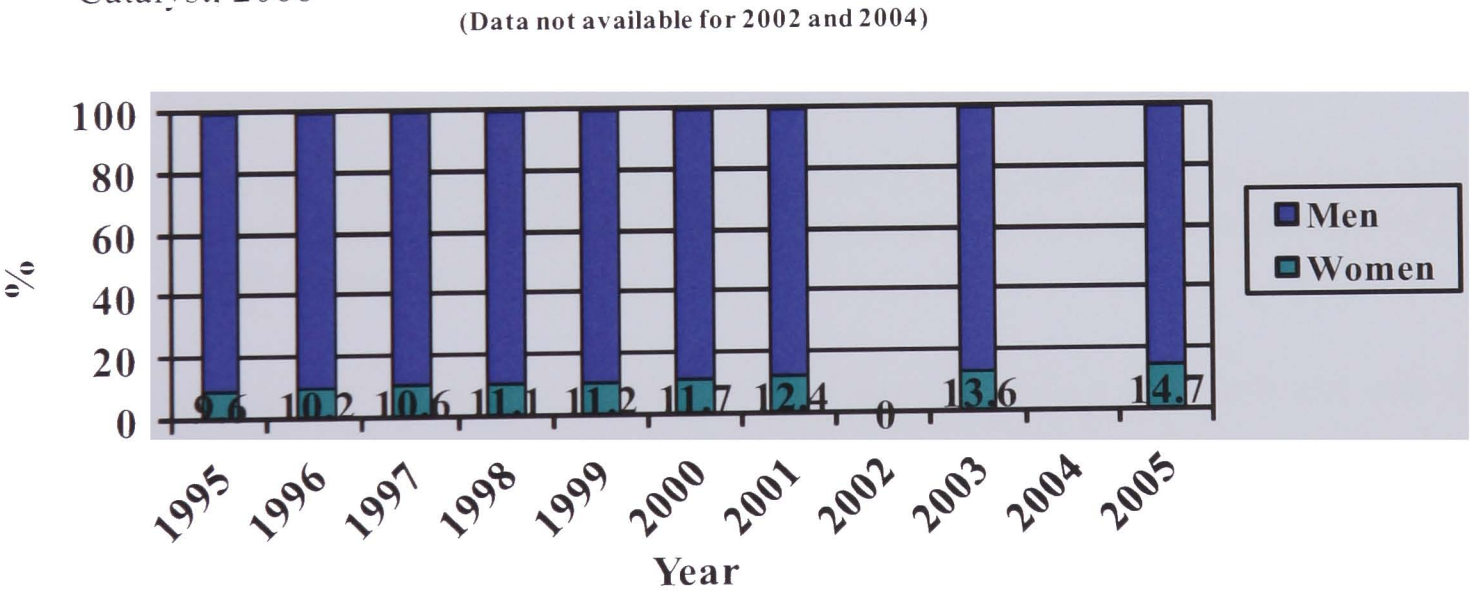
Where are the Women?

Before exploring the future, an understanding of the current reality with regard to the numbers of women executives was important. The number of women executives in the UK’s FTSE 100 and USA’s Fortune 500 has been measured in the UK since 1999 through Cranfield University’s International Centre for Women Leaders, and in the USA since 1995 through Catalyst, the non-profit research and advisory organisation. Despite this relatively short time frame of which to reference measurement, the two organisations concur that the numbers of women executives is small and the rise of women to executive positions has been slow (see table one and figure one).

Table 1: Female FTSE 100 Index 2001 - 2007: Source Cranfield, 2007

| Female FTSE 100 | 2007 | 2006 | 2005 | 2004 | 2003 | 2002 | 2001 |
|---|----------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|
| Female-held directorships | 123 (11%) | 117 (10.3%) | 121 (10.5%) | 110 (9.7%) | 101 (8.6%) | 84 (7.2%) | 75 (6.4%) |
| Female executive directorships | 13 (3.6%) | 15 (3.8%) | 14 (3.4%) | 17 (4.1%) | 17 (3.7%) | 15 (3.0%) | 10 (2.0%) |
| Female Non Exec Directors | 110 (14.5%) | 102 (13.7%) | 107 (14.5%) | 93 (13.6%) | 84 (11.8%) | 69 (10.0%) | 65 (9.6%) |
| Women holding FTSE directorships | 100 | 97 | 99 | 96 | 88 | 75 | 68 |
| Companies with female executive directors | 11 | 13 | 11 | 13 | 13 | 12 | 8 |
| Companies with at least one female director | 76 | 77 | 78 | 69 | 68 | 61 | 57 |
| Companies with multiple female directors | 35 | 29 | 30 | 29 | 22 | 17 | 15 |
| Companies with no female directors | 24 | 23 | 22 | 31 | 32 | 39 | 43 |

Figure 1: Percentage of Fortune 500 Boards Seats Held by Women 1995 – 2005: Source Catalyst, 2006

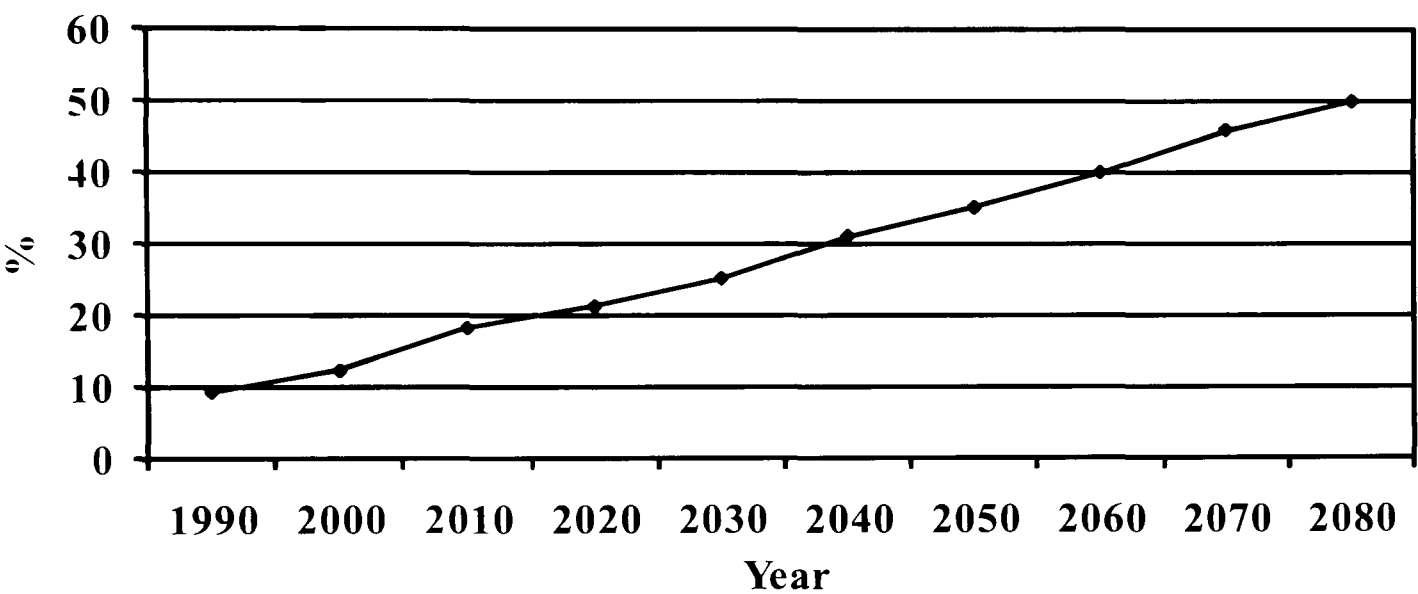


In 2006, women held 14.6 percent of board seats at *Fortune* 500 companies, actually down from 14.7 percent in 2005 and in 2007, women held 14.8 percent of board seats at *Fortune* 500 companies (Catalyst 2006, 2007). Although this data is not

specific to the banking and professional services industries, both table one and figure one show women occupy comparatively less executive positions than men and progress is slow. According to the US-based organisation Catalyst (2005b, p. 7) and figure two below,

“At the current average growth rate of one-half of a percentage point per year, it will take 70 years for women to reach parity with men on Fortune 500 boards.”

Figure 2: Projected Growth in Women’s Share of Seats on Fortune 500 Boards 2005 – 2075: Source Catalyst, 2005



The UK’s Equality and Human Rights Commission echo this, (2008, p. 2) and liken women's progress to a snail's pace,

“A snail could crawl from Land's End to John O'Groats and halfway back again in the 73 years it will take for equal numbers of women to become directors of FTSE 100 companies.”

So according to the research, women’s advancement is a slow process and there does not seem to be any signs of this changing in the future. However, despite this lack of advancement, the assumptions are that (1) organisations recognise the value of having more women at executive levels and (2) that, all women want to be at executive levels. (I use the term ‘the organisation’ and ‘organisations’ throughout this study as a metonym [shorthand] for organisational decision- and policy-makers).

Both assumptions were challenged in this study. For the first assumption, Catalyst (2007) found that companies with the highest representation of women board directors attained significantly higher financial performance, on average, than those with the lowest representation of women board directors. In addition, the report points out, on average, noticeably stronger-than-average performance occurs at companies with three or more women board directors. Yet despite the perceived positive effects of having women on boards, few organisations actually do have a significant number of women executives. Questions arise as to the recognition of the value of women on boards by organisations and their motivation to take action to achieve it.

For the second assumption, that all women want to reach executive positions, it is explored in this study whether women do not aspire to executive positions and may choose instead to leave and work for themselves. In the UK, female entrepreneurs make up one of the faster-growing segments of the economy, accounting for 13 percent of all small business owners (Bennett & Dann 2000; Mattis 2000). In addition, the number of women-owned businesses in the USA grew by 20 percent between 1997 and 2002, twice the national average for all businesses (U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Business Owners: Women-Owned Firms, 2002). Therefore, despite the perceived value that women executives bring to organisations, questions arise as to women's motivation (as opposed to ability) to reach executive levels and how this impacts the future.

Therefore, set in the context of a small number and slow progress of women executives within large organisations and the growing number of female entrepreneurs, this study explores what women executive's aspirations actually are, where they see themselves in the future, and how this might impact them and the companies they work for.

Why a Futures Study?

The field of futures studies has become an important tool for many organisations, as well as government. Areas involved in futures studies range from aeronautical

engineering to journalism and management consulting, and increasingly to politics and social sciences. While a vast amount of literature exists on gender, feminism, and women and leadership, it has focused primarily on the historical progression of women and the barriers to success for women at executive levels, both from an individual and organisational perspective. This has been useful in determining why women do not reach executive positions, and in the measurement and tracking of the numbers of executive women. However, with the research and the recurrent commentary in the press and by practitioners, I was left wondering: “will it ever change?” This study takes an alternative approach; it explores the future instead of the past, and explores possible ideas for the accomplishment of change.

Initially, this study aimed to construct one unified vision of the future for women executives. What quickly emerged was that is a variety of alternative futures that is important to women executives. Rather than one future, per se, this study focused on constructing *plausible futures* (futures that feel coherent and realistic); *probable futures* (those that are likely to happen, regardless of desirability); and *possible futures* (preferable or desirable scenarios to be aimed for, and some undesirable ones to be avoided). In this way, individual women executives could choose their desired or aspirational scenario and create action plans to achieve it.

Table 2: Classifications of Alternative Futures, Source: The Author

| | | |
|------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| Probable Future | Can be preferable or undesirable | Feels likely to happen; realistic |
| Plausible Future | Can be preferable or undesirable | Feels coherent and possible |
| Possible Future | Can be preferable or undesirable | Anything goes; blue sky; more idealistic |

Choosing an Epistemological Position

Before I began to tackle the research question, I needed to gain a sense of what kinds of findings I could reasonably expect to make, I needed to adopt an epistemological position.

According to Willig (2001, p. 2),

“Epistemology is a branch of philosophy concerned with the theory of knowledge. It attempts to provide answers to the question, ‘How, and what, can we know?’ This involves thinking about the nature of knowledge itself, about its scope and about the validity and reliability of claims to knowledge.”

At one end of an epistemological spectrum is positivism. Positivism takes the view that there is a straightforward relationship between the world (objects, events, phenomena) and our perception and understanding of it (Willig 2001). Positivists believe that it is possible to describe what is out there and to get it right without personal involvement or vested interests on the part of the researcher. My previous academic background had caused me to form a positivist belief that academic work needed to be valid and quantifiable. My view was that the social world could (and should) be measured through a scientific approach that entailed the use of objective methods, resulting in falsifiable theories that could be tested rigorously (Denzin & Lincoln 1994).

My positivist standpoint was an early dilemma for me. I found myself challenging my beliefs in order to adopt a more socially constructed view of the world – a view that I felt was more suited to exploring the views of women executives, and one which I ultimately found to be more authentic for me. I eventually took the view of Slaughter (2002, p. 94) who has been active in the futures field as both an academic and consultant for over 20 years when he stated:

“I have little use for quantitative methods. However, I will happily use the outputs of such methods, e.g. forecasts”

Admittedly, although my worldview has changed, there may be unintended instances in the thesis in which the remnants of my former positivist views become apparent.

The epistemological position I took was that reality is socially constructed rather than objectively determined implying that people gain knowledge from each other, through their day-to-day life and social interactions and language.

“Truth, i.e. our current way of understanding the world (which of course varies historically and cross culturally) is a product not of objective observation of the world but of the social processes and interactions of which people are constantly engages with each other” (Burr 2004, p. 3).

Social constructivism incorporates variants such as “Phenomenology,” “Interpretivism,” “Naturalistic Inquiry,” “Qualitative Enquiry,” “Post Positivism,” “Hermeneutics,” and “Humanism” (Easterby-Smith *et al.* 1991; Robson 1993). The focus is on understanding what is happening and why, by collecting data from social interactions and using methodological procedures such as case studies, ethnography, observation and interviews (Denzin & Lincoln 1994). This approach suited my research aims and gave me license to explore in perhaps a more free-flowing way than if I had taken a positivist standpoint.

As my position changed, I discerned a complex social interaction between the world in which women executives lived and their views on their future world of work. How their experiences and interactions governed their thoughts, feelings and attitudes; how they saw themselves and the significance and meaning that they attached to their future, its possibilities and their preferences – all of this was of key importance to this study. In my view, women executives were influenced by a variety of factors, including their social and cultural backgrounds, their work lives to date, the press, their personal history, the work their mother did and societal views of women’s roles.

I wanted to be able to integrate these social factors into the exploration of the future world of work. I did, however, question the compatibility of social constructionism with some of the assumptions about gender differences made by some sources cited

in my literature review – such as, for example, female leadership traits — in that they may reflect a more essentialist rather than social constructionist approach. Essentialism is the view that, for any specific kind of entity, such as women, there is a set of characteristics that any entity of that kind must have. This coincided with the view that women and men are different in ways other than just the physical, as exemplified by the debates on women and men's leadership styles. However, within the literature no clear conclusions were actually made as to whether or not such gender differences actually do exist. In addition, this study did not seek to determine differences between women and men, electing to focus solely on women executives and their socially constructed views of the world instead.

Be that as it may, it is now generally accepted that the research process does not stringently require an exclusive choice between two contrasting epistemological positions (Chalmers 1999). What researchers disagree on is the extent to which our understanding of the world can approach objective knowledge, or even some kind of truth, about the world (Willig 2001). Along the spectrum, we find a number of positions and different versions of social constructivism. It was up to me to find the appropriate position and choose associated methods in order to answer my research question. This was impacted by my world view and who I am as a both an academic and a pragmatist.

Academic Pragmatist

Who I am has had a significant impact on the choice of methods. I describe myself as an Academic Pragmatist, which largely explains why we are here: the nature of my study, my approach, and my academic and professional pursuits. I have always had a desire to link life, work, theory and practice in different ways.

An *academic*, what with the word's Greek origin in the philosophical school of Plato, is generally regarded as a teacher, researcher, professor, or scholarly type who deals to a great extent with theories and events. Some critics say that they tend to be:

“Insulated from the real world, and thus [do] not have to take into account the real effects, results, and risks of actually performing the actions [they] study” (Wikipedia 2007).

Pragmatist is “a term derived from the Greek word *pragma*, meaning action and from which the words *practice* and *practical* derive” (James 1907, p. 18) and as such:

“Pragmatism is a method for testing ideas by challenging them to make a difference in our experience of the world” (James 1907, p. 18).

William James, from whose writings these two quotations are taken, was a representative of the American philosophical school of pragmatism, along with John Dewey and Charles Sanders Peirce, who coined the term in 1878 (How To Make Your Ideas Clear, Popular Science Monthly, 1878).

For me, the combination of academic and pragmatist approaches provided a measure of balance between the abstract nature of theory on the one hand, and the real world and action-oriented aspects of pragmatism on the other. This suited my study. Being an academic pragmatist has similarities with the field of practice research, a research method that approaches research from the bottom up. Instead of starting with a theory, it starts with practice, and develops a research methodology from actual experience (Fook 1996). This meant that I started this study with a practical series of interviews (the preliminary study) before devising any precise research questions or possible working hypotheses.

This initial approach enabled me to understand the voices of women executives in the banking and professional services industries. These women were living the reality I was attempting to explore. What better source of information and inspiration might there be? Through their feelings and the thoughts they expressed, I gained first-hand knowledge and insight into the possible future world of work for women executives as seen through their eyes.

My Views and Experiences

It was important to be able to incorporate my own thoughts and insights into this study; it seemed impossible to distance myself and stand back from the research. According to Willig (2001, p. 7),

“Feminist critics argued that the attempt to be ‘objective’ and the strategies adopted towards this aim did, in fact, serve to obscure the fact that the researcher’s identity and standpoint do fundamentally shape the research process and the findings. They argued that it is impossible for a researcher to position themselves ‘outside of’ the subject matter because the researcher will inevitably have a relationship with, or be implicated in, the phenomenon he or she is studying.”

Throughout the study, I attempted to identify the ways in which my personal standpoint shaped the research process and findings. Although all qualitative methodologies do recognise that the researcher is, in one way or another, implicated in the research process (Willig 2001), I wanted to reflect upon the extent to which my own values, experiences and interests have shaped the research, positively or negatively. It also involved thinking about how the research may have affected and possibly changed me as a person and as a researcher.

Therefore, my reactions to and interpretation of what the women executives in the study were saying have also undoubtedly become integral parts of this study. As such, these auto-ethnographic elements are an important part of the structure of my study and of the results. As Denzin and Lincoln (2003) tell us, the observations of the ethnographer are important and guided by their view of the world. It is my hope that this unavoidable phenomenon added to, rather than detracted from, the depth of this study’s results.

I did not attempt to hide my thoughts and feelings, then. Why try to hide what would be readily apparent to others despite my attempts to conceal it? As it is impossible to separate oneself from the subject, I embraced my dual role as a researcher and pseudo-member of the study group. This was in some ways unwieldy: I worked with women executives as a coach, I am a woman myself and CEO of a growing business, I am balancing work and family in between researching a part-time doctorate; how could these elements not creep in? And I freely admit I

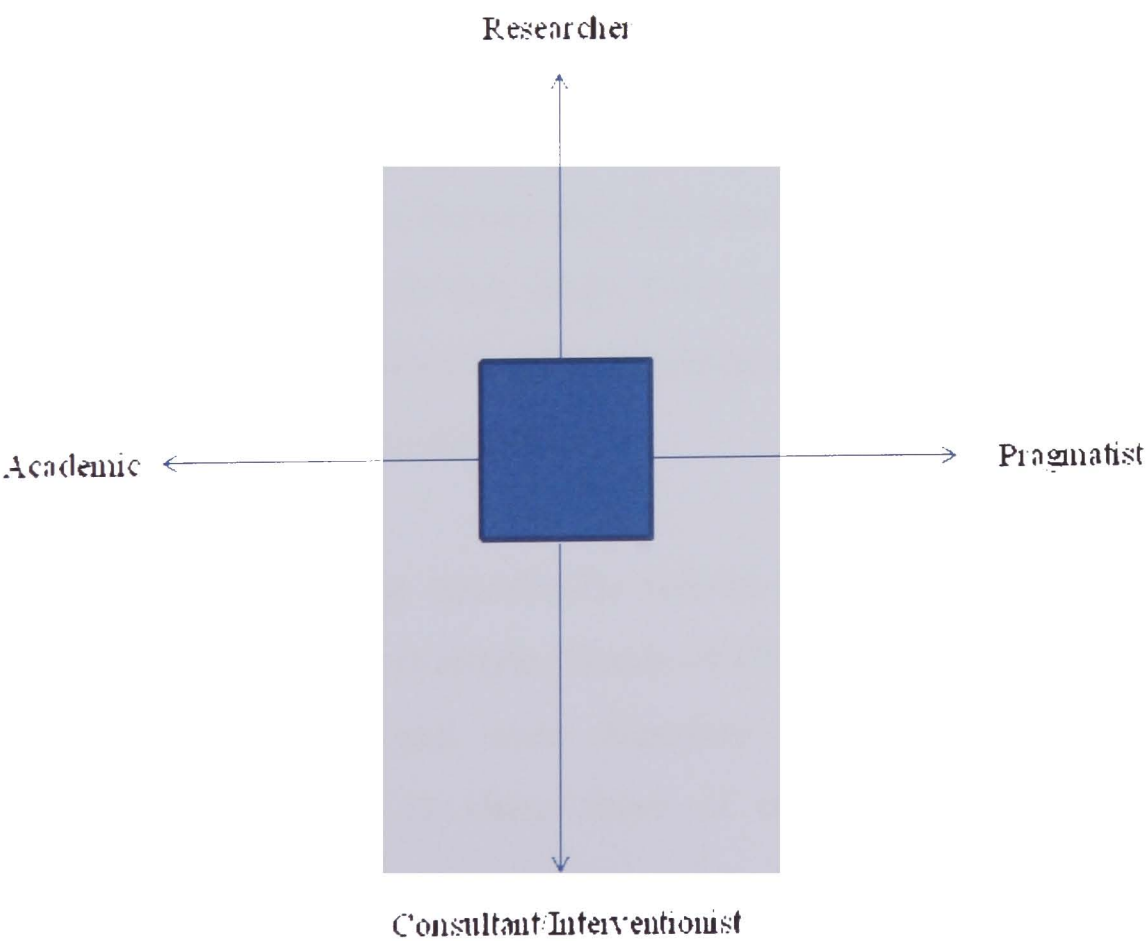
would like to see change for women executives in the future. As Marshall (1995b, p. 4) states:

“Much literature in the gender field has a change intent. It is often held in the background and disguised, but this does not mean that it will not show through or be suspected.”

In practical terms, this meant that I often use the first person mode, as is evident in this introduction, the methodology and findings. However, the literature review and conclusions are mostly impersonal.

The nature of the process involved a blurring of the boundaries and inevitable overlap between my various competencies in this research, between being an academic and a pragmatist; and a researcher and consultant/interventionist, all of which seemed highly relevant and instrumental in the exploration of the research question. Research is not then divorced from practice on the one hand, or from interventions on the other. After all, any focus group or interview is an intervention; it takes people out of their natural surroundings, and each one of my interventions was explicitly for research purposes.

Figure 3: The Blurring of Boundaries - Source: the Author



About The Women Executives in this Study

The focus of this study was predominately on fifty women executives working within large organisations in the banking and professional services sectors. This included banks, law firms, accountancy firms and management consultancies. A small number of maverick thinkers – academics and women entrepreneurs – were also included in the study, to add richness to the mix.

The women executives were mainly located in London, UK or New York, USA. These are two cities in which I have a number of professional contacts due to the fact that my coaching business is located in the heart of the City of London. It is the home to many of the large organisations in the banking and professional services industries and these organisations often also have offices in New York.

Banking and professional services are traditionally viewed as “male-dominated” industries. I was interested in researching those women who had achieved executive levels against the odds in these “male-dominated” sectors. Whether or not the conclusions can be generalised to other sectors – for example, politics, retail or non profit – is a subject of possible further research.

The women in this study were at a senior-level position rather than being at the highest board level. They filled positions such as Vice President, Managing Director, Senior Partner, Partner and Director, all of which are higher than manager level. For the purposes of this study, this seniority level was considered executive. This is because of the small number of women at the board level in these companies, and the difficulty of accessing them.

Some of these positions specifically related to the development of women within their organisations (for example, Heads of Diversity or Heads of Internal Corporate Women’s Networks) and were therefore able not only to offer their own perspectives, but also to share those of other women executives within their organisations.

Other more maverick thinkers were invited to participate, in order to avoid groupthink and go beyond the traditional data set. These included academics working in the field of women issues, women entrepreneurs who had worked at executive levels within the financial and professional services industries prior to starting their own businesses, a woman who led a charity focusing on developing women, and a woman who ran a network for women executives. By design, assembling such an eclectic group (as compared to the majority of other women participants who came from more traditional executive roles) was an attempt to add range, depth and greater diversity to the research.

The women executives were a mixture of customer- and non-customer-facing roles. All were responsible for sizeable teams, and some for multi-million-pound budgets. Their age range was 35 – 55 years old and there was a mix of mothers and non-mothers. Their income was over £100,000 (\$200,000) per annum, which was also considered indicative of their high-level position within the company.

Research participants were involved in initial face-to-face interviews (12 participants), three rounds of Delphi questionnaires conducted via e-mail (11 participants), a face-to-face focus group session (nine participants), individual telephone interviews (22 participants), and a group session on route maps (15 participants). Some of the women executives participated in multiple parts of the research, depending on their availability.

Table 3: Research Participants: Source: The Author

| No. | POSITION | SECTOR | LOCATION | PARTICI PATION |
|-----|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 | Director & Head of Women's Network | Banking | London, UK | Prelim Study |
| 2 | Partner & Head of Women's Network | Professional Services | London, UK | Prelim Study |
| 3 | HR Director | Law | London, UK | Prelim Study |
| 4 | HR Director | Law | London, UK | Prelim Study |
| 5 | HR Manager | Law | London, UK | Prelim Study |
| 6 | Managing Director | Banking | London, UK | Prelim Study |
| 7 | Senior Partner | Professional Services | London, UK | Prelim Study |
| 8 | Partner | Law | London, UK | Prelim Study |
| 9 | Managing Director | Banking | London, UK | Prelim Study |
| 10 | Partner | Professional Services | London, UK | Prelim Study |
| 11 | Director of Diversity | Professional Services | London, UK | Prelim Study |
| 12 | Director of Diversity | Banking | London, UK | Prelim Study |
| 13 | Partner | Professional Services | London, UK | Delphi, Route Maps Workshop |
| 14 | Vice President | Banking | London, UK | Delphi |
| 15 | Head of Talent | Professional Services | London, UK | Delphi, Route Maps Workshop |
| 16 | Director of Diversity | Banking | London, UK | Delphi |
| 17 | Director of Diversity | Banking | London, UK | Delphi |
| 18 | Head of Diversity | Professional Services | London, UK | Delphi |
| 19 | Director of Diversity & Leadership | Banking | London, UK | Delphi, Focus Group |
| 20 | Head of HR, Training and Development | Banking | London, UK | Delphi |
| 21 | Director, Women's Resource Centre | Charity | London, UK | Delphi, Focus Group |
| 22 | Head of Women's | Academic | London, UK | Delphi |

| | | | | |
|----|--|--------------------------|---------------|---|
| | Entrepreneurs Programme, London Metropolitan University, City of London | | | |
| 23 | Professor of Organisational Behaviour & Diversity Management. Director of Graduate Research, Director of the Centre for Developing Women Business Leaders, Cranfield University. | Academic | London, UK | Delphi, Focus Group |
| 24 | Director of Diversity & Leadership | Banking | London, UK | Focus Group, Route Maps Workshop |
| 25 | Head of The Women's Library, London Metropolitan University | Academic | London, UK | Focus Group |
| 26 | Director HR, Diversity | Banking | London, UK | Focus Group |
| 27 | Founder of DAWN, Asian Women's Network | Entrepreneur | London, UK | Focus Group |
| 28 | Managing Director | Banking | London, UK | Focus Group |
| 29 | Managing Director | Professional Services | New York, USA | Focus Group, Route Maps Workshop, Telephone Interview |
| 30 | Partner | Professional Services | London, UK | Telephone Interview |
| 31 | Managing Director | Banking | New York, UK | Telephone Interview |
| 32 | Managing Director | Banking | New York, UK | Telephone Interview |
| 33 | Vice President | Banking | New York, UK | Telephone Interview |
| 34 | Head of Communications | Banking | New York, UK | Telephone Interview |
| 35 | Director and Head of Women's Network | Banking | New York, UK | Telephone Interview |
| 36 | Partner | Professional Services | New York, UK | Telephone Interview |
| 37 | Partner | Professional Services | New York, UK | Telephone Interview |
| 38 | Partner | Professional Services | Chicago, UK | Telephone Interview |
| 39 | Partner | Professional Services | Boston, UK | Telephone Interview |
| 40 | Partner | Professional Services | London, UK | Telephone Interview Route Maps Workshop |
| 41 | Head of Development | Banking | London, UK | Telephone |

| | | | | |
|----|---|--------------------------|---------------|--|
| | | | | Interview Route Maps Workshop |
| 42 | Head of Cultural Development | Professional Services | London, UK | Telephone Interview Route Maps Workshop |
| 43 | Partner and Head of Diversity | Professional Services | London, UK | Telephone Interview Route Maps Workshop |
| 44 | Director | Professional Services | London, UK | Telephone Interview Route Maps Workshop |
| 45 | Head of Global Communications | Banking | New York, USA | Telephone Interview Route Maps Workshop |
| 46 | Senior Partner | Professional Services | London, UK | Telephone Interview Route Maps Workshop |
| 47 | Former Managing Director now Self Employed | Banking | New York, USA | Telephone Interview Route Maps Workshop |
| 48 | Former Director now Self Employed | Professional Services | London, UK | Telephone Interview Route Maps Workshop |
| 49 | Former Director now Self Employed | Professional Services | London, UK | Telephone Interview Route Maps Workshop |
| 50 | HR Director | Law | London, UK | Telephone Interview Route Maps Workshop |

Why London and New York?

38 of the women executives were based in London and 12 based in the USA, with ten in New York and two from Boston and Chicago. Five of the women executives from the USA had worked in the UK previously, and eight of the women in the UK had previously worked in the USA. Four women were regularly travelling and working in both the UK and USA.

I explored the perspectives of women executives based in these two cities rather than comparing them. The objective was not to conduct a comparative study, and the UK provided the first important benchmarks to the study. The New York-based participants were not involved until later in the study, due to issues of access and convenience with having to travel between the two cities. However, a comparative element did insinuate itself into the research, in terms of the level of women's confidence and assertiveness being perceived as higher in New York than in London. In addition, how these Anglo-Saxon environments compare in relation to other countries such as Norway, which has legislation requiring companies to appoint female directors is not explored and could be an opportunity for further study.

I wanted to draw upon the relative best practice of the USA and the UK in having higher numbers of women in executive positions globally than other countries. According to Corporate Women Directors International 2007 Report on the Fortune Global 200,

“The U.S. is the pacesetter in appointing women to board seats: Of the 75 U.S. companies in the Fortune Global 200, all but one has at least one woman on their board. Of these 75 companies, 17.6% of all board directors are women, leading all the countries represented by Fortune Global 200 companies. Within Europe, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands rate the best with 13.9% and 12.2% women's board representation, respectively.” (Corporate Women Directors International 2007 p. 1)

This was compared to other countries such as Japan (1.3%), the world's second largest economy, or Italy (2.9%).

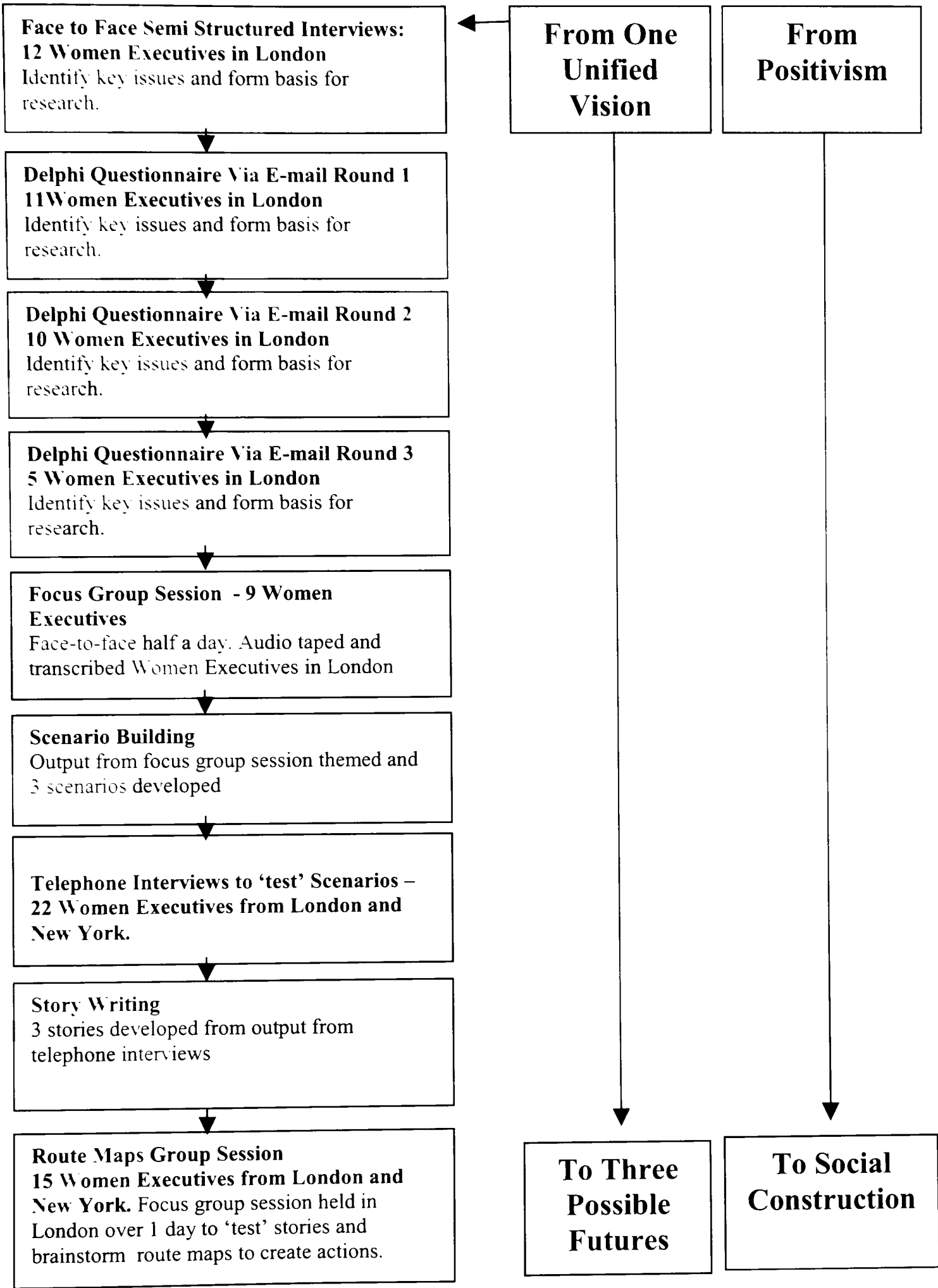
The cities of London and New York also, of course, provide substantial economic interaction between the banking and professional services industries, with considerable influence on world economies. My aim was to draw conclusions from women executives operating in these cities within traditional male-dominated industries.

The Research Process

The fieldwork undertaken offered an opportunity to engage with women executives in banking and professional services in their worlds and provided an arena for an emergent and iterative research process. The thesis is structured in such a way as to take account of this journey of exploration and provide a meaningful narrative on the aims, methods, findings and conclusions that emerged from the experience.

Figure 4 outlines the flow of the research, how many participants were involved at each stage of the research, and their locations. It shows the emergent nature of the research, the progression from trying to identify a single, unified vision at the start of the research to the building of three alternative possible futures, as well as the evolution from a positivist to a social constructionist worldview.

Figure 4: Research Processes, Outline of Participant Involvement and Research Methods. Source Author



The Research Coding System

The following index was created in order to attribute particular quotes and provide an 'audit trail' to the raw research data.

Table 4: The Research Coding System: Source: The Author

| | |
|--------|--|
| APIUK | A= Individual Identifier PI= Pilot Study UK= Located in London, UK |
| BDQ1UK | Person B DQ1= Delphi Questionnaire Round 1 located in London, UK |
| DFGUK | Person D FG = Focus located in London, UK |
| A | Individual Identifier |
| PI | Pilot Interview |
| UK | Located in London, UK |
| USA | Located in New York, USA |
| DQ1 | Delphi Questionnaire Round 1 |
| DQ2 | Delphi Questionnaire Round 2 |
| DQ3 | Delphi Questionnaire Round 3 |
| FG | Focus Group |
| TI | Telephone Interview |
| R1 | Route Maps Session 1 |
| R2 | Route Maps Session 2 |

For example:

“Women being true to themselves and being honest with each other and respecting each other and not pretending that they’re not on holiday, when they are. I like the idea of not having to put on a mask, about people integrating and working in the way that they feel comfortable, in terms of values and in terms of work content. (For them) it doesn’t have to be separate from life, it’s just ‘what they do’. Life is just a singular entity.” CR1UK
(e.g. Participant C, Route Map Session 1, located in the UK)

The Starting Point

Every journey has to begin somewhere. I began mine with a wonderfully idealistic naïvety, having read a large amount of populist literature on the “rise and fall” of women in the corporate world. As a naïve pragmatist, my original goal when I embarked on this study was to create a unified and inspiring vision of the future that executive women could aspire to. I wanted to change the world!

After receiving sound advice from my soon-to-be supervisor to read more academically and come back to him in six months when I had done just that, a somewhat enlightening six months followed. A literature review demonstrated to me that much of what had been and still is being written about the under-representation of women at executive levels focused on the historical reasons for the phenomenon; it dealt with the here and now. I did not find much discussion of the future possibilities and of change. In order to explore these areas, I embarked upon a journey of discovery that informed the overarching framework and approach to this study.

My early positivist approach to the study was much to the chagrin of my ever-patient supervisor, who constantly challenged and evolved my thinking so that I chose more appropriate methods for this study. “How, Sam, can you quantify the future when it has not even happened yet?” echoed words from regular supervisor review meetings.

To add to my problems, at the time that I embarked on this study, I had also recently moved back to London after working in the USA and I had just started my own business. This coaching business that specialised in working with executive women has emerged in parallel with this study. My intense desire to understand the mindset of my executive women client-base, and to be able to give them a vision for the future, helped me bounce into my second meeting with my soon to be supervisor and after having spent six months reading, I was keen to get started.

So, wisely – or I may not have made it through – my journey began very pragmatically and initially without a clear theoretical standpoint or ultimate research question. I knew I was interested in the future for women executives, whether it would change and how this may be brought about, but I was unclear as to my starting point. Therefore, I embarked on a preliminary study interviewing executive women myself to help me gain insights into their views on the world of work, so that I could start to form my research question and have my application accepted to start my PhD.

After a successful preliminary study and the research questions formulated, my application was accepted. And so began this journey. The methodology for this study was constructed as I went along. I evolved from a positivist to a much more authentic phenomenologist as the years went by. Every time I felt like I had reached the end of a road, a new technique emerged that suited each stage of the journey. I didn't know where I was going much of the time, but I was always cross-mapping with theory and constantly challenging my own beliefs, and this kept me and this study on track.

The study was emergent in nature; I took it step by step, as I could not plan it all out beforehand. Many of the years were a juggling act to balance the demands of the research with the challenges of a growing business and family. Much of it has been constructed by constant iteration and re-iteration and this, I believe, added to the richness and intricacy of what has emerged. I used a more narrative form to write this thesis by telling this story (that openly shows my weaknesses) and I then use this storytelling again to recount the stories of the women executives in this study. As Slaughter (2002, p.97) identified,

“Stories are powerful explanatory devices. They are not mere fiction because they model human reality in novel and useful ways. They can therefore be used to explore some aspects of human futures in ways not accessible to reason analysis”

The construction of text and the story element throughout was a very significant part of this research, as was the relationship between the researcher and storyteller sides of myself.

The Destination

Every journey has a destination. As with any journey, there is often no right way to get to a destination and there are many options available. The main challenge, therefore, was to make choices and decisions that are appropriate to where I was attempting to go. I made my choices and often I got lost; and it felt very uphill at times. My exploration into executive women and their future world of work was ever-evolving and emergent, revealing new facets, becoming more complex, or changing form as I went along. I didn't want to rely solely on what had already happened for executive women. I was no longer convinced that looking at the past and the present as reliable indicators of the future possibilities for executive women was a fruitful approach. As a result, exploring possibilities for the future, and especially having a vision (my ultimate destination) for the future, was important.

The destination changed as the study progressed; it soon became clear that a single, unified vision was unobtainable and unrealistic. Instead, several alternative futures or destinations emerged. The use of the word *vision* became progressively less useful. As the scenarios emerged, multiple destinations became apparent, and how inspiring or visionary they were depended largely on who was reading them. Indeed, one person's vision could be another person's nightmare. My destination therefore ended up being multiple possible scenarios for the future world of work for women executives.

Originality and Contribution to Knowledge

It was important that this thesis made an original contribution to knowledge. According to Phillips (1993) in Phillips and Pugh (2005, p. 62), various factors constitute an original contribution. Some that are particularly relevant to this study are:

“Taking a particular technique and applying it to a new arena, bringing new evidence to bear on an old issue and looking at areas that people in the discipline have not looked at before”, Phillips and Pugh (2005, p. 62),

This thesis provides an important development in understanding how women executives, especially within banking and professional services, perceive the future world of work, an area in which there is a limited existing body of knowledge and few explanatory conceptual frameworks. It contributes to theories concerning why women are not in executive positions, theories of women's careers, and what can be done to further women's advancement.

In evaluating this study, one could say that it is inherently impossible to judge claims about a future that has not happened yet. We can never be absolutely certain about what may or may not happen. If one was coming from a positivist perspective this would cast heavy doubt on the appropriateness of future scenarios and route maps. From an academic pragmatist perspective, however, what has emerged is that the use of a future study for women executives has decision-making utility. It provides a career-planning tool; it enables women to explore what their future may look like. This, in turn, enables them to develop plans to pursue or avoid certain scenarios. In addition, a future study may be utilised by organisational decision-makers with an interest in retaining women executives. It enables organisations to understand how their women executives perceive their future and then take action to support their development.

Future researchers are also provided with a suggested process for conducting a futures study for women executives. They may take this research further through such suggested factors as involving men in the research process, comparing the responses of women and men, applying it to other industries and sectors and cultures other than the UK and USA and pursuing a more detailed understanding of the scenarios and route maps in order to take action and create change.

Conclusion

This first chapter aimed to justify the research question, give the background to the numbers of women executives, the research process and the participants, as well as explain my world view and why a futures study was considered appropriate. The next chapter will further justify the research by establishing what has been

researched previously, the gaps in the existing literature, and hence the basis for this study.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review – ‘Reviewing the Map’

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to further justify the motivation underlying this research by reviewing the relevant literature – the ‘map,’ so to speak, of what has been written and created within the field. This establishes the theoretical framework that lays the foundation for the methodological focus in the following chapter. My aim was to show my deep connection to this area of study by establishing and understanding the most important issues and controversies and their relevance to my research question. This then provides a context for anticipating the direction in which the field may go by knowing where previous studies have gone and what has been neglected to date.

It was essential to explore my research question against that which is already known about the subject and determine whether or not it has already been addressed by someone else, and if so, how. This exploration is constituted by four interrelated parts. Firstly, a timeline of some of the studies of the past and of the historical progression of women executives over the past 30 years shows how the thinking in the field has progressed, and is helpful in starting to identify any gaps in the literature. Secondly, a critique of the selection of explanations offered in relation to women’s advancement in organisations, and in particular why this progress has not been as rapid or extensive as envisaged, and what is still unknown, is explored. Thirdly, a review of the literature concerning additional external themes and trends impacting women executives and their future world of work provides a macro background to the populist themes influencing women executives’ decision-making. Finally, a review of the literature on future studies as a discipline provides a background and context for its selection as the study’s methodology.

There is a plethora of literature that could fall into my four designated areas. I differentiated the research-based academic literature from the large amount of populist literature that made generalised statements without sufficient supporting evidence. I also packaged what I deemed to be the most important themes in a vast

amount of literature, recognising that this would be influenced by my own value orientations.

Rather than perhaps the more traditional approach of reviewing the literature fully before embarking on any practical research, I read and used the literature throughout the study. This enabled me to build on the various parts of the research process. For example, the literature helped inform the first preliminary interview questions, determine the choice of focus group session questions, the building of the scenarios and the creation of the stories. This meant that the research was increasingly iterative and “what happened next” in the research process depended largely on “what had just happened,” and the literature helped to support and mould the process in parallel.

My contention with the literature was that it has not been sufficiently future- or solutions-oriented. The focus of the literature has predominately been on why women are not occupying a high number of executive positions within large organisations, and on the past and present situation. These include sector-specific studies and surveys into areas as diverse as independent schools in the UK (McLay & Brown 2000), and financial services firms (Catalyst 2001), law firms (Catalyst 2001a) and the information technology industry in the US (Cordova-Wentling & Thomas 2005). There has been a tendency in many of the studies to explain phenomena in terms such as glass ceilings (Wirth 2001) and look for solutions at the individual level of analysis (Marshall 1993) in order to show how women might more effectively respond to internal factors – such as self-efficacy, personality traits and academic achievement – and external ones – such as gender-role socialisation, work-family constraints and opportunities for advancement (Cordova-Wentling & Thomas 2005). This research has been extremely useful in establishing the historical reasons for the lack of advancement of women, but it has less impact on determining whether and how the situation may change in the future.

The review of the literature supported the point that my research question (“what future worlds of work do women executives aspire and how might they be accomplished?”) had not yet been fully addressed within the literature, and that it

would be useful to do so. In addition, reviewing the literature on future studies as a set of methods revealed that it would be an appropriate approach to adopt in this endeavour.

A Timeline for The World of Work for Women Executives

It is a common idea that to understand the future, one must look to the past. In order to have a starting point for the literature review, I created a broad timeline of some of the studies of the past and of the historical progression of women executives over the past 30 years. This afforded an overview of how the thinking had progressed, and allowed me to start identifying any gaps in the literature and to explore some of the main ideas that may be extrapolated into the future, influencing the future world of work.

While this is a futures study, it was useful to examine the past and the historical progression of women executives. It sets a context to the study and identified some of the broad themes that have contributed to the world of work for women executives to date, and which may therefore influence the future. The period encompassing the last 30 years was selected, as it seemed like a reasonable time frame with which to demonstrate the relatively recent historical progression of women as executives.

Of course, the history of women prior to 1976 is extensive, but not within the scope of this study. However, a key point is that in historical terms, the concept of women occupying executive positions in all industries, and not just within banking and professional services, is a new one. Until the last half of the 20th century, women could not reach executive positions due to the assumption that a mother did not have time to devote to both a career and a family (one could argue that this view still exists in some arenas). A “marriage bar” existed, and despite a 1919 Act that legislated against women being barred from work for being married, the Civil Service kept the bar in place, as did many banks. Even teachers had to retire from their jobs if they chose to marry. The Marriage Bar was finally abolished in 1945, yet Barclays Bank did not abolish it until 1961.

(www.museumoflondon.org.uk/English/Collections/OnlineResources/X20L/Themes/1380/1257, downloaded 02/08).

The timeline is useful in showing how theorising and explanations have developed and changed over the years. Although the timeline is not specific to the women executives within the banking and professional services industries, it offers a range of reasons as to why women are not in executives positions. These reasons have evolved over time from an early focus on fixing women to a later focus on fixing organisational cultures.

Figure 5: A Timeline of Selected Studies on Women 1976 – 2007. Source: The Author

| YEAR | STUDY CONDUCTED |
|------|---|
| 2007 | Schein (p. 10) – “Male managers still perceive successful managers are men, but women do not” Höpfl and Matilal ““The lady vanishes”: some thoughts on women and leadership’ |
| 2006 | Jogulu and Wood (p. 244) “Women possess the qualities of a transformational leader.” |
| 2002 | Meyerson and Fletcher (p. 129) “Pervasive gender inequity” |
| 2000 | Vinnicombe et al created the benchmark “Female FTSE Report” |
| 1996 | Mintzberg “Musings on Management” |
| 1995 | Marshall, “Women Managers Moving On: Exploring Career and Life Choices” |
| 1990 | “Ways Women Lead” - Rosener |
| 1986 | Hymowitz and Schellhardt, writers in the Wall Street Journal, introduced the “glass ceiling” metaphor |
| 1985 | Greenhaus (p. 76) “Work-family conflict” |
| 1984 | Marshall “Women Managers: Travellers in a male world” |
| 1977 | Kanter “Men and Women of the Corporation” |
| 1976 | Schein “Think Manager, Think Male” |

The selected literature ranges from the late 70s and early 80s, which focused on perceptions of managers as men and not women (Schein 1976; Kanter 1977), to the mid-80s, when there was much discussion that aimed to establish that men and

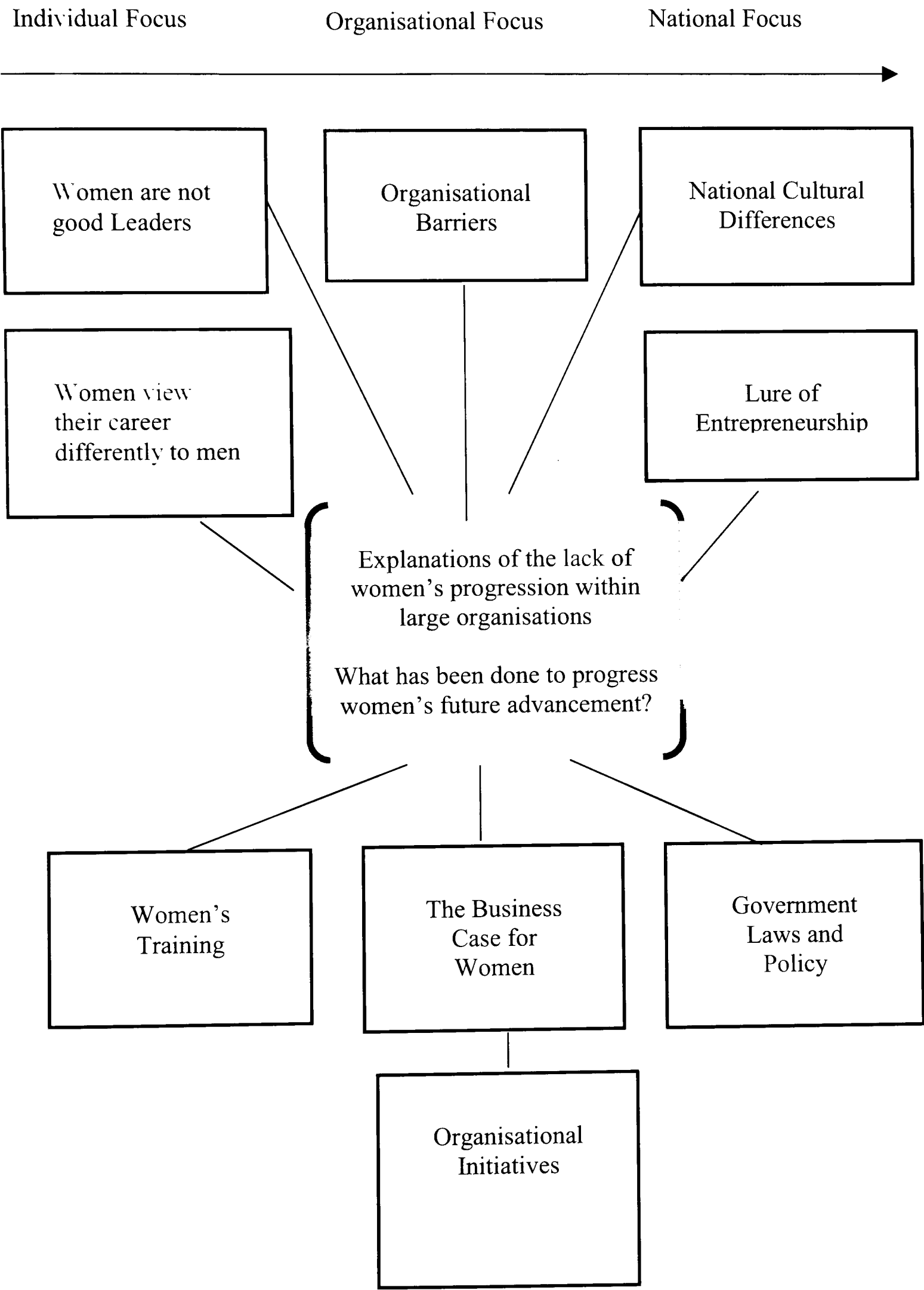
women were of equal proficiency as managers and leaders (Marshall 1984; Greenhaus 1985). In the 90s, the literature shifted to focus on the concept that men and women were fundamentally different as managers and leaders, and in fact, that women may be better leaders than men (Rosener 1990). The turn of the century focused on women's continued under-representation in senior management and the reasons for it, alongside a growth in female entrepreneurship. In more recent years, there has been some discussion on the organisational solutions to women's advancement (Myerson & Fletcher 2002; Condova-Wentling & Thomas 2005). Recent work seems to be returning to the merits of women's "transformational" leadership style as being necessary for organisations in the future, and the cultural and societal changes needed for women to be in executive positions (Jogulu & Wood 2006; Höpfl & Matilal 2007).

The timeline was useful in making sense of the huge amount of literature; it provided some order and showed a progression in thinking, from a micro level to a more macro and systematic level that includes organisational and societal change. This progression is surely a good thing; however, I found myself wondering how women's futures in organisations in 2008 might have been envisaged in the 1970s. How much has actually changed in this time period? If it is now the case that women are not to blame for their lack of progression, but instead it is the male-dominated institutions and cultures that need to change, what does this mean for women's careers? The latest ideas seem to be that the 'problems' are found in the workplace and the organisational environment rather than in the psychology of women. The point is, where does this lead us in terms of accelerating the progress of women executives and what does this mean for the future? These were questions that I found to be conspicuously unanswered in the literature.

Explanations for the Lack of Women's Progression in Organisations

In addition to the previous timeline, which shows an apparent evolution in thinking in the field (without perhaps the associated realised change), the diagram below seeks to synthesise the literature with regard to the various explanations for the lack of women's progression in organisations and some of the initiatives that have been taken. Each of the areas is explored in more depth and again, while this is useful, it suggested that it does not provide enough focus on where it may change in the future and what can be done to achieve any sustainable change.

Figure 6: Explanations of the lack of women’s progression within large organisations and what has been done to progress women’s future advancement.
 Source: The Author



Individual Barriers

There are a number of barriers to women's advancement within the literature that have an individual focus. A large part of these barriers focus on male and female leadership styles and the perception of women as viewing their careers differently to men. Many of the limitations of the literature associated with male and female leadership styles can be traced back to the work of feminist scholars.

“In the 1960s and 1970s, they drew attention to the fact that women had been largely invisible in social scientific work and that where women had been studied, they had been found to be inferior to men in terms of attributes such as moral development, intelligence and conversational style” (Willig 2001, p. 5).

Feminists argued that this was used to account for inequalities between men and women, and these arguments influenced the male/female leadership debate as it stands today, which still seems to be destined to be plagued by polarising male-female and similarity-difference issues. This kind of debate is of questionable utility in relation to determining the future for women executives.

These barriers, despite having their origins in the 1970s, still form the basis of a recurring and often conflicting debate within the literature today. While the discussion of women's leadership style and career has perhaps been a useful credibility-building exercise for women as leaders, it seems to have had considerably less success in creating any tangible and positive change for women.

Women are not Good Leaders – “Think Manager, Think Male”

The constantly recurring debate within the literature concerns the intrinsic differences between women and men's management and leadership styles. The extent to which it helps us understand women executives' aspirations for their future world of work has not been explored within the literature to any significant extent.

Early studies on women in management ascribed the general paucity of women in senior management levels to the widely-held view that successful managers were necessarily men. Schein's (1976) classic study entitled “Think Manager - Think

Male” summed up a world in which women were meant to prove themselves worthy of being managers. Their aim was to compare the traits of women against the firmly established pre-requisites of the successful male manager. In an effort to gain acceptance, women were repeatedly shown to be similar to male colleagues, but their success in executive roles did not necessarily follow.

The question consequently arose as to whether there is “something wrong with women that needs to be fixed.” Kanter (1977) was one of the first writers to explore why women were not achieving executive success. Kanter developed the concept of *tokenism* as an explanation of why persons of a particular social type, such as women, were in an extreme minority when they enter an occupation. This concept explained many difficulties women face as they entered traditionally male-dominated occupations. Both Schein and Kanter’s work formed the groundwork for foundational studies on women executives and were extremely useful; however, both attempted to explain why women were not in executive positions rather than offer any potential solutions to achieve change or insights into the future.

For women, demonstrating the male characteristics necessary to prove their equality to male managers was not an easy role, especially where women were burdened with the majority of childcare responsibilities compared to their male counterparts. This was explored by Greenhaus & Beutell (1985, p.76) who suggested that:

“Work-family conflict exists when: (a) time devoted to the requirements of one role makes it difficult to fulfil requirements of another; (b) strain from participation in one role makes it difficult to fulfil requirements of another; and (c) specific behaviours required by one role make it difficult to fulfil the requirements of another.”

These work/life conflicts may explain to some extent why the rise of women executives has not been more extensive. What seemed clear from the literature was that asking women to “act as men” in terms of their managerial behaviours and to work as many hours as their male counterparts when they also had childcare responsibilities was perhaps an unrealistic option for women, and contributed to their lack of advancement.

Accordingly, it was reasonable to infer that until the issues of management style and work life conflicts were resolved, the future would look dim. The question then arises as to who and what needs to change. Marshall (1995) described the situation in the 1990s as one in which more change was required of women than of men. For example, many discussions portrayed women as the primary carers and in charge of domestic responsibilities. She felt that the focus on women as individuals that somehow need to change or be “fixed” would not create any real change in organisations, and the facts suggest that she might have been right. Women may have been asking ‘why should I change?’

“Think Manager, Think Female?”

During the 1990s, the literature shifted from a “Think Manager, Think Male” to more of a “Think Manager, Think Female” debate. Various writers proposed that women’s leadership skills and style were in fact superior to that of men. This feminisation of management was widely adopted in Europe (Adler & Izraeli 1994). There were arguments that as organisations became flatter and more team-focused, the more male styles described as aggressive and competitive would be replaced by feminine styles described as more nurturing and caring (Rosener 1990; Minzberg 1996; Cooper & Lewis 1999).

Rosener (1990) examined the leadership styles of women and how they preferred to manage. She published a study that significantly added to the findings relating to male and female differences in leadership style. She found that male leaders tended to use rewards and punishment to influence performance, while women leaders preferred to employ a leadership style founded on interpersonal relationships and the sharing of power and information.

Her research sought to reject the male as being the gold standard of effective management and argued that the qualities previously stereotyped as female were equally valuable. For example, Rosener (1990) found in her studies that women, more often than men, adopted an interactive management style that was closely aligned with the then perceived model for the future, namely, transformational

leadership (Bass & Avolio 1993, 1994). Rosener's research included male and female executives with similar jobs, education and age. She concluded that women and men do manage differently. She felt that women were not as likely as men to conform to the traditional command and control leadership styles. That path is described as *transformational leadership* (1990, p.120):

“Getting subordinates to transform their own self-interest into the interest of the group through concern for a broader goal. Moreover, they ascribe their power to personal characteristics such as charisma, interpersonal skills, hard work, or personal contacts rather than to organisational stature.”

By contrast, men are more likely to describe themselves in ways that characterise them as “transactional” leaders (Rosener 1990, p. 120).

“That is, they view job performance as a series of transactions with subordinates – exchanging rewards for services rendered or punishment for inadequate performance”.

Her work was ground-breaking, as she proposed that women's more transformational leadership style was in fact highly conducive to manager or executive roles. It was, after all, the female style that made a successful manager.

Rosener implied that women are superior leaders to men by saying (1990, p.124): “[these] behaviours that were natural and/or socially acceptable for them have been highly successful.” Kark (2004) builds on transformational or interactive leadership being the choice for the future:

“As the work force increasingly demands participation and the economic environment increasingly requires rapid change, interactive leadership may emerge as the management style of choice for many organisations” (Kark 2004, p. 60).

She built on this by “accumulating empirical evidence that transformational leadership substantially influences employees' performance and organisation-level outcomes.”

Alimo-Metcalfe (1995) built on Rosener's work and described the findings from two UK studies that investigated female and male leadership qualities; two different models emerged. The descriptors used by women related directly to notions of

“transformational leadership,” and the men’s to “transactional leadership.” Burke & Collins (2001) also found differences in leadership styles of a sample of male and female accountants. The self-reported leadership styles of female accountants differed to those of their male colleagues. Women in the accounting profession described advancing their careers by following an interactive leadership style that was appropriate for them. This leadership style, called transformational leadership, was highly correlated with the very management skills that tended to produce success. DeMatteo (1994, p. 22) found that:

“Women were traditionally inculcated with qualities that include compassion, passiveness, patience, and commitment in the home. Men, on the other hand, were traditionally inculcated with qualities that included competitiveness, aggressiveness, risk-taking, and commitment in the workplace.”

These behaviours were labelled as masculine and have been considered indicators of success in the traditional male hierarchy.

DeMatteo (1994) goes on to describe how women whose style is masculine are frequently disliked by their subordinates and called names such as “Dragon Lady” or “Queen Bee” because they do not display the feminine qualities that we expect women in our society to have. This suggests that men and women may be judged differently as managers and leaders – that is, the same behaviour may be approved of in a man but criticised in a woman. Women are perhaps judged as women, not as managers, and men tend to be assessed differently.

Despite the positive intention to ‘prove’ women’s worth as managers, one can be left wondering what impact this has actually had in the workplace. Due Billing and Alvesson (2000, p.144) also found that “traditionally, leadership has been equated with masculinity but that there is now an interest in leadership adopting more “feminine” characteristics of being more participatory, non-hierarchical, flexible and group-oriented.” However, they argued that:

“We are not convinced that too much emphasis should be given to the gender vocabulary. Feminine leadership is tricky to disconnect from stereotypes and can easily restrain both women and men.” (p. 155).

Questions can be raised as to whether the ‘think manager, think female’ philosophy may have reinforced stereotypes. According to Catalyst (2005), in which they analysed more than forty studies of leadership, women leaders are still judged on what they call “caretaking” leader behaviours, whereas men do better at “take charge” behaviours, and they pointed to gender stereotypes that still be predominate.

In addition, despite the earlier discussion of the benefits of the transformational style of leadership associated with women (Rosener 1990; Alimo-Metcalfe 1995; Kark 2004), organisational cultures have been associated with a masculine style and culture (Maier 1999). This could be perceived as a barrier to entry for women, unless they are able and willing to adopt a masculine style. This has implications for the future if women are not willing to comply. During the 1990s there were significantly higher levels of women executives leaving organisations compared to their male counterparts (Institute of Management 1994).

It follows, then, that in the future women may need to adopt a masculine and more transactional style in order to advance within their organisation. Höpfl and Matilal (2007, p. 199) state that:

“It seems almost as inevitable as it is pervasive to hear women’s “success” described in terms of their ability to demonstrate male behaviour. To succeed requires that a woman perform as a man.”

Gordon (1991) explored the challenge faced by women who attempt to conform to the male management model. She studied organisationally successful women in various employment sectors in the USA. Her book based on the study, “Prisoners of Men’s Dreams,” contends that women have adapted to male organisational norms and she describes how the numbers of women executives did not increase, and the fundamental nature of organisations did not change. The research implies that in order for women to reach executive levels, they need to adopt male behaviours, which is contrary to earlier research that implied that it was feminine transformational behaviours that were necessary factors for future success.

The extent to which the “feminisation of management” and women’s adoption of male behaviours has reinforced gender stereotypes and weakened women’s position

has not been explored to any significant extent. It may be that it has not gained acceptance with both men and with women executives, especially when these roles are stereotyped as needing traits typically thought of as “male” (Calas & Smircich 1993).

The preoccupation with the similarity between men and women as “prisoners of gender” (Flax 1990a) has formed a large part of the literature. By continually asking and seeking to answer whether men and women’s leadership styles are different, it may have also led to a dilemma for women executives: “Do I take on the characteristics of being male in order to succeed, or do I lead in a female way?” The research seems to have created an “either/or” scenario, a binary opposition of male and female leadership, and assumes there is only one way of being a female or male leader. This is problematic, and has potentially reinforced stereotypes of women. This points to gender differences persisting in the future.

Think Manager, Think Male and Female

A recent wave of theorising has featured a more “androgynous” leader model, advocating a blending of styles previously labelled as male and female and that both men and women need to adopt in order to succeed. Those characterised as having a mixture of both masculine and feminine styles are termed *androgynous* (*andro* is Greek for male; *gyne* is Greek for female) (Korabik & Abbondanza 2004). This would suggest that gender differences in leadership style will disappear in the future.

Korabik and Abbondanza (2004) offer the concept of an androgynous style as a potential solution to the dilemma faced by women. If women choose to lead in a traditional feminine style, they may be viewed as likeable people and may also be perceived as poor leaders, because they lack the masculine task-oriented traits that organisations tend to associate with success. Androgyny would offer women a third option, and it would mean they do not have to choose between acting like a woman and acting like a man. However, how women learn and adopt this blend of behaviours is not properly addressed in the literature, especially when many of the traditional male organisations may still favour the masculine style of leadership.

What seems clear is that the literature is divided on whether or not there are differences between the leadership style of men and women and how relevant this is to the future advancement of women within organisations. If it is the case that organisations favour a masculine style and women do not possess it, then this may hinder women's progress. Conversely, if it is the case that the organisations of the future require more feminine qualities, then women's advancement may accelerate.

The debate does seem to be somewhat simplistic and focused on the two extremes of the masculine/feminine spectrum, when in fact it seems more likely that there is a whole range of possible styles and blends of styles in between. Perhaps the pursuit of an androgynous model will shift the debate away from the differences in men and women towards a debate about leadership in general and the future world of work, but on the other hand a "unisex" leadership model could also be perceived as a "dumbing down" aimed at pleasing everyone in pursuit of political correctness.

However, rather than a focus on moving the debate forward, some of the recent literature seems to favour a focus on old themes. Jogulu and Wood (2006, p. 245) report that "the attributes of transformational leadership are closely aligned to feminine characteristics in general as compared to masculine characteristics." They also state (p. 246) that:

"Women have what it takes to effectively lead in organisations today, and they are more likely to have these characteristics than are their male colleagues in management."

Cormier (2007, p. 269) says that:

"Women leaders are not men in skirts. Rather, they have their own sets of needs, dreams, ambitions, and talents that they bring to their role as organisational leaders."

Eagly (2007) found that in the United States,

"Women are increasingly praised for having excellent skills for leadership and, in fact, women, more than men, manifest leadership styles associated with effective performance as leaders" (p.1).

This seems to be repeating arguments from over 20 years ago, originating from Rosener in 1990, and the usefulness of such a repetitive approach has to be questioned. Eagly also found that it is more difficult for women than men to become leaders and to succeed in male-dominated leadership roles, which is hardly a novel finding. What is interesting is the apparent simultaneous advantage and disadvantage that women executives seem to experience. Women on the one hand are hailed as having a superior leadership style, but on the other hand the fact remains that there are a limited number of women in executive positions as compared to men.

To take us full-circle, Schein's original research (Schein 1973, 1975) set out to determine if there was a relationship between gender stereotyping and requisite management characteristics. In her recent work in 2007, she found that:

“Despite all the societal, legal, and organisational changes that occurred over the last thirty years, male managers continue to perceive that successful managerial characteristics are more likely to be held by men than by women (but women didn't)” (Schein 2007, p.10).

This suggests that men still experience barriers to accepting women as managers, despite progress in the perceptions of women who did not now accept this view. Within the study, even male management students held the same views as the male managers. As managers of the future, they viewed women as less qualified for entry into and advancement within management. Similarly, research done in Australia (Merrill-Sands & Kolb 2001) upholds the notion that leadership remains a masculine concept. The Merrill-Sands and Kolb (2001) study argued that while women may have the right skills, culturally they are not viewed as leaders.

How can women enjoy a leadership advantage but still suffer from disadvantage? To answer this question, the first step is to determine whether the female leadership style does indeed have an advantage, and the literature is again divided on this. ‘Good’ leadership is increasingly defined in terms of the qualities of feminine skills such as coaching and collaboration rather than the more masculine and authoritative ones, yet these stereotypical directive and assertive qualities of good leaders still exist too. In addition, organisations may still exhibit and favour a more masculine

style within the traditional hierarchy. Hence the question arises of where this leaves women in the future.

Women View their Career Differently to Men

A further barrier identified within the literature is how women, as opposed to men, perceive their career. It is suggested that women view their career differently to men and this has negative implications for women's future world of work. Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) developed a way of looking at how the career decisions of women are influenced by their personal relationships with spouses, children, relatives, and friends to a greater extent than men's. They called this concept the "kaleidoscope career."

"Like a kaleidoscope that produces changing patterns when the tube is rotated and its glass chips fall into new arrangements, women shift the pattern of their careers by rotating different aspects of their lives to arrange their roles and relationships in new ways." (Mainiero and Sullivan 2005, p. 111)

The implication of this study was that women may not want to reach executive positions if they feel they cannot achieve an appropriate balance with other aspects of their life. This is an important distinction, because it suggests that women are prevented from attaining senior management positions by their unwillingness to sacrifice other aspects of their life rather than by a deficiency in their skills.

O'Neil and Bilimoria (2005) indicate that women move through three phases within their careers: the "idealistic achievement" phase, in which they are optimistic and determined to be successful; the "pragmatic endurance" phase, in which they encounter the problems of professional relationships, organisations, and multiple life roles; and the concluding "reinventive contribution" phase, in which they positively redefine their careers and lives. It seems that where a woman might find herself along this progression determines how she feels about her career.

If we are to apply these phases to the woman's career, it may mean that women redefine their career and life either before or at executive level. This could mean career change, career break or leaving to work as self-employed. This was backed up by a special issue of Career Development International on advancing women's

careers (2005), which concluded with a paper on the phenomenon of senior women managers leaving traditional organisations to become entrepreneurs (Terjesen 2005). The study focused on how women were able to leverage the social capital and human capital they obtained in corporate life to set up new ventures.

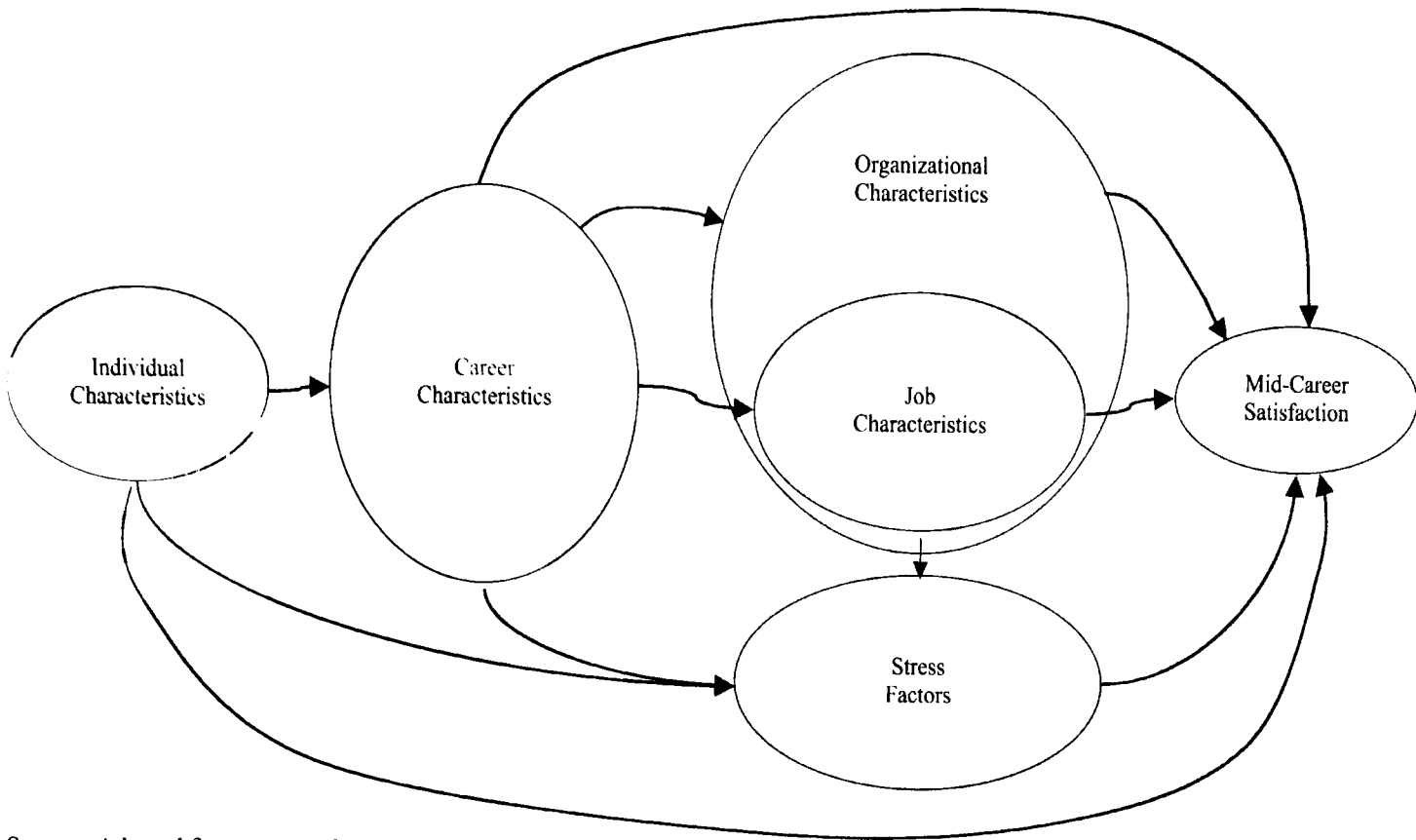
Therefore it seems that women may not be advancing to executive levels because of how they perceive their careers. Although the reasons women leave organisations is complex, Cabrera (2007, p. 228), found that:

“In fact, only 35 percent of the women who stopped working cited children as the sole factor in their decision to opt out. More often, numerous pull and push factors work in tandem to create the non-linear, interrupted patterns that characterize women’s careers.”

If women view their career in the broader sense of lifestyle and balance as well as career achievements, this raises questions for the advancement of women into executive levels. If women feel that the organisational culture is not conducive to their career and lifestyle goals, this may further reinforce women leaving executive roles, or not wanting to reach them in the first place.

However, Auster, in her 2001 study into the satisfaction of mid-career professional women, found that it was the combination of individual and organisational factors that determined a women’s career satisfaction. She provided an integrated framework for explaining how demographics, career history, job, organisational factors and stress affect their careers. As a means of exploring relationships between each dynamic, her model embeds a set of micro-level factors (individual, family, job design characteristics, stress, and satisfaction) within a broader organisational and career context. Individual characteristics that directly affect mid-career satisfaction, such as parenting responsibility and race/ethnicity, are mediated by career characteristics such as career history and career support (mentoring and professional networks), which in turn are mediated by job characteristics, which in turn are embedded within a larger organisational context.

Figure 7: Key factors affecting professional women's mid-career satisfaction:
Source: Auster and Ekstein (2005), adapted from Auster (2001, p.724)



Source: Adapted from Auster (2001, p. 724)

O'Connor (2001, p. 401) reinforces the idea that some women may be less interested than men in reaching executive levels. She suggested the idea of a “female career tree” rather than a career ladder, stating that:

“Many women reevaluate their lives and make changes in priorities at several stages. They may do this as a result of discovering that work is not the only source of life satisfaction or by coming to terms with what they care about. This may mean taking lateral career moves rather than upward ones, starting their own businesses, spending more time with family, taking up new hobbies, becoming involved in community work, or choosing less demanding jobs.”

What is probably true is that “one size does not fit all” in terms of women’s career choices. Many women do choose to stop working completely in order to care for their children, although in Cabrera’s (2007) study it was “only” 35 percent. Statistics show that this is an increasing trend, and the number of children with stay-at-home mothers increased by 13 percent in the past decade (Vanderkam 2005). Other women do not leave completely, but try to find a more flexible arrangement that lets them spend more time with their families. Schwartz (1989) introduced the term “mommy track” to refer to an alternative career path that allows a mother flexible or reduced work hours, but that concomitantly tends to slow or block advancement. A

newly-coined term, the “daughter track,” refers to a late-in-life version of the mommy track, in which women are leaving their jobs to care for their aging parents (Gross 2005). According to Gross (2005, p.1):

“71 percent of the people who devote 40 hours or more a week to care for aging relatives are women.”

The implication of the literature is that women make career choices that are informed by a multitude of reasons, and the unifying theme is that these reasons are frequently personal and lifestyle-related as opposed to organisational, or at least a combination of both. This raises questions on how this impacts the future world of work. For organisations, the relevance of these questions is that they need to consider how they retain women or accelerate them into executive positions when balance and lifestyle factors are important. This may be challenging when these factors may not be as highly valued in the traditional male culture.

Organisational Barriers

The previous section, which concerned the differences of women as leaders and how women perceive their careers, focused heavily on the individual characteristics of women. While useful, this needs to be set in the context of the organisation. There are various factors concerning the culture of the organisation that may influence the advancement of women into executive positions and hence their future world of work.

Traditional organisational cultures are described by Maier (1999) as masculine and hierarchical, and based on masculine values. These values are often opposed to feminine values and many women are uncomfortable working in organisations because they feel pressure to adopt behaviours that are inconsistent with their values (Van Vianen & Fischer 2002). In Marshall's (1995) in-depth interviews of 16 women, 11 of them mentioned dissatisfaction and pressures related to working in male-dominated cultures, and said that these experiences were central in their decisions to leave their jobs. How organisational cultures need to change in the future forms a large part of the literature.

Banking and Professional Services Companies are ‘Male-Dominated’

A distinctive factor about the financial and professional services industries is that they are traditionally known to be “male-dominated” and have more barriers to success than other industries. According to Ogden *et al.* (2006), there is a general consensus that women encounter more barriers to career progression in the financial and professional services industry than do men. This may have slowed the growth of the number of women executives, since many choose to exclude themselves from certain male-dominated sectors within these industries, such as corporate banking, due to the prevailing culture of long hours and perceived networking difficulties. (Ogden *et al.* 2006). According to the report “Women in Financial Services, The Word on the Street” (Catalyst 2001), which explored the perceptions of women working in the financial industry:

“65% of women feel that they have to work harder than men for the same rewards. 51% of women report that women are paid less than men for doing the same work. Only 8% of men agree. Further only 18% of women report that opportunities for advancement have increased greatly over the past 5 years. (Catalyst 2001, p. 4).

Another Catalyst (2001) survey of 400 senior-level employees from US and Canadian financial services firms found that women saw a lack of advancement within their companies more than men did. The reasons for which barriers for women exist within these industries are wide-ranging. Ogden *et al.* (2006) reported that most managers interviewed do not feel they have a satisfactory work-life balance, which relates to the earlier discussion about what women perceive as important in their careers. The most frequent reasons given were (Ogden *et al.* 2006, p. 47)

“A clear culture of presenteeism and long hours culture operating within the bank. Many managers reported their normal working day commencing as early as 7.30 a.m. and finishing as late as 8.30 p.m. Added to this, many spend significant amounts of time travelling from home to work, while most admit taking work home to do in the evenings and weekends. The focal point of this discussion was that most managers cannot do their jobs in the contracted hours, a common view being, you could be here 12 hours a day and still not feel you are doing enough.”

What is interesting is that many banking and professional services companies have a well-developed range of initiatives to support a healthy work-life balance, including

flexible working arrangements that range from a compressed working week to job-share and other working arrangements. However, Ogden *et al.* (2006, p. 47) found:

“Little evidence that senior jobs displayed much latitude for adjustment to accommodate responsibilities out with work since these posts are demanding and subject to long hours working.”

In particular, there is an indication that partners are expected to work full-time due to the extent of external networking required to be effective (Ogden *et al.* 2006). Therefore, it may be that even if initiatives that aim to support work/life balance are established, they may not be widely applied to executive roles, as role requirements and the organisational cultural norms preclude its success.

Further examples of the traditional organisational culture's lack of support for the advancement of women were found in a study of the UK financial sector. Woodward and Ozbilgin (1999) found the male culture of the sector to have powerful and unequal effects on the careers of women. Granleese (2004), in a study of gender differences in a UK bank, reported that while women were breaking the glass ceiling, they were doing so at a price, based on the fact that female managers were significantly less likely to be married or have children than male managers. This indicates that, in order to further their careers, women still have to make choices that men are spared.

The organisational cultural barriers to women's advancement are potentially problematic for the future of the financial and professional service industries. The majority of undergraduates studying accountancy in the UK are female, and while female graduates entering the profession are growing, the number of women at executive levels is not (Institute of Chartered Accountants, 2004). This may mean that women are leaving the industry before they reach executive level, representing a loss of talent at a significant cost. For example, membership figures show that, while in 2002 only 23 percent of all members were females (dropping to eight percent in the 50-59 age category), 48 percent of under 30s are female (Institute of Chartered Accountants, 2004). The figures for financial services are that in 2001, while 52

percent of the workforce was female, only 29 percent of managers were females (EOC, 2002b).

While the organisational cultural barriers for women in these industries are explored, there seems to be limited literature on what to do about it. The future for women executives within these industries and their aspirations for their future world of work have yet to be extensively explored. In addition, there is literature relating to other industries, such as the voluntary sector (Beattie *et al.* 2006) and the information technology sector (Cordova-Wentling. & Thomas 2005, 2007), although how transferable the issues are to the banking and professional services industries has yet to be explored.

Glass Ceilings, Sticky Floors and Concrete Walls

In the mid-1980s, the term “glass ceiling” was coined and has since become an established part of our vocabulary (Burke & Vinnicombe 2005). The glass ceiling refers to “an invisible but impermeable barrier that limits the career advancement of women” (Burke & Vinnicombe 2005, p. 165). Oakley (2000) argued that there are three categories accounting for the barriers that result in a glass ceiling:

1. corporate practices such as recruitment, retention, and promotion;
2. behavioural and cultural causes such as stereotyping and preferred leadership style; and
3. structural and cultural explanations rooted in feminist theory.

Since then, terms such as “sticky floors” and “concrete walls” have been used to refer to similar barriers that women experience in advancing in their careers in large organisations. The identification of the glass ceiling may have been a positive move for the progression of women, because instead of blaming women as intrinsically deficient in the requisite skills for management or having too many childcare responsibilities, it put the blame on an external factor: in other words, the issue may lie more with the organisation and its structure and culture, which had been designed primarily for men. However, literature on how to remove the glass ceiling is thin,

and even initiatives such as Affirmative Action in the USA and the implementation of Equality Opportunities Commission in the UK seem to have had limited effect.

Lack of Access to Networks

The lack of access to organisational networks has also been seen as a barrier to women's career progression (Catalyst and Opportunity Now, 2000). As a result, many companies have started to support corporate networks for women. Vinnicombe and Colwill (1995) describe external professional and occupational networks, such as those for women in engineering or finance. There are also internal corporate networks that sometimes started as informal gatherings of women but subsequently evolved into more formal networks supported by their organisations.

In a study of 12 corporate UK women's networks, Singh, Vinnicombe and Kumra (2006) found that the networks originated as a result of an awareness that women were not achieving their full potential, and that lack of access to male networks was a barrier for women. The most frequently mentioned benefit of the corporate networks for women in the survey was an expanded network, providing evidence that networks were meeting their objectives. Members seemed to appreciate networking with other women, perhaps because of their limited opportunities to meet other female colleagues. Despite the perceived benefits, the extent to which these women-only networks have potentially further reinforced stereotypes and alienated men has not been explored.

Role Models

Female role models are potentially important to the future because they may demonstrate to women that attaining executive positions is possible. Unfortunately, there are so few women at the top of organisations that female role models are hard to find (Singh *et al.* 2006). This problem is exacerbated if the role models are not perceived by lower-level women to be exemplary role-model behaviour; that is if they are exhibiting male characteristics or leading unbalanced lifestyles (Singh *et al.* 2006).

Summary

A variety of barriers to women's advancement in the future that are intrinsic to the culture of an organisation, instead of to women themselves, have been studied within the literature. They range from a masculine hierarchy and organisational structure, to a lack of access to networks, glass ceilings and a paucity of role models. This research has been useful, as it provides a more systematic framework for the lack of women's advancement, and it emphasises the need to transform organisations rather than women. With regard to the future world of work for women executives, it is helpful in terms of exploring what organisations may need to do in order to retain women executives. However, the range of organisational factors is complex, and there seems to be limited literature on what to do to solve these issues and where to start.

A National Context

While individual and organisational barriers have a significant part to play in terms of the barriers to women's advancement, the literature has addressed, to a limited extent, the impact of the national culture, and more so the impact of women's entrepreneurship. This is relevant because the future world of work may be influenced by the country and its specific cultural bias alongside its support of women's abandonment of their careers to start their own businesses.

UK and USA Cultural Difference

Little published research seems to exist concerning any differences in characteristics of executive women in the UK and USA, and specifically London and New York, which is the focus of this study. According to Duffy *et al.* (2006, p. 566), "there was little between-country variability among the successful women on the personal characteristics, self-efficacy and need for achievement," implying that cultural differences between women executives do not exist between countries. However, one of the foundation studies that did establish national cultural differences was Hofstede's original survey of IBM employees (1980) and the Collaborative

International Study of Managerial Stress project (Spector *et al.* 2002). These both demonstrated national differences between countries and implied that, to some extent, women executives may reflect the differences of their respective countries. However, Hofstede's study was limited to one company (IBM) and both studies did not specifically look at women executives in the UK and USA.

Travers *et al.* (1997) also found differences between women in the UK and USA. He stated that UK women sought and gained more career support from colleagues and senior managers than their counterparts in the USA. UK women also seemed more interested in self-development activities, and used networks for developing self-confidence and networking skills. They also preferred to engage in networks outside their organisations.

The literature is therefore divided on whether there are any differences between women executives within the UK and USA, and little data exists for the banking and professional services industries specifically. This may be because the UK and USA have relatively similar first-world cultures. The impact of the cultures of countries that are experiencing growth and changes, such as India and China, may be an area meritorious of future research.

The Lure of Entrepreneurship

The phenomenon of women starting their own business rather than being an executive within an organisation is a theme within the literature. Questions such as 'is it that women are leaving organisations as a response to some of the barriers previously outlined, or is it that entrepreneurship provides a legitimate career progression for many women?' are debated. Whether women aspire to entrepreneurship in the future has an impact on what the future world of work looks like for women executives.

The literature is replete with new terms and buzzwords designed to describe new female entrepreneurs with executive management experience: "careerpreneur," "corporate incubator," "corporate climber," "modern entrepreneurs," and "second-generation entrepreneurs" (Terjesen 2005, p. 247). Research reveals that women

entrepreneurs typically benefit financially from being self-employed as compared to their days as corporate managers (Devine 1994), and that they are more satisfied as entrepreneurs than in their organisations (Burt & Raider 2000).

In the UK, female entrepreneurs make up one of the faster-growing segments of the economy, accounting for 13 percent of all small business owners (Terjesen 2005). Almost half of all women in the UK who are employed full-time feel there are good opportunities for them to start their own businesses, and more than one third believe they have the skills and knowledge necessary to do so (Terjesen 2005). In the USA, favourable tax treatment policies have helped promote the establishment of women-owned and operated businesses. The number of women-owned businesses in the USA grew by 20 percent between 1997 and 2002, twice the national average for all businesses: most were small businesses (U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Business Owners: Women-Owned Firms, 2002).

Marshall (1994) found that instead of women leaving organisations because they could not cope, women construed leaving as a positive choice (in most instances) and that women, it seemed, did not want to conform to male models of management and cultures that did not support their individual style. Contrary to the view that women leave due to a dissatisfaction with the company culture, Terjesen's (2005) examination of senior women managers and the circumstances around their departure from organisations to start their own businesses suggested that it was a natural next step for those who wanted to leverage their knowledge and skills.

There are, however, studies that contradict the views that women start their own businesses as a natural, self-actualising next step. Vinnicombe and Bank (2003) describe the main reasons for which women executives leave organisations to start their own businesses as pay inequity, the glass ceiling and a lack of flexibility in the organisational culture. By starting and leading their own companies, it follows, most would seem to be in positions where they are better able to chart their own career paths, no longer having to conform to traditional, male-dominated organisations (Vinnicombe & Bank, 2003).

The increased number of female entrepreneurs may signify a shift away from traditional notions of career, reinforcing earlier ideas of women's perceptions of their careers. For many, the idea of a linear succession of promotions within a single organisation is gone. Instead, to meet the need for a better work/life balance, many women have designed their own career paths instead of following the more traditional career ladders (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005).

Cantzler and Leijon (2007), in their study of women entrepreneurs in Sweden, found that women work in teams within their company and have a network around their businesses; they describe this as a new, modern way of doing business. Buttner (2001) used relational theory to understand how women entrepreneurs run their businesses. Women entrepreneurs were viewed as being relationship-oriented, and this was a way of achieving success in which both customers and employees benefited. This seems aligned with earlier discussions of women adopting a more transformational style of leadership. Is it the case that if women cannot deploy this style within large organisations, they will do so within their own businesses?

The growth of women executives as entrepreneurs may have a negative impact on organisations, as they lose talent. Limited research exists for organisations on how they might retain women with entrepreneurial aspirations. This is important, as in addition to the costs associated with women leaving, it may be that those managers who are left behind lack essential entrepreneurship skills and may focus too much on the short term (Morrisette & Schraeder 2007). In fact, some literature blames poor corporate performance on over-reliance on managers who lack the entrepreneurial skills and mindsets necessary to recognise opportunities and emerging threats (Morrisette & Schraeder 2007).

What has been done to progress women's future advancement?

The aforementioned individual, organisational and national factors represent a multitude of influences that have been contributing to the lack of advancement of women within organisations. If one were to focus on these factors, one could perhaps be forgiven for feeling pessimistic about the future world of work for women executives. With so many barriers, what does the future hold? This is a question that has been addressed to some extent within the literature. Some organisations have taken the mantle and conducted initiatives to retain women, and government has legislation to support women. The background and effectiveness of these initiatives, and its relevance to the future world of work, is discussed in the next section.

The Business Case for Women

Building upon equal-opportunities legislation, academics and professional groups responded to the issue of women's advancement in the 1990s through research projects designed to help organisations take women executives more seriously. Schwartz (1992), from the non-profit research organisation Catalyst, asserted that women's issues are really business issues, and that companies will gain large financial rewards when they accept their responsibility to women. Their approach argued that it made good business sense for organisations to develop and retain women through drivers such as changing demographics and economics.

The efforts of research organisations such as Catalyst attempted to show links between gender equity and productivity. In their report "The Bottom Line: Connecting Corporate Performance and Gender Diversity," Catalyst (2004) found that companies with women on the board financially outperformed those without women on the board. The study looked at three critical financial measures: return on equity, return on sales, and return on invested capital, and compared the performance of companies with the highest representation of women on their boards to those with the lowest representation. The correlation between gender diversity on

boards and corporate performance was found across most industries – from consumer discretionary to information technology.

The Australian study of Probert *et al.* (1998) concerning workplace performance also found a direct correlation between high productivity and high levels of gender equity for both private and public institutions, regardless of size. It seemed that organisations genuinely benefited when women were in senior positions and that barriers preventing equal participation by women in executive roles were counterproductive. These studies were somewhat ground-breaking: they moved beyond the seemingly positive but potentially vacuous concept of equal opportunities to a solid, business-related motivation for organisations to retain women.

However, the organisations that agreed to participate in the Catalyst and Probert studies may have had high-performing boards to begin with, and factors other than gender may have accounted for their financial success. With regard to causal links, one possible explanation for women contributing to the financial success of organisations might not be caused by the superior performance of women, but by the simple fact that excluding gender considerations from the selection process results in the assembly of better boards. This makes it difficult to gauge the accuracy of their assertions. Presumably, if it was the case that ‘women make more financial sense,’ there would be more women in executive positions.

The value of these studies may therefore reasonably be called into question. The studies were often launched at conferences attended by women (I was at the Catalyst 2004 Conference in New York when the study was launched), so the extent to which they were read and influenced by the decision-making of men is unknown. It is possible, for instance, that these conferences alienated men, and concomitantly put women in a position in which they have to justify their own existence.

The literature has limited examples of organisations that have responded to the business case for women. McCracken (2000, p.160) cited a case study of Deloitte and Touche in the USA and their “radically different approach to retaining talented

women,” stating that women’s exodus from the firm is “a serious business matter that the firm could and should fix.” The case study detailed how most women were not leaving Deloitte and Touche to raise families, but to escape Deloitte’s male-dominated culture. The study referred to the huge cost savings, greater creativity, faster growth and far greater performance enjoyed by the organisation as a result of retaining women. However, what is interesting is that, despite this initiative, Deloitte does not have a significantly greater number of women executives than its competitors.

What is going wrong, then? Is it that women executives who did not want to be singled out as different or needing help may have rejected these business case arguments? Some writers also rejected the claims that women make business sense. Hakim (1995) argued that women’s work commitment is actually inferior to that of men. In 2002, she found that most women want to be at home and with strong support from their husbands. She stated that only a small minority of women are committed to achieving jobs at higher levels of status and earnings. This would imply that women do not make business sense, as their eventual departure from organisations is inevitable.

The business case for women has therefore had mixed effects. Its intent to prove that women are a worthwhile investment may have backfired, with both women and men. This is important, because it has implications for the future world of work for women: will organisations want to invest in retaining women, and are women interested in being retained? The literature perhaps raises more questions than it answers.

Organisational Solutions to Retain Women

The extent to which organisations have taken initiatives to retain women has been explored in the literature. The previous discussion on the individual, organisational and national barriers for women is explored as to how they have informed the solutions. Whether or not these solutions have been effective and have provided a

basis for women executives and their organisations to plan for the future is also reflected upon.

Prior to 2000, there had been a tendency to look for solutions at the individual level of analysis (Marshall 1995) rather than at the system level. Suggestions for action tended to favour person-centred remedies, such as training (Gutek 1993). The training may be for women, to empower them in relation to the reality of the organisational world (for example, through assertiveness training) or for men (to help them develop gender awareness). In addition to these efforts, other initiatives followed from them, integrating work-family concerns. Burke, Burgess and Fallon (2006, p. 424) report that “women describing more supportive organisational practices also indicated more job and career satisfaction and higher levels of psychological well-being.”

Despite Marshall’s assertions that solutions were focused on the individual only up to the year 2000, this practice still exists today. Cornish (2007, p. 18) found that:

“Formal programmes, career planning and courses provide good schooling but the best education comes from developing relationships, easy rapport and through informal coaching.”

Cornish has various suggestions for supporting women, which include assigning sponsors to fast-track women, presenting the business case for comprehensive, organisation-wide development, sponsoring non-gender-specific activities, replacing the annual golf game with a barbeque, promoting an environment that facilitates work-life balance and encouraging executives to “take a brutally honest look at their organisations” (Cornish 2007, p. 19). Cornish’s last point shifts the focus from individual women and how they might fix their problems to more multi-faceted organisational issues.

A focus on the organisation as opposed to the individual as a means to advance women was usefully synthesised by Meyerson and Fletcher (2000), who pointed to an approach called “Micro Inequities” for solving gender inequity in the workplace.

Their systematic approach summarised past initiatives as:

- *Assimilation* (teaching women to act more like men). An example is teaching women to assert themselves in meetings.
- *Accommodation* (adapting to the unique needs of women). An example is extending maternity pay.
- *Celebration* (emphasising the unique talents of women). An example is challenging women into jobs where they market products to other women.

Meyerson and Fletcher's cultural change approach focused on fixing entire organisations, not individual women. Their approach focused on changing behaviours and creating more comprehensive, systemic change. They asserted that it was not the glass ceiling that was holding women back, but the very structure of the organisation in which they work.

Wentling (2004) found that all of the multinational organisations she surveyed had initiatives designed to further the upward progression of women, and that these efforts were supported by governmental policies. However, despite all the research and organisational initiatives, women continued to be under-represented at the executive level in large organisations. Wentling (2004) goes on to acknowledge this and states that this is occurring despite growing organisational sensitivity and increased support through public policies, initiatives and equal opportunity legislation (not to mention a plethora of commentary over the past thirty years).

As a remedy, Schein (2007) calls for an expansion of legal initiatives at a national level, and efforts to change corporate cultures in order to bring about greater balance between work life and family life. Eagly and Carli (2007) support the view that any changes are multi-faceted and need to include individual, organisational and national change. Eagly and Carli (2007) submit that the workplace barriers faced by women are in fact a labyrinth of different issues – a metaphor that conveys more fully the complexity and variety of challenges that emerge along women's road to leadership roles. Their recommendations include changing the long-hours culture, using open-

recruitment tools and preparing women for line management with more demanding assignments.

The solutions presented in the literature to increasing the advancement of women at an organisational level are multi-faceted. There is little indication in the literature of how many organisations are actually adopting approaches for solving this and how successful they have actually been; indeed, organisations' recognition of this issue might even be a sporadic phenomenon rather than the norm. This has implications for the future world of work for women executives, and whether or not organisations will take their career progression seriously.

Government Policy

The issue of whether or not organisations are driven to retain women by government policy has received little attention in the literature. The plethora of government acts and initiatives in the UK and USA impacting women is too broad a topic to embark on a comprehensive analysis for this study, and somewhat outside the scope of my research question. However, a brief overview of some of the relevant policy is provided, as it has been part of the influences impacting women and their future world of work.

Earlier legislation in the UK focused on the issues of equal pay for women (1970 UK Equal Pay Act) and discrimination (1975 UK Sex Discrimination Act & the Equal Opportunities Commission established by the UK government). In the USA, equivalent legislation was passed earlier (The Equal Pay Act of 1963: Part of the Fair Labour Standards Act of 1938). These acts provided some of the first foundation stones in support of women at work.

More recently, The Women and Work Commission in the UK has aimed to help reduce the gender pay gap and in particular stimulate cultural change among employers. This emphasis on cultural change supports earlier literature on the organisational barriers to women's advancement. The then Minister for Women, Ruth Kelly, announced on 30 January 2007 that more than 100 companies and

organisations had signed on to the Exemplar Employer initiative. The Government had worked to engage employers who have exemplar projects covering a wide range of issues, such as working with schools to inform girls about careers in their sector and supporting mothers returning from work. The UK government has also established a gender equality duty (2008), a new legal requirement placed on all public authorities in the UK, to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment on the grounds of sex;
- promote equality of opportunity between women and men. (downloaded from http://www.equalities.gov.uk/gender_equality_duty/index.htm, July 2008).

In addition, the UK's Government Equalities Office now has a new (2008) self-standing department, whose mission is to "put equality at the heart of Government." The USA has a similar Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, although this seems to have a strong focus on discrimination rather than gender *per se*. In terms of legislation for women, the USA is one of the few industrialised nations that does not provide paid maternity leave for new mothers (Catalyst 2008), whereas in the UK, most mothers will usually qualify to receive Statutory Maternity Pay or Maternity Allowance during ordinary maternity leave. Additional maternity leave, available for up to 26 weeks, is usually unpaid (downloaded May 2008, <http://www.eeoc.gov/abouteeo/index.html>).

Despite the seemingly extensive commitment by the UK and USA governments to women's advancement, the actual impact the legislation has had remains unclear. McDonald (2004) refers to 30 years of equality legislation, after which women are still under-represented in management, occupationally segregated and paid less than men. There are calls for more legislation (Schein 2007) and input from the government to put pressure on organisations to create more initiatives for women's advancement. Other countries, such as Norway, have established a quota system for women at senior levels that organisations must adhere to; it is the first country in the world to insist on female quotas for company boardrooms. The Norwegian government made it mandatory for companies to ensure that at least 40 percent of

their board members are women (downloaded August 2008 <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,601897,00.html>). In addition, quotas for women have been part of parliamentary elections for some time and in 40 countries worldwide (Dahlerup & Freidenvall 2005).

The impact of the legislation has not been explored to a great extent within the literature. Cockburn (1991, p. 1) ascribes the limited impact of equal opportunities efforts on their association with notions of women's liberation, which implies an "embarrassing foolishness," and feminism, "a word with connotations of extremism, alienating many women." Much equal-opportunities work within organisations focuses not only on gender but also on race, disability and sexual orientation. This has perhaps hampered men and women's acceptance of equal opportunities legislation and its foothold in organisations.

With regard to the future, it will be interesting to see whether some of the more recent legislation (which still seems to have a heavy focus on equal opportunities) will have an impact on women and their decisions about their careers and future world of work or if, as has so far happened, the legislation will have little discernible effect.

What is missing? - Future Scenarios for Women Executives

The individual, organisational and governmental initiatives to retain women provide a background to what has been attempted to advance women in organisations. However, the focus is on the current and past situation and little attention has been paid to women's career scenarios in the future.

Some attempts have been made to develop future thinking scenarios that depict the future careers of women executives. In their book "The Future of Women: Scenarios for the 21st Century" (McCorduck & Ramsey 1996), scenario-building was used as a way of anticipating the status of women in 2015. Four scenarios were established: 1) backlash, in which the advances of women made through affirmative action were lost; 2) a golden age of equality, in which women achieved success in a gender-blind

society made possible by the anonymity of the Internet; 3) two steps forward, three steps back: some gains and losses but essentially no change in the glass ceiling; and 4) separate and “doing fine, thanks,” in which women develop separate networks, industries and measures of success. This was one of the few attempts made to explore what has happened and use it to envision possibilities for the future. More than ten years later, our experience bears greater resemblance to their third scenario, despite all of the research that has been undertaken. However, their book, which was more populist than academic, was not specific to executives or to the banking and professional services industries.

Another notable study was developed by Wilkinson (2002) for the year 2050. In her scenario, she constructs a future in which knowledge-based industries are the norm for developed economies. The knowledge will be dispersed and fragmented in an array of small businesses, with self-employed free agents moving from project to project. The dominant work culture will be a “Do It Yourself” (DIY), anti-careerist mindset, and large organisations will have been defeated in the war for talent. Wilkinson contends that such a scenario is an extrapolation of the trend towards the feminisation of work and the emergence of a “genderquake” DIY economy that engages with, but is unable to transform, mainstream corporations.

There are few future scenarios for women in the literature and it is unclear how useful they have been in women’s career decision-making or in organisational policies to retain women.

Conclusion

The literature concerning women’s advancement has been useful in determining what the barriers are and how these barriers might be overcome. The literature has shifted from an individual focus to a more systematic approach, taking into account the individual, organisational culture and national factors. However, the numbers of women executives remain low and the growth slow, despite the literature.

The literature is also limited with respect to the banking and professional services industries in particular, which are the focus of this study, and while some studies do exist (Parker *et al.*, 1998; Catalyst 2001; Granleese 2004; Ogden *et al.* 2006), they do not offer sufficient insight into the future world of work for women executives within these industries.

This raises questions, and we may wonder who and what needs to change, whether women want to be in executive positions and whether organisations are taking the issue seriously or not. The literature is also sometimes contradictory and covers a huge spectrum of individual, organisational and societal factors, making it difficult to apply to specific individuals and organisations.

It could also be argued that it is not the responsibility of academic literature to support the implementation of change. Although current progress for women is perceived to be slow and the numbers of women executives are lower than for male executives, we could also ask whether the situation is as bad as we thought and whether it is simply a matter of time before we see a surge in the number of women executives.

Lastly, studies aimed at understanding future scenarios for women executives have received very limited exploration in the literature. The next chapter explores the literature concerning future studies in order to establish its usefulness as a methodology in the exploration of the world of work for women executives.

To conclude this section, the literature provides a myriad of explanations for why women are not in executive positions; these explanations have formed the basis for an equally plentiful plethora of solutions. What seems clear is that “one size does not fit all” and a number of individual, organisational and societal factors are relevant. What does emerge from the literature is that some organisations are taking initiatives to advance women, albeit with limited success. What is not clear is whether and how this situation may change in the future and how this might be explored.

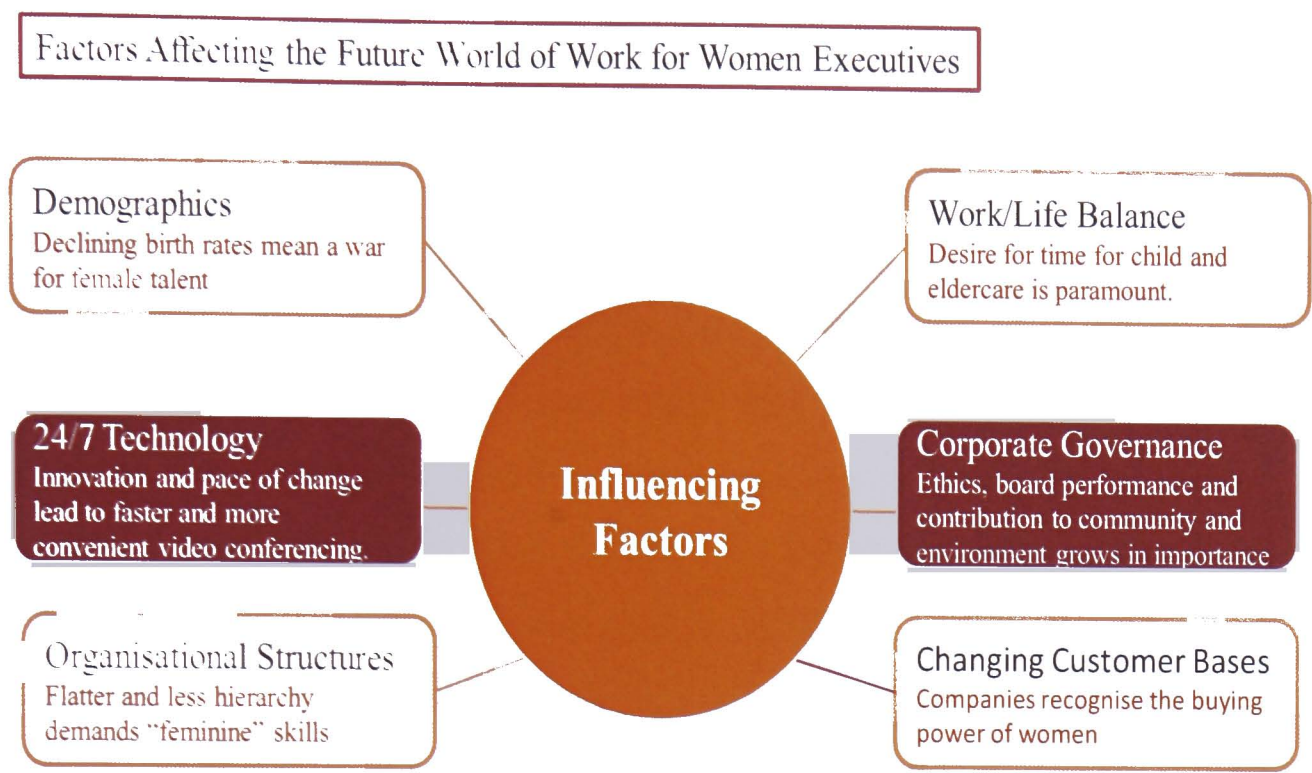
Chapter 3 - Populist Influencers – Reviewing the Terrain

Introduction

The literature review provided a backdrop of the reasons for the lack of women's advancement, and the organisational and governmental responses to the situation. What was not included were some of the populist influences that will also have an impact on women and their world of work. It is perhaps unusual to include populist material in an academic study, but it is contended that they provide a powerful set of external factors that influence the field.

This section provides an overview of some of the influences that originate from the media, books, company reports, professional bodies, etc., some of which are also supported by academic references. Addressing all of these factors is too broad a task for this study. However, a selection is provided and their associated relevance to women and the future world of work is outlined. This is useful, as it provides an additional backdrop for this future study and the various external stimuli impacting women.

Figure 8: Populist Factors Affecting the World of Work for Women Executives:
Source: The Author



Demographics – ‘The War for Female Talent’

“The global talent war is now so intense that the business case around retaining [women] – who now make up a large proportion of the professional workforce – is absolutely compelling. The demographics of the legal profession are shifting. The profession is gradually becoming less ‘male heavy’ and there are now many more women graduates coming out of law school than men” Lawyers Weekly Online, downloaded March 2008

Demographic trends such as declining birth rates and an aging population are hailed as having potentially dramatic impacts on the future world of work. The implication is that organisations will have fewer male sources to draw on, and as a result they will increasingly look to women as a source of talent. This was explored by Cassell (1996, p. 51), who stated that:

“A two-million rise in the number of women in work in Britain has corresponded to a 2.8 million fall in the number of men.”

Cassell discusses how declining birth rates are reducing the pool of available talent and how these demographic factors create a business case for organisations to attract and retain women. The implication of these demographic trends is that organisations will need to make more extensive use of women's skills and focus on how to retain high-quality women, including their women executives.

There is research to show that these demographic changes are also impacting women executives more personally. As their parents are living longer, caring responsibilities are increasing. According to Gross (2005, p. 1), "71% of the people who devote 40 hours or more a week to care for aging relatives are women." *Sandwich carers* – those who are looking after both children and elderly parents – and the newly-coined term, the *daughter track* (Gross 2005), referred to a late-in-life version of the mummy track, where instead of women leaving their jobs to care for children they are now leaving their jobs to care for their aging parents.

How demographic factors are actually influencing the career decision-making of women executives has not been tackled to any extent in the literature. If women are more in demand, yet find it more difficult to work through changing demographics and the increased caring responsibilities of both children and parents, then an argument can be made for organisations to find ways to support and retain them, thereby reducing costly talent losses.

Work/Life Balance – ‘A Juggling Act’

“Are women suffering a lifestyle crisis? A life spent juggling too many roles has left women feeling frustrated, according to a survey by Top Santé magazine. The poll of 2000 women says that the “have it all” dream of the 1970s and 80s has turned into a “do it all” disaster” BBC News, June 2004

As the above BBC quote demonstrates, women and their work/life balance is a recurrent theme in the media. Family responsibilities are seen as an important factor influencing the amount of time that women executives are able to devote to work, especially when women hold the primary responsibility for home- and child-care (Parasuraman & Simmers 2001). In addition, work/life balance concerns seem to be more acute among those who work more hours, as is common in executive roles

(Grzywacz & Marks 2000), and women are devoting more time than ever to primary childcare (12.9 hrs. vs. 10.6 hrs. a decade ago for mothers) (Mainiero & Sullivan 2005).

Mayrhofer *et al.* (2008) found that family responsibilities impact women more than men, and this affects the ability of women to perform at work. They suggest that fathers' careers actually benefit from their family role, whereas mothers' careers suffer. Various possible reasons for this are offered, including gender stereotypes, differences in work compensation, career-orientation and work-addiction that leads women to assume the bigger share of family duties. Traditionally, male executives have been able to turn to their wives to run the family, whereas women cannot do this, which may mean that they have to choose between family and career (Drew & Murtagh 2005).

In recent years, in an effort to meet the demands for work/life balance, organisations have begun to offer employees the ability to work from home, work fewer hours, and have more flexible schedules. This has, however, presented a problem for women executives, because if they take these opportunities they might jeopardise their careers if other executives do not make the same choice (Drew & Murtagh 2005).

Work life balance is therefore a recurring theme in both the populist and academic literature. The literature seems to indicate that the situation is getting worse for women executives, and this may influence their career decision-making.

Corporate Governance - More Women on the Board

“Shuffling the deck for boardroom diversity. The presence of women directors can lead to more civilised boardroom behaviour, a more interactive and transformational board management style and sensitivity to other perspectives, such as employee and community concerns, business ethics and environmental impacts”
Financial Times, June 2005

Corporate governance issues, as quoted by the Financial Times above, advocate ethical awareness and gender diversity among corporate boards. Jamali and Daouk

(2007), in their study of top and middle women managers in the Lebanese banking sector, looked at how recent corporate scandals have increased interest in corporate governance. They examined the effectiveness of boards of directors and the composition of boards, with particular attention to gender. They found that Lebanese women managers considered current board performance as not being satisfactory, and women were important board member candidates because of this reason.

However, questions can be raised as to whether men see gender-balanced boards as important and a measure of both performance and corporate governance. Burke (1993) stated that most male CEOs do not see women's issues as having a high priority; and found that it is the women serving on corporate boards who seemed to be playing an active role in raising and discussing issues of concern to women, both inside and outside their organisations. A more recent article shows little progress: Marshall (2007) found that women are absent from the mainstream of any corporate responsibility, and reports that those who are making their voices heard are operating as 'outsiders' at the margins and "choose the label 'activist'" (p. 175).

According to Tyson (2003), increasing the proportion of women in the boardroom can help a company build its reputation as a responsible corporate citizen. The Higgs Review of the "Role and Effectiveness of Non-executive Directors" (2003) contained numerous proposals for the improvement of corporate governance and the enhancement of corporate performance within the UK. The report found that the majority of non-executive directors in UK companies were white, middle-aged males. The survey found 30% of managers in the UK corporate sector to be female, yet women held only 6% of non-executive director positions (Tyson 2003). However, Albert-Roulhac and Breen (2005), in an overview of corporate governance practices in the top-listed companies in ten European countries, found significant progress and more convergence in corporate governance practices. They found one of the best-performing countries to be the UK, but nevertheless found that women executives were "still not enough in evidence" (p. 29).

The impact that the drive towards corporate governance and ethics has had on women executives' career decisions has received little attention in the literature. It

may be that organisations would not see the relevance, and others may encourage more women onto the board in order to be seen as deploying good practice with regard to corporate governance. From the individual women executives' perspective, it may be that they would be more inclined to stay with an organisation that is more ethically-driven, as there is some evidence to suggest that an ethical organisation is a motivator for women's careers (Limerick & Field (2003).

Increasing Buying Power of Women Customers – Women Roar!

“Women are the instigators in chief of most consumer purchases. To wit: 83 percent of all consumer purchases” (Tom Peters 2004, p. 172)

With the argument that customer bases have become increasingly female, some writers highlight the possibility of a competitive advantage for organisations that advance women executives (Adler & Izraeli 1994; Catalyst 2004). They consider the presence of higher numbers of women in the boardroom to be an essential business characteristic borne of the necessity to represent female customers (Huse & Solberg 2006).

Yorke & Hayes (1982) highlighted the female role in UK society and concluded that the working female market was one that organisations (especially banks, in their study) needed to recognise and find appropriate strategies for. Philp, Haynes and Helms (1992) identified women as financial decision-makers and as critical to the growth of the financial services industry. According to Peters (2004), a higher level of expenditure is controlled by women than in the past, and they are a more substantial customer base for organisations. The implication is that organisations will want to have more women executives in order to represent the needs of their female customers.

The Rt Hon Harriet Harman MP, Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, Minister of State, Ministry of Justice in the UK (2007) stated that:

“Women make up more than half the workforce and are important consumers of goods and services and that should be reflected on boards. Having balanced boards is good for businesses as they will better reflect – and therefore be better able to

serve – their customers and employees and therefore their shareholders. We must continue to monitor progress and support women in the boardroom" (from Foreword to Female FTSE Report 2007, Cranfield, p. 1).

In addition to the number of female customers rising, it is suggested that women customers are different to their male counterparts. Spathis *et al.* (2004), in their study of customers of Greek banks, supported the hypothesis that gender affects service quality. They highlighted strategies in targeting gender differences among their customers. Ndubisi (2006) found that gender played an important role in customer loyalty, and that female customers tend to be more loyal than male customers. Stendardi *et al.* (2006) found differences in how men and women invest, and felt that it is advisable for financial advisors to tailor their approach on the basis of their client's gender.

However, there seems little research that tangibly demonstrates the actual increase in the numbers of female customers over the past 20 or so years. Furthermore, the examples given seem to relate more to retail banks, and there seem to be few examples relevant to private banks and professional-service firms. The growing customer bases seem likely to wield greater impact on the decision of organisations to advance women in the future than on individual women's career choices.

Changing Organisational Structures – Women Leaders Rule

"As women leaders rule, new studies find that female managers outshine their male counterparts in almost every measure" Tom Peters, March 2007

In alignment with earlier discussions in the literature review on women's leadership style, there is a view that the leadership skills required for the organisations of the future are feminine skills that are naturally deployed by women (Rosener 1990). Martin (2007) contends that organisations of the future will have to embrace a more feminine leadership style. Daily and Dalton (2003) also argue that women contribute perspectives, experiences and styles that differ from those of men.

This is consistent with the view that organisations will become flatter and less hierarchical. These structures will demand new kinds of leadership skills in order for

organisations to gain a competitive edge. In their book “Creating Tomorrow’s Organisations,” Cooper and Jackson (1998) predict that most organisations will have a small core of full-time permanent employees and will buy most of the skills they need on a contract basis. Martin (2007, p. 8) identifies the necessity for leaders of the future to “be open and adaptable to new ideas” and be “as flexible as possible and participate in numerous diverse experiences” (p. 8).

This literature is useful as it takes a more futures-oriented view; it contends that in the future, women’s skills will be more valued within the organisation and this in turn may prompt organisations to advance women.

Rise in 24/7 Technology – Blackberry or Crackberry?

“Employers are being urged to do more to tackle the "Blackberrying" of the workplace, where workers find mobile technology is resulting in them being on-call and available 24-hours a day, seven days a week” Management Issues, March 2006

Technologies such as e-mail and Blackberries have attempted to offer women an opportunity to combine work with family responsibilities. According to Cross (1988), new technology has promised women a better deal at work. However, the reality behind the technology and its impact on work practices may be different. Brocklehurst (1989) examined the evidence for a growth in new-technology home-working and what it entails for organisations and women employees. The article concludes that the effects on women are mixed, and that most women may not be able to combine childcare with work.

The evidence seems to indicate that technology in the form of e-mail and Blackberries has not had a positive impact on the working lives of women. The way in which technology in its broader form will impact women’s careers has not received much attention in the literature, and it will be interesting to see how technology impacts women and the world of work in general in the future.

Conclusion

This section gave an overview of some of the populist influences impacting women executives and their careers. All of the influences have been ‘hot topics’ in the popular media, but also have some academic back-up. Their populist nature puts them at the forefront of women executives’ minds in their day-to-day lives. This means that women will take them into account, to varying extents, when making their future career decisions.

These influences provide additional information and context when exploring the future, and yet, clearly, we must accept that we cannot hope to cover every possible contingency. As Millett (2006, p. 48) states, nor can we claim to “know everything – ‘past, passing, and to come.’” It simply is not possible. However, an exploration of these factors has value; it adds to the literature review and enables an exploration into women’s views on the world and their associated future career decision-making.

Chapter 4 - Future Studies – Knowing the Destination

Introduction

The review of the literature revealed that there are few, if any, studies that explore the future world of work for women executives in the banking and professional services industries. This gap in the literature was the reason for conducting this future study. The purpose of this chapter is to convey the ideas, terms, descriptions and limitations that have been established with regard to the field of futures studies and its appropriateness to this research question. The discussion of the specific futures techniques used in this study are further explored in the methodological journey in the next chapters.

The futures field is not a new phenomenon. Old-fashioned sayings like ‘look before you leap’ and ‘a stitch in time saves nine’ emphasise the common-sense value of being able to use foresight. Yet looking into the future has often been the remit of science fiction novels (one recalls George Orwell’s attempt to create a plausible scenario for 1984 in his novel of the same title), tarot cards and crystal balls. Of course, neither the sayings, the novels nor the crystal balls have any academic credentials. Futures studies, on the other hand, seek to deploy academic methods in an effort to create “new, alternative images of the future and visionary explorations of the possible” (Toffler 1978, p.x).

Despite Bell (2000) referring to future studies as a new field, it was well in evidence by the 1960s. The translation and publication of “The Image of the Future” by F. L. Polak in English in 1961 was a major signpost, as was “The Art of Conjecture” by Bertrand de Jouvenel in 1967. Other early manifestations of the field included the creation of professional societies for the futures field. In 1966, the World Future Society was established. The RAND Corporation became one of the most influential of the many institutes, centres, and other thought research organisations, which later became known as “think-tanks.” The RAND Corporation also spawned a number of other organisations, including the Institute for the Future, Kahn’s Hudson Institute and Gordon’s The Futures Group.

The field in itself is extensive and has spanned at least 40 years. Slaughter (1993) helpfully distinguishes the futures field as consisting of three fundamental components:

- **“Futures research”** emphasises forecasting, planning, and exploration using more traditional analytical and quantitative methods. This area tends to be the purview of government departments and large organisations, and is dominated by specialists, since the methods involved are typically sophisticated, time-consuming and costly.
- **“Futures studies”** involve mainly teachers, critics, writers, and academics who try to balance specialised research with more informal approaches. This area typically has direct input into policy and planning, and is most concerned with understanding the futures field as a whole, developing overviews, and communicating with constituencies and groups.
- **“Futures movements”** is the realm of activists, the main agents of social change, such as women’s, peace, and environmental movements, as well as many non-governmental organisations. Those involved in this area typically place new items on the social agenda and seek to create support for social innovations.

To create future scenarios, futurists seek participation from a variety of people, not just those with power. Slaughter (1993) describes this well by segmenting the futures studies area into four sub-levels:

- Pop Futurism – Futurists coming from this perspective take existing relationships as given, are ideologically naïve, and provide unconscious support for the status quo.
- Problem-Focussed Futures Studies – At this level, futurists identify problems and seek to explore solutions at a superficial, taken-for-granted level.
- Critical Futures Study – Futurists conduct comparative analyses of assumptions, pre-suppositions and paradigms. They actively consider the influence of different cultural orientations and traditions of enquiry.

- Epistemological Futures Study – Futurists locate and “problematise” sources of problems in worldviews and ways of knowing. They see solutions as arising from deep-seeded and unpredictable shifts.

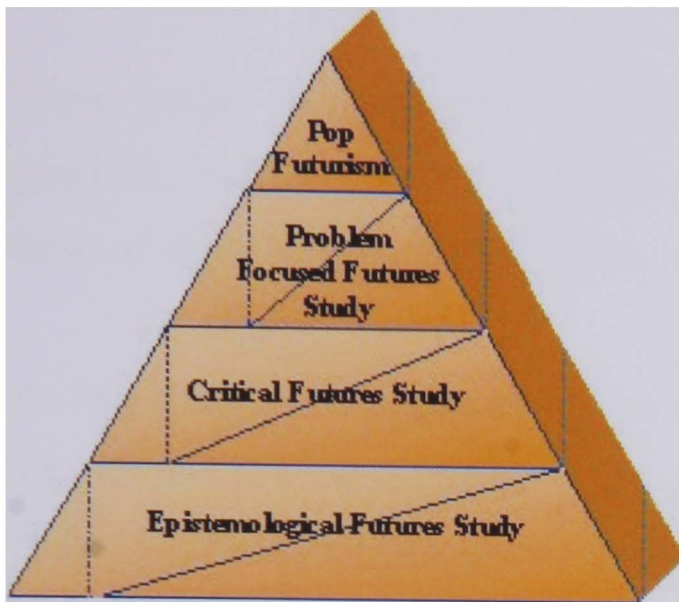


Figure 9 – Four Levels of Futures, based on Slaughter 1993

Using Slaughter’s terminology, this study therefore relies on elements found within both the critical futures study and epistemological futures study levels. It incorporated the voices of women executives through the use of futuring techniques such as Delphi, storytelling and scenario-building, which are explored more in the next chapter.

Why a futures approach?

Futures studies has been used extensively to gain foresight into the future world of work. One example is Scase (2000) who, in his portrayal of Britain in 2010, predicted some of the key characteristics that shape how we live and work. He talks about increased independence, anxiety, risk, creativity and how this impacts a more fluid world of work and the flexibility needed by organisations. Another example is provided by Davis and Blass (2007, p. 41), who cite Kulzick and contend that in the future:

“A successful business must be able to anticipate and take advantage of rapid change in an increasingly complex, ethical and technical environment.”

Davis and Blass (2007, p. 50) question whether anything will change in the future world of work, and ask whether it is “simply wishful thinking;” they suggest that the reality of whether or not any changes will produce a more positive work experience will only be seen with time.

These studies are useful in developing foresight into the future world of work generally, but they do not specifically address the needs of women executives, or those of the banking and professional services industries.

As Marshall (1995b, p. 4) states, “much literature in the gender field has a change intent,” and the same trend is apparent in the futures studies field. The literature review revealed that women are under-represented in senior management positions, and that there is a large body of research that examines the barriers to women’s progression into top management and the initiatives that have been adopted to change this situation – with, one could contend, limited success.

Future scenarios can be constructed by means of hard or soft scholarship-oriented futures techniques (Biglan 1973). “Hard” futuring techniques tend to be at the forecasting end of the futures research spectrum. These techniques usually involve sophisticated quantitative analyses that result in probability forecasts based on past trends and single scenarios. An example is “Dreaming with BRICs – the path to 2050,” which predicts the powerful global economic position of Brazil, Russia, India and China by the year 2050. The authors justify their conclusions by referring to these predictions as economically sound, consistent projections that support policy formulation (Wilson & Purushothaman 2003).

The literature focuses on the current and past experience of the women involved. If one were to employ a futures research approach that sought to create quantifiable forecasts from previous trends, we would probably see slow progress for the advancement of women. As stated previously, according to the US-based organisation Catalyst (2005), at the current rate of growth, it will take 70 years for women to be equally represented (50 percent) on boards, and The UK’s Equality and

Human Rights Commission (2008, p. 2), which likened women's progress to a snail's pace, stated that;

“A snail could crawl from Land's End to John O'Groats and halfway back again in the 73 years it will take for equal numbers of women to become directors of FTSE 100 companies.”

At the other end of the spectrum is “soft” futuring, so-called because it does not depend on sophisticated quantitative methodologies.

“This ‘soft’ approach is usually labelled as such because it does include a substantial amount of dialogue, creative thinking, brainstorming, and intuition. Planning based in the ‘soft’ approach is usually intended to encourage creative scenarios that identify possible, plausible and preferable futures, resulting in contingency and action plans” (Walton, 2008, p. 150).

This research instead approaches the questions of “what possibilities exist for women executives in the future?” and “what needs to change to achieve these possibilities?” from a futures study perspective. This was tackled with the use of a more informal and soft futures study approach – specifically through engaging senior women executives in the generation and analysis of scenarios and narratives of their future world of work. This seemed appropriate to the exploratory nature of this study, and as a way to generate alternative approaches to advancing women.

Building Scenarios

The use of soft futuring formed the foundation of this study, which was to build scenarios of the future world of work for women executives. According to Allen (1991), “scenario” is a term that originated in theatre. It can be defined as, literally, the script for a play. Scenarios can also be thought of as pictures or mental maps (Wilson 1998), and as such they can operate as a device to aid someone attempting to break away from conventional thinking. This was an essential element in this study; building scenarios provided a way of developing foresight that would perhaps break away from the conventional thinking on women’s advancement. These scenarios could then be used to create plans for the future.

Scenarios are sometimes seen as a favourite tool in futures studies. For some, they can help develop foresight, while for others, they elucidate alternatives ranging from ideal to disaster scenarios. There are a number of different types of scenarios. Most focus on a particular point in time, typically in the ten- to fifty-year range.

Table 5: Axiomatic Classification of Scenarios (from Walton 2008)

| Cluster | Type | Purpose |
|---------|---|---|
| A. | Corporate visions. Ideal future states | Identifying and aiming for preferable futures; corporate goal seeking. Change management strategy |
| B. | Disaster scenarios, shock scenarios, competitor scenarios | Proactive, timeless, contingency planning |
| C. | Probabilistic single scenarios. Often based on hard mathematical/statistical forecasting techniques. Fits the BRIC scenario | Context setting for strategic planning. |
| D. | This fits scenarios designed to deal with issues such as climate change and global warming. In the corporate world it addresses such issues as competitor interventions resulting in loss of market share. | Protective anticipatory actions and interventions to support strategy |
| E. | This fits the construction of alternative scenarios such as those described above by Kleiner (1994). Another good example is the BA case study differentiating between “wild gardens” and “new structures” (Moyer, 1996). | Proactive contingency planning to clarify and support corporate strategy |
| F.: | Optimistic versus pessimistic alternative plausible scenarios. Encompasses both predetermined trends on e.g. demographics and divergent thinking | Blue sky thinking. Breaking out of conventional mindsets. New strategic insights |

Hermann Kahn, who founded the US future-oriented Hudson Institute in the mid 1960s. and who pioneered the technique of “future-now” thinking while previously working for the RAND Corporation after World War II, was one of the first to adopt the term and develop the concept of scenarios. He particularly liked the emphasis it placed on creating a story or myth that helped people break out of their mindsets and consider the unthinkable. “Future-now” thinking encouraged people to write reports that drew upon their imagination as well as detailed analysis, as though they were really living at some point in the future.

Further evidence of successful scenario-building involves Shell Oil, an organisation that is often associated with the field. In 1973, the world’s biggest oil crisis to date was sparked when the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) collectively agreed to triple the price of oil. The world’s oil companies, with the exception of Shell, were taken entirely by surprise. The general view was that the

countries making up OPEC were so disparate that they could never reach agreement on a collective price-raising or production-reducing strategy. To believe they could was essentially “thinking the unthinkable.” Shell, however, had been damaged extensively in the 1960s when the Mexican government nationalised oil wells without offering compensation. At the time, Shell relied on conventional forecasting techniques (estimating the future by extrapolating from past trends) but following that crisis, the company incorporated scenarios into its strategic forecasting ideology and anticipated the possibility of a coordinated OPEC strategy; they assumed it would happen and planned accordingly.

Yet scenario-planning is not a panacea, as subsequent events affecting Shell have shown. Scenarios can have “blind spots,” which refers to factors and possibilities that simply cannot be seen when the scenario is developed. These blind spots are, by definition, incredibly hard to recognise. In increasingly volatile times, when largely unpredictable events change history rapidly, are we able to predict the future? One such blind spot with Shell has been the environmental front, as demonstrated by Greenpeace protests, which in 1995 prevented Shell from disposing of the Brent Spar floating oil storage facility, at a cost to the company of between £60 million and £100 million.

Clearly, when looking at any event trends and projecting them into the future, we must accept, as researchers, that we cannot hope to “capture possible discontinuities (accidents, disruptive events, wild cards, or black swans)” (Millett 2006, p. 48), nor can we claim to “know everything – ‘past, passing, and to come.’” It simply is not possible. But we must somehow strive to anticipate wild cards – “big surprises” – and the unforeseen. We do this, to a great extent, by relying on the expert judgment and informed opinions of others and using futuring techniques to make predictions that approximate the future as closely as possible. Yet futures studies make no attempt to study the future, since the “future” does not exist yet, and hence cannot be studied. What does exist, and what futurists can and often do study, are images of the future envisioned in people’s minds (Dator 2002).

At a macro level, how many occurrences such as the spread of AIDS, the collapse of the Soviet Union, 9/11, the arrival of mobile phones and the internet were even guessed at by futurists fifty years ago? (Walton 2008). This raises a serious issue in considering what arguments can be presented to legitimise such future-oriented scenarios and take them beyond the merely speculative; “even if futures studies allows us to objectify the future, it may not take us very far” (Walton 2008).

In an attempt to “truth-test” scenarios, Wilson (1998) emphasises five criteria for the construction of alternative scenarios:

- *Plausibility* – The selected scenarios must fall within the limits of what might conceivably happen.
- *Differentiation* – Each scenario should be sufficiently different for it not to be construed as variations of a base case.
- *Consistency* – The logical reasoning contained in a scenario must not have any in-built inconsistency that would undermine its credibility.
- *Decision-making utility* – Each scenario should contribute sufficient insights into the future to bear upon the decision focus selected.
- *Challenge* – The scenarios should challenge conventional wisdom about the future.

Walton (2008) highlights the problems associated with these criteria: plausibility (is a claim plausible?); credibility (is a claim based on credible evidence?) and relevance (what is the claim’s relevance to our knowledge of the world?) There will surely be significant differences in meaning and interpretation. Therefore, depending on who interprets the scenarios and their personal biases, many different meanings could be inferred. This means that the scenarios are not testable in any meaningful way. This poses a challenge for those researchers who tend to adopt a positivist paradigm in their work (Walton 2008).

However, Selin (2006, p. 2) describes how,

“The aim of scenarios is to be somewhat believable for the purposes of uptake, but also to invoke a fresh perspective on what’s to come.”

She explores how scenarios become trustworthy or considered valid for action. (Selin 2006). The construction of scenarios, despite their potential interpretive limitations, was chosen as the primary futures method in this study. This is explored further in the following chapter, which deals with the methodology.

Future Studies and Vision

Future studies incorporate notions of vision creation. Some of the well-known leaders of our time, such as John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela, are known for their visions of the future. Visions allow us to project a desirable future that might become reality, and this formed an important element in this study. Rather than dwell on the pessimistic view that it would take 70 years to achieve gender equality (Catalyst 2007), it is constructive to consider the possibility of alternative scenarios. This was reinforced by Raimond (1996), who advocated “creative foresight” (involving key people in creating an imagined future they would ideally have, and then devising effective means by which to make it happen) as opposed to “predictive foresight,” which aims to identify the key forces that will shape the future and predict their outcomes. The ontological status of visions is different to that of other scenarios, due to an element of fantasy or wishful thinking that inevitably creeps in. Such visions allow us to project a desirable future that might become possible – to imagine that a world to which we aspire might in fact be realisable (Walton 2008).

Visions are commonplace in the business world and most organisations have published vision statements. El-Namaki (1992, p. 25) calls a corporate vision statement:

“A mental perception of the kind of future that individual decision makers aspire to create for the organisation over a broad time horizon.”

Yet corporate visions are often not realised. Lissack and Roos (2001, p. 6) state that:

“Striking the balance between novelty and believability of such an ideal end state is often tricky and empirical evidence shows that people are neither satisfied with the vision, nor the visioning process.”

They argue that with an unstable and unpredictable world what matters is being coherent rather than being visionary. They view vision as:

“Misleading and limiting, that it restricts “possibility space” and may interfere with (one’s) ability to adapt to changes and seize new possibilities” (p. 6).

They note that visions and envisioning fail for several reasons: an executive’s walk does not necessarily match his or her talk; the vision presents an ideal future reconciled with the present; and/or the vision is either too abstract or too concrete. Futures studies provide a means by which to develop “visionary futures.” It differs from corporate-vision creation in that it enables us to create possible alternative scenarios of what the future may look like that range from the pessimistic to the optimistic. This is fundamentally different to the concept of a single, unified and often idealised and utopian option that a corporate vision may present.

Markley (1998) discusses the use of mental time-travel to visualise and explore these visionary futures. The method explores alternative futures from the perspective of “how would it feel to live in each such contingent in the future?” He found that, when using this method in conventional corporate settings, all participants typically agreed that the method was robust, but that a receptive political climate for its use needs to be developed early in the process so that results can be communicated in a credible way.

Markley’s method was utilised in this study and is discussed more in the next chapter. Rather than focusing on what the future will look like, the emphasis was on the question: “what would you like the future to be?” This wording was critical, as it allowed participants to focus on their aspirations and vision for the future.

Limitations of Futures Studies

Focussing on visionary futures may attract legitimate criticism; like corporate visions, they could appear as “pipe dreams” and could be perceived as dangerous. If aspirations are set too high, they may not be achieved and there would be an element of risk and disappointment involved. From a positivist standpoint, how do you secure quantifiable grounds over what has not happened yet? How can one find any kind of validity in predictions of what may or may not happen years ahead? Bell (2003) found that terms such as validity, reliability and generalisability, all of which come from the positivist arena, have limited applicability within futures studies.

Hence the question arises of whether future studies are a problematic form of study. Critics of future studies say that “the belief that foresight can produce the results sought is little more than modern superstition” (McDermott 1996). McDermott goes on to say that:

“If we took at face value the intriguing Socratic dictum ‘the unexamined life is not worth living’ and attached it to the future then ‘the unanticipated future cannot be attained’” (p. 191).

Further, he argues that:

“What makes life bearable is our ability to distort the past and forget the future as well as vice versa” (p. 191).

Like “happiness and extraterrestrials,” McDermott asserts:

“Foresight is more frequently discussed than encountered. The belief in foresight is often a belief in magic, superstition, and illusion” (p. 191).

Furnham (2000, p. 242) elaborates on this limitation by saying that “despite more and better economic, demographic, and technological forecasts, futurology is no science.” Mannermaa (1998, p. 427) sees future studies as:

“Part art, part science and notes that the future is full of surprises, uncertainly, trends and trend breaks, irrationality and rationality.”

Futures studies in themselves do not represent actual knowledge, because we are, at best, unable categorically to state that something is going to occur, but we *can* claim that it is likely to occur on the basis of our current understanding and discernible trends. What is useful is to be able to create possible and plausible futures, however idealistic or pessimistic, in order to give us something towards which to work; a specific goal to be accomplished. Despite “futures” perhaps appearing to be a problematic field of study at first glance, it is in fact not alone in dealing with intangibles: disciplines such as music, law, ethics and religion also deal with the less tangible, and anything we do has an element of uncertainty to it. There are always intangibles and uncertainties, and there is more to life than just scientific laws.

Conclusion

To conclude, a critical review of the literature concerning future studies informed the decision to use it for this research. The limitations of conducting a futures study are clear, and yet its use – specifically the soft kind – was suited to the exploration of women executives and their future world of work.

The review helped identify some of the key debates and the unresolved issues for futures studies. It shaped my understanding of the issues and aided in the clarification of my research agenda and question. The next chapter covers the methodology and describes how I pursued this research agenda.

Chapter 5 - Methodology – ‘Embarking on the Journey’

Introduction

In the review of the literature on women, populist factors and future studies in previous chapters, I identified some of the knowledge and understanding that is currently lacking with regard to women executives and their future world of work. This helped to further define my research question and aims. In this chapter, I turn to the research strategy that I adopted to address my research question. This involved the consideration of the kind of knowledge I needed to elucidate, and the subsequent development of an appropriate strategy to make those findings. I also describe why I chose my particular methods, how and why my approach shifted over the course of the journey, the assumptions I made, how ethical approaches to confidentiality were maintained, and some of the challenges and limitations of the research.

Going on the Journey

After conducting my pragmatic probe into women executives’ views through the first preliminary study, I needed to establish methods that would enable me to explore what the world of work for women executives may look like in the future. My research and subsequent analysis used soft futuring techniques (for example, storytelling and scenario-building) instead of the hard forecasting techniques. As Northcott (1996) states:

“There is no single right way to undertake a futures study. Which one will be best in any particular situation will depend on the purposes to be achieved and the resources available for achieving them” (p. 203).

Soft futuring techniques allowed me to use guided imagery, visualisation and creativity, which according to Markley (1998), are especially useful for audiences that, like mine, have had little experience with futures work. With quantitative data-like trends, it is possible to adjust the speed and intensity of the trend and relate it to other trends to create a variety of possible futures (Meadows *et al.* 2005). However, I was more interested in generating more creativity and narrative in the construction

of text relevant to the stories rather than hard quantitative data that did not seem as appropriate to the exploratory nature of my research.

The techniques used throughout this study, and which will be described in more depth, included the following:

- Face-to-face, semi-structured interviews (in the preliminary study)
- The Delphi Technique (three rounds via e-mail)
- Focus Groups (including a guided-imagery visualisation)
- Scenario Building (using inductive and abductive methods)
- Telephone Interviews using Incasting (technique used to engage subjects in creative exercises designed to stretch their thinking on what alternative futures might look like)
- Factional Stories (using real data and painting vivid pictures of the scenarios that inspire)
- Route Maps Focus Group Session using Backcasting (a method to create actions steps for how alternative futures become a reality)

I chose to conduct the study in London because the participants were all based in London, up to the point of the telephone interviews, where I was able to interview women executives from New York. This worked well because it did not seem useful to duplicate the London work in New York, as I was not conducting a comparative study.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The first part of the journey in 2003 involved a preliminary study to help me understand the context for my research as well as to refine its focus. My preliminary study consisted of interviews conducted with 12 women executives in the City of London.

In 2002, when I embarked on this research, I had recently arrived back in London after working in the USA for a few years. At the same time I was starting my own business and I had a very limited network. I was concerned as to how I would be able to access women executives in order to interview them. I remembered that at the start of my coaching business, I wanted to hold an evening event to launch the business. I had targeted women executives to attend by purchasing a list of contacts from a marketing company; this had been very successful, and I believed that it could also provide a way for me to reach women executives for this research.

I purchased a marketing database of 1,500 London-based women executives representing various positions and industries. I selected the first one hundred prospects who earned more than £100,000 a year (they were alphabetically listed by surname), which I took as an indication that these women were working at the executive level. In addition, they had to be working in large companies (over 5000 employees) and based in the City area of London. In this way, I was assured of reaching banking and professional-service firms that are based in this area of London. In the end, my list of potential interviewees were located in private and investment banking, law, accountancy and consultancy firms and filled a variety of

positions, ranging from Managing Directors, Vice Presidents and Partners to Heads of Human Resources.

To each of these women executives I sent typed letters along with an accompanying personal profile and a letter from my university authenticating the research. I requested a meeting with myself to discuss their views on why women are not better represented at executive levels and what they believed needed to be researched. I drafted the letter carefully (see appendix 1), trying to put myself in their shoes and asked friends and family for their opinion as to any suggested changes. I re-wrote the letter three times until I was finally happy with it. I then signed each one individually and hand-wrote each of the envelopes. I wanted to make the letters appear as professional, and yet as personal, as possible. Assurance of ethical use of materials was also important to secure access.

My hard work paid off, because within two weeks I had received 70 responses by telephone (generally from their personal assistant), letter and e-mail. This 70% level of response far exceeded my expectations and seemed indicative of a high level of interest in the topic. The fact that these busy women executives wanted to meet me to discuss this topic was incredibly uplifting. The research journey had begun.

Out of this group of seventy, I then selected the first twelve women who responded and sent an e-mail note to the remainder thanking them and letting them know that I might contact them again in the future. Ten women seemed an amount neither too big nor too small for preliminary interviews, and by selecting twelve I allowed for two drop-outs. I then arranged, via e-mail, an informal interview either at their places of work or in a local coffee shop, assuring confidentiality. I let them select where they wanted the interview to take place; seven chose a coffee shop close to them and five opted for their workplace.

Two had to cancel their interviews at the last minute, so I ended up meeting ten women executives. The interviews were scheduled for 45 minutes, but all lasted well over an hour, and one lasted nearly two hours. I wanted to make these women as comfortable as possible, so I started by giving them some background on myself and

why I was embarking on this PhD. I also decided not to record the interviews; I wanted the women to feel comfortable, and intuitively it felt right not to record these preliminary interviews, producing notes instead and sending them back to them for approval. I let them know that I was currently at the stage of determining my initial research questions. It was all at an early stage, and I was looking for themes to focus on. I stressed that I was going to ask open questions and encouraged them to answer in their own words. For example,

“Please tell me what you really think, you don’t need to soften anything for me. I am not recording the conversation, I will make notes and send you a copy of your answers. All is confidential and at this stage none of this information will be quoted or used in articles as I am purely information gathering” (researcher)

The interviews and discussions centred on the following questions:

- 1) Why do you think there are not more women in executive positions?
- 2) What can companies do better to retain women executives?
- 3) Is there such a concept as successful work/life balance or “having it all”? If not, what are the alternatives?
- 4) Does the corporate environment provide a responsive atmosphere for women who want to achieve professional as well as personal success?
- 5) Women are leaving the corporate environment at a fast pace. Have you ever considered this? What would be your challenges around it?
- 6) What is the question/issue/area on women executives that you believe needs to be researched?

I didn’t ask all the questions to all the women; sometimes I ran out of time, or the women went off on tangents or gave lengthy personal stories. I didn’t want to curtail the interviews at this point, as the information was rich and had considerable depth to it. Furthermore, I was not particularly interested in making any comparisons between the women at this point.

I took notes during the interviews, after which the responses were written up and sent to each respondent for further comment. Amendments were made and sent again to each respondent for final approval. Many of the women wanted the interviews not to be taped. Emotions ran high in each interview as I heard the stories and views of each individual woman.

Writing up the interviews and then reviewing the notes and my own personal reflections helped me develop a picture of these women's world and to justify my original suppositions. This iterative process allowed me to identify common themes and generate ideas based on the interviews. However, I left these interviews feeling overwhelmed by the sheer volume of information and by the large number of possible routes I could take. I wondered where to start.

Discourse analysis provided a conventional way of generating themes by studying the text from the interviews to identify recurring themes. This was used as the primary method of analysis for the interview data, in addition to the Delphi, focus group, telephone interviews and route maps sessions. Specific chunks of recurrent text were placed in "conceptual buckets" for emerging themes and patterns. This meant coding the themes and using the participants' own words to identify trends and patterns. This provided a robust basis for getting to grips with the viewpoints and assumptions of the participants, and led to the development of themes and thematic clusters that related to the research question. This was achieved by cross-referencing the women executives' responses for the purposes of authenticating emerging themes and patterns.

What became clear to me was that executive women wanted to understand and plan for their future world of work. According to them, there was a glut of commentary on the obstacles, issues and barriers to success, and a pessimistic picture of very few women reaching (and enjoying) executive positions, while what they really wanted instead was to see new and more positive possibilities for the future, along with a pragmatic plan for making them a reality.

This insight helped me to shape and formulate the next stage in the journey. In my view, a methodology was required to determine a unified vision for the future world of work for executive women. I discovered the Delphi technique, so-named because it is based on the ancient Greek tradition of consulting the oracle at Delphi in Greece. Legend has it that the oracle's advice was always enigmatic and susceptible to a variety of possible interpretations. As used today, it is a consensus technique that at this stage of the research I thought I could employ to develop this vision.

The Delphi Technique

In essence, Delphi is a consensus technique that fitted with my original notion of developing a single vision. Originally developed in the US defence industry in the 1950s, the Delphi technique aims to:

“Obtain the most reliable consensus of a group of experts, by subjecting them to a series of in-depth questionnaires, interspersed with controlled feedback” (Dalkey & Helmer 1963, p. 458).

The basic idea of a Delphi survey is to interview experts on a set of topics. The aim is,

“Not only to collect the rough opinions of experts on certain future-oriented topics, but also to get each expert to react to the general opinion of his peers” (Cuhls 2001 p. 555 556).

However, like all methodologies, the inherent limitations of the Delphi Technique needed to be addressed. One challenge was to establish the criteria that are used to decide who should be considered an “expert” (Hill & Fowles 1975). Once an expert panel had been identified, it was necessary to maintain their motivation through a number of rounds of the study. Some may lose interest, and there is a real risk of losing participants before the study is completed (Rauch 1979).

The number and quality of questions posed needed to be considered too. How many questions are too many? Are they the right questions, and are they worded clearly? Also, is the survey method conducive to the subject being studied? Is more lost (in

terms of dynamic and creative debate) than gained by interviewing subjects independently?

Despite its limitations, the Delphi method had been shown to have greater accuracy than other nominal group judgement techniques (Rowe & Wright 1999). Anonymity allows competing organisations to participate without being concerned about expressing sensitive views. The technique avoided the tendency that exists in other group situations, such as focus groups, to become dominated by senior people or strong personalities, or to suffer the loss of objectivity associated with groupthink (Tersine & Riggs 1976).

I deployed the Delphi Technique through an e-mail questionnaire sent to twenty women executives in London, UK. It was over a year after the preliminary study and my network had expanded considerably, so I did not feel the need to use the original marketing database that I had purchased. I had several women executives within my professional and social circle. Within my coaching business, I was working with women executives in banking and professional services directly, so I was able to access participants for the research much more easily than when I conducted the preliminary interviews on women accessed through a purchased marketing database of cold contacts.

Twenty participants appeared to be a sample size that was small enough to be manageable but large enough to afford a good range of responses and a correspondingly broad perspective. None of the participants had been in my preliminary study, as I wanted to begin again with new and fresh perspectives from different women executives. My goal was to use the Delphi to develop a consensus as to what a vision for the future world of work for women executives might look like.

In assembling my panel of experts, I wanted to elicit more creative, blue-sky thinking than the perhaps more pessimistic outlook offered by the participants of my preliminary study. Therefore, I used broader selection criteria in order to include some more “maverick thinkers,” incorporating the views of Patton (1990), who

recommends a criterion-based approach for purposefully choosing study participants.

The criteria used were:

1. Women who could be considered executives within their organisations, that is, who were director-level or above. (They were not board-level women but had senior-level responsibilities).
2. Women who had responsibility for the recruitment, development and retention of women executives within their organisations (these were normally under a Diversity or Human Resources remit).
3. Women with broader experience of leaving an executive position in the corporate world to become an entrepreneur.
4. Women who ran networking clubs for women executives.
5. Women who organised social enterprises and charities to support women.
6. Independent women commentators and academics in the fields of women studies that were identified in prominent UK universities.

My desire was for this eclectic mix to add to the breadth of opinions and views expressed to create the vision for the future world of work for executive women.

I conducted the Delphi via e-mail over three consecutive rounds, guaranteeing confidentiality. I constructed an e-mail describing the research and its purpose, along with a Word document attachment with details of the research questions (see Appendix three).

In the first round I prepared and sent the first questionnaire, which asked each participant to engage in individual brainstorming so as to generate as many ideas as possible relating to the question:

What is the future world of work likely to be for executive women?

Each participant then listed her ideas in a brief, concise manner and returned the list anonymously to me via e-mail. I emphasised to participants that the ideas need not be fully developed and that it was, in fact, preferable to have each idea expressed in one brief sentence, making no attempt to evaluate or justify these ideas at this stage. The second stage was to create and send questionnaire two. I prepared and sent a second questionnaire to participants that contained all of the ideas sent in response to the first questionnaire and provided space for participants to refine each idea, comment on each idea's strengths and weaknesses for addressing the question and identify new ideas. Participants then anonymously recorded their responses to questionnaire two and returned them to me via e-mail. The response rate dropped in the second round, even though I sent reminders.

The third stage was to create and send questionnaire three. I summarised the input from the previous steps into nine main themes and requested additional clarifications, as well as the suggestion of strengths, weaknesses and new ideas. The ideas were then evaluated by means of a vote. With this approach, I asked each member to identify the top three ideas and assign three points to the most promising idea, two points to the next most promising one point to the third best idea.

When the votes were returned to me I tallied the results and prepared a report of the top three ideas. The report noted the rank order of the ideas based on the total number of points received and indicated the number of people who voted for each idea. Discourse analysis allowed me to code the data by looking for patterns and themes. Strauss and Corbin (1997) state that the coding process produces additional questions, as well as additional data that needs to be examined. This coding, combined with a rating system, enabled a series of core themes (which are outlined in later parts) to emerge, but no consensus. This was initially a disappointment to me. My desire to develop a single, unified vision for the future world of work for executive women was not a realistic one. Instead, I had a mixture of concordant and discordant themes.

It was important for me to bear in mind throughout the process that the women executives were not a homogenous group, and that it was therefore not surprising to

find that they did not share a common vision of the future. My desire to converge on a unified vision was idealistic. I needed to determine the next step in this journey. Certainly, this series of common themes was of sufficient interest to warrant further study. I felt that a more in-depth understanding was needed, so I invited my experts to return for a face-to-face focus group in London.

Focus Group

Using focus-group sessions has several advantages over standard interviewing processes or remote online surveys. Focus groups tend to be more relaxed than formal interviews, and they offer more interaction with others. This encourages debate and discussion, resulting in new ideas and rich data gleaned from different perspectives (Kruegar and Casey 2000).

Kruegar and Casey (2000) state that focus groups have three distinctive characteristics:

1. They involve homogeneous people in a social interaction.
2. Their purpose is to collect qualitative data from a focused discussion.
3. They are a qualitative approach to gathering information that is both inductive and naturalistic.

However, there are some drawbacks with regard to focus-group sessions. Focus groups take time to put together and participants need to take time out to attend, may have travel concerns, and often have competing and busy schedules. Focus-group sessions also carry the risk of being vitiated by groupthink (Tersine & Riggs 1976) or being monopolised by a minority of participants. The role of the facilitator is very important in ensuring high-quality output from the session.

Krueger and Casey (2000) assert that the purpose of a focus group is to understand how people feel or think about a specific issue. For me, the focus group was a way to collect more in-depth information than arose from the Delphi study. With focus

groups, the goal is to collect data that is of interest to the researcher and to gain further insights into a particular research area (Kruegar & Casey 2000).

For me, holding a focus-group session had an additional advantage over the Delphi Technique, in that there was an incentive for the women to attend due to the potential networking opportunity. This encouraged debate and discussion of the themes that emerged from the Delphi, resulting in what I hoped were new ideas and rich data that would enhance my search for the elusive vision for the future world of work for executive women.

I wrote an e-mail invitation to all of the women who participated in the Delphi to see whether they would like to attend a focus-group session. I also identified other women executives from the banking industry, whom I invited so that I could have a group of at least ten (I was worried about last-minute cancellations). I was also interested in adding some new perspectives to the group from women who had not taken part in the Delphi. The group participated in a half-day focus group session at The Women's Library (managed by London Metropolitan University) in London, UK.

The objective of the session was to “create a scenario of the world of work for Executive Women in 10 years’ time.” A hook to get them to attend (aside from the interest in the subject matter) was the opportunity to network with their like-minded peers and also visit The Women's Library in London, UK, famous for its collections and exhibits on the subject of women's history.

After my previous fears that that my question's wording (what is the future world of work for women executives likely to be?) led to realistic rather than “blue-sky” thinking, I changed the wording, which now stated that the aim was:

“To create a scenario of how we would like the future world of work to be for executive women in 10 years’ time.”

The scenarios would arise from the discussion of the key themes identified in the Delphi process and addressed the following questions:

“What future worlds of work do women executives aspire to and how might they be accomplished?” 109
|Samantha Lillian Collins |

What is the current world of work for executive women?

What do we want the future world of work for executive women to be like?

What do we need to get there, and how do we envisage achieving the vision?

The questions that guided the focus group were as follows:

1. How do the themes of feminine leadership style, organisational culture change, and changing women's career paths contribute to the future world of work for women executives?
2. What is your ideal vision for the future world of work for women in ten years' time?
3. What needs to happen in order to achieve this vision?

The session had three facilitators (my two PhD supervisors and myself), confidentiality was agreed upon at the start by all participants and the discussion was structured around themes from the Delphi questionnaires. This was supplemented by a creative brainstorming session, visualising, and collecting major themes on post-it notes. The entire session was recorded, but unfortunately it could not be transcribed because the audio quality was poor.

After an introductory presentation of the themes that arose from The Delphi Technique, a lively afternoon of discussion ensued. Participants spent time in small groups and took part in larger discussions and exercises. A recurring challenge was presented by one participant whose very realist view of the world made it difficult for her to visualise the future. As previously mentioned, focus-group sessions carry the risk of having groupthink compromise their usefulness (Tersine & Riggs 1976), or people monopolising the conversation. This was overcome to an extent by the use of a visualisation exercise and post-it notes on walls with each individual view voiced. What did not emerge was much blue-sky thinking. The participants' view of the future seemed to emerge from their present state of mind and from their opinions, positive and negative, of their current world of work. They constructed visions of the future that were not that different to present-day reality. There was no

unified vision for the future world of work for executive women, but what was emerging instead among the post-it notes was a range of possible scenarios.

Scenario Building

Again, I found myself in the now familiar position of deciding what to do next. It seemed that when I felt most challenged, I would discover a technique that seemed perfectly suited to the next stage in my research. After realising that the attainment of a single, unified vision was impractical – and also of limited use to women executives with diverse views and experiences – I wanted to use the three basic scenarios from Delphi and the themes from the focus group to build a range of possible futures.

The process of scenario-building generally involves the development of three or four different plots and their narratives (Wack 1985). The scenario-building process could incorporate three approaches: inductive, deductive or abductive. Inductive methods, by nature, are less structured and rely largely on the knowledge and understanding of the person creating the scenarios. Conversely, a deductive approach uses simple techniques of prioritisation to construct scenario matrices based on the most critical uncertainties. The scenarios were built using a “creative iterative process” in which the themes emerged as a sort of “aha!” or “eureka!” moment (Kovács & Spens 2005, p. 139) incorporating inductive and abductive methods. “Creativity is necessary to break out of the limitations of deduction and induction” (p. 136), and instead of following a logical process, “advances in science are often achieved through an intuitive leap that comes forth as a whole, and which can be called abductive reasoning” (Kovács & Spens 2005, p.136).

The scenarios emerged in response to the themes generated at the focus group. To develop the final scenarios, I categorised participant responses and verbatim quotes within the context of the main themes identified. This was important to the construction of the scenarios, as it required me to draw on my experience to recognise what I considered to be important data and hence generate themes.

Throughout this process, I was also influenced by Kleiner's stepped approach for developing scenarios:

1. *Refining the sense of purpose.* The scenarios needed to be compelling and to express the genuine concerns and purpose of my study group.
2. *Understanding driving forces.* The scenarios needed to incorporate a fundamental understanding of the driving forces at play, including why events may move in a particular direction and the implications if they do.
3. *Scenario plots.* Multiple plots were necessary, as three distinct scenarios soon emerged. Each needed to be sufficiently realistic and sufficiently distinct to be considered a legitimate alternative.
4. *Recounting and conversation.* Once the scenario plots were developed, each needed to be considered separately. What would it feel like to live in the envisioned futures? By recounting and talking about the scenarios with others, I was able to incorporate their responses and feedback and make each scenario even richer and more plausible (Kleiner 1994).

The scenarios were also developed against the credibility criteria developed by Wilson (1998), which included the following points:

- *Plausibility* – Were my scenarios within the limits of what might conceivably happen? I felt that they were plausible, as I didn't pursue any wild tangents from the themes that had arisen.
- *Differentiation* – Was each scenario sufficiently different from the others for them not to be construed as variations of a base case? The scenarios were similar in some respects, and there was some overlap in how they were presented. However, I did not view this negatively, as it gave rise to questions of whether the scenarios could coexist simultaneously.
- *Consistency* – Was the reasoning contained in each scenario consistent? The scenarios in my view were coherent with the themes presented and therefore sufficiently reasoned.
- *Decision-making utility* – Did each scenario actually contribute sufficient insight into the future so that decisions could be made based on what they were telling us? I was unsure as to how much the scenarios would contribute

to future decision-making without asking women executives if this was the case.

- *Challenge* – Did the scenarios challenge conventional wisdom about the future? I was not sure that they did. I felt that the scenarios were more of an extension of the present-day world of work for women executives, and therefore not challenging enough. At no time did they engage in wild speculation about how the future world of work might turn out. The themes were grounded in reality and there was a paucity of “blue-sky” thinking; indeed, many of the themes were recognisable in the academic or populist literature. This could be explained in terms of their level of seniority and experiences to date, which kept them well grounded; their daily exposure to press on the subject may also have been a contributing factor. In addition, perhaps the topic was too important to them to engage in what they may have perceived to be random guesswork.
- *Confirmability* – Did data exist from the Delphi and focus groups to support my interpretation? (from Guba 1981). I back-tracked to check that the scenarios did in fact contain the most recurrent themes that emerged from the Delphi and focus group (see table six). I refer to the scenarios as being authentic, since the future described is plausible or credible, in the sense that they emanated from the themes and quotes of the women executive participants.

Table 6. Back tracking of scenarios against themes previously identified in Research: Source: The Author

| | AREA OF STUDY | Lit. Review | Pre Study | Delphi 1 | Delphi 2 | Delphi 3 | Focus Group | Sc. 1 | Sc. 2 | Sc. 3 |
|--|---------------|-------------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|-------------|-------|-------|-------|
| THEMES INDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS FROM STUDY | | | | | | | | | | |
| Business case Big picture for companies | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Women’s attitudes | | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Men’s attitudes | | | | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Why women not in senior jobs | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Future World of Work | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| USA UK differences in women | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | | |
| Women Entrepreneurs/ Social | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Role models | | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Coaching Mentoring Personal development | | ✓ | | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Workplace flexibility Work/life balance | | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Demographics | | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Org. culture Changes/ Male & female collaboration | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Women’s leadership style | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Women’s career paths | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Women’s networks | | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ |

- = theme identified in this research area

Three scenarios were constructed based on the identified common themes and a back tracking to cross map the scenarios against themes identified earlier in the research (see table six).

1. “The Business Case World”
2. “The Entrepreneurial World”
3. “The Change Agents World”

My views and “aha” moments were an unavoidable part of the building of the scenarios and some of the emphases placed on the process. Although this could be perceived as valuable, this leads to questions regarding the boundary between research and invention, and how much control an author has over the interpretation of a text he or she has written. Therefore, how credible were the scenarios, really? Who is to judge? There was no way of definitively answering this question, and the exploratory nature of this study makes these questions somewhat inevitable. However, it may also be the case that my intervention added richness, and that it was the action needed to bring the themes together into more concrete scenarios that could later be authenticated by the women executive participants.

The scenarios are explored in depth in subsequent parts of this study. The creation of the scenarios left me with a feeling of elation; the scenarios offered different alternative futures for women executives, and I had moved away from my idealistic pursuit of a single, unified vision. However, I had built these scenarios, admittedly on the basis of the data, but what were their limitations? What would executive women themselves think about these scenarios? The next step for me was to take these scenarios and explore them with women executives. I was now ready to take something tangible to my contacts in New York.

Telephone Interviews

I was keen to gain feedback on whether the scenarios made sense to women executives, and to identify any blind spots. I wanted to do this with women executives who were unfamiliar with my research to date, so that I could gain fresh perspectives. It was also now time for me to incorporate women executives from New York, now that I had more substantive scenarios to work with.

In order to explore the three scenarios in more depth, I conducted telephone interviews with ten women executives from the UK. Similarly, I conducted telephone interviews with twelve women executives from the United States. The work I had carried out so far in the UK provided my starting point – a benchmark of the views of women executives and their future world of work. I did not initially intend to replicate the study in New York, as I was not conducting a comparative study. However, now that I had something more tangible to work with, it seemed an appropriate time to garner credibility for the scenarios with women executives in New York. Another issue was that my contacts in New York were not as strong as those in London. I did not know the women executives in New York nearly as well as I did those in London, and I was interested in hearing their perhaps more unbridled feedback.

All the women who were interviewed held senior positions within large corporate organisations and were accessed through a form of convenience sampling using my business contacts both in the UK and USA. The New York contacts were essentially gathered through a “snowball” effect: I asked my primary contacts in the UK to connect me with their contacts in the US which, in turn, arranged for me to gain access to these women.

My goal with the interviews was two-fold. I wanted to gain new perspectives from women who had no prior involvement with or knowledge of the design of the scenarios, to ascertain whether (1) the scenarios made sense and were credible to them, and (2) which of the scenarios they would pick as the most feasible option for themselves ten years in the future. Participants in both the UK and USA were sent

the scenarios for review prior to their telephone interviews and were asked to identify the scenario (or parts of a scenario) that they felt, from their perspectives as women executives, they most aspired to in the next decade.

During the telephone interviews participants were encouraged to create future-based stories of themselves along the lines of “a day in the life of . . .” related to a particular scenario, describing the conversations, events, challenges of the day, and including personal events and situations. Some said they were not able to pick one exclusive scenario, so they chose a mix instead.

My goal was to develop credibility for the scenarios by using techniques such as guided imagery and incasting. Incasting is a futures technique that starts with an array of several future scenarios, and in which it is important that participants suspend belief about how this future came to exist (Carlsson-Kanyama *et al.* 2008). They are then asked to project themselves into this future and talk about their experience. I adapted this somewhat by asking participants to pick their preferred future, the one that they would most like to see happen, the one that was most meaningful to them, instead of imaging themselves in all the scenarios. Raimond (1996, p. 210) calls this the “intelligent machine” model. In this model, one imagines a future situation that is ideal, valuable, and meaningful, and then invents ways to make it happen.

I used an incasting technique identified by Burnside in 1992 as guided imagery. During my telephone interviews, I asked participants to see themselves experience “a day in the life of” their preferred scenario.

The process involved:

1. Sending them all the scenarios to read beforehand and encouraging them to think about their preferred scenario, assuring them of confidentiality.
2. Setting the context to the study and the call.
3. Asking them which was their preferred scenario and why.
4. Asking them to close their eyes, relax, and wake up ten years ahead.
5. Ask what their future is like. Explain a day in the life.

For example: “You have successfully attained your ideal future world of work. You are in your work place. What do you see around you? What do you hear? What are you doing? How are you feeling?”

6. Asking them to “look back over the past 10 years” and consider what they did and what had to happen to get them there.

I selected a timeframe of ten years which, according to Millett (2006, p. 44), “is long enough that significant changes could occur and that people suspend current operational thinking.” A shorter time frame would likely lead only to short-term thinking and solutions based on current trends, while too long a timeframe could lead to a loss of focus and relevance.

By asking participants to “imagine a day in the life of” their ideal scenario brought in an element of fantasy or wish fulfilment that I felt had been lacking in the study so far. It allowed participants to project a desirable future that might become possible: to imagine a world in which their scenario might be realisable.

The telephone interviews also had their inevitable challenges to deal with; people cancelled at the last minute or were late, a consequence perhaps of the anonymity of the telephone. Some women found it difficult to pick one scenario and instead wanted to claim a mix of the scenarios. Others found it difficult to project themselves into the future and kept reverting to the past. I used my coaching skills of listening and questioning to support them in reaching their stories.

Yet what did emerge were accounts of the day in the life of women executives in London and New York in the future that were informative, inspiring and that resulted in many pages of text to interpret. Confronted with a mass of information in pages of transcripts that represented the aspirations of executive women and their future world of work, I was at a loss on to what to do with it all. How could I translate all that I had heard without “sanitising” the feelings and emotions and losing the essence of the data?

Over time, it started to become clear to me that each of the three scenarios loosely resembled the pieces of a longer story. While the scenarios gave meaning to and began to organise the perspectives of the executive women in my study, I believed they could be expanded into something more. What they lacked was a compelling voice – they lacked passion. I saw stories, and specifically storytelling, as a tool that I could use to express these multiple perspectives in a way that would grab the attention of women executives and organisations. I wanted to take all the telephone interview data and somehow turn it into meaningful stories.

Factional Stories

I do not consider myself a writer in the creative sense, and I wanted to be able to write these transcripts in a way that communicated the richness of what the future for executive women could look like. I decided to attend a writing course by Robert McKee, the famous Hollywood screenwriter. During the course, he said that,

“Business people not only have to understand the past but also project the future. And how do you imagine the future? As a story; you create scenarios in your head of possible futures to try to anticipate the life of your company or for your personal life” (McKee 2005, oral communication).

McKee’s words resonated with me. I was energised by the prospect of telling the future story of women executives not from a “what I did to get here” perspective, but from the perspective of where women executives say they are today, where they are going, and how they see their own futures unfolding.

Writing the telephone interviews as stories would mean that I wouldn’t lose the richness and depth of information gained from the telephone interviews, and it would allow me to paint a vivid picture of what the future might actually look like for these women executives. After all, with my lofty goal of bringing about change for executive women and their future world of work, a more traditional reporting of results would simply not suffice for me.

Storytelling provides the opportunity to take real events – in my case the views of the women executives of their futures – and re-tell them in ways that allow for greater objective exploration.

The method of storytelling I chose was inspired by the concept of factional writing, a form of expression that treats real people or events as if they were fictional or uses real people or events in a fictional rendition. In factional writing, facts or situations are never invented; stories are based on thorough first-person research into real events.

According to Wikipedia, the online encyclopaedia (2007, available online at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Faction_%28literature%29),

“In literature, faction is a neologism used to describe works based on real historical figures and actual events, woven together with fictional writing.”

Factional writing can be seen as a form of “creative non-fiction,” which Hackley (2007 p. 99) contends is,

“Also called literary journalism or literary non-fiction. It is a personalised but factually-based style of writing that uses the essay form. The genre has its own society, the CNF Foundation (www.creativenonfiction.org)” (Hackley, 2007 p. 101).

With its potential for handling insightfulness, factional writing provided a powerful means for storytelling that offered a glimpse inside the minds and hearts of those in the narrative, a connection that otherwise could not be made through more conventional means of research and reporting. While the factional approach may be under-utilised and largely unrecognised by academia, for me, its ability to get to the essence of the future opened up an opportunity for greater exploration.

Factional writing as a research method is not without critics. Rhodes and Brown (2005, p. 467) “reflect on the use of fictional source material and fictional formats...in order to explore issues of responsibility in the writing of research.” Sparkes (2002b, p. 236) discusses how fictional techniques,

“Should not be accepted uncritically and asks whether creativity can exist without constraints in this field, and indeed whether fiction and social research can comfortably cohabit.”

Other criticisms target a presumptive lack of objectivity and verification, “though if one acknowledges that writing constitutes rather than describes reality, neither objectivity nor verification can be relevant” (Hackey 2007, p. 104). Obviously, the stories’ integrity is a matter for the reader to decide, yet there is also the

“Seductive effect of using ones’ own experience as interpretive research data. It can appear to the author to have social scientific interest, and to readers to be of merely therapeutic value” (Hackley 2007, p.104).

The method I used to write the stories involved compiling the comments and transcripts gleaned from the telephone interviews, using discourse analysis to categorise themes and viewing this alongside the scenarios and prior focus group and Delphi themes. This created a compilation of real data. These data were then used in creative writing to create the factional stories. I had a huge amount of rich information and quotes on all of the scenarios, and I also had several “day in the life” future stories. I found that the “day in the life” stories for each scenario were similar. As I grouped the individual stories together, composite stories started to emerge and I began to amalgamate them into three possible factional stories.

This process, of course, was not without its own challenges. First and foremost, was I really this kind of writer? Could I actually develop a plot line and characters to encompass all aspects of my work? Would it not be easier to simply write my findings along more traditional academic lines? Also, could I actually find the time to write, edit, and re-write these stories concomitantly with the more traditional aspects of thesis writing?

At first, I envisioned the story as being a “day in the life” of a female executive grappling with multiple aspects of what it meant to be a women executive ten years hence, but this turned into nothing more than a series of somewhat dull descriptions of events (along the lines of “I got up, I had breakfast, I went to work, I had a

business meeting...”). That’s when I embarked on the idea of creating three stories – one for each emerging future scenario – all centred around one business meeting set ten years in the future. This approach allowed me to create three female fictional characters (composites of different real people) who attend this same meeting. Thus each of their stories is intertwined, yet each unfolds from their own unique perspective.

Each story is based on the data collected, and yet is, in part, fiction. The actual settings, names and details are, by the very nature of the process, not real. At the same time, the events depicted, and the interactions between the characters, are based on the feedback from women participating in my study, their views, their thoughts on what the future holds, and in some cases on current realities. In essence, each story bridges the genres of creative writing and social science. Each story is “made up,” but each is also “true.” Each story uses imagination, but is also theoretically informed and draws on my research fieldwork.

After opting for this method, I found myself energised and passionate about the characters and settings I was creating to show these possible future scenarios. I believe this newfound enthusiasm came from the fact that the stories were never invented – they were based on primary research, drawing on actual statements gathered from the telephone interviews. In essence, I was giving life to the views, desires, and aspirations of the executive women who participated in my study. What emerged were three connected and interrelated fictional stories that breathed life into the future worlds of work that executive women aspire to.

However, simply articulating the scenarios and the telephone interview output into stories was not the final part to the research question. The stories do nothing if no action is taken. In short, giving lip service to the stories is very different from striving to realise the visions they describe; they only become meaningful if they lead to actionable strategies. This, in turn, led to the final instalment of this journey, The Route Maps – how do women executives reach these futures? How do they get from “here” to “there?”

Route Mapping

Route mapping is a technique frequently used by organisations and governmental agencies to develop the basis for an action plan to overcome a particular challenge. Godet and Roubelat (1996) contend that “the wedding of passion and reason, of heart and mind is the key to successful action” (p.165). My study had thus far wedded “passion and reason” and “heart and mind,” but what of “successful action?” Engaging in the process of route mapping – literally mapping out a route for how we might alter the present course as a way to realise a desired future – was the answer I was looking for. This approach also fit nicely with my coaching background, as I would be looking at what action steps executive women could take to bring about their preferred future.

Huse and Solberg (2006) describe the outcome of a particular route-mapping exercise with a company board of directors. Their challenge was to identify ways in which women might be able to contribute more on the board. Scenarios and stories were presented depicting how women in the company currently interacted with the board, and participants were asked to brainstorm ideas and action steps on how they might improve participation levels. What resulted was a list of key findings and action steps that this organisation (and presumably others) could take to increase female participation on the board, including creating alliances, being more prepared and more involved, attending important decision-making arenas, taking on leadership roles and becoming more visible.

Governments also engage in route-mapping exercises, often in response to societal problems, or to develop new programmes and initiatives. Typically, government departments appoint a panel of experts or a committee charged with the task of developing a strategy for taking action to implement a particular programme or policy. Quite often this panel will bring its own experts into the process, the goal being to assimilate data from those who are well-versed and experienced in a particular field of endeavour.

A joint publication by The Institute of Cost and Management Accountants and The Strategic Planning Society (Raimond 1996, p. 210) asked the simple question: “What do we have to do now in order to get to where we want to be in 5 to 10 years’ time?” This was precisely the question I needed to ask, and it appealed immensely to the executive coach in me whose job it is to find new solutions and actions to help a person move forward. Thus, I turned to route mapping – literally mapping out a route by which executive women might alter the present course as a way to realise a desired future.

Like the Delphi technique, route mapping typically involves engaging a panel of experts who are asked to brainstorm ideas and specific action steps on how they might achieve a desired result. I organised two route-maps focus groups at The Women’s Library in London’s East End, UK (this was the same venue that I had used three years earlier to conduct the focus group after the Delphi questionnaires). I sent e-mail messages inviting women from the earlier Delphi survey, the previous focus group, and the scenario-testing interviews (two women were from New York, USA), plus two new participants. The new participants were “referred” by those who had been involved in the research previously. All participants were either current women executives in banking and professional services or they were women entrepreneurs who had previously held these executive positions.

I sent e-mail invitations (see appendix seven) to the potential participants to attend the route-maps focus group of their choice. I decided to split the focus groups among the three stories. I would have preferred to do three sessions, but due to time constraints I decided to group two stories into the afternoon session. The morning focus group was: “Awakening the Female Entrepreneur” and the afternoon focus group combined “Women Executives on Board” & “Women Executives as Catalysts for Change.”

The first focus group, held in the morning, explored story one, dealing with female entrepreneurs. Participants in this session were a mix of women entrepreneurs and corporate executives. This session had eight attendees (of the twelve that were expected). Two dropped out the day before, and two failed to show up on the day.

Of the eight who attended, four had participated in the scenario telephone interviews.

The second session, held in the afternoon, consisted of women executives and one women entrepreneur, and explored scenarios two and three: “women on boards” and “women as catalysts for change,” respectively. The session had seven attendees (of the twelve expected). Five dropped out at the last moment, cancelling the day before or failing to show up. Three of those present participated in the scenario-testing telephone interviews, and three had also participated in the morning focus group.

Members of each focus group were asked to read their respective story prior to the focus group and to come prepared to brainstorm and discuss actions for achieving the desired future. Following a brief PowerPoint presentation by myself (which provided context of the research so far for the focus groups), the question I posed to each group was quite simple: “In your view, what needs to happen for women executives to achieve this story?” I then followed with instructions to “brainstorm as many ideas as you can, then pick your one big idea and expand and explore it in more depth.”

Within the focus group, small groups of three or four were asked to choose their “one big idea” – the one idea that they felt had the most potential to support the achievement of the future story – and prepare a 10-minute presentation outlining:

- The Big Idea – what is it, why will it work, what is the benefit?
- Strategy outline – how will it work? What are the key strategic areas? What resources are needed?
- Over the next 10 years, what steps need to be taken to implement the strategy, and by whom?
- How long will it take to implement the strategy?
- What’s next?

As with my previous focus group, both sessions were scheduled in London, UK. I was able to schedule a date on which some of the executive women from New York were in London on business, enabling them to participate.

Each of the women was provided with scenario-specific stories to read before arriving. This was the debut of my “stories” in action, and it was interesting to see how they were received and perceived by those in the focus groups. In short, they proved to be a valuable tool that allowed these women to step more easily ten years into the future and explore what the world of work might look like for themselves and their colleagues.

Each session featured an overview presentation of the nature of my research and facilitated discussion that began with key questions posted on a flipchart to make it clear from the start that these sessions were more about ideas and solutions than an actual discussion of issues. I utilised a form of “backcasting,” instead of the “incasting” used in the telephone interviews, to ask participants to project themselves forward into the future. They were asked to identify with a particular story, imagine they had achieved it, and trace backwards to elucidate what actions had been taken to make the story “come true.”

According to Carlsson-Kanyama *et al.* (2008),

“During the 1970s, backcasting studies started to emerge. They typically addressed a perceived societal problem with the aim of finding a real solution” (p. 36).

They describe how,

“Shell has a leading role, a methodology for involving stakeholders in idea-generation and scenario-building has been developed and successfully applied for three decades” (p. 36).

The format for this involves workshop exercises with elements of brain-storming and clustering of ideas. The underlying rationale is that due to the participative approach, the scenarios would be accepted as relevant, intriguing and plausible by those who were to use them.

Some participants wanted to discuss the here and now and their own personal experiences. While this was useful, the stories helped draw their attention forwards into the future; I used my experience as a coach and meeting facilitator to draw out their views on actual actions.

What came out of each session were the building blocks for developing action steps for individuals and organisations, specific to each scenario. These became the basis for my route maps and specific suggestions to bring about the futures envisaged by my study. These ideas included an “Inter-planetary Incubator for Women Entrepreneurs,” “The Best of Both Worlds Club,” “Overcoming Women-Centric Issues” and “The Centre for Authentic Leadership.”

For me, this started the conclusion of the study; not only were clear possible futures developed for women executives, but the emergence of some practical action steps to achieve these futures were starting to come into play.

Conclusion

In this part, I explored the methodological journey, how the study was conducted, the methodologies and approaches that shaped it, why and how they were applied and some of their associated challenges and limitations. The journey was much more akin to an adventure. It was not a simple and linear route that was known to me at the outset. At many points during the journey, I did not know what route to take next until I had reflected upon what had been achieved (or not) so far. This is the nature of interpretive and exploratory research.

Using so many different methods in the same study carried its share of difficulties – for example, ensuring coherence and consistency was an issue, because I was exploring the same questions and issues with women with a similar stake in the issue across the different methods. Delphi was useful because of the capacity to conduct it remotely via e-mail and its low time commitment. Motivation to complete Delphi did decline with each round, and any richness of discussion was lost in the written responses. It also did not succeed in reaching a consensus, which was the original intent.

The focus group was conducted in such a way as to elaborate on the Delphi responses and gain more richness of discussion by bringing together participants face to face. However, due to the remote locations of the participants and the work pressures associated with holding senior-level positions, some participants found it challenging to make the time to attend the face-to-face sessions. The discussion, however, was lively, which meant debate was intense, despite the fact that one of the respondents tended to dominate the conversation and some others found it difficult to visualise the future.

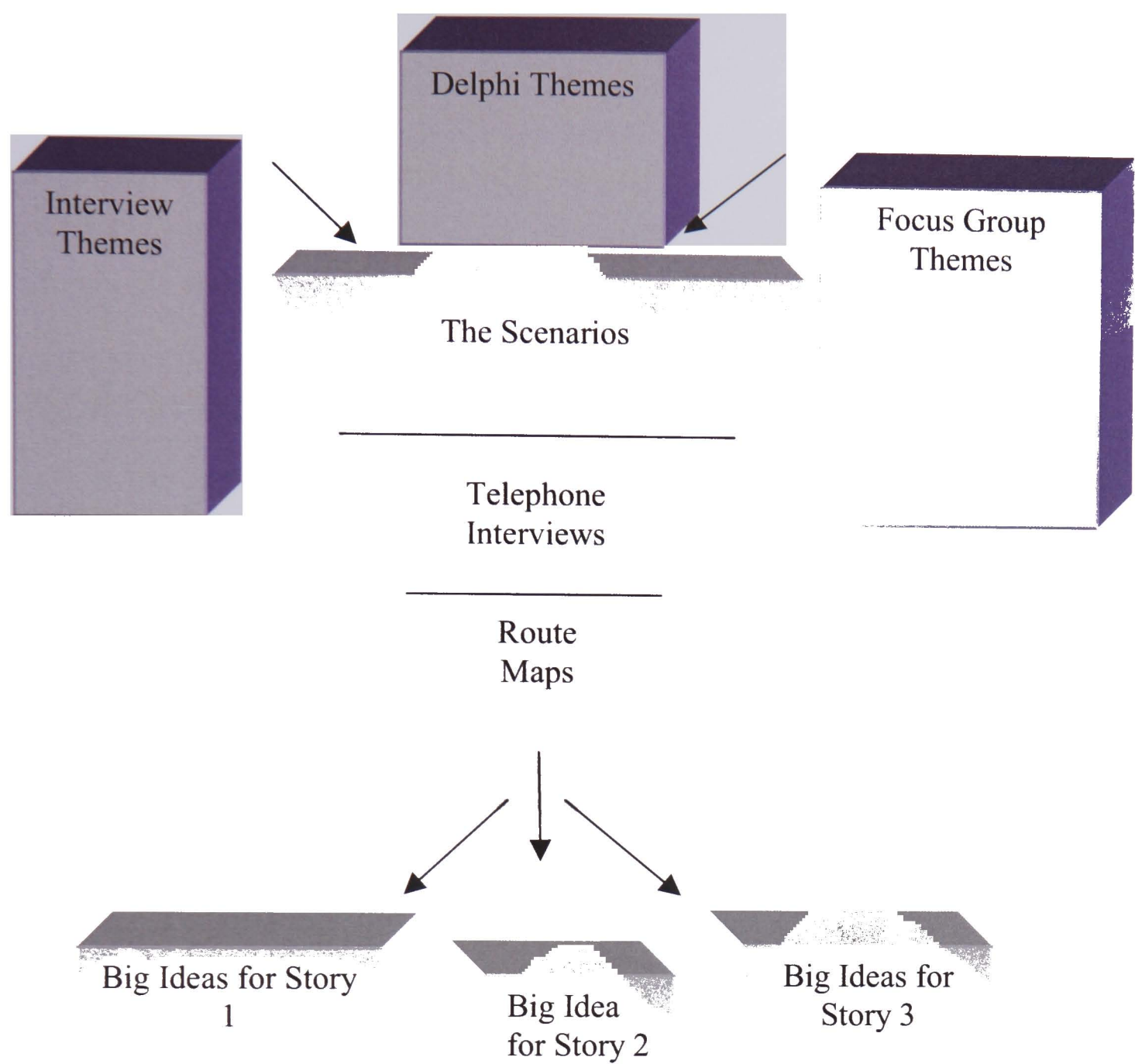
There were several issues associated with the scenario building. Because women executives in my study were by nature concerned mainly with their own futures rather than the futures of others, they tended to extrapolate from personal experience, projecting forward from the world of today as they know it, as opposed to identifying any critical uncertainties that might allow for change. They were driven by a strong sense of realism. Most perceived the issue as too important to fantasise upon, which meant that they did not feel as free to be creative when considering alternative futures as they might otherwise have been. They also had a predisposition to be either very optimistic or very pessimistic on the basis of their individual experience, which leads to the question: “Do these scenarios tell us more about today and yesterday than tomorrow?”

Conducting the telephone interviews was useful for three reasons. Firstly, it enabled credibility to be given to the scenarios built from the Delphi and focus group. The participants found the scenarios useful and had no difficulty choosing their preferred option(s). They used the scenarios as a decision-making tool to decide upon their career future. Secondly, the telephone interviews enabled the achievement of greater clarity on themes that had arisen from the Delphi and focus groups, and also identified differences in the perceptions and attitudes of women executives in the UK and the USA. Thirdly, the use of the “day in the life” tool yielded rich results from participants who were able to visualise and articulate what their future would look like in this scenario.

Three stories provided in-depth narratives of the scenarios and incorporated the richness and depth of data gained from the telephone interviews. They painted vivid pictures of what the future might look like for women executives. However, problems arose regarding objectivity and verification, and the danger of using the writer's own experience as data.

Finally, three "Big Ideas" were the output of the route-maps sessions. They were achieved through a funnelling of information and an emergent methodology.

Figure 10 - “Funnel” of Route Map Determination Source: The Author



All of these methods emerged along the journey, and they were appropriate to each defined stage, despite their respective limitations. The data that actually emerged are explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 6 - Conduct of the Study – ‘Discoveries on the Journey’

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I provided an overview of the methodological techniques and approaches that shaped this study. Here, I re-visit each step along the journey to discuss the results that emerged at each stage of the research.

The Preliminary Study - “Women’s Issues are Done to Death!”

As discussed in the previous chapter, before I could define the specific aims of the research, I undertook a preliminary study designed to help me better understand the challenges faced by women executives. This enabled me to develop a deeper understanding of the relevant issues. The purpose of this preliminary study was therefore exploratory. It provided a method through which I could gather more information and a greater understanding to guide me as I developed my research focus and questions.

As I had hoped, the preliminary study interviews provided me with a wealth of information concerning women executives and their world of work. On the basis of the information gathered, I was able to develop broad themes or categories that helped to hone the final research question (what future worlds of work do women executives aspire to and how might they get there).

The interviews and discussions centred on the following questions:

- 1) Why do you think there are not more women in executive positions?
- 2) What can companies do better to retain women executives?
- 3) Is the concept of a successful work/life balance or “having it all” a feasible one? If not, what are the alternatives?
- 4) Does the corporate environment provide a responsive atmosphere for women who want to achieve professional as well as personal success?

- 5) Women are leaving the corporate environment at a fast pace. Have you ever considered this? How would you avert this trend?
- 6) What is the question, issue or area concerning women executives that you believe needs to be researched?

What struck me most about these meetings was the sheer depth of the passion, personal stories and concerns expressed by these women executives. Though seemingly highly successful by all accounts, all had concerns about their futures and that of women executives in general. The meetings were emotive and it was a challenge for me to purely listen and write instead of defaulting to my coaching background; I resisted the urge to explore solutions for how they could take action to change their situation for the better. I left each meeting with pages of hand-written notes and a promise to type them and send them back shortly to check that I had captured each meeting faithfully. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, no recordings were made of the interviews. In fact, most participants expressed a reluctance to talk unless their anonymity and confidentiality could be maintained. As a result, in-depth, hand-written notes were taken during each session and a coding system was used in lieu of participant names. After each interview, notes were then typed and sent to each interviewee for approval.

Key Themes

The themes that arose from the interviews were as follows:

The Reasons for which Women are not in Senior Positions

The reasons given by participants in my preliminary study concerning why women do not reach senior positions were as varied as, and consistent with, my findings from the literature review. Reasons expressed by my study participants included: “the old boys’ club,” “having children,” “the glass ceiling,” “women’s lack of confidence” and “lack of role models,”

I actually found that asking this question was not particularly helpful; I did not hear anything new, and instead it seemed to get the participants into a more negative frame of mind. What was interesting was that they all seemed to have a wide knowledge and understanding of the relevant issues. Their assumption was that there were gender differences and barriers for women's advancement, even though they had reached executive positions themselves.

Lack of Interest in "Women's Issues"

Although these preliminary interviews were not specifically future-orientated (I had not even heard of Future Studies at this point), future issues did emerge. Essentially, they wanted me to leave women's issues alone, arguing that the topic is outdated and that the more important issues are about the economy, society and global change in the future.

Many said they saw the issue as not being about women *per se*, but about the future world of work for everyone and their place in it. Most could not see a positive future in which they were able to both be an executive and have a personal life.

"Why can't everyone shut up about women in business? Why can't we just accept that a woman being in business is a fact of life now? I'm bored with the subject of being successful and being a woman. I'm sick and tired of being judged, sick and tired of being adored, bored of society judging me. I'm pigeon holed!" DPIUK

Although the women executives insisted that "it wasn't about being a woman" and that they didn't want to be perceived as different or inferior to men, they did point to issues for women like the negative perceptions of successful women and unsupportive corporate cultures for women.

"Why on Earth can't I just get on? It's 2003 for goodness' sake. Why does everyone assume that you must be a bitch if you run a company? It's wrong and it's a shame that everyone has to be typecast. I don't want to fit in and I am really concerned about the future!" APIUK

"Corporate cultures are not going to change for women, many women leave because they have serious concerns about their careers and their abilities to achieve work/life balance" EPIUK

It was interesting to me that while the women's willingness to participate was high (a 70% response rate), they also claimed to be bored with the topic of women and that it's been done to death. On the one hand, they seemed to insist that gender differences were no longer important, and on the other they maintained that gender differences still exist and change needs to occur.

At first this seemed to be a contradiction. However, it became apparent that they were bored with the way in which the topic was being addressed, rather than the topic itself. The focus to date had been on why women do not make it to the top and on the past and here and now. This potentially led to a pessimistic outlook if one were to extrapolate past data into the future. My thoughts were that a focus on the future world of work and on initiatives for change could be a relevant area to explore within my study.

A USA and UK Difference

Many of the women executives interviewed worked for global companies that were either US-owned or conducted business in the USA, so a number of respondents had travelled to the USA on business or had worked in the USA previously. This offered a glimpse into their perceived differences between women executives' attitudes in the UK and the USA. What emerged was a perception that American women were more confident than women in the UK.

“American women are so much better at it than us. Whenever I am in a meeting in New York, there are more women who seem so naturally confident.” FPIUK

This was an unexpected theme for me; I had no intention originally to explore women executives in any country other than the UK. I had not seen evidence of American women being more confident or better than those in the UK within the literature. At the time of the preliminary study there was however only one woman CEO in the FTSE, Majorie Scardino of Pearson (Vinnicombe & Singh 2003), and this fact encouraged me to explore the perspectives of women in the UK and USA and whether there was any truth to these assumptions.

Women-Owned Business in the Future

Many of the respondents saw the prospect of working for themselves as the answer to a more positive future career.

“More women will set up their own businesses. Women are naturally good at setting up their own businesses, and I have been considering it.” GPIUK

It was an interesting assumption that women are “naturally good at setting up their own businesses.” There had not been any evidence of this in the literature (the number of women starting their own businesses was increasing but nothing was said about their success rates). Later on in the study in the route maps workshop, there were also recommendations to teach young women entrepreneurship and to support women entrepreneurs in their businesses – a suggestion that is inconsistent with women being naturally good. These assumptions about gender differences in entrepreneurship may have implications for their visions of the future.

The Business Need for Organisations to Retain Women

Concern for the future was not restricted to individual career paths, however. Much of the concern related to the future of organisations and the business need for companies to retain women executives.

“Flexibility will have to be built into organisations more effectively. The business case for this will be paramount rather than a ‘nice to have.’ ‘One size does not fit all’ and organisations must be flexible to retain women.” APIUK

The business case would also be driven by demographic influences, according to the participants; in particular, they cited workforce composition and an ageing population in which women expected to have both child and elderly dependents at home in the future.

Making women the subject of a business need somehow seemed an easier talking point for women than any discussion on equality. The language was perhaps more comforting and easier to justify to themselves. In this discussion, they referred to the organisation in the third person and there was no mention of any part they could play

in creating change for women executives. This contrasted with later parts of the research that identified women executives as possible change-makers.

Possible Research Areas

Some of the most passionate responses concerned what the women perceived to be the most relevant issues to research. In general, they expressed a genuine lack of enthusiasm in researching why women are, or are not, successful at the executive level. Instead, they pointed to the need to investigate the future world of work and to find ways to implement change.

“It’s old hat, past news – women in senior jobs. Think out of the box, it’s a whole new world. Why women don’t get to the top? It’s been done to death.” BPIUK

“We are so bored with hearing about how hard it is for women at the top, can you find something a bit more interesting to research? What about how to actually change things?” HPIUK

Such strong, emotional views fundamentally helped to shape the nature of my research. I was surprised by the somewhat pessimistic outlook by these seemingly highly successful women. I had recently started my coaching business and I had a rather idealistic view of how I was going to change the future world of work for women. I reminded myself that in the case of many of these women, they had perhaps fought their way to the top and were often the only women on the board; their everyday reality entailed having to adapt to male-dominated organisations. In addition, I wondered if engaging these women in dreams and ideals of the future may have made them even more dissatisfied with the current situation – something that they may not have been willing to do.

Before the preliminary study, I relied on relevant literature to fuel my basic understanding of barriers to women’s advancement at executive levels. But as the interview information was collected, it became clear to me that although such well-known and well-documented barriers were relevant to women executives, the participants were less concerned with why the situation existed and more concerned with the future and practical solutions for change.

As a result, I focused on what the future world of work for women executives might look like rather than why. I became determined that my research would explore ways to support women executives in achieving their desired futures. So it was from these basic themes derived from the responses to the preliminary study interview questions that the research scope for my overall study took shape. I wanted to create a unified vision, for the future world of work that women executives agreed upon. I discovered a consensus technique called Delphi which I believed could provide a way to achieve this endeavour.

The Delphi Technique – “The Route to Consensus”

As discussed in greater detail in the previous methodological journey, the Delphi Technique is a consensus tool designed to gain results that can then be used as the basis for decision-making.

I deployed the Delphi Technique through an e-mail questionnaire sent to twenty women executives in London, UK. My goal was to use the Delphi to develop consensus as to what a vision for the future world of work for women executives might look like. The participants included:

1. Women who could be considered executives within their organisations, that is they were director-level or above. (They were not board-level women but had senior-level responsibilities).
2. Women who had responsibility for the recruitment, development and retention of women executives within their organisations (these were normally under a Diversity or Human Resources remit).
3. Women with broader experience of leaving an executive position in the corporate world to become an entrepreneur.
4. Women who ran networking clubs for women executives.
5. Women who organised social enterprises and charities to support women.
6. Independent women commentators/academics in the fields of women studies who were identified from prominent UK universities.

I conducted the Delphi via e-mail over three consecutive rounds, each of which focused on individual brainstorming to generate as many ideas as possible to answer the question:

What is the future world of work likely to be for executive women?

Round 1 Delphi Output

In round one, twelve of the twenty women responded. I had a few e-mails asking for further clarification with questions like, “what do you mean?”, “this is too broad,” “how many years ahead are you talking about?” I then began to reflect on my question’s wording – “what is the future world of work likely to be for women executives?” Perhaps there were more effective alternatives, such as:

“What is your vision for the future world of work for executive women?”

“What is your ideal future world of work for executive women?”

I did decide upon a ten-year time frame, which I informed the round-1 participants about. Ten years was a time span that was neither too brief nor excessively protracted. I was concerned that using words such as “likely” and making it only ten years into the future may have elicited a more grounded response than I wanted. However, I did not want to change the question for round 2, as I was already into the process and believed it would have complicated the comparisons between rounds. The qualitative answers from round one were then grouped into themes or categories. Each theme was associated with the qualitative comments made by respondents as to how this particular factor might influence the future world of work for women executives. These themes were:

The Business Case for Women

As with the preliminary study, the business case for retaining women executives in the future was highlighted by participants as an important element to the future world of work for women executives.

“Organisations will have to clue up to more diverse workforces including women. In a changing global economy, we can’t afford to have the male clubs.” JD1UK

This theme, although by no means new to me, was reinforced during the Delphi responses. The emphasis seemed more focused on a broader diverse workforce rather than a sole focus on women. This was perhaps indicative of there being women in positions of diversity as participants. What was not clear was how organisations need to “clue up” and what needs to be done in order to convince that the business case has any real merit.

Women’s Changing Attitudes Towards Work

According to participants, in the future world of work, women’s attitudes will change in different ways.

“More women will become self-aware and will maximise their full potential in their careers.” JD1UK

“More confident women will be more demanding about working practices that fit them and their values.” CD1UK

“Women will accept that they cannot be superwomen and will be more supportive to each other.” AD1UK

Still others felt that the attitudes of women would change in a different way. Several expressed opinions that more “command and control management styles” arising because of challenging times would be adopted as much by senior women as by senior men, and that women will be under more pressure to show just how tough they can be.

“The future world of work for women will oblige women to be more like a man if they want to get on, but in so doing they will provoke hostility from both men and women.” ED1UK

“Companies will do nothing and never change; they think they have a tick in the box in diversity. Corporate politics will get even nastier and there will be slow progress on increasing number of women directors on top corporate boards, women will just need to adapt their style for the company or they won’t get on.” GD1UK

Changing women’s attitudes therefore meant different things; for some it seemed to imply empowerment, for others conformity. There was no consensus as to how women may or may not change in the future, and if gender differences would become more or less distinct. This was perhaps unsurprising, since each woman came from different perspectives and experiences and shared her personal view.

Men’s Attitudes Towards Women at Work

Men’s attitudes towards women at work was also identified as a theme, although participants’ views differed on what this meant:

“In the future, men’s attitude to women execs will still be a problem, i.e. they will be competitive but confused so will resort to bullying.” GD1UK

“There may be more ‘stay at home’ husbands if the woman wishes to pursue a corporate career. Role reversals.” AD1UK

“The nature of young men is changing, some are more open to a fuller view of ‘life’ and they will be more like allies for women who want to do things differently.” HD1UK

“In the future, men and women understand and make allowances for each other’s differences.” ID1UK

Again, although useful in identifying men’s attitudes as important, it seems to depend largely on the men involved, their role, relationship and age. It may be that all of the above occur simultaneously. What was not clear was how men will be engaged in the future world of work for women, and if there are ways to engage them further.

Role Models for Women

There were many comments on the importance of role models for women aspiring to executive positions. Of the few women at executive level, “not all were particularly good role models;” the emergence of more role models was seen as increasingly important in the future. In addition, one participant saw the emergence of the first “mega Black woman executive role model” turned entrepreneur – an Afro-Caribbean equivalent of Anita Roddick. This was an interesting comment that an entrepreneur would perhaps be a role model for women within large organisations. While role models were viewed as an important factor for the future world of work for women, it was unclear where and how these role models would arise, what actually being a good role model entails and what, if anything, current woman-executive role models could do to be more effective.

Women Executives as Entrepreneurs

A further Delphi theme offered by some participants was that the future world of work may consist of women executives leaving their organisations in order to follow an entrepreneurial route and create their own companies.

“New women executives entrepreneurs will set up small competitor “skunk” companies which would entirely break the traditional model of long hours and huge bonuses for individual success” BD1UK

“Women executives will vote with their feet in large numbers on their future world of work.” GD1UK

What was perhaps different from the preliminary interviews and the literature review was that participants described a more collaborative approach to entrepreneurship rather than the self-employed, sole-woman approach. Women executives would team up with other women to start bigger companies, utilising their collective skills learned in the corporate world.

Others described the concept of social entrepreneurship becoming successful. They described businesses that have a focus on making a difference in the community and

with charities rather than just the bottom line. There was the possibility that the most talented women would be attracted to work for them in large numbers, working on a co-operative basis.

“Women who have a fear of starting up on their own will leave their executive jobs to start up on their own with the promise of contracts from smaller entrepreneurial networks that not only will have access to large projects but will also have a social consciousness, perfect combo.” BD1UK

This theme seemed to assume that organisations will not change in the future, and that women will therefore take matters in their own hands. This was a similar theme in the preliminary study, where there were comments that women are naturally good at entrepreneurship. Whether or not this is true has not been explored to any significant extent in the literature. In addition, the support that women executives will need to set up these companies was not mentioned, nor was their capacity to deal with the possible risks and pay changes involved.

Workplace Flexibility

Although the theme of better workplace flexibility for women was not new to me (it had come up in the literature review and in the preliminary study), a greater acceptance of and support for flexible work arrangements within organisations was highlighted by participants as a key success factor for the future world of work with specific relevance to women. This included career breaks of many years being common for parenthood, with companies encouraging women to return to work even after a decade or more. Participants felt that “reduced working hours for all promotes much greater equality,” as does flexibility around hours and location, with opportunities for regularly working from home. Many foresaw job-sharing as becoming entirely normal for women, and one respondent remarked that women executives will “hopefully not have to make choices between family and working life in the future.”

Participants were largely in agreement on the importance of workplace flexibility, although views differed as to what it actually meant in terms of tangible actions.

Organisational Culture Change

Related to the theme of workplace flexibility, there was a consistent view that the organisational culture needed to change in the future. On one hand, participants said there would be a change for the better. They commented on a better understanding and acceptance of female values, more challenges to alternative ways of thinking, greater diversity, and that women would take the lead on culture change.

“In the future companies would operate differently with more women-friendly organisational cultures because they would have higher concentrations of women who do not see dominant working practices as normal, women will lead this change.” FD1UK

“A gradual increase in numbers of women at the top will slowly change the culture, and the unique talents and leadership styles of women will be acknowledged more and more and women would be promoted within organisations.” HD1UK

On the other hand, participants commented that organisational cultures would not change significantly in the future.

“Companies will do nothing and never change; they think they have a tick in the box in diversity. Corporate politics will get even nastier and there will be slow progress on increasing number of women directors on top corporate boards.” GD1UK

This was another example of diverging views among the participants, and again depended to a large extent on “where the person was coming from” – that is, the worldviews and experiences that informed her responses.

Women’s Leadership Style

In the future, some participants felt that there would be greater acceptance and acknowledgment of the leadership styles of women, and that this would result in higher representation of women at the executive level.

“Why should I change to adapt to the style of men around me all the time, I mean I do but I am constantly thinking, I need to be more direct, use a different style when I am naturally collaborative and intuitive, I don’t see men thinking about how to adapt their style for me!” HD1UK

“If a male leader has a strong leadership style, he is 'business focused,' and if he uses a soft leadership style he is considered as a 'people' manager. Whereas if a female manager uses her soft tactics she is likely to be considered a 'weak' manager and if she toughens up she is likely to be called a 'control freak,' this needs to change in the future.” JD1UK

This was another example of what appears to be an assumption that tends to be made about the ‘natural’ difference between women and men, and aligned with the concepts of women and transformational leadership identified in the literature study. What was also interesting was that although this participant identified what she perceived as a difference in style between men and women, she was unwilling to adopt her natural style.

Women's Career Paths & Changing Roles

In contrast to those who saw women becoming entrepreneurs, other participants said that women executives would not leave their organisations. This was because, rather than lose women executives, organisational decision-makers would respond by providing new roles, more challenging projects and the opportunity to make a difference in order to encourage women to stay. These roles would recognise that not every woman will want to reach an executive position. Career paths that follow what was described as the “road less travelled” philosophy (where different routes are taken depending on the individual’s values and needs) will become more the norm.

“I do see my future career with this organisation. I am good at what I do and I want to deliver for this business especially as our market gets more competitive. But I don’t want to be a partner, I want to stay at director where I can still see my kids and not be penalised for this.” BD1UK

There seems to be underlying assumptions in this theme that organisations see the need to retain women and will take action to achieve it, and that these new roles and career paths can be created and accepted within the organisation. It was not clear what these new roles would be and what changes would be needed within the organisational culture to accept that not all would aspire to the most senior levels.

Changing Demographics.

The theme of changing demographics was highlighted by participants as an important element of the future world of work for women executives. This was primarily because they envisioned many women executives choosing to work beyond retirement age.

“The retirement age in the UK is increasing from 60 to 65 years old and in the US, there is no mandatory retirement age for women. The needs of an older generation of women who continue to work and have careers longer will need to be addressed.” AD1UK

“As people live longer, many more women executives will be “sandwich carers” – they will be responsible for both children and elderly parents, therefore needing flexibility to work part-time, not something that is generally accepted at executive levels.” AD1UK

The issue of childcare was one that was repeatedly mentioned in the literature, although the issue of caring for parents and children was not explored to an appreciable extent. Demographics were also highlighted in the populist-themes section earlier, but the Delphi did not shed much light on what could actually be done to address this issue and the ways, if any, in which it can change in the future.

Women's External Networks

While networking of some sort was currently the norm for many participants and the “old boys’ club” was considered a barrier to executive levels (consistent with the literature review), some participants envisioned a new style of women’s network in the future, built around support and collaboration rather than simply a “what’s in it for me?” model. Many noted that access to external networks through which women could widen their contacts, share experiences and ideas, and be inspired by role models would become more popular in the future.

“New ways of building social relationships with colleagues outside the workplace in-line with the needs of women executives will become even more key for success, and indeed just for survival.” CD1UK

According to some participants, in-house corporate women-only networks will disappear altogether, to be replaced by mixed-gender networks.

“Businesses will take over women’s networks as they realise their value to the business and create more mixed-gender networks with personal and business development for all.” BD1UK

The theme of women’s access to networks was highlighted in the literature review alongside the growth of corporate women’s networks. Networking outside the organisation was a new theme, yet how and where these networks would be accessed and who would operate them was not explored to a great extent within the Delphi.

Summary of Delphi Round 1

During round 1, it seemed impossible to reach a consensus on the various themes. Not everyone subscribed to every theme, and views diverged widely within themes. This was to be expected: the views of individual participants were inevitably informed by their respective experiences within their work roles and their exposure to the populist literature. Besides, the first round of Delphi is supposed to uncover a large variety of themes that can then be condensed down into a smaller number of relevant areas.

Round 2 Delphi Output

The purpose of the second round of the Delphi questionnaire was to report back to participants the themes sent in response to the first questionnaire, and to solicit the relevant strengths and weaknesses of each theme. In this way, the process of clarification and consensus-establishment begins.

Participants were asked to refine the themes already received by clarifying them as desired, and by listing the strengths and weaknesses they associated with each. For example:

Theme 1 = Business Case for Women

- Your clarification (if any):

- Strengths:
- Weaknesses:

These themes and their associated comments were then sent to the twelve round-one respondents in a second round of e-mails. Care was taken to protect the anonymity of each participant by removing any specific, identifiable references within the comments. By being privy to the comments of the other participants from round one, each was able to consider their opinions as they responded in the second round, thereby laying the foundation on which to establish a consensus. The second round produced ten participant responses.

The five most popular themes were identified according to participant responses. Three of the themes were the same as in round 1; a new theme emerged on coaching and mentoring, and women's leadership style changed to mixed-gender leadership style.

Women's Career Paths and New Roles

Participants saw women executives' career paths as being key to the future world of work. Flexible careers would create "working lifestyles with a better balance" (BD2UK).

Job-sharing was seen as the key mode for flexible working, with more flexible work arrangements at executive level, where job-sharing will not always work. Work flexibility accompanied by support structures, along with a changed perception of flexible working within the organisation in which benefits are highlighted clearly, was seen as fundamental to success. This was combined with a higher flexibility in working hours and location, with regular home working and reduced working hours for all, promoting greater equality.

According to participants, women's careers will be enhanced in the future by a significantly improved childcare provision, and by parenthood and older career breaks of many years' duration becoming more common. Women will have longer

and continuous careers, and companies will encourage men and women to return to work for them even after breaks of 10-15 years. Job-sharing will become entirely normal for men and women.

“Different career models will emerge: waves, oscillating, hedgehopping, downsizing, being entrepreneurs, going back into PAYE, part-time consultants.” FD2UK

“Board-level positions will be more accommodating to women, part-time, less hassle, but with same power and authority, more like an external consultant to the board, but employed by the organisation.” CD2UK

“More women will lead the board on ‘corporate social responsibility’ and values-orientated management.” AD2UK

“Executive women to be allowed to be on non-exec boards of small companies and charities.” FD2UK

Greater clarity emerged as to what these new roles and career paths would entail. However, what would need to change within the organisational culture for these career paths to be accepted was once again not explored by participants.

Coaching & Mentoring for Women

Round-2 participants highlighted the need for coaching and mentoring opportunities for women throughout the responses. This was possibly a response to my request for the strengths and weaknesses of each idea, in which coaching and mentoring was highlighted as a way of overcoming some of the weaknesses of the themes.

“In order to change career paths, career coaching and more targeted career development needs to be available to women at various stages of transition & change especially for those who will find it more difficult in client-facing roles.” AD2UK

“For organisational cultures to start to change, innovative mentoring mechanisms will provide further support to women as they make it to the top.” CD2UK

“More senior women executives mentor and sponsor younger women.” GD2UK

What was not clear was how the coaching and mentoring would be offered. The literature review – one recalls Marshall (1984) in her criticism of women being offered help to change – did highlight coaching and mentoring for women. How any

coaching and mentoring specifically aimed at women would be perceived by men and women within the organisation – that is, the issue of whether or not it would be accepted or rejected as “women needing special help” – was not addressed, either.

Women Executives as Entrepreneurs

Again, in contrast to the view that organisations will create new career paths for women, according to some participants, the future world of work for women executives will not look much different to the current one; women will only be in senior roles in very small numbers, and many will opt not to progress to this level at all. There will still be a limited work/life balance and women will still have to make choices between career and parenthood.

This will mean that women will,

“Vote with their feet in large numbers and follow the entrepreneurial route and create their own companies with more aligned values.” JD2UK

“Women can contribute more as their own business, for the future I would like to see some serious businesses owned by women.” ID2UK

“Women executives of the future will be more confident to leave their place of work and set up their own businesses and companies if their needs are not met.” JD2UK

As in round 1, participants felt that more women will team up with others to start their companies through the combined skills learned in the corporate business rather than embarking on solo entrepreneurship. A more pervasive portfolio attitude to running one’s own business would lead to many more women bringing their skills to larger companies and a variety of work; furthermore, the ability to modulate the amount of time spent at work is conducive to striking a work/life balance and a desire to be self-employed.

Organisational Culture Changes

As in round 1, many participants saw organisational change as a critical factor in ensuring that more women are visible at executive levels in organisations in the future. A gradual increase in the numbers of women at the top would slowly change the culture, which would enable women to progress more easily. It was suggested that certain sectors (professional services was given as an example) would respond more quickly than others to this challenge and attract the bulk of the talented women.

The changing global economy, demographics and the need for talent at executive levels would drive CEOs and their boards to recognise the need to attract and retain women executives.

“Competition is growing, we can’t afford to have the male clubs anymore, and business will need to find ways to keep their best talent and that includes women.” AD2UK

“Demographics. being in a global economy, more women as customers, we can’t afford to have an all-male board anymore, what does this do for creativity and innovation.” CD2UK

This will lead to some companies operating differently, with more women-friendly organisational cultures, because they have higher concentrations of women who do not see the dominant working practices as normal. Young women will research the women-friendly companies in which women do get to the top, making the recruitment of women easier for these companies.

Changing organisational culture was seen to have significant strengths as an idea, as it incorporated business drivers and the board, and would have a positive impact on both women and men in the future.

“Making it about the business is key, we need to change the culture for everyone and the things that women specifically need to stay, like flexibility will have a knock-on effect on everyone.” BD2UK

This theme, which incorporates the business case for women, is broad and incorporates a number of complex factors. The extent to which an organisation will change its culture for the sake of its women executives must surely be debatable.

Mixed-Gender Leadership Style

In the future, according to participants, the unique talents and leadership styles of women will be acknowledged and promoted within the organisation. There will be an understanding and acceptance of female style and values.

Many felt that the debate needs to move on from women's style to what was described as feminine styles of leadership. It was suggested that, in order to be successful, both men and women will flexibly adopt feminine and masculine styles in response to contextual requirements.

"I am a female director and I feel I have had to compromise some of my characteristics to reach that level. However, I do not inherently believe that leadership characteristics are male or female - what is important is that you understand your strengths and weaknesses and build a team/network who can deliver." ED2UK

"I find it difficult to consider that it is a male-female issue, more a masculine-feminine preference of style. All leaders have different styles regardless of gender. It is wholly dependent on the individual." FD2UK

These responses were consistent with concepts of androgynous leadership models identified in the literature review, and with the view that gender differences would become less distinct in the future.

Summary of Round 2 Responses

The round-2 responses were useful in amalgamating some of the similar themes in round 1 and identifying the most popular themes. The themes could, however, be seen to be in conflict; for example, how do women executives as entrepreneurs reconcile with women's career paths and new roles, and do they need to? In order to establish a consensus on the future world of work for executive women, round 3 aimed to gain further clarity and consensus on the five themes from round 2.

Round 3 Delphi Output

For round three, the second-round comments were sent by e-mail to the ten participants who responded in round two. I asked that they assign votes to their top three themes. The votes were tallied and the results were then sent to the participants. Only five people responded to the third round of the Delphi. By this third and final round, getting people to respond was akin to pulling teeth. In fact, maintaining participant interest and getting timely responses proved to be among my biggest challenges throughout the Delphi process.

What emerged were three top ideas that were deemed most important for the future world of work for women executives:

1. Emergence of a Feminine Leadership Style (this changed again from mixed gender).
2. Organisational Culture Changes.
3. Changing Women's Career Paths (including entrepreneurial and in-house corporate).

Although three main themes had been identified, no single, unified understanding or vision of the future world of work for women executives had yet emerged.

These top three ideas needed to be explored in more depth. I had collected a large number of qualitative comments associated with each of the themes. These comments I deemed of sufficient interest to warrant further research, so despite my concerns about time constraints and potentially flagging interest among my panel of experts, I decided to conduct a more thorough face-to-face focus group session with these women executives in London, UK. My aim was to gain more clarity as to these three themes and to determine if there was indeed a unified vision for the future world of work for women executives.

The Focus Group Session – “Towards a Vision?”

I sent an e-mail invitation to all of the women who participated in the Delphi to see whether they would like to attend a focus group session, and also identified other women executives to assemble a large enough group. The group participated in a half-day focus-group session at The Women’s Library (managed by London Metropolitan University) in London, UK.

The objective of the session was to “to create a scenario of how we would like the future world of work to be for executive women in 10 years’ time.”

The questions that guided the focus group were as follows:

1. How do the themes of feminine leadership style, organisational culture change, and changing women’s career paths contribute to the future world of work for women executives?
2. What is your ideal vision for the future world of work for women in ten years’ time?
3. What needs to happen in order to achieve this vision?

After some group discussion of the three themes that emerged from the Delphi – which, although not terribly useful to me, due to one person hogging the session, was nevertheless a good warm-up for them – I used a closed-eye visualisation with the group, asking them to project themselves into the future world of work for women executives and imagine what it could be like. This was a challenging experience for me, as I was concerned that they would not take well to the exercise and find it too vague or abstract. I used a script and asked the following questions:

“Today is November 2nd 2014. Your dreams for the world of work for executive women have come true. What is it like?
How are executive women working?
What are they doing? What are their organisations doing?
What practices, structures and programmes are in place?
What are the mechanisms that keep that going? How are these sustained?
Working in a company, how has it changed, what does diversity mean these days?

What is society's attitudes towards executive women and how do men and women work with each other in the workplace?"

After the visualisation was complete, the participants used post-it notes to record the main words, phrases or themes that they came up with during the exercise. All of the post-it notes were then put up onto boards on the wall and then grouped according to topic. These topics were then named by the group and themed into three emergent scenarios that were named by the group as "Companies get The Big Picture," "Women as Entrepreneurs" and "Personal Development and Change."

Companies get the Big Picture

This theme included factors ranging from "Diversity directors and policies are gone as they are not needed," "No business case needed for women any more," "Women are in the majority on the board," and "Men argue the case for female leadership skills such as emotional intelligence."

The main theme in this area was that the predominately male boards of organisations will have recognised the need to retain women executives and will also have realised the business benefit. External trends like demographic impacts will have driven the business case for change, age discrimination will have diminished (the wisdom factor now being highly valued) and caring responsibilities for children and elderly parents will be taken as a given. Changing social values and corporate social responsibility and environmental activism will raise the level of what was described as "spiritual capital" in organisations, making them more attractive environments for executive women to work in.

Women as Entrepreneurs

The main theme underlying this topic was that organisations would fail to recognise any need for change and stick to business as usual. As the economy downturned and workers were much more accessible in countries such as India and China, women would not win the war for talent. Many executive women would vote with their feet and use their years of expertise and contacts to develop their own consultancies.

Rather than work for themselves, they would start small companies employing other freelancers for one-off projects. Technology would make this easier, and these nimble companies, with their low costs, would be able to entice corporate executive women who were otherwise unwilling or unable to shoulder the risk of resigning their positions and setting up their own company. Corporate arrogance will not acknowledge these networked entrepreneurs until they suddenly start to compete with them for talent and clients.

So-called portfolio careers would be on the rise, but instead of a variety of work-based assignments, it will be more of a portfolio life in which women, using their multi-tasking skills, would manage one to three clients, voluntary work and family and community work. Social entrepreneurship will become much more prevalent, and the lack of focus on the bottom line confuses organisations and means that women executives are able to secure large projects that both deliver a high income and have a significant impact on society.

Personal Development and Change

In this theme, women would seek to change the organisational culture themselves through their development and networking with other women, rather than waiting for the CEO or board to initiate any change.

“Women want to have an impact in their companies and make a difference, they won’t stop to think it will be difficult for them.” BFGUK

“Women will be stronger and have higher self-esteem – female bonding for networking and support. Ambition will be ok and celebrated more openly in a “female” style and women more comfortable about saying they are ambitious.” AFGUK

“I’ll do it my way /I am in control of it/I can change things I want when I want.” HFGUK

“It’s OK to want success, OK not to want it.” DFGUK

It encompassed a variety of views on women executives wanting to take charge of their own careers and development, as well as participants highlighting the need for support within the workplace to help them achieve such goals. Examples included

women creating new roles for themselves, pioneering programmes and networks to support women, providing business cases to the board to convince them of the value of women, offering executive coaching to aid female leadership and growth, providing more external specialist support for women's development and advancement, offering specific leadership-development training for women executives (alongside more traditional training in time and delegation management, which is often an issue for women executives) and fostering the development of softer skills (such as the communication and negotiation) for women.

Summary of Focus Group Output

The focus group session was useful in that it enabled the final three Delphi themes of feminine leadership, women's career paths and women executives as entrepreneurs, to be explored in more depth. From the focus group, the beginning of three alternative scenarios emerged, each with their own characteristics and assumptions. These were named by the group as:

1. Companies get the Big Picture

This scenario assumed organisational decision-makers (CEO and board) would understand the need to develop and retain women executives and would drive change from the top through their HR and Diversity initiatives. This would be driven from a business case of how women contribute to the success of business.

2. Women as Entrepreneurs

This scenario assumed that organisational decision-makers would not see the need to develop and retain women executives, and that women would consequently leave and start their own companies. It assumed that women are naturally good at business start-up and would be able to grow successful companies, but working together as networked entrepreneurs.

3. Personal Development and Change

As with scenario 2, this scenario assumed that organisational decision-makers (the CEO and board) – and inferentially men in general – would not appreciate the need to develop and retain women executives. Change would be driven by women in lower-than-board positions through women’s networks, mentoring and coaching. These women would drive change from the bottom up, persuading the board to provide support. These three scenarios provided the building blocks for the more in-depth scenarios in the next section.

The Scenarios – Alternative Possible Futures

As discussed in greater length in the earlier methodological journey section of this thesis, the process of scenario-building generally involves the development of three or four plots with their respective narratives (Wack 1985). The three scenarios that were constructed through the interpretation of the themes from the Delphi and focus group are not mutually exclusive. They are three possible worlds that provide a context in which to explore the future world of work for women executives.

The scenarios were built using a “creative iterative process” (Kovács & Spens 2005, p. 139). This meant that to create the final scenarios, I categorised participant responses and verbatim quotes within the context of the main themes identified without any prior theory. This was important in the building of the scenarios, as it required recognising important data and generating themes.

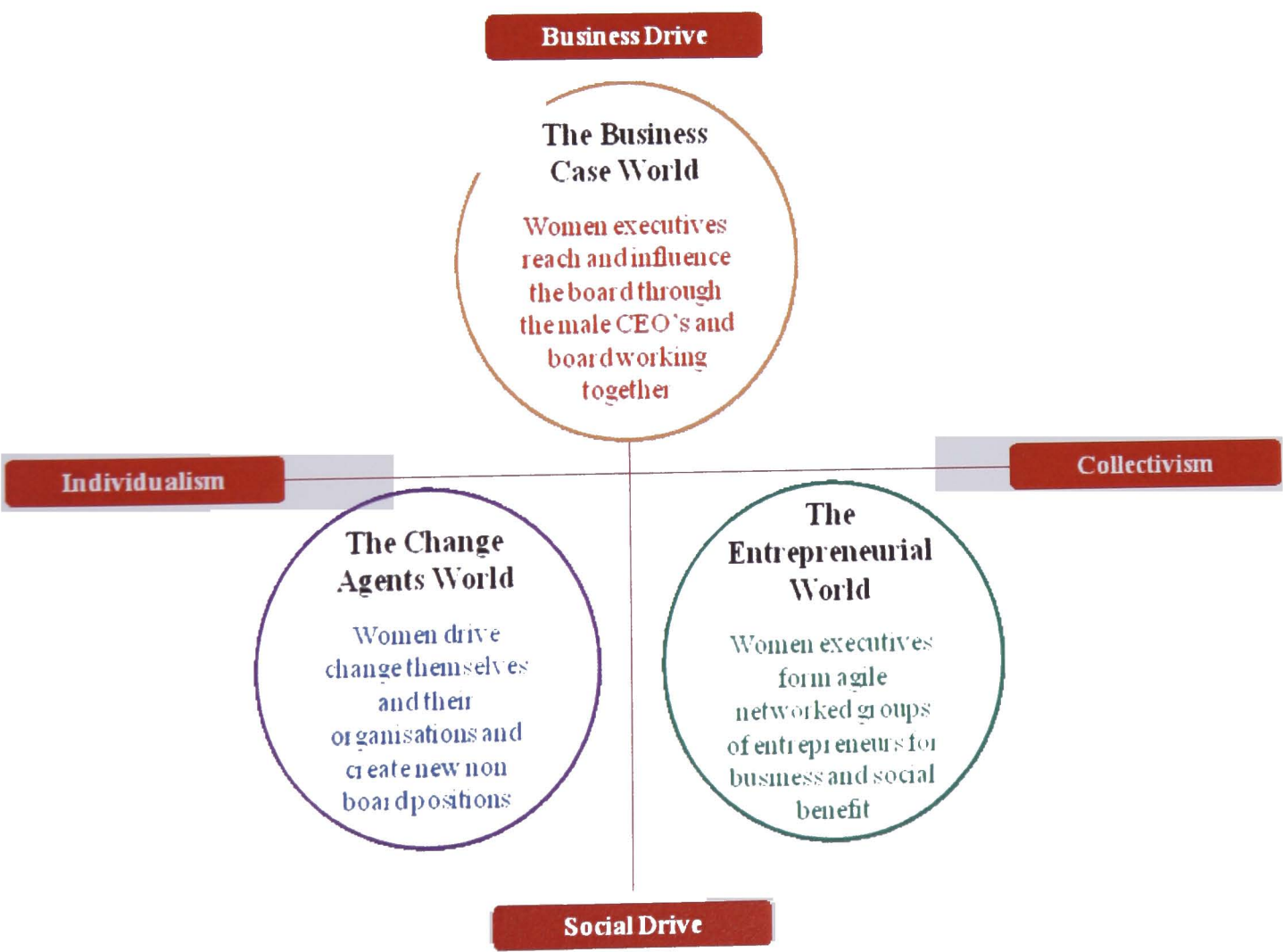
The creation of the scenarios was largely achieved in the focus group by the participants: I used the themes gleaned from the Delphi and the focus group to create more detailed versions of the scenarios. The process of the development of each scenario was influenced by Kleiner’s (1994) stepped approach for developing scenarios and the credibility criteria developed by Wilson (1998); these are discussed in the earlier methodological journey chapter.

In addition, in order to identify the ‘building blocks’ I needed to assemble each scenario, I examined all of the themes that had arisen so far and looked for recurrence. The themes are tabulated below. This process enabled me to determine which of the themes were the most important and recurrent during the process so far. The themes were loosely formed and emergent classifications that, useful as they were, needed to be synthesised in a more meaningful way. The scenarios were stringently based on the themes, so they were plausible and credible rather than just a loose interpretation.

The Three Scenarios

The scenarios are not intended to be taken literally, or as exhaustive and comprehensive visions of how the future should be. They are designed to present ideas and illustrate what work could look like for women executives, depending on a number of factors that would include the individual women’s values, goals and outlook, alongside their organisational context. They are potentially a tool that can enable women executives to position themselves against their preferred scenario and determine the associated individual actions they need to take to achieve this future. They could also be used by organisational decision-makers to determine how their women executives perceive their future, and for the organisation to take action to retain talent in the future.

Figure 11: The Scenarios for The Future Worlds of Work for Women Executives
Source: The Author



Scenario 1 – The Entrepreneurial World

In the future, the corporate world of work for women executives will not look much different to the way it does today. The number of women in senior organisational roles will remain relatively small. The business world will have become increasingly competitive and challenging, and women executives will be under greater pressure to conform to traditional “male, macho” managerial models.

As a result, many women will not opt to progress to executive levels and will instead leave and start their own businesses, networking with each other and working to both a business and social agenda. These women will be driven by a desire to take control of their own futures, to attain a high level of work/life balance and to make a difference through their businesses.

Women executives who have given up the “corporate battle” and become self-employed will draw on their extensive business expertise and networks to be successful. Their businesses will be primarily consultancies, sharing their knowledge and expertise in low-overhead, project-based work. These roles will demand high fees and the women will be highly sought after for their skills. In fact, many women executives will work for their former employer as a way for the organisation to retain the skills and knowledge of their former employee. Women will use their skills to support organisations in areas such as HR, Communications, Recruitment, Public Relations, Coaching and Corporate Social Responsibility. Others will follow their personal passions and follow more creative routes, or take time out to travel or start a family.

As more and more executive women “vote with their feet,” they redefine the entrepreneurial business world for women. Gone are the days where there was worry and concern about whether enough money can be made through working for oneself and if there is enough security in running a business. High-profile cases of successful women entrepreneurs are constantly in the press and businesses are set up (often by women) to provide resources, mentoring, coaching and expertise to help woman-owned businesses set up and grow. A FTSE- and Fortune-type indicator is set up measuring the top 200 small businesses in the UK and USA, with many

woman-owned businesses in the top 200. This new indicator of female success highlights female role models and provides new ways of measuring the number of senior women (who wants to be an executive in the corporate world when I can do it in my own business?).

A knock-on effect of these executive-women-turned-entrepreneurs is that many younger women at graduate or junior management levels aspire to be entrepreneurs rather than corporate executives, exacerbating organisations' difficulties in attracting and retaining women. Some forward-thinking organisations respond by developing entrepreneurial pods and skills within their organisations and seconding managers to work for these entrepreneurs to "see how hard it really is," but nevertheless fail to compete with the flexibility, perceived work/life balance and "cool" factor of being a woman entrepreneur. Many women executives become role models/mentors for younger, non-executive women who develop the confidence to leave and set up their own businesses. Some of the most successful women entrepreneurs are featured by the press as the new female versions of Richard Branson.

As woman-owned business numbers soar, work and life balance initially becomes a problem. Executive women who are used to working long hours under high pressure find themselves doing the same thing with their own businesses. Their competitive nature and desire to prove that they can be successful outside the corporate world means that they take their 24/7 mentality with them in their own business. In addition, advances and cost reductions in remote technology, video conferencing and global social networking over the internet make work a pervasive temptation, especially for the majority of women who work from home. Concepts of 9-5 work days disappear as women work late at night or early in the morning to accommodate their child and elder care responsibilities. The market responds with a plethora of books and press on "how to gain work/life balance as a woman entrepreneur."

As more and more men also see the benefit of entrepreneurship, many couples find themselves working from home together and sharing child and elder care responsibilities. Traditional roles in the home become more blurred and many women find themselves in the role of breadwinner as more men decide to take a

househusband role in the home. There are negative implications for relationships as the juggling act becomes too much and divorce rates go up.

As more people work from home and are back in their local communities, involvement in local activities – especially schools and healthcare – increases. Many women take on voluntary work and join charities that are aligned with their values. As issues of war, global warming, education and poverty gain more momentum, community groups – often headed by women – are involved in activism and lobbying of local and national governments.

This social agenda means that women executives incorporate it into their businesses, and in contrast with nominal corporate social responsibility programmes, women are serious about making a difference and changing society. As corporate ethics debacles increase and corporate distrust is at its highest levels ever, trust in women entrepreneurs is at an all-time high. Customers make choices based on ethical companies and slowly the tide starts to turn as the bottom line becomes not just about money, but also about giving back to communities and society.

Women entrepreneurs also encourage other women to “go it alone” through informal and formal networks. Support, sharing of ideas and contacts and showcasing role models is paramount in women’s networking. Old ideas of networking being about taking are replaced with a new philosophy of mutual collaboration and support. Women-only groups are popular and become closed to men, old girls’ clubs become the new way for women to get ahead in business.

Successful women-executives-turned-entrepreneurs join together to work in partnerships and small entrepreneurial teams, forming smaller, competitive skunk companies that will break the established practices of long hours and huge bonuses for individual success. This enables women to form and subsequently disband associate teams for particular projects as needed, without the formal ties of employment. They work under each other’s brand name, depending on who initiated the project, and are able to bid for large projects and generate significant revenues.

They also provide support and guidance for each other and share resources, reducing the risk associated with working alone.

A global network of linked but separate and smaller communities of women entrepreneurs exists. They are small businesses and their roles are fluid, depending on the project. They form groups of specialist providers and these less tightly-regulated clusters of entrepreneurs are perceived by their customers to work effectively and efficiently.

The millennial generation has driven the innovation of easy access, high choice and low-cost technology, and this allows these small entrepreneurial networks and individuals to 'meet' each other through online networks designed to categorise and rank potential projects and individuals. Women see themselves as members of a professional network rather than an employee of a particular company, and rely on achieving high eBay-style ratings of past job performance to land their next contract.

This method of working has a negative effect on some organisations, in terms of cost and knowledge losses, as their most talented executive women are drawn to these entrepreneurial partnerships in large numbers. Other organisations respond by using these networks of entrepreneurial women executives to outsource specific functions and projects, thereby saving money.

Scenario 2 – The Business Case World

In the future, the predominately male CEOs and boards competing in the war for talent will significantly increase the numbers of women executives, as they have recognised the negative implications of failing to do so. After years of limited growth in the numbers of executive women, and a persistent trend of women leaving their organisation and the associated costs of this exodus in terms of knowledge losses and negative public relations, they have recognised a business need for having more women in executive positions and will have worked significantly to increase their numbers.

Men's attitudes have changed, because they realise that having more women in executive positions is supported by a sound business argument, not by a vacuous feminist agenda. Those businesses with customer bases that are predominately female recognise that having more women in senior positions makes more "business sense."

This trend has also been driven by some expensive sex-discrimination cases in the past few years, plus some government legislation that has spurred action. In addition, many of the more traditional men have retired, and a new generation of men has entered the boardroom. As a new generation of women executives has entered the boardroom and as their numbers have increased, the queen-bee syndrome of "I fought to get here so why should I help you?" has gone and women executives are more willing to be featured as role models and encourage and mentor women on their way to the boardroom.

Generation Y and Z move into senior management positions at younger ages and companies that have all-male boards are viewed negatively by an equality-driven generation of managers. The media is unforgiving of old school/old boy companies, and more transparent rating systems and informal chats on social networking sites mean that the war for being an employer of choice is rife.

Organisations attempt to be more ethical and socially conscious, due to increased social and legislative pressure. In turn, women executives feel more attracted to stay and move into positions in which they can impact the social policy of their organisation and make a difference.

Organisations also respond to economic and demographic impacts. The aging population and a global immigration of talent have drawn attention to the business case for attracting back and retaining female talent, and for keeping valuable knowledge and skills within an organisation. Organisations provide greater support for their women executives, who expect to work for more years and become "sandwich carers" for young children and elderly relatives. This means that organisations respond with increased acceptance of working virtually from remote

locations and flexible arrangements. Rather than flexible working being a policy, it starts to become an integral part of the culture. This is led by the board, which has members who champion flexible and part-time working. CEOs and boards will redefine executive-level positions and create ways for women to work part-time at senior levels while still providing a high level of challenging work. There will be some backlash from men who also want this level of flexibility, leading to problems for organisations in managing senior-level workloads.

As organisations recognise the soundness of the business case, there is a greater acceptance and acknowledgment of the unique talents and leadership styles that women bring to the table, resulting in higher representation at the senior level. Women will no longer feel the need to adapt their styles to their male counterparts. Confident and emboldened, women executives will come to embrace their natural leadership styles.

Due to the focus on getting women to board level, organisations fail to recognise that not all women aspire to the board level. Those who aspire to the board are given every opportunity to get there, and those who wish to remain at a certain level will still be unconsciously penalised. This leads to problems of women still leaving at lower management levels.

Organisations claim that the concept of women's issues has disappeared, to be replaced by "the business need for individuality and strengths" concept that encompasses everyone. Organisations in which the product is essentially the person, such as professional-service firms, will claim to have excelled in this area. The need to create a specific business case for the retention of women executives will disappear in favour of simply making the case for "people development" (regardless of gender), in which the individual talents, styles and unique contributions made by women and men are paramount. This leads to problems for organisations in which issues specific to women have not been fully solved.

For some women executives, the changing attitudes by the male CEOs and boards is perceived as "too little, too late" and is met with a resistance akin to the "lip service"

complaints associated with corporate social responsibility. Therefore some organisations make slower progress than others.

Scenario 3 – The Change Agents World

In the future, many women executives believe that their CEO and board will not create change for women unless they themselves take a lead in implementing that change. They therefore decide to keep working within their organisations and attempt to influence organisational culture change themselves. They call for a lack of tolerance of a “macho culture” in which those who speak the loudest get heard, and a greater recognition that there are many women who have different styles and need to be heard in their own ways.

The culture change is initiated by women executives starting women’s networking groups within the organisation in order to drive change for women. This is met with initial resistance or platitude from the male CEOs and boards of organisations (and some other women), who do not see the validity of the business case and feel alienated and discriminated against by women-only groups.

These women’s networks slowly increase in popularity as male board members sponsor, male managers are invited to attend and external professional speakers on confidence, presentation skills, and how to progress within the workplace are brought in to encourage women to move into more senior-level positions. The networks encourage mentoring, and role models for women executives are highlighted. Women at lower levels form informal “splinter group” networks in which they discuss issues and gain mutual support.

Women executives gain access to external cross-industry and industry-specific networks that widen their personal and professional contacts and allow for a greater sharing of experiences and ideas. Many are inspired by external speakers and role models, and bring ideas for change back into their organisations. Although men are invited to these groups, issues of tokenism are rife and men disparagingly refer to these groups as “old girls’ clubs” and “women’s knitting circles.”

Many women executives run women's networks in addition to their day job, and find the juggling act difficult. They spend large amounts of their time convincing the board of their value. Finally, as the lower female attrition figures and associated cost savings speak for themselves, the board allocates a limited budget and resources to women's networks. Women executives respond by making the networks profit centres that sell resources externally and partner with external women's networks to promote fee-earning events. Corporate women's networks gain momentum by sharing ideas with other organisations, and the press highlights organisations that support women. Women are attracted by companies that run successful in-house women's networks.

Women executives take charge of their career development rather than waiting for the companywide initiative. They move away from traditional training and leadership development that is too time-consuming and group-focused, in favour of working with executive coaches and mentors. In this way, they focus on leadership issues and challenges specific to their needs. This means that they develop a level of confidence and empowerment to drive positive change within their companies. Rather than coping with negative cultural aspects, they instead attempt to effect a more deep-rooted change.

It is the combination of the coaching and networks that drives organisational change for women from the inside out. Women executives feel that they are not alone in wanting to create change and feel more empowered, and that they have the resources to do so. They join forces with like-minded men in creating a new business culture. This formal or informal peer-level collusion within organisations is what influences and drives cultural change.

As a result of this cultural change, many executive women begin to redefine their roles. They create roles that give them flexibility alongside challenging work and the ability to make a difference. Due to the initiatives of these "change-maker" women executives, more women attain the CEO position, get onto the board (even working part-time) or gain a new type of board-level position in the form of lower time

commitments, flexible hours, in-house consultancy roles with board-level decision-making power, but without running teams.

Telephone Interviews – Exploring the Scenarios

Having built the three scenarios on the basis of the data that emerged from the Delphi and focus group, it became important that I gain more credibility for them. Clearly, each scenario was grounded in the information gained in the Delphi and focus group session. None of them, in my view, contained fanciful predictions. I reasoned that, intuitively, the scenarios were good situations for women executives to find themselves in. After all, looking just ten years into the future, it made sense that the future world envisioned would, for the most part, be a continuation of what was already happening today, albeit with some subtle, if not important, changes or trends underway.

I wanted to understand better whether the scenarios challenged current thinking and could be used for decision-making. I was keen to gain feedback as to whether the scenarios made sense to women executives, particularly from those who were unfamiliar with my research to date, and uncover any blind spots. It was time for me to incorporate women executives from New York, now that I had more substantive scenarios to work with.

As described in earlier chapters, I conducted telephone interviews with ten women executives from the UK and twelve women executives from the United States.

My goal with the interviews was two-fold. I wanted to gain new perspectives from women who had no prior ownership or knowledge of the design of the scenarios to see whether (1) the scenarios made sense and were credible to them, and (2) which of the scenarios they would pick as the most possible option for themselves ten years in the future. During the telephone interviews participants were encouraged to create future-based stories of themselves along the lines of “a day in the life of . . .” related to a particular scenario, describing the conversations, events, challenges of the day, and including personal events and situations (the technique of incasting described earlier in the methodological journey).

The telephone interviews yielded rich results. The shortest interview lasted fifty minutes and the longest two and a half hours. These women executives mostly

expressed what their future might look like, and didn't seem to experience much difficulty in visualising it. This was different from the Delphi and focus group sessions. Perhaps now the women executives had some options, something to go on, so to speak, rather than having to create their own scenarios from scratch; it was an easier process for them to visualise the future.

I also believed that the relative ease with which I was able to conduct these interviews and get participants to open up was a result of the lessons I learned from the Delphi and subsequent focus group. I found myself giving a clearer explanation at the start of each interview, asking fewer and more direct questions, and providing sufficient structure and occasional prompts for the women to get started in their visualisations. In addition to the greater effectiveness of this one-to-one approach, I found my coaching skills invaluable during the interviews, especially since much of the coaching I perform is done over the phone. I seemed to know intuitively the time to listen, the time to ask questions, and the way to move participants gently into the future when occasionally they slipped back to the present or past. Also, with my own knowledge of their world gathered through years of coaching women executives, I was able to empathise with their issues and concerns, which helped to build trust and create more openness during the interviews

Future World of Work Aspirations

My first question asked which scenario they would pick for themselves for ten years into the future and why. "The Business Case World" was the most popular (eight participants), indicating that this scenario may be the most credible or plausible (though one could argue that due to the fact that these were all corporate women rather than entrepreneurs, this might cause them to favour this particular scenario over the others). Secondly, "The Change Maker World" (seven participants and again one could argue this was because participants were already in the corporate world) and thirdly "The Entrepreneurial World" (five participants) were cited as the most possible for the participants in the future. Two participants saw a combination of scenarios as most possible for them.

Table 7: Number of Participants who choose Scenarios 1 – 3 (total = 22)

| | UK Participants | USA Participants |
|--|-----------------|------------------|
| Scenario 1 – The Entrepreneurial World | 2 | 3 |
| Scenario 2 – The Business Case World | 4 | 4 |
| Scenario 3 – The Change Agents World | 2 | 5 |
| Scenario 1 and 3 | 1 | 0 |
| Scenario 3 and 2 | 1 | 0 |

“I’d pick scenario one, in number one what spoke to me was the pressure to conform to ‘male macho models’ – I think of it as generally very corporate and not just male. I find this way of working unacceptable. I don’t think the corporate world will change in my lifetime, unless I worked for a company I feel passionate about, I want to set up a business that impacts me, the financial side concerns me but it should be successful. I want a successful work/life balance and to be financially successful – let’s really encourage women to give up their corporate jobs and do something that speaks to them.” AT1UK

“Scenario two for me. In 10 years’ time – as more women are at the top in their own authentic way – not as men, organisations are more flexible on all levels because they have realised that business needs to keep women for solid business reasons. I don’t like option 3, achievement is a partnership, we can’t do it by ourselves. Men on the board need to be aware and take action.” BT1USA

“Scenario three definitely, it is no longer the board that creates initiatives. Women design and find roles that fit their values – that would be very cool – not about staying at home with kids, be able to design role that fits with individual values and still makes a difference at board level.” IT1USA

As the participants described their preferred scenario and why they picked it, many of the themes from the Delphi and focus group re-emerged, but the interviews gave some of these themes greater depth. These themes were:

Business Case to “Gender Intelligence”

With particular regard to scenario two, participants discussed the need to take the business case for women to another level and the need for both women and men to work together effectively in the future world of work.

“The business case has been on the table for many years. It’s not about quotas at the top; it’s about a competitive edge. Women executives are a scarce resource. There has been a lot of talk about FTSE and business case, and the most successful companies will have women on boards.” BTIUSA

One participant foresaw a tipping point in the next ten years – some sort of dramatic change, whereby we will see a 25 to 30 percent female representation in senior positions.

They discussed the need for a greater understanding of the differences between men and women, more “gender intelligence,” and that “mindsets and attitudes in the business world need to change.” The drive for greater gender intelligence was perceived as needing to come from business.

“We have enough legislation. It has to be about the business world – more dialogue, debate, training, and awareness. Real life, living in corporations that are taking it seriously.” CTIUSA

It was clear that participants saw the importance of a business case for women; the shift to gender intelligence seemed to focus more on women and men working together rather than a case to ‘prove’ women’s worth in the workplace. It was, however, unclear what gender intelligence actually involved.

Women Executives to “Next Generation Women’s Leadership”

According to some interviewees, the future world of work needs to focus on younger women who aspire to reach executive positions, instead of focussing on women who have already reached executive levels.

“Organisations must be much more direct with their junior women in the future, what it’s like, how it will work. Juniors make assumptions of what it’s like as a female partner.” NTIUK

Others remarked that some junior women may need to be encouraged to aspire to executive positions, and that one way to do this is by highlighting role models for them.

However, the focus on younger leaders needs to include men as well, so that, as one participant stated,

“There is no negative backlash on traditional men. We need to bring them with us. Any changes to patterns of working need to be described in ways that show change is good for everyone . . . it needs to be carefully managed.” MTIUK

This was the first time in the research that a focus on less senior levels of women and men had been highlighted. It was not clear what needed to be done to engage this group, and it may be an area for future research.

Executive Positions to “Non-Linear Careers”

With regard to scenario three, interviewees discussed the need for what was described as a ‘road less travelled’ philosophy to careers for women executives.

“Not every woman needs to be at the top; not everyone will opt for the pressure and stress. Let’s incorporate non-linear careers into standard ways of working.” LTIUSA

“I work hard and am committed, but then I take ten years out because I believe strongly that I should raise my own children. When I decide to come back, I’m 45 to 50 and willing to give the next twenty years to a full-on career again. I should be welcomed back in, reintegrated, and treated seriously despite my age.” GTIUK

“If men demanded the same things, organisations would have to put money where their mouth is.” BTIUK

Commenting on the notion of the road less travelled, another participant remarked,

“How does a road start? It’s a path that nobody takes, but the more people that take it, that’s when it becomes a road . . . and the women now are pioneers.” ATIUK

Much of this was a repeat of new career paths and roles highlighted in the Delphi and focus group, although the responses were more focused on women designing and pioneering these roles instead of the organisation designing them for them.

Mentoring and Role Models to “A Coaching Culture”

Ten years from now, interviewees expected the future world of work to have a stronger focus on people and their values. As a result, women executives would

make use of coaching, and more organisations would utilise what was described as a “coaching” style of management.

“The key to the future is coaching skills and coaching coaches. It’s about how we operate close up with people.” JTIUK

Participants also discussed the value of external support for women executives in their busy roles.

“Having a coach will be the norm in ten years’ time – helping me keep it all together in my role and in my life!” HTIUSA

Organisations will have a different mindset concerning how people contribute to the bottom line, and there will be a greater focus on reporting on aspects such as coaching and people development.

“We will be able to prove that the softer side of the world is worthwhile. Some of that will only come if organisations take a risk and realise some of it is not provable. Then when it looks back, it sees a change and realises HR (etc.) is part of its success.” JTIUK

This was also a novel theme in this study, although perhaps it also related to earlier themes on changing the organisational culture. There were many aspects discussed (external coaches, coaching skills for managers, a coaching culture), all of which would need further exploration.

Corporate Social Responsibility to “Corporate Social Entrepreneurship”

Participants also talked about their future role and the future role of their organisations in society.

“I obviously want to do something that makes a difference in the world. I’m worried about society and the world at large. What can we do as corporations to influence it?” BTIUK

Other participants talked of corporate social entrepreneurship, with one suggesting that she start her own charity while still working for her organisation:

“In ten years’ time, the charity will be taking more of my time. British Telecom has sponsored and helped me in the communication and support.” ATIUK

Many felt that there will be a shift from a focus on the bottom line to more of a corporate social aspect. According to them, women executives will ask: “Is my company making a difference in the world?” and “How do we influence the world for the better?”

“It’s a self-fulfilling prophecy that as companies make more of a difference, more women will be interested in influencing that and staying with the companies. We need to find ways to support this happening.” DTIUSA

Others discussed the business benefit of a corporate social influence.

“Organisations are not charities so there has to be an angle. If we can build it into a business model, there is a business benefit. These things will make a difference to us competitively.” ATIUK

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) and its connection to both large organisations and entrepreneurs had arisen previously in the study. However, how both entrepreneurs and organisations could link up regarding CSR and how this may specifically relate to the needs of women had not.

UK and USA Differences Emerged

Up to the point of the telephone interviews, the women executives in this study were treated as a homogenous group, as it was not the intention to conduct a comparative study between the UK and USA. However, as the telephone interviews progressed, it became clear that some differences were emerging. The issue of more confidence and assertiveness in women executives in New York than in London was explored, as well as the potential reasons for this difference. This may raise concerns as to whether the more confident and assertive US women executives would be more likely to achieve the scenarios of their choice than their UK counterparts.

There were differences in how women in the UK and USA reacted to the scenarios during the telephone interviews. In general, women from the USA appeared more optimistic about the future world of work for women and more confident in their

ability to create the change necessary to achieve their desired futures. They took a more proactive approach, and “The Change Agents World” was a popular scenario among the women executives from New York.

“Women in the US, we ask ‘why do I have to wait for change, rather than affecting it myself?’ DTIUSA adding.

“(Women in the US) make demands from life and society – ‘I expect it to give me this, and I’ll challenge it and change it if I have to.’ DTIUSA

Women in the UK, on the other hand, tended to be more pessimistic and somewhat less assertive.

“In England, we have a hesitation in putting ourselves forward. A lot of UK women are happy with interesting and challenging jobs, but on the whole are not ambitious; they don’t have a plan. When it comes to men and women, women particularly are more noticeable if confident.” CTIUK

Both women from the UK and USA agreed on the perception of USA women being more confident and ambitious. Interviewees from each country attributed the differences to how women in each country are brought up and raised. “It’s a cultural thing,” said one woman from the USA.

Most interviewees from the UK chose The Business Case World as their favoured scenario, while interviewees from the USA tended to choose the other scenarios, The Change Agents World or The Entrepreneurial World, although all participants in both groups envisioned shifting between scenarios over time:

“I was a three, now I am a two; I would like to be a one.” BTIUSA

The women executives located in New York commented on the differences between more junior women in the UK and USA. They saw more promise in the ability of their younger US peers to ascend the corporate ranks.

“The ambition of young women here is scary; they are very bright and more ambitious than their peers in London. Women in their mid twenties want really challenging work and greater responsibility and a short commute. And if they are married, they want flexibility and the challenge.” HTIUSA

This may also suggest a higher confidence level for women in the USA rather than the UK.

Both UK and USA women talked more about the pressures of the working culture of having to work long hours and be present on the job. However, some USA women complained of the paucity of holidays and short maternity leaves, and described differences in the organisational cultures.

“The USA has a more macho management culture, while in the UK, the management style is more akin to an old-school, old boys club.” DTIUK

In general, USA women seemed more comfortable with ideas related to working at home and flexible hours and schedules, while UK women seemed more apprehensive about such approaches; for USA women, the notion of working from home seemed very normal.

Some initial differences between women executives in the USA and UK were noted, although with such small numbers of participants and this not being a comparative study, it is hard to draw conclusions. However, differences primarily around confidence and organisational culture were noted by the participants. Although this was not explored in great depth during this study, it had implication on the scenarios and their applicability in different national contexts.

All of the evolved or new themes, plus the USA/UK differences, were drivers for the creation of the stories in the next section.

“A Day in the Life of...” – Scenarios in the Future

After the participants had chosen their preferred scenario(s) and explained their reasons, they created future-based stories of themselves along the lines of “a day in the life of myself in this scenario in ten years’ time. . .” This related to the conversations, events and challenges of the day, and included personal events and situations. This encouraged them to embrace the scenario and think through what it would actually be like, what would be happening, with whom they interacted and how they felt.

“I wake up, log on early from home, I have only 20 e-mails, there are 14 people to manage who are geographically dispersed, communications make it even easier. I am on the board of my company and involved in high-profile mergers & acquisitions. During the day, I have lots of time spare and take my kids to the park. In the evening, I have to put kids in front of a movie and I have to work. Sometimes I sleep with my blackberry by my bed because of the time differences. I work from home 4 days a week but have a longer day in the office, that has really enabled me to be really productive. I am able to do it because my team is geographically dispersed. It doesn’t matter where I am!” KT1USA

With a little encouragement, most of the participants engaged well in the “day in the life of” stories (possibly a little too much!), as I found myself with stories spanning many pages. I was growing frustrated with the more traditional writing-up by themes and potentially losing some of this rich narrative. I began searching for an alternative that would allow me present the stories and personal accounts I had amassed.

My aim was to retain the integrity of the individual accounts and build on the three original scenarios while presenting the data in a way that was different, interesting, effective and academically acceptable. Thus I turned to storytelling.

The Stories – “A Day in the Life of Women Executives in the Future”

Harris (2007) describes storytelling as narratives that allow us to use our personal experiences with specific social-studies content to tell a story. As discussed in the methodological journey, storytelling provided the opportunity for me to take real events (in my case the views of women executives concerning their futures) and re-

tell them in ways that allowed for greater objective exploration. The method of storytelling I chose is a variant of what is known as “factional writing” or “creative non-fiction” (Hackley 2007), a form of expression that treats real people or events as if they were fictional or uses real people or events in fictional settings. All future settings are, by definition, fictional because they have not yet occurred, and may never do. I created hypothetical people in possible settings using the real comments from the telephone interviews.

I found it difficult to cover an entire day as a story; it became a list of events and meetings (I got up, I bathed the kids, I had breakfast for once, I got ready for my first teleconference, etc.) and I could not find a way to incorporate the thoughts, feelings and personal reflections of the women executives as they explored “a day in the life” of their future. I therefore focused the stories on a single meeting at a certain point in the day, from the perspectives of all three women. I chose to link up all three stories to the same meeting intentionally, because I wanted to explore whether these scenarios could co-exist simultaneously and, if so, provide “win-win” scenarios for both women executives and their organisations.

Let there be no doubt that each story is a fiction: all settings, names and details are made up. But at the same time, each story is also informed by and draws upon the actual quotes from the women executives in my research.

With all three stories, I decided to use one common setting, immediately preceding a business meeting ten years in the future. The story unfolds around the interactions of three factional female characters – “Gillian Weston,” “Sandhya Mohan” and “Kathy Coles” – who find themselves in different, yet linked, future worlds of work.

Each story corresponds to one of the three scenarios and is told from the viewpoint of one of the characters mentioned above, offering us a glimpse into their reactions to and feelings about what is taking place around them as they all attend the same meeting. Story one, “Awakening the Female Entrepreneur,” is about Gillian, and incorporates the views of the women executives in support of scenario one (“Women Executives Become Entrepreneurs”). In this story, Gillian is about to

attend a meeting with her team to pitch for new business with her former employer, “Delekto Bank.” Story two, “Women Executives on Board,” is about Sandhya, a fictional character who incorporates the views of the women executives in support of scenario two, “Women executives on Corporate Boards.” Sandhya is the new CEO of “Delekto Bank” and is about to attend a board meeting in which a small entrepreneurial group led by a former colleague (Gillian) is making a business pitch. Story three, “Female Corporate Activism as a Catalyst for Change,” is about Kathy, a fictional character who incorporates the views of the women executives in support of scenario three, “Female Executives as Pioneers for Change.” As Head of Corporate Activism at Delekto Bank, Kathy is about to attend a board meeting with her colleague, Sandhya (her company’s CEO) as they consider a business pitch from Gillian’s company.

The future stories of Gillian, Sandhya and Kathy are tales of women executives and their future worlds of work. They are tales of careers, life, organisational politics, gender relations, and the relationships between women who choose different paths in their future. Each story is “imagined” based on the views expressed by dozens of female executives in my study, but each is also authentic in the sense that it represents a possible future scenario.

It could also be said that the stories are rather utopian and idealistic. The way they are woven into a single, unified narrative could imply that these are not competing versions of the future, but are in harmony and compatible with one another. I deliberately adopted this approach, because I wanted to explore a way in which the scenarios, which at first glance may seem to compete, may actually be able to co-exist. In this way it may provide more mutually beneficial solutions for women executives and their organisations to co-exist in different scenarios.

It may also be true that the scenarios may not be able to co-exist; the extent to which corporate organisations will take female entrepreneurial networks seriously is questionable (would they really be able to pull off large projects?), and would organisations be sympathetic to women who are leaving their organisations to set up on their own and expect to work with the organisation as a consultants, probably

earning more money than in their corporate role? In addition, to what extent will business drivers actually drive any change for women, and will women really bother to create change within organisations?

The stories are presented in the next section.

Story 1—“Awakening the Female Entrepreneur”

“Ten years ago, could I have ever thought this possible?” wonders Gillian Weston aloud in the solitude of her office. She answers with a resolute, “Of course I could. *I did*. I made this happen!”

Ten years ago Gillian was a frustrated, full-time banking executive and part-time wife dealing with full-time guilt and anxiety over whether she’d trodden the right path, personally and professionally.

“Ten years ago I was always struggling to do the right things for me and my husband. We wanted to start a family; we wanted to have lives outside of our careers, to be more than just our corporate titles. But I felt pressured to focus on the business, always the business, or fall behind. It’s a tough place to be, especially for a woman. I never wanted to be just another corporate animal.”

Gillian is not afraid to speak out loud, not afraid that some nosy work colleague might overhear and think her strange. This is no corporate male jungle, no private office with endless interruptions and banal office chatter. This is her home office, her space, and there’s practically no one to overhear – unless of course you consider her husband, David, who works from home like she does (and whom she knows is on a client call this very moment in his converted office space upstairs), or daughter Abby, who, at just six years old, isn’t likely to pass judgment on her mother for engaging in such a one-sided conversation.

Gillian checks her wristwatch, the latest slim-line, stainless model from Gucci. It’s nearly 3:00 p.m. Abby’s in her room playing and David’s upstairs, likely to wrap his day up in under an hour, provided his call goes well.

And Gillian?

In about ten minutes, she’ll be joined by four of her colleagues in the confines of her small, efficient office. But they won’t feel crowded. They will have plenty of “elbow

room” courtesy of their shared one-gigabyte connection. Theirs will be a virtual meeting, complete with real-time video and audio, plus the ability to share notes, documents, and even her group’s latest PowerPoint presentation. And it’s all powered by something called “VIP” (Virtually In-Person), a Web-based application that’s like “Skype” on steroids. Gillian can’t imagine how she ever got anything accomplished before things like Skype, Google Talk and “VIP” came along. Smiling, again she asks, “Would this even have been possible ten years ago?”

In the past decade, the world around Gillian has speeded up. For most, she imagines, everyday life must undoubtedly seem frenzied, with the pace of business even faster. For Gillian, however, the tempo has slowed. She controls just how frantic a pace she sets day-to-day – whether it’s pitching a business proposal, having a quiet dinner with David, attending a school event with Abby, or simply finding time alone to read a good book. She determines when she gets up, what she eats, whether she makes it to the gym for a work-out or not, whom she has business dealings with, and the extent to which her personal and professional life overlap.

“One of the benefits of being self-employed,” she muses. “And of being successful.” Technology has certainly made Gillian’s new life possible: faster, more portable computers; faster, more user-friendly and feature-rich telecommunications; faster, more reliable travel. But so has her willingness – her need – to think and work outside the box that used to encase her personal and professional life. For her, there are no more corporate boardrooms and politics; no more endless hours at work with little to show for it other than a recurring payslip; no more paying company lip-service to good causes and great ideals only to wind up defending her company’s underperformance; no more trying to play a man’s game and trying to be somebody else; no more missing anniversary dinners or birthday celebrations or school plays because of late nights or weekends at the office. Gillian’s life is now a unified entity – one with both personal and professional facets. She feels whole, invigorated, energised for what every day brings her, whether it’s a family outing, a business-only activity, her charity work, or a combination.

Gillian understands that the old ways of doing business have changed. Some may still prefer the notion of monolithic, corporate empires in a male-dominated business world. And still others – women who, like Gillian, desire to change the way business works – are trying to effect transformation from within. But that’s not for Gillian. She thinks such male, corporate constructs are outdated, ungainly colossi stacked with layers of management, redundant function, and unfulfilled and unsatisfied people. She views them as relics clinging to middling business approaches and consumed by conflicting attitudes, agendas, and ambitions. Such organisations sag beneath the weight of their underachieving masculine structures and the lack of innovative, engaged and empowered employees. They are destined to fail, she concludes; powerless to deliver on their promises.

What’s emerged are entrepreneurial networks, teams like Gillian’s, where the layers have been stripped away, revealing vibrant, focused, functional and efficient units – free-flowing consortiums of like-minded, mainly female service professionals and consultants who, at a moment’s notice, can re-configure for competitive advantage, and who can literally evolve on a project-by-project basis to meet the needs of an ever-changing marketplace. Gillian is convinced that the future belongs to such nimble, adaptable entrepreneurial networks . . . and she’s convinced *that* future is now.

In the past ten years, she’s literally seen an evolution in business practice take place right before her eyes – and she’s not only been a part of it, she has actively championed it. Call it natural selection or a natural progression, but it’s happening, and Gillian is proud to find herself at the forefront. Some may call her a pioneer, but she prefers the term “steward.” Unlike other business revolutions of the past, this has been a thoughtful, *planned* transformation. And ironically (but not surprisingly to Gillian), women have led the way.

“Men had their chance,” she thinks. “Now it’s our turn.”

Gillian’s personal and professional evolution started nearly eleven years ago. She was on a New Year holiday and, rather than take a trip with David to Paris or Athens

or Madrid, she convinced herself to attend a workshop in London. Deidre Jacobs, who at the time was a little-known life and business coach (with a little bit of ‘futurist’ thrown in for good measure), was presenting a three-day workshop series entitled “Awakening the Female Entrepreneur.” The seminar promised big ideas and even bigger solutions for women executives frustrated by the state of the corporate workplace, and Gillian was such a woman. She was unhappy with her job, with the company for which she worked, and especially with her boss (the memory of whom is still, to this day, the perfect antidote for any notions she might entertain of ever returning to a more traditional corporate role).

Gillian liked the career she had chosen: financial services. She’d always been good with numbers and understanding the intricacies of how markets and money and people interact, and how the economy tended to sink or swim based on what people did with their money, how they invested it, and where. But she did not like how the industry treated her. Essentially, she was a woman in a man’s role . . . *an outsider*. Her boss was a man, his boss was a man, and the entire executive board was male-dominated, except for the company’s Operations Director who, with her tough attitude and masculine persona, was decidedly not a role model for her.

Gillian felt stifled, with little hope for career advancement beyond her mid-level executive role, regardless of performance. She knew it; her boss knew it, and he always seemed more than willing to remind her. She was miserable at work, and often she brought this misery home with her. It pervaded her entire life, affected her marriage, her relationships with friends, and even postponed the decision to start a family. Too often, in the gloom of first light as another day of work awaited, she would find herself asking “Is this all there is for me?” The money kept her there; “golden handcuffs,” she called it. It felt too risky to change at this point in her career.

Then along came Deidre’s coaching workshop, and everything changed. Deidre was an entrepreneur herself, ahead of her time. Through discussions and coaching exercises, Gillian saw there could be more for her, that what she wanted was right in front of her, ready for the taking; that her path to fulfilment already existed, albeit

slightly different from the one she'd envisioned. Gillian needed to articulate her vision, state her intentions, and take action consistent with her values as a whole human being. The rest would fall into place.

That summer, Gillian began to create life on her terms – the life she wanted, not the one the corporate world was all too eager to hand her. At first David hadn't thought leaving the security of her job was such a great idea – “Just think what it'll do to our finances, all the years you've put in, what will people say?” – but he eventually warmed to the idea, as did her close friends and colleagues, who at first thought Gillian foolish to even consider leaving a steady executive position in one of London's top banks.

“For what, to start your own little company?” they had asked. “Do you have any idea how many businesses are started each year only to flounder? And then where will you be?”

But Gillian persisted. Deidre had done it. She had taken a risk and taken control. She had gone from working twenty-plus years in the corporate world to setting up her own business, and in five or so years she was already bidding for and winning some pretty big jobs. She'd done it by assembling a whole network of like-minded, professional women: trainers, seminar leaders, coaches and consultants that were all active, contributing members of the “team.” They supported each other, shared ideas, shared victories, shared defeats. And Deidre had done all this while managing to have a life, too – a successful marriage, two children, and time to pursue other interests, from gardening and being a housewife, to travel and even charity work. Deidre was a living example of what Gillian could be, a role model.

“That's what I wanted,” Gillian recollects. “That's what I have, it's not all been an easy ride, but I got here.”

Buoyed by Gillian's success and the growth of many other successful women entrepreneurs, four years later David finally decided to leave his corporate job to

start his own successful public relations firm, the structure of which (not surprisingly) now closely resembles that of Gillian's financial services group.

Gillian checks her watch again. There are only a couple of minutes to go before she is joined by her colleagues – four other ex-executive women who make up what Gillian has come to think of as her dream team. Each has a specific, important role on the panel: Debbie is the communicator; Lauren the number-cruncher; Jessica the trend-watcher; Audrey the project manager, the one who keeps them all pointed in the right direction; and Gillian is the big-picture person, the “visionary.” She's the one who develops the strategy and works – no, *relies* – on her team to help bring it all together.

There are no papers on Gillian's desk, which is really not a desk, but a simple work surface consisting of an oak slab stained white that's about sixty centimetres deep and a meter long and perched atop four, wrought-iron legs. On the wall directly in front of her, across the surface of the desk, is what looks like a flat-panel television screen, barely three centimetres thick and about half the size of the desk top. This is her computer monitor and e-camera, all-in-one. Sitting on the work surface is a pad-like device, about thirty centimetres square and three centimetres tall. This is her computer. A translucent screen on its sloped face serves as an auxiliary video display, electronic writing pad (complete with stylus), and keyboard interface. With a mere stroke of the stylus, she can toggle from using the pad as a touch-screen keyboard to writing by hand, to using it to navigate through the various files and programs stored on her computer or available on the Internet. At the very bottom of the pad is a slot through which she can feed paper, turning the whole thing into a printer, copier, and fax. And best of all, there are no wires, no messy tangles, making it all so very portable.

A chirp alerts Gillian that someone is trying to access her through VIP. It's Audrey, early as usual. Audrey's smiling face pops into view, filling the top left corner of the wall-mounted monitor's screen.

“Hi there!” Gillian greets her enthusiastically. From the vivid greens and bright blue colours she can see behind Audrey, it’s quite clear to Gillian that her colleague is not in her regular office, or indeed anywhere in England, given the fact that it’s mid-March. “Enjoying the sun?” Gillian asks, remembering that Audrey is in America for two weeks, taking pleasure in a stay at her holiday villa just outside Naples, Florida. She’s by the pool. In the background, Gillian can hear children playing. For a business call, she thinks, these are good sounds to hear, happy sounds – the sounds of a balanced life. “How are your kids?”

“Andrew and Tom are great, fighting as usual!” explains Audrey. “And Florida’s great, too! The weather has been fantastic, sunny, about 25 to 30 degrees every day. The kids are in the pool practically all the time—”

There’s another chirp, followed closely by a second. Two more faces pop into view: Debbie and Lauren. Each appears to be dialling in from a more traditional setting: Debbie from her home office in Bristol and Lauren from the space she uses when she does her consultancy work for another London-based firm. At only 28, Lauren is the youngest of the group to opt out after having reached director level and deciding that being on the board and having no life outside work was definitely *not* for her.

“Hi ladies,” says Gillian, and then updates the team that they are waiting on Jessica, who has yet to join them. Seconds later they all hear a fourth chirp and Jessica’s face fills the final slot across the top of the screen. They can all see that she’s *definitely* not calling from her office. Through a window behind her left shoulder, they can see what looks like dense, sub-tropical jungle.

“Did you find a connection all right?” Gillian asks.

Jessica is calling in from somewhere in Peru. She and her husband have been there for a week as part of a humanitarian mission, and they’re due to be there for at least another three. Last spring it was central Africa; the year before that Belize; next year . . . who knows?

“Loud and clear,” says Jessica.

“All goes well?” Gillian asks, but from the beaming smile on Jessica’s face, Gillian doesn’t really need an answer.

Jessica nods. “Couldn’t be better.”

“You’ll have to stream us all some pictures,” says Debbie. “Keep us posted on your adventure.”

“Will do.”

Gillian glances at her watch. It’s a little past 3:00 p.m. now. At 3:30 p.m. they will be joined by a team of executives representing Delekto Bank, one of the world’s leading equity and lending institutions. Delekto Bank and its new CEO are looking for a new strategy for one of their divisions, a new approach to spending and investing in the markets for both itself and its well-healed clients – a more socially-responsible and ethically-conscious approach. To Gillian, it seems that Delekto has finally caught on that “business-as-usual” is a thing of the past, and that doesn’t come as a surprise to Gillian. After all, she knows their new CEO, Sandhya Mohan; she has for eleven years.

“Good for them,” she tells herself. “And good for me and my team.”

Gillian and Sandhya Mohan first met eleven years ago at Deidre Jacob’s “Female Entrepreneur” workshop. Over three days, they shared a conference table, lunch, and compelling conversation. Since then their paths have crossed often, sometimes by chance, sometimes intentionally. They are very much alike – two women executives who, more than a decade ago, decided to make a difference in the world, two women who in their own unique ways *have* made a difference, albeit by taking different paths.

Gillian is convinced her group is just what Sandhya and Delekto need – they are a smart, agile unit that is not bound by corporate politics or traditional roles. They think outside the box.

But despite her familiarity with Sandhya and Delekto, Gillian knows it won't be an easy sell. While teams like hers are more and more common these days, hers is an all-female group in a traditionally all-male field. She knows one of the other bidders for the project is a large, male-dominated consulting firm. She also knows that her former employer is making a pitch, which means her ex-boss is probably heading the effort. Gillian's thinks "small world" and her stomach roils, not because she's concerned about the quality of the competition (she knows that her former employer won't be able to come close to the combination of price and value her team can offer, and doubts the consulting firm has the innovative mindset or flexibility that is the hallmark of her group), but because Delekto, despite having Sandhya at the helm, may not yet be ready to embrace such a divergence from their traditional and stuffy corporate past.

"Even tiny steps represent progress," Gillian reminds herself.

Gillian knows their bid is good, the package of services they offer unparalleled, their approach creative, and their ability to think and react on the fly unsurpassed. There's no reason for *them* not to win the bid . . . no reason at all. She feels confident that her group's bid represents their best effort, that it offers tremendous value for the client as well as tremendous upside for the team. It incorporates what's worked in the past with new, fresh ideas and it's all-encompassing – from a communications plan for both internal and external audiences to recommendations for strategic shifts in investment strategy and lending partners, so that Delekto's actions are more aligned with its stated principles. Above all, the bid is consistent with her team's values – both in a business sense and a personal sense.

A familiar thought – "Is this the right client for us?" – flickers in Gillian's mind as Lauren gives a quick personal update that she's expecting again, that child number two will be on the way in November. Gillian and her team won't work with just anyone; they made that a tenet of their work from day one. They want to work only with clients who are right for them, the type of clients who support the very same values they, as a team, espouse. They are focused on the triple bottom line, one that factors in not only financial aspects, but a client's corporate culture and deeds in the

community and environment, together with the calibre of people (as human beings) the client attracts and works with.

It's the same rationale Gillian used to assemble the core of her group. It took her well over a year – and she encountered a few misfires along the way with clashing personalities, differing levels of commitment, and differing values – but this shared vision of embracing technology, social responsibility, and remaining small and agile is what's kept her panel together and competitive for so many years.

In less than a combined 20 minutes, Lauren is able to run through the numbers, virtually walking the team through a spreadsheet one step at a time; Debbie outlines the communications strategy for announcing the new partnership to Delekto Bank's clients, shareholders *and* employees; Jessica shares her views on several regulatory issues she thinks they might bump up against (despite the sound of hammering and sawing in the background as volunteers construct a field hospital to serve the small Peruvian community where she and her husband volunteer); Audrey sends them all a chart encompassing the major project milestones (as well as retrieving an errant beach ball for her sons, without missing a beat); and Gillian runs them quickly through a short, twelve-slide PowerPoint presentation she plans to use during the meeting.

Ending with an eloquent summary that restates their intentions – to win the bid but not to compromise their values – Gillian is amazed at how truly efficient they are. This is a good team. Each player knows her role and each player delivers. These are good people, capable of doing great things. Remembering her former corporate life, she thinks, “A meeting like this would have taken three hours in some stuffy board room, with half the team too frightened to speak up and the other half too self-absorbed to listen.”

But not this group. They are happy, fulfilled . . . and that makes all the difference. In her ten years away from the daily grind, Gillian is amazed at how much more energetic and alive she feels. She can't say it has all been easy getting to this point,

but she took some risks and she persevered. As a result, her work has improved, as did her productivity and personal life.

As a couple and as individuals, she and David are happier than ever. She's not told anyone – not wanting to steal Lauren's thunder – but she's also expecting a second child. At forty-two, it's not too late. Given other choices, another path taken, perhaps it would have been. Certainly, she knew many, many women executives who were not so fortunate.

"Are we ready?" She asks the smiling row of faces across the top of her screen. Each woman nods in agreement. "Let's do it then."

With her stylus, Gillian hits the "Engage Conference" button on her keyboard. It's time to begin the meeting with Delekto Bank. Suddenly, the bottom half of her screen fills with a wide angle shot of a dimly lit boardroom that's panelled in oak veneer. She counts seven men and, to her surprise, two women (one of which is Sandhya) sitting stoically in high-back, leather chairs on one side of a glass-topped table. Gillian feels like she's caught in a time warp, as though she's slipped back ten years, returning to her corporate days.

Glancing at the woman she doesn't know and who doesn't appear particularly enthused, Gillian feels a bit of empathy, a pang of sorrow. She thinks, "That could have been me..."

As the rest of her team and the Delekto Bank panel introduce themselves, Gillian considers that business was never meant to be about big buildings and even bigger corporations. It was meant to be about people providing products and services for other people, fulfilling a need, making a contribution, feeling good about themselves, and getting something of value in return.

That's the kind of business and life Gillian enjoys more these days. That's what her team like about working with her. For them – and for more and more people like them – business has evolved. It's become more about staying true to a shared vision

and shared principles while meeting the needs of customers, rather than just making a quick profit. And it's all the more satisfying to Gillian and her peers, because women entrepreneurs have lead the way.

Gillian smiles. She sees that what she thought were leather chairs are actually upholstered in a soothing, rose-colored cloth fabric, and what's more, there are several interesting art pieces on a far wall. These are only small, subtle signs, Gillian knows, but signs of progress nonetheless. Slowly, but surely, Sandhya is making her mark. She wonders what other changes, both the modest and not so modest, her friend has introduced.

Outwardly, Gillian's smile is intended to greet the Delekto Bank representatives warmly and respectfully. Inwardly, it comes from a sense of strength, purpose, and confidence in having reached her destiny: "We're going to change their world!"

Story 2—“Women Executives on Board”

“Small world,” thinks Sandhya Mohan, as Gillian Weston’s smiling face lights up the large, flat-panel screen on the wall across from her and the rest of the Delekto Bank board. Nearly three months have passed since she last spoke with Gillian over coffee and a sandwich at a café local to the bank’s offices in New York. Sandhya was there on a business trip and Gillian was working with some of her other clients in Manhattan. At the time, she and Gillian agreed not to socialise during the bid process; each wanted the process to be totally, 100-percent above board, with no potential for questions about ethics or favouritism for friends of the CEO. Gillian would have to win or lose the bid based on merit and merit alone.

For Sandhya, transparency and authenticity are important, while remaining extremely commercial. It’s how she conducts her personal life. It’s how she conducts her business life. And by consistently modelling such behaviour, it’s how she expects others to conduct themselves. They didn’t always act that way of course, her constant source of frustration while making her way up the steep, male corporate ranks of Delekto.

“Lead by example,” she tells herself.

Sandhya knows quite a bit about Gillian but less about her team. This new kind of company, a loose formation of former female executives, is intriguing. In addition to the information gleaned from the company’s typical RFP process, she’s done some due diligence of her own. So far she likes what she sees. Gillian has assembled a diverse group of women of various ages, ethnic backgrounds, and (most importantly) talents and executive corporate experience. Those are the very qualities Sandhya looks for in her own team – except, of course, for the all-female composition, which she didn’t think would go down too well at the bank. Diversity is what she’s been striving for at Delekto ever since she came aboard as a Human Resources manager some twelve years ago. She’s always believed that a diverse employee culture – one that is not defined by gender or race, but by the myriad of talents, experiences, and ideals each individual brings to the table – is what will

ultimately catapult Delekto and other progressive companies like it to ever higher levels of success in the new millennium. With changing demographics and a war for good talent, she had been proved right. It is not a nice-to-have-people proposition to make everyone feel good, but a conscious business choice that will drive innovation and attract and retain the very best talent. A business case was easy to make, as talent and the war for its retention was one of the elements that kept her board awake on most nights.

Changing the culture of the bank was taking time. Over the past few years there have been some hefty ethics- and sex-discrimination cases alongside the government in the USA introducing legislation that spurred the UK into action, all of which really supported Sandhya's business-case arguments. In her early days as an HR Manager she used to meet a lot of resistance from many of old-school board directors (both men and women) with their traditional attitudes. Thankfully, many of them had retired and now that Sandhya was CEO at 55 years old, she wondered what many of them thought of that – a HR Manager who became the first female board director and who then worked in several divisions worldwide; and in a bank, no less!

“I did it and I did it in a way that suits who I am, my own leadership style,” she considers.

These days, by design, Delekto was much more selective about whom it works with. In fact, Delekto is adamant that it will only work with those companies and organisations that are closely aligned with its values. As the firm's new CEO, it's a precept that Sandhya embraces wholeheartedly, a guiding principle that she has infused into every facet of what the company does, at all levels. Gone is the idea of making a quick profit at any cost (although she still had to fight to ensure this was the case). Certainly, a business case must be made for everything – that's a given, and always will be – but Sandhya knows there is *more* to good business than simply making money. She's a devotee of the triple bottom line, to improving profits and revenue year-to-year in ways that are commercial, socially responsible, environmentally sound, and that contribute to changing the world for the better.

With unwavering commitment, Sandhya has advocated this philosophy ever since she emigrated from India as a child. Intuitively, she has always known that the *way* of working for businesses needed to change, that corporate politics and trickery had to disappear, and that in their place an atmosphere of values, honesty, and best practices needed to emerge. She was always accused of being idealistic, of being naive, that her industry would never change. Yet she knew that organisational cultures based on values and best practice would not only attract the best people, but also deliver the best results, it would become the definition of business success for the new millennium, a definition embraced by many other progressive leaders like her, especially women. All that was needed was someone to show the way, to make a business case for *why* this was the right course to take, be brave enough to put their head above the parapet and have an approach that was sufficiently long-term to see sustainable results.

“That someone is me.”

It’s this basic concept, this essence of an idea, that Sandhya has fought for during her time at Delekto: it’s the reason she stuck through long, frustrating weeks and months first as a Human Resources Manager and then for long, frustrating months and years as Human Resources Director, Director of Operations, a Global Head and years on the board before ultimately becoming CEO – this dream of hers, this vision of a new way of doing business, this opportunity to truly make a difference.

“And I *have* made a difference,” Sandhya realises, first glancing left and then right as the group introductions continue. The Delekto board is still predominantly male – just as it was 10 years ago – but it’s a *different* kind of board now. Back then it suffered from what she jokingly called PMS – “pale, stale and all male.” Now it’s a lively group full of creativity, new ideas, and people who share Sandhya’s ideals, values and, just as importantly, the values and ideals of Delekto’s customers. It wasn’t about male or female, but about a new way of working. Yet, in just the past four years, the number of women in management positions at the company has doubled; she’s become the CEO, there were two other women on the board, plus there were a number of very senior women who had board-level responsibilities

without all the hassle, a new version of the non-executive director role, filled by Kathy, who was sitting opposite her. This has meant huge cost savings for the bank, which used to regularly lose hundreds of women at manager level, not because they all wanted to go off and have children, but because they found something lacking in Delekto's culture. But gender is not a requisite for success on Sandhya's team; talent and the right attitude are paramount.

She figures it may have taken a woman to lead the way, to break with convention and to show that the company could be successful embracing a new philosophy, but as far as being a contributing member to the team, all she requires is a "can-do" attitude, productivity, talent and an acceptance of the corporate philosophy. For Sandhya there have been many sacrifices along the way; her family had found her ambition unsettling, she had married in her late 30s and only had one child, Thomas. In her early days, Thomas knew his nanny more than her, and she felt a constant guilt battle in never seeing him. Now Thomas was in his teens and she saw him more.

"Priorities, my job is not the be-all and end-all."

Sandhya hears Gillian wrap up her personal introduction and then launch into the first of what she promises will be a short capabilities presentation. The first of Gillian's PowerPoint slides fills the lower right quadrant of the board room screen.

"Gillian looks good; she sounds good," Sandhya thinks, and remembers when they first met at Deidre Jacob's three-day coaching and personal-development workshop.

"Wow. That was eleven years ago, already."

There, Deidre planted a seed that eventually germinated, grew, and blossomed into the career path Sandhya has followed ever since. While Gillian (and others like her) took an entrepreneurial approach to their career and life, Sandhya elected to stick it out with Delekto and transform the company's culture and way of working from the inside. With a one hundred year corporate history, Sandhya knew Delekto was already a key global financial player – perhaps somewhat misguided, of course, in some of its corporate practices – but surely such longevity, along with the security of

a big company, was an important asset. With its long history, Delekto had leverage and a certain corporate gravitas that Sandhya could put to good use to influence others . . . certainly more sway than she could hope to accrue in the short term if she was to start from the ground up with her own fledgling enterprise.

Turning ever so slightly, Sandhya winks knowingly at someone seated near the door, a spot she knows is out of the range of the video monitor. The gesture is returned by the stately-looking woman sitting there, a woman who's dressed in a pleasant peach-coloured blouse, a pair of comfortable slacks and white sneakers – certainly not your typical corporate attire. Now in her early sixties, Deidre Jacobs has served as Sandhya's mentor, executive coach and confidante for more than a decade. Without her coaching, without Deidre challenging her every step of the way over the years, Sandhya would not have been able to act on her intentions and create the future she not only envisioned for herself, but for Delekto and the business world in general.

"It's funny how things work out," Sandhya thinks, because she knows Deidre is also Gillian's coach. "Two women, same basic goals, two different approaches . . . and both very successful."

By now, Gillian is onto her third slide, a recap of her group's core values which, Sandhya is pleased to note, closely align with her own. Of course this is no surprise to her, but its good information for the others on the board to see and digest. Over the years, Sandhya has repeatedly stressed the importance of working with only those companies whose values are consistent with those of Delekto. It's become a personal *and* professional mantra. And now she's glad to see that most of the board members nod in agreement as Gillian reviews her team's guiding principles.

Sandhya remembers how she first connected with Deidre two weeks following that seminar long ago, first by e-mail, then by phone, and then an extended lunch. She remembers how their planned thirty-minute quick bite to eat turned into an extended ninety-minute discussion about the expanding role of women executives in the workplace, about trends, and about how a woman – someone with Sandhya's unique

talents, ambitions and abilities, for example – might actually go about becoming a board member, or maybe one day even a CEO.

“If you’re going to dream, dream big, right?” Sandhya fondly recalls Deidre telling her. The realist in Sandhya resisted this concept at first. The business, and especially the banking, world was numbers-driven and harsh and tough and certainly not about fluffy dreaming. Yet after a while, she came round to the idea, if she as a leader didn’t have some kind of vision of where she wanted herself and her organisation to go, how could she inspire and motivate herself and others to change?

Working with Deidre, Sandhya was able to define her intentions – what she really wanted to accomplish – and then develop an action plan to get from where she was to where she wanted to be. First on her list was to perform at her absolute best, to be an extremely business-driven HR manager with new ideas and the capacity to influence others to make things happen. She had a personal passion for diversity and wanted to start by finding ways to stop the bank’s inexorable loss of women at all levels. So she developed a business case for *why* a company such as Delekto would want to attract more women to leadership positions, and then pitched this concept to her boss and ultimately to the board. To Sandhya, the reasons were exceedingly obvious: women represented about fifty percent of the entry level into the bank but only ten percent of executives, so something was definitely going wrong! That was a lot of good people leaving. Where was the sense in that? No company, no matter how successful, could afford to do that and survive. Plain and simple, there just weren’t enough talented and qualified men around to fill the management slots. And to top it all off, stymied in their ability to become leaders in backward-thinking companies, more and more women were opting out of corporate roles and starting their own businesses, further shrinking the talent pool.

Sandhya’s plans didn’t take shape overnight. Certainly, it was a slow process, and on many occasions she felt defeated and wondered whether it was worth the effort. She met resistance from both men and women on the board and was constantly having to justify her case. It was particularly hard when the business or the economy wasn’t doing too well and she had to challenge the business to take a long-term view

of people. But over months and years, in her various HR and Operations roles, and eventually as CEO, she persisted.

She advocated the need to recruit for and retain only the most qualified candidates for positions at *all levels* of the company. Regardless of gender, Sandhya pressed for Delekto to hire only those people who were enthusiastic, motivated, capable, socially-aware, and committed to helping the company achieve its future vision. Through her mentoring, she encouraged more women to go for promotions from within and challenged any shortlists for senior positions that did not have women applicants on them.

She railed against the 24/7 culture, the grind-it-out, “don’t go home until the boss does” kinds of work days, pushing for a more flexible environment that incorporated full- and part-time positions as well as consultants, or else risk losing talented women (and men) to the ranks of the self-employed. She made a point of leaving on time and letting people know that she was spending time with her son and her husband. In short, she emphasised an approach to work that had more to do with results and productivity than with clocking a specific number of hours. This took years to make work but finally the employees and the clients appreciated the change. She stressed the need for balancing work time with personal time, for finding quiet moments each day for family, friends and oneself. This was especially important as a way of attracting qualified women and men with families. She knew that only in this way could Delekto foster an atmosphere in which people would *want* to work and *want* to remain. She demonstrated that employees who found the right balance of work and family – the balance that was right for *them* – were the most happy and most productive. And being productive didn’t mean they put in the longest hours, answered e-mails in the middle of the night, stayed at the office well past leaving time, or beat their boss to work each day. Being productive meant that an employee knew his or her role, understood the company’s goals and principles, and was given the opportunity to develop skills for the job so they could succeed. Being productive meant the employee delivered results day in and day out, in a way that was accountable to both the organisation and its customers.

Furthermore, Sandhya modelled ethical behaviour in the way she conducted all of her personal and professional relationships. She treated others as she expected them to treat her: with respect, empathy and authenticity. She taught that success wasn't always about the bottom line – it was about people, too, and respecting them as human beings. And like her, she expected the company not only to put its money (in the form of charitable contributions) where its mouth was, but to consistently recognise and honour the contributions and needs of employees and stakeholders, and to participate in various charitable and humanitarian causes around the globe.

Whether she knew it then or not, Sandhya was espousing a new way of working – a new and more ethical *modus operandi* for organisations and business leaders. Slowly but surely she was making the business case for the advent of more principled, socially-aware companies. She was convinced that if Delekto didn't do it – or was incapable of making a successful transition – others would, and it was up to her to lead the way. Delekto either had to evolve its way of doing business or face an evolutionary dead-end, the same sort of collapse that companies like Enron faced toward the close of the previous century. Stakeholders in that company may have turned a quick profit, but where were they now? Most were forever shamed; many serving prison time; and the lives of long-term employees and their families in shambles.

As a result of that collapse and others like it around the globe, people became savvier. They expected more from the companies with which they did business or in which they invested great portions of their lives and their careers. They no longer wanted to work for or buy from companies they viewed as corrupt, socially unaware or unethical. Consumers and employees knew they deserved better . . . and they began to demand it.

With a click, Gillian is onto her next slide. She begins to describe how her team meets its business obligations around the globe effectively and efficiently while leaving the smallest “carbon footprint” possible. They do it through technology, Gillian explains, only travelling when absolutely necessary. Like Sandhya, Gillian and her team have replaced the need for frequent face-to-face meetings by utilising

sophisticated video and telephone conferencing. It wasn't so long ago, Sandhya reflects, that such a meeting as this one only would have taken place face-to-face. It wasn't unknown for executives to travel to Africa or Australia for one-day meetings, which was ridiculous from an emotional and financial perspective. Certainly, technology like "VIP" and ultra-fast connections has played a major role in making such travel requirements a thing of the past, but so has demonstrating the business case for cutting back on unnecessary travel.

"Think of all we save on unnecessary airfare, hotels and meals," she tells herself. "Not to mention my stress and tiredness levels, and all that lost productivity and time away from friends and family."

Technology has also allowed employees more flexibility in terms of either working on the premises, from the field or from home. With computers and telecommunications, now almost anyone on her staff can be anywhere in the world and still contribute. Today's meeting is a perfect example. While Sandhya and her team are all assembled in central London, Gillian's team is "calling in" from a number of disparate locations. Sandhya can tell that Gillian and two others on her team are similarly ensconced in offices, most likely in and around London. But it's quite clear to Sandhya that the other two are not in London, the UK, or even on the continent. Bright sunshine, a rippling swimming pool, the laughter of children and, in one case, a sub-tropical jungle all attest to that fact.

Gillian's nearing the end of her presentation, which is short and sweet – just as Sandhya expected . . . and as she prefers. As a visionary, big-picture person – someone who, quite literally, wants to change the world and re-shape the future of business – she has little patience for self-aggrandisement or platitudes. For her, it's all about being real, about knowing who you are and being true to your values both personally and professionally. That's why, on most days, she can be found in either a pair of trousers and shirt or a modest dress, rather than the typical corporate power suit. That's just not her style . . . it's not who she is; it's not her authentic self.

Years ago, as Operations Director, she relaxed the dress code for anyone engaged in internal activities to business casual. Now, as CEO, business casual, whether for external or internal activities, is the rule rather than the exception each and every day. After all, when it comes to the new way of doing business, it's no longer about the packaging – it's about being real, being true to your values, and about what's inside and the actions you take, all the way down to the kind of clothes you wear.

As her turn to introduce herself and the Delekto team nears, Sandhya feels her energy levels rise. It's not from fear or anxiety, but from a sense of unbridled possibility. This is another chance for her to lead by example, another chance to see first-hand the fruition of all the hard work she's put in. She feels as though the business world has finally woken up to the need for women leaders – whether in an entrepreneurial setting or more traditional corporate environments – and to the need for companies to be more socially aware, responsive and responsible in order to gain a competitive edge.

Personally, Sandhya hopes Gillian's group wins the bid. For her, it would be a joy to collaborate with her friend during Delekto's next evolutionary cycle – for two such strong women leaders to pave the way.

“If it's in the cards, so be it,” she thinks. “If it's the right thing to do, if it makes business sense for us and for them, if it supports the triple bottom line, then it will happen.”

Hers is a singular voice in the decision process, but she also knows that now, more than ever, her board shares a common voice, one that's grounded in the solid principles she's championed so effectively. And whether this bid works out for Gillian or for Delekto, it's a good place – no, a *great* place, she tells herself – for the business world to be in.

Sandhya certainly has gone out on a limb with her road-less-travelled philosophy over the years, but for her and for Delekto it's made all the difference – as she hopes it will for countless others. Results and an unerring ability to sleep at night don't lie.

Story 3—“Women Executives drive change from the “Inside Out”

Kathy Coles is not like other people in the room. Of this she is certain. For starters, she’s an American working in London. She has been for nine years, and no one else on the Delekto Bank board can claim that, not even their new CEO, her long-time friend and personal mentor Sandhya Mohan. Kathy, who used to work at the bank’s head office in New York, knows this business inside out and is a woman who goes after what she wants. She’s been called brash, arrogant and over-confident in her time, and certainly working in the UK she’s had to tone down her style somewhat. Secondly, Kathy’s a lesbian – not that being a lesbian seems to matter much to anyone these days – but the fact that the seven board members present, aside from Sandhya and her coach Deidre Jacobs (both of whom she knows are *not* lesbians) are men, makes her pretty certain she’s the only one with that particular sexual orientation in the room. These two facts make Kathy smile; a few years ago, an American, female lesbian would have had no place on this board. No one would actually have said that, of course, but it was true.

For Kathy, as a long-time member of the Delekto Bank employee family who had recently left the bank (again!) to explore a non-profit foundation in Africa specialising in micro credit for women entrepreneurs there, it was with some amusement and secret delight that she had secured this new kind of non-executive board member position. It’s Kathy’s differences and unique perspective that make her such an indispensable resource to the company. It’s a role she relishes. It’s the role she was meant to fill. She’s in the position of having all the power of a Delekto board member (and some would say her power exceeds that of some board members) without having any of the obligations or typical headaches of the position. She has no department to oversee, no staff to manage, no earnings targets to hit – and yet she controls tens of millions of pounds of the company’s annual budget and is sought for her expertise and advice by leaders within Delekto and throughout the industry. It’s all a little surreal at times if you ask her, being in such a prime position to affect change throughout an entire organisation . . . and beyond.

“Too good to be true,” is a term that comes to mind when she thinks about her position. But then she has to remind herself, “You didn’t get here by accident. You’ve done some good stuff, some important stuff. You’ve worked hard and helped make a lot of difference in many, many ways.”

Basically, Delekto could not afford to lose her. The years of expertise, contacts and client relationships, as well as her public face of the company (Kathy was great with the press) were, shall we say, indispensable. The board tried their best to tempt her to stay with a board-level promotion, money and benefits, but this didn’t drive Kathy, not at this point in her life; she didn’t want the hassle. But the lure of a flexible-hours position, a unique project-by-project approach and board-level power, well “*who could resist?*” Kathy was delighted when she was approached by the board to take this newly designed position. Throughout her career, Kathy had advocated for workers – especially women – who had been side-lined because they didn’t want the traditional career path. The attitude had been “if you don’t want to get to the board, then what is the point?” Kathy knew this was power-crazed nonsense, and that it caused the loss of a huge amount of talent over the years.

As the self-proclaimed “conscience of the company,” on most days Kathy spends her time finding ways for Delekto to do more business while being a good corporate citizen within the many locations it serves, whether here in the UK or the USA, and especially in emerging markets and the developing world. By rule (and it’s a rule she helped establish several years ago) any such causes must be aligned with Delekto’s corporate values and remain consistent with the company’s underlying mission to support customers and bring value for stakeholders. On a personal level, Kathy cares little about the value prospect. “Really, now, how much more money do our investors actually need when there are so many in the world that go without?” she often wonders. Instead, she’s mostly interested in the humanitarian aspect of her role. It’s the activist inside her, she knows, trying to come out and stifle her more business-oriented side. Still, she’s been in business long enough and she’s savvy enough to realise that without continued business success, there would be little money left for Delekto (or any company, for that matter) to invest in *any* worthy causes.

When she's not directly involved in Delekto projects, she often finds herself consulting with other organisations, and it's something Sandhya encourages; she says it brings new ideas and fresh perspectives into Delekto. She has a role that actually allows her to work for other companies, as long as there is no direct conflict or competition. It has all the beauty of working for herself without the money and risk headaches – perfect. So maybe two or so days a month, Kathy presents seminars on the virtues of corporate giving or developing the leadership skills of executives; on others she delivers keynote speeches promoting the business case for corporate ethics and corporate responsibility; and on really adventurous days, she might even address a session of parliament (as she's done once already).

It's all pretty heady stuff, this role of corporate emissary, for a transplanted girl from Brooklyn, New York who at one time had no idea where she or her career were going, if anywhere.

Today, Kathy finds herself sitting in on a pitch meeting with a team Delekto is considering hiring to handle its new investment strategy, a decidedly more socially-responsible and environmentally conscious approach to lending and investing, particularly in struggling and underdeveloped regions of the world. As a non-executive board member, Kathy doesn't always attend board meetings, unless they are of particular interest or unless another board member asks her to, especially Sandhya. This meeting meets both of those conditions.

She's been carrying out her own formal and informal review of Gillian Weston's financial services consortium and, so far, she's pleased. From what she's discovered, Kathy suspects Gillian has an entrepreneurial spirit not dissimilar from her own spirit of activism. They appear to share similar values – a focus on a triple bottom line of profits and revenues, along with social and environmental responsibility – with a common desire to do the *right things* in a business world rife with people willing only to do the *wrong things*. Further, each sees the emergence of strong, effective leaders as the necessary catalyst for this kind of change.

But Kathy needs to be sure. These entrepreneurial groups are new to Kathy, the concept of entrepreneurs coming together for projects seemed a good idea but without the structures and processes of the normal business, could they deliver, and is such an approach sustainable? Are the values of Gillian's group truly in alignment with Delekto's? Can they deliver on what they promise? Or is this all just lip service? If Gillian and her unit *are* the real thing, then working alongside them makes business and ethical sense. They are just what Delekto needs – talented, nimble, forward-thinking, and focussed on making socially and environmentally sound business choices. But Kathy is realistic and plays devil's advocate: "*Let's not get carried away here.*" she thinks, as she mentally plans her most challenging questions for Gillian's team.

As she listens to Gillian and her team introduce themselves one by one, Kathy thinks back to when she first arrived to the UK from America, disillusioned and desperate to find her place in the world after several years of bouncing between mid-level financial services jobs for Delekto in New York's financial district. Not wanting to fall into yet another job she didn't love, and lacking the desire or the intestinal fortitude to make a go of it alone, on a lark she joined a New York and London-based international charitable foundation, "Hands Across the World."

Smart, capable and ambitious, Kathy was looking for some sort of direction, a fresh start. She'd never done charitable work before, but something inside – her inner voice – told her, "*This is the path for you!*" For three years it was. She travelled throughout Africa, Central and South America, and even the Middle East. She witnessed first-hand what a group of committed, enthusiastic, diverse individuals could do – what a difference they could make in the lives of so many. They might have had limited resources, but with big hearts, even bigger resolve, and a range of talents and expertise, they accomplished much. Kathy grew confident and poised. She developed a knack for public speaking, for facilitating and leading groups, for building consensus where there was none. In short, she became a *leader*.

For her, it was a life-changing three years, a period she looks back on fondly and frequently; a period that set the stage for everything she's been able to accomplish since.

Returning to the UK from a stint in Africa, she discovered that Delekto Bank was looking for a Corporate Diversity Officer. Curious but sceptical, she responded to the advertisement; after all, she knew the business and liked the company – it was the role she had before she didn't like. After all, this was certainly not a time when corporate diversity and responsibility were the norm, at least not in any real or meaningful way. Business scandals were rocking the world, from Japan to America to the UK, and seemed to fill the financial pages and televised news round the clock. Consumers and corporate types alike were preoccupied with what was *wrong* with business, not with what was right. Many began to believe that all business was corrupt, and that all business, at heart, was rotten – and on some days, even Kathy began to wonder if they might be right. She was excited about the position, as long as it wasn't just “lip service,” a position created to make them look like they were doing *something*.

Always one to confront the status quo, the Delekto position sounded like just the kind of challenge Kathy needed to put what she had learned about people, about leadership, and team-building with her “Hands Across the World” experience into practice. Perhaps the business world was where she could make the most impact. Perhaps, in her own way, she could transform the mess left by others into something far greater.

During the interview process, she met Sandhya, then Delekto's Human Resources Director. Sharing her vision for the future of role of leaders in the workplace, Sandhya had impressed Kathy so much that Kathy told her she absolutely had to have the job. Kathy's values, Sandhya's values, and the values Sandhya was working to instil in Delekto were all in alignment. She was convinced this was more than mere coincidence . . . it had to be destiny.

“It’s not just corporate change we’re about,” she would later say to Sandhya and any other enlightened members of the Delekto management team who would listen. “We’re evolving. And evolution, my friend, takes time . . . only the strongest survive.”

In the early days, having Sandhya as a mentor and confidante was invaluable to Kathy’s personal and professional growth. She taught Kathy about persistence and patience, that time was a pendulum that would eventually swing in the direction she wanted. She taught Kathy about possibility and the need, sometimes, for leaders to create possibility and opportunity where none exist. After all, that’s what Sandhya was doing. Perhaps together they could bring about great change at Delekto and then . . . who knows where? It sounded wonderful, but Kathy knew not everyone was on board; there were regular rumours that Sandhya was going to leave, and Kathy could see the long hours that Sandhya was frequently putting in to overcome blocks and resistance from above.

One of the first things Kathy did in her diversity role was to look at the issue of the number of women who were leaving the business. This wasn’t good for the bank; it was costing them a fortune after putting so much into their training and development. Kathy mobilised a network group of women, mostly managers and mid-level executives, who wanted more for themselves and more from their company. Kathy brought in professional speakers, facilitated monthly sessions, and implemented professional-development programmes, such as career-planning workshops and leadership-coaching training. Starting with a fledgling group of 12 members, she grew it to more than 30 women in a year. The network met with a lot of initial scepticism from mainly men and some women. Men felt it was sexist and women felt they didn’t need or want it. The network responded by addressing whether the issues were different for men and women and invited men to participate in the debate.

Slowly, Kathy transformed a group of formerly frustrated, dissatisfied female professionals who were on the brink of leaving the bank into a motivated and empowered network brimming with ideas and vim and vigour. Some great business

ideas arose from the network, and when it was featured in the press it contributed to women being attracted to work for Delekto. Several women ascended to leadership positions within the company and many attributed their extended career at the bank to the support network and development. When there was a potential sex discrimination case against the bank, the network contributed to the mediation and resolution of the case. Kathy now had her board's full attention . . . but what to do with it?

Kathy wanted an expansion of her role. Diversity was not enough. She was making a difference for the employees of the bank, and indirectly their customers, but a company this big working in so many countries and making millions of dollars, in her view, needed to make a difference to global issues like poverty, education and global warming. After a few years, she was made Delekto's "Corporate Diversity and Activism Officer." Now she was cooking!

Traditionally, each year Delekto allocated cash for what it deemed to be worthy causes. Often, this was done with little forethought for maximising impact and goodwill. In her new role, those same funds now flowed through Kathy and, best of all, she essentially had the discretion to spend the money as she saw fit. Intuitively, she knew there had to be *more* the company could do beyond simply donating money and shaking hands with gleeful recipients for a photo-op each year. Where was the impact? Where could Delekto do the most good for itself and for others?

Turning to her internal network of newly-empowered, emboldened female executives, the group crafted a "corporate giving" mission statement to govern the rules for donations and what constituted a worthy cause. Spouting ethics, social awareness, and environmental stewardship, the "Rules for Giving" incorporated many of those values Sandhya was championing in her own way as the only female representative on the Delekto Board. She took this into focus groups all over the company, and the starting point given by the women's network pioneered the way for a truly consultative effort by the bank's employees in how they wanted to allocate their funds to charities. As a result, the collective acceptance and associated positive culture shift were enormous.

In time, like Sandhya (who would soon be named the company's Director of Operations), Kathy began to feel the wheels of progress turn. She began to see how, in her own way, she was changing the way Delekto did business. Women executives were gaining influence, and they weren't doing it by having to claw their way to the top and become "Queen Bees." In her own way, Kathy had made possible what Delekto's predominantly masculine (and that includes women) leadership had been unable or unwilling to do, namely, to cultivate the company's incredibly talented and diverse pool of employees, to provide them with the training, skills and opportunities they needed to perform at peak capacity and make a difference to the outside world.

In her first four years in the role of Corporate Diversity and Activism Officer, Kathy tripled Delekto's corporate giving and made a strong business case for why a strategy of social responsibility was essential to Delekto's enduring success. For one initiative, she bussed the company's entire senior management staff into a depressed area of London for a two-day meeting, an area that would benefit not only from a straight charitable contribution from Delekto, but from the development and promotion of innovative lending products designed to encourage the kinds of investments necessary to revitalise several decaying neighbourhoods. Having "lived" it, having experienced it first-hand for two days – much in the same way Kathy experienced dramatic need first-hand with her "Hands Across the World" work – Delekto's corporate team voted unanimously to make revitalising such under-developed areas a company priority. For Delekto, it made both ethical sense and business sense. As a result, within a year customer loyalty increased demonstrably, employee satisfaction soared, and Delekto's reputation as an industry leader skyrocketed.

Three years ago, with the blessing of the Delekto Board, Kathy went external with her women's network, opening membership to female executives and professionals from other companies. Membership quadrupled. Kathy became busier than ever, and she hired three "facilitators" to assist in coordinating schedules, running meetings, and conducting training. Overnight, Delekto vaulted into a leadership role as a pioneer for fostering the development of effective and powerful female executives.

More recently, Kathy's been given free reign to explore similar investment revitalisation approaches for Delekto's work in the emerging markets of West Africa, China and India. Fundamentally, this ties in closely with Kathy's desire to be an activist, to lead change, and to innovate. Looking back, had she tried to go it alone all those years ago, to start her own company, there's no way she could have done even a small fraction of the good she's accomplished by sticking it out with Delekto.

Despite what some might perceive to be a strong entrepreneurial streak, she's always preferred to reserve her professional risk-taking for efforts *inside* the company (where she can make a bigger impact) rather than to go solo. Occasionally, she's toyed with the idea of consulting full-time, perhaps going "international." Maybe in time that will come, but right now she's in a pretty good place. Her Delekto colleagues respect her, they trust her, and above all else they value her opinion and her counsel.

"That's not so bad, I guess."

What amazes her most is that now in this new, enlightened era she's no longer scorned because she's a woman in a man's world; nor does her sexual orientation have any bearing on what she does professionally. Years ago, that wasn't the case – being a woman and being exposed as a lesbian was a source of fear, a challenge to overcome. But now she's simply Kathy Coles, doing her job, doing her part, being herself. The politics and back-stabbing so prevalent a decade ago (and one of the main reasons many women didn't actively seek out positions of leadership) are a faded memory of the past. The Delekto board has heard her voice; other companies have heard her voice, even political types have heard her voice, and they've all come to realise how necessary and important corporate activism is to the health of a company's bottom line.

Of course in newly emerged markets like China or India, male-female gender issues are still rearing their ugly heads. She can see it happening. But rather than fear such an occurrence, she views it as an opportunity to spread her message further – the

message that women business leaders have arrived and their voices won't be silenced. It's a harbinger of things to come, and you either accept the change or fall by the wayside. Business success is no longer about what gender you are, it's about the people you employ, the talents of your workforce, the essential good that your organisation embodies, and the willingness and ability of your company's leadership to leave the world a better place.

Looking back on the last ten years, it's clear to Kathy that women have finally claimed the kinds of leadership roles they've always wanted, from managerial positions and senior executives, all the way to CEO. And they've done it on their own terms, from driving the change themselves and not waiting for the male CEOs and boards to do it for them. A decade or two ago, this would have been unthinkable, except for a few token female executives here and there.

All in all, Kathy feels good about the role she's played in this transformation, and she's done it without compromising her principles – she simply defined her role, created a niche, and lead by example. Others may want titles like VP and CEO – and if that's what they choose, good for them – but titles aren't for Kathy. They never have been and never will be. She's more interested in influencing change by working with people at all levels, from the CEO to managers, from secretaries to the cleaning staff. Titles are too constricting. They get in the way; they make her less accessible. She'd feel as though she'd have to live up to the expectations of the title, rather than simply be herself and do her “thing.” Hers is a free-flowing personality. She wants the freedom to be the person she needs to be at any given time, the person – the voice – that's right for any given situation: whether it's motivating women to ramp up their careers and realise their dreams, or inspiring companies to respect all facets of their employee and customer families, whether male or female.

Smiling, Kathy looks first at Sandhya and then to the screen at Gillian. Like her, both share similar values and similar visions of the future for women and business. Like her, each has taken a unique path to make their future visions real. Each has traversed a path Kathy could have taken, but mobilising others and creating opportunities for women to lead the way is more her style. In essence, she has re-

defined the role of corporate activism in the business world. It's no longer good enough for a company to bring in a few speakers or to contribute to a handful of community projects each year. Corporate activism has become something much greater – it's become a conduit for change, a catalyst for engaging in social, environmental and technological efforts designed to promote social awareness, environmental stewardship, engender goodwill, and positively affect a company's bottom line.

“That's what it's all about, my friends,” she thinks, paraphrasing her own favourite line as she subtly makes eye contact with each member of Gillian's team. “Evolution takes time . . . and only the strongest, the most able to adapt, survive.”

Summary

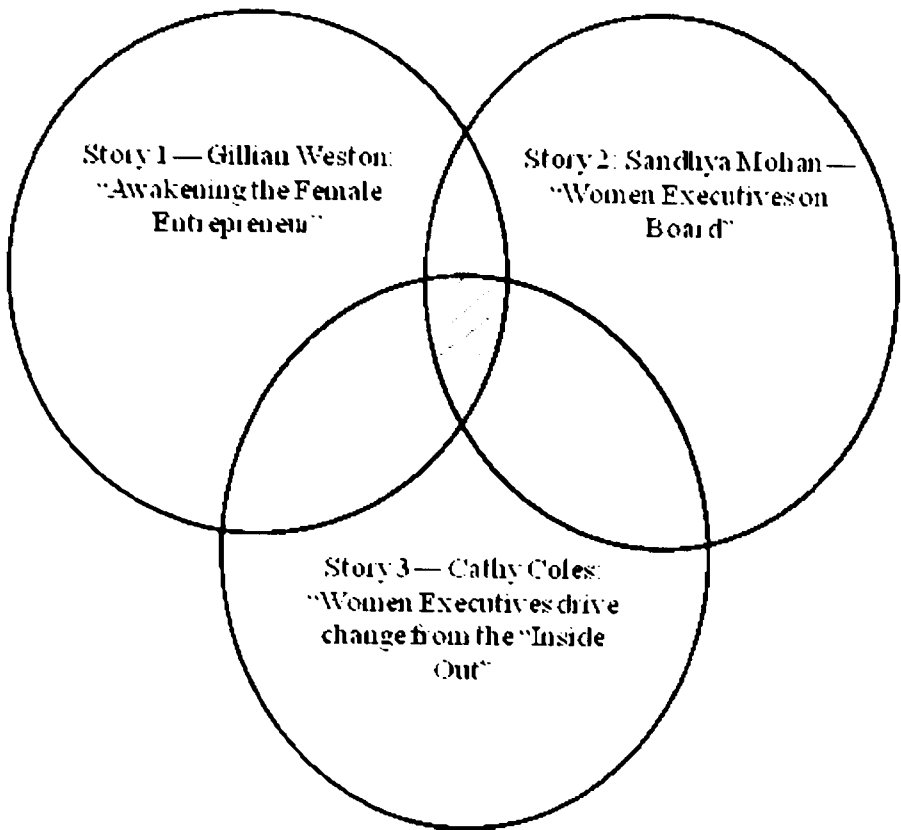
Each story builds upon a scenario and highlights a number of themes that were identified earlier in the research (see also table 6 on p. 114).

Table 8: The Scenarios and Stories and their associated themes: Source The Author

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| Story 1— Gillian Weston: “Awakening the Female Entrepreneur” (Builds on scenario 1 – The Entrepreneurial World) | Story 2: Sandhya Mohan: “Women Executives on Board” (Builds on scenario 1 – The Business Case World) | Story 3— Cathy Coles: “Women Executives drive change from the “Inside Out” (Builds on scenario 3 – The Change Agents World) |
| Women’s Attitudes | Business Case/Big Picture for Companies | Business Case/Big Picture for Companies |
| Men’s Attitudes | Men’s Attitudes | Men’s Attitudes |
| Women Entrepreneurs & Social Values | | USA/UK Differences in Women |
| Role Models | Role Models | Role Models |
| Coaching, Mentoring & Personal Development | Coaching, Mentoring & Personal Development | Coaching, Mentoring & Personal Development |
| Workplace Flexibility; Work Life Balance | Workplace Flexibility; Work/Life Balance | Workplace Flexibility; Work/Life Balance |
| | Org. Culture Changes; Male & Female Collaboration | Org. Culture Changes; Male & Female Collaboration |
| | Demographics | |
| Women’s Career Paths | Women’s Career Paths | Women’s Career Paths |
| | | Women’s Networks |
| Women’s Leadership Style | Women’s Leadership Style | Women’s Leadership Style |

Despite the stories having different “characters,” contexts and backgrounds, the table above demonstrates that each story has a number of common themes, albeit represented in different ways, depending on the individual character. This is important, as it shows that a theme such as, for example, Women’s Career Paths manifests itself differently in each woman. The stories demonstrate three possible career paths that are mutually beneficial to all parties.

Figure 12: Overlap of Stories: Source The Author



The shaded area in the figure above represents possible mutual benefits of the three stories (and their associated scenarios) coexisting. Although one could perhaps be accused of idealism in this instance, rather than the scenarios being in conflict with each other and not enabling the other to exist, this approach may mean that individual women do not have to adhere to a “one size fits all” paradigm and instead find a future world of work that not only suits their individual goals and aspirations but also fits in with the needs of their organisation and other women.

The scenarios were expanded into narratives that function as a tool that provides a mental picture of what could happen, while still allowing for flexibility for the individual. They are however, still stories, visions or pictures in the mind’s eye, and there is little information about how they may actually be achieved in practice. This was the focus of the next section, the creation of route maps, which detail how one can get from here (where I am now) to there (where I want to be).

Route Maps: “Getting from Here to There”

In building the scenarios and writing the stories, it became quite clear to me that articulating alternative possible futures, whether as an organisation or as an individual, gives people hope, a level of control, and a sense of something to work towards. Even if the scenarios are pessimistic, they still enable decisions to be made and alternative actions to be taken, and afford a clear view of what needs to be avoided. Thus the creation of scenarios as a future point for executive women to steer towards or away from is important: “How do you know how to get somewhere if you don’t know where you are going?” However, once an executive woman or indeed her organisation has decided that a certain scenario is desirable at some point in the future, the next step is to determine what needs to happen – that is, what actions can be taken to get from here to there?

The scenarios and stories are not an end in themselves; they only become meaningful if they lead to strategies that result in real action. As Godet and Roubelat (1996, p. 165) describe, “the wedding of passion and reason, of heart and mind” is the key to successful action. My study had thus far attempted to wed passion and reason, heart and mind, but what of successful action? How could the information explored so far actually support executive women in the achievement of their alternative futures? This led to the final stage of the journey, the route-maps focus-group sessions.

As described earlier in the methodological journey, I organised two route-maps focus groups at The Women’s Library in London’s East End, UK (this was the same venue that I had used three years earlier to conduct the focus group after the Delphi questionnaires). I sent e-mail invitations to the attendees of the earlier Delphi survey, the previous focus group, and the scenario-testing interviews (two of whom were from New York, USA), plus two new participants. The new participants were referred by those who had been involved in the research previously. All participants

were either current women executives in banking and professional services or women entrepreneurs who had previously held these executive positions.

The morning focus group dealt with “Awakening the Female Entrepreneur” and the afternoon focus group combined “Women Executives on Board” & “Women Executives as Catalysts for Change.” The first focus group, held in the morning, explored story one, dealing with female entrepreneurs. Participants in this session were a mix of women entrepreneurs and corporate executives. This session had eight attendees (of the twelve that were expected). Two dropped out the day before, and two never showed up on the day. Of the eight who attended, four had participated in the scenario telephone interviews.

The second session, held in the afternoon, consisted of women executives and one women entrepreneur, and explored scenarios two and three, “women on board” and “women as catalysts for change,” respectively. The session had seven attendees (of the twelve expected). Five dropped out, either the day before or on the day itself. Three of those present had participated in the scenario-testing telephone interviews, and three had also participated in the morning focus group in addition to the afternoon one.

Participants in the morning session were asked to explore route maps for “Story 1—Awakening the Female Entrepreneur.” The first step was for the group to re-read the story and identify any common themes or attributes brought to mind by the story which the participants deem necessary for the future scenario to unfold as expected. The goal would then be to consider these themes and posit specific actions or ideas to make them come to fruition.

One participant, commenting on her reaction to the story, said she was impressed by how it depicted women:

“Women being true to themselves and being honest with each other and respecting each other and not pretending that they’re not on holiday, when they are. I like the idea of not having to put on a mask, about people integrating and working in the way that they feel comfortable, in terms of values and in terms of work content. (For them) it doesn’t have to be separate from life, it’s just ‘what they do.’ Life is just a singular entity.” CR1UK

“The one thing I noticed was it’s life and work together. It’s not work/life balance, it’s one thing.” GR1UK

“I felt that if (Gillian’s) company or the team wasn’t going in the direction that they wanted to go in, they had such a sense of personal vision and clarity that they would seamlessly make a transition to something else, because they were following their own path which, at this point in time, just happened to connect or coincide with three or four other people.” CR1UK

Another participant noted the inclusion of easy, portable technology in the story and that, when combined with the attitudes and values espoused by Gillian’s team, overall “they were a much more productive, more effective group of people.”

The five major themes identified and named by the group for story 1 were as follows:

- *Self-activation/Self-initiation*

This theme circulated around ideas of self-confidence, referred to as self-activation and initiation by the group.

- “The characters show self-determination, they do things on their own terms” AR1UK
- “There are no apologies and fun is allowed.” CR1UK

This aligned with ideas generated in the focus group and scenario 1 of women demonstrating a level of empowerment and taking control of their career decisions.

- *Life Integration*

More than work/life balance, participants felt that time had more of an integrative quality, whereby life and work merged together. There were no apologies for having a life outside work, and in fact it was celebrated.

“No one pretends they don’t exist outside of work. Family is in the picture. Their whole lives are merged; it doesn’t feel like work. Work is part of life, it’s integrated. There are no boundaries; they are content, and there are no masks.” CR1UK

According to the group, the women executives in this story had found a career option that integrated their family life and outside interests, and this was important to the participants.

- *A New Kind of Company Culture & Structure*

Participants commented on the flexible structure created by the group of entrepreneurs who had limited formal legal ties and had still managed to create a culture of trust and respect between them.

“Gillian’s team demonstrates a culture of absolute trust. They use easy, portable technology; they are mobile and not tied down to one spot or location.” ER1UK

“Their culture is aligned with their values; they are walking the talk. There is linked independence on the team; they have agreed to roles, and there’s not the traditional “power” over employees. The environment has a lot less “crap” and fewer overheads to deal with. There is clear respect for others and what they want to do. Gillian’s team is agile, adaptable, flexible, nimble and free-flowing.” GR1UK

The group discussed how traditional concepts of power and authority within the story were replaced with a more collaborative approach, whereby highly skilled people with matching values have created a high-performance environment. They felt this was aided by technology, the small size and perceived low overheads of the team.

- *Sharing of Personal Values*

The group discussed what it was that held Gillian’s team together and they decided that it was their like-minded values, which they perceived were highly focused on ethics, balance, making a difference, challenge, mutual respect and working together.

“Gillian’s team emphasises ethics and corporate responsibility.” “They all share like-minded values.” ER1UK

The group felt that Gillian’s team would use their values in a variety of different ways, and these might be to make difficult decisions, recruit new people into the team and choose the clients and projects that they wanted to work on.

- *A 21st Century Vision*

With regard to these stories being ten years into the future, the group felt that some of the themes were likely to happen in ten years' time, and in fact some could already see certain elements already emerging within their organisations.

“There is a sense of east meets west and a global perspective. Ten years from now, diversity rules. CSR and environmental reporting is the norm. The pace of change is high and requires flexible and agile workers and companies.” FR1UK

Overall, the reaction to story 1 was positive and somewhat aspirational in nature. After the group had articulated the main story themes and their underlying attributes, I asked each participant to write down on individual post-it notes all the obstacles and barriers they could think of in terms of women executives achieving story 1. The group seemed to find this step easy, coming up with plenty of potential obstacles and barriers; I only hoped they could come up with as many solutions! The post-it notes were placed on a wall, and later collapsed by the group into two broad categories, one pertaining to mindset and the other to risk. Participants then split into two groups and brainstormed ideas on how to overcome either mindset or risk.

Mindset was defined by the group as,

“Having the right mental attitude to think bigger and take risks. Internally by having self-belief and confidence, and externally by having support and an understood and shared vision.”

The obstacles named by the mindset group on post-it notes were “self doubt, fear of failure (financial and credibility),” “poor self-belief by women: Who do you think you are? Am I allowed to enjoy my life?”, “lack of confidence, believing the doubters,” “the duty to stay and fight in the corporate world” and “being stuck in the wrong thing but not finding the time to create an exit plan.”

“Risk” was defined by the group as

“Outside factors and the ability to take a chance, to do something different out of your comfort zone when you don’t always know the outcome.”

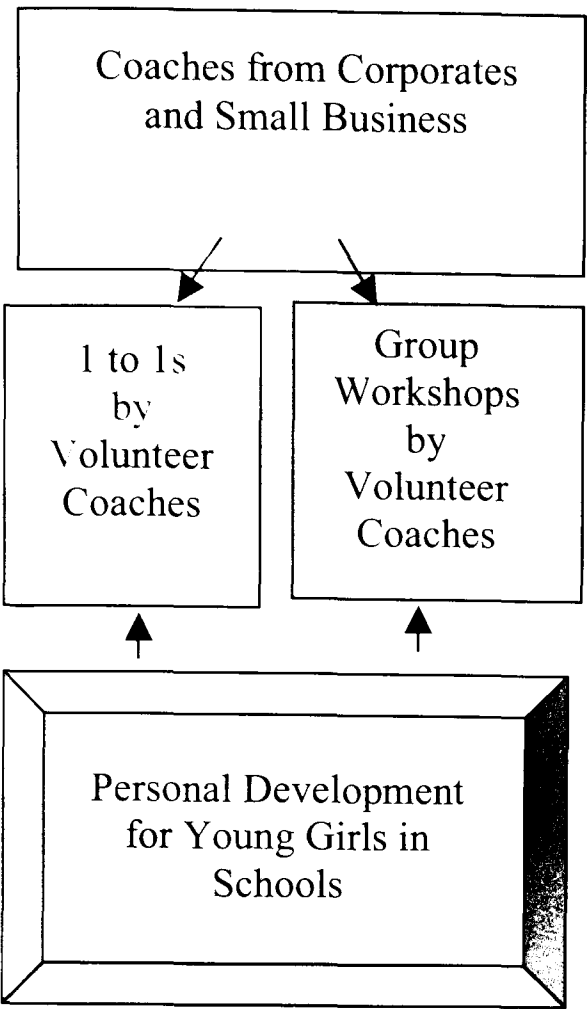
The obstacles named by the risk group on post-it notes were “negative male perceptions of women,” “big is best, organisations are safe and risk-free and you can be in a more influential position,” “society recognises organisations and not entrepreneurs,” “it’s too risky, job security, timing (when to make move), financial worries,” “how do you market yourself against all the competition out there?”, “there is a lack of support from partner/family,” “lack of start-up funding and a lack of network,” “not wanting to go alone, needing to find a business partner” and “technology is not there yet so I can work well remotely.”

In general, the mindset obstacles centred mainly around the women executives’ own internal beliefs and confidence level, whereas risk obstacles centred on more external factors like the perception of men, society and the need to get networks and resources to start a business.

These obstacles were an interesting contrast to notions of women being naturally good at setting up their own businesses which arose in the telephone interviews. I asked each group to brainstorm ideas for overcoming the obstacles of mindset and risk. They then picked one idea from their brainstorm list – the one that they felt would have the biggest impact on achieving the future story – and developed it further.

The idea for overcoming mindset was to “Create Entrepreneurial Spirit in Young Women by Introducing Coaching into Schools.” This would be achieved by introducing personal-development coaching into schools. In order to create a 10-minute presentation, they were then asked to imagine that they were a sought-after group of networked entrepreneurs pitching their big idea to the Rt. Hon Ruth Kelly, the then UK Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and Minister for Women, who has asked them to consult her on what she should do next to support and grow the number of women entrepreneurs.

Figure 13 “Create Entrepreneurial Spirit in Young Women by Introducing Coaching into Schools” Recreated from flipchart from Route Maps Session



Echoing the sentiments of most in the group, one participant argued that this idea would

“Lead to more confident young women starting their own businesses earlier. It will influence their life choices, reach them while in an optimum learning zone, create possibilities for them, and provide role models.” CR1UK

As to how to make this happen, they suggested developing coaching-style workshops led by qualified professional coaches for girls when in secondary school. Implementing such a programme on a widespread basis, participants contended, would most likely need to be funded by the government and implemented by teachers and voluntary coaches from small coaching companies (or internal coaches from large corporations as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility efforts to link with the local communities). Workshop topics likely would include “self belief,” “risk-taking” and “confidence.”

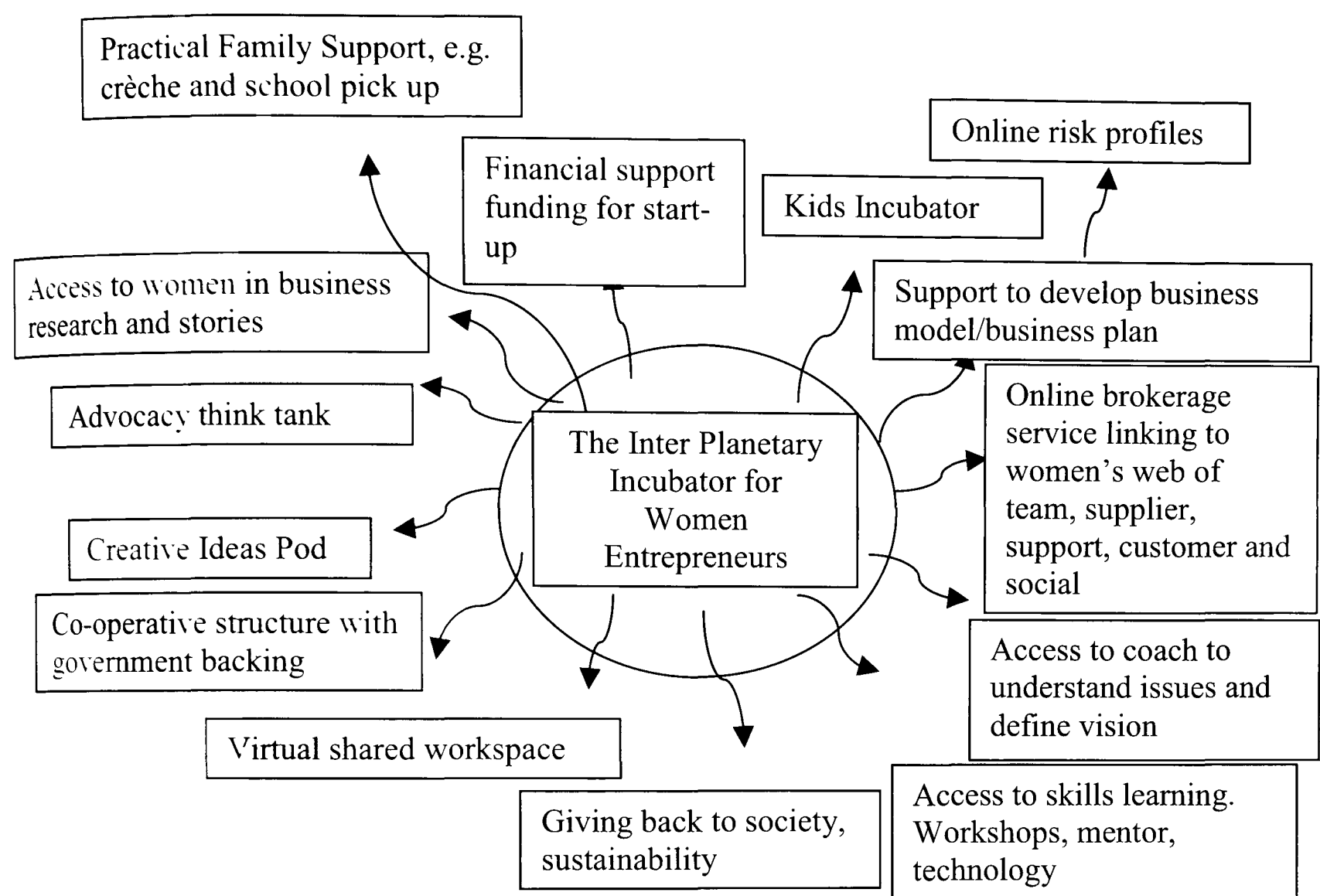
Additionally, the programme would offer one-to-one coaching for both girls and boys who want to start their own businesses, thereby encouraging entrepreneurial spirit at a young age, and bring women entrepreneurial role models and speakers into schools. As a next step, they suggested that over the next ten years (2007 to 2017) a research framework on feasibility be conducted, with funding options examined, and a pilot readied by 2010, with roll-out no later than 2012.

The idea for overcoming risk was the creation of an “Inter-planetary Incubator for Women Entrepreneurs.” This would aid women executives through the start-up phase of a new business. The group’s vision was to create an

“Affirming work environment for women that recognises and celebrates women entrepreneurs and helps to mitigate risk.”

Such an effort might consist of a brokerage service of sorts, linking prospective women entrepreneurs to a range of services designed to support and create women-friendly business models and business plans.

Figure 14: “Inter-planetary Incubator for Women Entrepreneurs” Recreated from Flip Chart at Route Maps Session



The service would provide access to online risk profiles so that women would be able to plan for the potential risk to themselves and their families. It would provide access to financial support and funding for start-ups from both governmental, community and corporate sources, as well as access to practical family support, such as crèches and school pick-up.

In addition, the “Inter-Planetary Incubator” would also create networks with advocacy groups, think tanks, and influencers that support the growth of women entrepreneurs, as well as improving access to research and success stories about women entrepreneurs.

Creative idea pods would form a part of the service in which women entrepreneurs would come together, either online or face-to-face, to brainstorm new business ideas or ways to support each other to reduce the risk involved in entrepreneurship. This would be complemented by having a resource list of professional coaches, skills and learning workshops, mentors and supportive technology.

Hence a kind of co-operative structure would be developed in which agile project teams could be formed and disbanded quickly. New projects could be advertised on sites requesting applicants for short, highly-paid projects. Project teams would work under the brand and name of a project leader who would be the initial contact and coordinator for a new piece of work. “Face Book”-style social networking would prevail and individual women entrepreneurs would receive ratings on their work.

Much of the work would be carried out online and via e-mail and teleconferences, suiting the lifestyle demands of women, and virtual-shared workspaces would be available. Not all projects would be for profit, and a number of projects advertised may also be programmes for giving back to society and promoting sustainability.

Emboldened by their explorations of overcoming the potential obstacles constituted by mindset and risk, the group offered a third big idea, “The Best of Both Worlds Club,” which would establish and enhance links between organisations and entrepreneurs to their mutual benefit. Organisations, participants argued, have the benefits of scale, money, resources, expertise, influence and credibility, while

women entrepreneurs, they said, are flexible, innovative, in touch with the market, light on their feet, less risk-averse and have an appetite for change. Combining all of these attributes would truly be “the best of both worlds.”

The idea involved the equivalent of “match.com” (www.match.com is an online personal dating agency in the UK) for business. It would include online communities, external mentors and forums for sharing ideas and contacts.

Figure 15: “The Best of Both Worlds Club” Recreated from flipchart at Route maps Session



The group envisioned organisations providing women entrepreneurs with access to their in-house training, systems, equipment and facilities, which would be of significant benefit to these small businesses. In return, the women entrepreneurs would create a strong brand and profile for the organisation in the local community (this was thought to be especially useful to organisations, such as banks, that want to develop strong relationships with small businesses as potential customers). In addition, “creative pods” of entrepreneurs and corporate executives would

brainstorm ideas that they could use to grow each other's businesses and be mutually supportive. This may add a level of inspiration, flexible resources, enlightened ways of working, cost effectiveness and a greater ability to spot trends for the organisation.

The benefits of membership in this "Best of Both Worlds Club" might include a web-based market of reliable people to connect, buy, and sell, networking and development events, both in-person and online, a lobbying voice for entrepreneurs with government, an online community of like-minded individuals to share work and contacts, entrepreneurs as external mentors for people in organisations and vice versa, online forums for sharing best practices, a "match.com" equivalent for project-based business, a "Face Book"-style rating system for entrepreneurs' work and services, and a profiling system for organisations who are committed to women entrepreneurs.

Being allowed into this club would require organisations to demonstrate a positive commitment to women entrepreneurs before they could join, and a system would be set up to assess organisations' eligibility to join. Women entrepreneurs would also need to "apply" and have a successful previous corporate work track record, meet certain professional standards, and have clearly stated personal and business values. All three ideas may have interesting implications for the ability of women executives to become successful and sustainable entrepreneurs. They all aimed to create a positive personal mindset and an ability to handle risk. This was achieved through an amalgamation of personal, organisational and government support.

However, the "Create Entrepreneurial Spirit in Young Women by Introducing Coaching into Schools" does little for the executive women of today who want to take the leap into entrepreneurship. The "Inter-planetary Incubator for Women Entrepreneurs" and the "Best of Both Worlds Club," although created by separate groups, have a number of similarities. Both are essentiality networks that act as a central point with access to a number of different resources, and they reduce risk through collaboration and shared learning. These two ideas could be combined to create an even more valuable resource.

The feasibility, funding and resourcing of all of these ideas was not explored to any significant extent. Who would lead such projects and how they would be funded could be an opportunity for further research.

The morning session on women entrepreneurs felt positive; participants were fully engaged in the process and wanted to continue developing their ideas after the session had finished. There was a suggestion from the participants that they continued to meet up as their own network to take some of these ideas forward. In addition, one participant who was not originally planning to do so, stayed for the afternoon session because she felt particularly engaged with the subject matter.

This enthusiasm was different to the previous focus-group session, in which the focus was on creating the scenarios. In the route-maps session, the scenarios and stories were already created. This perhaps gave the participants a starting point, something to work towards, and may be an indicator of the usefulness of creating a variety of inspirational scenarios and stories. Women executives can then choose an appropriate scenario, work through their obstacles to achieving it and determine actions to move forward.

“Women on Board” and “Women Executives Drive Change from the Inside Out” (Afternoon Session)

Participants in the afternoon session were asked to create route maps for both story two – “Women Executives on Board” and story three – “Women Executives Drive Change from the Inside Out” I worked with two stories in the afternoon due to time restrictions and the reduced number of women executives who wanted to be part of story two and three compared to story one (perhaps this in itself was saying something about how women executives would most like to see their future world of work, namely, as entrepreneurs, although this was not supported by the telephone interviews).

Like their counterparts in the morning session, the women executives were asked to identify common themes in the story that they felt were important to address for the

future scenarios to unfold as desired. Unlike the morning session, however, we were now dealing with two stories, so the larger group split voluntarily into two smaller (but even) sub-groups, tackling one story each.

One woman expressed an affinity with all three stories, commenting:

“I’m also in that place of exploring options . . . what’s interesting is that I want to be all of them, all scenarios . . . I want to be an entrepreneur, I want to be in a large corporation, and I want to change the world.” BR2UK

Another described story two as:

“Being driven from a business perspective, it was about actually getting the (desired) results or outcomes, and the most effective way of getting them is by being authentic to the members of staff.” ER2UK

She also liked the way in which the scenarios touched on both technology and corporate culture, but not as “the be-all and end-all” solutions many think them to be. Instead, technology was treated as an important tool necessary to help achieve desired results, but it was not the only thing necessary; similarly, a healthy corporate culture was necessary but not sufficient for success.

“And the culture wasn’t just a female culture,” she said. “It was clear the board members were a mix of men and women.” CR2UK

After re-reading the stories and summarising subsequent brainstorming sessions on a flipchart, these were the major themes identified by the group for each story. These were similar to themes identified earlier in Delphi, focus group and the telephone interviews, so are not elaborated on in great depth.

- *Story 2–Common Themes*

- A focus on the business case; retention and attraction as an important issue for organisations.
- A global world, with advanced technology.
- Demographic changes will drive greater diversity; greater diversity as a given in the future.

- An organisation's competitive advantage will be all about sustainability; leadership will include a value- and ethics-driven approach.
 - Coaching as more important in the future.
- *Story 3–Common Themes*
 - Flexible working arrangements for women as a proven success.
 - New approaches for women at board-level positions will be common. New career paths will be created for those on the “road less travelled,” that is, those women who do not want board-level positions but want to stay and be successful in their organisation.
 - Ethical working, honest leadership, corporate social responsibility and “carbon footprint” rules will be at the forefront of people's minds. There will be a greater link between charities, other non-profit organisations and corporate organisations.

It was not surprising that these themes arose again, as the scenarios and stories had been built using the data from the Delphi, focus group and telephone interviews.

As I had done with the morning session, after participants had articulated their main themes for each story, I asked them to write down on post-it notes all of the obstacles and barriers they could think of in terms of women executives achieving the stories of “women on boards” and “women acting as catalysts for change.” Similar to my experience with the morning group, this step seemed easy and quick for the group; and, as before, the resulting ideas were posted on the wall for further review and discussion.

The following obstacles to “women on boards” were identified: “women often stand in their own way, women not even realising it's possible due to lack of obvious role models who have already done it,” “childcare issues and work/life balance issues,” “business mindsets being too short-term for real change and inflexibility by the organisation on the number of hours worked,” “social roles/values and what society expects from women is not conducive to women serving on boards” and “a lack of social acceptance of women's definition of success.”

The following obstacles to “women as catalysts for change” were identified, “women don’t like having to play a man’s game,” “trying to change the organisational culture is too hard,” “lack of obvious role models who have already done it. No one to learn from, having to trail-blaze the way,” “not knowing how to (or having to) do things under the radar,” “a ‘Catch 22’ wherein men tend to promote other men and play by ‘male business rules,’ thereby preventing alternative ways of conducting business from entering the corporate world,” “a sense that if you are outside the normal career path, organisations are not interested,”

“People in the business thinking new positions are ‘fringe’ or minor league. Businesses undervaluing and sidelining anyone who doesn’t want to work in the core business area” and finally the “media and government referring only to classic career paths.” CR2UK

After considering the various obstacles, participants then brainstormed ideas on how to overcome them. As I did with the morning session, I also asked each sub-group to pick one obstacle that represented what they thought was the biggest hurdle or challenge for which they could brainstorm route-map ideas. They were also asked to identify an idea as a route map for each story – an idea they felt would have the most potential to achieve the story and to be prepared to defend it. In doing so, each sub-group was asked to imagine that they were a sought-after strategy group presenting their big idea to a consortium of CEOs consisting mainly of men from a range of global companies who were “meeting to discuss key business issues of the future and had asked the strategy group to outline a solution for greater retention of women in organisations” (see appendix 8).

The biggest hurdle or challenge identified by the “women on boards” group was that many of the issues seemed to be “women-centric” or belonging only to women, such as childcare, maternity leave, and to a similar degree sandwich carers (those women responsible for both young children and elderly dependents). As boards were predominately men who had wives at home, in the view of the group they were not overly empathetic. In addition, board-level positions required long hours, overnight travel, were considered high-stress and political, not particularly ethical places to be, and very difficult if not impossible for women to juggle with families. There was

also a view that women choose not to progress to board level as they felt the trade-offs with their personal lives were just not worth it.

The “women on boards” group’s idea for overcoming “women-centric issues” was to “change the working environment to one that is more flexible, open, genuine, and non-gender-specific.”

“This is a complex issue, it is about women of course but also affects everyone, companies need to change, the culture needs to become more inclusive and this needs to involve everyone, including government.” ER2UK

The women-centric group found it difficult to commit to one idea; they saw a series of actions that would support the achievement of Story 2. These actions would in turn encourage a more flexible work environment.

Table 9: Ideas from “Women on Boards” Group to Create a Flexible Working Environment, Source: Route Maps Session

| Organisational Actions | Professional Body Actions | Governmental Actions |
|--|---|---|
| Partnering with professional bodies and networks for research and establishing best practices for organisational culture change. | Case studies where flexible working has been successful to publicise model companies. | Case studies where flexible working has been successful to publicise model companies. |
| Align performance management to behaviours. | Showcasing women-executive role models. | Creating a better transport infrastructure for people to get to and from home and work more easily. |
| Showcasing women-executive role models. | Demonstrating increased productivity through home working studies. | Showcasing women-executive role models |
| Demonstrating increased productivity through home working studies. | Create environments where remote working becomes accepted. | Giving corporate and individual tax credits for those working at home. |
| Promote creativity forums within organisations as a means to innovate in the area of work flexibility. | Conduct more research on the effect of women on organisational success. | Demonstrating increased productivity through home-working studies. |
| Focus on “output” versus “hours.” | Foster strengths-based, individualistic business cultures. | Conduct more research on the effect of women on organisational success. |
| Recruit workers based on values. | Promote corporate swaps and secondments to share skills across sectors. | Create quotas for women in senior positions. |
| Engage graduates early in a new work environment; role models do not have to be women at the top. | | Foster strengths-based, individualistic business cultures. |
| Get rid of bullies, male or female. | | |
| Ban males-only corporate events. | | |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| Create quotas for women in senior positions. | | |
| Foster strengths-based, individualistic business cultures. | | |

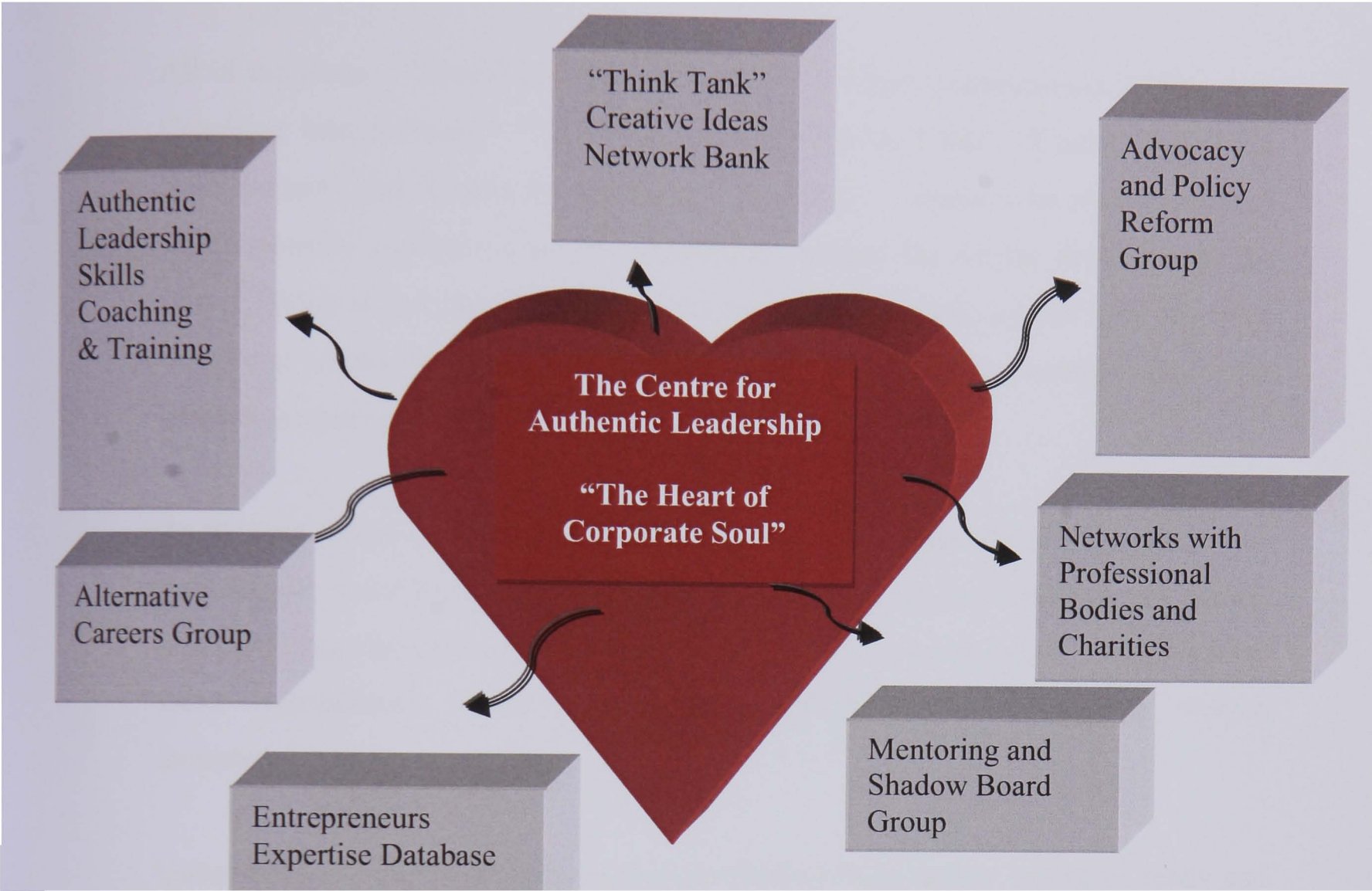
The biggest hurdle or challenge identified by the “women as catalysts for change” group was what they termed as a “catch-22” situation – the fact, according to the group, that executive men tend to promote other men and thereby perpetuate male-oriented rules and management styles in business. Therefore, if you are found to be outside the norm (such as a women with a desire to follow a so-called “road less travelled” career path or who is seeking a more flexible work arrangement), organisations tended not to be interested in that individual and are therefore much less likely to be promoted. Thus meaningful change to organisational culture and management style never gets a foothold and male dominance continues.

“This morning the lady setting up her own company, she was an entrepreneur, she was changing her personal environment; then you’ve got the story of a lady who was leading a company, so she’s changing her corporate environment; and this (third scenario) is the story of a lady who’s doing a lot of changing in a lot of different environments, hence changing the world. . . . It’s about motivation. The biggest motivation for 65% of people is having a sense of purpose and a sense of direction, and 11% is money. So this whole thing is about understanding what motivates people and then creating opportunities for them to use their skills. This is how organisations should be keeping their staff, as well as recognition, and making them feel that they could make a difference.” FR2UK

- *One “Big Idea” for Overcoming ‘Catch 22’ Issues*

The “women as catalysts for change” group’s big idea for overcoming “catch 22” issues was “the development of an advocacy group whose mission would be to get on the government agenda and promote real change in corporate soul, the heart of business, and encourage greater creativity and innovation in business management and culture.” They called this group “The Centre for Authentic Leadership.”

Figure 16: The Centre for Authentic Leadership - Recreated from flipchart output at Route Map Session.



The Centre for Authentic Leadership would have the main function of generating new ideas to support the growth of the number of women executives by addressing issues such as how to get more women onto boards and how to develop and support alternative organisational career paths.

It would also provide a forum that would support the evolution of the next generation of women executives. It would provide shadow board opportunities, mentoring for women, and bring heart and soul into business. The centre would focus a large part of its activities on creating a mezzanine level below the board, from which women could move into board, non-executive, and new types of board-level roles. It would provide organisations with access to research and human-resource, diversity and talent-consultant expertise for organisations to work with on a freelance basis (perhaps these would-be women entrepreneurs from the “Best of

Both World Club” or “The Inter-Planetary Incubator for Women Entrepreneurs”). In addition, they would create links with non-governmental organisations like charities and professional bodies to establish “more authentic and ethical ways of working.”

All of the ideas – “Inter-Planetary Incubator for Women Entrepreneurs,” “Introduce Coaching into Schools,” “The Best of Both Worlds Club,” “Change the Work Environment” and “Centre for Authentic Leadership” – aimed to be route maps with which women executives could successfully realise the vision described in the stories. What is not clear is who would initiate these ideas; would it be the male board that would fund and operate these initiatives, or a governmental body, or the women executives themselves?

As the route maps emerged, the emphasis moved away from individual action to the need for the involvement of men within organisations, external professional bodies, non-profit organisations, and for government policy. An emphasis was on how all of these stakeholders would work together collaboratively to support women executives.

Questions were raised by the group as to whether these parties would be ready and willing to work together and that perhaps competing agendas and politics would make it an unrealistic option.

“To make (these future scenarios) happen, we need somebody somewhere to act as a catalyst to get it on the agenda again, but in a different light – not about women, *per se*, but about a better life and more balance for everybody.” DR2UK

Five big ideas were presented as potential action steps to achieving the future stories. These ideas were more “blue sky” than the original scenarios, yet various issues existed in terms of possible funding, operations and whether or not interested stakeholders could work together effectively.

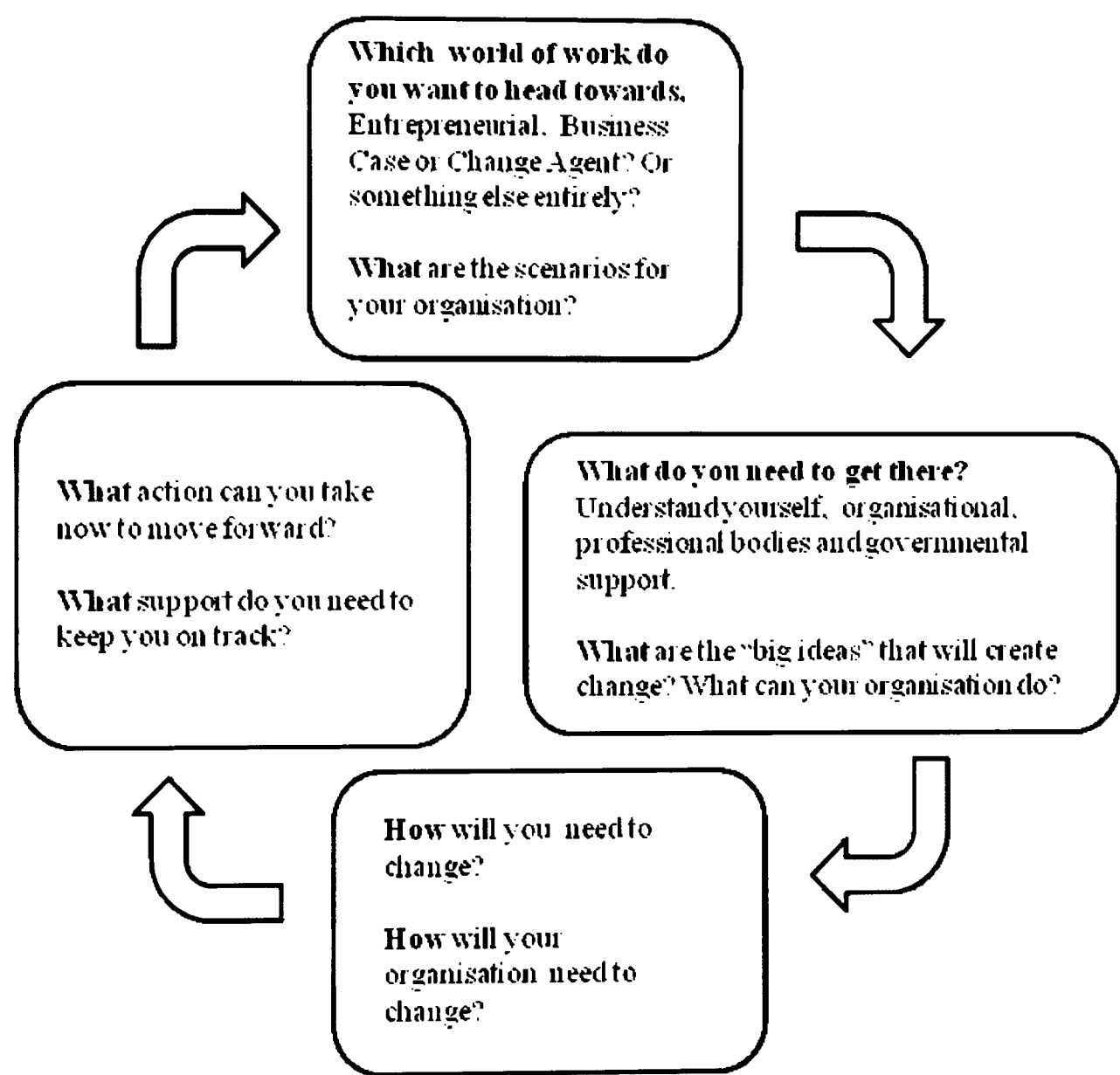
A Structure for Route Mapping

The creation of the scenarios and their associated story narratives enabled women executives to choose a preferred scenario, examine the obstacles associated with it,

and determine ideas for resources and support to move towards achieving the scenario.

This gives rise to a process, a possible route-mapping structure for supporting women executives and their organisations to determine their future world of work. This gives a framework of questions that can be used to determine the appropriate scenario and then take action to achieve it.

Figure 17: Route Maps – Moving from Here to There: The Author



Route Maps – Moving from “here” to “there”: Source The Author

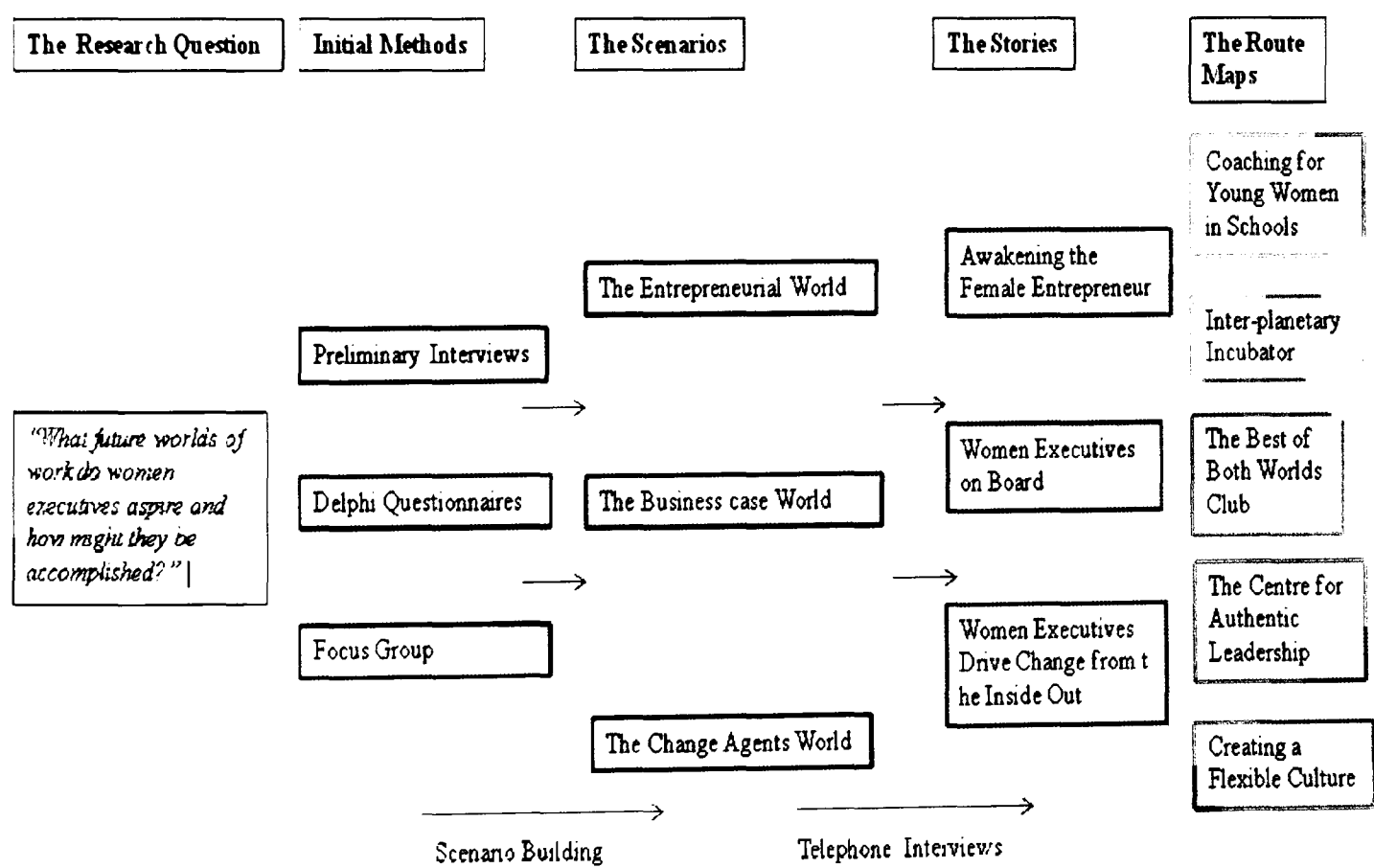
This framework could be used by both individual women executives and organisational decision-makers; whether or not their aspirations would be in conflict would need to be investigated further.

Reflections and Conclusion

This chapter explored the findings at each part of the journey. This ranged from the various themes that arose from the preliminary study interviews in 2003, the Delphi and focus-group themes that helped formulate the three scenarios, to the telephone interviews that supported the creation of the three factional stories to the route-map ideas focus group in 2007.

The use of each method yielded rich results that helped inform the subsequent part of the journey in order to answer the research question. The techniques used therefore related to each other, and at the same time stood alone with useful themes and information. The ideas that emerged from the final route maps are not the only output; the usefulness of the findings was in the rich information uncovered at each stage of the journey.

Figure 18: The Research Journey and Outcomes: Source: The Author



As is inevitable, some aspects of the possible futures developed in the scenarios are starting to appear. In 2003, when I first embarked on the preliminary study, I used a notional time frame of 10 years as the point in the future for participants to look into,

making it 2013. It is now 2008 at the time of writing – already half way to the 10-year time frame. For me personally, the stories are starting to come true. I sit here in a sense living story one, working remotely in the USA running my UK coaching business for women executives, with a sub-contracted associate team located in different countries, rather like the fictional character Gillian Weston in story one. Maybe story two is further away; we do not seem to be seeing many more women at the board level yet. In story three I do, however, see a surge of scenario-3 women pioneering change in their organisations. Perhaps this is the emerging tidal wave that will change the world of work for women executives. Only time will tell.

I wonder if for some of the participants in this research, the stories are also coming true; an area for further research perhaps, to revisit them and hear their new stories. What is clearer to me now is that any foresight into the future world of work is a complex endeavour. My initial idea to create one scenario, an idealistic vision of how things could be for women executives quickly developed into more pragmatic alternative possibilities. I look back now and wonder how I could have imagined that one scenario was feasible. I didn't account for all the factors that come into play when exploring the future world of work. Individual, organisational and societal influences provided a plethora of factors that needed to be incorporated as much as possible into the research.

The next and final stage of this research was to explore the usefulness of the findings, and their contribution to the field and areas of further research. This is explored in the following final chapter.

Chapter 7 - Summary and Conclusions – ‘Coming Home’

Introduction

This research explored the following research questions:

1. What future world of work do women executives aspire to?
2. How might they (the future worlds of work) be accomplished?

The focus of the study was on the banking and professional-services industries in predominately London and New York. As stated previously, a distinctive characteristic of these industries is that they are traditionally known to be male-dominated and have more barriers to success for women than other industries (Woodward & Ozbilgin 1999; Catalyst 2001; Granleese 2004; Ogden *et al.* 2006).

The fieldwork consisted of interviews, Delphi questionnaires, focus groups and telephone interviews. These exercises afforded key themes that were used to construct relevant scenarios and associated story narratives for the future world of work for women executives. These scenarios and narratives were explored within a route maps workshop of women executives to brainstorm ideas for how these future worlds of work could be accomplished.

The research followed a qualitative research methodology, within a pragmatist/academic orientation and a social constructionist research epistemology. The robustness of the research in terms of its process, ethical issues and outcomes was carefully considered in the research design and specifically addressed in the methodology chapter.

The purpose of this final chapter is to provide a coherent closure for this part of the journey into the future world of work for women executives. The task here is not only to review the outcomes of this research, but also to consider its usefulness and contribution to the field. The structure of the chapter is firstly to consider the insights and implications drawn from the research and its contribution to academic

and practitioner knowledge; secondly, to see to what extent the research questions have been answered and consider the implications for further research; and finally, to consider the implications for the researcher.

Insights and Implications Drawn from the Research

This section considers the insights afforded by this research, and their implications. It critically examines the usefulness of this research in the context of what elements within the literature are supported by this study. The conclusions are drawn from the data collected in the study, that is, from the women respondents themselves, alongside the literature and populist trends.

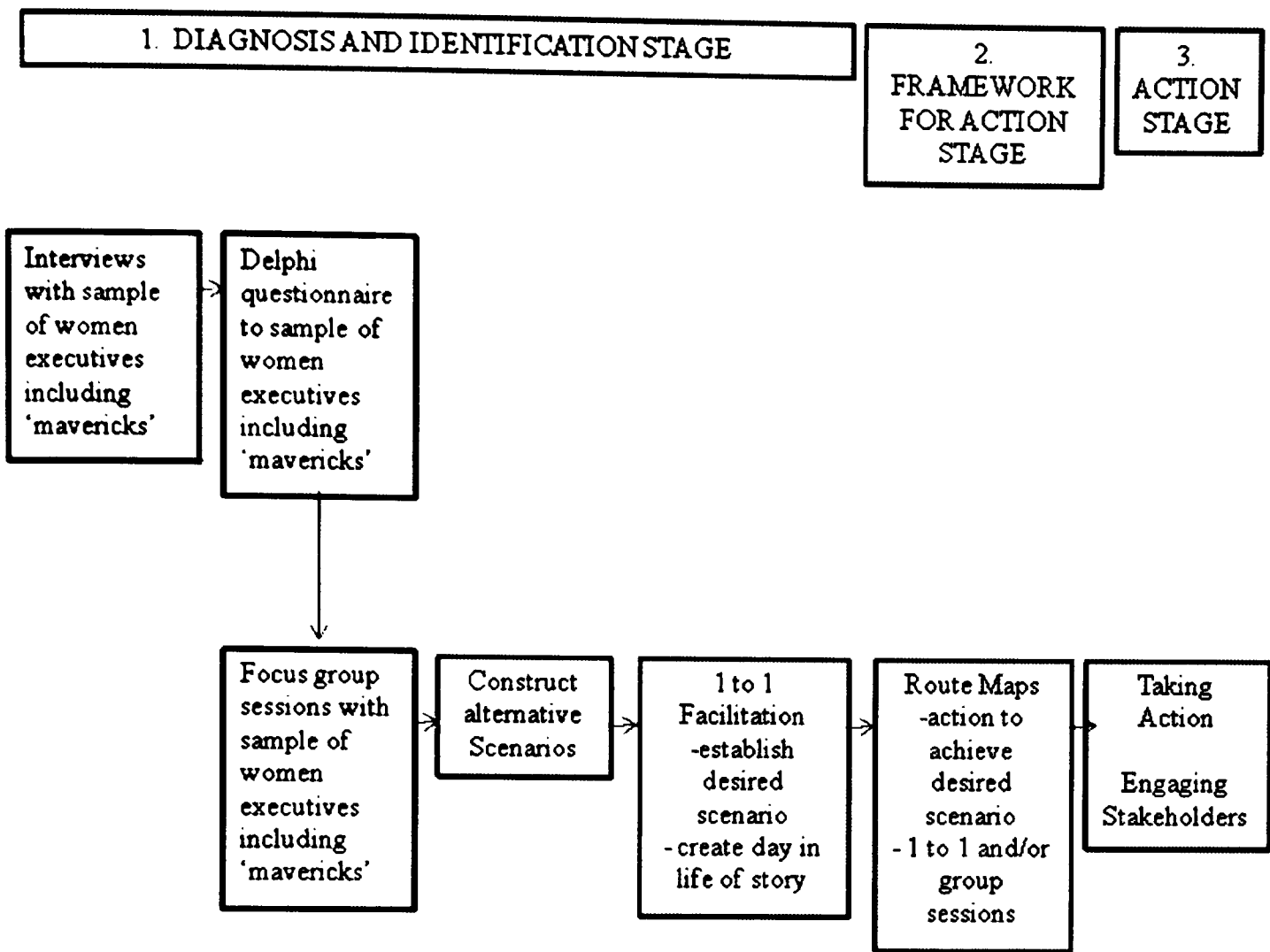
Future Studies as a Tool for Women Executive's Career Decision Making

As stated previously, futures studies seek to provide academic methods and an approach to create “new, alternative images of the future, visionary explorations of the possible” (Toffler 1978, p.x.). This first insight concerns futures studies as a useful tool in the career decision-making of women executives. The literature review revealed few examples of the use of future studies as a means to explore women executives' careers, and this study has generated a process and set of tools for other such studies.

This process can be utilised by organisations to provide a framework for the creation of a range of future scenarios for women executives. In addition, individual women executives may be able to use these methods to explore their careers and make decisions based on their aspirations.

Figure 19 represents a suggested career decision-making process and framework.

Figure 19: 3-Stage Model: “What future worlds of work do women executives aspire to, and how might they be accomplished?”



This research had an emergent nature, was spread over five years and had a number of stages to it. The three-stage model above offers a somewhat simplified process that could be completed in less time. It represents ‘if I was doing this study again what would I do differently?’ This would include the initial interviews having a focus on the engagement of the participants instead of an exploration of generic questions, as the aim of the research would be stated upfront. Three rounds of Delphi would not be necessary; instead three themes could be identified in one round and pursued in subsequent focus group sessions. A final implementation stage has been added as a framework for action is needed to implement the changes that might be signalled in the route map sessions.

One limitation of the process as a career decision-making tool is the possible conflict between the aspirations of women executives and organisational needs.

Organisations will need to take into account how to manage resultant scenarios. If, for example, the preferred scenario is “The Entrepreneurial World,” this will represent a cost and loss of talent to the business.

Another limitation that emerged during the Delphi and focus groups was the difficulty some of the women executives had in projecting their thinking into the future and escaping the here and now. The participants needed guidance at times, and as a researcher I had to be active and intervene to get them back into the future by using facilitation skills. This is important to bear in mind, as this research was conducted by a researcher who was also a trained executive coach and facilitator. The extent to which facilitation had an impact on the outcomes of this research has not been explored to any extent in this study. It may be that while it may be possible for women executives to conduct the techniques on themselves, there would be value in being facilitated through it.

The Business Case World

The second insight concerns the “The Business Case World”, where the situation in respect of women’s advancement within organisations has not changed significantly during the six years of this study, and we are not yet seeing any evidence that the situation will improve. As previously stated, from Marshall (1995b, p. 4), “much literature in the gender field has a change intent.” One of the original underlying intents of this study was to contribute to changing the future world of work for women executives in the corporate world. This was due to the fact that the numbers of women in executive positions when starting this study in 2003 were growing very slowly and this was considered an issue. Now, at the time of writing (2008), the number of women executives in the UK is actually decreasing, including the sectors explored in this study (Equalities Commission, 2008) and it is considered by many to be even more of an important issue. But the study has highlighted alternative perspectives.

Prior to this study, academics responded to this issue by emphasising the business case (Schwartz 1992; Catalyst 2004) and some organisations responded by creating organisational diversity initiatives to retain women (McCracken 2000) and to train

them (Gutek 1993). More recently, organisational cultural issues are starting to be addressed (Eagly & Carli 2007) and this did form a main theme in the “Business Case World”. However, questions still arise as to how much organisations actually recognise the business case and their motivation to take action to rectify the situation, clearly more work needs to be done.

Many of the women in the Delphi, telephone interviews and route-maps sessions wanted cultural change to occur within their organisations, mainly in the form of more flexible working and acceptance of female leadership styles. Their assumption was that it was not women that needed to change; women were not inferior or in need of special help to succeed – it was organisational cultures that need to change.

“In the future companies would operate differently, with more women-friendly organisational cultures, because they would have higher concentrations of women who do not see dominant working practices as normal; women will lead this change.” FD1UK

“A gradual increase in numbers of women at the top will slowly change the culture, and the unique talents and leadership styles of women will be acknowledged more and more and women would be promoted within organisations.” HD1UK

But the study drew out - and challenged - additional and perhaps more fundamental assumptions. The underlying assumptions in the literature were that (1) organisations recognise the value of having more women at executive levels and (2) that, all women want to be at executive levels. Both assumptions were challenged in this study: many women did not aspire to higher executive positions, and according to them, their organisations do not see a great need to advance them or change their culture. This may explain the emergence of the “Entrepreneurial” and “Change Agents” worlds.

Only time will tell if the Business Case World will be realised in the next few years (2014 will be the end of the ten-year time frame set in the Delphi questionnaires in 2004).

The Entrepreneurial World

The third insight concerns the “Entrepreneurial World”, whereby women executives leave their organisations not just to set up as single owned small businesses or consultants but to create larger networks of fluid teams with low overheads and shared power and responsibility. These networks of women come together to be able to deliver large projects and make a significant financial impact. They form and disband depending on the availability of projects and the work/life balance aspirations of the individuals.

“New women executive entrepreneurs will set up small competitor “skunk” companies which would entirely break the traditional model of long hours and huge bonuses for individual success.” BD1UK

In reality, we are seeing a growth in female entrepreneurship (Terjesen 2005) and the possible emergence of “The Entrepreneurial World.” The literature was filled with buzzwords designed to describe new female entrepreneurs with executive management experience: “careerpreneur,” “corporate incubator,” “corporate climber,” “modern entrepreneurs” and “second-generation entrepreneurs” (Terjesen 2005, p. 247) as well as evidence of women as networked entrepreneurs (Cantzler and Leijon 2007).

Women entrepreneurs were viewed as being relationship-oriented (Cantzler and Leijon 2007), and this was a way of achieving success in which both customers and employees benefited. This seems aligned with earlier discussions of women adopting a more transformational style of leadership. Is it the case that if women cannot deploy this style within large organisations, they will do so within their own businesses?

However, this study revealed conflicting messages about women executives becoming entrepreneurs with some participants stating that women are “natural entrepreneurs” and others citing barriers in terms of confidence, mindset and attitude towards risk. We have yet to see if more networked forms of women entrepreneurs

do form and how successful they actually are, how they are run and who is responsible for developing new projects.

A further reason that “The Entrepreneurial World” may be coming to fruition is the apparent lack of faith that some women in this study had that the organisational culture was going to change for the better (this was in contrast to advocates of “The Business Case World” who did see organisational culture change happening).

“Corporate cultures are not going to change for women; many women will leave because they have serious concerns about their careers and their abilities to achieve work/life balance.” EPIUK

“Women executives will vote with their feet in large numbers on their future world of work.” GDIUK

This was supported in the literature by Vinnicombe and Bank (2003), who described pay inequity, the glass ceiling and the lack of flexibility in the organisational culture as the main reasons for which women executives leave organisations to start their own businesses.

We have yet to see the true impact of “The Entrepreneurial World”. As women “vote with their feet”, there are significant cost implications for organisations as they lose female talent and knowledge. However, it may be that those organisations (as in story one) that find innovative ways to partner with women entrepreneurs or even attract them back may find benefits in the form of outsourcing skills and positive public relations.

The Change Agents World

The fourth insight concerns the emergence of scenario three, “The Change Agents World.” This scenario challenged both assumptions that are that (1) organisations recognise the value of having more women at executive levels and (2) that, all women want to be at executive levels (and therefore want to leave and start their own businesses) In this scenario, women did not want to leave their organisations and become entrepreneurs and also did not believe that their boards and male colleagues recognised the business case for women executives. Therefore, they saw themselves as “change agents” driving organisational change themselves rather than

waiting for the board or the men to create change. Through women's networks, mentoring and coaching they change the culture and create "non-linear career paths" and new board-level positions for women executives that have high levels of power and authority and low levels of time and team commitment. This allows women to be in careers with positions of power while enjoying a work/life balance.

The importance of women's careers and work/life balance, is by no means new, and was highlighted in the literature (Grzywacz & Marks 2000; Parasuraman & Simmers 2001; Mainiero & Sullivan 2005; Drew & Murtagh 2005; Mayrhofer *et al.* 2008). The literature was concerned with how women perceive their career and it was suggested that women view their career differently to men, perhaps less traditionally, and this has had negative implications for women's advancement (Auster 2001; O'Connor 2001; Mainiero & Sullivan 2005; O'Neil & Bilimoria 2005; Cabrera 2007). There was, however, little in the literature about what women's "alternative" careers will actually look like and scenario three provided tangible possibilities and ways to get there.

The growth of women's networks is starting to emerge (Singh, Vinnicombe and Kumra 2006). They found the most frequently mentioned benefit of the corporate networks for women was that members appreciated networking with other women, perhaps because of their limited opportunities to meet other female colleagues. Although, despite the perceived benefits, the extent to which these women-only networks could potentially reinforce stereotypes and alienate men has not yet been explored.

We are also seeing a growth in non executive director positions (Cranfield 2007) indicating the development of more flexible board level positions for women. What is unclear from this study is how any new "alternative career paths" will be structured, the level of responsibility and how they would be perceived within the organisation. Further investigation into the feasibility of alternative career paths and non board positions is an area of future research.

What has become clearer is that not all women aspire to the board and any organisational change needs to take account of this fact. There are also implications

with regard to the measurement of “successful women”, in that it is the number of women at board level that is considered to be an indication of success and perhaps this needs to change.

Further Insights and Conclusions

There were a number of additional insights that were common to all three scenarios. They concerned whether or not gender differences are increasing or decreasing in the future, and women’s confidence levels.

Gender Differences in the Future

Assumptions about gender differences and gender relations are implied in the three scenarios of the future. The scenarios were built from the women executives’ views on the future world of work. These views were based upon their perceptions and assumptions about women’s advancement, and they varied between different women. The scenarios implied that gender differences will continue to exist in the future and that the differences are either not accepted and therefore women will leave organisations (scenario one “The Entrepreneurial World”) or are accepted and celebrated as important to business (scenario two “The Business case world” and three “The Change Agents World”).

There was evidence throughout the literature review that supported both the existence of gender differences and similarities in management and leadership styles. As discussed in the literature review, during the 1990s, the debate evolved from “Think Manager, Think Male” (Schein 1976; Kanter 1977) to “Think Manager, Think Female” (Rosener 1990; Adler & Izraeli 1994; Minzberg 1996; Cooper & Lewis 1999). More recently, Korabik and Abbondanza (2004) identified an “androgynous” leader model, advocating a blending of styles previously labelled as male and female, and that both men and women need to adopt in order to succeed.

Both the assumptions about gender difference and the merging of male and female styles were identified by participants in the study. In some instances, men and women were represented as having different leadership styles,

“If a male leader has a strong leadership style, he is 'business-focused', and if he uses a soft leadership style he is considered as a 'people' manager. Whereas if a female manager uses her soft tactics she is likely to be considered a 'weak' manager and if she toughens up she is likely to be called a 'control freak.’”JD1UK

Whether men and women have different management styles is not the issue here; the issue is that the same style is perceived to be judged differently according to whether it is performed by a woman or a man. This may imply that gender differences and their associated judgments will continue in the future.

In other circumstances, gender distinctions were perceived as becoming less important and more blurred.

“I find it difficult to consider that it is a male-female issue, more a masculine-feminine preference of style. All leaders have different styles regardless of gender. It is wholly dependent on the individual.” FD2UK

What is unclear is whether gender is becoming less relevant and less of an issue as more women enter executive ranks – losing their curiosity value and ceasing to be judged ‘as women’ – or whether the kind of judgment in the previous quote still undermines this possibility.

Rather than see these as fixed, there were situations in which gender 'disappears' (“The Business Case World”) and others in which it is put in the foreground (“The Change Agents World”). This may be one of the reasons for which women in the preliminary study showed some resistance (the idea that gender issues have been 'done to death'). This study didn't ask women about what they had read on the matter, although they did have a number of similar thoughts and ideas. A theme at the start of the study was that ‘women's issues had been done to death’ and they resisted the idea of studying gender (again). There have been a number of studies of women, but they continue to be published, perhaps suggesting that it has not been ‘done to death.’

This group of women, rather than seeing gender as a fixed quantity, may see it as an aspect of identity that is more or less relevant and salient according to the situation and context. The reason for linking this to the feeling that gender issues were being 'done to death' is that powerful women may be represented and judged as women first, that is, in relation to their fulfilment of a female identity, rather than as managers, chief executives, chief accountants or whatever role they happen to work in. It may be that the 'done to death' comment reflected a wish to be judged on the merit of their performance rather than constantly being assessed in the light of their gender. (Male executives seem to rarely find themselves having to justify their gender at work.)

Women's Confidence

Women's confidence was not addressed to any great extent within the literature. However, according to some participants, in the future world of work, women's confidence will increase.

“More confident women will be more demanding about working practices that fit them and their values.” CD1UK

Women's confidence formed an element of all the scenarios, although perhaps more so in scenario 3, “The Change Agents World,” in which it is women themselves, in a grass roots way, that drive change within their organisations.

Women executives in the USA were described as more confident than those in the UK, yet it is difficult to know why this is so. Little published research was found concerning any differences in characteristics of executive women in the UK and USA, and specifically London and New York. According to Duffy *et al.* (2006, p. 566), “there was little between-country variability among the successful women on the personal characteristics, self-efficacy and need for achievement,” implying that cultural differences between women executives do not exist between countries. Travers *et al.* (1997), however, did find differences between women in the UK and USA, and this was supported by some participants.

“Whenever I am in a meeting in New York, there are more women who seem so naturally confident.” FPIUK

This study (but not the literature) also identified US women as being more focused on their role as potential “change agents”, and this was important, as it formed a foundation for scenario 3:

“Women in the US, we ask ‘why do I have to wait for change, rather than effecting it myself?’” DTIUSA

“(Women in the US) make demands from life and society – ‘I expect it to give me this, and I’ll challenge it and change it if I have to.’” DTIUSA

The reasons for this are unclear, although one could make hypotheses concerning how national culture and societal norms affect the personal development of women. While this may be an interesting area of future research, it can safely be concluded that confidence may be important for women to develop in order to achieve their work aspirations for the future.

To what extent have the research questions been answered?

Research Question 1

1. What future worlds of work do women executives aspire to?

No single, unified vision emerged in this study. Instead, a range of possible perspectives was identified from an analysis of the participants’ contributions. Secondary analysis by cross mapping against the literature showed that these perspectives were diverse but not random, based upon ideas and embedded themes from the academic and populist literature that could be seen to reflect a ‘zeitgeist,’ or ‘spirit of our times.’ There was also a clustering of themes that enabled the construction of three scenarios, entitled “The Entrepreneurial World,” “The Business Case World” and “The Change Agents World.” These three scenarios had ‘face validity’ for the senior-level participants who found them authentic and coherent, that is, they made sense to them and they were not critical of them. No one presented anything radically different or voiced dramatic disagreement. This is not to say that the scenarios were a perfect fit for the individual participants; many wanted to construct their own variant by taking parts from more than one scenario. This means that there could be a number of viable variants of these scenarios. Overall the high

level of inter-participant and literature-based correlation makes the scenarios particularly credible.

Because the scenarios were meaningful they can therefore be used by women executives and those interested in women's advancement. There is no basis that the scenarios would be useful for men or mixed groups and other industries and sectors as this was outside the sphere of the research. It would however, make an interesting area of future research.

Research Question 2

2. How might the “future world of work” scenarios be accomplished?

The backcasting approach used in the route-maps workshop yielded various ideas for how the scenarios could be accomplished. These included “Coaching in Schools for Young Girls,” the “Inter-Planetary Incubator” and “The Best of Both Worlds Club” (for scenario one, “The Entrepreneurial World”); “Create a Flexible Working Environment” (for scenario two, “The Business Case World”); and “The Centre for Authentic Leadership” (for scenario three, “The Change Agents World”). It is however difficult to draw the conclusion that these ideas are the ones necessary to accomplish the scenarios. This is because each person will need to develop their own framework or plan of actions to reach their desired scenario. Backcasting does provide a useful process that can be utilised by women executives to plan for how they may reach the scenarios.

A number of senior people engaged in the creation of the route-map ideas and found the session exciting and interesting. The facilitative workshop element to the route-maps workshop (and for that matter the focus group and telephone interviews) worked as a research technique that was credible to a group at this level. For this group of women “time is money:” the facilitation was an explicit condition of their involvement and it was important to create a set of interventions that engaged them.

What was intriguing was that the women executives came up with the route map ideas with such enthusiasm. These ideas had meaning for them but have not been tested or pursued as this was outside the scope of the research. It is unclear who would drive these ideas for change, who are the decision makers and what are their drivers for change?

The Implications for Further Research

This final part considers the limitations of the study, suggests what new work is now appropriate and discusses how the theory is affected by this work. It gives an indication of how future researchers will determine what topics merit further attention as a result of this work.

Involvement of Men

This study was limited to feedback and stories from women executives. Therefore the analysis is based on their perceptions only. I did not seek to involve any men and this raises various questions as to whether involving men in various stages of the research would strengthen the process for the future world of work for women. If men are to be involved in the action planning stage, then their engagement during the earlier stages is important. It cannot be assumed that men would come up with similar scenarios and a study concerning ‘what future worlds of work do men aspire to?’ is a separate research question and an area of future research.

Applicability to Other Industries and Sectors

This was an exploratory study that looked at a sample of women in two cities in a specific sector so it is hard to make broad generalisations that go beyond the context of the study. At this point, I cannot make claims that the scenarios will be applicable in other sectors. A hypothesis is that they may be applicable and that women elsewhere would come up with similar scenarios yet each person will have own nuance and there may be similar clusters and patterns elsewhere. This is a reasonable assumption because there was a correlation between the themes in the literature and what the women in this study were expressing. Future studies designed to include such factors might make different findings and seek to understand whether the scenarios and stories can be readily transferred to other industries. In addition, at the time of writing (September 2008), there are significant global issues in the banking world and subsequent studies in this sector could yield different results.

Exploring Cultural Differences

Further investigation could be conducted into the possible differences between women executives in different national cultures. As the banking and professional-services industries become increasingly global in the future, the creation of alternative scenarios for the future world of work for women executives in countries such as China may grow in importance. In addition, although it was not a focus of this study to compare UK and USA differences, some differences did emerge, in the form of women's confidence and assertiveness; this could be explored to a greater extent and form ideas for how to develop a confident mindset in the next generation of women leaders in the UK.

Role of Professional Bodies and Policy Makers

The role of non-profit professional bodies and groups with an interest in the development of women within the banking and professional-services industries was not explored to any great extent in this study. Their potential contribution to the field is a further potential area of future research. In addition, the role of government policy makers was not addressed in any meaningful way. Research in this area could also add a useful dimension to the future world of work for women executives.

Corporate Social Responsibility as a Career Motivator for Women

Prevalent in all three scenarios was an underlying importance of values and ethics. The growth of Corporate Social Responsibility within organisations and social values within entrepreneurship were highlighted as important elements in the career decision-making processes of a number of women executives. This may be an area that organisations can explore further in order to ascertain practical avenues through which women executives can give back and contribute to their communities and society. In addition, those interested in supporting women entrepreneurs can explore how contributing to society impacts small businesses and how they may support women-owned businesses in this endeavour.

“I obviously want to do something that makes a difference in the world. I’m worried about society and the world at large. What can we do as corporations to influence it?” BTIUK

Final Thoughts

What is clear is that there is still significant work to be done in terms of women executives and their future world of work. This exploratory study has provided three credible scenarios and five route-map ideas to accomplish these scenarios. The research has not specifically “acted” on accomplishing any of the scenarios. From a pragmatic point of view, a fascinating area of future research concerns exploring the scenarios in more depth and the ideas presented in the route-maps workshop. This is an area where policy makers need to be influenced and academics may pursue in the future by engaging with agents for change such as women’s networks, entrepreneurial groups and professional bodies.

The Implications for The Researcher

Having carried out a significant proportion of the research on a part-time basis over a six-year period has been a significant learning experience, and at times somewhat of a challenge. During this time, I also started my own business, moved countries and had a baby. Successfully balancing the needs of the research with those of my family and business, while retaining a sense of enthusiasm was indicative of my commitment to learning and the research objectives.

The thesis was akin to a journey. The methodology was constructed as I went along. Every time I felt like I had reached the end of a road, a new technique emerged that suited the subsequent stage of the journey. I didn't know where I was going some of the time, but I was always cross-mapping with theory and constantly challenging my own beliefs, and this kept me and this study on track.

The study was emergent; I took it step by step, as I could not plan it all out beforehand. Much of it was created by constant iteration and re-iteration and this, I believe, added to the depth and perhaps unwieldy intricacy of what has emerged. I used a more narrative form to write this thesis by telling this story (that openly shows my weaknesses), and I then use storytelling again to recount the stories of the women executives in this study. The construction of text and the story element throughout was a very significant part of this research, as was the relationship between my researcher and storyteller sides.

Although all qualitative methodologies do recognise that the researcher is, in one way or another, implicated in the research process (Willig 2001), I was always challenging myself to find the appropriate balance of both my academic and pragmatist sides. My own values, experiences and interests shaped this research to an extent and I hope, added an extra layer of richness.

Conducting this research was certainly different to my Master research where I gained a distinction prior to embarking on this PhD. In reflecting on the process, the journey of this research enabled me to evolve from a positivist to a more authentic phenomenologist. Utilising a social constructionist viewpoint helped me to understand the complexity of this research and that there were no "cut and dry"

answers, as is expected with social construction. It has given me the opportunity to develop my research skills and confidence as an academic. Conducting the fieldwork and adopting future studies methods contributed to my understanding of research methods and current practice, both for women executives in banking and professional services and in the broader academic and practitioner fields.

The emergent nature of each of the methods did at times felt overwhelming; I did not know at the outset that I was going to conduct a futures study yet I always had a sense of where I was going. At various points during this journey I was ‘stopped in my tracks’, an example being when the participants did not come up with one unified vision. In hindsight, this seems an obvious outcome, at the time, I had to find ways to overcome this obstacle and determine the next step in the journey. I learnt that this was necessary at the time, and if the research were to be repeated, time commitment and repetition could be reduced because the methodological framework would be in place.

As I said at the start of this thesis, my early positivist approach was much to the chagrin of my ever-patient supervisor, who constantly challenged and evolved my thinking so that I chose more appropriate methods for this study. “How Sam, can you quantify the future when it has not even happened yet?” echoed words from regular supervisor review meetings. I now understand that when we look at the future, what we mean by it, in that it is the exploration of possibility that is of interest. We cannot quantify the future but we do have the opportunity to look at how it could be and what our aspirations are. I have learnt that it is what we are doing now and our actions that we take today that will in some way influence the future. It is our daily decisions, small and large, that will have an impact on the future world of work for us all.

A Post Script

How do we reflect upon process? One of the issues of being involved in a piece of research over a five year period is that one can get too close to it. We reach the end of a sequence of steps and engage in *post hoc* rationalisations in our writings that assume that everything took a natural course, and construct text that gives the impression that there was an air of inevitability about what elapsed. But research is, by its very nature, messy.

This study, which I completed in 2008, explored the world of work for women executives ten years into the future. This postscript takes the perspective that this time frame has already come to pass and it is 2018. This is an opportunity to take stock and to make sense of what happened during the research journey. I thus draw upon a strategy used with my participants during the research to distance myself and take a 'fresh' look at what I did and why I did it.

As I sit here in 2018, post the credit-crunch and emerging out of a global recession and as the US President Obama has completed his terms of office, I reflect on the research journey I undertook 16 years ago beginning in 2002. So much has changed since then and who could have predicted that one of the very industries I studied, banking, would have experienced such a downturn in the final days of my study in 2008.

As I look back, and recall the decisions I made, I attempt to critically evaluate how and why I made them. My own contribution to these decisions and the research outcomes are now easier to scrutinise after all these years. I can now take a historical perspective, dredge up memories, and reconstruct what happened and its associated learning. What would I do the same if I conducted this research again? What would I do differently? This now seems such a luxury as during the five years of the research, there was often little or no time to reflect, and the world of practice seemed at times divorced from the world of reflection. Personal demands forced me into active involvement then, whether I liked it or not with little conscious reflective inquiry.

Of course, anything now that I might claim to do differently is with the benefit of hindsight. Reconstructing “reality” is notoriously problematic, the relativist conundrum. Even had I written this piece three months after the completion of my thesis my thoughts would have been different, my memories faded or changed as I changed. “There is not just one single “remembered self”, permanently established by some fixed set of memory traces. Different occasions must, should, and do elicit different accounts of the past” (Neisser & Fivush 1994, p.vii).

There were parts of the journey where I came to a crossroads and where I went down a specific path when I could have taken a different route. Take, for example, the decisions to use the Delphi Technique or to write fictional stories as a way to capture to data from the telephone interviews. I often did not know where I was going next and there was no linear straightforward path to the research. It involved juggling multiple variables, reconciling conflicting values and manoeuvring around constraints, a process in which, I found, there were no unique right answers. I found that I discovered more about the problem as I sought to solve it. I chose a course of action, only to find myself surprised at the outcome and as a consequence, I adjusted; I manoeuvred in a world of complexity. This was always a challenge as I stepped into the next stage of the research without knowing ahead of time what it would be like. I was taking Monica Lee’s type B research process (Lee, 2002) one step further without at the time being aware there was a type B research! How interesting it is that such research processes are now, ten years on, so much more taken for granted. In my first draft of this postscript I wrote that I lacked the capability to make it all perfectly clear at the outset. But on further reflection, had I thought I had the capability it would have been a different piece of research.

I wonder what would have happened if I have gone down a different route. At each time that I was at a decision point, there were choices to be made. When I conducted my very first preliminary interviews and the women told me that women’s issues were ‘done to death’, I could have then decided to track these individual women’s careers over a period of years. Yet at the time, I felt this had been done to an extent so what would the value be? What research questions could I create? This was when I started to think about the future and conducted a futures study.

After those first interviews, I conducted an online Delphi study as I wanted to gain consensus as to 'a vision for the future world of work for women executives'. I suppose I could have gone straight into a focus group but I would have lost the richness and themes created in the Delphi. For me, then, there was no point in doing a focus group straight away, as I did not know the themes and Delphi seemed a suitable technique. My supervisor introduced me to Delphi, I read about it and it gave a framework for gaining a measure of consensus of what the future could entail. I was still in the mindset of an idealistic vision and I was looking for a convergence technique. It helped me to clarify issues and build themes. I then discovered the problems of a Delphi - the themes were not converging and my participants were getting bored with it.

I could have gone straight into a literature review, immersed myself in it as is traditionally done and delayed the fieldwork. Yet a decision to do endless reading (and also because the literature related to women is so broad) and then come up with a research question didn't suit me. I probably would not have maintained the motivation to complete the research. So I conducted the literature review in parallel with my fieldwork. This provided value to the research; I kept up to date and regularly cross-mapped literature. I was an activist and I needed to engage with the research process as opposed to getting too heavily involved in the theoretical process. But it went beyond this. I wasn't sure what I was foregrounding at this stage. What was the "*it*" that I would be immersing myself in? Was it a detailed review of executive women's career paths, was it the future world of work, or was it some other phenomenon that might unexpectedly emerge?

The decision to conduct a focus group was a way to de-virtualise the process (a criticism of Delphi). I was also comfortable with focus groups, I had done them before and looking back now, I am not sure what else I would have done then. I had techniques I had used beforehand to help people generate ideas. But there was a risk. It blurred the boundaries between subject and object of the research, the emic-etic dichotomy. How did my interventions influence the outcomes? The moment I used focus groups, whether I liked it or not, I had departed from any claim to operate within a positivist paradigm.

The focus group also made me realise that there was no point in continuing down the route of attempting to gain agreement on one ideal future. There were going to be alternative desirable futures for people so I immersed myself in the literature on scenarios. This was an eye opener. I had never come across this before. I used scenario building because after my reading they seemed appropriate to what I wanted to achieve. I had had a mind shift from one vision to alternative scenarios; now this seems obvious, but not then.

Looking back, I could have decided to stick with trying to construct one ideal vision of the future but it would not have come out of data, and my supervisor would not have permitted it. I changed my value orientation. Why did I feel that there would be an 'ideal' world of work, a promised land, anyway? It was unrealistic. 10 years on, I realise that the 'ideal' depends on the individual and even more than the three scenarios I suggested, there can be hundreds, if not thousands, of possible variations. What was helpful were the patterns that emerged, the convergence in the three scenarios and the process created, the way to help women uncover their future career possibilities and the guides and signposts created by the scenarios and stories. I then prepared a paper to present at the 2006 Academy of Human Resource Development International Research Conference in Columbus, Ohio. The conference was a turning point for me as it gave me a lot of confidence as interest in my research was high. I was exposed to ideas about what about it would be different in the US. I could have then conducted a Delphi and focus group in the US but I was not doing a comparative study and it would have been expensive to do, so I chose instead to conduct telephone interviews with women in the USA.

The scenarios then were formed based on data. My supervisor suggested factional writing as a possibility. This seemed to be a recurring incidence. I would meet John at a cross roads, and he always surprised me with a new idea and challenged what I thought a PhD was. Once I researched factional stories, I ran with it. I decided to go on a story-writing course to combat my writing demons. The stories all depended on each other and were part of a global world. I could have done constructed three very separate stories that were not linked; I could have done much more 'disaster',

negative scenarios. The stories were optimistic and perhaps more idealistic for individuals, they created hope, yet still came from the data.

At the time, I constructed the stories for anyone who would read them, organisational decision makers, women executives themselves, policy makers. 10 years on, to my surprise it is policy makers who have made the most difference with these fictional stories. In a post credit-crunch environment where the appetite for equality has re-emerged, it is legal and social changes that have made change for women.

For me, part of developing doctorate insight was to go through this messiness of the research process. I recognise now, ten years on, that this was also a high-risk strategy, but it did not feel this way at the time. Looking back, I recognise that it is not to be recommended for the faint of heart, as I could have ended up falling off a cliff. In retrospect, I suppose we take risks because we are at different points in our life. For me, I had nothing to lose and I wanted to change the world. I was also, I realise now, blessed with a supervisor who would allow me to run with it and who relished in the triumph of optimism over adversity.

On reflection, this lack of a single-track agenda was a challenge. At each cross roads, options were presented in supervisor discussions and I had to draw from them as I deemed appropriate. This came through engaging in dialogue with my supervisor and back tracking to the literature. In so doing, I exposed my own thinking and made explicit my reasoning in order to clarify it and justify it as a way forward. Putting it this way, my decision-making was rooted in ‘what had just happened’ in the previous stage of the research and in my goal to answer the research questions. This, of course, can be challenged as my background, values and knowledge inevitably played a part in the decisions that were being made.

It is hard to know what would have happened if I was not so much part of the process. My personal values were the reason that this research happened in the first place and, in turn, influenced the conduct of the research. I wanted to make a difference to the world of work for women executives and this inherently influenced the decisions that I took. The choices that I made were based on what I deemed to be

the best option at the time to answer the research question. This, of course, can be highly criticised with traditional notions of validity. If another researcher conducted this research, would they have come up with the same themes and constructed the same scenarios and stories? I have to say probably not, and would ask, in the context of what this research was trying to achieve, does it matter?

It has been a challenge to distance oneself from a study that took five years. It inevitably becomes personal, and to dedicate one's life to a study of this nature, alongside growing a business and having a family brings with it a unique set of conflicts. As I reflect, I realise that so much of what happened I did because it felt right, and intuitively I knew that the path was the right one for this study, at that time. But of course, in traditional academic terms, 'it felt right' lacks credibility, how can a study of this nature have any kind of validity based on feelings?

During this research my original ideas about research and 'validity' changed. They used to include, for example, a representative sample, a standardised measurement instrument, the appropriate statistical test and conducting them in the right order. My positivist view was that there is a straightforward relationship between the world and our understanding of it. Positivists believe that it is possible to describe what is 'out there' and to get it right, based on a view from 'the outside', without personal involvement on the part of the researcher.

My ideas about research emerged into those of a more authentic phenomenologist. I was able to take an interpretative and social constructionist framework to address the aspirations of women executives in the future. It was not a straightforward relationship between women executives and their future. It was complicated, messy at times and exposed to various social and cultural constraints. I found myself deeply vested at times and battling urges to want to 'make it better' for women who aspired to more in their organisations and lives. I found myself being both inside and outside the research and the feminist in me emerging as time went by.

A feminist perspective on this study offers a critically valuable lens now as I look back upon the research in a different light and take more of a critical feminist

standpoint. Feminist scholars gave rise to an extensive critique of ‘male science’ or the positivism I was moving away from. ‘Male science’ claimed to be ‘objective’. This meant that researchers had to remain detached from and impartial towards their subject matter. Feminist critics argue that the attempt to be ‘objective’ and the strategies adopted towards this aim obscure the fact that the researcher’s identity does fundamentally shape the research findings. They argued that it is impossible for a researcher to position themselves outside of the subject matter because the researcher will inevitably have a relationship with the phenomenon being studied. This provides some comfort and justification now. I was firmly part of this study, which came with its own set of critical considerations.

One could also examine my motives at the time I conducted this study. I am a consultant and own a company dedicated to the support of women executives’ careers. It could be questioned to what extent this study was carried out to further my own career and business. Did an unconscious bias creep in to produce a thesis that would be aligned to the needs of my clients and not reflect a true picture, so to speak? As I have personally opted for scenario 1 in my own life, (The Entrepreneurial World), was that my preference for women executives to achieve? Even now, ten years on, my business clients are organisational decision makers who have an interest in supporting and retaining women in their companies - it is not often the individual woman who approaches me for career advice. When one of the scenarios (The Entrepreneurial World) involves women leaving their organisation, which would incur a significant cost to the organisation, then this scenario might be considered a ‘risk’ to include. However, I did include it because it reflected the responses from the participants in this study and academically and ethically (but perhaps not from a business perspective), this was the correct thing to do.

This relationship between me as a researcher and as a consultant was a consistent theme throughout the thesis. Traditionally, the researcher’s role is distinct from, and is usually considered superior to, the role of the practitioner. I called myself an ‘academic pragmatist’ in an attempt to merge the two aspects into one identity. I am not sure this ever really worked - sometimes the academic won out and often, the pragmatist had a whole lot to say. My attempt to be ‘suitably academic’ was

constantly being redefined. What did this mean when I had chosen a more non-traditional academic path anyway, in future studies?

The theoretical foundations for adopting a future study were justified in this thesis and it was acknowledged at the time that there are limits to the use of the methods chosen. More important than justifying my approach again is the reminder of the ethical and political stance of the research participants in this study. It was the participants' responses and not me that empowered the research outcomes. Three scenarios and stories were constructed with associated route map ideas and it was the women executives involved in this research that essentially constructed the outcomes and ideas for the change required for the future to be different. Women executives are now, 10 years on, beginning to live the reality of these scenarios. It can, of course, be argued that the outcomes were subject to my interpretation of the participants' responses in order to construct a version of 'the truth'. However, not even the most scientific method can guarantee the truth. This study involved the translation of experiences into text, and this was a complex multi-faceted process. It was subject to ethical and political constraints and redefined traditional notions of validity. There were inevitably theoretical and methodological issues to conducting this kind of study, yet I come back to the fact that my observations were empirically grounded by a careful analysis of discourse patterns. The words used by the participants to describe their future world of work and the meaning they attributed to it played the role of the construction of the scenarios and stories. Yet language has a constructive dimension, it does not simply mirror reality. This means that the 'themes' (the categories and labels) used during the research process shaped the 'findings' and this interpretative process is, of course, subject to scrutiny.

Within this research, there were several pages of interview transcripts providing insight into the interviewee's view of the future world of work. The view taken of the transcript defined the construction of the scenarios and stories and this came from the theoretical framework and my epistemological stance. Taking a social constructionist stance meant that the text was approached using a discourse analytic theoretical framework. However, if my epistemological position was a positivist one, I might have used pre-formed categories arising out of my literature review to

identify the themes and categories of meaning. In each case, the analysis of the interview transcript might have produced different findings.

I choose a qualitative approach to this research. It was not a linear and structured quantitative route. This suited the research but would not please those needing more validity in the findings. When one of the motives for this research was to see higher numbers of women executives, I would hope that someone would take this research to its next logical stage, and define how specifically the numbers of women executives might be increased. It is possible that the next stage of this research might perhaps be more in the positivist realm.

A goal of future studies is in the realm of activism, to drive social change. This is the reason that conducting a futures study appealed to me. Now, ten years in the future, the world of work for women executives is being shaped positively by the actions taken arising from reading this thesis and implementing the process undertaken in this research. The factional stories and their associated narratives are beginning to be used by organisational decision makers for women executives to help them plan their careers and this is having a positive impact on women and their organisations.

I have changed as a person by virtue of the experience. I am someone who was never the same again after completing this journey. Tangibly, I have additional research skills, I can conduct doctorate research, yet intangibly and, perhaps more importantly, I have a deeper knowledge of the complexity of the future world of work for women executives and I ignited a passion for futures research and for change.

As I reflect back now, imagining it is indeed 10 years into the future, this study set me on a path to understanding my own biography. I embarked on the study as a vehicle for change, and it led me into new academic, social and political arenas that enabled me to influence changing the world of work for women. It allowed my voice to be heard on a platform to evolve thinking on the future world of work for women executives. As I reflect, I ask if I challenged thinking enough? One can never really

know, yet I emerged as a researcher, as a consultant and as a person. I made a difference and now that change has come.

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Appendix 1 – Letter sent for Pilot Interview Study

19 August 2003

Re: PhD Research on Women Business Leaders and Professional and Personal Fulfilment

Dear Barbara,

My name is Samantha Collins and I am writing to request your participation in my PhD research on women business leaders and their efforts to obtain work/life effectiveness.

Some of the issues I intend to address are:

- What does the future hold for women business leaders?
- Is there such a concept as successful work/life balance or ‘having it all?’ If not, what are the alternatives?
- Do work/life balance initiatives impact the bottom line?
- Is leaving the corporate world and starting your own business an alternative that works?

I appreciate that your time is precious. Therefore, your involvement in my research would be completely flexible and, of course, highly confidential. That is, our discussions could take place in person, over the phone, via e-mail—whatever suits your schedule.

My final objective is to produce a forward-thinking, practical piece of research that would assist women in achieving the most in both their professional and personal lives.

For your information, I have included a letter confirming my attendance at London Metropolitan University (formally London Guildhall University) and some additional information about my professional life. These should give you adequate information regarding my background and motivations for embarking upon this research.

The participation of successful women business leaders, such as you, will be critical to the success of this project. I do hope you will give it your consideration. I will phone you over the next week or so to discuss the possibility of arranging an informal meeting.

Kind regards,
Samantha Collins

Samantha Collins, Professional Biography

(attached for your information only)

Samantha Collins combines her global executive coaching experience with years of involvement in personal development. Samantha has worked with a corporate client list including executives from JP Morgan Chase, Schroders, UBS, Accenture, Ernst & Young, Carnival Corporation, Conran Holdings and British Telecom and now exclusively works with individual male and female executives and professionals.

In addition to her executive coaching service, Samantha is Owner/Managing Director of two Personal Development companies. Aspire Companies provide coaching, workshops and events for women in business. These companies have supported thousands of women in achieving professional and personal success.

Samantha holds a Bachelor in Business and a Masters in Training and Human Resource Management with emphasis on Psychology and Organisational Development. As part of her ongoing passion for learning and development, she is completing a PhD in leadership for senior women executives.

Samantha is a fully trained coach and has trained with the best in the world at the Coach Training Institute. The San Francisco-based Coach Training Institute is one of a very small number of coach training schools in the UK that is accredited with the International Coach Federation (the leading body that sets standards, ethics and accredits coaches).

Samantha is on the board of trustees for the Women's Resource Centre. This organisation generates, promotes and sustains voluntary action that improves the status of women in the UK.

She runs frequent public workshops and events in the areas of executive leadership and entrepreneurship. Her work has been featured in the *Sunday Times*, the *Daily Mail* and on national television. Samantha is married and lives in Muswell Hill, London, England.

Appendix 2 - Pilot Study Outline (personal preparation notes for interview)

PhD Why undertook

- felt field of women in business and development /retention issues needed some addressing from an individual and corporate perspective
- wanted to produce a practical piece of leading edge research that makes a difference focuses on future not on the past

Sam Background/history

PhD – currently at stage of determining my initial research question to be addressed. Very early stage. Looking for themes to focus on. Aim to finish PhD within 5 years.

Outline today – 45 minutes, going to ask quite open style questions, just answer in your own words. Please tell me what you really think, don't need to soften anything for me. Not recording the conversation, will make notes and send you a copy of your answers. All confidential and at this stage none of this information will be quote or used in articles as I am purely information gathering.

Personal Information

Name:

Organisation:

Address:

Tel:

Position/responsibility:

Children y/n

Length of time in organisation:

Size of Organisation:

% of women in organisation:

% of women in senior positions (director level and above):

1) What do you think is your greatest quality/skill or strength that got you to where you are now?

2) Why do you think there are not more women in senior positions?

3) What can companies do better to retain women?

4) How do you feel about training courses/development programmes that are specifically geared towards women? (work/life balance/working parents/flexi working) Do they work? How do they impact the bottom line? Can you measure that?

5) Is there such a concept as successful work/life balance or 'having it all?' If not, what are the alternatives? (Is leaving the corporate world and starting your own business an alternative that works?)

6) Does the corporate environment provide a responsive atmosphere for women who want to achieve professional as well as personal success?

7) Women are leaving the corporate environment at a fast pace. Have you ever considered this? What would be your challenges around it?

8) What the question/issue/area that you believe needs to be researched?

Training/coaching?
How are you developed?

Future.

Thank you.

I would like to send you a draft of your answers. Please quickly check I wrote down the right messages from you, I will e-mail it over so if it captures your thoughts there is no need to reply.

E-mail address:

Would you be willing to be interviewed again in the future. Y/N

Appendix 3 – Delphi Questionnaire

“The Future World of Work for Executive Women –

A Comparative Study between London and New York”

Samantha Collins and London Metropolitan University

The Delphi Technique

The Delphi Technique will be utilised during this first stage of the study.

QUESTIONNAIRE 1

JULY 15 2004 DEADLINE

The purpose of this questionnaire is to elicit your ideas regarding the following issue:

What is the future world of work likely to be for executive women?

Please engage in individual brainstorming so as to generate as many ideas as possible for dealing with this issue. Please list each idea in a brief, concise manner and e-mail your response to me. Your ideas need not be fully developed. In fact, it is preferable to have each idea expressed in one brief sentence or phrase. No attempt should be made to evaluate or justify these ideas at this point in time. Your ideas will be anonymously included in the next questionnaire.

Idea #1:

Idea #2:

Idea #3:

Idea #4:

Idea #5:

Idea #6:

Idea #7:

Idea #8:

Idea #9:

Idea #10:

QUESTIONNAIRE #3 (alternative A) DEADLINE SEPTEMBER 15 2004

Attached is a listing of all strengths, weaknesses, and clarifications of ideas sent in response to the second questionnaire dealing with the issue:

What is the future world of work for executive women?

Please further refine these ideas by providing additional clarification where desired and by listing additional strengths and weaknesses you associate with each. Please list any new ideas at the bottom of the questionnaire and comment on each new idea's strengths and weaknesses for addressing the issue.

Please note that this will be the last questionnaire. After receiving all participants' responses to this questionnaire, I will provide you with a sheet on which to assign votes for five ideas you feel will best deal with the issue. All votes will be tallied and results sent to participants. Your ideas will be anonymously included in the next report.

Idea #1 _____

- Your clarification (if any):
- Strengths:
- Weaknesses:

Idea #2 _____

- Your clarification (if any):
- Strengths:
- Weaknesses:

Idea #3 _____

- Your clarification (if any):
- Strengths:
- Weaknesses:

Idea #4 _____

- Your clarification (if any):
- Strengths:
- Weaknesses:

Idea #5 _____

- Your clarification (if any):
- Strengths:
- Weaknesses:

Idea #6 _____

- Your clarification (if any):
- Strengths:
- Weaknesses:

Idea #7 _____

- Your clarification (if any):
- Strengths:
- Weaknesses:

Idea #8 _____

- Your clarification (if any):
- Strengths:
- Weaknesses:

Idea #9 _____

- Your clarification (if any):
- Strengths:
- Weaknesses:

Idea #10 _____

- Your clarification (if any):
- Strengths:
- Weaknesses:

My new ideas:

#1 _____

- Strengths:
- Weaknesses:

#2 _____

- Strengths:
- Weaknesses:

#3 _____

- Strengths:
- Weaknesses:

ATTACHMENT: RESPONSES TO SECOND QUESTIONNAIRE

Idea #1 _____

- Strengths listed: _____
- Weaknesses listed: _____

Idea #2 _____

- Strengths listed: _____
- Weaknesses listed: _____

Idea #3 _____

- Strengths listed: _____
- Weaknesses listed: _____

Idea #4 _____

- Strengths listed: _____
- Weaknesses listed: _____

Idea #5 _____

- Strengths listed: _____
- Weaknesses listed: _____

Idea #6 _____

- Strengths listed: _____
- Weaknesses listed: _____

Idea #7 _____

- Strengths listed: _____
- Weaknesses listed: _____

Idea #8 _____

- Strengths listed: _____
- Weaknesses listed: _____

Idea #9

• Strengths listed:

• Weaknesses listed:

Idea #10

• Strengths listed:

• Weaknesses listed:

BALLOT

The purpose of this ballot is to solicit votes for the five ideas that best deal with the issue:

What is the future world of work for executive women?

The following are all of the ideas that have been submitted by participants. Please identify the top five ideas and assign five points to the most promising idea, 4 points to the next most promising, and 3, 2, and 1 points to the third, fourth, and fifth-best ideas. Vote for only five ideas. Your ideas will be anonymously included in the next questionnaire.

Idea

#1:

I would give this idea (0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) points.

Idea

#2:

I would give this idea (0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) points.

Idea

#3:

I would give this idea (0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) points.

Idea

#4:

I would give this idea (0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) points.

Idea

#5:

I would give this idea (0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) points.

Idea

#6:

I would give this idea (0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) points.

Idea

#7:

I would give this idea (0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) points.

Idea

#8:

I would give this idea (0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) points.

Appendix 4 - Example of Delphi Output

What is the future world of work for Executive women?

Future = 10 years.

Main Themes

1. Workplace flexibility.

1. Flexible working lifestyles will create a better balance
2. Job-sharing will be a key mode for flexible working
3. Work flexibility with support structures along with a changed perception of flexible working within the organisation where benefits are highlighted clearly.
4. Much more flexibility around hours and location with regular home working; reduced working hours for all promotes much greater equality; childcare provision is much improved.
5. What about women not worried about flexibility still biased against them?
6. Organisations holding pattern only need to be flexible for a period / completely.
7. Need to see a world with paid childcare
8. Better childcare support for women
9. Different career models will emerge: waves, oscillating, hedgehopping, downsizing, being entrepreneurs, going back into PAYE, part-time consultants.
10. More flexible working i.e. working from home hopefully!
11. Might be more stress for women executives at the top if work/life balance issues are not addressed.
12. In the future women executives will hopefully not have to make choices between family and working life.
13. More flexible work arrangements at exec level, job share will not work.
14. Not physically in office, flexi jobs with assistant level, if not there would not notice it. Serious jobs with job share won't work.

2. Diversity.

1. Less pay discrimination
2. Fewer cases of sexual harassment
3. Equal opportunities will be the norm.
4. More working mothers & in top positions.
5. Diversity will be a passing fad?
6. Investment banks get worried by all the sexual harassment cases and start taking discrimination against women more seriously.
7. Diversity forums addressing inclusion and creativity enabling differences to be embraced.
8. Male and female managers continue to discriminate against female managers.
9. More pay and benefits.
10. Equality – Women to have same opportunities perceived as men.
11. The battle of the sexes will continue in the workplace but with greater stratification than in previous generations.

3. Women entrepreneurship

1. Executive women will follow the entrepreneurial route and create companies with more aligned values.
2. Women from diverse backgrounds. BME backgrounds could get further up the career ladder.
3. 1st mega Black woman executive role model will emerge – an Afro-Caribbean equivalent of Anita Roddick (these women exist but the media does not publicise them)
4. Increase in female entrepreneurs.
5. New entrepreneurs set up small competitor ‘skunk’ companies which entirely break the traditional model of long hours and huge bonuses for individual success; social entrepreneurship becomes very successful and the most talented people are attracted to work for them in large numbers, working on co-operative basis; women vote with their feet in large numbers.
6. More women will combine with others to start their companies through combined skills learned in the corporate business
7. Portfolio careers lead to many more women bringing their skills to larger companies; variety of work and ability to manage amount of time spent at work encourages more women.
8. Women can contribute more today, for future would like to see some serious businesses owned by women.
9. Need more mental resources like guidance with transition from corp. to own business. If you want to grow a big business you have to be very structured educated about business

4. Organisational.

1. More women will be visible at senior levels in organisations.
2. There is an understanding of and acceptance of female values.
3. Women running female teams
4. More challenges to 'alternative' ways of thinking and diversity, more pressures
(overt & more covert) to conform to dominant managerial models
5. Women taking the lead sometimes on 'corporate social responsibility' and values orientated management.
6. Companies do nothing; they think they have a tick in the box in diversity.
7. Supportive types of people similar mindset all working together – brainstorming – collaborate – little hierarchy.
8. Inclusive strong women in the boardroom
9. Still difficult in the Board Room.
10. Young women will research out 'women-friendly' companies where women do get to the top.
11. Organisations will have to clue up to move diverse workforces inc. women
Changing global economy, can't afford to have the male clubs.
12. Some companies operating differently – more women-friendly organisational cultures – because they have higher concentrations of women who do not see dominant working practices as normal.
13. Gradual increase in numbers of women at the top slowly changes the culture, which enables many minority groups to progress more easily; certain sectors respond more quickly than others to this challenge and attract the bulk of the talented people.
14. Unique talents and leadership styles of women to be acknowledged and promoted within the organisation.
15. Corporate politics will get even nastier.
16. Executive women to be allowed to be on Non-exec boards of small

companies.

17. Slow progress on increasing number of women directors on top corporate boards.
18. Professional-service firms want to demonstrate how good they are at gender diversity.
19. Women head of HR/if they want to.

5. Skills & Development.

1. Women will have longer and continuous careers.
2. Career coaching to be available to women at various stages of transition & change and also for dealing with growth opportunities.
3. It will be more difficult for women in client-facing roles.
4. Innovative mentoring mechanisms providing further support to women by
Women executives could find more peer support as more of us make it to the top.
5. Women find themselves making tough (business and personal) decisions.
6. More senior women executives mentor and sponsor younger women
7. More feminine styles of leadership will emerge for men & women.
8. More targeted career development for women, more opportunities. We have to start doing it for ourselves.

6. Networks

1. Access to various external networks to widen their personal network and also share experiences & ideas & be inspired by role models.
2. New ways of building social relationships with colleagues outside the workplace in line with the needs of executive women.
3. Networking skills will become even more key for success and indeed just for survival.
4. Interacting with people external to the organisation. Key to success.

7. Demographics.

1. Age group differences: young graduates expecting more equality and sometimes finding it; still hitting challenges when they consider having children.
2. Many women choose to work beyond retirement age.
3. Demographics will impact on women execs. They will work for more years. Parenthood and older career breaks of many years' duration are common and companies encourage men and women to return to work for them even after breaks of 10-15 years; job-sharing becomes entirely normal for men and women.
4. We will all have to work till 65 or 70.
5. Women will be in the workplace till their 30s, and if they take career breaks to have children, they will be in junior positions when they return in their 40s OR they won't return and will start up as entrepreneurs, where some of them will be very successful.
6. More women will be 'sandwich carers' e.g. babysitting both grandchildren AND elderly parents – therefore needing flexibility to work part-time.
7. Another less derogatory word for older career women will emerge.

8. Women's attitudes

1. More women will become self-aware and will maximise their full potential in their careers.
2. More women leaving as do not want to play game.
3. More women thinking that dominant ways of doing things are 'normal' – the time of surprise has passed, regimes of truth are subtle and insidious.
4. More confident women being more demanding about working practices that fit them and their values.
5. Not every woman will want to aspire.
6. Women executives might be more confident to leave their place of work and set up their own businesses and companies if their needs are not met.
7. More women executives may be likely to leave the corporate sector and move into the public or charity sector to increase job satisfaction.
8. More command and control management arising because of challenging times and adopted by senior women as much as senior men, in fact the women may be under more of some kinds of pressure to show just how 'tough' they can be.
9. The future of world of work for women will oblige them to be more like a man if they want to get on but in so doing they will provoke hostility from both men and women.
10. Encouraging women to be involved in projects in the community and society, thereby bringing more meaning to their lives.
11. Some women will choose not to have children if they decide to have a successful career.
12. More women may decide to give up the corporate battle and become 'Stepford wives' if they have a corporate husband.
13. Women accept that they cannot be superwoman.
14. Women will be more supportive to each other.
15. Women will continue to spend more time worrying about their weight than learning to deal with corporate politics effectively.

16. The future will not look much different to today; women will only be in senior roles in very small numbers and many will opt not to progress to this level; the women at the top are unlikely to have children as they will have made a choice of career over parenthood.

17. Women leave as not accommodating & not enthused.

9. Men's Attitudes.

1. Men's attitude to women execs will still be a problem i.e. they will be competitive but confused so will resort to bullying.
2. There may be more 'stay at home' husbands if the woman wishes to pursue a corporate career. Role reversal.
3. Men groups or 'clubs' will become even more exclusive.
4. Changing natures of young men, some are more open to a fuller view of 'life' – more allies for women who want to do things differently.
5. Men will become even more confused and this could lead to backlash.
Don't have a choice, a lot of women self-employed.
6. Men and women understand and make allowances for each other's differences.
7. Even the mediocre can excel (well, heck, mediocre men have been excelling for years!!!)

Appendix 5 – Focus Group Session Information to Participants

‘The Future World of Work for Executive Women’ A comparative study between London & New York

An Expert Group Session on November 2nd 2004

The PhD forms part of a 5-year study into *The Future World of Work for Executive Women* in City based industries within the financial capitals of London and New York. The Expert Group Session brings together the collaborative knowledge, expertise and experience of many of the UK’s thought leaders on the subject of Executive Woman. All participants have been identified as having a passion and commitment to making a difference to the world of work for Executive Woman.

Outcome

Our outcome is to forecast a scenario of the world of work for Executive Women in the city in 2015. It is proposed that our joint insight may be successfully utilised to further the debate and understanding of the future world of work. In addition, it is anticipated that a tool may emerge that can provide additional guidance for organisations’ HR, recruitment and retention policies. Furthermore, it is proposed that the tool may be utilised to support and guide woman’s career development decisions both now and in the future.

Why This Is Important

Current research examines phenomena such as the lack of women in senior positions (McLay & Brown 2000), the growth in entrepreneurship and part-time working for women (Catalyst 2002) and issues such as the glass ceiling (Linehan & Walsh 1999).

This research explores how these and new emerging research findings and learning can reshape the workplace for executive women in the future.

Attendance Assurances

- Confidentiality and ethical guidelines adhered to
- Participation in leading edge research that will make a significant contribution to the world of work for executive women.
- Opportunity to exchange ideas and network with leading experts in the field of executive women and the City.
- Complete usage of information gathered in the session for your own use (subject to organisational confidentiality agreements).

Proposed Working Methodology

As a group, we will utilise forecasting and scenario planning methods to create a scenario of ***how we would like*** the future world of work to be for executive women in 10 years time. The basis of the methodology will be many of the key themes and ideas identified in the pre expert group questionnaires.

During the Expert Group we will address the questions of:

What is the current world of work for executive women?

What do we want the future world of work for executive women to be like?

What do we need to get there?

How do we envisage achieving the vision?

The session will be interactive, fun and informative.

Location

The Women's Library
London Metropolitan University
25 Old Castle Street
London
E1 7NT

t: 0207 320 1191

www.thewomenslibrary.ac.uk

Closest Tube: Aldgate East

Timing: 4pm – 8pm

Drinks and networking from 3.30pm

Appendix 6 – Telephone Interviews Email Sent to Participants

Sent: 21 July 2006 11:51

To: Judith Shackleton

Subject: A request - The Future World of Work for Executive Women

Dear Judith,

As you know I am in the third year of a part-time doctorate, 'The Future World of Work for Executive Women'. This future focused study focuses on 3 possible scenarios:

- 1) Women as Entrepreneurs
- 2) Women on Boards – The Business Drive for Change
- 3) Women as Pioneers for Change

Earlier this year you were kind enough to take 'time out' of your busy day to be interviewed, your feedback was great and has been of great value to me and I will of course share my findings with you once completed.

The next stage involves US and UK based women. *So if you know of any US based women (especially New York based) who would be willing to be interviewed by me for 30 minutes by telephone (I would send a brief and questions before hand) I would really appreciate it.*

Please would you put me in contact with your colleagues who are senior level women (Director and above), based in New York Area, in large corporates.

I have attached a document which supports my study (I am up to stage 5 scenario testing) together with my bio.

Thank you so much!

Sam

Samantha Collins
Doctorate Student
Management and Professional Development
London Metropolitan University
Samantha Collins

Appendix 7 – Route Maps Email Invitation

From: Samantha Collins [mailto:scollins@aspirecompanies.com]

Sent: 27 February 2007 06:35

Subject: Special Invite from Sam

Dear Rachel,

I would like to invite you to a special working session on *'The Future World of Work for Executive Women' – Getting from Here to There.*

This which forms part of my doctorate research with London Metropolitan University and will take place at The Women's Library in London, UK on **Friday March 30th from either 9am – 1pm AND/OR 1.30pm – 5.30pm** The Women's Library is in the East End of London, it's a great venue with a comprehensive women's business and historical library and regular exhibitions see www.londonmet.ac.uk/thewomenslibrary/

I am inviting just a few great women who have a keen interest in this area and there will be no more than 10 of us at each session.

The session builds on 4 years of research to create 3 scenarios of the future world of work for women in the USA and UK. I would like to use the sessions to revisit these scenarios and to brainstorm, discuss and share ideas on the practical steps to take for individual women, organisations and government to achieve this vision.

9am – 1pm Scenario 1 - Women as Networked Entrepreneurs'

AND/OR

1.30am – 5.30pm – Scenario 2 & 3 - 'Women as Corporate Pioneers of Change' and 'Women on Boards, My Way'

As well as supporting this research, the sessions will be a rare networking and idea-sharing opportunity on what works (and doesn't work) for women leaders.

You are welcome to attend one or both of the sessions (there is no cost involved). Please let me know if you are interested and I can send you more information. Or perhaps you know a woman who you would recommend to come along.

I do hope you can make it.

Kind Regards

Sam

Appendix 8 - Route Maps output

- *Route Map Brainstormed Ideas for Overcoming “Mindset”*

The following ideas were identified by the group:

- Set up networking groups to share learning and grow confidence in and outside of work.
- Develop school programmes to focus on self-belief at an early age.
- Provide more life-planning learning opportunities earlier on at school.
- Offer coaches in schools.
- Provide more skills classes to build on confidence, with teachers trained in teaching confidence and self-belief.
- Ensure better government support for women entrepreneurs, including mentors for start-ups and changing legislation to require big companies to enlist the services of women entrepreneurs and/or have incentives to buy from entrepreneurs.
- Create higher profile entrepreneurial programmes at universities.
- Create more non-executive director roles for women entrepreneurs.
- Profile women entrepreneurs in the media; highlight and publicise successful case studies.
- Develop better connections between organisations and entrepreneurs, perhaps through corporate social responsibility efforts, or develop “intra-preneurial” skills (working with an entrepreneurial mindset within an organisation).
- Make it possible for young women to shadow their entrepreneurial counterparts and learn from them.
- Develop cooperative-funding and shared-ownership schemes for women entrepreneurs.

- *Route Map Brainstormed Ideas for Overcoming “Risk”*

The following ideas were identified by the group.

- “Identify risks of staying in the corporate world and of doing nothing.”
- “Write your ideal vision for 10 years’ time and prepare a plan.”
- “Define personal and business success and define failure and what it will take to be successful.”

- “Work with others to share risk, build a network, and talk to people who have already done it.”
- “Find a coach/mentor to support you to make it happen.”
- “Design a ‘life and business’ together, plan when to have kids.”
- “Include family in your conversations and integrate your family into your business, bringing in a feminine style of working.”
- “Go part-time in your corporate role and try working for yourself in the rest of the time.”
- “Create a broker of women’s services to reduce risk of gaining new work.”
- “Create profiles of women risk takers (successes and failures).”
- “Identify secondments to work in small businesses to try it.”
- “Take a career break to plan your new business.”
- “Create an Incubator for new women’s businesses.”
- “Run a global forum about women entrepreneurs and risk.”
- “Set up informal networks to discuss risk and women.”
- “Write better books by and for women entrepreneurs.”
- “Write research papers on risk attitude differences in men and women.”

Women on Board Ideas

Their thoughts on how to get there included the following:

Women Catalysts Change

- *Route Map Ideas for Overcoming ‘Catch 22’ Issues*
 - Create a transparent system for promoting men and women.
 - Develop criteria for diversity in career promotions.
 - Make it illegal not to have women on shortlists.
 - Make a twenty-five-hour work week the norm.
 - Promote job-sharing/portfolio-sharing.
 - Foster an environment where the “triple bottom line” becomes the law.
 - Increase opportunities to do short-term work.
 - Tap into the “mezzanine” layer of women below board level more often.
 - Change what are considered traditional career paths.

- Give new “starters” a career path presentation with examples of women who have done their careers differently.
 - Provide networking for people who have done things differently, reassuring them that they are not alone.
 - Offer “career coaching” through the Human Resource department to demonstrate what “alternative career routes” there might be.
 - Have an “ideas box” person or function with every company through which employees can sound out ideas.
 - Showcase women who have successfully achieved through untraditional career paths.
 - Find ways to make flexible senior positions still challenging and client-facing.
 - Encourage senior men to take untraditional career routes and showcase them.
- *Route Map Ideas for Overcoming ‘Women-Centric Issues’*
 - Change society’s “brainwashing” that only women look after kids.
 - Make a 3/4 day week the norm; what’s so special about Monday to Friday anyway?
 - Build the case for a shorter week by doing a full evaluation of “working smarter” versus “working harder” and demonstrate how much time is wasted and unproductive.
 - Encourage women to think more strategically about themselves.
 - Make “coaching” the norm for all executives.
 - Have companies give executives at least one day per month to develop themselves.
 - Encourage consistent and constant culture change and have a person or unit champion it.
 - Do a “life swap” with men on boards and their wives for a week.
 - Run executives’ discussions on men and women in the workplace.