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From a Novice to an Expert

Finnish Female Leaders' Eventful Career Developments

Sanna Hyvärinen (Corresponding author)

Faculty of Education, University of Lapland

PO Box 122, 96100 Rovaniemi, Finland

E-mail: sanna.hyvarinen@rovaniemi.fi

Satu Uusiautti

Faculty of Education, University of Lapland

PO Box 122, 96100 Rovaniemi, Finland

E-mail: satu_uusiautti@hotmail.com

Kaarina Määttä

Faculty of Education, University of Lapland

PO Box 122, 96100 Rovaniemi, Finland

E-mail: Kaarina.Maatta@ulapland.fi

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Abstract

Many factors influence leaders' career development. This article introduces Finnish female leaders' careers as leaders and the factors that are the most crucial for becoming a leader. The following questions were set for this research: (1) How do female leaders describe their career development? (2) What are the factors enhancing commitment to a leader's work? (3) What are the critical factors during female leaders' career development? This was a qualitative study employing a narrative approach and in which ten female leaders were interviewed. The findings showed the factors enhancing commitment to a leader's work were interest in one's own field and in self-development. Working in the field of their calling led women into a

leader's position. The beginning of the career appeared as the critical phase of their careers. Leaders perceived adversities merely as a part of their work. The path from a novice to an expert required hard work but is eventually rewarding. The study provided new viewpoints to careers counseling and development.

Keywords: Leadership, Female leaders, Narrative research, Career development

1. Introduction

Today's careers can be described as more unpredictable, fragmented, and multifaceted than before (Blom & Hautaniemi, 2009; Koivunen, Lämsä, & Heikkinen, 2012; Lämsä, 2009). The traditional career-related research has faced new developmental challenges due to societal changes (see e.g., Aaltio, 2008; Ekonen, 2007; Heilmann, 2004). Hierarchical, traditional careers have given room to more varied careers developing freely to different directions combining personal and vocational lives (Cohen, Duberley, & Mallon, 2004). This change in work and careers necessitates that both leaders' and women's careers should also be analyzed from new viewpoints (Lämsä, 2009).

The field of career research is diversified and it is labeled by fragmented, ambiguous concepts partly due to the multiple scientific fields that study career questions; which also makes it difficult to compare research results (Lähteenmäki, 1995). For example, various orientations can be distinguished. A career orientation is goal-oriented action where people create, evaluate, and pursue fulfilling their own plans (Abele & Spurk, 2009; Creager, 2011). This is influenced by their conceptions of work, education, own possibilities, and limitations set by the environment as well as their own values and prevailing values in society (see e.g., Lopez-Kidwell, Grosser, Dineen, & Borgatti, 2013). In addition, perceptions of their own expertise and successes make important signposts (Uusiautti, 2013; Uusiautti & Määttä, 2015). Vocational orientation should be seen as a part of people's goal-oriented action and lifespans (Savickas et al., 2009).

Traditionally, career development has been seen as a series of random elements where the career has just veered from a situation to another (Aaltio, 2008; Gvozdeva & Gerchikov, 2002). A study of Finnish women with successful careers showed that many of them explained the development with luck, while several were, nevertheless, of the opinion that their own work and effort had been crucial in addition to lucky coincidences (Kauppinen-Toropainen, 1993; Lipponen, 2006).

Indeed, the terminology for career research has been unestablished. Concepts such as work career, career, professional career, organizational career, life career, career development, career path, and career flow have been used side by side (Lähteenmäki, 1995). This study leaned on organization and leadership research in which the concept of career refers to a chronological sequence of an individual's career experiences (Arthur, Hall, & Lawrence, 1989) while, for example, research on vocational orientation focuses on analyzing vocational choices (Holland, 1973; Phillips & Blustein, 1994), vocational development (Super, 1957, 1980), and vocational behavior (Savickas, 2001).

We consider the process of becoming a leader as one kind of manifestation of positive development, which usually is a sum on many factors (Uusiautti & Määttä, 2013). This study focuses on the most crucial factors in career development among ten Finnish female leaders. The framework of the study also leans on positive psychology and its interest in studying human strengths and positive strategies. However, critical factors in career development belong to the scope of the study as well as the positive psychological viewpoint does not want to ignore the negative events (Baltes & Freund, 2003; Gable & Haidt, 2005; Magnusson &

Mahoney, 2003; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005).

2. Theoretical Viewpoints to the Development of Career Orientation

Finding one's career is a long-term developmental process (e.g., Arthur, Arthur, Hale, & Lawrence, 1989; Creager, 2011; Pryor & Bright, 2011). It also is a result from compromises as every individual solves the dilemma of personal preferences and the realities. People tend to orient to vocations in which they can use their skills and talents, express their attitudes and values, and work with problems and roles suitable to themselves (Blustein, 1997).

Super's (1957, 1980) theory is one of the widest theories about vocational development. According to the theory, an individual's vocational career development results from three factors that are (1) vocation-related interests and abilities, (2) the individual's understanding about vocations and careers, and (3) vocational development as a part of one's lifespan. Another classic theory about vocational choice and development was created in the 1950s by Ginzberg (1988). This theory describes vocational choice as a life-long decision-making process. A human being tries to find an optimal balance between his or her vocational goals and work life realities. Changing career goals and work life realities make one reassess one's choices continuously (see also Perlow & Kelly, 2014; Thomas, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005).

Vocational choices have been analyzed through choice motives (London, 1983; London & Noe, 1997). Singular motives cover, for example, calling (the content of work), career orientation, extrinsic rewards related to a profession, influence of idols, and substitute solutions when the most important wish becomes unfulfillable (see e.g., Heilmann, 2004; Juuti, 2006; Wrzesniewski, McCayley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997). One could roughly state that the meaning of work can be divided into three areas: job, career, or calling (Baumeister, 1991; Ojanen, 2007; Seligman, 2002; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). One can work just to earn money, when the job is seen as a means to achieve another goal. When work represents a career, one has more profound commitment to work. Achievements cover career progress and rewards as well. Calling means a passionate attitude toward work for the content of work itself. Work is satisfying as it is regardless of pay or career development (see also Uusiautti, 2008).

The changing work life needs workers and leaders with ability, wish, and desire to constant learning and self-development (e.g., Niles, Amundson, & Neault, 2011). Indeed, vocational growth and learning continue through the whole career (Brousseau, Driver, Eneroth, & Larson, 1996; Lähteenmäki, 1995; Ruohotie, 1999). Hall and Mirvis (1996) use the concept of protean career to describe the constant vocational development and expanding and diversifying expertise (Bird, 1994; see also Baruch, 2004). The traditional vertical career development model is being replaced by a mere cyclic development (Inkson & Amundson, 2002). Today's organizations are not necessarily committed to employees' career development, nor are employees and leaders willing to bind themselves to one organization for their whole life (see e.g., Hall & Mirvis, 1996; Ruohotie, 1999). The modern careers constitute numerous vocations and difficulties to make choices (Pryor & Bright, 2011). Therefore, commitment to a profession has become more and more complex (Zikic & Hall,

2009).

This study aims at analyzing the career development and factors influencing career commitment among Finnish women who have become leaders (see also Archard, 2013; Vinkenburg, Jansen, Dries, & Peppermans, 2014). The purpose is to find out not only those reasons that have strengthened the leader's careers but also the critical phases of these women's career development.

3. When a Woman Becomes a Leader – Viewpoints to the Career Choice

Despite its over-hundred-year-long history, leadership research has not found a universal definition of leadership which makes having a holistic look at leadership challenging (Juuti, 2010; Kanste, 2005; Northouse, 2013; Solheim, 2000; Yukl, 2010). Scientific research on female leaders started to emerge in the United States in the 1970s (Alvesson & Billing, 2009). In Finland, female leadership research started in the 1980s (see e.g., Aaltio-Marjosola, 2001; Lämsä, 2003), and it has increased since the second half of the 1990s (Lämsä, Vanhala, Kontoniemi, Hiillos, & Hearn, 2007). In early research, the concepts of "female leadership" and "female leaders" could refer to any managerial or leadership position (Vanhala, 2007).

Some researchers classify and define leaders according to their position in the organization hierarchy, for example, between top leadership/superior management, middle management, and lower management (see e.g., Ekonen, 2007; Frantsi, 2013; Huy, 2001; Kuusela, 2010; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011; Vinkenburg, Jansen, Dries, & Peppermans, 2014; Vanhala, 2011). Research introducing various levels and foci provides wider understanding about the concept of a female leader and about the usability of the concept. For example, the earlier Finnish female leadership research can be criticized for being focused on women in just top leadership positions. Due to this, the careers represent a sort of success stories making an impression of career development without major conflicts or obstacles. It is noteworthy, that only a marginal group of Finnish female leaders can identify with these success stories (Ekonen, 2007).

Ekonen (2007) points out that the international research on women's careers was first connected with men's careers, because the classic career theories are based on studies conducted among men (see e.g., Levinson, 1978; Schein, 1978; Super, 1957). Despite the abundant research, women lack models according to which they could build their careers (Ekonen, 2007; Oakley, 2000; see also Alvesson & Billing, 2009).

This study does not focus on just one type of a leadership position but aims at consciously expanding the concept of female leadership to cover more than, for example, just those women in top leadership positions in society. In this way, the study attempts to serve a wider group of women and provide tools to understand and guide career development.

4. Method

4.1 Research Questions

This was a qualitative study employing a narrative approach. This purpose was to analyze how female leaders describe their careers. How does one become a leader? This study is a

part of wider research analyzing female leaders' paths of becoming and experiences of being leaders. This article reports their careers as leaders and the factors that are the most crucial for becoming a leader. The following questions were set for this research:

(1) How do female leaders describe their career development?

(2) What are the factors enhancing commitment to a leader's work?

(3) What are the critical factors during female leaders' career development?

4.2 Narrative Method

To answer the aforementioned questions, a narrative approach was chosen (see e.g., Heikkinen, 2010; Hänninen, 2003; Keskitalo-Foley, 2004; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Polkinghorne, 1995; Riessman, 2008). Narrative research represents an approach that focuses on narratives as ways of transmitting and constructing information. The relationship between research and narrative can be viewed from two main perspectives: the research data can be narratives but research also produces a narrative about the world (Heikkinen, 2010). Narrative research can refer to the information process as such, way of knowing, and the nature of information when it represents constructivism (Heikkinen, 2010; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Riessman, 2008). In this research, the narrative approach covered not only the methodological choices concerning data collection but also data analyses thus forming a framework for the study as a whole (Heikkinen, 2010).

The narrative approach can also be applied as a professional tool when the purpose is not just describe and interpret the world but also to change it by trying to influence the research participants and organizations (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995). Narrative career viewpoints provide a life-long perspective that help individuals understand and perceive how the narratives of their past have laid the foundation to the future. However, they have to be tied clearly in some wide and comprehensive career theory, because alone they do not offer sufficient clarity and direction for example career counselors' work (Del Corso & Rehfuss, 2011; see also Bujold, 2004). In this study about female leaders' career development, the primary interest is information formation. However, describing one's career development to an outsider can turn into a therapeutic moment as well even if it was not the goal of research (see also Ekonen, 2007.)

Individuals connect manifold threads to their career descriptions from various areas of their lives. In the narrative approach, the career descriptions include also complexities and adversities. The purpose is to question traditional career definitions and presumptions of how a successful career should be constructed (Ekonen, 2006).

4.3 Research Participants, Data Collection, and Analysis

The research participants were selected based on "Ammattiluokitus 2010 (AML 2010) [Classification of Occupations 2010]" classification which is based on the ISCO-08 International Standard Classification of Occupations 2012 (ISCO-08). According to AML 2010, leaders are responsible for and make decisions about the business strategy or organization's operational guidelines, budget, or recruitment of personnel as a whole.

Leaders' main task is leading. In this research, leadership positions were divided between four sectors: municipality, state, organization, and private sector. The operation level was defined with the so-called dartboard analogy: the closer the position is the bull's-eye, the higher level leader one is. When the dart board is combined with the four sectors, it was possible to locate suitable participants and reach as comprehensive target group as possible. In this study, all participants are called "female leaders" without making distinctions with the level they operate (cf., Ekonen, 2007; Frantsi, 2013; Huy, 2001; Kuusela, 2010; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011; Vinkenburg et al., 2014; Vanhala, 2011).

The data collection started by recruiting participants. A recruitment letter was sent to 12 female leaders representing municipality, state, and private sectors in 2006. In 2006, the organization sector was excluded from the research. The women were contacted by phone after sending the recruitment letters. Unexpectedly, the female leaders seemed very interested in the research. Of the first six leaders contacted by phone, everyone was willing to participate. Five of them were finally interviewed as the sixth interview was cancelled due to difficulties in finding suitable time for interview. The data collection was continued in 2011 by sending recruitment letters to five more female leaders: two of them were ones reached in the first phase but whose interviews were cancelled and three of them were new participant candidates. Two of the groups contacted in the first phase were interviewed because they represented such levels of leadership that would provide new perspectives to the data. Three other interviewees represented the organization sector which was considered important to include to the research in order to have comprehensive data. Altogether, ten female leaders were interviewed: two of them represented municipality, two state, three organization, and three private sector. Therefore, they covered all sectors quite evenly. In addition, the study included women of different ages: the participants were born in 1945-1968.

A combination of narrative (Hyvärinen & Löyttyniemi, 2005) and themed (Eskola & Vastamäki, 2001) interview was applied in this research which is quite a usable method of obtaining narratives from a certain point of view (Saastamoinen, 1999). The interview data were altogether 16.5 hours long. The interviews followed partly biographical structure as the interviewees were for example asked to talk about their work history (Hyvärinen & Löyttyniemi, 2005; Saastamoinen, 1999). Narrative interview is biographical by nature but the emphases of the narrative can be directed in a certain direction, for example to describe closely the relationship between life events and a particular phenomenon or viewpoint (Saastamoinen, 1999). In addition, biographical structure helps to form a comprehensive picture of the interviewee and perceive leadership as a part of life history that is constructed narratively in the interview situation. The combination of narrative and theme interview method was therefore useful: the interest was focused on particular themes in female leaders' biographies.

This study focused on female leaders' narratives about their careers in Finland. The analysis employed certain features of qualitative content and narrative analysis (Heikkinen, 2010; Riessman, 2001). In practice this means that the data were analyzed with Polkinghorne's (1995) analysis of narratives and Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber's (1998) approaches of holistic vs. categorical and content vs. form. The analysis of narratives focuses on the data

as a whole: the narratives are classified into various categories based on types, themes, or metaphors similar to qualitative content analysis (e.g., Mayring, 2000). This method requires data that are in the form of narratives: analysis focuses on descriptions of the themes, personal features, or events in the narratives (Polkinghorne, 1995). The analysis in this research started by dividing the data into three main sets: upbringing, education, and professional life. The latter was further divided into two main categories that were career development and professional image in Finland. This article reports findings from the third category focusing on the female leaders' career development. Their careers were further categorized according to important features and transitions, however paying attention to each narrative as an entity, too.

After this preliminary analysis of narratives, the data were studied with approaches introduced by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) that can further specify the way narrative data are read. The holistic approach focuses on the person and his or her life as a whole. Part of biographies are analyzed in the light of the unity. This study applied the holistic-content approach because the content of the whole narrative was taken into consideration although the actual analysis could focus on a certain theme. This viewpoint tries to find a general impression from the story and patterns that appear repeatedly after which it is possible to recognize holistic developmental processes and transitions in the narrative. Narratives were placed in a separate table that helped locating specific themes and patterns in the data.

In the categorical approach, the original narrative is split into parts in order to separate and gather sections of data that represent the same theme. This method complemented data analysis as it made possible to focus on linguistic or stylistic features within each theme. In this case, the interest was especially in metaphors (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). We do not necessary know proper words to describe all our emotions or experiences but we can describe them or parts of them through metaphors (Keskitalo-Foley, 2004). Metaphors combine two different things: one explaining the other with its special features (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In this analysis, categorical-form approach was not targeted to any specific part of career development but the metaphors were chosen whenever they appeared directly or could be used for describing a situation or event (see also Keskitalo-Foley, 2004; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). If the holistic-content approach did not provide sufficiently profound analysis, metaphors were applied to provide deeper interpretation, and thus they complemented and put together the analyses.

Data excerpts are added to illustrate how female leaders described their careers. Excerpts also function as a support for the researcher's interpretations. In order to secure the participants' anonymity, any specific information (e.g., the sector the leader represents) is not revealed. However, the leaders were given random Roman numeral. The results are introduced according to the research questions but highlighting the findings from the data. Therefore, the analysis was data bound.

5. Results

5.1 Leaders' Descriptions of Their Career Development

When the female leaders were interviewed it soon became obvious that it was impossible to locate the exact starting points of their careers as leaders. An analysis of their childhood contexts showed that the positive attitude toward work, going to work in early adolescence, and working alongside studies had their own important role in the leaders' career development (see Hyvärinen & Uusiautti, 2014; Hyvärinen, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2014). As leadership was analyzed from the lifespan perspective (see e.g., Day, 2000, 2011), any job was considered important regardless of position or length of employment. The female leaders mentioned these jobs in interviews after so many years which implies that they were important to these women. When analyzing the leaders' career development as a whole, it was possible to distinguish two types of careers: straightforward and zigzag career development.

The straightforward career development typified those female leaders' (N=7) careers who had progressed vertically in their positions. This was the most typical type of career development among the interviewees. Changing work tasks and positions led them from a level to another. They did not have or did not mention any horizontal movement during their careers; they had always been promoted in their positions. Certainly, their early jobs during studies and in summertime varied greatly, but, at the latest, their career development was upbeat after graduation.

Three female leaders' careers represented *zigzag careers*. In this career development type, careers progress not only vertically but also horizontally. This means that when changing a job, the new position may have been higher, equal, or even lower in rank compared to the earlier position. When looking at the career as a whole, the development has still been always positive because, as one interviewee described, changing work tasks and positions provided with wide-ranging expertise that was considered important in a leader's work.

I came here through a sort of a complicated path. Originally, I came for a very short work period… And stayed… But I did so many, many, many tasks in XX [organization] which was not intentional either, in retrospect. It was my blessing or benefit that I did because it gave me madly lot of opportunities. So, if you think my position in this organization now, it provided me with a totally different kind of perspective to this organization. - - I did many zigzags here. (Female leader IX)

The analysis of career development types created a rough illustration of the female leaders' careers. It is important to understand that both types led careers to leadership positions through various tasks and phases (cf. also Uusiautti et al., 2012). Whether the development was merely straightforward or zigzag, the next purpose of this study was to identify those factors and phases that the female leaders' careers contained.

5.2 Factors Enhancing Leaders' Commitment to Work

5.2.1 Interest in their own field and self-development as motivating factors

Expertise obtained through education, comprehensive studies of one's field and work experience gained alongside studies are important factors enhancing leaders' commitment to their work (see also Hyvärinen, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2014). They illustrate the female leaders' relationship with work, ability to persistent and organized activity, as well as motivation to develop themselves and their fields, and moving forward.

The female leaders' work tasks and jobs during their education or right after graduation represented their chosen fields, while earlier jobs had represented quite wide scale. Most interviewees' stories surfaced how all education and work tasks regardless of position were significant and formed an entity that laid foundation to the future. Many interviewees brought out how they had progressed from the so-called grass roots to the top. The following two excerpts illustrate well the significance of education and work experience in this process of proceeding in more and more demanding tasks before becoming leaders.

On the basis of my work experience, I was superior. - - I was newly-graduated too, but I had been in work life already so long… I had started from the very bottom. I really know everything from the bottom to the top. So I was from grass roots, I had already learned everything. (Female leader V)

I got the job maybe because I had been focusing on the tasks of that specific field from so young, during studies. And they happened to have a position that corresponded all that I had done. The competition was tough, 40-50 people applied and they were quite qualified. I happened to have that experience and expertise. (Female leader II)

These women emphasize how they had earned their position in their own right. Eight of the female leaders worked as leaders in fields in which they had been educated. The two other women were not working in their own professional fields but their wide education and studies had benefitted them. Most of the interviewees had had many irons in the fire already in their childhood and adolescence (see Hyvärinen, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2014), and their ability to advance many projects simultaneously was typical in their career development and their way of working as leaders.

I have really many projects or goals at the same time. It might appear chaotic to an outsider. But I do have a clear idea of it. Big things do not progress by thinking that now I will do this and then it is ready. Instead, you have to advance them little by little. - - Therefore, you have to have many projects, and forward them depending on which one can be done at the moment. (Female leader II)

I have always been a person who does not just do one thing at a time. I am not someone concentrating and fiddling with one thing. (Female leader I)

5.2.2 From an expert to a leader of experts

One point of analysis in this study was to discuss whether the field-specific substance

knowledge lays the foundation for leadership or whether the general knowledge of leadership is "enough". In this data, eight female leaders had risen to their position based on their field-specific expertise. They had built their expertise through various positions and traveled various paths that eventually led to a leader's position. One of the leaders was a trained leader and, thus, worked as a leader without substance knowledge in the field. One of the female leaders was in the middle of these two categories. The following excerpts illustrate how the female leaders described their progress toward a leader's position:

I honestly think that I have never aimed at a leader's position. It has not been my goal. Merely, when I look at the past, I see a path. But it was not a career choice. - - I think that the paradox is that when you do what you really want and really are interested in, you can develop, perhaps unintentionally, in a direction that people starts to consider you as such a profound expert in something that you can be a leader. And it is a paradox because it is not easy to combine expertise and leadership. Being an expert does not necessarily make you a good leader. I am not arguing that it would be vice versa either. Leadership requires quite dedication of its own… (Female leader VIII)

Usually, in these expert organizations, leaders have expertise of that substance. - - I do not have a clue of that substance. It has been wonderful to be a diversified expert, a general leader, without that expert experience necessarily. - - But of course, you have to have an understanding about that field. (Female leader VII)

The female leaders mostly shared a view that if you are in a leader's position, you have to understand the substance of the field but you do not have to be the leading expert. When you are a leader, you specifically have to know the substance of leadership regardless of the basis you have obtained the leadership position. Both paths necessitate familiarization; either with leadership or with the substance in the field. Eventually what matters is that the experts being led have the best of knowledge.

When you are leading an organization like this one, that is an expert organization, you have to remember that someone has more expertise than you do in some special field. You do not have to even know how to do everything. You just have to know how to find the one who knows better and can do it. (Female leader III)

The important tenet is that leadership requires expertise of its own. You have to learn it as thoroughly as the substance knowledge that was the starting point of this all in the first place. (Female leader VIII)

The significance of expertise was emphasized to the extent that when asking about the role of one's gender in leadership, most of the leaders wanted to underline the insignificance of gender. They argued that what is more important is that you have the expertise and knowledge.

Everything depends on your expertise here. It means more than whether you are a man or a woman. (Female leader IV)

When you really concentrate on something, it does not matter whether you are a woman or a

man. You are working. Finnish men are so great because when you are working, you really are just working. (Female leader I)

As mentioned in the introduction, the positive psychological viewpoint (see e.g., Baltes & Freund, 2003; Gable & Haidt, 2005; Magnusson & Mahoney, 2003; Seligman et al., 2005) pays attention to the whole spectrum of human beings' experiences, and this was the purpose of this study as well. Five female leaders mentioned that you have to earn your respect with hard work. They meant that a female leader has to be extremely qualified and be ready to drudge. You cannot afford to fail.

You should be able to show constantly that you are capable. And I think that in this sense, it is a bit easier for men. They do not have to show all the time how good they are. (Female leader V)

A female leader is left alone if you make even a little mistake. She has to be twice as good as her colleagues, and more. They find the reason for being able to say "I told you so, she could not succeed."… The younger you are, the more challenging it is. (Female leader VII)

The female leaders thought that seriousness is a part of female leadership. Four interviewees described how men tend to be more relaxed and how women could learn from them. This can partly explain their emphasis on how they had to earn their position.

Somehow, I have a perception that male leaders take it a bit more loosely. They know how to be relaxed and not be that stressed. Women tend to, we have the problem that we are so very serious. (Female leader V)

5.2.3 Attitudes and values

When analyzing the factors enhancing leaders' commitment, a theme aroused including certain attitudes and values related to work. Calling and joy of work originating in one's leadership skills were crucial parts of this theme. Naturally, the positive attitude toward work was strongly linked to the female leaders' childhood memories and the culture of encouragement in their childhood homes (see Hyvärinen & Uusiautti, 2014).

I am one of those people who wonder every now and then that it is incomprehensible that I am being paid for this, that I am allowed to do this. (Female leader VIII)

Mostly I feel such a joy of work that these are interesting things. - - You do not get bored. (Female leader III)

Previously, we have introduced the three-dimensional categorization of the meaning of work (see Baumeister, 1991, Ojanen, 2007; Seligman, 2002; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997), and it can be interpreted that they all appear in the female leaders' narratives. The relationship with work before graduation was about working for earning money. This also reflected the attitude learned from home according to which work itself is already valuable (see Hyvärinen & Uusiautti, 2014). Especially those short-term employments during studies appeared merely as work as a means to earn one's keep. However, the relationship with work started to deepen either at the end of studies or after graduation, and was in constant change during the

interviewees started to have jobs that corresponded to their education. At the time of interviews, the female leaders seemed to have progressed in a position that could be called their calling. When the interviewees described their work, the words they used were "passion", "joy of work", and "opportunity to influence". Many of the female leaders brought up the political aspect of leadership, how they could influence social issues through their leadership position.

In my leadership, the most typical feature has probably been that it is not a value per se but a means to do something. The more you can use leadership to defend the conditions of those in a weaker position, to give voice to the voiceless, to fix structural and societal flaws. Then I have the experience of success and I get the biggest satisfaction from this instrumental leadership. And I think that it is holistic. Leadership is not for me and not just for the work unit wherever I have been. My experience is that I am just a means toward greater goals, and it is fantastic. And it motivates me. (Female leader VII)

5.3 The Critical Factors of Career Development

The purpose of the analysis of critical factors is to provide a realistic picture of the female leaders' career development; they must have faced certain challenges and obstacles which they have conquered during their careers.

The beginning of the career represented the most critical phase in the female leaders' narratives. It was a phase when they were not yet in a leader's position. Half of the women talked about difficulties they had had at the beginning of their careers, mostly due to their young age. For example, one had been working at a very young age in a unit that had serious problems, another had had a very responsible job when still relatively young and had been facing some underestimation due to their age and gender.

That time was really horrible. I think the workplace was just awful. So, I really did vomit sometimes in the morning before going to work. It was that stressful because, in my opinion, the organization did not function as it should. (Female leader V)

The female leaders had had some *adversities* too during their careers, but mostly not very serious ones. Some of the leaders mentioned the problems of making difficult decisions such as dismissals, warnings, or other confrontations. However, they considered these challenging situations merely just a part of a leader's work.

I have not had any adversities with a capital A related to leadership. Certainly, I have had situations that have made me think how to get through them and how convince people of something. It is part of the leadership. (Female leader IX)

Dismissals have been horrible challenges to me. You never get used to them. But maybe you learn how to handle the situations better every time. So, that they would not leave wounds to the other or to you. It is a part of this work. (Female leader I)

Two women talked about the phases of adversities when having started in the position they were at the time of the interviews. A few years learning period has happened starting from a so-called honey moon followed by the phase of proving oneself and doubt. Not until the

leaders had to deal with structural problems and change them, they could feel having earned their position. One of these interviewees had even hired a consultant to guide her through the difficult phase, while the other had to study the workplace and personnel carefully to have the situation under control. After realizing the structural problems and being able to solve them, the work as a leader started to go better. Both leaders emphasized persistency at the time of first hardships, but this feature was brought up by several other leaders as well.

I have gone through these traditional phases. First it is the honeymoon. - - In three years, I more or less learned how things work. - - So, if you start as a leader in an organization, you should not give up too quickly. It might appear really messy and difficult, the work I mean, before you have really learned it. It takes time, and even if you were how experienced and how educated and know this and that, it is not just that. It takes time, I say. And before the organization starts to trust you. (Female leader VIII)

Mostly the female leaders were of the opinion that they had not experienced adversities because of their gender. Two leaders had these kinds of experiences in their communities: one among her peer experts and the other related to her position of trust. They were the only women in their male-dominated communities. The former had faced the glass ceiling among her Finnish peer experts which had aroused wonder abroad. Despite the difficulties in this community, she had a wonderful career and did not want to make her gender an excuse. The latter woman had interrupted the established men's habits. She described the sauna meetings laughing:

Of course they had some habits how they had been doing things previously. Meetings and negotiations took place in sauna. I said that "well, I am not coming to sauna, you have the meeting by yourselves". "But we are used to do it". "Yeah, you are used to it, but now we are not going to sauna. We can have the meeting in the changing room." (Female leader IV)

Likewise, another interviewee referred to sauna meetings. The comment can also be connected with the seriousness in women's action as described earlier in results.

The female leaders have to face men and male leaders, and there is a sort of difference in tension, because you do not know the others' viewpoints and ways of thinking like men know each other. They say that they make decisions in sauna. - - Although they do not go to sauna anymore today but it is like they were sitting in sauna wherever they work. They are with each other like that. I know it because when I go negotiate in situations where the opposing side is a female leader too, you have a sort of more equal negotiation attitude. Somehow, you have a feeling that this female leader thinks about the same things and has had the same problems than I have here. I am not saying that it would any easier otherwise because they have to fight so much for these things, so they often are quite tough. (Female leader V)

Lucky coincidences were mentioned by some of the female leaders. They were considered critical for their career development. These could be events that led them to their profession or a new position. However, the female leaders did not emphasize much these coincidences or their meaning for their careers. The reason why these are here categorized as critical factors is that whenever the women had a place for chances, despite their hard work or

profound expertise, the chance could become quite critical. These events had been positive for the women as they had promoted their careers but it is necessary to realize that this might not be the case for everyone. Therefore, it can be concluded that one's merits are more important for one's career but lucky coincidences complement the career development for their part. A good example was that two female leaders had been head hunted to their jobs and the third had been chosen unexpectedly among diehard applicants (see also, Hamori, 2010; Vinkenburg et al., 2014).

Quite soon after a few years of studies, I drifted to this career. I took a XX course which pretty much has directed everything I have been doing after that. (Female leader II)

This kind of coincidents have their own role, but expertise plays the main role. The categorical-form analysis produced therefore the metaphor of "from a novice to an expert" to illustrate the career development in the Finnish female leaders in this study.

I consider it difficult to see it and think that when you talk about some female leaders and women's jobs and so on. I do not think like that. You just do the job you happen to have, sort of have driven to. - - I do not think that I as a woman apply for a leader's position. Neither do I see myself being employed due to some quota for women. I have been tested for three different positions, these top leadership offices, and each of them proved the same: suits well to demanding leadership tasks. (Female leader III)

6. Conclusions

6.1 Career Development to a Leader and as a Leader

The female leaders' career development can be best described as holistic. According to the lifespan viewpoint (see e.g., Day, 2000; 2011), careers are influenced by upbringing (see Hyvärinen & Uusiautti, 2014) and education (see Hyvärinen, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2014), and therefore, the beginning of one's career cannot be located in something specific moment. The findings of this study can be viewed from two perspectives: career development to a leader and as a leader. The former consists of development and jobs before the position the women held at the time of interviews. The latter focuses on their development in the position they are at the moment as female leaders. This definition was necessary because some of the interviewees had had a leadership position already before the current one. Still, some areas of development occurred in both categories or in the borderlines.

The process of development to a leader was strongly directed by being interested in one's field and self-development. Concretely, they were shown as extensive education and work experience. This phenomenon can be further analyzed in the light of Siitonen's (1999) theory of empowerment. Becoming a leader can be regarded as a process constituting three factors: goal-setting, goal-orientation, and goal-achievement. Freedom of choice, self-regulation, as well as career-related needs and hopes are important for the goal-setting phase. They seem to increase the motivation to develop to a leader and have a successful career.

The significance of substance knowledge appeared in the process of development to a leader as expertise in the field. The female leaders emphasized this kind of expertise and described

how they had to earn their respect with hard work. An expert in the field becomes a leader of experts when starting as a leader. Then, the expertise changes its form as the leader has to be able to hire and use the best experts to have the organization succeed under her leadership. The emphasis on expertise surpassed the meaning of gender in the women's interviews. Indeed, according to Siitonen (1999), goal-orientation is merely directed by one's development and agency as a leader. Trust, respect, appreciation, social skills, interaction, and efficiency are the core elements in this regard. The female leaders showed trust in their own expertise as well as that of their employees. They also emphasized the ability to understand the substance of the field also to gain respect and appreciation.

Values were also identified as motivating factors among the female leaders because their seemed to regard their work as calling. When considering from the viewpoint of career development, being able to work according to their calling led them to a leadership position. Like in Siitonen's model (1999), goal-achievement was manifested by well-being, satisfaction, success, positivity, joy, creativity, and healthy self-esteem.

This study was in line with Nikander's (2003; see also Hermans, 1995; Kotter, 1990) definition of the features required for one to develop to a leader. Nikander (2003) divided these features into individual-specific and community-specific features. In this study, the former are of great interest. First, the individual-specific features include motivation, values and goal-orientation, which were all visible in the female leaders' narratives. Second, leader development necessitates prowess and problem-solving skills that were manifested as the ability to handle even the most critical events and adversities during the female leaders' careers. The third set of features is interest in human-beings and the fourth includes expertise in the field, work experience, successes, and merits. And further, they were all apparent in the leaders' narratives. Finally, the fifth group of individual-specific features in constant development and learning, which appeared strongly in the women's way of acting as leaders.

Likewise, the positive psychological approach (see e.g., Baltes & Freund, 2003; Gable & Haidt, 2005; Magnusson & Mahoney, 2003; Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson, 2005; Uusiautti & Määttä, 2015) is interested in how human beings conquer challenges and difficulties during their careers. In this study, the most critical phase in the female leaders' careers was the beginning of career. On the other hand, when working as a leader, certain adversities were seen merely as a part of one's work and were not seen as downright difficulties. This finding is in line with Uusiautti's (2008) study among Finnish top workers who had been awarded as employees of the year. They also showed this kind of proactive and optimistic attitude toward work in times of hardships or trouble. Finally, lucky coincident could be identified as a part of career development, and they could be categorized as critical factors because of their randomness.

6.2 Limitations of the Study

In this study, leaders were selected based on the definitions provided by AML 2010. In some cases, it did not provide very detailed description of the operations level. However, this did not have any significant influence in this research but this feature is worth recognizing on a large scale. All participants were called leaders in this study, which directly refers to the

leadership position mentioned in AML 2010.

In addition, it must be recognized that the theoretical difference between career and calling viewpoints is somewhat clear, but in this study, they appeared overlapping (see also Baumeister, 1991, Ojanen, 2007; Seligman, 2002; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). When attempting to categorize the female leaders into one of these categories, it seemed difficult to distinguish whether the women were working because of their calling or whether they were career-oriented. According to our understanding, the significance of work can move along one's career from career-orientation toward calling, and sometimes they are closely intertwined already at the beginning. For example, one of the interviewees reported that she had consciously applied for a leadership position but was working in the field of her calling.

Studies of the role of gender, its advantages or disadvantages, make their own part in leadership research (see e.g., Alvesson & Billing, 2009; Davidson & Burke, 2004; Eagly & Carli, 2003; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Northouse, 2013; Oakley, 2000; Reskin, 2003; Rhode, 2003). In this study, the gender question was not given much emphases because the female leaders did not consider it meaningful in their work. Instead, they underlined the importance of expertise in the leader's work, and therefore, this study also focused more on the analysis of expertise and development as a leader.

Certainly, it is always possible to speculate how the leaders perceived their gender or why they did not talk about it more in the interviews, except for a few exceptions. The women interviewed in this study had long and successful careers that they did not necessarily want to explain with or take the shine off by their gender. It also might be that if the interviewees had been beginning leaders or women aiming at leadership positions, the narratives could have had different emphases and opinions on gender. These experienced leaders may already view the gender question differently as they can interpret their past experienced from the achieved leadership position. They also can be tired of answering gender-related questions and thus wanted to pass them quickly.

Third, this study did not discuss about the role of personal lives in career development. It would bring another aspect to the phenomenon. Undoubtedly, forms of support both at the personal level (e.g., personal relationships and social networks) and organizational level (e.g., mentors and colleagues) would complement the analysis of the female leaders' career development.

7. Discussion

The female leaders' narratives showed their persistent and highly-motivated work to enhance their careers and develop their expertise in the field and as leaders. Their attitude is probably the most important lesson to be learned. However, their narratives also show that some issues could be addressed in workplaces and, for example, careers counseling.

The most critical moment of career development was located at the beginning of the career. Here, mentoring might be the best solution to smoothen the initial phases of career development (see e.g., Petäjäniemi, 1994; Rhode, 2003). Experienced female leaders could be mentoring younger women who are struggling with the beginning phase but who are

motivated and capable to progress in their careers. The leaders in this study had perceived adversities as a natural part of their work and showed the ability to face challenging situations as they were and did not take them personally. They had good self-esteem which could be enhanced in young leaders and employees by positive support and encouragement. This would lay a fine foundation for career development.

The afore-mentioned finding made us also thank that if we want to guarantee the competiveness of Finland through excellent leaders, we have to invest in the future leaders regardless of the field. We can learn from the careers narrated by female leaders in this study and use the information already early in education. We consider the role of student counseling significant for career development. Students should learn about various careers already during basic education. An approach showing that everything is possible would support these future makers the best. Likewise, careers counseling is crucial and far-reaching. People with various careers and at different stages of career development could show positive examples by visiting schools and colleges, just like the female leaders in this study. As alumni, they could describe their successes and challenges. With their stories they could show how by following one's points of interests one can find one's calling. And as the female leaders' narratives pointed out, persistence and self-appreciation are extremely important features in career development—and these too become strengthened by edifying experiences.

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