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The Gender Perspective of Constructing Managerial Career

The Gender Regime of a Large Financial Organization in Hungary

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Doctoral Dissertation

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1 INTRODUCTION

This dissertation contributes to scholarship on gender regime by advancing the in-depth analysis of mid-level women managers' career trajectories and the role of the gendered organizational processes in it. Data collection is based on an organizational ethnography research conducted at a multinational company in Hungary. The case of mid-level women managers working in the finance sector was chosen to explore what particular organizational processes and how they define and impact managerial career construction.

1.1. Defining the Problem

Research results and constant monitoring show that women have gained significant status and power in leadership positions since the late twentieth century in the European Union (EU). It has been reported that there has been clear and steady progress in terms of the number of women managers at the top level (EC Report, 2019; Equality Index 2017 EIGE; ILO Report 2018). We also know that professional and managerial occupations not entirely but are less gender-segregated than ever before. This was partly anticipated by the fact that the number of women participating in tertiary education has increased to the extent that they outnumber men in higher education in many fields, indicating that women consist of a significant and increasing resource for the business world (Catalyst, 2020; ILO Report, 2015, 2018; Madsen–Scribner, 2017).

The gendered nature of managers' career paths has been explored in great detail. We know a lot more, for example, about how gendered organizational processes impact women managers' career development. As a consequence of such gender-oriented exploration, new issues have emerged, and other work-related and non-work-related factors have been discussed in relation to women manager's career advancement and success (Acker, 1999, 2006a; Calas et al., 2014; Cuzzocrea–Lyon, 2011; Tienari et al., 1998). Additionally, EU-level policy development supports equality between women and men in decision-making positions using legislative directives (Baumann, 2017; EC Report, 2019). On the level of organizations too, numerous companies have taken steps to promote gender equality. They have implemented practices that support women managers' equal chances in their careers, including organizational support (tools and programmes) for work-life balance (Hobson–Fahlén, 2009; ILO Report, 2018). The dominant discourse in media and the world of business involves a high level of recognition of the barriers women managers face during their careers, and in line with this, large organizations have welcomed gender equality, if not as a human rights issue, then as a business case (Baumann, 2017; ILO Report, 2018; McKinsey, 2015).

The gender-sensitive investigation also supports the scientific perspective that women's balanced participation in management is no longer unattainable. However, a closer look at the findings shows that we have not come as far as business-driven equality reports suggest. It is evident, for instance, that despite

decades of progress regarding the situation of women, their increased educational attainments, targeted equality policy and work-life balance programs, gender-based inequality is still manifest at workplaces, progress is slow, and women managers still face persistent inequalities during their career development (Eagly–Carli, 2007; Eikhof, 2012; Nielsen, 2017; Padavic et al., 2020; Pryce–Sealy, 2013). The majority of women managers are concentrated in the lower and middle levels of the organizational hierarchy (ILO Report, 2018; Powell, 2012), and in those types of managerial fields which are typically regarded as feminized fields (Billing–Alvesson, 2000; Gottfried, 2012; Martínez, 2011). Moreover, empirical findings confirm that women managers face various challenges inside and outside of organizations that limit their career progress, and it is still hard for women managers to get ahead in their careers in male-dominated organizations (Acker, 2006a, 2012; Gottfried, 2012; Kumra, 2010; Zanoni et al., 2010). Career trajectories have highly gendered characteristics in organizations, offering women managers seemingly similar opportunities to men managers, but still involving numerous manifest and potential obstacles that hinder women's progression in their careers (Acker, 2012a; Calás et al., 2014; Cuzzocrea–Lyon, 2011; O'Neil et al., 2008; Padavic et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2012).

Moreover, scholars have long argued that the disproportionate burden of family responsibilities and unpaid domestic chores is one of the crucial factors influencing women's career development, and in the evaluation of women's commitments towards their work and career (Acker, 2006a; Carli–Eagly, 2007; Hochschild, 2001; ILO Report, 2015; O'Neil et al., 2008; Padavic et al., 2020). In addition, the trend of a 'culture of long hours of work', which requires employees to engage in work for as long as possible, and in an uninterrupted way, is also reported to be a salient issue, especially in the case of knowledge-based managerial work (Hochschild, 2001; Holth et al., 2017; Kvande, 2009; Williams et al., 2013).

While a vast amount of international literature has been produced about the careers of women managers, little is known about high-skilled Hungarian women managers who work at large organizations. Only a few exceptional cases have examined large organizations and demonstrated the importance of the organizational culture and structure in defining managers' careers chances, work-life balance strategies, and the acceptance of women as managers (see, e.g. Glass–Fodor, 2011; Kalocsai, 2010; Nagy–Vicsek, 2014; Primecz et al., 2014). Little is known about the particular group of the high-skilled Hungarian mid-level women managers; notably, the exploratory organizational research applying a gender perspective is missing when investigating the role of organizational processes in career development.

Aside from this shortage of literature, which in itself is a valid reason for further examination, the case of this group of women managers is also interesting, because, although Hungarian society has already had long experience with women managers over the last decades, their position in work organizations is hindered by traditional gender relations and conservative attitude about gender roles in Hungary (Blaskó, 2005; Nagy–Vicsek, 2008, 2014; Saxonberg–Sirovátka, 2006; Takács, 2008). Finally, there is a lack of

exploratory organizational research that has applied a gender perspective to explore organizational processes particularly focusing on the mid-level managerial hierarchy.

1.2. Research Questions, Aims and Relevance

This dissertation is motivated by the claim that women managers experience ambiguous and often problematic career development at work organizations, despite their balanced participation in mid-level management and organizational intentions of ensuring gender equality (Acker 2006a, 2012a; Martinez 2011; Powell 1999). The Hungarian case of women managers working at the mid-level of organization and in the finance sector was chosen to help examine the ambivalent situation of women managers' career development and narrow further the research gap about managerial career development at large organizations in Hungary.

Research questions were formulated on the basis of the theoretical and empirical literature (Acker 2006a, 2012; Benschop–Doorewaard 2012; Calas et al. 2014), and also on the 'ad hoc' nature of ethnography that allows emerging new themes and perspectives relevant for the initial research objectives (Angrosino–Rosenberg, 2011; Cunliffe–Karunanayake, 2013). This thesis is structured along three main research questions. The first is to what extent the organization provides men and women managers with equal career opportunities. The second concerns the underlying organizational processes that define managers' career construction, focusing on mid-level women managers. The third issue is the work-life balance tools and strategies offered by the organization, in connection with which I examine how these initiatives reproduce mid-level women managers' capabilities to construct their careers.

Data collection for the analysis described in this thesis was based on organizational ethnography research conducted between February 2016 and January 2017 at a multinational financial organization in Hungary. The empirical basis of the research comprises expert interviews with HR personnel and semi-structured career interviews with women and men managers. Additionally, ten month-long periods of participatory observation were implemented. This included shadowing days with managers, participation in project work initiated by the HR department of the company, and other, more traditional ways of field observations.

I make three key scientific contributions to the existing literature in the field of 'gender, work and organization'. A primary aim of the analysis was to understand how contemporary careers are constructed in a large organization where women managers have a long history of working in their professional fields and how it connects to mid-level women managers' career experiences and opportunities. A central intention was to explore the complex organizational (gendered) processes forming mid-level women managers' career construction and opportunities and identify how and to what extent career construction is gendered. However, it was also a major element of exploring career advancement to see how women

managers make their decisions on career, how they experience and explain their choices and preferences. With the purpose of making a link between the organizational processes, constraints and the individual agency and attitudes, I relayed on the combination of Acker's (Acker, 1990, 1998, 2006a) theoretical framework for gendering organizational processes (in particular, explain the gendered nature of work organization and its role in career development, opportunities and individual decisions) and the capability framework (Hobson–Fahlén, 2009; Hobson et al., 2011) for interpreting individual choices under the influence and structural circumstances of the organization and societal-level gender role assumptions. Indeed, the previous works of literature provide various insights on women's career advancement. However, this integrated analytical view provides a deeper understanding of the mechanisms behind the organizational-level gender processes of career construction that incorporate the interplay between structure and agency (Nielsen, 2017; Walby, 1996; Williams et al., 2012). All in all, the findings further clarify through which organizational-level mechanism the gender regime of a large organization in the post-socialist context is reproduced, and the presented analysis, in this way, strengthens the argument that the gender regime is reproduced through organizational processes of career construction (Acker, 1990, 1998, 2006a, 2006b, 2012; Benschop–Doorewaard, 2012).

Second, it was also an aim to make a novel contribution to the scholarship about the gendered nature of managerial careers in the particular setting of large organizations in Hungary. Using the integrating analytical framework, my thesis findings will add new insight to the Hungarian literature explaining mid-level women managers' careers unfoldings in a post-socialist context. The novelty of my findings is based on the detailed explanation of the organizational processes behind the career constrictions at the mid-level organizational hierarchy and the interplay of these processes with individual choices and views. What makes the research more interesting is that it examined a post-socialist organization where women are in the majority and have access to managerial positions. In contrast, mainstream organization research is more likely conducted in organizations where men attend most managerial positions. The findings fill a significant gap in the literature of the Hungarian mid-level women managers' career opportunities and experiences. They will deepen our understanding of gender equality issues on leadership in Hungary as a particular case of being a post-socialist country.

The third contribution of the thesis relies upon its methodological novelty. The presented dissertation is an example of a detailed organizational study. To my knowledge, only a few existing research applies organizational ethnography (see for instance, Kalocsai, 2010; Kispéter, 2012) for studying large work organizations, and this dissertation is the first attempt to empirically document what happens in an organization in the finance sector in relations to career construction.

1.3. Structure of the Dissertation

The dissertation is structured as follows. After the introductory remarks (Chapter 1), the dissertation introduces the background of theoretical framework selected for this research and the previous empirical findings on women managers' careers from the research field of 'gender, work, and organization' (Chapter 2). This chapter also reviews the international empirical literature related to mid-level women managers and their organizational career trajectories. Then, Chapter 3 outlines the Hungarian context of women managers working in the finance sector. Chapter 4 introduces the research questions. Chapter 5 covers the methodology of organizational ethnography that was applied in the research. It starts with a detailed presentation of the theoretical and ethical orientation of doing ethnographic research, followed by a systematic overview of the research background and data collection methods, with a description of the sample. The chapter ends with describing the analysis method, which also provides insight into how the research questions were finalized. Chapter 6 presents the findings and is organized around the three main research questions; thus, this chapter is divided into three subchapters. Each subchapter ends with a discussion part that summarizes the key findings in the context of the theoretical background and previous empirical findings. Chapter 7 concludes the findings, summarizes the theoretical and methodological contributions and reflecting on the limitations of the research.

2. BACKGROUND: AN OVERVIEW OF THEORY AND EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

This thesis builds on a conceptual framework which awards importance to gender in analyzing the impact of organizational processes on career construction. 'Career construction', following the relevant examples of empirical studies (see, for example, (Acker, 2006b; Hochschild, 2001; Williams et al., 2012) is understood as including the following processes and practices: trajectory, decisions about career movements, perceived obstacles and support, advancement, and future career plans.

The gender-sensitive theoretical framework applied here derives from the research field of 'gender, work, and organization.' With regard to career, the long-standing use of this framework first includes the analysis of the complexities of women's careers (gender and career) in order to identify the specificities of the situation of women managers. Second, it also has the purpose of examining and analyzing the role and importance of gender in the construction of organizational careers ('gendering careers') (Calás–Smircich, 2006; Calás et al., 2014; Gherardi–Poggio, 2001). The gender-sensitive framework helps to understand that the careers of women managers are constructed and exercised by and within the structure and culture of work organizations. This perspective focuses on the organizational components of career trajectories, but at the same time leaves enough space for analyzing the individual level of women's decisions, choices, or preferences on their careers, while not forgetting that individual decisions are operated and executed in a

socially constructed situation. Therefore, the complex interaction of agency (regarding how individuals construct their careers) and socially constructed organizations, thus the structural and cultural embeddedness of individual careers is the focus of the analysis. However, individual needs, responsibilities, skills, and family-related circumstances are also all acknowledged as factors affecting career construction (Acker, 1990; Benschop et al., 2013; Hochschild, 2001).

2.1. Conceptualising Career

This chapter elaborates how the critical feminist perspective has departed from the mainstream sociological and normative view of careers as having a linear mode of development, and arrived at the point of reconceptualising careers as a social practice and social construction.

2.1.1. Form Linear towards Flexible Career Models

The categories of 'career' and 'career trajectories' have long been discussed within the field of sociology (Cuzzocrea–Lyon, 2011). The exploration of careers started in the mid-twentieth-century, when the scientific focus was mainly on the specific order of career advancement within the organizational hierarchy. According to the dominant understanding, 'career progress' was defined as linear development in an upward direction, preferably within the same work organization. Career development, in this way, always signifies a positive change in organizational status and power, associated with an increase in the level of responsibility, and naturally, salary. From a methodological point of view, it is worth mentioning that such research was based almost exclusively on the examination of men's career trajectories (Cuzzocrea–Lyon, 2011; Naschberger–Finstad-Milion, 2017).

Later on, models appeared that attempted to match career stages with biological age. However, the scientific approach still understood career advancement as normative progress: there was only one way to climb the career ladder. Eventually, the traditional way of interpreting career patterns was challenged, resulting in new career models that described those kinds of career trajectories which lacked predictability (in terms of the next stages in career progress). The 'traditional order' of linear development had finally been questioned (Naschberger–Finstad-Milion, 2017).

On the one hand, the focus on the role of employees in forming their careers increased. The latter were presented more as individuals (agents) who are capable of inventing and changing their careers (Cuzzocrea–Lyon, 2011). Thus, different career patterns were described which were given names based on their alternative types of development. Some of the career models became more popular than others – such as the 'boundaryless' (Nicholson, 1996), 'protean' (Hall–Mirvis, 1996), 'nomad' (Cadinet et al., 2000) (summarised and quoted in Naschberger–Finstad-Milion, 2017).

On the other hand, as the presence of women increased in the labor market, the idea of a 'career' gained popularity as a 'women's issue' in the field of management and organizational studies and human resource studies (Calás–Smircich, 2006; Cuzzocrea–Lyon, 2011). In line with this, a movement from more rigid to more flexible career development models can be traced (Naschberger–Finstad-Milion, 2017). Most of these alternative career models incorporated various groups of women and turned attention to the various factors that shape the development of the careers of women managers. The women's and management literature was interested in creating models for describing the various patterns of women managers' career paths, and sought to interpret their career satisfaction – which was not necessarily thought to be based on their achievements in terms of organizational hierarchy (Mainiero–Sullivan, 2005; O'Neil et al. 2008; Xian–Woodhams, 2008).

Models for analyzing empirical findings about women managers usually involve typologies. One of the most popular career models is the 'Kaleidoscope career' (Mainiero–Sullivan, 2005; O'Neil–Bilimoria, 2005; O'Neil et al., 2008). The name of this model indicates that women encounter many different life and work situations which create various patterns within their careers. Thus, the aim of the model is to capture the complexities of women managers' career patterns and experiences. This concept understands that women consider the impact of their career-related decisions on other people; therefore, their careers should be interpreted using a broader context that includes non-work relations, constraints, and opportunities. Accordingly, we should see women's career patterns as shifting according to their relational context; like in a kaleidoscope, where different patterns are created by changing the relation between the glass elements (O'Neil et al., 2008; Shaw–Leberman, 2015).

A further model was created based on the kaleidoscope metaphor; this is known as the ABC Model of Kaleidoscope Careers (authenticity, balance, and challenge), and provides a typology using three core aspects. These aspects can be understood as critical parameters which shift over a woman's life. The intensity of these elements changes in the career path of women as their relations become arranged in various life contexts and other non-work circumstances. The various patterns of women managers' careers derive from the ongoing shifting of different aspects of their lives that arrange and rearrange their roles and relationships. Based on these considerations, a threefold typology of early, mid- and late-career was created. In the mid-career phase, women typically must cope with the issue of balancing family and work, while the issues of challenge and authenticity play a secondary role. In contrast, issues of challenge dominate in the early career stage, and authenticity at the late career stage (Mainiero–Sullivan, 2005).

Another three-phase, age-linked model of women's career patterns was proposed by O'Neil and Bilimoria (2005). The authors intended to create a typology which could describe women's various career experiences over their life course. The three phases are the 'idealistic achievement phase', the 'pragmatic endurance phase' and the 'reinventive contribution phase'. Additionally, the authors characterized career

patterns as being 'ordered' or 'emergent'. An 'ordered' career pattern refers to a stable, planned career which is more or less predictable, fits into a traditional organizational hierarchy, and assumes that other life roles accommodate to career plans. An emergent career pattern is a disordered version; this career pattern is designed to accommodate the impact of non-work aspects and events, and includes interruptions for non-career activities. Based on their empirical data, the authors claim that these two career patterns (ordered and emergent) are of different magnitudes of relevance during the phases of women managers' career paths. Women in mid-career are typically in the 'pragmatic endurance' phase, and their career patterns can be characterized by both ordered and emergent tendencies. Women in this phase of their career typically manage multiple responsibilities. Also, the relational context of women in this phase is relatively high, as their career development can be influenced by other people (both professional and personal, spouses and children), independent of how long they have been engaged in the workforce. The centrality of their careers might be questioned in this phase due to the different demands they face. Women in this career phase typically reach middle-level management; however, their experiences reveal that they are dissatisfied and they feel that they have become stalled at this level (O'Neil–Bilimoria, 2005).

As can be seen, movement from a more rigid to a more flexible career development model can be traced. Also, those models which incorporated women paid more attention to 'gender', although still understanding gender 'only' as a group characteristic (Naschberger–Finstad-Milion, 2017). It should be acknowledged, however, that these models do not merely describe the careers of women managers, but highlight that career advancement is related to non-work factors. Thus, it was understood that women typically have career patterns in which work issues and life issues cannot be separated, that these play various and equally important roles in their lives, and that being a manager may be only one component (Mainiero–Sullivan, 2005; O'Neil–Bilimoria, 2005; O'Neil et al. 2008). It is also a positive component of these various typologies that they highlighted the fact that women managers are not a homogeneous group (Billing, 2011; Vanhala, 2011; O'Neil–Bilimoria, 2005).

2.1.2. Gender as a Structuring Principle

The exploration of careers profoundly changed when 'gender' became seen as a fundamental structuring principle of organization and society, and as such started to shape the empirical research on women and careers (Calás–Smircich, 2006; Cuzzocrea–Lyon, 2011; Sheridan, 2004). The literature that has been produced on careers that applies a gender-sensitive perspective has mainly been generated by feminist scholarship (Calás et al., 2014). The study of gender first appeared in the academic studies of American feminism. Shortly afterwards (in the late 1970s), it was imported into Europe (Gherardi, 2003), where – in a similar way – the gender-sensitive research field on women working in management was mainly developed by feminist social scientists (Calás–Smircich, 2006). The feminist research made it clear that

organizations are not gender-neutral entities (Ely–Padavic, 2007; Sheridan, 2004). In addition, this literature not only raised new issues for research, but also made space for previously unheard voices (Calás et al., 2014). Although, many scholars still raise the point that feminist-based scholarship on organizational studies has made a limited contribution to mainstream literature (Cuzzocrea–Lyon, 2011; Metcalfe–Woodhams, 2012; Nagy, 2014).

The first focus – structural inequalities in organizations

The very first milestone within organizational studies – i.e. when gender was included in the analysis of career trajectories – was a piece of work by Rosabeth Moss Kanter entitled 'Men and Women of the Corporation' (1977). Kanter's work analyzed the connection between career positions and the distribution of the number of men and women in powerful and administrative corporate positions. The author demonstrated that gender differences in positions are the result of organizational structure, recognizing that women more often had positions in dead-end jobs at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy, but also that they were token elements of top management. Kanter's analysis demonstrated gender-based structural inequalities for the first time in the field of organizational studies (Acker, 1990; Nagy, 2014).

Kanter's work is highly acknowledged, and often cited as recognizing the role of the organization in career construction and for presenting many examples of male dominance. Her work is criticized for failing to admit that organizational culture is not gender-neutral (i.e. for failing to recognize that gender is part of organizational structure), and thus creates different situations for women in organizations that mainly men have in top positions. Kanter did not challenge the fact that cultural norms and assumptions have different consequences for women and men at the top or bottom of the organizational hierarchy (Acker, 1990; Nagy, 2014). Men, for instance, when a minority in women-predominant organizations, have a greater chance of being promoted into higher positions than their female counterparts (Acker, 1990). However, women in token positions face negative prejudices and stereotypes. At the top level of the organizational hierarchy, it is particularly hard for women to enact the 'right' type of femininity expected of them, and to fit into the organizational gender culture; as a consequence, women in top positions are harshly labelled and negatively evaluated (Mavin–Grandy, 2012). Despite all the (justified) critiques of Kanter's work, it is widely acknowledged that she successfully drew attention to the problematic of the homogenous composition of top-level management (Acker, 1990; Benschop–Doorewaard, 2012; Nagy, 2014).

From a focus on the glass ceiling to the identification of various barriers

The primary focus in the early 1970s was on the identification of the various barriers to career advancement that women managers faced (such as differences in promotion, salary, and evaluation) (Mavin–Grandy, 2012). The 'glass ceiling' metaphor became the most popular way to describe the invisible blocks women face in their careers, and prevent them from obtaining top positions.

The 'glass ceiling', however, never become a concept that was able to explain the factors behind the obstacles women face during their careers – it is preferably used as a way of describing an organizational phenomenon. It has also been much criticized for its focus on privileged white, middle-class women with aspirations for higher level managerial positions (Calás–Smircich, 2006; Benschop–Brouns, 2009). Furthermore, a significant argument against the use of the glass ceiling metaphor is that it cannot theorize the complex relations and interactions between structure and agency, and nor is it of use in analyzing the underlying power processes within organizations (Benschop–Brouns, 2009).

Later on, as the research orientation changed, scholars started to focus on the whole career and placed less emphasis on the individual level in career-making. This change in approach entailed the spread of new metaphors (e.g. glass walls, glass cliffs, the labyrinth) and models that did not concentrate exclusively on the difficulties and disadvantages of women managers moving up the ladder of the higher echelons of organizations (Smith et al., 2012). Instead, the latter pointed out that women face multiple barriers at all levels. Thus, these metaphors imply a critique of the glass ceiling metaphor, and, more importantly, question the perception that the difficulties connected to career advancement increase only at the top level of the organizational hierarchy (Benschop–Brouns, 2009).

One well-known and often-cited model is the 'labyrinth' model developed by Carli and Eagly (2007). The model addresses the difficulties women managers face throughout their career trajectories from the beginning of their managerial careers. The authors identified four factors that primarily influence organizational culture, and as a consequence typically create barriers for women in terms of their career development. The four factors are (1) prejudices about women leaders, (2) resistance to women's leadership, (3) issues of leadership style, and (4) the demands of family life. Another study by Fitzsimmons and his co-authors is an example of an exploration of the various structural and cultural factors that influence mid-level women managers' careers. The authors concluded that women's disadvantages in executive positions start as early as in childhood. Women obtain fewer experiences in childhood, education, and early work experience that are relevant for leadership, because girls are often directed towards undertaking traditional tasks and roles. Also, they are just not encouraged to engage in those types of games, group activities, and sports through which they could gain experience in relation to leadership and taking risks. Subsequently, women managers arrive at the middle management level with less social capital and leadership experience. According to the authors, men, on the contrary, already have leadership experience when they are promoted to their first managerial positions (Carli–Eagly, 2007).

From a focus on the individual to a focus on the organization

The scientific attention first concentrated more on individuals' positions and the characteristics of career development, such as organizational status and women's leadership capabilities (Calás–Smircich, 2006; Calás et al., 2014; Ely–Padavic, 2007; Gherardi, 2003). This scientific focus on individual women indeed revealed many of the patterns involved in the way that careers unfold, but not the reasons for those patterns (Ahl–Marlow, 2012). In the 1980s, scholarship – while continuing to identify barriers and the unique challenges that women with various backgrounds were facing – called for a new wave of theory building and turned towards increasing understanding of the 'gendered nature of organizations' (Calás et al., 2014; Gherardi, 2003; Sayce, 2012).

Questioning the assumptions of the gender neutrality of organizational culture, and careers too, exposed the fact that workplaces typically maintain a male-dominated organizational culture (Calás–Smircich, 2006; Gherardi, 2003; Metcalfe–Woodhams, 2012). On the level of practice, researchers started to focus on the mechanisms behind the organizational processes and practices of perceiving, evaluating, and rewarding women and men that ultimately create an unequal situation for women and men. Accordingly, the understanding of power relations and statuses as being gendered in an organization has also become a relevant focus in research related to careers (Gherardi, 2003; Gherardi–Poggio, 2001; Calás–Smircich, 2006; Calás et al., 2014; Ely–Padavic, 2007). Examining 'networking', for instance, has become an essential issue in assessing career development, and how this impacts career and organizational status (Gherardi, 2003; Calás–Smircich, 2006; Ely–Padavic, 2007; Calás et al., 2014). According to the relevant scientific literature, an essential advance in the field of gender studies was that the theory and approach turned towards an analysis of the constructions of 'gender relations' that result in hierarchical orders among men and women (gender order) (Ahl–Marlow, 2012).

As we can see, in this examination, the 'organizational context' becomes interesting, so studies aimed to demonstrate that the climate, the culture of the firms influence men and women's employment outcomes differently (Mavin–Grandy, 2012). Additionally, organizational categories (such as 'management', 'work', 'leadership', and 'career') were redefined to better reveal that organizations are not (gender)neutral spaces/entities with abstract, disembodied or desexualized workers (Ely–Padavic, 2007; Gherardi, 2003).[1] Finally, from the intention of scientifically examining how gender plays a role in

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[1] Organizational studies did not include gender on their research and analytical agendas. Organizations were viewed as gender neutral. The reconceptualization of these categories/terms is evaluated as a critical engagement in knowledge production about the 'organization' (Calás et al., 2014). From this point of view, feminist research is always understood as a critique of the mainstream field of organizational studies, as it reveals the gendered nature of this area of knowledge production (Cuzzocrea–Lyon, 2011; Ely–Padavic, 2007; Gherardi, 2003).

individual-level career development, we arrive at the point of examining how gender plays a role in organizational-level career construction.

The organization is not a closed entity

It also become a well elaborated subtopic in the literature that the role of organizations in the construction of gendered processes that impact careers is not restricted to within the boundaries of organizations. Work organizations are explained as not being closed entities as they are embedded in local (social and economic) practices and as such can have a specific, historically situated, contextual culture (Acker, 2006a; Liebig, 2000). This literature views individuals as being in interplay with the organizational culture, while there is also an interplay between the organization and its social environment, the wider society (Acker, 2006a; Liebig, 2000; Padavic et al., 2020). Consequently, organizational culture can be characterized by its organizationally specific meaning, collective opinions, expectations, and ideas about male and female employees, about gender relations, or in terms of the state of gender equality both within and outside of the organization. Because organizations are always located within the broader social-economic context, organizational attitudes and practices associated with gender relations and issues may or may not differ from those views and opinions that exist outside of those organizations (Liebig, 2000).

The literature highlights that it is especially important to understand that cultural norms, values, and expectations constrain career moves, both on an organizational and societal level, independent of women managers' discourses about their career progression (Broadbridge, 2010; Halrynjo–Lyng, 2009). In the case of women managers with children, it is strongly recommended to consider the role of the socially-bound value system, as this affects the career activity of ambitious women negatively, and can help describe the processes and practices that are involved in the unfolding of the gendered nature of career development (Carli–Eagly, 2007; Halrynjo–Lyng, 2009; Xian–Woodhams, 2008).

The involvement of intersectionality into research

The research focus also moved from employing an essentialist perspective about women (i.e., as women consisting of a homogeneous group, or women being representative exclusively of male norms) to incorporating a more complex image of women managers (Billing, 2011; Ely–Padavic, 2007). Scholars agree that the new issues and concepts that emerged under the themes of diversity inevitably helped to highlight the differences between various groups of women (managers and professionals) and to theorize the 'multidimensionality of inequality' (Metcalfe–Woodhams, 2012).

Not only did themes of diversity start to shape the research agenda on gender inequality (Ely–Padavic, 2007) as new issues emerged (Calás et al., 2014; Metcalfe–Woodhams, 2012). It was also recognized that multiple characteristics define individuals (including race, ethnicity, class, age, sexuality,

and religion) (Holvino, 2010; Metcalfe–Woodhams, 2012). All these categories can intersect with gender, leading to 'overlapping' and, eventually, mutual reinforcement (Acker, 2006a; Metcalfe–Woodhams, 2012). It is more explicitly clear in the case of women of colour that gender is fundamentally complicated by class and race/ethnicity, and that when the latter are involved in research a more complex social reality can be captured (Acker, 2006a). Therefore, incorporating intersectionality into research changed the perspective that women and men are essentially different. As a result, the understanding of women managers as white middle-class women expanded to include the diversity of the various groups of women managers, and it became highlighted that women are situated in a socially constructed way (Acker, 2006a; Billing, 2011; Ely–Padavic, 2007; Metcalfe–Woodhams, 2012). By now, the use of intersectionality as an approach to exploring how gender operates in tandem with class, ethnicity, age, and sexuality (Cuzzocrea–Lyon, 2011) is widely acknowledged in research (Acker, 2006a; Brink–Benschop, 2011).

Changing the conceptualization of gender

The different theoretical assumptions for conceptualizing gender generate different understandings of the organization and have resulted in various scientific approaches to studying organizations and careers (Calás et al., 2014; Ely–Padavic, 2007; Gherardi, 2003). Additionally, defining gender is also a relevant methodological issue (Calás et al., 2014).

In the 1970s, the term 'gender' was understood much more simply and seemed much more straightforward than it is nowadays (Hearn, 2019). Within the scientific approach of 'gendering organizations', the conceptualization of gender moved towards acknowledging that gender is a *socially constructed practice and experience* that is enacted through an *ongoing social and dynamic process* (Gherardi, 2003; Metcalfe–Woodhams, 2012; West–Zimmerman, 1987). Scott's definition of gender perfectly summarizes this social constructionist view on gender: "The core of the definition rests on an integral connection between two propositions; gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power" (Scott 1986, p. 1067, quoted in Acker 1990).

In this social constructionist understanding, gender is conceived of as a social process and practice that is always in the process of 'doing'; it is thus not equivalent to the characteristics of the two sexes, and nor does it refer to natural, essential, or biological difference (Ely–Padavic, 2007; Gherardi, 2003; West–Zimmermann, 1987). Increasingly, the understanding of gender is no longer only based on particular cultural and historical constructions, but is 'intersectionalized', which means that for a richer (or clearer) understanding of 'gender', further intersectional perspectives are involved (Hearn, 2019).

The expression *'doing gender/undoing gender'* is a central one for understanding that gender refers to fluid and contextualized performance/achievement. The original insight into the term 'doing gender'

came from a seminal article written by West and Zimmerman in 1987 entitled 'Doing Gender' (published in *Gender and Society* 1. (2): 125-151). Besides West and Zimmermann, R. W. Connell and Judith Butler are the two scholars whose contributions are widely acknowledged, as it was they who laid down the conceptual framework of 'practising gender', and described it as a learned practice through socialization. They further defined gender as fluid, specific, embodied interactions involving little reflexivity and awareness and with different consequences for men and women, but favouring men (Martin, 2003).

As West and Zimmerman (1987) explain, "Doing gender means creating differences between girls and boys and women and men, differences that are not natural, essential, or biological. Once the differences are constructed, they are used to reinforce the 'essentialness' of gender" (West–Zimmermann, 1987, p. 137), and, because gender is seen as "natural", instead of taking gender as the "property of individuals, we conceive of gender as an emergent feature of social situations: both as an outcome of and a rationale for various social arrangements and as a means of legitimating one of the most fundamental divisions of society" (West–Zimmermann, 1987, p. 126). Research on 'doing gender' even goes further in the understanding of what doing gender means. Accordingly, if the 'gender doing' signifies how gender can be done well, meaning that it is in congruence with the sex category, 'gender undoing' should be instead replaced with 're-doing' referring to that gender can be performed, expressed differently or alternatively as being congruent with the sex category. This conceptualization of 'doing gender' can better reflect that gender is a fluid concept (Billing, 2011; Mavin–Grandy, 2012). What is essential for the theoretical background of this research is that within organizations, gender appears as a social accomplishment and is enacted and organized around shared practical understandings of its performance (Gherardi, 2003; Gherardi–Poggio, 2001).

Given the above, the social constructionist perspective is that gender should not be understood as something individuals *have*, such as fixed characteristics, or taken as the fixed essence of individuals that defines what male and female are. On the contrary, gender appears as a multiple, flexible, fluid (Gherardi, 2003; Calás–Smircich, 2006; Calás et al., 2014; Mavin–Grandy, 2012), and intersectionalized category (Hearn, 2019), and refers to a social practice; a practice that individuals *do/undo/redo* concerning each other (Ely–Padavic, 2007; Gherardi, 2003; Mavin–Grandy, 2012; West–Zimmermann, 1987). This is why recent theories speak about gender (and gender relations) as being 'produced', 'reproduced', or 'performed' in a particular social and cultural context and language (Calás et al., 2014, Gherardi, 2003). Hence, gender is always a social construction and a socially accomplished process, but at the same time it is a cultural product within a historically and culturally institutionalized system (Calás et al., 2014; Gherardi, 2003). Accordingly, gender is not only a social but a *situated* practice; an accomplishment which is culturally (re)produced at a local organizational level. Gendering processes are understood overall as being embedded in particular power relations, and historical and political conditions (Acker, 2006a; Gherardi, 2003). The

scientific attempts to theorize inequalities and differences in organizations accordingly turned towards seeing organizations as being gendered and understanding that gender is deeply embedded in organizations (Acker, 1990).

Based on the socially constructed perspective of gender, scholars have turned their attention towards understanding how gender is *done* (or achieved) rather than what gender *is*, for which purpose the measuring of differences is not enough. Instead, the construction of processes (i.e., how differences are formed and enacted) and their related dynamics and fluidity should be examined (Ahl–Marlow, 2012). Following the social constructionist conceptualization of gender, *gender inequality* in organizations appears to be an outcome of practising gender in everyday working life. Practising includes language, images, ideologies, and knowledge as well (Acker, 1990, 2006a; Calás et al., 2014).

The approach of a 'gendering organization'

The current approach to studying career-related issues in organizations is referred to as the 'gendering organization' approach (Calás et al., 2014). The 'gendering' approach is distinguishable from the approach of 'gender and/in organizations', the primary focus of which was describing the differences between men and women (as introduced above). The 'gendering' approach focuses on examining the *gendered nature of relations, processes, and production* (see, for instance, language, knowledge, and symbols) in organizations. It tends to understand how the social construction of sex differences – and through this, identities, power relations, and career opportunities – is maintained, reinforced, or potentially changed (Acker, 2006a; Calás et al., 2014; Ely–Padavic, 2007; Nagy, 2014).

Therefore, in line with the approach of the 'gendering organization,' the purpose of scientific examination is to attend to how practice and meaning in organizations and management become gendered (Calás et al., 2014; Ely–Padavic, 2007; Gherardi, 2003). One of the primary purposes of this approach is to demonstrate that hierarchical structures are organized along gender lines. On an individual level, 'doing gender' might contribute to the maintenance (or changing) of gender inequality regarding power and career in organizational culture. Additionally, revealing that gender relations are practised as if they were natural or objective facts is also an aim (Calás et al., 2014; Ely–Padavic, 2007). For this purpose, social practices such as *gender beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, and norms* (Ridgeway, 2009) help to maintain *gender order* (Gherardi, 2003).

Scholars understand that applying gender to the study of organizations (and career development within them) offers a rich and relevant theoretical approach and conceptual tool. This is because such an application of theory goes beyond describing the differences between men and women, more importantly, and takes these differences as socially constructed and continuously changing phenomena (Calás et al., 2014; Ely–Padavic, 2007; Gherardi, 2003). Thus, organizations cannot be taken as gender-neutral contexts

because the gendered subjectivity of individuals and gender-related power dynamics, in terms of organizational processes, are accomplished and performed in interaction with organizational structure and culture (Cuzzocrea–Lyon, 2011).

Furthermore, a gender-sensitive conceptualization of careers and the methodology applied to examine the latter no longer apply a normative view of careers as involving upward vertical mobility. Instead, the aim is to understand how organizations produce an idealized, male-centred construction regarding careers. Second, it is also an aim to show the different constructions of careers that operate across all levels of organizational hierarchy (Cuzzocrea–Lyon, 2011).

To sum up, the application of a gender-sensitive theoretical framework allows for a broader conceptualization of career, which can widen the scientific scope in terms of better understanding the reality and the unfolding of women's careers and working lives (Calás et al., 2014; Cuzzocrea–Lyon, 2011).

2.2. The Gendered Nature of the Organization

Gendered processes and practices fundamentally organize social relations, norms, and attitudes to women and men within organizations, and also the distribution of power, resources, and control concerning career trajectories. The former determine and reinforce differences and inequalities, shape the identities of individuals, power relations, and career opportunities. Many sociologists draw on Joan Acker's theory of gender regime (1990, 2006a, 2012a) and focus on the gendered nature of organizations to explain how gender equality is built into the structure of work organizations.

This section introduces the theoretical framework referred to as the 'gender regime' to explain the role and impact of gender on those organizational processes that define the development of the careers of women managers at the middle level of the organizational hierarchy. The concept of 'gender regime' is a sophisticated framework which can be used to explain the impact of the gendered organization on individuals' career construction. The theoretical starting point is the claim that gender shapes the organizational context that defines individual opportunities for career construction (Acker, 1990; Nagy, 2014). The explanation of how gender operates within organizational processes and practices contributes to a deeper understanding of the embeddedness of career moves, experiences, and decisions in the organizational context (Acker, 1990, 2006a; Benschop et al., 2013).

2.2.1. Origin of the Gender Regime concept

The persistence of gender inequality in organizations has inspired many scholars to come up with theories of gender that are applicable to work organizations. One of the critical purposes of explaining the gendered nature of organizations has certainly been to demonstrate the gendered nature of careers (Calás et al., 2014). It is extensively argued that gender is a fundamental element of organizational and working lives, and that career maintenance is based on gendered discourses, assumptions, and practices that contribute to different

individual career situations, and in the case of many manager women, marginalized ones (Acker, 1990; Gherardi–Poggio, 2001; Nagy, 2014; Poggio, 2006).

Joan Acker has undoubtedly had a significant influence on the literature which critically questions the gender neutrality of organizational culture and structure (Benschop–Doorewaard, 2012; Nagy, 2014; Sayce, 2012). The gendered outcomes of organizations were already well-described (Dye–Mills, 2012), but Acker's theory for revealing how organizations can be interpreted as gendered entities became established (Acker, 1990). Her work significantly contributed to explaining how gendering processes and practices are developed, reinforced, or changed in organizations, and how the power relations of a male-dominated organizational culture are maintained. Acker (1990, 1998, 2006a) demonstrated how organizational practices and relations create gender inequality and discriminatory practices, including the practices of career development (Acker, 1990, 1998, 2006a; Sayce, 2012).

To examine the domains of the gendered nature of organizations, some of Acker's widely used and quoted concepts are especially relevant: namely, the concept of (1) 'inequality regime/gender regime' and, (2) the 'gendered substructure of organizations' (Acker 1990, 1998, 2006a, 2012a).

The conceptual framework of the gender regime was originally introduced by Connell into the scientific discourse in the 1990s (Boni Le Goff et al., 2019; Nagy, 2014). Connell distinguished the term 'gender regime' from the term 'gender order' (Connell, 1987). By now, the concept of gender order is used when the focus is on macro-societal or national-level gender relations to describe and interpret the structural relations of women and men in society. Gender regime, however, is applied in the scientific discourse when specific institutions and their organizing practices are under examination (Boni-Le Goff et al., 2019; Nagy, 2014). The gender regime of an organization is always a specific locally situated regime, and as such can be similar or different to various degrees to the 'gender order' (either reproducing or changing the social patterns of gender relations) of wider society (Connell, 1987). To describe the gender regime of an organization, Connell (1987) identified four dimensions of the patterns and gender relations that can be used as a framework for describing any organization's gender regime. These are the following: the gender division of labour, the gender division of power, gendered emotions, and the gender culture of attitudes, symbols, and beliefs about gender (Connell, 1987). This approach of concentrating on the gender regime at the meso-organizational level was also applied by other scholars (see for instance, Gherardi–Poggio, 2001; Nagy, 2014; Walby, 2005). Walby, for example, applied the concept of gender regime in relation to the macro-level of society. In this way, she widened the focus to more than single institutions, and hence, understands that a gender regime is the systematic construction of gender relations on a societal level (Walby, 2005). When Acker concentrates on gender-based inequalities, she uses the term '*gender regime*' (Acker, 1994, 2006a) similarly to other authors, particularly when analysis of the role of gender in

reproducing or changing the power structure of organizations is conducted (Acker, 1994; Boni-Le Goff et al., 2019; Tienari et al., 1998).

By now, use of the term 'gender regime' has become well established in the gender and organization literature. Gender regime is used to explain the dynamics of gendered (and racialized) and class inequalities within organizations. Inequities appear through more visible signs, such as differences in positions between men and women, and via less visible examples, such as the nature of gender relations, narratives, values, norms, and symbols in organizations (Healy et al., 2018; Nagy, 2014). 'Gender regime' as an approach is also well-used in the literature to explore careers, especially when the focus is on the construction of gender inequalities at any stage of the career (Boni-Le Goff et al., 2019).

2.2.2. Inequality/Gender Regime

Indeed, Acker's most comprehensive attempt to describe the organizational dynamics and the multiple, intersectional sides of the differences in gender relations is based on the concept of '*inequality regimes*'. Using this concept is central to the understanding of how power, control, resources, decisions, and opportunities in an organization are shared unequally. Acker points out that inequality regimes are everywhere, both formally and informally, at all layers of organizations: "The ubiquity of inequality is manifest: Managers, executives, leaders, and department heads have much more power and higher pay than secretaries, production workers, students, or even professors" (Acker, 2006a, p. 443). Acker, however, goes further – she argues that organizations are not only gendered but reflect the differences between men and women in a way that organizational arrangements favour men and exclude and discriminate against women (Acker, 1990, 1998, 2006a).

In the process of building up the conceptual framework for gendered organization theory, Acker emphasizes the importance of intersectionality: "I still believe that the concept of gender regime is a useful approach to understanding how gender is reproduced in organizations. I would now emphasize the idea in the paper that organizing processes should be looked at simultaneously from various 'points of entry.' Organizing practices are always shaped with the help of images, symbols and ideologies, actually carried out in interactions—some through computers, by people who have fashioned themselves as competent gendered organizational actors. I would now emphasize, more than appears in the paper, the importance of class/gender/race interests in shaping organizing practices and ideologies" (Acker, 2006c, p.212). As this quote perfectly shows, an inequality regime is a complex and complicated phenomenon. Therefore, in any examination, it is essential to first see that practices and processes are always interlocking, and second, that the result is continuously maintained inequalities (Acker, 2006a, p. 443).

In essence, Acker argues that gendered inequalities cannot be fully understood without consideration of the impact of the other components. Furthermore, she also emphasizes that it is challenging

to examine the various processes simultaneously. First of all, the variety of different inequality processes makes it difficult to reveal them. Second, searching for intersecting processes can be difficult due to their invisibility (i.e., those with advantages do not see how they reproduce the disadvantages of others). It is thus suggested to highlight more visible signs of intersectionality and to concentrate on actual organizational practices (Acker, 2012a).

Acker defines the roots of inequalities "as loosely interrelated practices, processes, actions, and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities within particular organizations" (Acker, 2006a, p. 443). In the practice of examining an organization, this means looking for at least the following inequalities and their intersecting relations: class, race, and gender, while further categories such as sexuality, religion, age, and physical inequalities may also be examined. These additional variables are all potential bases for the activation of inequalities within organizations. However, Acker (2006a) acknowledges that, among the previously mentioned categories, gender, race, and class are the most relevant, as they fundamentally construct the working day and work-related obligations. Gender is always present in organizations. Men's better representation in decision-making authorities is a good example that shows how socially constructed differences between men and women are present. Acker also emphasizes that gender is integrated with class and race in many organizations, although class relations at workplaces are no longer completely integrated with gender, but socially defined differences based on race are still one of the bases of inequality. Also, age currently seems to be one of the more significant characteristics that defines the inequality regime in organizations (Acker, 2006a, pp. 444-445) In essence, the inequality regime serves as a conceptual approach to the exploration of gendered and racialized class practices in organizations (Healy et al., 2018).

For the purpose of exploring inequalities, Acker defined six components of inequality regimes, which are the following: "the bases of inequality, the shape and degree of inequality, organizing processes that create and recreate inequalities, the invisibility of inequalities, the legitimacy of inequalities, and the controls that prevent protest against inequalities" (Acker, 2006a, p. 444). The first component, the basis of inequality, can vary in different organizations, but gender, class, and race are those elements of the basis that they are usually present in every organization and show systematically maintained differences. Changes, however, can occur. The desegregation of professional and managerial positions, for instance, is progressing. However, occupational segregation is still a strong aspect of inequality. Another visible sign of inequality is the differences in the wages of the genders. Acker (2006a) also mentions differences in power. It is women managers who "quietly […] do the organizational housekeeping, […] keep things running, while men managers rise to heroic heights to solve spectacular problems" (Ely–Meyerson, 2000, p. 447., quoted in Acker, 2006a, pp. 445-447).

The second component of the inequality regime is its shape and degree. One dimension that signifies the shape and degree of inequality is the "steepness of hierarchy" (Acker, 2006a, p. 445), for which we can find examples – from the steepest hierarchies of traditional bureaucracies to flat organizations with less hierarchical structures. To further deepen the descriptions of the steepness of hierarchies, how power differences and jobs are gendered within organizational levels may be analyzed.

Organizational practices and processes are the third components that produce inequality along the lines of gender, class and race. These organizational processes and practices include numerous formal and informal processes that occur as work is carried out. First of all, work is organized in line with formal, often written, general requirements, but also conforms to the (informal) image of the unencumbered worker (who is often a white man), who is dedicated to his work and has no reproductive responsibilities towards his family. Flexibility and part-time arrangements are also significant in organizing processes nowadays. The possibility of working flexibly or part-time and the degree varies according to the hierarchical level of jobs, and as such these factors are critical to the maintenance of gender inequality in organizations. Wage setting, supervision, recruitment and hiring are other ways of creating both formal and informal practices (for instance, selection based on an old-boy's network). These practices then define who is suitable for particular positions, or who is rewarded for high-performing work, and who is asked for their opinion or considered to be the next aspirant. All of these formal and informal practices influence in subtle ways patterns of inequality, and gender is a fundamental organizing factor in this process: "Female bodies are appropriate for some jobs; male bodies for other jobs" (Acker, 2006a, p.449). In sum, gender inequalities (similarly to class and race ones) are created and maintained in the fundamental construction of the working day through organizing work, work obligations, supervising, and all the formal and informal interactions, assumptions and expectations (Acker, 2006a, pp. 447-451).

Also, inequality regimes at different organizations can be characterized by the degree of awareness of such inequalities. Patterns of invisibility/visibility can vary from a complete lack of awareness to being very conscious of inequalities. However, it is often the case that those who are in a privileged position do not see their privilege, or that inequalities seem to be so minor that they almost disappear, and are therefore almost impossible to recognize. Similarly, the legitimacy of inequalities can vary according to the hierarchical patterns of organizations. In organizations with more rigid bureaucracies, inequalities are more accepted. However, in those organizations in which anti-discrimination steps and affirmative action are employed, inequalities continue to appear through assumptions and beliefs that naturalize unequal situations – for instance, the perception that women are better suited to child care and less suited to demanding careers (Acker, 2006a, pp. 452-454).

Finally, the sixth component that maintains inequality is organizational control (i.e. managerial power) that ensures that employees accept the system of inequality. Mechanisms for exercising control and

power draw on gendered and racialized assumptions, content, hierarchical relations, and also on internalized forms of control insofar as they are premised on a belief in the legitimacy of hierarchical relations between managers and subordinates (Acker, 2006a).

According to Acker (Acker, 2006b; 2012; Sayce, 2012), the gender regime is a useful approach to understanding how gender is reproduced in organizations. Nevertheless, to show where and how inequality is reproduced we should turn to a more analytical process of understanding the gendering of an organization to reveal the hidden layers of organizations, which are introduced as being the gendered substructure.

2.2.3. The Gendered Substructure of Organizations

In the theory on gendered processes and practices in the work organizations, Acker's descriptions of the '*gendered substructure of organization*' and the '*organizational logic*' on the '*abstract, disembodied, ideal worker*' are much-used concepts (Sayce, 2012) and are still considered to be a scientifically relevant framework for asking questions about the persistence of gender inequalities (Acker, 2012; Sayce, 2012). These concepts help to understand what the gendered nature of a work organization means.

According to Acker (1990, 1998), the gendered nature of an organization means that structures in the hierarchy, any advantage or discrimination, work processes, and even control over the work, relations, interactions, and identity formation of employees *"are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine"* (Acker, 1990, p. 146.). Accordingly, organizational culture, which is seemingly gender-neutral, demonstrates a masculine pattern and produces certain conditions which favour men as being *ideal worker*s. It is not easy to see the gendered nature of organizations because this layer of organizational culture is taken for granted and assumed to be neutral, hence appearing as organizational reality (Calás et al., 2014; Martínez, 2011).[2] Additionally, the fact that gender is an integral part of organizational processes, and that individuals 'doing their gender, indicates that work organizations cannot be fully understood without an analysis of gender (Acker, 1990; West–Zimmermann, 1987).

In sum, a seemingly gender-neutral organizational structure and culture are constructed by gendering processes in work arrangements, work descriptions, rules, segregation between work and private life, hierarchies, behaviours, and even in the way employees maintain relations and interactions. To describe the gendered substructure more systematically, Acker introduced (1990) five ways in which organizations are gendered. The five (later four) elements of the gendered substructure (through which the gendering

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[2] It is important to add that although Acker does not put much emphasis on class, she also elaborates on the relations between organizational process and class structure: "The structure of the labour market, relations in the workplace, the control of the work process, and the underlying wage relation are always affected by symbols of gender, processes of gender identity, and material inequalities between women and men. These processes are complexly related to and powerfully support the reproduction of the class structure" (Acker, 1990, pp. 145-146.).

processes of an organization take place), in which inequalities are built into, and so lead to gendered organizations, are the following: 1) Organizing processes: gendering practices in the structure of the organization creating gendered divisions (devisions in power, responsibilities, relations, tasks), 2) Organizational culture: gendering practices in culture, 3) The gendered patterns of social interactions on the job, workplace interactions, 4) Constructing gendered components of individual identities, 5) Reproducing organizational logic (Acker, 1990, 2012a).

These five, interrelated gendered processes and practices contain analytically distinct groups of elements. However, they are part of the same reality that continuously creates and reinforces the appearance of normality and neutrality of male-defined practices in organizations (Benschop–Doorewaard, 2012; Calás et al., 2014; Martinez, 2011). Therefore, we can say that the gender substructure is a component of "many, always interacting, aspects of organizing." (Acker, 2012a, p. 217). Perhaps the structural arrangements into which inequalities are built are the most obvious example of the many gendered organizational processes and practices (in relation to the allocation and percentage of women and men in the various hierarchical positions of an organization) (Acker, 2012a; Benschop–Doorewaard, 1998, 2012). This is the first of the gendering processes: "the construction of divisions along gender lines" (Acker, 1990, p. 146), which can be very visible in power structures of organizations, locations in physical space, and also in the allocation of jobs or differences in wages (Acker, 1990). Dye and Mills (2012) also emphasize that, in addition to identifying visible signs of discrimination, we should look for those practices which are responsible for sex segregation in occupations and gendered ways of recruiting or evaluating employees (Dye–Mills, 2012).

The second gendering process involves the *"construction of symbols and images that explain, express, reinforce, or sometimes oppose"* the division between men and women (Acker, 1990, p. 146), and also all of the attitudes, behaviours, values, and beliefs about gender differences and equality or inequality (Acker, 2012). This gendered nature of organizational culture is often revealed very explicitly in job descriptions, and in the ways tasks are coordinated by using symbols, images, rules, and values (Benschop–Doorewaard, 2012). The symbols, images, and the consciousness of using them shape societal norms and values; this is how symbols and images help to create an organizational environment in which the strengths and power that is valued is associated with maleness (Dye–Mills, 2012). Organizational cultures incorporate particular and specific images, attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, and values that are shared and accepted by everyone, and also elements that are unacceptable to some. Similarly, images of multiple masculinities and femininities exist within a single organizational culture (Acker, 2012a; Metcalfe–Woodhams, 2012).

Third, the social interactions between all employees can inevitably reinforce gendered processes in an organization (albeit they can reinforce equality too). For instance, interactions can strengthen the role orientation of women who give emotional support to others as being social-emotional oriented, and the role of men as task-oriented actors in all kind of situations. Other examples may indicate the existence of

gendered organizational processes, such as gender differences in interruptions, turn-taking, topics, defining topics, joking about women, harassment, or opposition to proposals favoured by women (Acker, 1990, 2012a; Metcalfe–Woodhams, 2012). This contributes to the characteristics of women and men's statuses, and to those practices that create the distinctions between women and men along lines of power and subordination (Acker, 1990; Benschop–Doorewaard, 1998, 2012).

The fourth type of gendering process includes the identity formation of women and men within an organization (Acker, 1990, 1998). Individuals continually undertake internal mental work involving gender construction to understand the organization's structure of work and opportunities (Dye–Mills, 2012). Gender identity construction contributes to the appearance of individuals as women and men, and through this of masculinity and femininity, thus their power-based relations are enforced. Ultimately, clear rules and norms may be connected to the formation of distance between women and men (Benschop–Doorewaard, 1998, 2012). As we can see, as women and men participate in work processes, their identities are formed and changed, which then contribute to the aspects of the gender substructure (Acker, 2012a; Metcalfe–Woodhams, 2012).

Acker says that individuals might be conscious of their choice of work as being appropriate for women or men, and may willingly present themselves as gendered members of organizations as they demonstrate gender-appropriate behaviours and attitudes (Acker 1990, 1998; Dye–Mills, 2012). Gender identities, however, can be modified through experiences at work – a clear example of this being when women managers working in higher level positions face the challenges of managing 'like a man'. All in all, "Managers' identities are complex, variable, and changing over time and place" (Acker, 2012a, p. 216).

The fifth gendering process, the organizational logic identified by Acker, appeared in the early conceptualization of the gendered organization, and the 'ideal worker' was introduced as the most fundamental element of organizational logic (Acker 1990, 2006a). Later, organizational logic was presented as a kind of foundation for the everyday organizational activities of the other processes according to which employees behave and interact with each other (Benschop–Doorewaard, 2012; Dye–Mills, 2012). Most researchers draw on the later iteration of the concept consisting of the four processes (Dye–Mills, 2012). Eventually, through developing her work, Acker finalized her conceptual framework based on the four processes of gendering organizations, which appear as structural, cultural, inter-relational, and identity-constructing processes (Acker, 2012a; Benschop–Doorewaard, 2012; Dye–Mills, 2012).

Thus the final set of organizational processes, which now is referred to more as an organizing principle of gendered processes, is organizational logic (Dye–Mills, 2012). The organizational logic which is reproduced every single day through organizational activity creates and conceptualizes social structures in organizations (Acker, 1990). It is a kind of "common understandings about how organizations are put together, the constituent parts, how the whole thing works" (Acker, 2012a, p. 217). However, organizational

logic refers to the broader socio-economic embeddedness of organizing work, along with the separation of work and domestic life (Dye–Mills, 2012).

Organizational logic can also be found in those kinds of organizational arrangements which have material forms: these include the written work-related rules, labour contracts, managerial directives, and informal behaviours which prescribe workplace behaviours (Acker, 1990; Dye–Mills, 2012). Furthermore, organizational logic can be even "created and transmitted through texts, management consultants, articles in management journals, books, lectures in management schools and departments, and schools of public policy" (Acker, 2012a, p. 217.). Looking at the various forms of organizational logic, it appears that the former is not directly based on hierarchy. Team-based organizations, for instance, in which more democratic collaboration and organizational logic can be identified are not based on hierarchical control, although greater gender equality is not necessarily achieved therein (Acker, 2012a; Metcalfe–Woodhams, 2012).

2.2.4. The Ideal Worker

The central notion of organizational logic is the ideal worker; this constitutes certain expectations about working. The general requirements of work can vary among organizations and organizational levels too; nonetheless, work is organized around the same image of an ideal worker who is unencumbered by family obligations, works for long hours, is available any time, and in a flexible way. The characteristics of this ideal worker refer to those kinds of work-oriented and highly-qualified employees whose primary interest and responsibility towards is paid work, and who have less commitment outside the workplace or are free from household and childcare duties. Therefore, the ideal worker is someone who ideally has no family responsibilities, will not break their career path because of childbearing, or an ill family member – therefore, is a person who is available full-time and who is flexible (Acker, 1990, 2006a, 2012).

In organizational thinking, the ideal worker is not only an 'abstract' concept, so does not have a 'body' (is disembodied), but is also neutral in terms of not having a 'gender'. Even though the ideal worker appears to be gender-neutral, the characteristics of a disembodied ideal worker correspond more closely to men workers, especially men managers who work in the higher ranks of organizations (Acker, 2012; Metcalfe–Woodhams, 2012; Benschop–Doorewaard, 2012). Therefore, the ideal worker is more likely to be considered to be a man (or occasionally childless women), and women, consequently, are primarily considered to be mothers or potential mothers within seemingly gender-neutral organizations (Acker, 1990, 1998). This claim represents a significant part of organizational logic, because the notion of ideal work "implicitly differentiates women from men, with men more likely to be seen as real workers because traditionally women have done the unpaid work that allows men to be unencumbered" (Acker, 2012, p. 218).

At this point in discussing the gendering processes, we arrive back at the starting point of explaining gendered substructure, as organizational logic about the ideal worker legitimates the thinking that organizational processes contribute to gender-based discrimination and the marginalization of women in work organizations. In this way, it is explained why the disembodied ideal worker more often happens to be a man, in reality (Sayce, 2012). Thus, this gendered organizational logic – the idea that the ideal workers are male employees – is embedded so deeply in organizations that it creates the sense that men and a masculine type of leadership are the reference points for representing the ideal manager. In the end, the whole system of organizations favours men as ideal workers (Acker 1990, 2006a). It is precisely in this way that the organizational logic of the ideal worker creates an unequal situation for women: "Images of men's bodies and masculinity pervade organizational processes, marginalizing women and contributing to the maintenance of gender segregation in organizations" (Acker, 1990, p. 139).[3]

In the same way, if the career development of managers is based on the image of the ideal worker, such workers are considered to better fit the assumptions about ideal workers. The latter do not have commitments in the private sphere and are fully available for work (Acker, 1990, 1998). Because women have more obligations and responsibilities outside of work, they are considered to be less available for managerial work, especially within the higher ranks of an organizational hierarchy. It is precisely this way that the gendered nature of organizations, the gendered organization of work, and assumptions about the ideal worker take on importance in maintaining the unequal distribution of men and women in the organizational hierarchy (Acker, 2006a). Alongside this, organizational processes, rules, and work arrangements become normalized due to the assumptions derived from organizational logic. Therefore, organizational processes appear as gender-neutral (Acker, 1990; Dye–Mills, 2012).

To conclude this section, the gender regime of organizations is maintained through the processes and practices of organizing work, and by assuming who best corresponds to the image of a seemingly gender-neutral and disembodied worker. These processes and practices are supported by various, interrelated elements of the structure and culture of organizations and are reproduced in interactions and gendered identity constructions within and outside of organizations. These gendering processes are supported by the gendered logic of organization which recreates gender inequalities at a less visible level (Acker, 2012). Also, the organizational thinking that involves assuming that a disembodied and universal worker has a man's body is found to be a common conception in work organizations (Acker, 2006a. 2012). It is, however, essential to add – particularly in regard to twenty-first century workplaces –, that although

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[3] Benshop and Doorewaard (2012) also explain that "the notion of the abstract or 'ideal' worker is an important manifestation of the functioning of the gender subtext in organizations", while as an example of the gender subtext it is explained that the idea of an "abstract worker is implicitly loaded with masculine connotations" (Benschop–Doorewaard, 2012, p. 227).

this hypothetical worker resembles a man, men also can find it difficult to work according to this ideal form of working life (Geszler, 2016; Kvande, 2009).

2.3. Dynamics between Individuals and Structure
2.3.1. Societal-level factors to consider

Although literature articulates the importance of the organizational embeddedness of individual career choices and moves, it similarly highlights the importance of the impacts of societal-level structures, processes, norms, and expectations (Acker, 2006a; Broadbridge, 2010; Carli–Eagly, 2007; Halrynjo–Lyng, 2009; Healy et al., 2019; Brink–Benschop, 2012; Powell, 1999). Accordingly, individuals are always understood to be in a state of interplay with the organizational culture, while at the same time there is interplay between the organization and its environment, wider society (Acker, 2006a; Calás et al., 2014; Liebig, 2000; Padavic et al., 2020). Therefore, the inequality regimes of organizations are understood to reflect and be interconnected with broader societal influences (Acker, 2006a, 2012; Healy et al., 2018; Liebig, 2000).

From an analytical perspective, this means revealing and interpreting the macro-level influences of broader societal norms and expectations about individual experiences, and the differences between women's and men's experiences with careers (such as their aspirations and beliefs about career success) (Pryce–Sealy, 2013). Theoretical approaches offer a holistic approach to identifying the various factors which determine the development of women managers' career paths (Powell, 1999, 2012). Perhaps the most well-known is a holistic model called the GOS approach that refers to the intersecting field of gender, organization, and the broader system of society (The approach referred here was developed by Fagenson [1990] then applied by Powell [1999].). The individual level of gender focuses on factors which are connected to the individual's socialization, attitudes, and motivation regarding career, education, and family background. Organizational-level factors include norms and expectations, promotion, recruitment, evaluation, the structural position of men and women, and working arrangements. The third level focuses on the macro-level of societal correlations and the broader social and economic system. This level of factors can include, for instance, the educational rate, structure of the labour market, patriarchal social system, norms and expectations about gender roles, and national-level social and family policy (Powell, 1999).

Indeed, there are objective constraints among the macro factors to consider. These factors include, for instance, states subsidies for child care, the availability of childcare institutions, financial resources, and work-family policies (Ahl–Marlow, 2012; Halrynjo–Lyng, 2009). In addition to objective constraints, consideration of the role of a socially-bound value system in shaping career activity is suggested. Several examples in the literature demonstrate how the societal norms and expectations related to women being the primary carers affects negatively the career aspirations of women when they have a child. In this way, social

norms and expectations play a significant role in the processes and practices of how the gendered nature of career development unfolds (Carli–Eagly, 2007; Halrynjo–Lyng, 2009; Xian–Woodhams, 2008). State policies and legal arrangements, for instance, are known to have an essential role in shaping public opinions about gender attitudes and women's participation in the workforce through the provision of subsidies and allowances related to combining work and family duties (Fodor, 2002; Halrynjo–Lyng, 2009; Kispéter, 2012). Similarly, it is well known that the opportunity to take extended parental leave, together with traditional attitudes about gender roles, contributes to women moderating their previously high career aspirations (Halrynjo–Lyng, 2009; Saxonberg–Sirovátka, 2006).

In relation to women managers and their careers, the literature points out that it is especially important in the case of this particular group to understand that cultural norms constrain their career moves, values, and expectations, not only on an organizational but also at a societal level – independent of women managers' discourses about their career progress (Broadbridge, 2010; Halrynjo–Lyng, 2009). Accordingly, some scholars suggest making the focus of researching cultural constraints instead of highlighting the impact of objective constraints on women's career development (Halrynjo–Lyng, 2009).

One of the most prominent examples of how societal-level norms about gender roles influence the organizational perception of women that is particularly relevant in the case of Hungary is that women are assumed to be potential mothers. As such, they face discriminatory treatment even at the beginning of their careers (in terms of recruitment) (Glass–Fodor, 2011; Nagy, 2003). Also, organizational responses related to the provision of work-life balance (WLB) programs are ingrained in the strong social belief that it is primarily mothers who take advantage of work-life balance programs to fulfil their expected role of being the primary caretaker. This is even the case in the more egalitarian Scandinavian countries. As we can see, macro-level, informal, and gendered norms and values can play an essential role in legitimating and reinforcing organizational practices, policies, and claims, and, in practice, shape opportunities and access to resources for balancing work-life and maintaining a career through formal structures (Burnett et al., 2010; Hobson et al., 2011; Padavic et al., 2020). In this way, gender expectations about women's and men's caring responsibilities can provide a 'rationale' in the organizational setting for keeping women in certain positions and at lower levels (Acker, 2006b).

Also, the societal acceptance of women as leaders can determine both the rights and resources awarded to women (and men too) to realize leadership positions at various organizational levels (Inglehart–Norris, 2003). The societal belief about who should be a leader and who should aspire in terms of their career is ingrained into the organizational logic, which can thus operate as a norm or a belief, and in this way reinforce and maintain the opportunities and statuses of women and men (Acker, 1998; Gherardi–Poggio, 2001; Nagy, 2014). Inglehardt and Norris, for instance, clearly (2003) demonstrated in their study that the norms, values, and beliefs about gender roles in a given society determine both the rights and

resources awarded to women and men to achieve powerful positions, and also determine how equally men and women are accepted as leaders. Inevitably, in a culture with a high level of gender equality, it is easier to claim legal rights de facto because women are not so limited to act due to society's traditional values when seeking opportunities (Inglehardt– Norris, 2003). Thus, this is how the societal acceptance of women as leaders contributes to women's disadvantaged and unequal organizational positions and their smaller chance of becoming leaders (Carli–Eagly, 2007; Inglehardt– Norris, 2003; Martínez, 2011; Nagy 2010).

The complexity and intersectionality of the factors that operate at the different levels indicate that none of the factors individually fully explains the subject on its own. However, all of them contribute to explaining the relationship between gender and career (Fagenson, 1990; Powell, 1999). Also, besides acknowledging that the surrounding social system maintains and reinforces organizational norms and logic, the literature suggests giving analytical prominence to individuals as agentic persons (Billing, 2011; Hobson et al., 2011; Walby, 1996) when examining how and with what dynamics individual-level career activities (decisions, choices, and moves) and social-level structures intervene in the specific, locally situated organizational environment (Cuzzocrea–Lyon, 2011). Therefore, the literature has somewhat turned its attention towards understanding how individual preferences and choices are shaped, reproduced, or constrained socially and culturally, and is seeking to explore how women's career decisions and choices are influenced by gender norms and stereotypes (Ahl–Marlow, 2012; Halrynjo–Lyng, 2009; Hobson et al., 2011; ILO Report, 2018). This kind of analytical approach understands careers to be not only a result of individual decisions and choices determined by organizational and social level factors but as manifestations of the interaction between agency and societal structures and norms (Halrynjo–Lyng, 2009; Hobson et al., 2011; Pryce–Sealy, 2013).

2.3.2. Agency and Capabilities

This research gives priority to analyzing the organizational-level processes and is also interested in how individual-level decisions are made on career, particularly how meso-level factors impact the individual-level decisions. In order to better understand how the disadvantages/constraints well-embedded in the structure and culture of organizations (see, i.e., assumptions on the ideal worker) impact the individual-level decisions making (preferences, choices, ambitions), I will draw on the 'agency and capability' conceptual framework, applied by Hobson and her co-authors (2011), initially developed by Sen (1992, quoted in Hobson et al. 2011). This conceptual framework serves as an example for this research in regard with the analysis of the interconnections between individuals and the gendered organizational context (Hobson–Fahlén, 2009; Hobson et al., 2011).

Through the analysis of individuals' decisions about work-life balance, the authors mentioned above presented how individuals can convert the multiple resources (referred to as conversion factors) of

individuals (i.e., human capital, income, gender, age, family and friend network, and resources), work organizations (i.e., organizational culture, quality of jobs, working time regime, etc.) and the normative elements of society (i.e., norms, social rights, the media, movement, and social policy) into 'agency freedom' (Hobson et al., 2011). This conceptualization of individuals' decisions clarifies the distinction between what a person actually does and the possibilities are available for actions in connection with the person's capabilities (Nielsen, 2017).

Accordingly, the explorative focus seeks to uncover the mechanisms behind the influencing factors at all levels in individual decision-making that shape their choices and capacity to exercise agency, and which can eventually lead to the desired preferences and a sense of greater control of work-life balance, career, or working time, etc. In essence, individuals' capability to use (or not use) resources shapes their decisions, as Sen summarized in the following way: "Institutions, rules, and informal norms held by others hence not only affect access to resources, but also agency and subjective states of efficacy, the real freedom to make choices or imagine alternatives" (Sen 1992, p. 2003, quoted in Hobson et al., 2011).

This 'analytical dimension', as Hobson et al. (2011) refer to it, also helps understand gender agency: "since gendered norms and values are legitimated and reproduced in policy and discourse, and can either inhibit or enable a sense of entitlement to make claim WLB" (Hobson et al., 2011, p. 170). The gender aspect in the analysis is essential for interpreting how gendered norms in the private sphere, workplaces, communities and society may impact the agency freedom to make decisions or claims. For instance, in work organizations where gender equality is embedded in practice, men and women are more likely to be able to convert their individual resources into claims for parental leave. In this way, a social right (which is legitimized in society), and based upon on this right, an institutional resource (i.e. when the norm is embedded in an organization) can be converted into individual agency to decide about work-life balance.

For interpreting the concept of career, the above-provided conceptual framework can be applied in the following way: individuals have different abilities and skills (for instance, their family's financial background, socialization, individual attitudes and motivations, and education level) to convert their resources into action – i.e. to further develop their careers. Individual-level ability, furthermore, is impacted by institutional-level norms and rules as these determine access to resources, including perspectives about what individuals can potentially achieve (partly based on gender). Hobson and Fahlén (2009) use a framework of 'disembodied' and 'embodied worker' to describe this organizational attitude towards employees concerning their capacity to use family-friendly programs. The authors argue that organizations view employees either as 'embodied' or 'disembodied workers'. Embodied workers – who are mainly women – are claimed to use the initiatives offered to them for reconciling work and life responsibilities. Disembodied workers – typically men – are assumed to be free of family- and other responsibilities and

can thus efficiently devote time and energy to work (Acker, 1990; Hobson–Fahlén, 2009).

When analysing career decisions, the individual aspirations, preferences, or expectations always is recommended to be interpreted in the context of the specific (local) organisational circumstances as women and men's make their decision by adjusting their preferences, desires to their work situations, organisational circumstances. Also, the individual level ability to use institutional resource towards a career is determined by the organisational processes which impose different gender expectations on women and men based on their gender. Therefore it is relevant to ask how assumptions on gender norms can be accounted for individual decisions (Nielsen, 2017). Although following Acker's (2006b) explanation, gender expectations about women's and men's caring responsibilities can provide a 'rationale' when making decisions. For instance, the ideological construct of 'intensive mothering' is a robust social expectation on highly aspiring women (Christopher, 2012; Hochschild, 2001). The latter requires mothers to devote a vast amount of energy and time to their children, regardless of their employment status. This solid requirement puts significant pressure on women by inferring that if they avoid being the primary caretaker and miss out on building a strong mother-child bond, they risk their children's well-being (Green, 2015).

Also, in the twenty-first-century organizational environment, a willingness to work long hours, career-making, and in line with this, work-life reconciliation, appear as a matter of individual responsibility and choice based on personal preferences (Halrynjo–Lyng, 2009; Hobson–Fahlén, 2009). It is mainly in the case of knowledge work that managers and professionals have a great amount of autonomy to organize their work (Williams et al., 2013). Furthermore, research on managers and professionals indicates that their working for long, uninterrupted hours signifies commitment and devotion towards work, which is the appropriate behaviour in the workplace according to the ideal norm of working. In such a work environment, those who have fewer career aspirations and use work-life balance tools to manage long working hours appear to be less devoted towards work, and thus do not correspond to norms about the ideal worker (Burnett et al., 2010; Hochschild, 2001; Kvande, 2009; Nielsen, 2017).

To sum up, by using the agency and capability approach we can recognize that organizational-level factors can determine the opportunities and capabilities of individuals to make choices about careers and also to use organizational resources for developing a career. Therefore, it is not only work organizations that influence managers' access to career resources, but perceptions about opportunities to use resources and the freedom to choose them (Hobson et al., 2011).

The theoretical combination of the gendered organization theory (with the abstract notion of ideal worker) and the capabilities framework can serve as an analytical option to avoid the 'structure–agency dilemma' (Walby, 1996), choosing between focusing on structure or agency. It is also helpful to capture the connections between individual-level experiences and organizational processes and understand more profound how organizational barriers become 'self-reinforcing patterns' of career decisions (Nilesen,

2017). In essence, the scientific inquiry that emphasizes the relevance of structural, cultural, and social constraints agrees that autonomy and the ability to have control over work and career and to use work-life balance tools are not solely subject to personal choice (Acker, 2006a; Halrynjo–Lyng, 2009; Hobson–Fahlén, 2009; Williams et al., 2013). Therefore, those organizational processes that leave the organizational culture unchallenged do not eliminate the norm of the 'ideal worker', thus lead to the marginalization of women who are more likely to use initiatives and practices which reinforce their appearance as disembodied workers (Burnett et al., 2010; Hobson–Fahlén, 2009; Hobson et al., 2011; Hochschild, 2001; Nielsen, 2017; Tomlinson–Durbin, 2010).

2.4. Applying the Concept of Gender Regime in Research

Acker's theorization on work organization offers a complex explanation that shows how organizational structure and culture reproduce, maintain, or change unequal gender relations, differences, and practices, including unequal career practices. This subchapter is dedicated to showing how scientific examination has explored gendering in organizations, and how this theoretical system provides the background for conducting exploratory research on mid-level female managers' career construction. Accordingly, this subchapter answer the question how to identify the gendered organizational processes and practices behind individual-level career-making.

The impact of gendered organizational processes and practices on career construction is selected as the central focus in understanding how careers unfold in the case of mid-level women managers. Acker's description of gender regime and the concept of gendered substructure serve as analytical tools for examining the practices and processes that reveal the gendered nature of specific organizations and their impact on career construction. This certainly means that the examination and analysis should reveal the differences between male and female managers' career construction. However, the examination also has to go beyond the identification of gender distinctions and ask questions about the organizational processes (including career practices, norms, and attitudes) that produce and maintain them in managerial career construction (Benschop–Doorewaard, 2012). Additionally, it is also a research interest to reveal the individual-level perception of gender differences in career construction, and the extent of their normalization in the researched organization.

The invisibility of gendered organizational practices, interactions and relations (as well as those of class and race) should be mentioned as being relevant components of the approach to examining organizations. Therefore, the research goal should be to make the 'invisible visible'; a goal which is undoubtedly has societal-level value, beyond any specific research goals (Acker, 2012a). The concept of the 'gendered nature of organization' is applauded for being able to show that individuals, based on their

gender, assumptions, norms, and values about gender, are presented with different opportunities and situations when attempting to improve their careers (Benschop–Doorewaard, 2012; Sayce, 2012).

2.4.1. Looking for Concrete Practices and Processes

Similarly to other scholars (see, e.g. Benschop–Doorewaard, 2012; Brink–Benschop, 2011; Bruni et al., 2004), Acker highlighted that while looking at concrete activities – i.e. what people do and say –, any examination should also consider the assumption that gender is embedded in the locally specific processes of organizations (Acker, 1992, 2006b, 2006c). In a way, she thus changed her focus from looking at the more abstract concepts of inequality processes towards more concrete practices and processes (Acker, 1992, 2012b). As she writes, "I wanted to go beyond empty abstractions and argue that such abstractions if they stood for actualities such as gender inequality, are based in ongoing processes or linked practices" (Acker, 2012b, p. 211) and "I moved to the analysis of concrete practices because I wanted to understand what I meant by 'structural'. I was influenced by Dorothy Smith, whose work makes the convincing argument that 'structure' is constituted in the actualities of daily practice. I think that we can use both levels of analysis, fleshing out abstract structures as well as cultural, interrelational and identity constructing processes" (Acker, 2012b, p. 211). This turn also explains why 'organizational logic' as one of the processes reproducing gender inequality disappeared from her later articles (Acker 2012a, 2012b). According to Benschop and Doorewaard (2012), this means that systematic analysis of the interrelated processes (of structure, culture, interaction, and identity) has disappeared. However, they admit that there "is much to say for the analysis of concrete processes as these enable a better understanding of the gender inequality processes in daily organizational practice" (Benschop–Doorewaard, 2012, p.230).

It should be added that the scientific approach of looking at concrete practices does not require a stable organization, however a changing organization inevitably makes the examination more complicated. However, the suggested understanding of an organization is the following: "Gendered inequalities, gendered images, and gendered interactions arise in the course of the ongoing flow of activities that constitute 'an organization'. A processual view is the only way to capture these emerging and changing realities" (Acker, 1998, p. 196). As Acker argues, the "study of change efforts and the oppositions they engender are often opportunities to observe frequently invisible aspects of the reproduction of inequalities" (Acker, 2006a, p. 441) Literature highlights that examining the changes in organizations is one way of exploring hidden gendered layers of inequality (Acker, 1994, 2006c; Dye– Mills, 2012; Martínez, 2011; Tiennari et al., 1998).

2.4.2. Gendering a Local Gender Regime

According to some scholars, the use of this framework to analyse the gendering of organizations in studies is somewhat under-utilized (Dye–Mills, 2012). Nor did Acker produce that many examples of practising the approach of the 'gendering of organizations'. Her study, however, of a Swedish bank entitled 'The gender regime of Swedish banks' (1994, 2006b) can serve as a guide to a research approach to examining a local gender regime. 'Gender regime', in this article is defined as the "internal structures, processes and beliefs that distribute women and men into different tasks and positions" (Acker, 2006b, p. 195). The content of this quote is a good starting point for understanding what to look for when examining a local gender regime.

There are many visible instances, signs of a gendered organization when we take gender into account, see, for instance, the differences in women's and men's positions (which is a visible example for concrete practices) at organizations, and their wages, tasks distributed to them, and their hierarchical positions (Acker, 2006b). However, differences between men and women are often symbolic or based on socialization and are therefore often normalized. Thus, they often change through history and also vary between organizations. As Acker wrote, "The gender regime of Swedish banks differs from the gender regime of US banks; the gender regime of the 1940s differs from that of the 1980s" (Acker, 2006b, pp.195-196). Such processes constitute an ongoing flow of activities, often changing as new conditions arise and new policies are attempted, and always informed and legitimized by gendered images of the organization and its participants. Furthermore, gendered differences within these processes are integral to gender differences in life outside the organization in the reproduction of organizational participants. To conclude, the term 'gender regime' stands for the ways in which gender is part of organizational processes at a particular time in a particular organization (Acker, 2006a, 2006b). Therefore, a description of particular organizations requires an introduction of the broader socio-economic environment.

Acker emphasizes that for identifying the invisible internal processes of a gender regime, we need to turn to collective organizational patterns of processes, "the ongoing flow of actions and interactions that constitute organizational life" (Acker, 2006b, pp.196). Accordingly, she suggested looking for (1) ordinary procedures (the concrete practices) and decisions (the concrete processes) that are connected to the daily organizing of work. Decisions can be effective ways to contribute to gender-based (and class- and race-based) segregation in a workplace through managing, controlling, or constructing new hierarchies. The decision to hire more part-time workers, for instance, can increase the proportion of women at the lowest level of an organization. The gender assumptions behind decisions also contribute to gendered differences and inequalities, and assumptions are often embedded in rules and policies and written procedures (Acker, 2006b). There are, for instance, gender assumptions behind job requirements, the complexity level of

specific tasks, and behind the negative values connected to women-dominated jobs; all of this can influence the low level of wages in such jobs in which women dominate (Acker, 1990).

Another way (2) to examine the gender regime is to study "images, symbols, ideologies and forms of consciousness that portray and give legitimacy to gender inequalities and differences" (Acker, 2006b, p.196). One way to use the symbols, images, and meaning of organizational processes is to show how gender inequalities are portrayed as legitimate inequalities. Therefore, by looking at the various views about how women and men see their organizational culture (whether the same way or differently), a new layer can be identified in the gendered organization. Based on the unequal situation of women and men in organizations, women often find different ways to cope with work culture (Acker, 2006a).

Third, face-to-face interaction is often loaded with gender implications and can show how control/power is managed. Interpersonal interactions can confirm, recreate, or oppose existing gendered patterns (Acker, 2006a, 2006b). By describing individual interactions, we can reveal how people 'doing gender' (West–Zimmermann, 1987) or 'undoing gender' (Kelan, 2012; Martin, 2003). The fourth focus in the examination of gender regime involves understanding the maintenance of a 'gendered persona' (Acker, 2006b) that is appropriate for achieving success within organizations. Accordingly, the gender regime can be revealed by looking at single patterns of individual behaviour, and whether these are adequate in the organization. Also, the gender regime can be revealed by examining how assumptions and practices related to private life and responsibilities for reproduction are incorporated into organizational processes and practices (i.e., work schedules, task demands, hierarchies, and workplace locations) and into the meaning of work (Acker, 2006b). Indeed, the concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987) is also an important one in understanding organization and gender, mainly in that organizational culture is often characterized as male. Thus, the functioning of masculinity in present organizations, male behaviour, male bodies and even male sexuality are also central issues as well in research which does not consider organizations to be gender-neutral (Acker, 2006a).

Promotion-related practices are one of the ways through which a gender regime is created. Acker provided several examples of this, with the purpose of showing that the practice of organizational promotion, together with work assignments, creates differences (including disadvantages) between and for women and men. The following examples were identified as being of relevance to those of (lower) managerial statuses: task differentiation helps young men to move to aspirant status; managerial potential is identified early in the case of men; different treatment of women and men at the point of deciding about careers; the sex segregation of positions connected with various levels of wages; the different patterns of connecting work with family responsibilities for women and men; part-time work is created to facilitate women's role in care work that also limits promotion possibilities; the organizational understanding of part-time work means lower career aspirations for women (when not promoted, men tend to leave an

organization, women tend to stay); additionally, the organizational understanding is that men compete for advancement, actively plan careers, and take risks, while women do not compete or plan careers as actively as men (Ackerb 2006b, pp.199-202). Also, in other articles Acker deeply elaborated on how different types of higher leadership positions for women and men are created when the former have family responsibilities (Acker, 1990, 2006a).

2.4.3. Gender Subtext

Examples of how to use Acker's theoretical framework as an approach involve the theorization of the gender subtext and an examination that demonstrates the role in the gendering processes of organizations by Benschop and Doorewaard (1998, 2012). In their conceptualization, the gender subtext is defined as "a set of often concealed, power-base processes (re)producing gender distinctions in social practices through organizational and individual arrangements" (Benschop–Doorewaard, 2012, p.225). The focus of the former was on the power basis of gendered relations in organizations, and they demonstrated in their research how organizational and individual processes produce or change the different positions of men and women (gender distinctions) and the various meanings of masculinity and femininity at work. In their view, the gender subtext contributes to the power basis of the inequalities between men and women. The gender subtext in this way contributes to the emergence of the various notions of the disembodied, ideal worker whose gendered character has implicitly masculine connotations in relation to care responsibilities and qualification profiles (Benschop–Doorewaard, 2012).

As Acker (2012b) evaluated their approach, Benschop and Doorewaard turned "to the more abstract concepts of the locations of gender inequality processes" (Acker, 2012b, p.209). Accordingly, they mainly relied on the concept of the ideal worker and organizational logic to reveal the gender subtext of specific organizations. For instance, they demonstrated how gender connotations of the ideal worker influence the gendering of jobs in the case of part-time work arrangements, and as such reinforce the unequal career opportunities of women in management positions (Benschop–Doorewaard, 1998). They also examined the various situations in relation to which persistent gender inequalities that are relevant in career-making, such as the 'mommy track' or women working in token positions. Also, they demonstrated the divergence between rhetoric about gender at work (the dominant perception that there is equality at organizations) and the practice of gender at work (various inequalities exist within organizations) (Benschop–Doorewaard, 1998, 2012). In their analysis, they examined both organizational and individual processes, and concentrated on objectives, measures, and habits, thus all the systems that maintain persistent gender inequalities and gender-based distinctions. They particularly paid attention to what they call the 'power processes'; i.e. those of violence, authority, manipulation, and regulations, the conventions of maintaining hegemonic power processes, and the informal and subtle aspect of power relations. They also emphasize

that inequality involves systematically maintained difference between participants that can appear through the distribution of power (such as control over goals and resources); in opportunities for workplace decision-making (such as how to organize work); and finally, in opportunities for promotion. These are all aspects of power that are crucial to understanding the gender relations in organizations (Benschop–Doorewaard, 1998, 2012). In relation to this dissertation, this suggests looking at the power processes and relations behind individual career stories.

Furthermore, one of the most useful examples of the latter authors with regard to the present dissertation is their analysis of the divergence between rhetoric about part-time work (which is understood as a tool for improving equal opportunities in career development) and the examples of women managers who work part-time (as part-time work is a gendered practice that creates difficulties and disadvantages in career management) (Benschop et al., 2013). Benschop and her colleagues' (2013) examination of the career opportunities of women working part-time is also an excellent example that shows that not all gender distinctions (as part-time managers are mainly women) appear as straightforward gender discrimination. Therefore, the authors demonstrate both the positive and negative sides of the subtle, invisible, and often ambiguous practices. It is also emphasized that one should remain aware that gender inequality exists at different levels in various parts of organizations, which helps explain why practices of gender inequality can be persistent in reality although the dominant organizational perception is one of gender equality.

Following the concept of the gender subtext and the approach to revealing it through analyzing power relations, Martínez in her analysis (2011) shows the recruitment processes of women managers into mid-level positions at universities. This article also serves as an outstanding example of this type of research. The author demonstrates that structural changes in organizations reproduce gender inequality in career development by analyzing the power and prestige women's positions represented. She also examined the type of work the women did on a daily basis. She found that women managers regularly did emotional work and engaged in conflict management on behalf of their male colleagues. Moreover, it was strongly expected that they would provide this form of support. Ultimately, Martínez demonstrated how the gendered expectations of women fulfilling positions considered as feminine created positions with limited power and less prestige (Martínez, 2011). This issue of 'one job with two realities' is one also elaborated on by Acker, who demonstrated in her analysis of the Swedish bank that the reconfiguration of specific jobs could lead to internal gender segregation. This means that men's and women's tasks may vary within the same jobs, which then channel women and men into different opportunities for promotion (Acker, 2006b). Similarly, Martínez (2011) explains that the feminization of management is a variation of internal job segregation by which women are channelled. This segregation then leads to negative career consequences because the women in her study had to take on those types of tasks that did not groom them for a more widely appreciated scientific career.

2.4.4. The Gender Regime of twenty-first-century Organizations

A series of articles has even been dedicated to celebrating Acker's theory and supporting its relevance in one of the issues of the journal *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal* (2012). Some of the articles from this issue are also good examples of how to turn the original concept into an approach to examining current discriminatory practices (Sayce, 2012)**.** Perhaps it is needless to mention that critical 'gender and organization literature' includes topics that examine organizational processes in terms of looking at issues outside the formal boundaries of organization and work, such as relations between work and life, and unpaid reproductive work (Acker, 1998, 2006a).

The relevance of using Acker's concept should be discussed from the aspect of 'time' as well. She developed her concepts based on examinations of traditionally male-dominated workplaces. Although many changes have occurred in the social organization of work and the structure of organizations (Williams et al., 2012; Kvande, 2009), the empirical results about twenty-first-century organizations and managers still show that her conceptualization of how to explain gendering processes in shaping careers and discrimination remained a relevant, valid scientific approach (Dye–Mills, 2012; Sayce, 2012). For instance, it is demonstrated in the literature that how work and organizational culture is organized is still more incompatible with the lives of those who are centred both on work and family life (Acker, 2012a; Burnett et al., 2010; Williams et al., 2012). Therefore, Acker's claim that "*hierarchical organizations are an important location of male dominance*" (Acker, 1990. p.139.) still stands nowadays. Plus, Acker's concepts are also acknowledged for being concepts that are compatible with the idea of intersectionality (Sayce, 2012).

Williams and her colleagues (2012) extended our understanding of the concept of organizational logic within the twenty-first-century work organization. Through an analysis of women scientists and professionals' career processes (at an oil company), they demonstrated how hierarchies are rationalized and legitimized within the researched work organization. They concentrated on some of the features of career practices (networking, teamwork, and career maps), and showed that these practices are embedded in organizational life and have become normalized while still maintaining inequality. It is elaborated in the article how these contemporary practices of career-making are problematic for women. By analyzing the new practices for career-making (such as the gendered characteristics of identifying future opportunities through networking, or team control of women), the focus is moved from the visible practices of career development (such as career ladders, job descriptions, and formal evaluations; see Acker, 1990) towards elements which are connected more to individual experiences and interactions (Williams et al., 2012). Still, the purpose is the same: "understanding […] how modern careers are organized and connect[ing] these changes to women's workplace experiences and the persistence of gender disparities in careers" (Williams

et al., 2012, p. 569). Thus, the centre of the investigation remained organizational logic, as authors have paid attention to the 'new organizational logic' in the twenty-first-century workplace that produces the mechanisms for reproducing gender disparities that are relevant to career-making (Williams et al., 2012).

In sum, the conceptual framework about the gendered organization is comprehensively referenced in the scientific literature, and a great deal of research supports Acker's theoretical claims about it. Her conceptual approach to examining organizations is still taken as a powerful framework, and still represents a theoretical base on which to analyse why inequalities exist or emerge in new ways (Benschop–Doorewaard, 2012; Healy et al., 2018; Hart, 2016; Sayce, 2012; Williams et al., 2012), even if not all the components of the conceptual framework are utilized when studying organizations (Healy et al., 2018).

2.5. Previous Empirical Findings in International Literature

A vast amount of literature has been produced about the careers of women managers in the field of sociology and gender studies. The topic has been studied from many angles, from the macro to individual level, and gender has been incorporated both as an analytical tool and as a research objective in empirically based career research. The gender focus is generally interpreted as being a means of both examining factors missing from the hegemonic knowledge of organizational studies and one that facilitates deeper analysis of the gendered processes in career building (Ahl, 2006; Broadbridge–Fielden, 2015; Carli–Eagly, 2007; Gherardi, 2003).

In terms of progress in gender-sensitive research, the lack of women in the top ranks of work organizations was the first major focus; therefore many questions were raised to identify the obstacles that prevent women's access to such top levels of management (Calás et al., 2014; Fagenson, 1990; (Nagy–Primecz, 2010). The concept of the 'glass ceiling' gained popularity from the middle of the 1990s and became a widely studied issue in the academic literature, especially in management research (Benschop–Brouns, 2009).

Although the glass ceiling is no longer presented as an unbreakable and unsolvable blockage (Beschop–Brouns, 2009; Carli–Eagly, 2007; Powell, 2007), this powerful metaphor is still praised by many scholars, and it is still a scientific intention to identify the place of the glass ceiling (localization) and beliefs (perception) about its existence (Benschop–Brouns, 2009). Also, the image of the glass ceiling represents the message that it is crucial to understand that women face barriers not because they as individuals are incapable of achieving (i.e. they lack considerable cultural capital or social experience), but because they as a group are kept from advancing into higher positions due to the presence of invisible obstacles (Benschop–Brouns, 2009; Nagy–Primecz, 2010).

With the increase in the proportion of women managers in organizations, researchers' attention turned towards the barriers that are encountered along the career path from the beginning (Carli–Eagly,

2007). First of all, scientific curiosity led to inquiry into why women are not advancing into top leadership positions, despite the considerable efforts that have been made to eliminate the related barriers (ILO Report, 2018; (Pryce–Sealy, 2013). Therefore, the gendered nature of managers' career paths has been explored in great detail. It was revealed from various perspectives that gendered organizational processes have a major impact on women managers' career development, mostly in a negative way compared to that of men's (Acker, 1998, 2006a; Tienari et al., 1998). Second, several new issues regarding careers that were previously unnoticed have been identified (Calas et al., 2014; Cuzzocrea–Lyon, 2011). Similarly, new issues have emerged in the literature which can be connected both to changing gender roles, the digitalization of work, and also to changes in how organizations operate in the twenty-first century (Hochschild, 2001; Holth et al., 2017; Kvande, 2009; Williams et al., 2013). It was, for instance, clarified at great length that women manager's career advancement and success is related to several non-work-related factors, and that they typically follow career patterns in which work issues and life issues cannot be separated (Acker, 2006a; Carli–Eagly, 2007; Hochschild 2001).[4] Therefore, the literature suggests considering the broader life context and the interplay between non-work and work demands when the purpose is to explain women's career stories (Carli–Eagly, 2007; Fagenson, 1990; Powell, 1999).

This chapter is written to introduce those findings about women's managerial careers that widen our knowledge of the particular group of women managers who work at the middle level of the organizational hierarchy. A review of literature on career advancement shows that major barriers are derived from the structural and cultural arrangements in work organizations. It is the aim to show findings both about the supporting elements and the practices preventing women from progressing in their careers in order to provide the most comprehensive picture of the careers of women managers' prospects. In regards of Hungary, there has been a minimal examination of the situation of women managers and gender at work organizations. The (mid-level) careers of women managers is a particularly under-researched area compared to the international situation. Therefore this chapter will serve as a base for the next chapter (Chapter 3.) to interpret findings on Hungarian women managers and organizations and, where appropriate, compare the international and Hungarian-related results.

2.5.1. Women Managers' Presence in Management

Recent popular discourse and media coverage often strengthens the belief that gender equality has almost been achieved in EU member states (Baumann, 2017). Certainly, much has been achieved (Baumann, 2017; Catalyst, 2020; EC Report, 2018), and numerous companies have taken steps to promote gender balance

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[4] Accordingly, many research findings claim that women typically follow career patterns in which work issues and life issues cannot be separated, and that they rather maintain various and equally important roles in their lives, of which being a manager is just one (O'Neil–Bilimoria, 2005; Mainiero–Sullivan, 2005; O'Neil et al., 2008).

and implement practices that support women managers' promotion (ILO Report, 2018). Long time-series macro data also demonstrate the increasing participation of women in management positions (see for instance: EIGE statistics; EC Report, 2018; ILO Report, 2018). The issue of the total lack of women leaders in management lost its relevance a long time ago (Powell, 1999; ILO Report, 2018).

It is now evident from all types of studies and reports that women in the EU have gradually gained significant power economically in terms of numbers and level of positions in the last decades (McKinsey, 2012; Powell, 1999; ILO Report, 2015; EC Report, 2019). It appears that the majority of women managers tend to be concentrated in the lower and middle levels of organizational hierarchy (in junior, supervisory, and senior management positions) (Catalyst, 2020; EC Report, 2014a; Powell, 2012; Carli–Eagly, 2007; ILO Report 2015, 2018). Macro data even show steady progress in the number of women managers at the top level (EC Report, 2014a; EC Report, 2018, 2019; Equality Index 2019, EIGE; ILO Report, 2015, 2018). For instance, in 2018 the proportion of women on boards in the EU (in the largest publicly listed companies) reached 26.7 % (EC Report, 2019). However, it is also reported that the progress of the representation of women in corporate boards and the highest level of corporations (chair and CEO positions) has slowed down since 2015, or there was only a slight increase (EC Report, 2018, 2019; Gender Equality Index 2019, EIGE). Still, it is observed that women managers' presence in senior and top positions has improved during the last years at the largest publicly listed companies (EC Report, 2018, 2019; Gender Equality Index 2019, EIGE).[5]

Women's increased participation in tertiary education during the last decades has also contributed to the reshaping of higher-level jobs (Madsen–Scribner, 2017). By now, the trend for women to overtake men in higher education has become established (England, 2010; ILO Report, 2015, 2018), although it should be added that horizontal segregation in higher education is still significant. Similarly, the female employment level is increasing at the EU level (EC Report, 2014b, 2018; ILO Report, 2018).[6] These

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[5] It is worth noting that significant progress has occurred in those countries in which a legislative quota was imposed with an associated target for the percentage of women on the boards of largest publicly listed companies. This is mostly the case in France, Belgium, Denmark, Italy, Austria, and Portugal (EC Report, 2018, 2019). The last Report on Equality between women and men in the EU adds that even in boards horizontal segregation exists, as women board members hold less critical positions in terms of decision making power. Therefore, it seems that legislation has had an impact on the number of women on company boards, but less impact on the type of positions they hold on such boards (EC Report, 2019). It is also stressed in the EC Report (2019) about the equality between women and men (2019) that applying legislative measures is not only important because gender equality in decision making (both in terms of the economy and politics) has not been achieved as an objective, but also because progress in reaching equality in this field is still too slow.

[6] The female employment level is increasing at the EU level, although it progressed more rapidly before the economic crisis of 2008 (EC Report, 2014b). The economic crisis created a vulnerable situation both for men and women overall in Europe; although female employment was reported to be less affected by unemployment and the disadvantages of women compared to men have declined, this may be seen as a temporary situation. Research also revealed another layer of the consequences of the economic crisis: it found that women in peripheral countries suffered more from the recession than their counterparts in Western countries, hence the inequality gap widened regarding employment and the poverty rate among women in core and peripheral countries (Nagy–Fodor, 2014). It is also reported that austerity

tendencies show that women's participation rates in the labour market and their investment in human capital are still proportionally higher in general than their participation rates in managerial positions (ILO Report, 2015). In other words, despite the steady progress in relation to women reaching top positions, vertical segregation is still a concern in the EU states. Additionally, all of the above-mentioned tendencies demonstrate that women managers represent a significant and increasing resource for the business world (EC Report, 2018, 2019; Equality Index 2019, EIGE; ILO Report, 2015, 2018). A closer look at the macro data support the view that the increased educational attainments of women, and the international-level focus on and intention to support women obtaining senior positions are still insufficient (ILO Report, 2018; Pryce–Sealy, 2013).

Gender segregation within the various managerial jobs also shows that the situation of women is not fully positive. It is a well-documented phenomenon that women managers' statuses and numbers are higher in those types of managerial fields which are typically regarded as feminized fields (Billing–Alvesson, 2000); EC Report, 2014a; Martínez, 2011). In reality, this means that women tend to be concentrated in the fields of human resources, public relations, communications, finance and administration, marketing, quality control, and procurement management. Additionally, women are more likely to be underrepresented in managerial roles related to operations, sales, research and product development, and in general management (Catalyst, 2020; ILO Report, 2015, 2018).

2.5.2. Findings about the Careers of Women Managers

As the previous section presented, women can enter managerial jobs in large numbers and they can advance in their careers (ILO Report, 2015, 2018; Pryce–Sealy, 2013). However, research continues to report that corporate culture strongly favours men, and that women managers experience ambivalent and often problematic situations regarding their career progression and managerial positions. (ILO Report, 2015, 2018; McKinsey, 2012). It is also emphasized that, despite the significant achievements and progress in promoting women into decision-making positions (EC Report, 2104b; ILO Report, 2018; Jackson, 2001; Wajcman, 1998), women still face persistent challenges, barriers, and discriminating organizational culture practices when seeking to advance in their careers (Calás et al., 2014; Carli–Eagly, 2007; Benschop–Doorewaard, 2012; Jackson, 2001; Kumra, 2010; Lämsä–Hiillos, 2008; Padavic et al, 2020; Pryce–Sealy, 2013).

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policies have had a negative impact on gender equality (and on women's rights) including on their equal position in the labour market. The overall qualities of working conditions and work-life balance options for women have worsened, and women have been pushed into more precarious jobs and their domestic workload has increased (EWL, 2012). In general, the crisis has undermined the progress that had already been achieved towards women's integration into the labour market (Women's watch, 2012-13).

Literature provides various examples of the structural factors that contribute to the difficulties women managers experience during their career progression. Formal gendered organizational practices such as recruitment, promotion procedures, performance evaluation and leadership development are perceived as factors that create such barriers (Acker, 2012a; Broadbridge–Fielden, 2015; O'Neil et al., 2008; Tlaiss–Kauser, 2010, Fitzsimmons et al., 2014; Madsen–Scribner, 2017).

Fitzsimmons and his co-authors (2014), for instance, in their study on the determinants of women managers' careers, emphasize that organizational structures – underpinned by strong stereotypes about women as leaders (see also on this Carli–Eagly, 2007) – influence women's positions from the very beginning of their entry into organizations. Women receive less career support right at the beginning of their careers, and while progressing in their careers they are provided with fewer opportunities to experience and improve their leadership identity. The following examples were identified in detail: women have less access to mentoring and career development programs, and lack the opportunity to engage in line roles or international assignments. The authors also claimed that flexible and part-time arrangements do not help women managers to be seen as committed and successful leaders. It is concluded that women managers are placed in a disadvantaged position even at the time they are recruited into mid-level positions (Fitzsimmons et al., 2014).

Empirical research has also demonstrated at great length that women, especially in strong male-dominated organizations, are typically excluded from informal networks, tend to be given lower-level projects with less perspectives for developing career, and their ideas are frequently ignored or discounted. As a consequence, women managers' competencies are underutilized and undervalued, ultimately making them less visible as potential leaders (Acker, 2006b; Carli–Eagly, 2007; Jackson, 2001; Kumra, 2010). This is true in the case of work-centred women too; as was demonstrated by Kumra (2010), although women managers were considered hard-working, aspiring employees who were actively seeking to advance their organization's goals, they were not recognized as aspirants for higher positions. Thus, their efforts were not rewarded and they experienced less opportunity for career advancement than their male colleges.

Networking is a central organizational practice in career progression, and thus a major determinant of future positions (Benschop, 2009; Cuzzocrea–Lyon, 2011; Nielsen 2017). In the literature, networking is understood as the practice of managing the deployment of social capital both within tight and wider interconnections and relations (Cuzzocrea–Lyon, 2011). In this sense, belonging to a network is an essential resource that individuals can use to achieve career goals and to overcome challenges (Madsen–Scribner, 2017). Its primary purpose is to foster self-promotion through high levels of visibility and sponsorship (Kumra–Vinnicombe, 2008, quoted in Pryce–Sealy, 2013).

As Benshop (2009) explains, networking is 'socially accomplished and dynamic,' which means that it is a career-enhancing process which is fundamentally based on interaction between people, and as

such, it can be very problematic and is based on gendered mechanisms (Brink–Benschop, 2011, Carli–Eagly, 2007; Williams et al., 2012). In practice, networking is often referred to as being a male process (Kumra–Vinnicombe, 2008, quoted in Pryce–Sealy, 2013). More importantly, it is known that formal promotion processes rely on informal processes that occur during a preparation period. The opportunities to use such networks are reported to be different for men and women, and women managers are typically excluded from relevant information networks (Madsen–Scribner, 2017). Women's exclusion is often based on gender dynamics, such as the 'subtle mobilizations of masculinities' in daily interactions from women are left out, and hence lowering their chances to accumulate social capital and increasing the risk of becoming invisible for their environment as potential career aspirants (Nielsen, 2017).

Also, changes in organizational structure are considered to lead to particularly vulnerable situations for women managers (Acker, 1994, 2006b; Martínez, 2011; Tienari et al., 1998). Empirical research suggests that structural changes in organizations have negative consequences for women managers' positions. Both Acker (1994, 2006b) and Martínez (2011) illustrated in their studies on women managers that the latter ended up in positions with less power and prestige after structural changes were initiated in work organizations. Martínez (2011) reported about the interviewed women that they ended up in operative managerial positions, where they were loaded with administrative tasks and did less strategic and professional type of work than before. It was also general that women who were assigned to new positions were often required to do emotional work for other professionals or team members, such as moderating conflicts among other employees while fulfilling the role of social mediators. Another source of problems came from their lack of acknowledgement as managers by other professionals, especially by older male colleges; therefore, they constantly had to fight to have their positions taken seriously by others. The interviewed women managers described themselves as problem-solvers instead of leaders; in line with this, they described their work as 'doing housework' as they were always overloaded with never-ending administrative tasks. Besides referring to their positions as 'service management' or 'domestic management', they experienced being undervalued in their work.

Martínez (2011) raised another interesting issue; namely, the fact that interviewed women managers were recruited due to the fact that they were women. Tienari et al. (1998) came to the same conclusion in a study of bank managers that women managers were recruited to positions due to their feminine traits. The question certainly arises here whether women's socially constructed competences are positively acknowledged, and may be able to provide better opportunities for women. However, paradoxes arise in relation to the situation of women fulfilling managerial positions in large numbers within an organization (similarly to the horizontal segregation within sectors).

First, similar to the 'flexibilization' at workplaces, the 'feminization of management' is also of concern and in the same way a controversial development (Acker, 1994, 2006b; Madsen–Scribner, 2017;

Martínez, 2011). The feminization of a management not only means that women are present in large or in visibly sufficient numbers, but it also signifies the fact that management is associated with practices considered as feminine (such as facilitating, developing people, and conflict management), and behaviours and traits considered as feminine (such as being emotional, and being a caring, dedicated person) (Priola–Brannan, 2009).

On the one hand, the feminization of management represents a fundamental change that signifies that women are largely integrated into managerial jobs; on the other hand, it also shows that managerial jobs in which women are concentrated often lead to segregation and devaluation (Acker, 1994, 2006b; Madsen–Scribner, 2017). For instance, in the case of branch bank manager roles, it is agreed that women are included into management, but this role became devalued after women entered this occupation in large numbers (Acker, 1994, 2006b; Tienari et al., 1998). Due to the disadvantages derived from the devaluation of managerial positions women fulfil, it is typical for them to change organizations if they want to advance in their careers or to end up specializing in particular fields while lacking experience of general or line-management (Fitzsimmons et al., 2014).

Second, it is known from the literature that women are typically recruited for non-desirable management positions and/or in the case of an emergencies, when they take up positions in riskier times, and end up with worse conditions (Acker, 2006b; Baumann, 2017; Fitzsimmons et al., 2014; Martinez, 2011; McKinsey Report, 2012; Tienari et al., 1998). All these considerations about the gender of managing/management lead to the next determinant, leadership style, which contributes to the success of women managers' career advancement.

2.5.3. Women Managers as Leaders

The acceptance of women as leaders also has a major impact on their career success. Studies suggest that the societal acceptance of women managers as competent leaders is of particular relevance regarding women managers' careers, as the normative position of male managerial behaviour and masculine traits are treated as more suitable in an environment which is constantly full of change and tension (Acker, 1998; Carli–Eagly, 2007; Linstead, 2002). In addition, it is important to see that contemporary organizational culture still requires a masculine type of leadership independent of the sex of managers, especially in higher positions (Billing, 2011; Linstead, 2002). The empirical findings on women managers' acceptance as leaders, however, show ambivalent results.

The corresponding literature admits that women managers acceptance as leaders has increased by time (Carli–Eagly, 2007; Powell, 2012). Roles in which women managers tend to be concentrated in large numbers typically have supportive and serving functions, requiring leadership that includes skills and traits stereotyped as feminine, such as good communication, caring, or emotional bonding with inferiors

(Martínez, 2011). It should be added that the feminized fields of management may have contributed to the greater acknowledgement of the female leadership style (Calas et al., 2014; Linstead, 2002), as they have also been part of a positive change in the discourse about women managers. Skills and values characterized as feminine have become part of the characteristics that describe a good leader, and as such have contributed to the greater acceptance of women as leaders and greater acknowledgement of the feminine-stereotyped leadership style (EF Report, 2009; Linstead, 2012; Calas–Smircich, 2006).

Additionally, despite the greater acceptance of women managers as competent leaders, research agrees that women working in feminized managerial roles have limited career prospects because these positions usually provide limited power, status, and experience and are thus insufficient stepping stones to executive positions, as they are not constructed through the exercise of decision-making, authority, and control (ILO Report, 2015; Linstead, 2002; Martínez, 2011; Priola–Brannan, 2009; Tienari et al., 1998). Ultimately, positively evaluated feminine traits concerning the leadership style can legitimize the gender-based division of work in some departments (Martínez, 2011).

Turning to higher leadership positions, literature explains that when women managers prosper in their career and enter higher positions, they are still required to follow a more masculine type of leadership style (Wajcman, 1998). It is also known that, for women, it is more difficult to fit this prototypical image of an ideal leader (Acker, 2012a; Madsen–Scribner, 2017), and those leadership practices which are considered as being fit for mid-level positions are undervalued (Madsen–Scribner, 2017). Partly, the tension of being a woman leader comes from the incompatibility between the societal roles assigned to women and the masculine character of leadership (Wajcman, 1998). The empirical literature refers to this as a 'double bind' situation: either women act in a "feminine" way (by adopting a consensus-based leadership style) or a "masculine" one (by being an agentic leader) – either choice leading them into stressful and controversial situations and questioning their ability to lead. Being feminine disqualifies women managers from being competent leaders, but being masculine types of manager questions their femininity and leads to them being perceived as being over-ambitious or even aggressive (Carli–Eagly, 2007; Ely–Padavic, 2007; Pryce–Sealy, 2013; Xian–Woodhams, 2008).

In essence, the fact that women have to develop a male type of management style, especially in senior positions, is considered to be a relevant gender-related barrier, because after adapting such a style women are usually labelled negatively (Jackson, 2001). Empirical results on women leaders, however, show a much more complicated situation, as the application of masculine traits in leadership style has been found to be part of building a credible leadership identity. Empirical findings reveal that women managers intentionally adapt their behaviour to the male-dominated culture of organizations to be successful managers. Lamsa and Hiillos (2008), for example, reported on Finnish women managers who described masculine behaviour as valuable, although they had experienced that they had to modify it, becoming only

modestly competitive. Billing (2011) also demonstrated in her empirical research on Swedish and Danish women managers that not all women managers experience incongruence between being a woman and adjusting to a male management style.

Similarly, in a meta-analysis of studies, Powell (2012) reported mixed findings about the relation between gender and leadership. He concluded that managerial fields still favour men, and managerial behaviour is still associated with masculine gender stereotypes. He also reported evidence of women managers being evaluated less positively compared to male managers. However, Powell also pointed out that there have been positive changes in attitudes and preferences regarding the gender of managers. A good manager is not described predominantly with terms associated with masculinity. Martínez (2011) also pointed out that women managers are expected to have personal managerial competences in general, but their stereotypically feminine skills are also highly in demand. These tendencies definitely show a greater acceptance of female managers, although it is also claimed that despite the growing acceptance of women managers, we should be aware of the extent of such changes, because they are not enough to eradicate the disadvantages and obstacles women face in workplaces (Powell, 2012).

2.5.4. Long Working Hours, Flexibility, Work-life Balance

Organizational culture in the twenty-first century, especially the culture of large companies, requires flexibility, long working hours, and competitiveness from employees (Hochschild, 2001; O'Neil–Bilimoria, 2005; ILO Report, 2019; Tienari et al., 1998; Pryce–Sealy, 2013; Williams at al., 2012). It is also a well-supported claim that the intensive use of Info Communication Technology (ICT) and the ongoing and rapid digitization of work is pushing employees to fulfil the organizational requirement of being available for work all the time, and from anywhere (Holth et al., 2017; Kvande, 2009; Primecz et al., 2016; Sayah, 2013).

Employees should be ready for change all the time (Tienari et al., 1998; Martínez, 2011), and are required to be constantly available and mentally centred on work (Holth et al., 2017; Kumra, 2010; Primecz et al., 2016; Sayah, 2013). It is also well-described in the literature that flexibility is a double-edged sword, as it often means that it is the organization that rewards employees to be flexible for the interest of the employers. Therefore the employee-driven and employer-driven flexibility is differentiated when discussing the issue of long working hours (Hobson–Fahlén, 2009; Padavic et al., 2020). Literature reports that although women and men both increasingly face this requirement of availability for work, the implications for their careers is different for men and women (Holth et al., 2017). The organizational norm of availability requires managers to subordinate their non-work roles and to delegate family responsibility to others, typically spouses, which creates an especially difficult situation for women who have children (Hochschild, 2001; Jackson, 2001; Kumra, 2010), even in more egalitarian societies (Holth et al., 2017).

These requirements can create harsh condition and an unfriendly atmosphere for managers, both women and men (Acker, 2006a; Jackson, 2001; Geszler, 2016).

All these requirements and characteristics of organizational culture contribute to the decreased acceptance of women managers an aspiring managers, and create difficulties for their career advancement. Research on managers and professionals indicates that working for long, uninterrupted hours signifies employees' loyalty, commitment, and devotion towards work, which is considered appropriate behaviour in the workplace according to male/ideal norms of work (Hochschild, 2001; Holth, et al. 2017; Kvande, 2009; Pryce–Sealy, 2013; Williams et al., 2013). It is demonstrated in the literature that when women combine their work availability with family responsibilities, they withdraw from their careers, and, eventually, their career progress slows down, and they can lose their expertise and confidence in their field of profession (Hochschild, 2001; Carli–Eagly, 2007; Holth et al., 2017).

In this organizational environment, men who work long hours can appear to be more devoted to work and more ambitious in relation to their careers than, for instance, women who work part-time or are less available because of the illness of a child (Carli–Eagly, 2007; Hochschild, 2001; Holth et al., 2017). Being ambitious in this sense signifies how much extra time and effort an employee can further devote to their work. Ultimately, those men managers who work long hours and are constantly available for work (are free of family responsibilities) become valuable employees for the organization (Benschop et al., 2013). All this can lead to the organizational view that the devotion to and ambition for work and career is connected with long working hours and permanent availability (Benschop et al., 2013; Lewis–Humbert, 2010; Tomlinson–Durbin, 2010; Williams et al., 2013).[7]

Furthermore, the acceptance of an individual's capacity to decide on their career is paired with the view that individuals are responsible for their choices, which are based on personal preferences (Halrynjo–Lyng, 2009; Hobson–Fahlén, 2009). This view of individual's capacity to make choices and state their preferences particularly applies in the case of professional and managerial work when employees have a great amount of autonomy to organize their work (Williams et al., 2013). The trend of long-working-hours culture is reported to be a salient issue that particularly challenges employees' concerns about their careers, hence their personnel choices and preferences in relations to work-life solutions (Hochschild, 2001; Holth et al., 2017; Kvande, 2009; Williams et al., 2013).

Part-time arrangements are a good illustration of the ambivalent situation of women managers in relation to deciding on career advancement, as these can represent both promising and problematic issues

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[7] A culture of long working hours is an issue for men as well. Research has found in the last decade that, with changing social and gender roles, fathers also face difficulties and significant stress balancing work and life, and this may damage their careers, but they more likely continue to advance contrary to women (Hochschild, 2001; Holth et al., 2017; Kvande, 2009; Padavic et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2013). On the Hungarian perspective of father's' work-life balance, see Gelszer, 2016.

in relation to career advancement (Bleijenbergh et al., 2016). On the one hand, part-time work can be taken on due to withdrawal from a previously ambitious career plan, or as a break in career advancement (Benschop et al., 2013; Bleijenbergh et al., 2016; Dick, 2010; Tomlinson–Durbin, 2010; Hochschild 2001), while on the other hand, part-time work can support women managers to maintain their careers (Bleijenbergh et al., 2016). According to research findings, good relationship with superiors have a major role in supporting the careers of women managers' plans in the case of part-time work and supporting their acceptance as aspirants for further higher positions (Benschop et al., 2013; Dick, 2010; Durbin–Tomlinson, 2014). Similarly, the positive impact of digitization in work and using ICT is an issue that needs to be discussed in relation to career advancement (Benschop et al., 2013; Bleijenbergh et al., 2016; Tomlinson–Durbin, 2010; Hochschild, 2001).

2.5.5. Family Responsibilities

Family responsibilities are usually mentioned as one of the most crucial factors in influencing women's career development and in the evaluation of women's commitments towards their work and career (Acker, 2006a; Carli–Eagly, 2007; EC Report, 2014a, O'Neil et al., 2008; Vanhala, 2011). The negative effects of family responsibilities on women's careers are well-known to the whole of European society (EC Report, 2014a). An ILO survey (2015) reported similar findings about the awareness of this issue: Central and Eastern European countries identified family responsibilities as the primary barrier, with men not being encouraged to take family leave as the second, and the lack of strategies for the retention of skilled women as the third most important barrier to women becoming leaders.

Corresponding literature has identified the consequences of having children and work-life balance conflicts both on career and family life. Having children slows down women's career progress (Carli–Eagly, 2007; Hochschild, 2001). It has been demonstrated even in a Norwegian scenario that women reduce their career aspirations after having a child (Halrynjo–Lyng, 2009; Bleijenbergh et al., 2016). Also, family responsibilities can include activities other than taking care of children; the expectation that women are responsible for elderly care, for example, is also a factor which influences women's careers in a negative way (Atkinson et al., 2015). It is also important to see that being a woman, thus gender and not family status, is the primary cause of barriers in women managers' career progression, as women who do not have children perceive similar barriers as women who have children due to the expectations about their having family responsibilities in the future (Kumra, 2010).

It is also worth noting here that this way of thinking about societal expectations is of significance both for women and men because it not only confirms the structure of organizations but determines the role of women and men and their responsibilities outside organizations in the private sphere too (Acker, 1990, 2006a; Calas–Smircich, 2006). In essence, the scientific perspective that motherhood is a culturally

constructed status in society has consequences for women's careers in two ways: by influencing women's career motivation/plans/prospects, and due to the expectations of organizations that women are the primary caretakers, which involves several negative stereotypes about women and their aspirations (Carli–Eagly, 2007). This belief about roles in the family is ingrained in the organizational response to providing solutions for achieving work-life balance. It is a widely-held solution that organizations offer flexible work arrangements to women to ease the conflicts between family obligations and their jobs (Padavic et al., 2020). This is how meso-organizational and macro-level, informal, and gendered norms and values can play an important role in legitimating and reinforcing organizations' work-life balance (WLB) policies and claims, and, in practice, shape opportunities and access to resources through formal structures (Burnett et al., 2010; Hobson et al., 2011; Padavic et al., 2020).

Literature also points out the fact that, despite the existence of diverse parenting practices and women's long-established presence in the labour market, the ideological construct of 'intensive mothering' is also a strong social expectation, especially in the case of middle-class women with higher education (Christopher, 2012; Hochschild, 2001; Kutrovátz, 2017). Mothers are required to devote a great amount of energy and time to their children, regardless of their employment status, and significant pressure on mothers comes from the assumption that if they avoid being the primary caretaker and miss out on building a strong mother-child bond, they risk their children's well-being (Green, 2015). According to Carly and Eagly (2007), the expectation that mothers should spend more quality time with children is increasing, but what women gain due to greater sharing of domestic work with men, they lose in spending more time with their children (Carli–Eagly, 2007).

The pressure from such societal expectations that results in the slowing down of careers of women managers at the mid-level is demonstrated by many examples. Carli and Eagly (2007), in their study on middle-level women managers, illustrated how the social expectation that women are the primary caretakers impacted their career development and opportunities negatively. The responsibility of household work and childcare forces women to take more time off, to do less paid work, or to do more part-time work than men. As a consequence, they cannot put in extra hours at work (plus, they have less time for recreation), and they have fewer opportunities to build social capital and develop their professional skills, which is essential for career advancement. Similarly, Hochschild (2001), in her emblematic study of an American corporation, also illustrated how the dual expectations of working for long hours and being the primary caretaker forced women to choose between career and family, although a sophisticated family-friendly program was implemented in the company under analysis. Regarding women managers working at middle level with small children, she found that due to the pressure of organizational norms, they worked more than those women managers who did not have children, and they typically ended up slowing down their careers (being

on 'the mommy track,' or working part-time) or tried to become 'supermoms', which did not help them to reduce the stress of managing work and family.

The gendered expectation of intensive parenting is a valid case in Norway too, even though the latter country is considered to have the best opportunities for professional and managerial women to combine career and motherhood, and which has developed policies for promoting gender equality in workplaces. Halrynjo and Lyng (2009) demonstrate in their study of 14 professional women working in Norway how they reduce their work commitment after childbirth and withdraw from previously promising careers to adapt to managing family and work. The authors examined the gendered patterns of processes, circumstances, and discourses about how women shifted towards work-family adaptation and changes in their career-related commitment. They describe the way in which women shift their identities and orientations towards a more childcare-compatible lifestyle when they encounter the incapability of care and career commitments, and they experience feelings of incompetency. Vanhala (2011) also demonstrated, by examining data collected from more than 400 Finnish managers, that women's definitions of success and priorities change after they become mothers. However, she also highlighted that these changes were due to non-existent career prospects, and not the other way around (i.e. that women made a conscious choice to put family first, and careers after).

The private sphere is interesting in another regard in the case of the development of the careers of women managers. Spousal support can influence women's managerial success both positively and negatively (Heikkinen et al., 2014; Lamsa–Hiillos, 2008). Heikkinen and her coauthors (2014) conducted interviews with 25 Finnish managers working at the middle level of organizations. It was found that both the type (such as practical, psychological, and theoretical) and level of spousal support was a significant factor in women manager's career development. A shortage of spousal support made it strikingly difficult for women to build their careers. The authors concluded that those male spouses who broke with the traditional 'gender order' of men being the breadwinners and women being the homemakers could provide various forms of support for their women manager wives. Those women who accepted a more traditional gender order regarding gender relations and were not provided with spousal support could also succeed as managers, but they ended up behaving as supermoms. Not only was the amount and type of spousal support significant, but its timing too – it was especially important at the time of having children and when reaching senior positions (Heikkinen et al., 2014).

In line with the above empirical findings, the family-friendly politics of organizations are strongly critiqued for stabilizing the traditional career system involving men being breadwinners/ambitious leaders and women being channelled onto the 'mommy track' with its poorer career prospects (Eikhof, 2012; Nagy–Paksi, 2014; Benschop–Doorewaard, 1998, 2012; Benshop et al., 2013). Women managers who take advantage of family-friendly policies face the paradox of disadvantages in terms of their career

advancement (O'Neil et al., 2008; Benschop–Doorewaard, 1998, 2012). In an organizational culture where employees who work long hours are rewarded, women managers do not have a real choice, for instance, to work part-time, and when they do, it seems more of a constraint then a free choice (Halrynjo–Lyng, 2009; Benschop–Doorewaard, 1998, 2012). It is only when they reach senior positions that women managers can alter their working arrangements freely to manage family and work (Broadbridge, 2010). Accordingly, the scientific literature calls the negative consequences of using family-friendly benefits the 'motherhood penalty' (Glass–Fodor, 2011).

To summing up, the presented empirical findings show that organizational career practices (i.e. part-time working), as well as the trend to a long working hours culture (Holth et al., 2017; Kvande, 2009; Williams et al., 2013), family responsibilities joined with the societal expectation that women are the primarily caretakers, and the need for an intensive parenting style (Christopher, 2012), particularly challenge women's preferences and decisions about their career choices and keep women at the middle level (Hochschild, 2001; Acker, 2012a, Tomlinson–Durbin, 2010, Benschop–Doorewaard, 2012). In a working environment where long-working hours are the organizational norm, women managers, especially those who use work-life balance initiatives, may appear to be less devoted towards work, and thus do not correspond to the norm of ideal workers, which situation has negative consequences for their career development (Acker, 2006a; Burnett et al., 2010; Hochschild, 2001; Kvande, 2009; Padavic et al., 2020; Pryce–Sealy, 2013). The different treatment of women and men and the different expectations create a gender regime in which women and men end up with different career opportunities, career paths, and ambitions (Acker 2006a, b, 2012a; Madsen–Scribner, 2017).

3. THE HUNGARIAN CONTEXT OF WOMEN MANAGERS' CAREER

In regards of Hungary, there has been a minimal examination of the situation of women managers and gender at work organizations. The mid-level careers of women managers is a particularly underresearched area compared to the international situation. Therefore, the discussion of those results follows, which can add to the Hungarian context of the mid-level careers of women managers working in the finance sector. The following interrelated issues have emerged as particularly relevant to describe the management status, opportunities and societal acceptance of women managers working at large organizations in Hungary: 1) the presence of women in management, including the impact of the economic and political transition from state socialism on women managers' status in management, 2) social-level attitudes about women's and men's role in society, 3) the gender culture at corporations, including the organizational perspective about gender equality and women managers' acceptance as leaders, and (4) the difficulties of managing work and life.

3.1. Management Status of Women in Hungary

To better reveal women managers' current status in Hungary, the legacy of the socialist era and post-socialist practices should first be discussed (Kalocsai, 2010; Nagy–Fodor, 2014; Nagy, 2005; Nagy et al., 2017). During state socialism, the participation of the female labour force in Hungary was high – almost full employment of women was reached by the mid-1970s (Fodor, 1997, 2002, 2003; Kalocsai, 2010) – and largely due to forced emancipation, women were successfully promoted to leadership positions, although on a limited extent (Fodor, 1997, 2002, 2003; Kalocsai, 2010; Kispéter, 2012; Nagy, 2005, 2010). The socialist emancipation project (Kalocsai, 2010) for promoting women is evaluated as a form of forced support; however, it is agreed that this enforcement helped to achieve greater gender equality, albeit incomplete (Fodor, 1997, 2002, 2003). Also, workplaces were transformed in ways that actively supported women's participation in them through the introduction of flexible and shorter working hours (Fodor, 2002, 2003), and the states provided generous child care institutions, allowances, and maternity leave of three years (Fodor, 2002, 2003; Nagy et al., 2017).

Ultimately, women's presence in the paid labour force became a norm under state socialism (Fodor 1997, 2003). However, it is important to see that although women's participation in the labour force was encouraged, their inferior and limited position in society in terms of economic and political power remained unchanged, just as the domestic division of labour and traditional gender roles remained unchallenged (Fodor, 1997; Nagy et al., 2017). Women were underrepresented in more well-paid, prestigious sectors (they were typically excluded from sectors of industry) and mainly classified through horizontal segregation into having a secondary, inferior status (Fodor, 2002, 2003; Fodor–Nagy, 2014; Glass–Fodor, 2011). Throughout the socialist era, in every sector, women were also paid less than men Kalocsai 2010), but social policies allowed women to balance paid work and family (Fodor, 2002; Kalocsai 2010), although the gendered division of work was no addressed on state-level (Fodor et al., 2019). As scholars explain, women's participation was both encouraged and limited in terms of paid work and authority by acknowledging women's differences and reinforcing the gendered division of labour within the domains of household and child care (Fodor, 2002; Kalocsai, 2010; Nagy et al., 2017). Consequently, women were not seen as equal partners, neither in employment nor in politics, although they were delegated into managerial positions (and they held political positions too).

Consequently, women were rarely seen as equal partners, even if they were delegated to high (Fodor, 2003; Fodor et al., 2019).

Next to employment as a primary way for women's empowerment, a key element of women's emancipation was their participation in the education system. Studies in economics (besides the legal studies) was particularly a popular choice by young women. The proportion of women in studies of economics is reported to exceeded 50 percent of all the students in the late 1980s (Fodor, 2002), which

proportion further increased during the 1990s (Nagy, 2005) and remained one of the most popular studies fields to attend by women in recent times (Lannert–Nagy, 2019; Nagy et al., 2017). Finance, business management, and the banking system were new fields into which women entered between the 1960s and 1980s, where they could build their careers and take on positions of authority quite successfully during state socialism (Fodor, 2002; Fodor–Nagy, 2014; Glass–Fodor, 2011; Kalocsai, 2010). However, the limited inclusion of women also applied to leadership positions (Fodor, 2002, 2003; Kalocsai, 2010).

Thus, education and following it career advancement were available for women in socialist Hungary; at the same time, it is also true that the highly educated women typically occupied administrative, lower- and mid-level leadership/managerial positions in lower-paid, less prestigious fields and more likely in states institutions, where poisons were even less prestigious and less-payed (Fodor, 1997, 2002, 2003; Glass, 2008); Kalocsai, 2010 Nagy, 2003; Nagy–Vicsek, 2014). Some professions, and even whole occupational sectors, become particularly feminized, such as the sectors of health care, social services, administration, finance and business management, and white-collar jobs, like the field of tertiary education (Fodor, 2002; Kalocsai, 2010; Nagy, 2005). Accounting, for instance, became one of the most feminized occupations in Hungary during the 1980s (Koncz, 1994). Fodor (1997) points out that the reason of the little prestige of financial managerial positions lies in the state policy, under which the financial resources were centrally allocated, and hence these positions had a relatively low level of authority and autonomy. Therefore, jobs in the finance sector for women were rather administrative, white-scholars jobs, and professional jobs. They were often paid less than the blue-collar, manual labour force in the industry and agriculture (Fodor, 1997). Later on, as men started to enter into the service and finance sectors, the prestige of management positions in banking started to increase (Fodor, 1997).

On the whole, women managers in Hungary had greater career opportunities compared to those of Western European women in the socialist era (Fodor–Nagy, 2014; Nagy, 2010). Moreover, both the proportion of full-time working women and executive women was considerably higher than for their counterparts in Western European societies (Fodor, 2002, 2003; Glass–Fodor, 2011). Nevertheless, the state policy ensured only a relative success for women in the domain of work and never full equality (Fodor, 2003). Management positions are good examples for representing it, as women managers failed to gain influence in powerful positions and managerial occupations remained gender-segregated, and overall, they did not disturb the social status quo between men and women (Nagy, 2001, 2010).

Empirical research findings consistently strengthen the claim that, despite the strong socialist attempt at emancipation, women's opportunities remained structured: managerial positions could be differentiated based on gender, thus they could be distinguished as male or female by function and economic sector (Nagy, 2005). Eventually, women's chances of occupying higher positions in management were

fundamentally lowered by states policy and segregation in education and occupations (Fodor 2202, 2003; Kalocsai, 2010; Nagy 2001, 2005).

By 1989, the economy of Hungary was restructured radically (Nagy et al., 2017). The labour market situation had worsened both for women and men, although economic and political restructuring had different impacts on women and men's workforce participation. So, both women and men faced high unemployment but associated with different timing and patterns (Nagy, 2005). Women's presence in higher management had already decreased by 1989 (Nagy, 2005), and, as a study by Balint (2007) on the proportion of women and men managers demonstrated, by the beginning of the 2000s, the glass ceiling could be located somewhere between the upper-middle management and executive, top-level (Balint, 2007). Kalocsai (2010), in her doctoral research on post-socialist subjectivity, speaks about the 'Hungarian version of the glass ceiling,' which, as agreed by other scholars, occurred when women's withdrawal from higher positions happened largely after they started families due to the socialist legacy of three years of parental leave (Fodor–Glass, 2011; Kalocsai, 2010; Nagy, 2005).

Despite this, literature also argues that, at the time of the transition, occupational segregation and educational background provided security for a particular group of women in lower-level managerial positions, at least for a while. First of all, educated women typically worked in low-prestige occupations (with low pay and limited career options), which were less affected by the economic changes (Fodor–Nagy, 2014; Nagy, 2001). On the other hand, women managers obtained skills and participated in tertiary education under state socialism that was useful later in a service-oriented, globalizing economy. By the time of the transition, there was a group of women managers who were highly educated, invested in developing their skills, spoke foreign languages, and had already gained experience with managing. Ultimately, despite structural disadvantages on the labour market, women managers' cultural and human capital made them particularly attractive to the newly emerging multinational corporates that arrived in Hungary from the beginning of the 1990s onwards (Fodor–Nagy, 2014; Kalocsai, 2010; Nagy, 2001). Kalocsai (2010) pointed out that this group of educated female youths can be called the winners of the transition ('triumphant subjects') due to the relative ease of their inclusion into transnational workplaces. Thus, despite strong occupational segregation and wage differences, young educated women were well-positioned to enter the corporate sphere and could successfully adjust their personal lives and identities to a transnational corporate culture. Research also shows that this kind of winning position of young educated women in companies is a socialist legacy that emerged in all post-socialist countries (Kalocsai, 2010; see similar cases of other post-socialist countries: Dunn, 2004; Weiner, 2007).

The sector of finance and management was particularly a field in which women could secure their positions in the labour market after the transition. By the time of the transition, women's presence in the finance sector was already significant. The economic profession gradually became feminized by the 1980s

(Nagy, 2005), and from the 1990s onwards, many women obtained degrees in management and business, which enabled them to start to build careers in the business world (Kalocsai, 2010; Nagy, 2003, 2005). Women working in the finance sector were among those employees who had higher educations, experiences in leadership, had fluency in foreign languages, good anylítical skills (Fodor, 1997). Therefore, in addition to the education and job segregation that provided them protection to retain employment, they could also 'revalue resources' that they gained from education and employment experiences. Their skills had become increasingly valuable in the post-state socialist economies, hence th e sector of finance, despite high unemployment levels, could still provide an opportunity for this particular group of women to participate in the labour force by the time and after the transition (Fodor, 1997; Kalocsai, 2010; Nagy, 2005).[8]

The positive trend of women managers' employment had changed in the opposite direction by 1995 (Kispéter, 2012; Nagy, 2001, 2003, 2005).[9] Women's labour force participation rates declined compared to during the socialist area (Fodor–Balogh, 2010). By 2000, distinct patterns of gender inequality had also increased in the labour market coupled with a decline in social provisions, especially affecting women with young children (Kispéter, 2012). Subsequently, the economic crisis in 2008 increased the vulnerability of men and women overall in Europe. The same situation emerged as occurred in 1989 regarding women's positions in the labour market. First, female employment was reported to have been less affected by unemployment than that of men due to gender-based sectoral segregation, but this was later identified as a temporary situation (Fodor–Nagy, 2014). Austerity policies are also reported to have damaged gender equality, including the situation of women's equal position in the labour market. For instance, the overall quality of working conditions and work-life balance options for women have worsened as they have been pushed into precarious jobs and their domestic workload has increased (EWL Report, 2012). Women's labour force participation rates have somewhat declined compared to during the socialist era, and their position in the labour market eventually became more vulnerable as a result (Fodor–Balogh, 2010).

A recent ranking of Hungarian women managers' positions in international comparison indicates that Hungary is among those countries which have witnessed a slight increase but no significant progress since 2010 (EC Report, 2019), although the proportion of women managers is below the European average (ILO Report, 2015; Nagy–Vicsek, 2014). In short, similar patterns can be witnessed with Hungarian women's participation in management compared to the international situation (Nagy, 2006; 2013a), but data also indicates that Hungary is in a more disadvantageous position in terms of women's managerial positions (EC Report, 2014b, EC Report, 2019; Nagy et al., 2017). Thus, not only does Hungary performs

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[8] For further reading about the period of transition, the privatization process, the transformation of the labour market, and transnational corporates, see Kalocsai, 2010 and Nagy et al., 2016.
[9] However, it has changed positively in Western European countries, so the relatively strong position of women managers in comparison to that in western countries eventually vanished (Nagy, 2013a).

worse regarding the proportion of women managers in high-level positions compared to the EU28 average, but it performs more poorly than previously during the socialist era (ILO Report, 2015; Nagy, 2013a). Despite the poor representation of women on boards and top management, there is no intention in Hungary to introduce any initiative or regulation regarding improving women's proportion at different levels of their decision-making positions (Nagy et al., 2017).

Despite this, data regarding Hungary has shown for a long time that women and men are equally present in middle management and that everywhere else, entrance into top management is obstructed by a glass ceiling (Bálint, 2007; Nagy, 2006, 2013a; Nagy et al. 2017; Nagy–Sebők, 2018). More recently, data has also shown that women's presence in leadership positions is relatively balanced, with more than 41% of managers being women since 2010; this figure applies to the public sector as well (Nagy–Sebők, 2018). In terms of data only about the for-profit sector, we get a different result. According to one piece of research, 28% of all employees working at the mid-level of organizations and 38% at the entry managerial level in the TOP200 companies in Hungary are women.[10] Plus, recent trend data show a decrease in the proportion of women in board positions in Hungary (EC Report, 2014b). Also, horizontal segregation is still a vital feature of the labour market in Hungary (Nagy–Sebők, 2018). Moreover, similarly to the international situation, investment in human capital regarding women does not seem to pay back in terms of the labour market. Even though more potential women leaders are graduating at universities than men, more men are in decision-making positions than women (Nagy, 2013b). However, in recent years the high proportion of women graduating from universities may contribute to the steady presence of women in leadership positions (Nagy–Sebők, 2018).

In sum, during the socialist era, women gradually entered into leadership positions, their presence decreased after the economic transition, while in more recent times, their participation has increased, so their presence has become significant in lower and middle management, which is especially true in case of the finance sector. Despite this, they do not have a real chance to reach influential positions in management, especially in large companies (Balint, 2007; Fodor et al., 2019; Nagy, 2006, 2013a, Nagy et al., 2017). Horizontal segregation is also a concern, as women tend to obtain positions in feminized fields, which is true both of sectors and occupations in which women employees dominate (Nagy, 2013a). Top management is also highly gender-segregated: women typically reach top positions as HR directors (Kalocsai, 2010).

3.2. Social Policies and Social Sets of Values about Gender Roles

To better understand how Hungarian society thinks about women' societal role, it is again worth starting with the legacy of state socialism. The primary aim of women's emancipation in state socialism was due to

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[10] 202020 club research on gender equality among the TOP200 companies in 2014. Hungarian Business Leaders Forum, Carried out by BISNODE. http://figyelo.hu/cikkek/414922-nok-a-csucson

the economic need for a cheap labour force (Fodor, 2002, 2003; Fodor–Nagy, 2014). Therefore it is commonly agreed that women's emancipation was due to ideological and economic reasons (Nagy–Vicsek, 2008). Women's full-time employment was encouraged and sustained by various social policies and institutions. Among the most important of these, women's employment was legally secured if they were mothers. A well-developed childcare system supported women's full-time employment, involving various benefits and institutions (Fodor, 1997; Glass–Fodor, 2011; Kispéter, 2012; Nagy, 2001). Still, despite generous state support and day-care institutions, women had to cope with the burden of the dual roles of being full-time employees and doing the unpaid labour involved in childcare and household work. Women remained the persons solely responsible for the domain of the home. This centrally regulated integration of women into the labour market on a limited basis reinforced women's difference and inferiority status in society. As a consequence, women leaders both in the field of economy and politics were never considered as reliable, powerful, and as devoted workers as men (Fodor, 2002, 2003; Glass, 2008; Hobson et al., 2011; Kispéter, 2012; Nagy, 2001, 2010).

Among the many reasons, 'forced emancipation,' together with the unchallenged division of household tasks and the lack of women's organizations (to support women's greater equality), resulted in a conservative gender role concept at the time the economic transition proceeded: the traditional views strengthened in all post-socialist countries (Fodor–Balogh, 2012; Krížková et al., 2010, quoted in Nagy–Vicsek, 2014; Nagy et al., 2017). Representative survey findings demonstrate well the conservative turn in attitudes towards the role of men and women in society. In comparison with EU 28 countries, Hungarian society is ranked as being strongly traditional in terms of gender roles (Pongrácz–Molnár, 2011; Takács, 2008). This traditional set of values has been identified since the 1990s (Pongrácz–Molnár 2011). This traditional view supports the notion that women's natural state is motherhood and that women's primary role is caring for children and doing household work (Blaskó, 2005; Nagy, 2013a). The literature explains that this rather conservative attitude to gender roles contributes to women's disadvantages in the labour market, including their career opportunities, see, for instance, women managers' withdrawals from higher leadership positions (Nagy, 2013a; Takács, 2008).

By the end of the 2000s, the strong belief in the duality of gender roles had eased, especially on the side of men. Based on international survey findings, Pongrácz and Molnár (2011) state that fewer people identified themselves as traditional or defined the roles of women and men traditionally. For instance, views about the traditional division of labour had become less typical, while the idea of working women with young children had become more accepted. Therefore, it is suggested that Hungarian society should be interpreted as being located between a fully traditional and full modern society (Pongrácz–Molnár, 2011). However, despite the empirical evidence that Hungarian society has become more egalitarian, this change cannot be fully evaluated as a clear shift towards a "modern" attitude to gender roles (Pongrácz–Molnár,

2011), as recent empirical results still confirm that traditional attitudes about gender roles remain strong in Hungarian society (Gregor, 2016; Nagy et al., 2017; Saxonberg–Sirovatka, 2006; Takács, 2013).

By the time of the transition, the turn towards traditional gender roles, together with employees' vulnerable market position, fostered the appearance of a conservative re-familiarization regime at the level of state policies (Fodor–Balogh, 2010; Saxonberg–Sirovatka, 2006; Takács, 2013).[11] Post-socialist countries, in general, have tried to reintroduce a traditional familiarization regime and restore the male breadwinner model and related private-public division of gender roles by inducing women to return to the home. The pre-existing trend of women with young children staying at home for a longer period intensified in the 1990s (three years of child-care allowance continued to exist), although the actual value and number of social entitlements and child-care facilities decreased (for instance, the availability of nurseries for children under the age of three) (Fodor, 2002). All these factors together strengthened the emergence of re-familiarization (Saxonberg–Sirovatka, 2006). In terms of the labour market, this turn towards more traditional values and the re-familiarizing family policies of social welfare state regimes did not encourage women to achieve higher managerial positions, but instead forced them to choose between family and career (Kispéter, 2012; Saxonberg–Sirovatka, 2006), and as such contributed to the increase in gender inequality in the labour market (see, for instance, occupational segregation, or wage gaps) – in the case of high-status professional positions for women too –, and, as a side effect, the gender divisions of labour in the home were reinforced too (Fodor–Nagy, 2014; Glass–Fodor, 2011; Kispéter, 2012; Saxonberg–Sirovatka, 2006). This turn towards a traditional familiarization regime was strong in all-post socialist countries (Saxonberg–Sirovatka, 2006; Takács, 2013).

Referring back to the survey findings mentioned above, it has been confirmed on a macro-level that refamilization policies encourage society to accept the existence of separate gender roles. In accordance with this, at least on the level of values, Hungarian society supports the male breadwinner model and encourages women to take full responsibility for household and child care (Pongrácz–Molnár, 2011; Takács, 2008), although, quite paradoxically, due to the financial need of families, the dual-breadwinner family model is widely maintained in reality (Blaskó, 2005; Nagy 2013a; Saxonberg–Sirovatka, 2006). Despite this, the turn towards more traditional gender roles allows specific groups of women to choose not to participate in paid work (Nagy, 2001; Takács, 2008). On the whole, refamiliarization has strengthened traditional views about gender roles and also restored contradictory normative expectations towards

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[11] The notion of re-familiarization describes how state-level policies have strengthened the model of separate gender roles by providing long periods of parental leave and encouraging women to stay out of labour force when with young children (Saxonberg–Sirovatka, 2006).

women, as they are expected both to participate in the labour market and maintain the domain of home (Fodor–Balogh, 2010; Takács, 2013).[12]

The impact of social policy with its re-familiarization character and traditional gender view of women's role in society is reflected in the findings of the little empirical research that exists about the employment, acceptance, career goals, and opportunities of women with young children (under the age of three) (Kalocsai, 2010; Nagy–Vicsek, 2014). It essentially appears in the literature that the tension derived from the contradictions between traditional female roles and managerial roles is a major issue for women managers. For instance, women managers reported that having a family is the number one obstacle in terms of their careers, and the discriminative practice of HR recruiters avoiding recruiting recently married women into managerial positions has been clearly demonstrated (Nagy, 2005). At the beginning of the 2000s, specification for positions and jobs could even include a preference for younger single women (Nagy, 2005). It is also known that due to the length of maternity leave (it is a guaranteed three years of leave), almost half of all women do not manage to return to the same workplaces they worked at before having children (Glass–Fodor, 2011). Besides, the motherhood penalty is a highly relevant phenomenon in Hungarian business life (Glass–Fodor 2011). Recently the state implemented policies and increased the number of nurseries for children below three years, although without easing the traditional gender roles, but helping young mothers return to work (Nagy et al., 2017). Overall, it seems that it is particularly women's reproductive responsibilities that play an important role in employees' attitudes (Blaskó, 2005) and employers' decisions (Nagy, 2005).

It has also been reported that for the same reason – acceptance of a traditional view about the role of women – women managers (who were interviewed in the 1990s) primarily introduced themselves as mothers and wives and entirely accepted that they naturally belonged to the reproductive sphere (Nagy 2001, 2005). Similarly, Kalocsai (2010) framed the new type of corporate women as being sensitive ('a late socialist sensibility') about emancipation and described women managers as having family-oriented corporate subjectivities. It is also interesting to learn from Nagy and Vicsek (2008, 2014) that traditional views about gender roles may explain why highly educated women managers' ambitious career opportunities are seen as due to the need for personal development, in addition to financial need related to supporting family (Nagy, 2001; Nagy–Vicsek, 2014). It was also demonstrated by these authors in their examination of women managers who work at multinational companies that those women who have more prestigious work are willing to follow a different pathway instead of choosing between career and children, as they tend to take shorter periods of parental leave, in contrast to the average staying at home for 3-4 years, although they were harshly judged as mothers for this choice (Fodor, 2002). Fodor and Glass (2011)

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[12] Western European trends have generally changed towards a more liberal gender attitude, and the process of re-familiarization has run counter to that in CEE (Fodor–Balogh, 2010; Saxonberg–Sirovatka, 2006).

also introduced the case of professional mothers on maternity leave, and described how they changed their minds and returned to their workplaces before their maternity leave had ended, and accepted part-time arrangements as a way of maintaining both their careers and provision of child care. In the case of these women, it is important to add that they were considered as highfliers, initially planned to have a relatively short time on maternity leave, and their earlier return was only possible because the company believed in them for becoming successful managers.

To sum up, the legacy of the states socialist emancipation supported that traditional gender roles were strengthened. In line with it, an evident backlash can be witnesses against gender-egalitarian arguments in society. Consequently, the traditional Hungarian culture is one of the main factors that contribute to limiting women's career opportunities (Nagy et al., 2017). The findings mentioned above serve as examples that demonstrate the importance of macro-level social attitudes: they are decisive factors for individual-level choices and opportunities related to careers and/or families (Hobson et al., 2011). The traditional gender order in society discourages women managers from aspiring to higher positions, especially when they have young children (Gherardi, 2003; Nagy–Vicsek, 2014).

3.3. Organizational Gender Culture

Similarly to international findings, the mixed acceptance of women managers is identified in the empirical studies conducted on women managers working at large organizations in Hungary (Nagy 2001, 2005; Kalocsai, 2010). Findings have consistently revealed that the 'difference' between men and women is a major argument in organizations for explaining women's status within organizations. Perceived differences about social roles (such as reproductive capacities and child-caring roles) create different expectations about women and men in relation to fulfilling managerial positions, and career and personnel development. However, women leaders are not always seen negatively. It was found, for instance, in research that examined the gender culture of a local government in 2004-2005 that positive characteristics and stereotypes were held about women managers too; however, this only strengthened their role in those lower-prestige positions which are assigned to women because of their stereotypically assumed feminine traits. Regardless of this, employees expressed a preference for male managers in general (Nagy, 2005; Nagy–Vicsek, 2014).

The major argument for differences between women and men is derived from the perception of women's expected role in society. A study from the beginning of the 2000s (Nagy 2005) about equal opportunity at organizations shows that respondents clearly emphasized women's reproductive duties and agreed that child-care is primarily women's responsibility. Further, it acknowledged that this is a major and valid factor in employers' decisions about promoting women managers into top managerial positions, which view accounted for the different roles women and men fulfil in society. This attitude was not understood as

discriminatory against women; instead, state legislation regarding maternity leave was perceived as a burden both to employers and women who have to manage. From the view of the organizations, women with young children (or even without them) were seen as a 'high-risk category' in terms of employment, especially in managerial positions. Next to women's societal role, the 'feminine,' 'softer' managerial skills women possessed were also seen as inappropriate behaviours which make women unsuited to more competitive and stressful higher managerial positions (Nagy, 2005).

In recent times, the most comprehensive empirical research about gender culture at a large corporate which concentrated on women managers' status was undertaken by Beata Nagy and Lilla Vicsek in 2011 (2014). They examined a telecommunications company, one of the largest multinational corporations in Hungary. Findings from this research strengthened the identification of mixed views about women managers and showed the somewhat limited acceptance of women managers. It was consensually perceived that the majority of women managers have negative behavioural characteristics, which typically involved relations with colleges. The consensus about this negative characteristic of women managers was evident, as they were judged negatively by both women and men employees. This judgment was related mainly to their managerial competencies, although women's professional skills were more and positively accepted, while the ideal manager was considered to have masculine qualities, such as fighting for the group, and being dominant and aggressive (Nagy–Vicsek, 2014).

It was also found that organizational practices encourage women with young children to take only short periods of maternity leave. However, paradoxically, women managers were judged most negatively by colleagues when returning to work earlier than is generally expected in society. Top women managers and managers who returned to work when still with small children were the two groups that were judged the most negatively. This activity was considered an extreme and unnatural life course, and such mothers were called 'careerist,' with the negative connotation referring to the view that their careers had become too important for these women (Nagy–Vicsek, 2014). This expectation about women becoming mothers is in line with the same stereotypical role concepts about women's societal role of being the primarily child-care providers, which are strong within society (see Pongrácz–Molnár, 2011).

To explain the differences associated with women and the claim of different, more feminine managerial skills, representatives of the researched organization argued that women have those types of qualifications that channelled them into different types of work. This is a clear example of the acceptance of horizontal segregation, which was even strengthened by the attribution of positive stereotypes to women. For instance, they were said to be more patient and friendly to colleges and customers than men. Similarly, a perceived higher tolerance for monotonous work was acknowledged as a positive characteristic of women, making them more suitable for certain positions (Nagy–Vicsek, 2014).

Nagy and Vicsek (2014) pointed out that the consequences of positive stereotypes about women managers are a well-known phenomenon in the literature (see, e.g. Carli–Eagly, 2007), and are considered to be one of the main constraints to the full acceptance of women in management. The findings of this research may be interpreted as being in line with earlier international findings that found that women managers have to cope with the trap of the double-bind, involving being either too feminine or too masculine (Carli–Eagly, 2007; Powell, 2012). Also, according to Nagy and Vicsek (2014), the paradoxical expectation women managers meet in organizations is clear evidence of the gendered substructure of organizations (Acker, 1998), because those women with young children who return a few months after giving birth, thus follow the organizational (masculine) norm of continuing their careers, are judged harshly for not following the traditional societal role assigned to them based on gender. Therefore, when women return to work while still having small children, they violate social norms in two ways, because i) they violate the traditional gender order, and ii) they question commonly held views about motherhood (Nagy–Vicsek, 2014).

This contradictory situation is explained to be the legacy of a socialist belief in equality. It is considered to be still a strong belief in Hungarian society that opportunities for employment and career are equally the same for women and men, and that women work full-time on the same basis as men (Nagy, 2005; Nagy–Vicsek, 2014).[13] Despite this, the backlash against women's emancipation in post-socialist countries is also intense (see previous parts on social beliefs about women's roles) (Nagy et al., 2017; Saxonberg–Sirovatka, 2006; Takács, 2013). This backlash against explicit initiatives for gender equality in the society is strengthened by the political level too, where there is a lack of understanding that the society would benefit from more balanced gender relations in the society (Nagy et al., 2017).

Due to these contradictory expectations and messages about employment and motherhood, women managers can easily find themselves trapped between the demands of a competitive organizational culture that expects women to work full time, take advantage of career opportunities, and the ideals of 'perfect motherhood,' that involve expecting them to stay at home with children for a more extended period (Nagy–Vicsek, 2014). All in all, examples of women managers from the above-introduced research together with data about the proportion of women managers strengthen the conclusion that corporate culture does not support women managers' career advancement, and a very distinctive feature of organizational gender culture is that women are viewed through a traditional gender lens that is dominant within society (Nagy, 2005; Nagy–Vicsek, 2014). In addition, research also highlights that women and men alike do not view

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[13] The cultural conception that working means having a full-time position remained strong after the transition. In line with this, research on part-timers reported that those who worked part-time felt that they are now treated in an equal way to full-timers (Tóth, 2005).

organizations as significant obstacles to equal opportunity (ILO Report, 2015; Kalocsai, 2010; Nagy, 2005, 2006; Nagy–Vicsek, 2014, Tóth, 2005).

All this raises the issue of how equal opportunities are discussed at workplaces. Equality as a topic was introduced into Hungarian society in the late 1990s (Nagy, 2005). In the early 2000s, Hungarian labour law was modified due to the processes of accession to the EU; hence a section on equal opportunities was included as a precondition for accessing the EU (Kalocsai, 2010; Nagy et al., 2017). Thus, the legislative framework for equal opportunities was well-established at the state level; however, on the level of practice, the implementation of equal opportunity practices was slow (EWL Report, 2012). This lack of law enforcement on the meso level of organisations was found to be a contributory factor in terms of discrimination against women managers (i.e. a lack of reintegration processes for women after having children that could ensure equal opportunities) (Glass–Fodor, 2011). Additionally, in CEE countries, there is strong resistance to selectively promoting women through organisational development as this would represent unfair competition (Metcalfe–Afanassieva, 2005). Correspondingly, women's poor representation in higher management has not been considered problematic by employers or employee's (Nagy, 2005). The post-socialist legacy of forced emancipation clearly has a delegitimising effect on this present-day thinking on issues connected to gender equality, especially on policies for improving women's presence on company boards. There was a backlash towards women's issues in the organisations, too (Nagy et al., 2017).

Later on, while the equal opportunity was still marginalized in public discourse (Nagy, 2003), organizations started to understand that it is in their interest to retain women; therefore, they started to introduce alternative work arrangements and concrete programmes for the promotion of women's opportunities (Kalocsai, 2010; Nagy, 2005; Nagy–Vicsek, 2014). Foreign-owned multinational companies had a significant role in initiating discussions on gender equality and implementing steps and policies towards increasing the number of women managers in decision-making bodies, although it is typical that at Hunagrain organizations, gender equality is mainly connected to supporting a family-friendly workplace (Nagy et al., 2017).

Recently, a growing interest in business feminism has also been accelerated through multinational companies that shape the organizational commitment to women's advancement (Fodor et al., 2019; Nagy et al., 2017). Women executives are found to be advocates of business feminism at multinational companies. Adapting to the news of business feminism, they appeared to construct the local context of the Hungarian society as being 'backward' on gender roles. Therefore, contrary to the society, the organization represented the place for them where women's emancipation is supported. However, this local version of business feminism in multinational companies offers limited empowerment for women, as it does not go further on improving women's professional ability and individual characteristic for leadership. Therefore, this version

of women's empowerment does not make real steps towards recognizing barriers such as gender division of work in the home or the structural constraints in the organization or how organizational culture maintains traditional gender roles (Fodor et al., 2019).

3.4. Family Issues, Long Working Hours and Work-life Balance

The vast majority of research has demonstrated the negative impacts of family responsibilities (childcare and household duties) on the careers of women managers (Carli–Eagly, 2007; Hochschild, 2001), and, among these, returning from maternal leave is said to be one of the most crucial periods for women who are high achieving (Halrynjo–Lyng, 2009). Moreover, society and organizational culture constantly enforce the expectation that women are the primary caretakers of family/children and household. Due to these expectations and norms, women managers are reported to take more time off, and to do less paid work or more part-time work than men. As a consequence, they cannot put in extra hours at work, and they have fewer opportunities to build social capital and develop their professional skills, which are all essential for career advancement. Women are even seen as less devoted to their careers and work (Carli–Eagly, 2007).

Consistent with the the international findings, the same applies in the case of women managers in Hungary, and the little available research has demonstrated that professional manager women with small children are those who especially experience difficulties with balancing work and family life (Geambaşu, 2014; Kalocsai, 2010; Nagy–Paksi, 2014; Takács, 2013; Tóth, 2005; Primecz et al., 2014).[14] In line with this, a high level of awareness was reported in an ILO Report (2015) about work-life balance: women managers saw conflict arising from work-life balance as the main factor affecting their career advancement negatively.

Above all, the literature emphasizes that, in post-socialist countries, reconciling work and life has become more complicated (Nagy et al., 2016). A constellation of many factors can be mentioned to explain the difficulties in women managers' work-life balance. It has already been touched on how women managers face contradictory expectations concerning how to be working mothers, which create difficulties related to balancing work and life. First, there is strong societal pressure that it is primarily women's responsibility to take care of children and household duties, and second, organizational norms require employees to advance at work on male terms (Kalocsai, 2010; Nagy–Paksi, 2014; Nagy et al., 2016).

In the same way, literature points out that, despite a long period of maternity leave that has been created by a policy of refamilization and state support, this practice of 'maternal responsibility-oriented

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[14] In Hungary, it is also investigated in the work-life balance research that manager fathers find difficulties in balancing work and life. Nagy (2008), for instance, found that male managers experience conflict connected to the scarcity of time they spend with their children. Recent studies emphasize that it is difficult for male managers to follow an active, involved parenting pattern (Geszler, 2016; Takács, 2013). At the same time, in society, there is no intensive discussion about a more equal share of household and child care duties (Kutrovácz, 2017).

family policy' (Nagy et al., 2016) is not entirely supportive of women. This is because, with limited access to child-care facilities and to flexible alternative work arrangements (Hobson et al., 2013; Kispéter, 2012; Tóth, 2005), it creates a vulnerable situation which makes difficult the returning of women with small children to their former workplaces/positions, and also forces women to choose between career and family due to the lack of opportunities for balancing work and life (Glass–Fodor, 2011; Fodor–Kispeter, 2014; Nagy et al., 2016). This is especially true in the case of women with small children. An examination of recruitment processes found that highly educated women face the 'penalty of motherhood' in the Hungarian labour market, which in practice means that after becoming mothers, they can lose their jobs or positions, and receive lower wages (Glass–Fodor, 2011).

Moreover, the long-working-hours culture of multinational companies is also a concern, as it requires constant availability and intensive work from employees, which fundamentally impacts individuals' opportunities to effectively balance work and life (Geszler, 2016; Hochschild, 2001; Kvande, 2009; Nagy et al., 2016). The little existing research (see Geszler, 2016; Kalocsai, 2010; Nagy et al., 2016 and Tóth, 2005) that has examined work-life balance and organizational support at Hungarian corporates shows that the long-working-hours culture of multinational companies is also a concern for hungarian managers too. It was reported that employees working in managerial positions work 10 and often 12 hours per day (Kalocsai, 2010; Tóth, 2005). It was also emphasized that the interviewed managers tended to naturalize the phenomenon of working long hours by articulating that it is the norm to work until they finish their tasks. It was also claimed by women managers that flexibility is a requirement they must constantly adapt to, even on weekends or on vacation (Kalocsai, 2010; Tóth, 2005). These examples perfectly show that changing patterns of work quickly emerged in post-socialist Hungary, specifically within the culture of transnational companies (Kalocsai, 2010).

Recent research findings also show that work-life balance both as an issue and as the intention to provide related programs and initiatives for employers has emerged and become an integrated part of organizational culture in Hungary (Géring, 2016; Geszler, 2016; Hobson et al., 2011; Nagy et al., 2016; Oborni, 2018a; Primecz et al., 2016), although, as an analysis of the content of corporate websites by Géring (2016) shows, support for work-life balance was not the strongest identity-forming factor at Hungarian companies at in the beginning of the 2010s. Besides this, flexible working arrangements and family-friendly programs mainly occurred at those large-sized companies which have foreign owners (Géring, 2016). Nevertheless, it is an undeniable trend that, despite all the difficulties associated with balancing work and life, it is large organizations that are capable of providing more flexible working arrangements and part-time work opportunities (Glass–Fodor, 2011; Kispéter, 2012; Tóth, 2005).[15]

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[15] Part-time work in Hungary was introduced after the transition from the socialist area. Since then, it has not become a widely used form of employment (Gregor 2017; Nagy, 2003). Data indicate a low proportion of part-timers, as in

According to an examination by Nagy (2003), those companies started to offer alternative working hours at which more attention was paid to the issue of equal opportunities (Nagy, 2003; Tóth, 2005). Women managers in Hungary, particularly the young, newly emerging talent recruited into transnational corporations by the 2000s, seem to have adapted more easily to flexible and long-hour working patterns. Despite this, ambivalence and difficulties can be traced regarding the willingness and opportunities of women to work long days (Kalocsai, 2010). The contradictory requirements of working for long hours, managing careers on male terms, dealing with caring responsibilities in the domain of the home, clearly create difficulties for women managers related to balancing work and life (Hobson et al., 2011; Kalocsai, 2010; Takács, 2013).

Overall, the little research that exists on work-life has consistently demonstrated that reconciling work and life issues is a far greater challenge for women managers than men, and when women managers have children, the conflict intensifies due to the double burden of work and family (Kalocsai, 2010; Nagy, 2001; Tóth, 2005). Similarly to in the international literature, some of the well-known coping strategies that women managers use to develop balance between work and life have also been identified. For instance, both Kalocsai (2010) and Tóth (2005) state that women may cut back on working time and claim to be satisfied with positions at a middle-level management; another strategy is to become a supermom or put energy into developing personal skills such as learning time management strategies (Kalocsai, 2010). Also, certainly mostly due to the development of info-communication technology and the tendency for the boundaries between work and home to blur, work has entered into the spaces and times formerly reserved for family, therefore working from home is also considered to be a solution (Kalocsai, 2010; Prinecz et al., 2016).

Research also reveals that Hungarian women like to rely on their parents instead of hiring baby sitters or domestic workers (Oborni, 2018a; Kispéter, 2012; Tóth, 2005). In line with this, the identified coping strategies and research results also indicate that women develop individual strategies because they essentially consider work-life balance and the difficulties that arise from this to be individual-level issues, just as solutions are seen as the obligations of the private sphere (Kalocsai, 2010; Hobson et al., 2013; Tóth, 2005). This expectation suits the socialist heritage of the strong identity of the mother as worker, which does not question the role of mothers as being the primary caretakers (Takács, 2013). The more recent societal expectations of 'intensive parenting' also encourage women to take responsibility for spending

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2016 only 5% of total employment in Hungary involved part-time arrangements. This is much lower than the European trend: in the western and northern parts of the EU, part-time work accounts for around or above 20-25% of total employment. Further statistical data on the situation of part-time workers in Hungary reveals that the largest group of part-timers comprises younger women and women who are close to retirement or already retired (Gregor, 2017). It is also known that a significant percentage of female part-time workers occupy their positions involuntarily, and work in the tertiary sector (Geambaşu, 2014; Gregor, 2017), similarly to the global trend (Tomlinson–Durbin, 2010).

more and more quality time with children (Kutrovácz, 2017; Takács, 2013). This claim is clearly demonstrated by the fact that actual time devoted to children, and the need to spend more quality time (instead of only increasing the quantity) with children is reported to have increased in Hungary in the past decades (Kutrovácz, 2017; Nagy, 2016; Takács, 2013). As a consequence of intensive parenting, the amount of time spent with children has increased compared to during previous generations. Ultimately, what women can gain by sharing more domestic work with men, they lose by spending more (and more intensive) time with their children (Carli–Eagly, 2007).

It has also become evident from research that large organizations in Hungary agree that maintaining a balanced work and life is primarily the responsibility of individuals (Tóth, 2005; Primecz et al., 2014). The claim to the emphasis on individual responsibility is further supported by the slow implementation of part-time arrangements in large organizations, and in general on the labour market (Gregor, 2017; Nagy, 2003; Tóth, 2005). It has also become clear from research in the case of Hungary that a more profound reason for organizations offering part-time work other than improving equal opportunities is the desire of the latter to retain highly qualified women with the company after they have had children (Glass–Fodor, 2011; Nagy, 2003; Primecz et al., 2014). Further illustrating this statement, little empirical evidence shows that well-educated, middle-class professional and manager women have the best chance to use part-time work as a tool for balancing work and life (Geambaşu, 2014; Glass–Fodor, 2011). It is also very typical that the target group of part-time work at organizations are those women who return from maternity leave and already have well-established relationships with employers, often with the immediate superiors with whom the part-time positions are negotiated (Geambaşu, 2014; Glass–Fodor, 2011; Oborni, 2009; Primecz et al., 2014).

A study, for instance, by Glass and Fodor (2011), having examined employment processes in financial firms, describes the procedure of companies rehiring those women after maternity leave who are considered to be 'high-flyers.' Some of these women were rehired part-time after their superiors protected their positions. In return, they induced the women still on maternity leave to take shorter periods of leave. They reached women through informal channels, indicating that if they did not return on time, they were unlikely to have jobs to return to. Relationships with superiors as a necessary condition for obtaining part-time positions was also emphasized by a study on family-friendly organizations conducted by Primecz and her colleagues (2014). Their analysis found that part-timers had a good relationship with their superiors and had already secured their positions before they left for maternity leave. Not surprisingly, the study also revealed that there were no formal, established solutions for part-time arrangements at companies – on the contrary, individual requirements were typically applied to the situation one by one, and women typically achieved part-time positions only when this did not cause any difficulty for their colleagues in terms of their working routines (Primecz et al., 2014).

Geambaşu (2014), in her research on part-time (Hungarian and Romanian) women, describes more precisely the reasons for accepting part-time positions in the case of highly skilled women. She differentiated two groups among the middle-class women who work voluntarily in part-time positions. The two groups mix, but there is a distinct difference between them. The first group consists of women who work part-time to fulfil the traditional role of being care-providers. Their part-time work is more symbolic than financially needed. It is emphasized that this kind of part-time work is only open to middle-class women who want to lead a lifestyle by which they can devote a significant amount of time to their children. According to Geambaşu (2014), in their case, part-time work is a tool for maintaining a lifestyle, and the opportunity to choose it depends on their middle-class status and not on their financial situation. With the other group, future career aspirations were the reason for working in part-time positions. These women talked about why they were in the labour market when they could be at home instead. If they had not been able to work part-time, they would have chosen to work full time, in contrast to the previous group of women, who would have chosen to be inactive had they not succeeded in securing a part-time arrangement (Geambaşu, 2014).

It is also known from the limited research on women managers working part-time that while part-time work is arranged to help manage the demands of family and work, part-timers experience intense frustration and work intensely; they frequently do overtime, and have no time for recreation (Primecz et al., 2014; Tóth, 2005), which claim corresponds fully with the international results about part-timer mothers (Benschop et al., 2013; Hochschild, 2001; Tomlinson–Durbin, 2010). Still, part-timer managerial mothers are agreed to be exceptional cases among part-timers, as they are in the best position among working women to take up part-time arrangements in the way that best suits their life situation and career (Geambaşu, 2014; Glass–Fodor, 2011; Nagy, 2003; Primecz et al., 2014).

Finally, in relation to the organizational intentions behind supporting employees to achieve better work-life balance, the literature agrees that, similarly to international findings, organizational initiatives and programmes are not entirely effective at fulfilling the needs of employees (Hobson et al., 2011; Primecz et al., 2016; Takács, 2013). Primecz and her colleagues (2014, 2016) report in their study on multinational companies that significant stress related to the difficulties of balancing work and life was discovered even in those companies that had received national-level awards for being family-friendly workplaces. Herta Tóth (2005), in her study on managers' work-life balance experiences in multinational companies, however, calls our attention to the fact that although employees experienced conflict and difficulties with work-life balance – especially those women who had small children –, they evaluated the organizational culture and the intention to help employees rather positively, and, in general, the requirements of working for long hours was accepted and taken as the norm (Tóth, 2005). The results introduced by Kalocsai (2010) are very

similar; the latter also demonstrated that young women managers who have favourable and successful career plans can easily adapt and are willing to work long hours in a flexible way at corporations.

All these examples and research results show that regardless of whether women succeed at better balancing their work and life, it is important to see that it is mostly women who have to learn to negotiate a long-working-hours culture, who are concerned about work-life balance issues, and ultimately women who have stories about withdrawing from future career plans, or taking a new turn in their life course, taking positions higher than mid-level, or leaving companies and becoming self-employed (Glass–Fodor, 2011; Kalocsai, 2010; Tóth, 2005). Three closely linked features appear in the literature that discusses the links between work-life balance and careers unfolding in the case of women managers in Hungary. First of all, research on Hungarian corporates has reported that neither employee-friendly initiatives, the programmes of large organizations, info-communication technology, nor flexible working arrangements automatically ease the difficulty of maintaining a good work-life balance (Burnett et al., 2010; Eikhof, 2012; Hochschild, 2001; Hobson et al., 2011; Primecz et al., 2016). This suggests that family-friendly initiatives and programs, etc. only serve the interests of employees when organizational culture changes too (Kispéter, 2012; Primecz et al., 2014). Also, it is not enough to implement work-life balance tools once, but these should be monitored and developed further together with the constant support and commitment of leadership to increasing work-life balance (Oborni, 2018a; Primecz et al., 2014; Tóth, 2005). Third, research also demonstrates that highly educated, career-oriented women managers who are devoted both towards their careers and family face particular challenges regarding work-life balance issues in Hungary (Nagy–Paksi, 2014). Therefore, it would be equally important to increase the gender awareness of responsible organizational persons, increasing their reflexivity about gender-related influences on work-life balance difficulties in relation to women's career opportunities (Kalocsai, 2010).

3.5. Concluding remarks

The study of women managers' status and career advancement is still a relevant scientific issue in Hungary. Work organisations in Hungarian post-socialist society have only rarely been analysed from a gender perspective, especially in relation to how gender relations are shaped in work organisations (see for exceptions Nagy–Vicsek, 2008, 2014; Kalocsai, 2010). Nevertheless, the existing findings are sufficient to describe the broader context for examining mid-level women managers' careers working in the for-profit finance sector.

An essential element of the women's managerial status is that Hungarian society has a long history of accepting women as managers. Women gradually entered into leadership positions during the socialist era, and by the 1980s, they consisted of a meaningful group in the Hungarian society. At the same time, the extent they could succeed in managerial positions is a perfect example of their inferior status in society, as

the management where women gained access were lower-paid, with a less prestigious status and power, and were considered as administrative jobs, such in the case of the managerial positions in the field of finance. Then, after a decrease in women's proportion in managerial positions during the economic transition, their participation has increased. In recent times, women's presence has become significant and steady in lower and middle management, which is especially true for the finance sector. Horizontal segregation is also a concern, as women tend to obtain positions in feminised fields, which is true both of sectors and occupations in which women employees dominate (Nagy, 2013a). Top management is also highly gender-segregated: women typically reach top positions only as HR directors (Kalocsai, 2010). In addition, and what is important for the case of this research, university studies in economics remains a popular choice among young women (Lannert–Nagy, 2019), creating a potential pool of becoming managers.

In line with the above, which is also central to consider in the case of this research, the little empirical evidence shows that women managers in Hungary are better accepted as managers when they fulfil positions regarded stereotypically as feminine and thus do not violate the existing gender order in society. Also, studies showing the negative stereotypes and prejudices about women managers are strong evidence that the acceptance of women managers in a higher position is still quite problematic in Hungary (Nagy–Vicsek, 2008, 2014). The forced emancipation of women by states policy left a significant imprint on society. In Hungary and other post-socialist CEE countries, quotas for the interests of women's greater inclusion into power are strongly refused and critiqued. Thus, there is strong resistance to promoting women managers as a target group because this may be seen as a discriminatory practice by the Hungarian society (Fodor, 2002; Metcalfe–Afanassieva, 2005).

4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research joins the scientific stream which claims that studying organizational and societal-level factors adds to the understanding of mid-level women managers' career construction and the difficulties they encounter during their whole career trajectory (Acker, 2006a, 2012a; Benschop–Doorewaard, 2012; Calas et al., 2014; Gherardi, 2003). Therefore, building upon the conceptual framework of the gender regime, the genedered substructure of organizations (Acker 1990, 2006a, 2012a) and findings about Hungarian women managers' careers and related topics (Geambaşu, 2014; Kalocsai, 2010; Nagy, 2001; Nagy–Vicsek, 2014; Prinecz et al., 2014), this analysis explores the interconnections between gender, women managers' careers, and organizations, with a focus on the mid-level of large organizations.

Recent related literature directs our attention to the systematic processes, norms, and structures that maintain the gendered nature of work organizations (Acker, 2006a, 2012a; Benschop–Doorewaard, 2012;

Calas et al., 2014; Gherardi, 2003). This scientific background suggests that gendered organizations contribute to women managers' career outcomes and disadvantaged positions at large organizations (Acker, 2006b, 2012a; Benschop–Doorewaard, 2012; Broadbridge, 2015; Calas et al., 2014; Gherardi, 2003).

On this basis, **the aim is to explore how and to what extent career construction is gendered in the organization under investigation, and to reveal the gendered organizational processes that define and impact mid-level women managers' career construction.**

First, I turn my focus to organizational-level roles and narratives about managers' career construction. Therefore, this study first attempts to answer the following research question:

1. To what extent does the organization support equal opportunities for men and women managers in terms of their careers?

a) What kind of career development system (tools and programs) has the researched organization established to support managers' careers?

b) How does the organization under analysis interpret the personal contribution of mid-level managers (e.g. responsibilities and roles) in relation to career construction?

Second, the focus on the gender regime requires study of the informal and formal processes of the organization, and the role these features play in women managers' career construction (Acker 1990, 1998, 2006c). Therefore, the study attempts to answer the following research question:

2. How do organizational processes define and impact mid-level women managers' career construction?

a) What kind of organizational processes define the career activities of managers, and how do these processes influence mid-level women managers' career patterns?

b) What are the organizational requirements and conditions for career promotion, and how do women managers fulfil them?

c) How do the organizational processes of career construction impact mid-level women managers' intentions in relation to supporting a family?

Finally, the corresponding literature elaborates how managers in a twenty-first century work environment can balance work and life (Hochschild, 2001; Holth et al., 2017; Kvande, 2009; Pryce–Sealy, 2013; Williams et al., 2013). Also, it is clearly identified how women managers' careers are associated with non-work factors and, as a consequence, the latter experience tension between the spheres of work and life (Acker, 2012a; Carli–Eagly, 2007; Halrynjo–Lyng, 2009; Hochschild, 2001; O'Neil 2008 et al., 2008). Therefore, the third research question concerns the relation between work-life balance and career. It pays particular attention to women managers' adjustment to the long-hours working culture at the organization:

3. How do the work-life balance tools offered by the organization reproduce mid-level women managers' capabilities in relation to constructing their careers?

In order to investigate the third research question in detail, I first explore the support the organization offers to its employees with regard to maintaining a better work-life balance. I then investigate to what extent women managers perceive these tools as positively impacting their career plans and opportunities.

5 METHODOLOGY

I conducted organizational ethnography research for this dissertation between the end of February 2016 and February 2017 at a multinational organization in the finance sector in Hungary. Given the exploratory approach in the research, a detailed introduction of methodology, research background, researcher's positionality, data collection and method of analysis follows.[16]

5.1. Organizational ethnography

Ethnographic, observation-based methods became a widely used research approach throughout the 1980s in empirical-based social research (Calás et al., 2014; Czarniawska, 2008; Gilmore–Kenny, 2015; Jarzabkowski et al., 2014; Rouleau et al., 2014), while the interest in all kind of qualitative methods in general also increased (Eberle–Maeder, 2011). The rise in popularity of ethnography is well illustrated by the expression 'ethnographic turn' that scholars use to refer to the changes in the field of organizational studies (Rouleau et al., 2014). During the last decades, a clear shift from the canon of classic observation-based research has occurred towards a more fluid, context-situated and collaborative type of research approach in ethnography (Angrosino–Rosenberg, 2011; Gilmore–Kenny, 2015; Rouleau et al., 2014). In this process, new ways of doing organizational ethnography have emerged, some of which now incorporate recent technological innovations and draw on new tools for collecting data (Angrosino–Rosenberg, 2011) To name a few: researchers can do multi-sited ethnography, network ethnography, autoethnography, and netnography/virtual ethnography (Angrosino–Rosenberg, 2011; Czarniawska, 2008; Islam, 2015; Rouleau et al., 2014).

It was inevitable that the rapidly developing technological advances in info-communications and digitalization would contribute to methodological renewal (Angrosino–Rosenberg, 2011). By now, a large variety of methodological approaches may be applied to observe organizations, although doing ethnography always involves more than merely applying a collection of particular (mostly qualitative) research methods (Angrosino–Rosenberg, 2011; Czarniawska, 2017; Kostera, 2007). Thus, some specific characteristics should be mentioned that constitute organizational ethnography research (Kostera, 2007, p. 200). First of

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[16] This chapter is partly based on a methodology paper that has been already published on the experience of conducting the ethnographic research presented here (Oborni, 2017).

all, organizational ethnography involves *longitudinal* study, although researchers do not need to spend a relatively long period in an organization any more (Czarniawska, 2017).

Another characteristic is that research has to be conducted from *inside a community of an organization (*Angrosino–Rosenberg, 2011; Czarniawska, 2017; Eberle–Maeder, 2011; Kostera, 2007; Rouleau et al., 2014). It follows that ethnographic research always requires considerable *fieldwork* to make adequate sense of organizational practices and processes, which fundamentally differentiates it from other types of research (including qualitative research). So, it is essential that the researcher always enters the research site and observes data from the inside of a given social entity (in case of an online community too) (Eberle–Maeder, 2011; Rouleau et al., 2014).

Furthermore, it is also a vital characteristic of an ethnographic research approach that it primarily relies on *observation-based methods* to collect *primary data* from the research site where the research takes place. A wide range of methods and tools for data collection are available, such as different versions of non-participant and participant observation, direct observation, all kinds of interviewing, diary writing, collecting documents, pictures, methods for producing audio-visual materials, the use of ICT devices, and so on (Angrosino–Rosenberg, 2011; Czarniawska, 2008; Eberle–Maeder, 2011; Kostera, 2007).

Finally, the reconceptualization of epistemology along the line of postmodern critiques (including feminist critiques) has been as crucial as the methodological innovations in ethnographic research. Thus, throughout the multi-layered reconceptualization of objective knowledge production, several modifications have occurred in the field of organizational ethnography research, such as reconsideration of the researcher's position during data collection. The latter is no longer considered the only authoritative person capable of designing and carrying out the research and producing the so-called ethnographic truth (Islam, 2015; Rouleau et al., 2014).

5.2. Theoretical orientation for conducting ethnographic research

Some theoretical and ethical questions and issues should be addressed as they define every part of how observation-based research is conducted – from the beginning of designing a research plan to the end of writing an ethnography.

The relevant literature also discusses in great length how the individual has become more and more the focus of qualitative research. This change in focus was followed by changes in methodology too, as those techniques have become more popular which can explore individual experiences, opinions, and perspectives (Eberle–Maeder, 2011). Therefore, it is commonly agreed in organizational ethnography that data collection should be primarily based on interview techniques supplemented with other types of observation-based methods, which often involve respondents in data collection (Czarniawska, 2008; Davids, 2014; Eberle–Maeder, 2011; Jännäri–Kovalainen, 2015; Kostera, 2007). Plus, the organizational

embeddedness of individual processes in career building is tackled in the literature that deals with the career situation and opportunities of women managers. In order to explore the layers of this embeddedness, this literature highly recommends using ethnographic research methods (Acker, 2006a; Bruni et al., 2004; Calás et al., 2014).

Part of the methodological novelty in ethnography is derived from the changes that have occurred at the research site, the work organization (Angrosino–Rosenberg, 2011; Davids, 2014). Work organizations nowadays, especially large companies which are operating transnationally, can be described as communities that are highly competitive, diverse, constantly changing, have virtual management and an uncertain environment, with less clear borders between the domains of work and private life (Angrosino–Rosenberg, 2011; Czarniawska, 2008; Kalou–Sadler-Smith, 2015; Rouleau et al., 2014; Williams et al., 2012). As Rouleau and her colleagues (2014) describe, organizational activities such as management have become complex processes affected by globalization and digitization, while these activities are also "fragmented and dispersed throughout both the temporal and spatial spectrum" (Rouleau et al., 2014, p.3.). Following the description of the changes in work organizations, it is argued that the ethnographic approaches have to be reconsidered as they do no fit contemporary organizing practices Czarniawska, 2017).

Due to the fragmented activity of management, managers and professionals move and work quickly and continuously in time and space. Therefore, managing, and all other organizational activities, are incredibly mobile and happen simultaneously in many places, including virtual spaces (Czarniawska, 2008, 2017; Rouleau et al., 2014). It is also a concern that many practices, norms, and values related to work and communication are mediated virtually. Inevitably, many of the traditional approaches to observation have turned out to be inadequate (Rouleau et al., 2014) For organizational research, it means that new practices of management are the target of exploration as researchers have to continuously reconsider some of the practicalities of research design, such as the longevity of the research, or ways of observing 'working' that occurs virtually or outside workplaces (Czarniawska, 2008, 2017; Rouleau et al., 2014). Also, the requirement of the presence of researchers has changed, and a large part of work has moved into the online world, thus it is not necessary to be physically present at the research site, as is the situation when studying managers (Czarniawska, 2008; McDonald–Simpson, 2014; Rouleau et al., 2014).

In addition to the fragmented presence of researchers at the research site, the postmodern theoretical reconceptualization of the approach encourages researchers to adopt an interrelational and reflexive position (Angrosino–Rosenberg, 2011; Cunliffe–Karunanayake, 2013; Rouleau et al., 2014). Methodological discussion in the corresponding literature has raised concerns about whether it is possible for a researcher to remain entirely an outsider, and if a researcher can be present when researching without interacting at all with respondents (Angrosino–Rosenberg, 2011; Rouleau et al., 2014; Gilmore–Kenny,

2015). The scholarly position in this discussion is that a researcher always develops some kind of relations and connections to the research site during the research – at a minimum, their presence is recognized (Angrosino–Rosenberg, 2011; Kostera, 2007).

As a result, contemporary ethnography is considerably more subjective and situated than before (Angrosino–Rosenberg, 2011), suggesting that researchers cannot fully control data collection and research design, as the nature of the relationship between researcher and respondent shapes both the context of data and the opportunities for data collection (Cunliffe–Karunanayake, 2013).

This concern about the researchers' position has since been elaborated by organizational ethnography studies, mainly those with a feminist background. It has been noted that observation-based research (from the point of data collection to the analysis of the research) is fundamentally maintained by fluid and agentic interrelations between the researcher and participants (Cunliffe–Karunanayake, 2013; Islam 2015). This methodological view requires that researchers become more aware of the degree and quality of their membership and relations in the communities they enter into, even if they apply methods more similar to non-participant ones (Angrosino–Rosenberg, 2011). No less important is the fact that respondents are not considered passive agents anymore who only provide data. On the contrary, they are seen as participants who are active partners during research, and who therefore can influence and formulate all parts of the research: the design, the actual conduct, and the outcome. Also, it is agreed that the active involvement of respondents can increase the richness of research in terms of quality (Angrosino–Rosenberg, 2011; Cunliffe–Karunanayake, 2013; Davids, 2014; Islam, 2015).

According to such changes in how the involvement of respondents and relations between researchers and respondents is seen, methodological tools that enable participants' involvement in design and carrying out a research plan are recommended (Cunliffe–Karunanayake, 2013; Islam 2015). Several examples can be found in the literature that describe how participants can be involved more actively during research other than by giving interviews: they can, for instance, participate in creating and finalizing interview questions and be given an opportunity to voice their opinion about the findings. Nevertheless, discussing results or giving feedback does not need to wait until the research ends – it can be an integrative part of the research (Bruni et al. 2014; Davids, 2014).

The next issue to address is the fact that collaboration should not occur without reflection, because the various relationships and interactions between the researcher and participants can enhance data collection or research design as much as they can limit it (Gilmore–Kenny, 2015). Plus, being reflexive is also an acknowledgement that pre-existing knowledge (i.e., academic knowledge or prejudices), the position of the researcher, and other characters of the researcher (such as gender, class, age, or marital status), affect how the research is carried out. It is thus not rare in ethnographic texts in which the subjectivity of the researcher is acknowledged (since they are one of the actors of the intersubjective

relations) that this subjective character of knowledge production is also discussed (Cunliffe, 2003; Cunliffe–Karunanayake, 2013; Gill, 2011).

Besides, it is understood in the current literature that while the researcher observes, they are also observed, and this collaborating relation can be understood as being a two-directed, reflective practice. Due to this interrelational practice, it has become a methodological issue to elaborate and reflect on the base of power of the relations among all the actors participating in research (Davids, 2014; Hansen–Trank, 2016; Manning, 2016). For instance, to reflect on the impact a researcher potentially has due to her/his presence in the observed community (Gilmore–Kenny, 2015). As we can see, contemporary ethnography draws attention to the complexity of the researcher's position during research: the researcher has thus lost sole control of the research, including themes and methods (Gilmore–Kenny, 2015) but at the same time responsibility for the participants has emerged as an issue, which is related to the understanding of the power position of the researcher (Davids, 2014; Manning, 2016; DeVault, 1996).

Finally, the last concern that should be addressed is knowledge production. The baseline here is that 'organizational truth' is a form of constructed knowledge, which, as a result, is not only based on the decision and experience of the researcher (Cunliffe –Karunanayake, 2013). The intention is still to adhere to scientific objectivity in postmodern ethnography; however, achieving objective truth (or at least what is considered objectivity in positivist, quantitative types of research) is not the aim of observation-based ethnographic research any more. The aim is rather to achieve an insightful interpretation (Kunda, 2013), to create internally consistent knowledge (i.e., that which avoids misinterpretation or contradictions in interpretation) and to make research findings acceptable and somewhat plausible, scientifically adequate, and valid (Angrosino–Rosenberg, 2011; Eberle–Maeder, 2011; Gilmore–Kenny, 2015).

It seems that to be conscious about knowledge production, researchers should be explicitly clear about their role and extent of involvement in the observed community. Therefore, they always should be aware of their relationships, and "cannot become so utterly subjective that […] the rigour of carefully conducted, clearly recorded, and intelligently interpreted observations [is lost]" (Angrosino–Rosenberg, 2011, p. 154.). In creating scientifically adequate and valid results, a reflexive attitude to how data is gathered is essential, at least for two reasons. One is to generate a better understanding of how the data were collected and the research evolved in general (Cunliffe, 2003; Cunliffe–Karunanayake, 2013; Gill, 2011), and the other is to demonstrate that the research findings are scientifically valid knowledge (Angrosino–Rosenberg, 2011; Cunliffe, 2003; Rouleau et al., 2014).

To conclude, a researcher does not merely examine and then describe 'reality', but actively construct it, in which process the situated nature of the researcher's experience in creating knowledge cannot be ignored. Consequently, the nature of knowledge production must be addressed in observation-based research, as this is not only based on the decisions and experience of the researcher (Cunliffe, 2003;

Cunliffe–Karunanayake, 2013) – it means that observed social reality will be based on the researcher's narrative. However, many factors construct the related knowledge: for instance, the observer's experience, knowledge, and assumptions (both reflected and unreflected) and emotions, as well as participant individuals' narrated knowledge and shared experience. The latter individuals might also contribute to knowledge production by interpreting data and formulating concepts. Also, academic contributions and knowledge, rules, and, in the case of the present research, the academic requirements of PhD research, play a part in knowledge production. Therefore, such reflection on the research methodology and researcher's position can generate deeper understanding of the research results (Cunliffe, 2003; Cunliffe–Karunanayake, 2013; Gill, 2011).

As we could see, the contemporary ethnography is considerably more subjective and situated than before (Angrosino–Rosenberg, 2011), suggesting that researchers cannot fully control data collection and research design, as the nature of the relationship between researcher and respondents shapes both the context of data and the opportunities for data collection (Cunliffe–Karunanayake, 2013). Methodological discussion in the corresponding literature has even raised concerns about whether it is possible for a researcher to remain entirely an outsider, and if a researcher can be present when researching without interacting at all with respondents (Angrosino–Rosenberg, 2011; Rouleau et al., 2014; Gilmore–Kenny, 2015).

The scholarly position in this discussion is that an observation-based research (from the point of data collection to the analysis) is fundamentally maintained by fluid and agentic interrelations between the researcher and participants (Cunliffe–Karunanayake, 2013; Islam 2015). A researcher always develops some kind of relations and connections to the research site during the research – at a minimum, their presence is recognized (Angrosino–Rosenberg, 2011; Kostera, 2007). More importantly, participants are seen as active partners during research, and who therefore can influence and formulate all parts of the research: the design, the actual conduct, and the outcome. Also, it is agreed that the active involvement of respondents can increase the richness of research in terms of quality (Angrosino–Rosenberg, 2011; Cunliffe–Karunanayake, 2013; Davids, 2014; Islam, 2015).

According to such views on how the involvement of respondents and relations between researchers and respondents is seen, methodological tools that enable participants' involvement in design and carrying out a research plan are recommended (Cunliffe–Karunanayake, 2013; Islam 2015). Several examples can be found in the literature that describe how participants can be involved more actively during research other than by giving interviews: they can, for instance, participate in creating and finalizing interview questions and be given an opportunity to voice their opinion about the findings. Nevertheless, discussing results or giving feedback does not need to wait until the research ends – it can be an integrative part of the research (Bruni et al. 2014; Davids, 2014).

This methodological view, presented above, requires that researchers become more aware of the degree and quality of their membership and relations in the communities they enter into. Therefore, the postmodern theoretical reconceptualization of the ethnographic approach encourages researchers to adopt an interrelational and reflexive position (Angrosino–Rosenberg, 2011; Cunliffe–Karunanayake, 2013; Rouleau et al., 2014). It is recommended that the researcher reflect on the one hand on the processes of access to the research site and the process of design of the research methodology (Calás et al. 2014), and on the other hand reflect on how relations and identity formation (including the researcher's identity) unfolded during the research (Cunliffe, 2003; Cunliffe–Karunanayake, 2013; Gill, 2011). It is also worthwhile to emphasize the reflection on collaboration, because the various relationships and interactions between the researcher and participants can enhance data collection or research design as much as they can limit it (Gilmore–Kenny, 2015). Plus, being reflexive is also an acknowledgement that pre-existing knowledge (i.e., academic knowledge or prejudices), the position of the researcher, and other characters of the researcher (such as gender, class, age, or marital status), affect how the research is carried out. It is thus not rare in ethnographic texts in which the subjectivity of the researcher is acknowledged (since they are one of the actors of the intersubjective relations) that this subjective character of knowledge production is also discussed (Cunliffe, 2003; Cunliffe–Karunanayake, 2013; Gill, 2011).

5.3. Research background

5.3.1. The research site

Large organizations, nowadays, have complete programmes, initiatives, and a history of empowering and supporting women managers addressed either by the organizational logic of equal opportunity or diversity. Therefore, when searching for an organization, it was important to find a large organization, which is large enough to have a standardized career system or some initiatives that demonstrate responsibility for improving women managers' career development. A determining factor in the choice for the research site was that the organization to be studied have a long enough history in employing women managers, who are not present as exceptions gaining access into the male-dominated world of management. Following this intention, I avoided looking for workplaces that can be characterized as traditionally male-dominated workplaces.

It was essential to find an organization where I could realize an examination that goes beyond identifying gender distinctions and can ask questions about the organizational processes based on the applied theoretical background (Acker, 2006b, 2012b; Benschop–Doorewaard, 2012). Accordingly, I had to find an organization that will allow me to conduct exploratory research on mid-level female managers' career construction, and therefore they will let me enter into the organization and apply observational

methods, as I was interested in finding concrete practices, processes, internal structures embedded in organizational life.

After making contact with an HR manager, a company became available for conducting the research. What made the company appear suitable as a research site other than the fact that it turned to be available for realizing the research plan? In the beginning, I could only collect a small fraction of accurate statistical data, as the organization applied strict restrictions to maintain its security, and due to it, a limited amount of data was shared with me regarding employees' contacts or the gender distribution in specific departments. Nevertheless, the examination of other facts and discussions with the HR manager, who turned to be my main contact later, clearly showed that managerial positions were gender-balanced at the middle level of the company. Also, during the first meeting with this HR manager, I noticed that support for women managers is an issue at the company. At our second meeting, she then outlined the career support system. She featured the company as having concerns about career development and providing various programs and tools for its employees to fulfil their career goals. All this information gave me the impression that the company was an appropriate choice for researching the issue of career and middle management with a particular focus on women managers. However, the level of involvement of such empowering practices in reality remained unknown to me at that time.

What made the company appear even more suitable as a research site were the small signs I noticed at the first expert interview about the incongruence between the straightforward claims about ensuring equality and the individual elements the above mentioned HR manager shared with me, and her views about her career and her work schedule in practice. For instance, she had a strong opinion that men managers do not have problems regarding their careers, while women managers face difficulties, especially if they aspire to top managerial positions. At our first meeting, she even opposed my intention of conducting interviews with men managers.[17] Initially, it seemed that this was because she was so aware of the difficulties women managers might face during their career trajectories compared to those of men. As she continued, it also became clear that she believed that it was women who decided not to aspire to higher positions due to their preferences. Thus, this attitude to women as the problematized group and men as having an unproblematic career path indicated that this organizational environment (which was claimed to be based on meritocracy and equality) was influenced by other factors that meant a different situation for women and men might exist.

Furthermore, her strong views about the difficulties female managers face was very clearly supported by her own example of her not being able to set up a date for the first meeting for a number of weeks (she continuously postponed it). Then, as our conversation evolved at the first meeting, she shared

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[17] Finally, I could convince the HR manager to provide the contacts of male managers too by raising the issue that men can experience difficulties with work-life balance that can impact their careers.

the fact that she had unexpected family issues recently (as the mother of one child), although she had such a heavy workload she could not skip work, despite these serious family issues. She described this period with words such as *'surviving'*, and *'working at night'*.[18] Despite her negative personal experiences, she introduced the company as a well-functioning organization regarding career support. These were small but indicative signs of the differences between men and women regarding the everyday experiences of working, which were in contrast with the organizational concerns regarding career development and opportunities.

After a while, but still, at the very beginning of the research period, I become fully confident that the investigated organization was an ideal choice in the sense that women managers were visible both in terms of their numerical presence at the mid-level of organizational hierarchy and in terms of their visibility in the finance sector. This means that the women managers at the chosen company were fully integrated into managerial jobs, also confirming the analytical focus on the impact of organizational processes on careers. All in all, the company seemed to fulfil the condition for selection as a research site.

The studied work organization employed approximately 4000 persons at the time the research was conducted. It has a headquarter in Budapest and several local bank branches in the countryside. Despite the many locations the organization has throughout the country, the organization was very centralized structurally. The strikingly massive physical appearance of the central office was a perfect symbol of it. After rather large acquisitions and merges in the Hungarian bank sectors, the company, by now, is a wholly-owned subsidiary with a foreign owner from one of the EU member states in the field of finance. The company is well-rooted in the Hungarian bank sector, but in order to maintain its anonymity, no further details or characteristics are provided.

5.3.2. Access to field

Gaining access to the chosen work organization was a slow process. After spending more than a half a year searching for a company in which to conduct the research, I finally made contact with an HR manager at the subsequently selected company. It took a while we could set a date for the first meeting, at which I finally introduced the research plan. The manager I met was a woman with a position in the upper-middle level of the HR Department, and her responsibilities included the career development of managers working at all levels of the company; therefore, she seemed to be the right person to approach. I received many questions about the research plan and aims, and even the sample and methods. A lengthy discussion developed about what to study of mid-level-managers' career development, and how. I experienced a strong feeling of being tested to see if I had enough knowledge to implement appropriate career research.

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[18] Emails were exchanged between us containing information about her heavy workload and difficulty balancing work and life. The emails were exchanged before receiving the company's permission to conduct the research. This is the reason I do not share any specific details of the former.

At first sight, it appeared that implementing the research in the way I had planned would not be promising. It started with the manager allowing me to conduct only ten interviews, and then, based on the company's strict organizational policy, she refused my request to move freely as a researcher in the company's main office or in any offices at other locations for security reasons. In one way she acted as a gatekeeper – as the nature of her organizational role required –, but at the same time she appeared supportive in relation to finding alternatives ways that I could spend some time at the company. She indicated – following a conversation about my previous work experience – that if an interviewee agreed, I could implement a shadowing day for managers (this is a well-known method in business coaching, which is why she was familiar with it). A week later, I shared a document about the planned research detailing the methods, aims, and the interview guide. Soon after, I received confirmation allowing me to research the organization, but I was kindly asked to remove sensitive questions from the interview guide.

What was considered a sensitive question? All those questions inquiring into whether respondents had a family and how they reconciled work and family. So, questions about employees' private lives and domain were not permitted, and I was asked to follow the organizational policy and respect employees' private life in this way. I was, however, allowed to include questions on respondents' view on the organizational support for work-life balance. It also turned out that respondents, as I expected, shared many experiences and personnel views, stories about their family, career, work-life balance without even asking questions about it. To conclude, the initial requests of the HR manager about not asking personnel-related questions did not influence the way and the content of how the interviews turned out in practice. Other than asking me to remove 'sensitive questions' from the interview guide, the HR manager was very helpful in guiding me through the procedure of acquiring the corresponding licences from the company to conduct the research. Later on, we also agreed on the date for starting, which was continuously delayed due to the heavy workload of the HR Manager, who did not have time to recruit the interviewees.

As the literature suggests (Cunliffe–Karunanayake, 2013; Gill, 2011; Islam, 2015), it is better to expect that the design of methodology and data-gathering will not be under the sole control of the researcher in observation-based organizational research. The contribution of the HR Manager mentioned above, as the gatekeeper, had a prominent role in shaping the research methodology. First, she provided the list of potential interviews of women managers. Also, I had to convince her that was also worth interviewing men managers about career issues, but finally I received some contacts for men managers as well. The list of contacts was created entirely by her based on my description of what kind of managers I would like to meet and ask questions of. The question may be raised if we should assume that this HR manager had prepared a list of women (and men) who were viewed as being successful company managers.

Inevitably, power dynamics also played a role in this collaborative relationship between the HR manager and me, which factor may have become very explicit during the process of data collection

(DeVault, 1996; Gill, 2011; Gill et al., 2017; McDonald–Simpson, 2014). First of all, it was me who asked for permission and she who gave it, checked the interview guide, and even suggested applying the method of shadowing. She also later invited me to take part in project work at the HR department. So, as can be seen, at the beginning the collaborative relationship was guided by the instructions of the HR Manager, and I did not have any choice other than to follow them. However, as I spent more and more time at the organization, I built up relations with other managers and gradually gained access to other departments, and even moved more freely around some parts of the central office, and organized interviews on my own. Eventually, the HR manager's strong influence declined as the research developed and new ways of recruiting interviews opened up, and as we developed working relationships during times of collaborative project work.

This collaborative relationship with the HR manager also had another layer which was significant for data collection, because the closer relationship led to the provision of additional data about the working lives of mid-level women managers. As we exchanged numerous emails and talked in person about issues concerning the research, details about other work- and family-related issues were shared with me.

It is reasonable to conclude that this first contact point played an especially significant role both in creating the sample and finalizing the design of the methodology (Oborni, 2017). This means that how the research methodology looked eventually was not only based on the research plan and related opportunities (and my previous experience with researching a work organization), but on our collaborative relationship that involved shaping the research design. This experience corresponds to the claims of the relevant literature that researchers who apply ethnographic methods cannot fully control the process of data collection and research design, as the nature of the relationship between researcher and respondents shapes both the context, and opportunities for data collections (Cunliffe–Karunanayake, 2013; Gill, 2011; Islam, 2015).

When the project work finished, all the shadowing took place, and I conducted several interviews, even succeeding at arranging an interview with a senior woman manager, I felt that I had exhausted all the opportunities for recruiting new interviewees, so I decided to end the fieldwork. Then, I started to arrange the notes and transcribe interviews. During the research period, the findings of this research were only partially shared with the research participants during informal discussions, interviews, and shadowing days. According to our informal agreement with the HR manager, the completed dissertation and related articles will be shared with the organization.

5.3.3. Researcher positionality - personal considerations
The methodological concerns on being reflective as a researcher (Angrosino–Rosenberg, 2011; Cunliffe–Karunanayake, 2013; Rouleau et al., 2014) is an especially relevant point in the case of the present

research,[19] as the selection of methods was not based entirely on the proposed research plan, but more on what was permitted in the chosen organization, and also on what I could achieve by developing a good relationship with a gatekeeper HR manager and through other relationships that developed while conducting research. The description of the access to the research site, as we could see it in the previous subchapter, demonstrates that the outcome of this research was based on many factors and in a large portion on the relations formed between organizational persons and me.

Spending more and more time at the research organization (at the first time mainly in the headquarter) and becoming more visible as a researcher significantly raised my chances of recruiting new respondents for the career interviewees besides choosing from the list provided by the HR Manager. After a while, I had the chance to participate in project work, and I could start to maintain some shadowing days. This increased diversity in data collection methods inevitably improved and changed my position as a researcher at the organizations.

I develop different relationships based on the different roles I had as a researcher through applying the various data collection methods. I could also have several informal conversations with employees, people started to know me by my name, and I developed a few stronger but still a professional-based relationship.

My role as an outsider researcher was the clearest during the interviews. I could develop the most insider position during the participation in the project work; however, my role and position moved on a large scale during this period the most, from an outsider participant, sitting in a corner making notes, to the active involvement of completing the project tasks. Applying shadowing provided again a new experience of the position I have developed as a researcher. Interestingly and contrary to my expectations, my presence was the most visible and influential during the shadowing days, although I kept my position as an outsider researcher during these days. Shadowing days also provided many possibilities to meet and talk to new employees, attend various meetings and organizational events, and visit new offices. In comparing the participatory observations in the project work and the shadowing days, the project work allowed me to maintain a rather participatory role and collect more focused data. The shadowing days, however, allowed me to have a somewhat outsider role as a researcher but provided a reflective and richer insight into the day-to-day management and life of the organization.

Another significant layer that certainly influenced forming the relationships and, in this way, the framework of data collection was the fact that I was not only present as a researcher but as a woman, and often as a woman having a family. Following the literature (Cunliffe–Karunanayake, 2013; Gill, 2011), I often experienced that data collection was driven by the fact that I was a woman or had children. Although

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[19] For a more detailed description of the changing position as a researcher and the power relations influencing the research process, see Oborni, 2017.

I never presented myself as someone who has family or as a parent, it was easy to cross the border between being a researcher and a woman. I am confident that for women respondents, the fact that I was also a women (and a mother) eased the way to talk about sensitive issues, such as divorce or feeling guilty of not spending enough time with their children. Married men managers also related to the fact that I was a woman researcher; however, from another point of view, as they typically talked about their partners' career concerning having a family.

Finally, I have to admit that my positions as a researcher was never questioned independently of having an insider or an outsider role. Similarly, discussions related to the methodology or arguments about the necessity for improving women managers' career was never intended to question my role or ability as a researcher. Other then conducting the research in practice, I also had many occasions to present myself as the correspondent researcher. For instance I was asked to do a presentation on the indians of the work-life balance literature with a focus on Hungary, at a workshop organized for the senior management, I was asked to present the results of the work-life balance interviews conducted within the project work. I also have several discussions with respondents and shadowees when I was asked to share research results, partial finings and theoretical arguments on women managers' career opportunities. After all, the organization did not have any role in the final analysis of data and the writing of this manuscript and publishing results.

The important lesson that I have learned from the applied ethnographic method is that conducting ethnographic research is not like wandering through a place without a clear idea of what to look for and explore. On the contrary, "ethnography is more than casually observed opinion" (Angrosino–Rosenberg, 2011). It is understood that the researcher should closely observe a specific social setting of an organization, and while doing this, can be involved in it to various extent (Angrosino–Rosenberg, 2011; Cunliffe–Karunanayake, 2013). I experienced a mix of outsider and insider positions as a researcher, mainly depending on the data collection methods. Remarkably, the insider position during the participatory observation of the project allowed me to feel like a community member. This kind of variations of the positions within one research is well-documented by ethnographers (Cunliffe–Karunanayake, 2013; Czarniawska, 2008; Gill, 2011; Gilmore - Kenny, 2015). Also, my experience corresponds with the methodological concerns whether a researcher can remain entirely an outsider and if a researcher can be present when researching without interacting at all with respondents (Angrosino–Rosenberg, 2011; Rouleau et al., 2014; Gilmore–Kenny, 2015).

5.4. The applied methods and sample

In order to fulfil the requirements related to reflections about data collection, interpersonal relationships, and the respondents' involvement in the research, I here present the applied methods in a narrative way. In practice, this means that, besides describing and interpreting the collected data, I also focus on presenting

how the research was carried out. Based on these considerations, a detailed description of the methods that were applied follows below. In the following, I first introduce the primary sources of methodology: semi-structured career interviews, the shadowing of mid-level managers, and participant observation in project work. I then cover the additional sources of data collection.

Table 1: Summary of applied methods and sample

Interviews	19 career interviews with 17 female managers	Open-ended, semi-structured interviews
	9 career interviews with 8 male managers	
	3 expert interviews	
Shadowing	Field notes on 4 days with female managers	Direct observation
	Field notes on 2 days with male managers	
Active participation (WLB project)	17 interviews with employees from the HR department (15 female, 2 male respondents)	Direct observation, Active participation in the project work, semi-structured interviews
	Small-scale survey for employees working at the HR department (23 female, 8 male respondents)	
	Field notes 6 meeting	
	Workshop for senior managers	
	Documents produced during project work	
Visiting/Participating in events	Field notes on Career day	Informal interviews, Observation
	Field notes on Training day	
	Field notes on Informal conversations in general	

5.4.1. Interviews

For the *semi-structured career interviews*, I primarily identified respondents from the list provided by the contact HR Manager. Interestingly, male managers first answered my emails, and there was hardly any sign from the female managers. A whole month passed, and only one female manager responded. Therefore, I asked the HR manager to give me more contacts – which she did – so as to enhance my chances of getting

in touch with more female managers as well. Slowly, I started conducting a few interviews. After a few months, as I got to know more people at the company, other opportunities opened up for recruiting new interviewees. One of the interviewees allowed me to do a shadowing day. On this day, I participated in a meeting with her, where I met a director of another department. As we chatted about my research, I mentioned how much I was struggling to recruit women managers for interviews. This was a turning point in the process of recruiting interviewees, because he offered to help me; it then took only one email that was circulated among the employees working at his department. With this help, I was able to reach managers located outside the headquarters, many located in rural cities. I also recruited two women managers who were not initially included on the list. I met with one of them on a shadowing day. I recruited the other woman manager from the project team in which I participated, thus I was able to include a woman who was leaving the company during the week of interviewing.

In the interviews with female managers, one recurrent topic was why they do not want to work as top managers, or what they think of women who work at that level. Due to their strong opinions about 'top management', I decided to extend the sample to include women working at the top as well; therefore, two additional interviews with senior women were arranged. One of the senior women was identified during the interviews because she was often referred to as an example of a successful leader by other women managers, so I asked for her contact details. The other one was on the list of potential respondents drawn up by the HR manager. It took months to organize the interviews with them.

The career interviews were semi-structured, with most lasted a minimum of an hour, and several lasted longer. The interviews took place in the offices of the organization (the rest of them in Budapest). Except for two interviews, they were all digitally recorded with the permission of the interviewees, and then transcribed by me. The sample of career interviewees consists of 15 mid-level women (a total of 17 interviews – I conducted three interviews with one of them) and 2 interviews with senior women (see Table 2), and eight men managers (see Table 3), ranging from the lower level of middle management to the upper-middle level. I also met with a male manager for a second interview. I conducted the additional interviews because the managers (both the woman and men manager) had experienced upward mobility in their careers during the research period. The purpose of the additional sessions with them was to discuss how changes in their positions had unfolded. In total, 28 in-depth career interviews were carried out.

From the 25 respondents, 24 managers (16 female and eight male) had been employed at least for three years at the researched company. It was revealed from the interviews that many of them had participated in the company's talent program, which was designed to support the career advancement of young potential leaders. Naturally, many of them had worked at other companies, while some of them had experience working in other sectors and had worked at smaller or mid-sized companies too, but all of the respondents already had quite a long employment history at the researched company. The managers' ages

ranged from 30 to 50-60. All of them held a master's degree, mainly in economics or a similar field; however, women managers turned out to have a slightly higher level of education than men in general. More women, for instance, had obtained more than one diploma compared to male managers. Most of the women managers were married or cohabiting, and some were divorced; typically those who had higher positions in upper-middle management, while one had a senior position. Most of the women managers had children who were under 18. All of the man managers in the sample were married, and all of them had children who were under 18.

Table 2: Overview of female interviewees' characteristics

No. of Interviews	Occupational grade	Division	Education	Age	Marital status (No. of children)
FI 1	Upper-middle	HR Directorate	University Degree in Economics and European TM	46	Married (1)
FI 2	Upper-middle	HR Directorate	University Degree in Economics	45	Divorced (3)
FI 3	Upper-middle	IT Department	University Degree in Economics	48	Divorced (3)
FI 4	Low-middle	Sales	University Degree in Humanities	41	Partnership (no children)
FI 5	Middle	Retail/Bank Branch Management	University Degree in Economics	31	Married (no children)
FI 6	Upper-middle	Retail/Cluster Management	University Degree in Economics (States Socialist Degree)	50+	Divorced (1)
FI 7	Upper-middle	Corporate Customer Service	University Degree in Economics	41	Married (2)
FI 8	Low-middle	HR Department	University Degree in Psychology	39	Married (2)
FI 9	Upper-middle	Marketing	University Degree in Economics	40	Married (1)
FI 10	Low-middle	Investment and Cash Management	University Degree in Economics	35+	Divorced (2)
FI 11	Upper-middle	Operational Management	University Degree in Humanities	46	Divorced (2)

FI 12	Upper-middle	Retail/Branch Group Management	University Degree in Economics	40	Married (no children)
FI 13	Middle	Retail/Bank Branch Management	University Degree in Economics	39	Married (no children)
FI 14	Upper-middle	Retail/Branch Group Management	College Degree in Economics	43	Partnership (no children)
FI 15	Upper-middle	HR Directorate	University Degree in Economics	50+	Married (2)
FI 16	Upper-middle (senior before)	Sales	PhD in Economics	45+	Divorced (2)
FI 17	Senior	Micro SEM Development	University Degree in Economics (States Socialist Degree)	60+	Divorced (1)
FI 18 2nd int. with FI 3	Upper-middle	IT Department	University Degree in Economics	48	Divorced (3)
FI 19 3rd int. with FI3	Upper-middle	IT Department	University Degree in Economics	48	Divorced (3)

Table 3: Overview of male interviewees characteristics

No. of interview	Occupational grade	Division	Education	Age	Marital status (No. of children)
MI 1	Middle	IT Department	University Degree in Economics	33	Married (3)
MI 2	Upper-Middle	HR Department	University Degree in Economics	42	Married (2)
MI 3	Upper-Middle	Portfolio Management and Finance	University Degree in Economics	41	Married (4)
MI 4	Upper-Middle	Management and Sales Support	University Degree in Economics	39	Married (1)
MI 5	Middle	Trade Finance Directorate	University Degree in Economics	36	Married (2)
MI 6	Senior	Internal Audit Directorate	University Degree in Economics	44	Married (3)
MI 7	Upper-Middle	Retail/Cluster Management	University Degree in Engineering Management	39	Married (3)

MI 8	Upper-Middle	Retail/Branch Group Management	University Degree in Geography	45+	Married (no children)
MI 9 2nd int. with MI 5	Middle	Trade Finance Directorate	University Degree in Economics	36	Married (2)

In-depth interviews are mainly considered to be suitable for studying subjective narratives and individual experiences (Jännäri–Kovalainen, 2015). In order to deeply understand the reasons and driving forces behind the choices women managers make about their careers, it is recommended to cover the whole life context and ask questions about issues outside of the world of work (Broadbridge, 2010; Mainiero–Sullivan, 2005; Xian –Woodhams, 2008; Vanhala, 2011). It is also suggested that researchers do not undervalue women's awareness about the organizational barriers that affect their careers but assume that they are active agents in shaping their careers (Billing, 2011; Vanhala, 2011).

Following the above-introduced suggestions when drawing up the interview guide, I asked many open-ended questions. My primary intention was to get to know respondents' perspectives about how they see their career development and identify what events and forms of support or obstacles they highlight without prompting. Therefore, I did not ask them to relate the precise details of their careers with every little detail; instead, I was more interested in how they presented their stories. However, when a transition or any significant change in employment (such as a promotion, or a switch in working time) occurred, or when critical or significant life events happened (such as having children or getting divorced), which seemed to be a turning point in their careers, they were asked to elaborate on this in depth. There was also a focus on exploring the current state of their careers within the context of their whole employment histories; accordingly, respondents were asked about their education and other jobs and positions they had previously held at other companies.

Also, in order to collect data about issues strongly related to career success and opportunities, questions were asked about family, working time, work-life balance, and future aspirations. All in all, the following topics were covered (see the interview guide in Appendix 1): background questions (education, marital status, number of children, etc.), current job responsibilities and workday, career trajectory and employment history, future goals, and satisfaction with current career status, general views about women's opportunities when career building. The interviews ended very differently, but some of the interviewees (mainly women) were very interested in the research, so they asked me how the research was going and what results I had already produced. This inquiry on their part often led to a discussion about broader issues such as equal opportunities in the world of work.

In addition to the career interviews, I conducted three *expert interviews* with HR managers, who were working at the organization under analysis (see Table 4). All of three of them were digitally recorded

and transcribed by me. I conducted the first expert interview with a male HR manager who was one of the senior managers at the HR department; he was responsible for personnel services. The second interview was conducted with the HR Manager (my contact person), who was responsible for leadership development. The contact HR Manager organized both of these interviews right at the beginning of the research period.

I initiated the third expert interview. I interviewed a professional HR employee during the period of project work and learnt that she was managing the talent program designed to support young potential leaders, so I asked her for an interview and to explain how the talent program was operating. At the end of this one-hour long interview, we agreed to meet one more time, which we later did. She provided some documents regarding the talent program so that I could look at the exact number of women and men who had participated in the program per year, and the number of those who had successfully been recruited into managerial positions.

Table 4: Overview of characteristics of expert interviewees

Sex	Occupational grade	Division	Job title	Method of Data Collection
Female EI 1(same as FI 1)	Upper-middle	HR Directorate	Head of Leadership Capabilities Development	Open-ended interview/1hr Documents provided: charts, tables
Male EI 2	Upper-middle	HR Directorate	Head of HR Personnel Services	open-ended interview/1hr
Female EI 3	Entry	HR Directorate	Senior HR Consultant	open-ended interview/1hr work meeting/ 2 hr

Expert interviews are frequently used in ethnographic research and are usually 'non-standardised interviews' (Kostera, 2007). This was the case with these expert interviews too; they were unstructured, thus left much space for improvisation and lasted less than one hour. In each case, I had a few questions prepared in advance, but many questions were improvised on the spot (see interview guideline in Appendix 2). Therefore the interview process perhaps felt more like a conversation between two people. In the case of the first two interviews, I asked about the issue of equal opportunities in relation to career development and talent management in general. In the third case, the interview centered on the talent management program. The goal was to understand how it operates, how participants are recruited for it, what they learn, and how they succeed in their career in the longer term (see more detail on it in chapter 6.1.2 and Table 8). The HR managers' expertise and long experience in their field helped me better understand how career goals can be achieved at the company.

For quotations in the 'Findings' chapter, I add a number for each respondent and use the designation 'F' or 'M' for indicating sex ('F' for female, 'M' for male). I use 'I" to designate career interview, 'E' to designate Expert interview, and HR always stands for human resource personnel.

5.4.2. Shadowing

At the end of the interviews, I asked each of the respondents whether they would let me shadow them for the day. After two months of being busy conducting the interviews, I completed the first *shadowing occasion*, which lasted a whole working day. All in all, I undertook six shadowing days, two with male and four with female managers (see Table 5).

Table 5: Overview of managers participating in shadowing

No.	Sex	Occupational grade	Division/Job title	Location
Shadowee 1 (MI 1)	Male	Middle	IT Department Business Architect Manager	Budapest, Headquarters
Shadowee 2 (Fi 2)	Female	Upper-middle	HR Department Head of Training and Development Department	Budapest, Headquarters
Shadowee 3 (FI 5)	Female	Middle	Retail/Bank Branch Management Head of Local Bank Branch	Budapest, Bank Office
Shadowee 4 (MI 8)	Male	Upper-middle	Retail/Branch Group Management Head of Local Bank Branch Head of Branch Group	Small Town, Countryside Bank Office
Shadowee 5 (FI 14)	Female	Upper-middle	Retail/Branch Group Management Head of Local Bank Branch Head of Branch Group	Small Town, Countryside Bank Office
Shadowee 6 (FI 6)	Female	Upper-middle	Retail/Cluster Management Head of Local Bank Branch Head of Cluster	Small Town, near Budapest Bank Office

Organizational literature defines shadowing as a type of 'direct observation' (Kostera, 2007; McDonald–Simpson, 2014), and which has become popular in management and organization research in the last two decades (Czarniawska, 2008, 2014; Gill, 2011; Vasquez et al., 2012). It is also called 'one-on-one ethnography' (Gill, 2011). Shadowing is favoured because it provides an opportunity for researchers to observe the complex, ever-changing, complicated, and fragmented structure of work and technology, and

partly a virtually working community within a shorter period of time (Czarniawska, 2008; Gill et al., 2014; McDonald–Simpson, 2014; Rouleau et al., 2014; Vásquez et al., 2012).

In practice, during a shadowing day, a researcher follows a person everywhere and observes them while they perform their organizational role and work. The researcher records the observation somehow – by taking notes for instance, writing a diary, or taking pictures. The accompanied person always gives their full agreement to being shadowed (Czarniawska, 2008, 2014; Kostera, 2007; Gill, 2011; Vásquez et al., 2012).

Another version of shadowing is observing not a person, but an event, a piece of project work, or an object (Bruni et al., 2004; Czarniawska, 2014; McDonald–Simpson, 2014). The observation of events/behaviours may also be observed in real-time through the process of following an organizational member (Czarniawska, 2008, 2014; Gill, 2011; Kostera, 2007; Vásquez et al., 2012). In my cases of shadowing, I also experienced the phenomenon that, although I was always following a particular person, I obtained insight into the whole organization through the person I observed. First of all, the focus of the observation was not always on the shadowed person, as I participated in meetings, online conferences, and other organizational events. Shadowing days also served as good occasions to improve my informal networks within the organization and to establish relations with other managers.

Researchers who use shadowing generally agree that as an approach it is associated with methodological challenges. However, it can also generate insights into the "the mobile and temporary character of modern organizing" (Czarniawska, 2008, p.9.), and into 'postindustrial organizing processes and events' at the micro-level of work organizations (Czarniawska, 2014; Gill et al., 2014.) Shadowing is especially recommended for observing managers and their managing processes (Czarniawska, 2014; Gill et al., 2014) because, as Czarniawska pointed out (2014), a manager's work is independent of time and space, as they are always on the move. They often manage virtually, so their physical presence is not a necessity at the workplace. During shadowing, a whole day and the working process of an organizational actor can be followed, which otherwise would not be possible for a participant observer (Czarniawska, 2014). Last but not least, it is easier to get permission from a company to conduct a one-day long period of observation with managers than it is to get permission to spend months researching at a company. As can be seen, one of the advantages of this methodological approach is that the observation is done within a short period, as it may last only for a day or week. Nonetheless, the researcher can observe the everyday life of an organization in real-time, and ultimately can collect a large amount of (possibly rich) data (Czarniawska, 2014; Gill, 2011; McDonald–Simpson, 2014).

It is also an advantageous feature of shadowing, that – in contrast to interviewing, when the researcher always hears someone's narrative – it provides direct access to organizational processes and events (McDonald–Simpson, 2014), while the individual experience of these organizational processes

remains pronounced (Czarniawska, 2008; Gill, 2011). Additionally, the events which are observed (such as board meetings, emailing, answering the phone, having lunch, or meetings) are witnessed in a continuum. Therefore, what the shadower – the researcher – sees is not fragmented in the sense that observed events or behaviours are not disconnected (McDonald–Simpson, 2014).

This style of continuous observation, which involves some 'ongoing interaction' and 'constant reflexivity' between the researcher and shadowee, makes shadowing different to other types of techniques of participant observation (Czarniawska, 2008; Gill, 2011; McDonald–Simpson, 2014; Vásquez et al., 2012). Although the researcher adopts the position and perspective of an outsider, always keeping some distance from the researched person, the researcher is nonetheless not a stranger (Czarniawska, 2008; Gill, 2011; Kostera, 2007; McDonald–Simpson, 2014; Vásquez et al., 2012). As Czarniawska (2008) points out, during shadowing research a specific duality is created between the shadowed person and the researcher, in which dynamic, complex relations play a role (Czarniawska, 2008). It is widely claimed in the related literature that shadowing is a very communicative approach that involves many questions, conversations, negotiations, and unexpected situations. Even the object of the study is continuously redefined, depending on the observational situation and the relations that unfold between the researcher and the shadowee. Accordingly, the data produced through a shadowing approach are inherently the result of 'intersubjective' and 'coconstructed' processes (Gill, 2011; Kostera, 2007; McDonald–Simpson, 2014; Vásquez et al., 2012).

The six shadowing days compared to the number of career interviews might seem limited but only in numbers. Data collected during shadowing enriched the picture of women managers' career development derived from the interviews. In some cases, I collected more details on being a manager, balancing work and life, and managing people working in a bank branch. By the end, I received a more nuanced and colourful picture of the obstacles for marinating a high achieving career. It also turned out that those women managers who introduced themselves as being satisfied with their careers also revealed their difficulties, challenges they encountered during career development, the sacrifices they had to make. In line with the literature introduced above, the data that a shadowing day can provide are substantively different in many senses than the data derived from interviews (McDonald–Simpson, 2014). The uniqueness of the type of data that can be accessed by shadowing is due to the situation of shadowing itself: the researcher records not only what a 'shadowee' says or says about what she/he does (like in an interview), but also records what is going on in particular situations. This means that the researcher's perspective can also be a source of data (Gill, 2011; McDonald–Simpson, 2014; Vásquez et al., 2012).

Not surprisingly, concern about the expression 'shadowing' is raised in the literature. Literature highlights that researchers do not remain unnoticed as individuals either in their role or their positions as researchers (Gill, 2011). Many interactions and conversations can unfold even during a one-day shadowing

occasion, not least because it is the purpose of the researcher to identify how the shadowee interprets or comments on ongoing events and conversations. Also, it is a commonly shared experience of researchers that if there is time and space for it, shadowees themselves generate conversations with researchers to interpret certain events together. Therefore, the researcher cannot be entirely invisible during the time of observation (Bruni et al., 2004; Czarniawska, 2008; Cunliffe–Karunanayake, 2013; Gill, 2011; McDonald–Simpson, 2014). My presence as a researcher, for instance, was more noticeable to the company employees when I spent a day together with a manager who worked in a smaller office compared to those days when I shadowed managers working in the main office building, in which hundreds of other employees also worked.

Overall, the organizational literature understands the approach of shadowing to involve a kind of intersubjective study of organizational processes, everyday interactions, and behaviours (Czarniawska, 2008; Gill, 2011; McDonald–Simpson, 2014). Due to the intersubjective character of this approach, a reflexive approach is recommended when introducing the process of data collection and, later, the interpretation of data (Gill, 2011; McDonald–Simpson, 2014). In my case, this reflective approach started on the spot, when doing the shadowing: while I was taking notes, I also raised questions about what I saw, and made notes in advance that would be useful for analysis, and I also wrote down my reflections about what was happening.[20]

In sum, in the literature it is agreed that participating in the working life of organizational actors allows researchers not only to ask and talk about careers, management practices or opinions, but also to observe in practice what interviewees talk about (Angrosino–Rosenberg, 2011). I am convinced that this methodological approach led to the collection of rich data, as described in this dissertation.

5.4.3. Participant observation

The third primary source of the empirical basis for this dissertation comes from *participant observation of project work*. In ethnographic research, participant observation simply describes the case when a researcher becomes a participant of an organizational event for a shorter or longer period, and the research is conducted from this insider perspective. The purpose of this kind of observation is to gather information about specific situations, and to see how certain events, behaviours, and relations happen. Due to the researcher's inherently insider position during participatory observation, there is a greater chance of gathering sensitive data (Kostera, 2007).

My experience of doing participant observation corresponds with the description given above about this method. Being involved in one group's work created the opportunity to hear informal conversations, rumours, and personal opinions, especially as the group members tended to 'forget' that I was present.

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[20] For more details on the experience of using the shadowing technique for this research, see Oborni, 2017).

Participating in the project work was a unique experience which provided a different type of data compared to that collected during the interviews. It was very informative, for instance, when project team members had informal chats about the number the projects they were involved in, and how they ended up being involved in too many of them. It was also beneficial to gather data about their everyday routines of working without having to ask them about it.

Furthermore, the researcher can also obtain data through the personal experience of doing the actual work, or at least being involved in the work or event which is under the observation, thus "learn[ing] what reality and work look like from the perspective of tacit knowledge" (Kostera, 2007, p. 128). Because of this involvement, the researcher can thus benefit from an observation as an intensive and unique learning process. However, their problematic side should also be raised. Namely, the researcher can become so involved in the observed situation that they forget to study the situation systematically. Therefore, it is recommended that the researcher have an active attitude, and always stays alert and open to problems, questions, and experiences (Kostera, 2007).

About the observed project work. I was invited to participate by the human resource (HR) department of the company. The project sought to examine and then to improve employees' satisfaction with their work-life balance, so they decided to carry out research on their department. Later, based on the findings, an action plan was initiated that was relevant to the whole company. Given the fact that HR departments are usually feminized, I could consider myself fortunate that the project team was somewhat balanced regarding their gender: there were four female and three male organizational members with various demographic and organizational backgrounds in the project team (plus me as an observer). The project leader was the HR manager, who was the contact person for the research in general (married, one child, part-timer), and there were two other female members who were in their early thirties and working full-time (unmarried, no children), while one woman was working full-time (married) and had a young child. One of the males was a very senior member of the HR department (unmarried, no children) and the two other were also working at the HR department, leading projects, and had no children. They all worked full time, flexibly (their relationship status remained unknown to me).

I joined the project team from the very beginning. The whole project lasted four months; we had eight project meetings, and a workshop was organized for senior managers of the HR department. I participated in all of these meetings and events. Most of the time I made notes about the meetings, but I also recorded then transcribed two of them. During the project, the project team carried out some exploratory mini-research. First, a questionnaire was distributed among the employees of the HR department. Thirty-one out of 40 HR employees completed it: 23 women (two of them working in senior positions, and one of them a senior manager) – other demographic details were not asked about in the

questionnaire (for instance, number of children or marital status, in order to ensure anonymity). The questionnaire consisted of questions about the amount of work, overtime, and using work-life balance tools.

Then, 17 semi-structured, short interviews were conducted. Those who completed the questionnaire could volunteer to give an interview. Out of the 17 interviewees, only two were male. The female respondents had a varied background: the related sample consisted of managers and professionals with various types of occupations and positions (three of them were even working part-time at the time of the interview), and most of them had from one to three children. For the details of the sample, see Appendix 3.

The interview guide (see Appendix 4) was the result of collaborative work between the team members and me. First, the team created an interview guide; they discussed it at one of the meetings. It was at this point when I became a more 'real' member of the project team as I was asked to comment on the interview guide, which I did. This collaborative way of applying the interview technique is not unknown in post-modern ethnographic research when the researcher's control over the interview is minimized (Angrosino–Rosenberg, 2011; DeVault, 1996). Eventually, the interview guide was finalized according to my recommendations. The dominant frame of the interview material was not changed at all, but I helped to clarify the purpose and the questions. The interview questions focused on the experience of using work-life balance tools, opinions about the company's attitude and support for work-life balance in general. At the end, we asked the interviewees to give recommendations about how to improve the company's work-life balance support for employees. I recorded all the interviews digitally, and then transcribed them. I presented an analysis of the interview findings for the project team.

After other team members had analysed the results of the questionnaire and interviews, a workshop was organized for the senior members of the HR department with a twofold purpose. First, the team introduced the findings; second, senior managers were asked to evaluate and then discuss an action plan together with the project team. Finally, the action plan was finalized based on the discussions during the workshop.

It might be clear at this point that my role was not fully clarified when the first meeting about the project was held. I started out as a non-participant (but direct observer), but slowly my position developed into a more active one, and eventually I participated in the project work in many ways, so my outsider position developed into a more – but never fully – participatory role by the end of the project. First, I was asked to comment and give advice on the questionnaire that the project team distributed among employees working at the HR department. Then, for the next meeting, I was asked to give a presentation about the sociological literature regarding the issue of work-life balance in regard to the Hungarian corporate world. Slowly, I got more and more involved in conversations during the meetings. I was included in group emails, and documents were shared with me, then I was asked to conduct the interviews. I was also deeply involved

in finalizing the interview guide. Finally, I was asked to make a presentation at the workshop organized for the senior members of the HR department.

In sum, the data derived from this observation series consist of the questionnaire, the results of the questionnaire, the interview guide, recorded texts of the interviews, field notes, two records from the meetings and the workshop, notes on informal conversations during the meetings, and the action plan document. I found it essential to incorporate the field notes on the meetings and the informal conversations as data because the members had a strong tendency not to treat data independently from their own experiences and opinions. For instance, they often considered data (for instance, an answer in the questionnaire) to be valid when their own experience supported it. Similarly, the power dynamics inside the project team impacted the content of the action plan (Oborni, 2017).

5.4.4. Additional sources of data

During the ten months while I was doing the research, I had other opportunities to gather data. I became involved in two organizational events. One was a *training day* organized to improve the capability building of low-level managers. The second one was a one-day long event: it was a *career fair* which was organized for the company's employees with the purpose of promoting job rotation within the company.

In general, I could not participate in the everyday work of the company or move entirely freely within the office buildings for security reasons. In time, however, I spent more and more time in the main office building and developed several relationship. Receptionists, for instance, recognized me after a while, so I did not have to wait at the entrance for someone to take me into the office area. I even got a Wi-Fi code to use. I could then move a bit more freely and spend some time in the office building and undertake classical field research, making observations of the things happening around me, and taking field notes. There were other occasions when I could spend more time in the main office – for instance, when I spent a whole workday there on the day of the career fair, and a shadowing day. One of the most valuable moments during these occasions happened when I was waiting to participate in a meeting with a shadowee, and when it finished I had a short, informal chat with one of the top male managers of the company, who in two minutes summarized his everyday work schedule.

Similarly, it was not rare that after project meetings the team members started to ask me questions, or they felt the need to explain to me decisions they had made during the meetings. Much important information was shared with me during these informal talks that all created more precious data. I heard more career stories on these occasions (the career fair was particularly useful for this), and could observe every day work in a more 'realistic' way. Also, it naturally happened several times that *informal talks and quick chats* developed between the employees and me. I made notes on these informal conversations most of the time, and data derived from these informal settings were incorporated into a dataset.

5.4.5. Ethical concerns

I have ensured the anonymity of all the people who participated in the research. In some cases, the biographical data of respondents and formal names of organisational processes have been limited to protect individuals' identity. Similarly, I ensured the anonymity of some of the research locations.

When I conducted interviews, shadowing days, and participating in the project work, I obtained informed consent from respondents. First, I sent information to potential respondents. They received an email introducing myself and the research objectives, and about issues ensuring privacy and confidentiality throughout the research and later analysing data and potential publications on the results. I also assured them that their participation was voluntary and confidential. Then, right at the beginning of conducting the interview, starting a shadowing day and the project work, I clarified again how I would ensure anonymity and store data and requested respondents' consent in verbal again.

In ethnographic research, many ethical concerns arise next to ensuring participants' anonymity and informed concern. The literature has a large reference and elaboration on discussing ethical issues and concern, and all highlight that due to the many interactions, relations, ongoing issues in ethnographic researches, the ethical concerns can not be reduced simply to ensuring anonymity and obtaining informed consent (Armstrong–Gibbs, 2019; Guillemin–Gillam, 2004; Van Maanen, 2011). Although ethical dilemmas are part of all kind of research, in the case of ethnographic research, it is recommended to apply reflexivity as a helpful tool to understand the complexity of relationships and the nature and relevance of ethics in research in order to reach an 'ethical practice in research' (Guillemin–Gillam, 2004).

First of all, the researcher creates and manages relationships during the observation, which can have ethical implications both for the researcher and the respondents (Armstrong–Gibbs, 2019; Guillemin–Gillam, 2004). For instance, in my case, relationships based on power differences hardly emerged, except when I entered the organization, and I had to built and then maintain confidentiality, and so to be able to increase my network within the research field. As it turned out, I had to be more concerned, as a researcher, about the impact the interviews and shadowings might have on the respondents. A major ethical account evolved when I become involved in private, personnel and sensitive stories. Having meaningful time during the interviewees and shadowing days meant that respondents shared intimate and often sensitive details about themselves, families, and children. Sometimes, I was surprised how many and how sensitive issues they shared with me - both women and men.

I am confident that providing time and attention for the respondents was a respectful and responsible act, they might even be benefited from it, but at the same time, I had to ensure that I withdraw from these conversations without causing any harm - that is why some of the interviews lasted long because I wanted to give enough and focused time for the respondents to say what they want to say and to give them

the   experience   that   someone   is   listening   to   them.

A second ethical issue to consider is that there were some cases, I could not obtain informed consent, and sometimes it was not that obvious to define who is a participant, an informant in an event I was observing. Also, the question may arise in some cases, whether the informants knew that their answers would be recorded (Armstrong-Gibbs, 2019). For instance, when I collected valuable data from informal chats, conversations developed with employees during career day or the training day I attended. Therefore, being aware that they did not give their concerns directly for using their words, their words were never extracted   or   quoted   verbatim   besides   preserving   their   anonymity.

Making the findings of ethnographic research visible also has some ethical concerns: what to make visible and how to involve participants in interpretation (Armstrong-Gibbs, 2019; Van Maanen, 2011). Some of the interviewees (who then became shadowees) or project work members expressed the need to hear the interpretation of the results. It is then an issue how to interpret sensitive data and share findings knowing that I will leave the research site and I might not be aware of some of the implications on the participants. During the research period, the findings of this research were only shared with some of the research participants during informal discussions, interviews, and shadowing days, but not with the organization as a whole. Therefore, assessing the actual impact of the research and the relations formed between the organization and me is not part of describing the methodology. Although I can not be entirely sure about who was directly or indirectly affected by the research, however, based on the few cases that I shared and discussed results, I am confident that I could avoid causing significant difficulties or damages as an impact of my presence and ethnographic practice.

5.5. Method of analysis

There was no intention to draw macro-level conclusion from the research results. Instead, the focus of the interpretation was to reveal and clarify the processes behind career construction, which required finding patterns and links between practices and both individual and organizational-level discourses and attitudes by applying a reflexive perspective. The research was thus fundamentally explorative, and the data were derived from one specific research site. Therefore, qualitative content analysis served as the best way to arrange and interpret data (Bazeley, 2009; Braun–Clarke, 2006).

Thus, the analytical approach is an exploratory one that aims to discover a wide range of organizational and individual-level practices, values, and attitudes about careers. The process of creating coding categories followed Acker' theory (2006a, 2012a), which states that the organizational logic associated with the profile of the unencumbered, ideal, and disembodied worker can be found in assumptions, expectations, practices, values, and norms. Therefore, categories were applied to the practices, narratives, and attitudes regarding career and work practices and work-life balance in relation to careers. In

parallel with the coding process, the finalization of the research question simultaneously followed the theoretical framework and the inductive logic of an ethnographic investigation, where emerging themes are also considered. This process led to even more refined research questions.

All the parts of each interview were tape-recorded and transcribed. Then, together with the field notes from the project meetings, events, and shadowings, the transcripts were organized and analysed with NVivo 11 Software. While the aim was to create categories systematically, the latter were created in three ways.

First, categories were created based on the corresponding literature. For instance, the category of the role of the supervisor in enhancing opportunities for career advancement was created in advance, as its importance is well-known from the literature (see for instance Williams et al., 2012). Thus some of the categories were defined by the theory, and were constructed in a deductive way. Second, other categories were formulated inductively after reading the interviews and field notes. For instance, after discovering that the majority of women managers were dissatisfied with the constant need for overtime, it seemed especially important to examine the strategies that such women managers (including part-time mothers) employed on a daily basis to manage their work-life balance. Third, new categories were created based on research findings. More specifically, it was found that despite the strong organizational discourse about the existence of part-time work, I hardly found any women managers who were working part-time. Therefore a second analysis was carried out, this time focusing on the personal experiences of part-timers and the role of part-time work in the career trajectory. In addition to the thematic analysis, the analysis of organizational documents and charts provided some numerical data about the proportion of women and men managers.

After finishing the category building, three major themes emerged from the empirical material and organized under three main research questions. The research findings are organized according to these research questions. In the first chapter, the aim is to explore the organizational narrative on gender equality, and to see what gender equality means at the researched company in relation to career development opportunities, and whether women managers receive dedicated support for it. The following chapter describes the underlying processes that define managers' career building, and interprets how career differences are created for women and men at the middle level of the organization that was investigated. The last chapter explores work-life balance strategies and examines how mid-level female managers and professionals adapt themselves to the norm of long working hours, even if they work part-time.

6 FINDINGS

6.1. Organizational-level Support for Careers

In this chapter, I first provide an overall summary of the career-supporting system. This is further detailed with the organizational narrative about individual-level career construction, which is then compared to the actual presence of women and men managers in the various levels of the organizational hierarchy.

The first meeting with the HR Manager (EI 1, my contact for implementing the research at the company) was very informative about organizational concerns and views in relation to supporting women managers' career development, and in general about the issue of equal chances for career opportunities. A couple of months later, I conducted an expert interview with her. She also shared some documents with me, showing the proportion of men and women managers at the company.[21] Data gathered from this interview and two other experts' interviews – one with a male, upper-mid-level HR manager (EI 2), and one with an HR professional who was responsible for coordinating the company's internal training program (EI 3)[22] – create the basis for this chapter.

It took me a while to put together the whole picture about the programs and the various organizational initiatives that are part of the supporting system, including those work-life balance programs which were intended to support a well-balanced career. Career interviews and shadowing days also provided additional insights through personal stories that clarified how career moves happen in practice.

6.1.1. Career-Developing System

The picture of a well-established organizational system of career support emerged out of the data. It appeared that the company purposefully cared about its employees' careers within the framework of a pre-established HR system. The company offered a wide range of opportunities, training, and work-life balance support for career development at various levels. Additionally, it also had solutions for following and monitoring career progress at the individual level. The organizational system for supporting career is summarized in Table 6.

The company applied a systematic data collection to examine employees' satisfaction with all kinds of issues, among them the satisfaction with career progression. In the yearly Employee Commitment Survey,[23] the company asked employees what they thought about their opportunities for career

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[21] During the first expert interview, charts and graphics were shared with me showing the distribution of men and women in leadership positions, and a chart explaining the system of the hierarchical levels in the Company. I made my own calculation based on this data containing the names and the positions of the top 250 managers.
[22] This occasion proved very useful in understanding the operational side of the training program. She explained the main parts of the program, such as recruitment, educational content, and the mentoring phase.
[23] The questionnaire measured employees' satisfaction with regard to a wide range of issues such as career, work-life balance, performance, supervisors, and salary. The company did not give me access to the results of this survey.

development, what their plan was in relation to it, how satisfied they were with it, and so forth. The findings of the annual surveys show that overall satisfaction regarding the company has increased in the last ten years with regard to all the work-related issues; however, 'satisfaction with career development' and 'satisfaction with work-life balance 'were scored lowest. Nonetheless, the HR Manager (EI 1) with whom I talked about the evaluation did not evaluate this finding negatively, because although this factor scored as the least satisfying work-related area, the results also showed improvement during the last few years. The other expert interviewee (EI 2) further explained that an HR team studies the results each year, and makes an action plan based on the findings that includes topics related to career development.

Furthermore, when monitoring employees' satisfaction in general, the evaluation of individuals' work and career plans is strictly undertaken: *"We have a lot of unified systems, and the basis for this is the performance evaluation system, which starts with objectives and includes not only performance targets, but also competence targets" (EI 1).* Thus, part of this unified system is making sure that individuals' work performance is monitored and evaluated: *"For each employee, this is evaluated in every six months by the manager to see what progress has been made and what needs to be improved" (EI 1).* Then, the results are always discussed personally with a superior at a meeting dedicated to career development. This meeting is held once every year, or every half year. I heard some women interviewees saying that some of their superiors did not take these career meetings seriously enough. Nevertheless, I also witnessed the importance of these kinds of career-related discussions. On one of the shadowing days, a female manager (Shadowee 2) I followed had such a 'career meeting' with one of her team members, and I was kindly asked not to participate in it (so I could not observe it), as it would involve sensitive discussion with employees. It turned out to be a one-hour long meeting.

It was explained that the evaluation of individual performance follows a competence model.[24] The model contains various competencies diversified into four levels. On the level applied to middle-level leadership, managers are required to have competencies – for instance, to be able to prioritize or delegate tasks, be able to motivate and develop team members, have the courage to deal with uncertainty, and, of course, have business awareness. Through a personalized career plan, specific targets for achieving a pre-defined level of performance and the individualized development of competencies are set up.

A mid-level female manager tried to give me an idea about the importance of measuring performance and its relevance in evaluation in the following way:

However, I received some information about it during the expert interview I conducted with the HR Managers (female, expert interview, contact person for the organization).

[24] The model of competencies was presented at the expert interview (EI 1), and later on a chart illustrating the model was sent for further study but without permission for publication. The model's name is an acronym made up of the abbreviation of the first letters of some of the competencies. The model is used under this name in the organization by everyone.

"...here everything is quantifiable, my work, your work, even the work of the coffee machine, everything is reported, ... and everything" (can be shown). *You are practically judged by numbers"* *(FI 5).*

This quote perfectly shows that employees' performance could be tracked in exact numbers and presented in percentages. During my field observations at the local bank offices, I witnessed the practice of how individual performance was measured. Charts were hanging on the office walls designed to track all employees' performance on a daily basis. I also learned it was regular practice in the local branches every week to start with a morning meeting to evaluate and give feedback about the previous week's performance. This emphasis on weekly performance was paired with intensive internal competition among employees. The best performing employees achieved an average performance of 120%. Evidence of the highly competitive environment was also given by the female HR Manager (EI 1), as when I asked about the importance of the competencies, she said: *"There are areas where you can loiter in relative comfort but I think that's no longer the case for most of the organisation."* Overall, the company placed strong emphasis on the individualized career plans that were developed and mainly based on performance evaluation and the feedback of superiors.

Furthermore, the HR department was responsible for organizing various training events for employees. Some of the training is provided following the results of personnel evaluation, but there was also ongoing internal training for employees working at all levels of hierarchy (i.e., company-specific training, soft skills training, executive training programmes). In addition, all the departments could contact HR at any time and request specialized training according to their needs. I had the opportunity to participate as an observer in one of these training events, which was organized for freshly appointed team leaders. They received training for some essential leadership skills, such as giving feedback correctly. I learned during my observation of this event that this particular training event was the idea of the senior manager who had requested this opportunity only for his team members. Other than these specific training occasions, the HR department had a unified system for providing training to employees. Similarly, to the personalized career plans, training events could be based upon individual needs. An HR manager explained it thus:

> *"... for jobs, we have specific tools and processes, but also for mass development. These can be individualized as much as the methodology is uniform, but who needs an additional development plan because they are very behind in something or we see that they could be suitable for a higher-level position and then we support them more strongly, this is decided by the manager, these are prepared additionally on an individual level." (EI 1)*

As this quote shows, the company has a well-developed training events system that is intended to provide personalized support for career development, in which the superiors have an important role.

Furthermore, when an employee was making a career move to another position, they had to participate in a mandatory, one-day, extended aptitude test. On these occasions, general leadership skills and specialized skills required for desired positions were tested, and suggestions were made about further development when necessary, including taking some training events.

It also appears that career movement requires personal effort to develop skills continually. Different educational programs[25] operate for this purpose for managers working at different levels. There is a three-month-long training period designed for would-be top managers, which is maintained together with the owner company and usually takes place abroad. Furthermore, in general, a team within the HR department is assigned to work on the recruitment and career development of top managers. The former had the responsibility of organizing specific career development programs for the top 40 and the top 100 managers. At this level, all the top managers are provided with personalized career development and training events. In addition, there is a two-year-long internal training program within the company (at the time of conducting the research, the procedure had already begun to recruit new candidates for the next group). This takes the form of a company-specialized educational program for finding and educating the next generation of aspirants for managerial positions. Theoretically, the company opens this program to anyone. However, the candidates (usually young female and male professionals under the age of 30) have to apply for this program with the full agreement and recommendation of their superiors:

> "Training, thus leadership development, is also available on a standardised menu, but again it's up to the leader to decide who they want to offer a higher-level leadership module to, and we have a talent-program pool of people that we develop even more intensively than the average. These are colleagues with strong leadership potential who are seen by their managers as having the potential to reach the higher positions they are aiming for faster than average". (EI 1)

As we can see from the quote above, the primary purpose of this training program was to develop skills and the appropriate knowledge for leadership positions. However, it also served as an entry point for aspiring young employees to start their managerial careers at the lower and middle ranks of the hierarchy. Therefore, the HR department monitored the success of trainees in relation to their obtaining leadership positions. The program was designed to help all of the applicants to reach a low or a mid-level managerial position by the end of the program, although not everyone finished it.

A significant portion of this internal training was a mentorship system for trainees, as the HR professional (EI 3) who was responsible for running this program explained during the expert interview. The HR department had a routine of recruiting mentors from within the company; managers with a long period of leadership experience can volunteer for this position. Later, I also learned during career

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[25] To preserve the anonymity of the company, I do not give the formal names of these educational programs.

interviewees that some of these mentor-mentee relations lasted longer than the two years of the training events program. Men and women managers alike mentioned that they still have their mentors, although their training period was already over.

Next to managerial skills development, HR put a lot of attention and concern on a career-related move called 'rotation'. This appeared to be one of the most important – if not the most important – concern communicated by the company to its employees. Rotation was defined as a beneficial horizontal move between different departments of the company. Managers who made rotation moves did not always end up in higher-level positions. However, the moves always occurred between different fields that require different skills and even the learning of new kinds of knowledge. The HR Manager (EI 1) in the expert interview described rotation as "*lateral displacement from the comfort zone*"*;* a necessary method for improve the competency for strategic thinking (*"shaping a strategic approach"*). Her description of rotation clearly shows that taking part in rotation is a necessary step for reaching higher levels of management, as completing a rotation move involves developing the right skills to enter top management.

During the ten months of the research period, the HR department organized a career day for company employees. I was in an advantageous position to participate in this organizational event. It was a one-day event with two roundtable sessions, lectures, and a career fair, at which departments could advertise their open positions. At the roundtable sessions, mainly men and a few women managers from various levels of the organizational hierarchy shared their stories and experiences about rotating into fields that were previously entirely unknown to them. Not surprisingly, they advocated the positive effects of this on their career development, and accordingly, they recommended to their organizational peers an early start to rotations between different departments. The mutual benefits of rotation for the individual and the organization were also evenly emphasized, as one of the top male managers said in a presentation on this day that: *"Rotation is not only good for the organisation, but also for the individual. It makes us more, better, more complex"* (field notes). Although this career fair dedicated to advocating job rotation was a one-off event, the company's message about the importance of rotation in career progression was quite clear and widely shared.

As the quote presented above also shows, managers successfully internalized views about the importance of rotation in career moves. In addition, rotation often came up as an issue during the career interviews slightly more often with men than women managers. To conclude about the topic of rotation, managers seemed to be well aware of the importance of rotating jobs within their careers. We can say that rotation had become an essential element of leadership development that was built into mid-level managerial careers, which was additionally a necessary condition for further career moves into top positions.

It also appeared that organizational support for work-life balance is deeply related to the intention of providing career support. I would particularly like to point out here that the company was very proud of its various tools for supporting mothers of young children in their career. There was an organizational initiative designed specifically for the 'new mother's' to help them to return to the world of work from maternity leave. Within this program, the HR department remained in close contact with women on maternity leave, and when mothers were returning, they were offered practical options, such as part-time work or training events. Women on maternity leave even had access to internal data about open positions and were encouraged to use it.

In sum, the company under analysis had a well-established, unified system for career development that had space for personalized career plans and skill development based upon individual needs. It turned out that rotation is a highly required career move; the organizational narrative keeps encouraging employees to take rotations. In practice, various tools for skill and leadership development, and support for better balancing work and life were provided to aspiring employees. Nevertheless, this well-established career support system might leave us with the impression that employees could not avoid following the organizational perspective about career development. Employees always had to think and say something about it: where they wanted to move to the following year, or what career goals they had already achieved (or not) yet. Only individual career interviews could reveal how managers experienced the constant attention of HR in terms of how their careers unfolded. Were they satisfied with the support, or did they instead perceive it as (potentially unwanted) pressure?

Table 6: Career support system of the company

Internal survey (Employee Commitment Survey)	Annual survey measuring employees' satisfaction with relevant issues such as work, salary, career, work-life balance.
Action plan based on the survey	Written and managed by the HR Department based on the result of the annual survey; e.g., projects for improving work-life balance.
Career plan	Personalized career plan.
Career meeting with superior	Once per year or every six months: employees have a meeting with superiors to evaluate performance and redesign career plans.
Training events	According to employees' specific needs, HR department provide various forms of training.
Educational program for aspirants to top management	This is an international and intensive form of training. Those who are chosen for these training events are listed as candidates for top managerial positions.

Two-year training program for young talent (including mentorship)	This is program involving training and a mentorship program. Candidates are chosen based upon superiors' recommendations. The aim of this program is to recruit the next generation of leaders for low and mid-level positions.
Various work-life balance tools	The initiative aims to support returning mothers, part-time work, home office, and a flexible work schedule
Programs, other tools supporting career moves	Career days, career fair, public events within the company,

6.1.2. Organizational Narratives about Career Development

The unified system for career development was presented as applying equally to everyone. The way that HR managers talked about career support (during the expert interviews) shows that they considered it as being available to everyone, and under the same terms. See this quote, for instance:

> *"so, there are these systematic and institutionalised career development programmes, there are talent programmes that you can get into and then you can aspire to top 100 positions"* (EI2).

According to this quote, it seems that obtaining one of the top 100 management positions is an easy process. Above all, it is a matter of individuals' intention and active participation in organizational programs for career development. I want to point out that the above quote shows the perspective of the interviewee and not the actual chances of achieving a position in the top 100, and as such, is a valuable source defining the specific gender regime at the studied organization (see, Acker, 2006a, pp. 452-454). In this sense, this quote is instead an example for showing the degree of awareness of inequalities – which, in this case, is the firm belief in the existence of equality – then the accurate description of the mechanism for supporting promotions.

Furthermore, in line with the emphasis on individual performance and intentions related to career moves, both of the HR managers who gave the expert interviews strongly agreed that achieving the equal treatment of men and women did not need any further support, especially affirmative support or a kind of gender-related support. Organizational efforts to apply affirmative actions or positive discrimination to create better balance in the gender distribution of managers was rejected:

> *"Well, the idea that we should create a job or hire someone just to improve the ratios, there is no such thing..."* (EI 2).

As we can see, any action that favoured a particular group was presented as inappropriate. The presumption that a meritocracy provides the solid base for career advancement was adequate justification for not taking any action as specific support for women to increase gender equality:

"and I don't really believe that there should be a big difference between men and women, previous competences, performance and work experience that I think should play a role." (EI 2)

"I don't feel that here... probably because there are more women overall, that this would be a problem, I mean our talent programmers that we're more concerned with, who we say has the potential to move into a B minus 1 position, there's two women out of the current intake, two men... so I don't think... I don't think it's gender or sex, it's more about performance." (EI 1)

The above quotes clearly demonstrate the belief that it is individual performance, experience, and skills than can ensure women's advancement into leadership positions. Other than the existence of a meritocracy, increasing women's presence in leadership was rejected based on its potentially negative consequence for male managers:

"I personally think that as long as it's not unhealthy, it's better not to do it, because it can be overdone. Now if we are going to take measures in favour of women, there has to be a very clear business case that if there is really such an inequality that we can just level it out and it's not a question of discriminating in favour of women and it's going to be to the detriment of men" (EI 1).

The application of affirmative action to increase the proportion of female managers in certain positions was considered unacceptable not only because it would involve unnecessary positive discrimination but also because it would have negative consequences for those men managers who would be disadvantaged. This clearly articulated opposition is already a strong negative reaction against gender equality policies and actions, but what is more interesting is that the respondents demonstrated a backlash (see, i.e., *'unhealthy', 'can be pushed too far'*, '*will be detrimental to men'*) against gender equality policy without even having affirmative actions taken place at all in the organization before[26]. Except, that one justification for taking action to increase the number of women in leadership positions would be a clear business case: *"there must be a very clear business case."* However, the business case for women was mentioned more as a hypothetical scenario, not as an existing practice.

Next to the business case, there was one exceptional area in which support for women's career development was considered acceptable, and was seen to be treated with the proper attention:

"...where there is a role to differentiate women in a positive way, the parenting related absence, so that she can return to a position that is not 3 times below where she left, and we have a well-established practice for that." (EI 2)

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[26] It also turned out that an equal opportunity plan was just under preparation, which was a mandatory requirement of organizational policy. The compulsory but unnecessary implementation of equal opportunity policy in large organizations is well known from literature about Hungarian multinational companies (Nagy, 2003; Tóth, 2007; ILO Report, 2015).

The welcome program for women returning from maternity leave is introduced in this quote as a positive and justified example of positive discrimination, but in general, positive discrimination was rejected. In general, it was rather understood that equal opportunities were ensured for both men and women at the organization. In taking this perspective, respondents understood that any affirmative action that involved positive discrimination in the interest of women managers would give rise to inequality in relation to all the other managers.

It also appeared that, instead of 'equality', 'diversity' was considered a more reliable concept with which to consider the needs of various groups, and not based on gender, but age. Both of the HR managers underlined the importance of diversity during the interviews:

> *"We talk a lot about generations x and y and how to integrate them, which is very important, and how to keep them here, even after 2-3 years, but it's equally important to talk about people with families, people about to start families, it's important to talk about people who are around 50 and stuck professionally, how to train them, and then we need to talk about those who are 55 plus and have a good 10 years to go before they retire, whether they are training or not training or some other job where they are not in such a hurry, how they can gradually retire, so we need to talk about a lot of things, we have been talking about these issues for a long time within the organisation. "* (EI 2)

Seeing equality as an issue of diversity was also validated from the perspective of believing in a pre-existing and satisfying state of equality:

> *"Our approach is that if there's a job, women and men can apply for it..., we always support the best candidate for the job."* (EI 2)

I detected a strong belief in the existence of equal treatment at the researched organization. Corresponding with how Hungarian corporates think of gender equality (Nagy et al., 2017), it was articulated that it is only a business case or improving diversity would validate any step towards improving gender equality. The HR managers I spoke to appraised the organization positively in relation to the organizational approach to equal treatment. Moreover, the company appeared to be evaluated as above average at achieving gender equality. See how an HR manager (EI 2) who is responsible for establishing the company's equality policy evaluated the company in terms of how far it has developed in ensuring equality for women and men:

> *"I come to these family-friendly and diversity-related conferences to give presentations, and then when we take part in roundtable discussions, I see that with the examples I can give, we are above the industry average or the average of multinational companies." (EI 2)*

Similarly, the other HR manager was also very convinced that the company has the right approach to addressing equality. She stated the following: *"Personally, I think the organisation operates in a healthy*

way". In addition, in full agreement with the principle of rejecting positive discrimination in the interests of women managers, she added:

> *"...I also see that there is no situation that would justify consciously creating women's clubs, career circles, and if we say equal opportunities for women, then move quasi-inequality of opportunities in any direction in favour of men." (EI 1)*

The two HR managers' arguments about equal treatment and the lack of need for positive discrimination indicate their belief in meritocracy, and in line with it that career achievements are based on individual-level performances and a willingness to aspire to higher positions. Both of them appeared to be truly satisfied with the organization in terms of the opportunities and programs it offered for career development. All they argued was confirmed with the number of women in management positions.

There was a positive attitude to and a high level of satisfaction with the proportion and distribution of women managers working in leadership positions. Data showing that women and men managers are equally present at the mid-level of the organization was presented to me as clear evidence of gender equality. The distribution of women and men in mid-level managerial positions was almost perfectly balanced: 51% of managers at this level were female, and 49% male (see Table 7).

I also learned that other than at the middle level, the gender distribution of men and women managers was not that balanced. However, the fact that in the top management (not including board members) the proportion of women was 21% and of men was 79% was presented as an entirely acceptable distribution of leadership positions between women and men. Similarly, the pyramid structure in relation to the ratio of women and men employees was also accepted at the organization:

> *"It's certainly the case that overall, the 70-30 men, it works like a pyramid, so at the bottom of the organisation, in lower-ranking jobs, the proportion of women is higher than that, and as you go up the ranks it gets lower, but I think that's still okay. ...so, if we are looking at the proportion of women in senior management, which is absolutely good in a European comparison, thus also within the group, with our 20%, which is again just below the board level..."* (EI 1)

First, the HR manager admitted that women make up two-thirds of the entire population of employees. The data I received showing the proportion of women and men also demonstrated this. It clearly shows the strong presence of vertical segregation in the organization. Second, it seems that there is an organizational consensus about that the proportion of women in the highest leadership positions is satisfying. This situation was also positively evaluated by the other HR Manager (male, expert interview): *"I think we are better than the Hungarian average except for senior management."* Indeed, explanations were given to justify the unbalanced presence of women and men in top management as the accepted case. The HR manager (EI 1) who was responsible for the recruitment of managers into top managerial positions explained why women are not present in top management:

"What I see is that there are fewer women who have the ambition to go above a certain level, so it's more the men who tend to have it more generally." (EI 1)

Therefore, on the one hand, it was acknowledged that there are significantly fewer women in managerial positions at the top level. However, the representatives of the researched organization – the interviewed HR managers – did not interpret this fact as being problematic at all:

"I'm conservative in that respect, but I don't see a problem with changing that position." (EI 1)

Thus, in contrast to being seen as problematic, the presence of women in leadership was viewed as an achievement. Moreover, as we have already seen, it was even highlighted that compared to the other large companies in Hungary, the company was in a relatively good position (*"we are better than the Hungarian average"* EI 2*)* in terms of the proportion of women managers. To investigate the experiences of women working at top management is not the aim of this study. However, due to the finding of women's limited presence in top management being non-problematic, the question arises as to whether individual views and experiences echo the straightforward organizational attitude to this situation, so the belief in meritocracy and that gender equality is ensured in the career supporting system.

As we can see, the most definite vertical segregation appears at the top level. However, when analysing the data about the proportion of women and men in managerial positions in more detail it appears that women managers are also at a disadvantaged position at the middle level, clearly in contrast to what the HR managers explained during the interviews (see Table 8). The less visible vertical segregation at the mid-level only appears if we examine the proportion of women and men separately on the four sublevels of the middle level. Doing this shows that the pool of men at the upper-mid level (28% of the total mid-level) – which could be considered the critical group for recruitment to top management – is almost twice as big as the women managers' pool (15 % of the total mid-level).

Table 7: Distribution of men and women in the researched organization

Organizational level	% of women	% of men
All staff, male/female ratio	68 %	32 %
Senior management (Top 40)	21 % (plus one woman on the board)	79% (eight men on the board)
Mid-level management	**51%**	**49 %**

Table 8: Distribution of men and women at the middle level management

Organizational level	% of women	% of men
Mid-level /All	51% (239 persons)	49 % (232 persons)
Upper-mid level	7.5 % (35 persons=15% of women at Mid-level)	14% (65 persons=28% of men at mid-level)
Mid-level	10.2 % (48 persons	11% (52 persons)
Low-mid level	12.7 % (60 persons)	8.5% (40 persons)
Entry level	11.7 % (55 persons)	9.6 % (45 persons)

Similarly, looking at entry-level to middle management, we can see an unbalanced proportion of women and men, this time in favour of women. What we see here is that slightly more women enter the lowest rank of middle management. However, these data do not indicate gender balance at this lower level of management either. The gender profile of the candidates participating in the two-year-long internal training program provides an excellent example of the claim that despite the fact that there are more women numerically, gender equality is not greater in the lowest rank of middle management (Table 9). Gender-based monitoring of trainees was not carried out by the HR department – which is entirely consistent with the identified organization view that there is no need to be taken any action for the inters of improving gender equality. Nonetheless, all the relevant data were available about the number of men and women candidates who had applied for the programme, and the number of men and women who completed the program and eventually received a managerial position after finishing (or sometimes during) the training programme.

As a result of this calculation, I conclude that gender inequality was slightly present even at the entry level to management. This was not the case for every group, but overall if we consider the number of all the candidates, we find that more women than men applied for the training program. At first sight it seemed that more women than men had obtained a managerial position (80% of women and 76% of men had obtained a managerial position by the end of the training program). However, considering how many men and women applicants finally ended up in such positions we see that men trainees reached managerial positions in slightly higher proportions than women (men: 20%, women: 17.5%). Knowing that more

women than men work at this lower organizational rank, we can underline that women experience the structural embeddedness of inequality even at the beginning of their careers.

Table 9: Overview of participants of the two-year long internal training program

	Number of applicants (note: not all of them were accepted for the training program)	Number of trainees successfully completing the training program	Number of trainees promoted to a managerial position upon finishing the training program	Proportion of promotions in relation to number of applicants
Women	160	35	28	17.5%
Men	127	33	25	20 %

I also detected clear signs of horizontal gender segregation at the mid-level of hierarchy. However, due to the absence of available data, I only examined this during field observation, from the lists that I received for contacting potential interviewees, and from other resources such as the interviews and shadowing days. It was evident that, at the lower ranks of the bank branches, the majority of employees were female and only a few young, male employees, usually fresh graduates from university, were working at the lowest rank of the local branches. Similarly, out of the 40 persons working at the HR department, only 4-5 of them were male, including the director. These differences between men and women in terms of holding positions at particular departments suggest that horizontal gender segregation exists at the organization with regard to mid-level managerial positions. This tendency of women to work in certain types of managerial positions (such as human resources, public relations, communications, finance and administration, quality control, or procurement management) is well-known from the literature as well (ILO Report, 2015). It is also known that feminized fields of management have further consequences in relation to careers (Martinez, 2011; Tienari et al., 1998, Fitzsimmons et al., 2014).

In sum, the proportion of women and men in managerial positions, and the horizontal segregation, which was reasonable to assume, are the visible signs of the construction of inequality along gender lines (Acker, 1990; Dye–Mills, 2012). These signs indicate that women and men managers end up differently in their careers despite the firm view that the organization's career supporting system is based on acknowledging meritocracy and follows the belief of having gender equality.

6.1.3. Discussion

The researched organization appeared to have a well-established, unified system for supporting the career development of its employees. HR also recognized that during a certain period of their life, women need additional career support; therefore, a welcoming program was initiated and was already functioning at the time of the research. In addition, work-life balance initiatives were dedicated to helping women with small children to better maintain their careers. Furthermore, the organizational intention to develop an internal group of accessible leaders was evident.

According to the HR managers I interviewed, career support was considered equally available to everyone. However, it was not a standardized process at all, as it involved personalized opportunities for development. As we know from previous research (Benschop et al., 2013; Durbin–Tomlinson, 2014; Williams et al., 2012), superiors can play a defining role in the individualization of careers. In the case of the present research, it similarly turned out that superiors play a part in determining career moves by evaluating processes and recommendations. The literature provides several examples of why negotiating with superiors may be a problematic part of career development (Durbin–Tomlinson, 2014; Williams et al., 2012). For instance, gaining the support of a superior for career plans could be a significant determinant that is especially difficult for women. Negotiations can include gender bias, while superiors may favour men managers when recruiting due to what is known as 'homosocial reproduction'. However, a supportive superior also can create a problematic situation for women managers, when, for instance, organizational need does not match an individual's personal aspirations, or when an employee cannot avoid pressure by a superior to take up an opportunity, or otherwise risk further promotions in the future (Williams at al., 2012). Additionally, without having a supportive superior who can provide systematic help, mentorship, or access to often informal networks, women managers cannot fulfil their plans for professional development, needs, and personal aspirations (Benshop, 2009; Madsen–Scribner, 2017; Williams et al., 2012).

Data gathered from the expert interviews, documents, and charts do not allow us to reach further conclusions at this stage of the analyzation about the processes of negotiation between superiors and aspiring women managers. However, when analysing HR managers' descriptions and interpretations of the career-supporting system, three organizational narratives appeared in relation to women managers' career construction. All of these narratives show that any organizational approach which might favour women managers is rejected on the base of its anti-discriminatory character. First, the company was presented as an organization where relatively well-balanced gender equity in leadership positions had been achieved. The equal access of women and men to leadership positions was often justified by the balanced proportion of women and men managers at the middle level of the organization.

Second, it was also a strongly held perspective that the researched organization does not need to apply positive discrimination to improve equality in relation to career opportunities. The idea of positive

discrimination or any organizational career support measures to increase the number of female managers was not welcomed at all, especially not in relation to top management, although it turned out women have limited access to this level. In the interviews, HR managers clearly expressed the belief that career support is provided on an equal basis for men and women. In the light of it, it appeared that the negative consequences of positive discrimination for men were a more persuasive argument when explaining why there should not be any attempt to provide support for women that was not based on their work performance and knowledge. Accordingly, the company does not have any intention to provide any special treatment for women based on their gender. Instead, it aimed to ensure diversity in terms of those who belong to particular groups, and need additional support because of their age or life situation. Previous studies conducted on a Hungarian municipality and a multinational company by Nagy and Vicsek (2008, 2014) already explained that the rejection of policy measures for equal opportunity is derived from a negative association with "reform society by command" – a legacy of the socialist era (Nagy-Vicsek, 2014). My finding on the negative connotation of the gender equality policy and actions in women's interest is very similar. In the case of the present research, it is also accompanied by the belief in meritocracy.

In line with the first two narratives, the third one also emphasizes women's agentic roles in the making of their managerial careers. Career moves were presented as being inherently premised on the freedom of individual decisions and choices. This organizational perspective that women's decision about their career-related activities and work-life balance are based on personal preferences is well described in the literature (Halrynjo–Lyng, 2009; Hobson–Fahlén, 2009).

In essence, all these organizational attitudes serve to strengthen the view that career construction at the company is based on gender-neutral terms. Furthermore, none of the former was understood as entirely negative or discriminative concerning the careers of women managers. On the contrary, organizational narratives instead demonstrate that women were valued and accepted as managers at the middle level of management. The presence of women in leadership was viewed as an achievement.

Therefore, it may be concluded, interestingly, that women were introduced as empowered women who had achieved their leadership positions based on their abilities, performance, and personal preferences. This perspective makes it easier to understand why any special career-related treatment (except in relation to mothers with young children), or positive discrimination in the interest of women, was rejected. All these findings demonstrate that women's presence, especially at the middle-level of hierarchy, is well embedded. Using the conceptualization of women's managerial statuses by Billing (2011), women managers were perceived to be 'congruent' with managerial positions, which explains why career development was not understood as an organizational process reserved only for men managers.

Despite the strong organizational narrative about the existence of gender-neutral support for career development and the importance of individual willingness and performance, a pyramid-shaped structure

characterized the hierarchy, with men dominating the decision-making positions in top management. Similarly, the equal share of power between men and women at the middle level was only seemingly equal. Closer examination of the middle-level organizational hierarchy showed that men managers numerically dominate the upper rank of the middle level, thus comprise a pool that is twice as big for selection into top positions. In contrast to this finding, it was expressed by the interviewees that the lower number of female managers in top positions is not problematic as concerns equal opportunities for career-making, and in general, women's good representation at the middle level justifies why this is an adequate situation. This adequacy of the situation in relation to the number of women and men in leadership positions was even strengthened by pointing out that the company was doing better than the average large Hungarian companies in terms of how many women are managers are employed at the company. Contrary to this view on existing gender equity in the number of women and men managers, I found numerical facts that gender imbalance already existed at the mid-level management, although the most definite and visible vertical segregation appeared at the top level.

Although the proportion of women in leadership positions was acknowledged positively by organizational members, the uneven distribution of power between men and women is strong evidence for the gendered substructure of the organization (Acker, 1990, 1998). It can also be concluded that the limited number of female managers in top management, and the general satisfaction both with the proportion of female managers in middle management and women's decisions not to aspire to top positions shows that there are specific limitations for women in terms of their career progression. Hence, the examination of the structure of leadership positions and the organizational attitude to women's presence in the hierarchy provided evidence for the existence of gender inequality. In the light of the above, I can conclude that the organization did not thematize gender equality as a troublesome issue; instead, it confronted and dealt with the problems arising from work-life balance. This underlying assumption of denying the existence of gender inequality in career structured the organizational understanding on inequalities that it is related to women managers (see the similar case presented by Nielsen, 2017). In this way, the whole issue around gender equality is eventually treated as an individual-level problem.

As Acker (1998, 2006) explains, the inequality regime is both visible and invisible. The visible signs of inequality are often limited (Acker, 2012a), as is the case at this organization: the proportion of men and women at the middle level was balanced, and there was a strong organizational belief about the existence of gender equality in terms of leadership positions. However, we could also perceive that invisible signs of inequality are present in the organization. One of the two most striking examples is the gendered assumption about women not wanting to aspire to top positions. Moreover, the uneven sex ratio within the horizontal levels of the organization is another sign. Therefore, it is appropriate to conclude that my findings are in line with previous literature explaining in great length that it is more difficult for women to meet the

expectation of being 'ideal workers' than for men, and gender inequalities can be portrayed as legitimate inequalities in the organizational culture (Acker, 2012a; Benschop–Doorewaard, 2012; Halrynjo–Lyng, 2009; Tomlinson–Durbin, 2010; Williams et al., 2012).

6.2. Organizational Processes in Career Construction

The previous chapter employed a broader perspective to explore organizational processes. I found that the dominant perception in the organization is that career development is based on equality. As Benschop and Doorewaard pointed out (1988, 2012), the rhetoric on gender can diverge from the practice of gender at work. In the case of this research it means that a dominant perception of equality in career development occurs, at the same time persistent gender inequality appears which is the most visible in the number of women achieving senior management level. Therefore, in this chapter, I will turn to towards exploring the more concrete processes defining and shaping career construction. My primary interest is presenting how women's careers unfold at the middle-level of the organization under investigation, and above all to show how the organizational processes create gender distinctions and hence producing this divergence between rhetoric and practice.

The methodological approach behind the analytical intention is presenting a reconstruction of career stories (instead of a description), for which I mainly rely on career interviews with the woman (19 interviews) and man (8 interviews) managers, and on data collected during shadowing days. At the time of conducting the research, all the respondents, men and women alike, already held managerial positions, from low to upper-middle positions, while one woman held a senior position, and two other women had been in a higher position previous to their current position. Many of the respondents had a long story to share and were proud of what they had achieved in their careers. It felt that the women I interviewed had a retrospective attitude to their stories, and most of them talked from the position of having had a secure career. Therefore, what they described was not only career stories in general, but successful career stories. This perspective may partly explain why they were willing to commit their precious time to giving me an interview, especially as it turned out that the majority of them worked long hours and had difficulties balancing work and life.

6.2.1. Career patterns

This chapter is connected to the research question (R.Q. 2.1.) on how organizational processes define and impact mid-level managers' career activities, and in particular, how do these processes influence mid-level women managers' career patterns? At first sight, it appears that that none of the career stories are identical. In addition, the patterns and career moves of the interviewed managers show that both aspiring women and men can reach mid-level positions. However, the more in-depth analysis revealed slight differences in how

the managerial careers of women and men unfolded in relation to fulfilling organizational expectations. Among these slight differences, it emerged that women and men arrive into upper-middle management with different career stories, and they encounter different conditions for further developing towards senior positions. One of the most striking differences between women and men's career partners is that women tend to follow a 'step-by-step' approach to career-building, while men employed 'rotations' more easily than women. Notably, men generally have a career pattern considered a 'typical' way of developing a career at the organization. In referring to a 'typical' way of developing a career, I mean organizational expectations and requirements about building a career.

Two organizational processes emerged from the analysis of the career stories that define career development at the middle level of the organizational hierarchy and appeared as a storm organizational norm. First, both man and woman managers agreed that the ideal amount of time to spend in a position is at least 2-3 years before moving to another one. The respondents often referred to this period of 2-3 years when speaking about the intentions behind moving into or staying in a position: *"because it is not preferred to move within three years"*, as one female manager (FI 12) summarised. A man manager said almost the same thing: *"well, here they say that you have to spend two years in one position, which I think is fair"* (MI 8). Therefore, the idea that 'spending at least 2-3 years in a managerial position is a must' was very common.

Second, rotation between different fields/departments was a common component of the interviews, in line with the strong organizational intention to promote this. Rotation was introduced as a necessary step in careers, especially when someone higher achieving, as one of the upper-middle-level woman managers said: *"the higher you are, the more likely you are to be moved, either out of the organization or back and forth, i.e. rotated"* (FI 1). The following quote by a senior woman manager about her motivation to move into her new position even shows how strong the expectation that employees engage in rotations was: *"I was not lured back. There isn't any kind of lure involved. Rotation command (is)"* (FI 17)! This quote shows that the approach of 'rotation' is a prominent and well-known practice, but what makes this quote even more interesting is that it has a strong emotion attached to her words. This strong emotional expression implies that she could not fully control her options for career choices. This quotation is a perfectly illustrative example to show that how strongly an organizational norm can operate and narrow the way for career advancement in this sense.

The career stories of upper-middle managers clearly proved the importance of rotations in career, as most of the latter had already worked in two or three different departments within the company by the time they had reached their current positions. In line with the communication on 'rotation' – that it is a significant factor in developing a career – career stories similarly revealed the importance of rotation for career moves into higher positions. For instance, one of the female managers (FI 2) explained that not

having enough rotations in her career moves is the main reason that she did not fulfil the requirements for the position of director of the HR Department.

As we see, rotation was well embedded in organizational discourse and practice, and employers seemed to be well aware of the importance of rotating in their careers. *"...rotating and cross-stepping, which is also a sort of an expectation...,* (FI 10) See, for instance, how this male manager explains what rotation is, and how it supports the capacity building of aspiring managers:

> *"In the last 6-8 years there has been a very positive shift in mindset, where everybody understands that it's very good to rotate people within the bank, because they gain an awful lot of knowledge and they can look at things through a different lens, which can only benefit the organisation."* (MI 9)

As the above quote illustrates, rotation between departments helped managers to improve their abilities to become generalist managers who can hold any kind of positions and have an overview of the whole organization.

In essence, managers strongly accepted the requirement of rotation; it was a well-known process, and everyone seemed to be aware of its role in career-making. All of the interviewees expressed in one way or another that rotation is a necessary step for career development, especially for reaching top positions (*"one or two more sideways steps would be very helpful"*, MI 5). It is not hard not to see that the organizational demand for rotation construct the appearance of being an ideal worker.

However, not everyone could or wanted to adhere to this organizational requirement. First, rotation was a a topic raised more intensively by men in the interviews, independently of the number of positions they had had during the years they spent at the organization. They talked about the opportunity of rotation, and about planning to do rotations. Male managers also reported that they regularly talked about rotation opportunities with their superiors, and the timing and direction of these were considered an essential part of the yearly career meetings. Furthermore, both men and women were aware that refusing a rotation opportunity, or simply not having an opportunity for rotation, would have consequences in relation to their career. Nevertheless, only two men shared stories about refusing rotation opportunities and the consequences of this in relation to shaping their careers in the future. See, for instance, how this upper-middle manager talked about refusing a rotation opportunity, and its consequences in relation to his career:

> *"So, there HR would have expected me to stomp and clap my hands at every opportunity, because what a great opportunity and it must be true, and I said no a few times ... there's no doubt about it and it must have been a setback ... so I would have to take a big step to erase this brand"* (MI 3)

As we can learn from this quote, it is risky to refuse rotation opportunities when someone plans to develop their career, especially into the higher echelons of the hierarchy. I detected only one more concrete case involving refusing a rotation opportunity by a man manager (MI 5). He recalled his decision to postpone a

career move for one year. He also believed that his career had slowed down due to his decision to postpone a career move. Other than these two examples of men managers, the male respondents seemed more likely to praise the positive and career-enhancing side of rotation. Not only did they like rotation more, but they also wanted to have more opportunities to have changes in their careers.

According to my calculation of the career moves, men were involved in rotations in the first 10 to 15 years of their careers more often than women. Rotating positions appeared to be a settled way of maintaining a career at the organization. However, men also expressed that it could be challenging to take on a new position every 2-3 years, as one of them said:

> "...change is not easy for me either, even though I have changed my position quite a lot, the first 3 to 6 months are always difficult for me, and that doesn't make my life easy. I've changed 5 jobs in the last 12 years, so I'm doing something different every 2-3 years on average. A new environment, new people, new structures, new expectations, the world is changing, so this doesn't make it easy." (MI 2)

To conclude about the requirement for rotation, taking rotations and spending at least two or three years in a position was equally crucial for men and women. However, it turned out that one of the striking differences between the career patterns of the women and men managers was the number of positions they had fulfilled by the time they reached an upper-middle position. There, I want to highlight, that women who were close to a senior position or who had held senior positions previously reported to having held up to eight positions altogether, while those men managers in upper-middle level or senior positions appraised that they had filled four to five positions. A few men managers (two out of the eight) who were working at the mid-level had also filled six or seven positions, but this was the results of rotations. Therefore, in the case of men managers, it was rotations that increased the number of positions they had.

In comparison, women working in lower managerial positions had already occupied three or four positions before their current one in the same field within the organization. Therefore, their moves were typically horizontal, and were not considered rotations between departments. It also turned out that rotation mainly occurred with those working in the field of finance. The rotation of HR experts, for instance, was less typical (see above the example of FI 2). On the other hand, the HR department was sometimes one of the stations of rotation for managers working in finance or marketing, signifying that HR is somehow considered as a lower status profession which can be done even without corresponding degree. This finding that women and men managers tend to employ different approaches for career-building demonstrates that career decisions are interactions between 'structure' and 'individual capacity, individual actions to exercise the capacity' for making decisions (see 'agency and capability framework', Hobson et al. 2011; Nielsen, 2017). Accordingly, women are appeared to have fewer real choices to follow rotation when advancing in their career.

Not surprisingly, and in line with the praise of rotation as a positive and enhancing career move, some of the managers mentioned the negative consequences of "sector-specific positions", as one of the man managers called it (MI 1). For instance, from the sample, two of the HR managers' career stories show signs of their being in a dead-end position regarding professional development (FI 1, FI 2). In the feminized departments for which the HR department is an excellent example, the access of women to senior positions seemed difficult, as all the women managers were channelled into dead-end positions at the upper-middle level.

Going back to those women who were working in the field of finance at the organization, a clearly identifiable pattern emerged from their stories. These women managers often explained that they considered their career movements a form of step-by-step development (quite the opposite of rotation movements), which were often combined with hard work and perseverance. See, for instance, how this female manager talked about them:

> *"...because I'm not saying that progress here is relatively easy, because then I'd be lying, but I knew that with hard work, let's say, but not so hard work, but perseverance, I could achieve something and advance step by step."* (FI 5)

Similarly, this respondent (woman) talked about the development of her career in the same way:

> *"I've come here and I've told Attila that if I have to, then okay, I'll do my best, I'll bust my ass, we're 150% on a lot of lines, I'll do my best, but I want to, when he feels that I'm worth it, I want a bigger branch on my own, not 7-8. Not a 5-person, but a 10-12-person branch."* (FI 13)

Both of the quotes show that thinking on career advancement implies the 'step by step approach'. All women managers working in the field of finance presented their career stories in the same way: they talked about the steps they had taken, each of which led to the next one. The stories they presented showed that they did not skip a single step, as it was vital for them to gain knowledge and competencies gradually. It was typical, for instance, that woman first became managers of smaller sized branches (after already filling several positions) where they supervised 4-8 people. Then, after proving their capability and professional knowledge (see also 6.2.2. on proving capability) in relation to being a manager, they became the heads of offices of bigger bank branches, leading 10-14 people.

Overall, it appears that men managers were more liable to fill positions by taking rotations, while the number of women managers' positions increased due to the greater number of steps they had to take until they reached upper-middle level or senior positions. One of the consequences of step-by-step career development is a slower career trajectory. Furthermore, it also turned out that women tended to spend more time in their positions than men, especially when they had a relatively high-level position within middle-level management. I learned that women had often spent 5 to 11 years in their positions at the upper-middle level. Regarding the 'age' at which one obtains a higher position, women work in more positions in the

same field, and spend more time in them. This means that men tend to reach upper-middle level and senior positions by the age of 40, but women do this after the age of 40 – more typically by the age of 45.

A typical career pattern emerges from the stories of women managers, especially in the field of finance. It is typical that young women, after graduation, start at local bank branches and spend a considerable time there while starting to climb the career ladder. When entering into management, they already have a significant amount of professional experience in the various fields of the banking sector and have enhanced their management skills. They then usually spend a few years at a bank branch where they are more likely to have a senior consultant position and participate in the talent programs of the organizations. The next step is having a position as a deputy head of a bank branch or head of a small branch, leading a few employees. Finally, they become heads of bank branches when they already have the experience and knowledge to manage a bank branch.

Therefore, women managers more often follow a career pattern that starts and develops at the level of local bank branches, at the kind of periphery of the organization, but finally leads to upper-middle management, or in a few cases, to top management. In contrast to women, men managers start to develop a typical career at the headquarters of the organization, and when they fulfil positions at bank branches, they do it only for temporarily due to rotations, and accordingly do not spend a long time there. In addition, they are well aware that these represent entry-level positions for later advancing to the higher ranks of the hierarchy.

Interestingly, many women managers I interviewed (who were working in bank branches) mentioned a power-related reason to avoid having a position which might include working at the main Central Office, the headquarters of the researched organization in Budapest. The reason? One senior woman manager who was working at the central office at the time of the interview had obtained her senior position within the network of bank branches, and recalled her experience moving from the network of local branches to the headquarters of the company:

> "... the kind of work that's here, it's coordinating, so you don't really have an authority. I've beem here for three years (in the headquarters), but for me it was a liberation, a release from my shackles, to be back as a regional manager, I missed a little bit this, how shall I say, this up-close, it has an inspiring role, it has a power, but it can't be said how much better it is if you can define exactly what your authority is, you have freedom within that, you can do what you want within that.... and there are many more things and what is very important is that you can decide for yourself and it's up to you." (FI 17)

Similarly, see how a woman manager working at a branch office (in Budapest) also talked about why being the head of a branch benefits her as a manager:

> "I've got my own little kingdom here, that's such a big phrase, but I've got my own little milieu.... I have a lot of freedom, obviously I don't control the opening hours, and there's a lot of things we

have to go after because we get fined, prosecuted, etc., but I have a lot of freedom for a bank, and I have flexible working hours, although that means that I'm usually here most of the time, but I have the freedom to say that if I say, if a colleague coughs and sneezes, I have the freedom to say, get up and don't see you until tomorrow or the day after, go and cure yourself, because you're only infecting us, then I can do that." (FI 5)

As the above quotes illustrate, some women managers preferred to have positions outside of the central office, which was clearly introduced as the place where power is concentrated. Their reasons for choosing a local branch over a position at headquarters included the higher level of autonomy and flexibility as managers of a local office. It seems that in local branches they could gain more independence. While the first quote also illustrates that, managers prefer positions in local branches because of the benefits of being independent managers, the second quote also illustrates the importance of a flexible working schedule. I believe it is very symbolic that the only woman who was one of the board members of the organization for a long time was the division leader of the retail banking business that is built on the countrywide net of local branches. Reaching a higher position thus did not necessarily mean that women had to leave the network of local bank branches.

To sum up, the reconstruction of middle managers' career stories reveals two particular organizational practices: one is the informal expectations about the ideal time spent in a position, and the other is the organizational requirement of job rotation. These organizational practices create slight differences for women and men managers in terms of constructing their careers and professional reputation; consequently, they follow different career patterns and arrive at upper-middle and senior management level positions through slightly different conditions. This means that women managers go through a longer career-building process with a step-by-step approach, including fewer rotation moves, which results in less relevant skills and competencies for senior management. In addition, it emerged that women managers tended to have a career pattern showing movement from the periphery to the centre in terms of location, also signifying their independence in terms of maintaining their power as managers.

6.2.2. Promotional Processes

This chapter is connected to the research question (R.Q. 2.2.) on organizational requirements and conditions for career promotion. The conceptual reason to look for the concrete practices and processes of an organization follows Acker's analytical view that promotion-related practices are one of the ways through which a gender regime is created (Acker, 1992, 2012b). In the previous chapters (Chapter 6.1.), I described that even the proportion of women and men was perceived as equal at the middle-level overall. However, the pool of upper middle-level individuals, which is the entrance pool for the top positions, contains almost twice as many men as women. I also demonstrated (in Chapter 6.2.1.) that men and women follow a slightly

different career pattern. Therefore, in this subchapter, I look more closely at the organizational processes and circumstances that define the opportunities for promotion and look to identify how women and men managers fulfil the organizational criteria to be promoted.

As we learnt from the previous subchapter, men managers often talked about the right timing of changing positions, about the right amount of time to spend in a position, and the negative consequences of spending too long in a position on career development (i.e., not having enough challenge). All the male interviewees, without exception, referred to the time spent in positions in one way or other. They always considered the issue of time and evaluated their current positions from the perspective of the time they had spent there. In this way, time spent in a position became an indicator of successful career development: it always turned out that 'too much' time spent in a position counted as stalling in terms of career progression.

Woman managers, in contrast, were not that keen on counting or referring to the time they had spent in a position. 'Time' as an issue hardly appeared during the interviews in the way men managers talked about it. Instead of talking about how much time they should spend in a position, as men managers often did, women respondents instead talked about the issue of being at the right age for getting a position. It appeared that the idea of 'being at the right age' for a position has two intersecting layers.

First, it turned out from the career stories that a high achieving career has to start by the age of 30 and no later than the age of 35. Success while being outside this age range could happen, but was not the norm. There was only one female manager from all the interviewees who talked about crossing the age border. She referred to the fact that she had started to build her career too early:

*"I became a branch manager at the age of 27, it was not so typical, but 30, 31 is typical, I think even earlier for men, I'm not saying that for women, but there are also branch managers besides me, or the same age as me, when I became a branch manager, I was the youngest, now I'm not, but we have this network management programme, this is to support or help young aspiring people, and actually I became (*a branch manager) *through this."* (FI 5)

The quoted woman recalled her story to explain that being an appointed head of a branch office at such a young age is rare. She also mentioned that men used to be appointed to a leadership position much younger. However, she did it only as a reference to highlight her point and not interpreted or questioned why is it possible for men to be promoted at a young age compared to women. She referred to the talent program as well, which over time has become one of the places where woman managers can emerge as members of the pool of potential leaders. The talent program involved an internal effort to recruit young potential talent. Inevitably, the high percentage of women (the female proportion of all employee is 68%, see Chapter 6.1.2.) at the lower rank of organizational levels also helps them to enter this program. Despite the significant presence of women in the internal education program, the respondents appear to accept the organizational norm of recruiting female talents into managerial positions by the age of 30: *"it's always the*

30-35 age group that is very much highlighted in terms of careers" (FI 10). Additionally, the age of 35 served as an upper limit for starting a managerial career: *""You have to get in the talent programme by 35""*, as one of the women explained. Additionally, being 'only' at the age of 35 kept women out of senior positions, as this quote illustrates:

> *"... the bank doesn't put itself in a position to appoint a 35-year-old woman as a cluster manager, because I say I could be anything, I could have 3 university degrees and speak 6 languages, and 35 is a bit young for this position. ... Now I'm telling you, I'm sure that no matter how good I would be, there's almost no way I'd get a cluster leader position under the age of 40."* (FI 5)

Again, what we see here is that women are required to be at the right age to start to build their managerial career, which also means that it is not favourable to achieve too much too soon. When women reached the upper-middle level or a senior position, they were usually already above 40 – as elaborated in the previous subchapter. Probably, the systematic progress of women's career trajectories helps to fulfil the organizational requirements of being at the right age when starting a managerial career, and continuing to achieve higher positions.

In contrast, men did not have these kinds of concerns about their age (i.e., being too young to fulfil a position), so they did not seem to worry about the 'right age' at which to start a managerial career. As seen in the previous sub-chapter, men managers were more concerned about having inadequate experience for a position (i.e. accepting rotation in a new department previously unknown for them), although this did not deter them from accepting new positions. To sum up, both women and men raised concerns about their careers from the perspective of time, but variation between men and women was detected. This is also a relevant finding to show that women and men develop different relations to the same promotion practices for career.

Following the literature, networking in career progression appears to be similarly crucial in determining changes for a promotion (Benschop, 2009; Cuzzocrea–Lyon, 2011; Madsen–Scribner, 2017). I was particularly interested in the roles of networking and informal relations to achieve career goals and overcome challenges. It clearly emerged already at the beginning of the data collection process that informal networks are of significant importance in making career moves. See, for instance, how this upper-mid level woman manager related the following:

> *"A lot depends on the individual, what they can get out of their HR business partners, there is nothing written down..." (Shadowee 2, female).*

As we see from this quote, an excellent relationship with HR personnel is crucial in making a career move. In line with this, the former individual also harshly critiqued the unified system of career development as "*being very incorrect*". Later on, I also learned that relationships with superiors play a significant role in

making career moves: superiors led meetings about career plans and evaluations. They also issued recommendations if an employee wanted to participate in the two years long training events for would-be leaders. A personalized network and good relationships also appeared to be a necessary condition later, as the interviewed managers explained. Interestingly, the higher the level of leadership they achieved, the more awareness they had about the importance of such relations.

It was especially stories about getting the latest promotion to a wished-for mid-level position within the organization that shows that informal relationships are similar in importance to following the formal organizational system of recruitment and promotion. When speaking about the process of obtaining a position, both men and the majority of women managers repeatedly mentioned that they negotiated with a close colleague – a mentor, and often their superior – about the opportunities and plans for promotion. They also talked about mentors and colleagues who encouraged them to apply for a new position. One of the interviewed male managers (MI 5), for instance, mentioned that he used to have a coffee with an HR manager to obtain information about vacant positions from time to time. I even learned that a well-established mechanism exists for connecting the formal channels of the HR department and informal negotiations. It usually starts with the HR Department openly announcing a position through the company's recruitment system. Additionally, leaders start to recommend potential aspirants whom they wish to have in their teams and who they prefer. The HR Department is then made aware of these aspirants who have undergone the informal process of selection and have already been recommended by responsible organizational persons.

Furthermore, I also identified that there was a well-established practice of mentorship that was available for those women who participated in the talent program. Despite the existence of the mentorship program, which is a sign of an established social network, I hardly heard women managers claiming the relevance and importance of the networks they had established through mentorship. In contrast, woman managers did not talk about using their network activity in the interest of career progress. These above examples show that in corresponding to what we already form the literature (Madsen–Scribner, 2017), belonging to a network is an essential, informal resource contributing to formal promotion processes.

It is evident that women and men used informal channels in relation to career development, but it also appeared that men used the informal channels with more awareness, as one of the woman managers said: "*to be at the right place and at the right time*" (FI 1) to be promoted. Furthermore, many woman rather reflected on their careers as primarily being the result of professional achievement, independent of the hierarchical level of the position and the informal relations. Therefore, when looking at women's stories, informal channels of maintaining a career seem to be essential, although not the most important means of being promoted.

Woman managers' career stories also show that the higher they get promoted, the more they have to prove that they have the right knowledge, talent, and attitude or professional experience before getting the particular position they have applied for. It was typical, for instance, that before becoming the head of branch offices, woman managers had already worked for a shorter or longer time as deputy head of office in the same office, or in other, often smaller offices. In this way, women managers not only follow a step by step approach in their career advancement, but acquired the knowledge they needed for managing a bank office:

> *"(name of the superior, female), my boss, besides the fact that I was doing this, so he gave me a lot of tasks, which was a kind of deputy thing, and a lot of things that, if he wasn't there, I had to do, but he was more into it, he was more into career building, so, but it came suddenly, and the reason was that there were no other applicants, he told me at that time that I was leaving and you should be, because you are ready for it."* (FI 6)

Therefore, it seems that having the 'right knowledge', or 'being ready for the position' was also an informal but necessary condition when a woman manager applied for a new position, particularly if the new position was in a higher rank of the organizational hierarchy than the previous one. See also the following quote by an upper-middle woman manager, in which she described the circumstances of her latest promotion:

> *"Yes, and because then the head of the programme, ... and I've just finished the programme, we'd been working together for years, he knew we could work well together, he knew exactly what my work ethic was, what I could do, how I could deal with people."* (FI 14)

This quote is also interesting for what is not said: the interviewee did not say, 'I was ready for the position'. Instead, she emphasizes that acknowledging her readiness for the position was based on her environment's opinion, and she seemed to internalized this attitude. As the informant explained, she had already proved to her superiors that she had the knowledge and experience she would need for the next position. Similarly, but demonstrating the other side of the same story, this woman manager recalled her experience of not being promoted beforehand because she had lacked the right knowledge for the position to which she was applying. Not having the right knowledge was a valid reason for refusing her appointment to a position she had never had, although she had performed well throughout her career. What is more, she had had the experience of managing a small branch office – the requirement for the position that the other candidate did not have:

> *"Whoever got* (male), *...he had no branch experience, and there you could see he was saying several things that showed he hadn't seen the inside of a branch."* (FI 14)

Later on, after two years of refusals, she was promoted to her upper-middle level position:

"I continued to do my job and when the head of the bank was replaced and I was asked to do it, because the results came in and I was asked to do it, they thought what if I did it and I did it there." (FI 14)

This story presented above illustrates how informal practices for promotion operate and impact career advancement. We could see how this informal demand of proving the proper knowledge narrowed the advancement opportunities of the woman manager. At the time of the interview, she presented herself as someone who had already proved that she was capable of fulfilling her position. Her hard work finally measured up with the actual opportunity to enter into an upper-level position, but first, she had to sidetrack in her career.

However, in the case of men, it turned out that they are often given positions without having the proper knowledge precisely, and previous experience that fulfilling the positions should require – as we have already seen from the story told by the above-quoted woman manager (FI 14). The stories of men managers revealed that potential career moves start with an invitation by someone who has direct experience working with them and therefore knows their capabilities, work-related attitude, and plans for career moves. When I asked men interviewees about how they had been promoted to their current positions, they often started their story by saying things such as "*It was (XY) who called me last summer and told about this opportunity*", "*...somehow I got into that circulation*", "*we have worked a lot previously together, and we have talked a lot; also XY* (a top manager) *recommended me for the position*", "*and then the executive director asked me whether I wanted to be a member of this team*". Similarly, in the case of not being assigned to a position, but planning to change position or field, the first thing that men often did was to contact someone informally, as this manager said:

"And then I figured for myself that I would also move to something very diverse, but something very different ... ... it was pretty much like knocking on the door of the region manager, here the region 1 manager, XY, and telling him that I would like one of these and what he thought." (MI 4)

We cannot possibly conclude that men and women managers achieve career development differently from the data collected on what they shared about their networking experiences. However, we can see that women and men narrate the reality of their career differently in connection to networking. It has already been specified that, in general, informal channels were as important as the formal recruiting system of the HR Department in career development. It also emerged that for men managers, informal relations appeared to be of the same significance as their personal performance and professional knowledge. In contrast, women emphasised that they earned their position due to their hard work and professional knowledge. It is well-explained in the literature that preselection for career moves is still based on such subtle practices as the old boy's club and gender homophily (Nielsen, 2017). So, even though it is hard to estimate the extent the informal networking influences women and men's career advancement, the

interview data can demonstrate that women and men are encouraged and supported differently to apply for positions beyond the available formal processes. This finding is entirely in line with the literature saying that informal networking practices can reinforce the hierarchical divisions along gender lines (Brink–Benschop, 2011; Carli–Eagly, 2007; Nielsen, 2017; Williams et al., 2012).

So, what are the differences the informal channels reinforced? For instance, men were given the confidence to develop their competences and skills to professionally fulfil the applied-for position. See, for instance, how this male manager relates how he obtained his current position, which was a new field for him:

> *"... and I said that I wanted to be in the network, and he said that's cool, because he was thinking that I should be in the network, because I need that kind of networking experience, and then two things came up."* (MI 8)

This manager quoted above spoke about a position he did not have experience in it previously. His story also covered the fact that first he was not given an open position after an executive manager refused him. Then, three months later, he was successfully promoted into a position that was the same kind as the one he had been rejected for. He received a call from another executive manager from a different region of the organization:

> *"... and then in December I received a phone call, maybe on December 10, from Laci Tóth, who is the regional manager here in R2, that he heard that I would like to be the cluster leader, there will be such an opportunity, when we can sit down to talk and then the next day or the third day we sat down to talk, and then we agreed that from January 4 I will be the leader of the (name of the city) cluster. That's what happened."* (MI 8)

Although the confidence of man managers was boosted when receiving a new position, they were aware of the difficulties of these new positions as they often referred to them as challenging situations (i.e., *"it was a total abyss"*) and spoke about the problematic side of situations they had not encountered before. See, for instance, how this manager commented on his decision to take up a position without any experience related to it: *"I undertake all the hardships of this, that I will break there in the first two years"* (MI 9). Another male manager said: *"It's hard, you get in and you get the stares for weeks, months* (MI5). As we can see, despite the difficulties of remaining in a new and unexperienced position, it did not appear that having no experience or professional knowledge in a field required caused men any disadvantage related to their career trajectories.

Just as men were aware of the difficulties of positions, and that they might not have the right knowledge to fulfil them, women were aware that not having the right relations had negative consequences for career advancement, as this short quote from an interview with a female manager demonstrates:

> *Interviewer: And do you think you've had any relationships that have helped you along the way?*
> *Interviewee (MI 10): Unfortunately, not because it would have been quicker.*

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The decreased use of informal channels was also observed in how women talked about how they had got their promotions. They often used expressions such as *"and then I was selected"* (FI 12), *"I was told and invited"* (FI 12), *"I was offered to apply"* (FI 17), *"I was lucky enough to meet people who noticed me"* (FI 1), *"when it was over there* (project), *they just found me"* (FI 3). I want to point out here that women managers tended to talk about their promotions using passive connotations, showing that informal channels played less of a role, and professional knowledge and availability *("being in the right place",* FI 2) played more importance in their promotions.

As we can see, in the case of men managers it was not only informal channels that mattered for making career moves, but the confidence they received through informal relationships. It was found, however, in women managers' stories that they could rely less on their superiors' trust in relation to their being capable of fulfilling a new position when lacking the knowledge and experience a position required. I found that, in the case of women, the 'right' to a position had to (paradoxically) be proved through having the knowledge and experience that the position required. The gender-based differences in the process of promotion create a two-way selection practice that is more favourable for men, and which includes 'asking', 'negotiating', and 'postponing'. Women managers are more likely to experience a one-way selection practice in which they are selected as potential aspirants rather than receive an offer for a new position. While, at the same time, we have to acknowledge that informal channels might additionally help them to obtain new and higher positions.

Further to the exploration of how careers unfold at the middle-level, the topic of the transition from middle to senior management was also part of the interviews. On the one hand, I asked the managers, both men and women, about their future career plans and how they see themselves in terms of the level of position at the researched organization. On the other hand, as could be seen in the previous chapter (6.1), the gender balance of senior management as an issue was also part of the expert interviews with the HR managers. From these discussions, it appeared that – beyond the role of the proper timing and the right knowledge in relation to obtaining positions – the dominant career template for women managers included the organizational expectation of not having the ambition to reach senior managerial positions. See, for instance, how one of the expert interviewees describes this situation:

> *"Women are much less likely to plan to become senior managers, not because they are afraid they will be bad at it, or at least that's the impression I get, but because they think they want to spend a lot of time with their families and children. The other* (reason) *is that being a senior manager is a serious challenge even for men, so it's just as challenging for women, and they don't necessarily want to take it on, which is why, as I said, it's a much bigger competition.* (MI 1)

Using other words, but this upper-middle women manager argued similarly: *"I think the boldness factor is lower (for women)"* (FI 16). As the quotes above illustrate, interviewees either argued that senior

management is not for women because of the fierce competition in work and the challenges in work-life balance, or they admitted that they do not want to have a position in senior management. The role of individual choices and intentions was also emphasized when explaining why women managers do not reach senior-level management:

> *"Well, I think it's totally individual, what's important to each person, what they feel competent in, what they want to be, where they see themselves. ... I see that there are fewer women who have ambitions to go beyond a certain level, so it's more men who have that ambition in general. And I think even that is appropriate, but I'm someone with a damn conservative outlook."* (EI 1)

This quote above shows the opinion of the HR manager who was responsible for the leadership development of the senior managers at the research organization. In this sense, she was an authentic person who could represent the organizational view of women managers' capabilities.

Organizational view about women managers' career intentions was clear: women managers lack the courage and ambition to reach senior positions, and there are individual-level reasons behind women's choices. Quite similarly to this organizational norm, women managers working at the mid-level consistently expressed that they desire to have a career within middle management: *"For me, this is the stop, the ceiling".* (FI 1), *"Well, I'm maximum a cluster leader, which is one above me actually."* (FI 5), *"(In senior management) I don't think about it"* (FI 6), *"if I stay here, in this position, it's perfect for me, I do what I like to do"* (FI 9), *"it doesn't bother me that I don't move up"* (FI 11), *"I don't collect titles"* (FI 14). Taking all these quotes into account, the picture of a self-selection pattern emerges.

Corresponding to the organizational perspective of women having weaker intentions ('courage') to fulfil senior positions, only three women mentioned they were lacking some of the experiences or skills necessary for senior management. Two of them talked about a lack of self-confidence (FI 3, FI 13*), "I feel myself a little bit small"* said one of the women (FI 13). A third woman mentioned that she does not have a '*careerist personality*' (FI 6). The majority of the women managers expressed that they do not have any intention to strive for senior positions, and, except for the examples of the three women mentioned above, they did not say that it is their inadequate professional knowledge or lack of skills that makes them unsuitable for a senior position. In contrast, the interviewed women managers articulated the importance of individual-level development in their profession, and emphasized their aim of becoming masters and specialists of their work. Corresponding to their intentions regarding professional development, they expressed their belief that the quality and the content of their job is also crucial. They argued that they would need to give up the satisfaction they found in their work if entering into senior management. See, for instance, how this woman manager explained why she would refuse a senior position:

> *"If I stay here, in this position, it's perfect for me, doing what I love to do. If you ask me, for example, if I'm going to get two grades up the day after tomorrow, and I don't know, a BMW and I don't know what the hell, but I have to do a job that I don't like, I certainly couldn't do it."* (FI 9)

As we can see, the manager in this quote emphasizes how much she likes her work. Several women described in depth what they like about their work. They talked about the importance of gaining self-fulfilment while deepening their professional knowledge and becoming specialists in their profession. See the following examples that illustrate their preferences for professional fulfilment and success:

> *"I used to say here that it's your luck that I don't work for the money, because it's important, but I'm not motivated by how much money I can earn, for me it's very distant, so I like to see what I create, so to see it from a closer perspective."* (FI 11)

> *"I'm dealing with HR issues that I think are future building, developmental, constructive issues,... So it's an area that's very dear to my soul. ... I'm very, very happy that these topics have not been taken away from me professionally, so I'm not only putting together big things as a mosaic, but I can go back to the last detail if I need to, and that gives me a good feeling, a sense of security, and I like doing it."* (FI 1)

> *"... to be innovative, to change, to shape, to move things around, to turn things upside down and then see what happens."* (FI 12)

> *"Well, I don't know if it's a career otherwise, let's say a career development."* (FI16)

> *"To have something else written on my business card, I'm not that interested in* (senior positions) *and as time goes by, I'm less and less interested, so here* (middle level management) *you can also succeed."* (FI 14)

In some way, all the above quotes refer to the opportunity for expanding professional interests and achieving professional success at the mid-level of management that contributes to their decision about career plans. Nevertheless, the professional fulfilment and satisfaction that the women managers gain from their work was a major reason they did not aspire to senior management. This phenomenon often referred to as 'opting-out', is well-known in the literature. Accordingly, women explain their choice of not entering into senior-level because they find personal and professional fulfilment in where they are (Padavic et al., 2020). However, in the case of the present research, we can only talk about a variation of the opting-out phenomenon, because the women managers of the sample were not leaving their managerial career at all, they did no prioritize family over work upon their blocked advancement to senior management but remained devoted both to work and to parenting.

In line with professional success and development, some women also considered the differences in work-related tasks in middle and senior positions to be important. This partly also explains their preference for careers at the mid-level. In the following quote, for instance, this woman manager not only introduces work tasks at the senior level as non-desirable, but even refers to them as boring, less challenging tasks:

> *"I'm very fond of to figure out anything, trying to achieve anything ... I don't want to read enormous amounts of materials that is completely unnecessary, and there are so much documentation and so much material coming to them, they have everything that exists, I can't do that, for me it's a very high level."* (FI 11)

Also, some of the women (FI 5, FI 8) mentioned the importance of personal relations, and this was another reason for preferring mid-level management over senior management positions, as one of them stated: *"What makes me happy is what I do* (working) *and who I do it with"* (FI 9). Other woman explained it more concretely:

> *"It's (senior management) too big, too far away from the colleagues, on a daily basis, it's like that, it's a quote-unquote political fight." (FI 6)*

By emphasising the lack of personal relationships and unsatisfying tasks involved with senior-level management, they created a discourse about senior-level positions with negative connotations. In contrast, women managers positively described mid-level management, and as such it was interpreted as a desirable career ambition.

The next layer in women managers' explanations for refusing to have a career at a senior-level includes their awareness of the relation between working hours and senior-level management. There was only one woman (FI 12, upper-mid level, married without child) who clearly stated that she plans to have a senior position in the future. She was the only woman out of all respondents who did not have or plan to have children at the time the research was conducted. All the other mid-level respondents who have care-taking obligations (either children, or caring for ill parents, or both) or were planning to have children raised the fact that an unmanageable work and life balance is the main reason why they do not want a senior position. See, for instance, how this upper-middle level woman manager explained it through the example of her superior:

> *"anyone above that* (upper-middle management) *has no private life at all"* ... *"so I think that I could do it, because if you make an effort you can go to the end of the world, it's not that, but I think I can keep a relatively healthy balance, I have a family and a private life, I mean, if I look at my boss (male), who is here from morning till night, and if he's not here, it's because he's flying to (name of city) or (name of city) back. I don't want to do that."* (FI 15)

As this quote above illustrates, a senior position requires work-centrality with working long hours ('*is here from morning till night*') and adapting to employer-driven flexibility ('*if he's not here, it's because he's flying*') to the extent that it excludes the possibility of a well-balanced work-life ('*has no private life at all*'). Working long hours and unexpected travel were often mentioned as being requirements of senior-level management. Fulfilling these requirements seemed especially problematic when they have children:

> *"And if I were to get a higher position, I would either have to manage my time more wisely and prioritise my tasks differently or it would be at the expense of my family, and I think I wouldn't do it because I decide that it's either a family and then I really want to raise my child normally, ... there are not many good examples of women in high positions versus family, I would say that I would choose one or the other. I would choose one or the other, I don't think you can sustain it in the long term anyway."* (FI 5)

What we can also see from the quote above that women managers might not have to choose between having a career and children, but having a position at the senior management excludes the preferred way of parenting. Similarly, the following woman also talks about how senior-level jobs require a woman to choose between career and children Additionally, she explained that she could have a desirable career while having children since she did not aspire too high in terms of her career:

> *"Family was always very important to me, and I wasn't willing to sacrifice, so to speak, for a career, but I was always so gritty that I demanded that I could study and work as a mother of three, so I didn't have the other one, I don't know, so I didn't feel that, I didn't feel that I had to sacrifice for the family, but I tried to balance the two, and then a lot of people said that with all the noise, if I hadn't had a child, I could probably have had a bigger international career, and the question is whether it would have been good or not". (FI 3)*

Some of the women have positions as upper-level managers; in this way, they have the opportunity – at least theoretically – to enter senior-level management. All of them, however, similarly to the women managers quoted above, explained that having children excludes accepting a senior position at the organization, even if one were offered to them. One of them, for instance, said that although she had a senior position before, she does not want to accept one again while she has school-aged children (FI 16). Other women managers seemed very ambivalent about having a senior position in the future, and one clearly stated that while she has the duty to take care of a young child, as a mother, having a senior position is not a scenario for her:

> *"Since I had my little girl, it's been a big change and I don't want to do the work myself, so I have to admit that I've never worked 100%, I've always worked 120, so it's a lot of work to get to this point, I couldn't do it now like I did then, I'm thinking about how we can improve it, and I'm sure I could only do it again if I felt that my daughter was leaving home, it's okay, you know, you're not in her life anymore. " (FI 9)*

This quote above illustrates that refusing or not even thinking of reaching a senior position is presented as a reasonable act by women managers, especially by those who already had children, as in this case, overdelivery of work seems particularly impossible. Nevertheless, the additional requirements of senior-level management that may include working overnight or travelling appeared to be an everyday norm of men managers too. Not surprisingly, it appeared that they also accepted the organizational requirement of devoting extra time and commitment to working in senior-level management. They also mentioned, when talking about career plans (aspirations for senior management too), that they considered the difficulty of maintaining work-life balance when making decisions about the next career steps. However, only two people (MI 1, MI 5) talked about postponing career moves due to having young children. Another striking difference in comparison to how women managers explained their career choices was that men did not want

to refuse senior positions in the future, but only wanted to postpone their career moves for one or a couple of years.

To conclude about the theme of career plans, I found a common organizational perspective that women usually stop at the entrance to senior management. I found several instances showing that women managers had internalized this organizational expectation that women would stop at upper-middle level management. They clearly articulated that women would refuse a career in senior management due to the expected difficulties of work-life balance upon the time intensive, travel intensive and unpredictable work at the senior-level and the inconsistency of senior-level management with providing care for children (the right way of parenting). This robust disengagement of women managers with senior management reinforce the organizational perspective that they lack the intention of reaching the higher echelons of the organizational hierarchy. However, the majority of women managers admitted that they have ambitions and plans for career development. They interpreted the mid-level of management as providing an opportunity for developing professional talent, for extending their interests by learning new skills, knowledge, and fields, and even for providing satisfaction in terms of maintaining their working relations. It appeared that mid-level provided the women managers strong identity formation opportunities.

In addition, their ambition and intentions in relation to career plans corresponded with the societal expectation of being the primary caretaker for the family. Eventually, such an intention of fulfilling their care-taking role in the family and having a career implies that they stop at the level of upper-middle management. In this way, the women managers not only reinforce organizational expectations about who is accepted in senior management, but they can also make sense of the decisions to reject senior management on a personal level. Using Acker's (1990, 2006b) and other's (Benschop–Doorewaard, 2012; Dye–Mills, 2012; Sayse, 2012) explanation, women managers appear as having a gender-appropriate choice, behaviours and attitudes (due to their caring responsibilities) which is interpreted as a rational decision making in this organizational setting. Women managers' identification with middle-level management stands here as an example to demonstrate that gender assumptions behind decisions also contribute to gendered differences and inequalities of the organizational setting (Acker, 2006b). Women's explanations for refusing senior management clearly show that their preference-based interpretations can be traced back to organisations' structural and cultural characteristics (see, similar findings, Nielsen, 2017).

In summing up this chapter, when describing the path of obtaining mid-level position, both men and women underlined their hard and long hours of work, professional ambition, and devotion to the company. Therefore, in general, all respondents emphasized the role of individual intention and effort as necessary elements for receiving a promotion. However, in addition to these quite general factors for career development, four particular organizational processes emerged which seem to define career moves differently for women compared to men managers at the mid-level of management along gender lines, and

in this way creating hierarchical differences. These are the following: (1) being in the right age when making a career move, (2) subtle practices of informal networks, (3) having the right knowledge and professional experience to be promoted, and (4) internalizing the organizational norm about who is expected in senior management. I found that these organizational processes generated different expectations and outcomes for women and men managers concerning their career opportunities. This finding indicates that these gendered organizational processes impact the career construction of women and men differently, and as such, create gender-based inequality.

6.2.3. Career and having a family

This chapter focuses on the research question (R. Q. 2.3.) asking how organizational processes of career construction impact mid-level women managers' intentions in relation to family. The previous subchapter revealed that having a child creates a situation for mid-level women managers according to which their choice not to aspire for a career in senior management is interpreted as a right and rational choice. In line with this, the majority of managers agreed that mid-level management could provide the opportunity to have a desirable career while also having children. Furthermore, they indicated that senior management excludes a preferred way of parenting. We could also learn that an upper-middle or senior-level position entails continuous involvement in a career (i.e., showing commitment by working for long hours, and having an uninterrupted career). In addition, literature consistently underlines the negative impacts of having a family on managerial careers (Acker, 1990; Benschop et al., 2013; Carli–Eagly, 2007; Hochschild, 2001). All these findings suggest the investigation in more detail of the following issues: how the careers of women managers unfold when they have a family; how organizational requirements concerning maintaining a managerial career impact women's intention of having children; and what strategies women employ in order to maintain their careers when they have children. Therefore, I dedicate this subchapter to exploring the relationship between women's managerial careers and family.

As I expected, during the interviews with women managers, several questions were raised about having a family when talking about career development, even without asking about this topic. I heard various stories by women managers who specified how having a family defined, and in many cases, reshaped their career. Even those women who did not have children when the interviews were conducted had concerns about balancing career and family. Their stories indicate that having a family shapes the unfolding of careers. Men managers also mentioned the family and work-life balance as an issue, but covered much less this topic and did not articulate concerns about how to continuously cope with the difficulties arising from planning, having and maintaining a family in relations to career. Relaying on my data collection experiences and the literature saying that relations between family and career are an issue of particular importance for women managers, this chapter focuses primarily on women's managers' experiences.

Although the issue of career and family was an important topic during the interviews, only two women expressed their concern about the negative consequences of having a family on their career development explicitly. One of the managers (FI 10) who was working in the lower ranks of middle management reported how she had postponed participating in the educational programme for talents one year (to give the place to someone else out of a sense of solidarity). However, the next year, she became pregnant. Also, she reached the age of 35 (which is the age limit for being recruited into the talent program), so finally: *"When I could have started the following year, I had already left to have a baby, so that's how it was for me."* This woman was eventually left out of the talent program. As it turned out, it affected her career prospects negatively, as she compared her achievements with those of managers who had participated in the talent program. Not surprisingly, she was of the opinion that 'having a family' contributes to the unequal situation of women's career-making:

> *"I think it's harder to make your way in life as a woman, because the couple of years off because of childbirth is exactly the time, or at least for me it was the time when you could build a career, because between 30-35 is the time when I think you can be jiggled or get into these programs."* (FI 10)

This quoted woman manager was among those rare cases when the interviewees explicitly talked about the disadvantages women face when having a family. I also learned the story of a woman who had taken on a senior position at the time she had her second child (FI 16) and who had more explicitly difficulty in her career due to having a child:

> *"When I had my second pregnancy, it was absolutely not something that I experienced as a positive thing in this organisation. It was treated as a kind of disloyal abandonment, so it wasn't that yes this is a second child and at 34 this is a normal thing, but I was getting quite a lot of questions from my managers. And when I came back, I couldn't sit back in my chair, it was like, well, go to another job and there was this down grading."* (FI 16)

As we can see from the above quotes, having a family can affect the opportunity of obtaining a position and can affect the chances of getting a senior position negatively. Other than these two stories of a discriminative outcome in relation to career prospects, I was not told of any other examples or references describing experiences of discrimination regarding women's careers. Thus, these kinds of stories in which women managers with families were discriminated against were rare cases. Nevertheless, women managers with children seemed to be well aware of the difficulties a family could mean for a career, and vice versa, of the difficulties a career can create for family life. In addition, I would not claim that these informants were gender-conscious about the consequences of having a family on their careers. Further, the narrative about family and career-making varied very much, mainly depending on the hierarchical level of the

managerial position. It appeared that the higher the position of the respondent had, the more she was aware of the difficulties that a career has on family life.

Some women from the older generation talked about having their children while they were studying at university. These women (FI 2, FI 11, FI 17) typically started their careers at the lowest level at a local bank office (i.e., as tellers), and reached higher positions when their children were teenagers. They acknowledged having successful careers, but it was they who argued most strongly that balancing work and home is difficult, despite the organizational intention to support them. I also met a group of women managers (FI 9, FI 12, FI 13) who were in their late 30s and early 40s who postponed having children, and some of them were still planning it. These were the women who had positions at the middle-level, or more precisely, at the upper-middle, and were about to reach a senior level of the organizational rank. A decision to postpone having a family appeared in their stories about career moves. One woman manager (head of a bank branch), for instance, talked about not applying for a position because she planned to have a family soon. As she continued, we learn that she had changed her mind about the timing of having a family several times:

> *"When a branch became vacant, and it was a big branch, and I said to my regional manager that I'm not going to apply for it because I might want to have a child, and it just went away. And then every time I wanted a child, I was offered a new position, with a really good feeling, and I always had to have a child or a child, and then I got (X) position... once I didn't apply for a position because of that."* (FI 13)

For some women, finally deciding to have a family was a hard choice:

> *"I can honestly tell you that in two years' time I would like to go further and choose, let's say, that path or a family, I can't answer that yet because if I had to choose, I would definitely choose the bank, but I hope my partner doesn't hear that, doesn't feel that, because he really wants to have children. We're building a house now, I can put off answering that for a little while longer, but I think it's a year at the most, and then I'll have to decide."* (FI 5)

As we see, the pressure was not necessarily from the organization. Nonetheless, it was pressure on the respondent to postpone a career move due to having a family. This quote above also illustrates that some of the women had to face a complicated double-bind situation, as they had to navigate between the organizational expectation of building a career according to male terms, and the societal expectation of having a family. Another career-related issue appeared to be a difficult situation: *"...but for some reason I think I haven't had children yet, because it's always been a bit more important what's going to be on the next step, what I'm going to miss, so I don't want to miss out."* (FI 13). It seems that those women who had already reached a relatively high level in the hierarchy were well aware what was at stake regarding careers.

In contrast to the awareness of women managers working in higher ranks, those younger women managers working within the lower ranks of the organizational hierarchy were more confident about the

possibility to reconcile family and working life/career**.** I met with women managers (I also met with young women during the project work I participated in, and we touched upon this topic) who already had managerial positions within the lower rank of the organizational hierarchy who were intentionally planning or thinking about having a family without feeling pressure about this decision. See for instance, how this woman talked about her plan to have children:

> *"I want to let go of all that* (career) *and I'm now moving towards family, I'm not a wife yet and I'm not a mother and that's the next step for me."* (FI 4)

It appeared that the majority of women (without children) were very conscious about planning when to have a family, and accordingly, were planning everything in advance. It was common that they planned to have a one-year period of parental leave and to return in a part-time position, or they were leaving it open what length of extended parental leave they preferred, but one year was a kind of minimum for everyone:

> *"Well, we've agreed that I'm going to take a year off from the birth of the child and come back like this, and fortunately I can afford it, because the family support is such that I can come back like this. But, of course man designs, god makes."* (FI 4)

The expression *("Well, we've agreed that")* refers to the respondent's superior. Preparation for this period of their life included talking about it with colleagues: *"from about the age of 28, everyone asks me when I'm going to give birth"* (FI5), and with superiors and HR person*s: "I have a boss now with who I can talk to about it, we're in this series of conversations about me leaving and how I'm going to go about it (having children)..., We discussed how I think, what I would like and so on and then we will continue this conversation, how long I will be gone, what is the long-term plan and how I will get back"* (FI 4). Also, planning to have a family was a regular issue of discussion at career planning meetings: *"I'm asked every half a year, my boss keeps asking me if I'm going, when I'm going, if I'm going, for how long, when I'll be back."* (FI 5).

When analysing the stories of the women I interviewed and the data collected within project work, I noticed that the young women who were planning to go on maternity leave and return to the company appeared to be confident, first, that their return to the company would be secured:

> *"(Superior) also said, he was very cool, that I should never hold on to my chair, I said no, because (name of the Company) needs me, and that if I go to maternity leave they would take me back and a better sentence, I won't say I worried, but a better sentence, I don't think a man could have said that I would be taken back and not hold on to my chair."* (FI 13)

The above-quoted respondent also described what she thinks about returning from maternity leave:
> *"I think the way I would do it, and I think it works, is that I would say goodbye to the cluster and region leader so that they would tell me when they have a position and it's in evidence, presumably*

when they need a person, they will tell me, and then I can decide at that age how I want to part with the child." (FI 13)

These younger women managers without children had strong views about their return, which they often verified by referring to the few examples they saw around them in the organization: *"I saw a branch manager who had a six-month-old child and was already working"* (FI 13), *"there are positive examples, I have two female colleagues I saw (working part-time), also top managers."* (FI 12). This manager referred to a woman who is working as a senior who has a young child and works full time, but when she returned it was to a part-time arrangement. See also know another woman manager, working in lower management, recalled her return: *"I left with the idea that this position would be kept open for me, and I'll be back in a year and a half."* (FI 10) She returned after one year of maternity leave and was working part-time at the time the interview was conducted. Therefore, the positive attitude that these young women had when planning to have a family was seemingly backed up by the examples they saw.

Interestingly, when women were recalling their stories about organizational persons asking about 'their plans for family', they were very understanding of the organizational standpoint: *"As a matter of fact we have these career interviews..., every single time he asks me how I am doing family-wise, which, I might add, if I were in his shoes, I would ask him."* (FI 5). A woman manager even argued that discussing family-related issues should be naturally part of job interviews: *"I think that you have to talk about it, what the other person thinks, that if I went for a job interview, I might bring it up myself, because I want to know what my future boss thinks about it."* (FI 12). As we see, women were rather understanding about being asked about their family plans; although not everyone accepted this fully, it was definitely a well-embedded norm in the organizational culture.

In addition to individual, personalized discussions about family planning, the HR Department also put much effort into and paid special attention to the career development of women who became mothers. On the one hand, they supported internal recruitment, which made it easier for mothers to rejoin the company (they are permitted, for instance, to see the company's open positions while on maternity leave). On the other hand, HR implemented a welcome program for returning mothers and was continually developing organizational programs and tools for better balancing work and life (see also the next chapter about this). Part-time arrangements were usually mentioned by HR professionals and employees, too, within the framework of the company's "Welcome Back" program which helps women to transition from full-time motherhood back to the company.

It was regarding the second point where I also witnessed the significant confidence of young women towards the company in relation to planning their return from maternity leave. When analysing responses, stories, and experiences concerning work-life balance, I noticed that those women who were planning their return from parental leave appeared to believe that there were widely available part-time

arrangements. Thus, they interpreted part-time arrangements as a widely established component of work-life balance at the organization. Others who mentioned part-time work opportunities referred to these as a pre-existing initiative. Despite this common belief about the general accessibility of part-time work for young mothers, the individual stories of part-timers revealed a different story concerning the extent of the availability of part-time positions (as elaborated on in the following sections).

As we see, planning to have a family is a defining aspect of career movement for women managers working in lower or lower-middle management (i.e., by refusing to participate in a talent program, postponing an application for a new position, or planning by relying upon organizational practises for returning from maternity leave). The organizational narrative that 'women's careers have to be discussed and shaped concerning the family' was also internalized by women, especially by those who did not have children at the time the research was conducted and were intensively planning to have a family. In addition, the organizational role in supporting women managers in their return from maternity leave was positively evaluated. Due to its initiatives and tools, the organization provides to its employees, it was seen as a supportive, co-operative, family-friendly entity. This finding, however, about the supporting, caring organization becomes much more nuanced (or complicated) when we look at the stories and experiences of those women in higher-level managerial positions who care for children. I noticed that the myth about the possibility of the balanced reconciliation of career and family was strongly diminished, and the view of these women was more realistic.

First, I would like to point out how women managers experience the period in their life when they care for small children when already having established a managerial career. These women managers, for instance, talked about what the change from a six-hour working days to an eight-hour working day had caused for her:

> "I have days when I think I'm just surviving, so that I don't know if you're familiar with that feeling when you are in a hamster wheel of getting up, doing the thing, coming in, and actually sometimes I'm so tired, you know, it's like, that's good, that I've survived this day and I know that this will pass and I know that when the baby gets bigger it will be much better, but I can tell you that 4 hours was a quality of life, I'm present there, I'm present everywhere and I have time for myself. I don't have any time for myself now, so sports or reading a book, nothing, I try to manage that when I'm here I'm 100% and when I'm with the child I'm 100% and I'm waiting for the time when it will pass and it will be easier." (FI 9)

As we see, this period in women managers' lives – when they fulfil the role of working mother while having a small child – is reported to be an intensive one. It is also evident from the quote that the intensive period is seen as a permanent period: *"I look forward to the time when this will pass and it will be easier"*. In general, both women and their superiors understood that when women managers have small children, their career movement naturally slows down, although they assume that childcare will be less time-consuming

as their children become older, as we see from the quote above. The respondents were a very well defined, distinct group of women managers. Having experienced this period in their working life as intensive but temporary, they also saw this period of their life as a kind of break in their career management. These women were devoted both to their work and to their children; accordingly, their focus was primarily on maintaining their position and postponing career moves in the (near) future. For the women in this group, the reason for the slow-down in their careers was strongly connected to having small children, while in the same way, aspiring for a higher level of positions (not including the senior positions) was again connected with the time when children become teenagers:

> *"I can imagine that in two or three years, when (name of child) starts kindergarten and we see that it's okay, if there was a possibility that in the same way in this six-hours, or if God forbid back to eight hours, then I would still like to get a position that (upper-mid level position), I would like to get to that level."* (FI 10)

Some of the women managers in the group mentioned above even had part-time arrangements, and added that they saw this period as intensive but temporary, thus it is especially relevant to perceive this as an adjusted form of 'mommy track' (Hochschild 2001). Therefore, in describing the strategy of this small group of women in relation to their efforts to balance work and life, this period in their career trajectories could be seen as a 'temporary mommy track'.

The stories of those women managers who had older, school-aged children included all kinds of difficulties stemming from the double burden of managing work and private life. Thus, in contrast to the concerns and ideas of women managers with small, 1-2 year-old children, difficulties balancing work and life may have changed, but the intensity had not diminished. See, for instance, how this woman describes the experience of intensive parenting:

> *"And as a woman, it is more difficult to manage this, and even the fact that the childbirth has been postponed, it is not even possible there to say that by the time you are 38-40 years old, the child is already 14-15 or even older and you say that it is not a problem that I am not every case, because I can manage myself at home, but it has also become very intensive, what the child needs, so going to school is one thing, so you have to be very much there, and it is more difficult to reconcile."* (FI 10)

This women similarly talks about the challenges that she had when doing her 'second shift':

> *"When I get home, they* (children) *are already tired, I can at most look at their homework, but that doesn't always work, bathing and dinner is my job, and as soon as I put them to bed around 8:30 or 9:30, I can get to it afterwards if I have something to do, I used to do that a lot more, I used to be quite set on having a second round after the kids, but as the years go by, I just run out of energy and I feel less and less like I'm doing myself or anyone else any good. "* (FI 7)

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On the one hand, as the above quotes shows, this woman manager kept working long hours. In this sense, she was adapting to the organizational requirement of long working hours and demonstrating constant availability in order to show her devotion to work. However, it was not easy to stay devoted to her work due to her having a family and the care-related tasks this required. I even found more visible signs of the impact of school-aged children on women's career movements. One of the women managers who was working at the HR department was leaving the company when I interviewed her. Her position required her to work full-time and to do overtime often. She decided to quit her job because she was not spending enough time with her school-aged children. She took a new position at another company, where *"I might be able to see my children through their first few years of school in the same way"* (FI 8).

Next to this concrete example of leaving the organization (a very concrete opting-out!), it was also common that those women managers who had children in their teenage years wanted to spend adequate time with their children. It was a driving force for them to leave the office on time to avoid prolonged working hours at the workplace. One of the senior women managers, for instance, explained that she does not have a babysitter because she wants to be available for her school-aged children. Another senior woman also recalled a period in her life when she was studying with her child when he needed extra help to finish the school year. Some of them expressed concerns by saying they felt guilty about not spending enough time with their children. In contrast, others strongly insisted that although they were working long hours, they were still able to be available and hence good parents:

> *"...there was a period when I was the corporate contact and team leader when I was really staying up a lot, so there was a lot of work and I was taking a lot home, but no, so I wasn't neglecting the child, I must say, so I could devote as much time as I wanted to."* (FI 6)

Thus, as the quote above illustrates, women managers acknowledged that they were working long hours. However, they also expressed the importance of doing care work for their children, and the importance of being an available parent. Indeed, they were not always available for their children as much as they wanted to be, which sometimes caused conflict at home, as the following example of a woman manager working in the IT department shows: *"they are fed up with it* (the children), *yesterday I wanted to go home at 5.30 and I got home at 8.30, it was a crisis meeting"* (FI 18). She also said: *"I haven't managed to make weekdays human if I'm going to work weekends".* This woman manager admitted that this was when her department finished a project, and the working schedule was intensive. This is why she talked about having had the experience of not spending enough time with her children (she has three children between the age of 12 and 20 years).

One of the consequences of women managers working long hours and having child-care duties at any age was the blurring boundaries between home and work, which is a topic that has long been raised in the literature on work and life reconciliation (Acker 2006). Interestingly, it was not only the domain of

work that invaded the space and time of the home, but I witnessed the invasion of the private life/home into the domain of work. I hereby demonstrate this with data from my field notes. I had the chance to observe a working day of a woman manager (FI 8), as I spent a shadowing day with another manager at her department. She held several meetings all day (I participated in her meetings with the manager I followed as a shadower), making reports, etc. I noticed that during the intensive day of work, she was also managing her private life: she called one of her children, one of her children joined her at the office (it was the end period of the school year, almost summer vacation) in the afternoon, she helped her with English homework, then another of her children called her because of a lost key. She then arranged a birthday present for one of her children. It seemed that it was common practice for her to be readily available for her family on most days while working. However, it needs to be emphasized that the 'invasion' of private life into the workplace happened mostly through technological devices, and mainly concerned managing the issue of the daily life of family and children while at work. Nonetheless, it appeared that the workplace was one of the locations at which women managers were required to practise intensive parenting.

I also noticed that, other than the daily management of family life which was visible at the workplace (see the above example), the women managers were very keen on not showing that they had any difficulty reconciling career/work and family, and particularly on not revealing any crises in their private lives. I heard women saying that they did not tell their superiors and colleagues about their divorces; they chose to use the home office when a child was ill instead of taking sick leave, or they worked at night when taking care of sick parents. It was only in rare cases, when they opened up more deeply during interviews and shadowing days, that making a career and having a family was challenging. I believe that the strong discourse that had been established in the organizational culture about it being a 'family-friendly company' (see also next chapter) might have led employees to internalize the view that they are well-supported in terms of having a good balance between work and life. Under the surface, however, when the discussions during the interviews developed about the details of how to manage the daily routine of working long hours and caring for children, challenges appeared in more detail.

I want to support this claim of a 'common habit of denying existing difficulties' with the following example of the 'dark side' of a successful career. A woman manager (FI 2) who was working at the upper-middle level spoke about her well-established working-schedule, which provided her with the chance to balance work and life. She proudly said that she had finally succeeded in managing to have an eight-hour working day, starting early in the morning, after doing so much overtime for so many years. She was incidentally mentioned as a kind of role model by another woman manager: *"You might have heard of her, she's quite a big leader around here. So, she's a workaholic too, although she has children."* (FI 5). She was referred to as someone who had succeeded in her career and who could successfully balance work and life, but also work hard. I also had a shadowing day with this manager, during which we could take a broader

and a more in-depth look at the other aspects of a successful career, including having difficulties and making sacrifices in her private life. By the end of the shadowing day I had learned that she had only succeeded in managing her strict schedule and better balancing work and life after she had divorced her husband, had grown up children, and so finally had been able to move closer to the headquarters of the company. As we can see, despite the difficulties this manager revealed by the end of the shadowing day, she was referred to as a role model by another manager. Her colleagues agreed that she regularly worked long hours, was available for work, and had accepted a position that required travelling every week.

Here, I would like to point out that, somehow, making such a connection between career and family is deemed to be necessary when reference is made to women managers' career stories. Perhaps this is why women managers' careers were acknowledged to be successful, when it was also indicated that they could also manage their family life in a balanced way. The perspective that having a family impacts a woman's career, however, was not only confirmed by the women respondents' stories and examples, but by the hardly visible organizational expectation that women are capable of working long hours to a limited extent when they have small children.

To illustrate how the view that women managers were able to have a successful career when they balance work and life was internalized in the organization, I quote one of the heads of a bank branch who talked about a senior woman whom she considered to be successful in her career:

> *"She's consciously built her career, as well as being a very smart woman I think, interesting in the sense that she has three children and she's very family-oriented and she's very good at finding that work-life balance and she's very good at maintaining that and she's successful and she's respected."* (FI 6)

We can learn from this quote that, in the case of women managers, acknowledgement for having a successful career was connected to having a work-life balance. This perspective that career achievements are only relevant when they involve having a balanced work and life was more striking when we consider men managers' stories too. In the case of men managers, success was measured according to the well-implemented rotations and positions they had taken on. This organizational process of creating discourses about what a successful career is shows that women managers face a particular challenge when achieving more: a situation of double burden that is associated with intensive working (being available, working long hours) and being responsible for managing family life and childcare. Women managers, even if they are referred to as recognized leaders, cannot appear without the background of having a role in the private domain, and their career is acknowledged to be successful if they fulfil the demands in both of the domains, the work and the family (intensive parenting). In sum, it was a strong expectation for women managers to fulfil the gender-appropriate roles of being ideal mothers at any cost in their careers.

This finding is partly similar to what Nagy and Vicsek found (2014) at a multinational company at which they studied women managers' status. The former highlighted that the gendered nature of the organization is intertwined with traditional views of society about gender social roles. In particular, they found that a robust negative discourse was articulated about women who returned to work when their children were still very young (a few months old), or if they had leading positions while also taking care of young children. Although I did not identify this negative judgment about women managers who returned 'too early' from maternity leave, women's acceptance as managers was similarly found to be related to being a 'good mother', and if not the only caretaker, at least the responsible one. So, I could not identify any direct antipathy towards managers who returned to work after a few months of giving birth (Nagy–Vicsek, 2014).

The third group of women that was identifiable from the interviewees (and from the anecdotes that I was told about them) consisted of those women who had succeeded in reaching upper-middle or senior positions, or who had a senior position before the time the interview was conducted. This research focuses on women managers' career trajectory at the middle-level; therefore, I only conducted interviews with a limited number of women who had obtained a higher managerial position. Overall, six women fell into this category in one or other way. Despite the limited number, a distinct picture emerged about the strategy they employed for career maintenance when they have a family. Applying a relatively rare strategy for maintaining career and family, which could be distinguished from the strategies of the women at the mid-level, they had reached the top rank of middle and senior managerial positions.

What we can learn from their stories is that not all women managers want to slow down their careers when they have a family. They followed all kinds and various paths to develop their careers. For instance, three of them started to build a career when they already had young children (one of them had children in her mid-30s, and two of them had senior positions when they had already started a family). Therefore, all these women already had children when they started to climb the career ladder. Furthermore, in terms of starting their careers in various ways, it was found that they spent a relatively short time on maternity leave from six months up to one year, which is considered to be short according to Hungarian standards (Blaskó 2005; Nagy 2016). Those women who spoke about returning quickly from maternity leave not only recalled that the time they spent on maternity leave was short, but also that that they could pick up their work where they had left it:

> *"I came back after 5 and a half months, I was back in the chair, it wasn't really that big of a break, so everyone took note and I came back quickly."* (FI 16)

Nevertheless, the women managers mentioned all kind of examples which shows that they did not (or could not) give up on the role of being responsible for childcare. Nonetheless, they were not the only person who cared for their children. Therefore, this period of being on maternity leave was either short or busy with

finishing university. Therefore, the women did not feel that returning from maternity leave was like reintegration to work, or was a slow process.

Second, it turned out that they actively shared the responsibility for childcare and domestic chores with their spouses. Those women who returned six months after maternity leave to work had husbands who could stay at home with the children. In addition, one woman could rely on two grandmothers (FI9) who took turns in taking care of her child when she returned to work when the child was six months old. It also became evident that relying on fathers for childcare did not mean that the latter became responsible for all the other household chores too (i.e., I heard about husbands who never do the ironing, laundry, or cleaning). Therefore, their spouses were active at childcare, but remained mostly free of the responsibility of doing household work. For instance:

> *"I had to do the cooking, the clothes, everything that provides the kind of material conditions to have warm food, to have the nappies there, hm, hm, hm, I had to manage that"* (F 16)

When their children become older (reached school age), they also reported that fathers and grandparents maintained their active role in childcare on a daily basis. Interestingly, what I also learned from the women's stories is that the active role of grandparents in supporting childcare did not depend on the availability of fathers. Grandparents actively helped when they were in good health and lived close by. In addition, all of the senior women had periods in their life when they hired babysitters and additional help with other domestic chores, which is still not the standard practice in Hungary (Nagy 2016; Fodor et al., 2019).

In this way, the women managers remained responsible for managing care-related tasks associated with their children, but a whole chain of other people stood behind these women so that they could maintain their career/work and childcare. This active and available daily support seems to have helped women managers build their careers according to the organizational requirements about managers in top positions, such as constant availability, working in the evenings, and travelling long distances between home and workplace. One woman said that she drove 250 km each day for years before moving closer to the company headquarters. Another senior woman manager spoke of how she had always moved to a new home when organizational changes required it: she had lived in three different cities in different counties in Hungary in line with what her position required, while maintaining a house in a fourth one.

Other interviewees praised these women managers as being successful leaders. One of them has already been introduced above as someone *"she's quite a big leader around here."* (FI 2). FI 17 was recommended by another interviewee as an interview subject because she was considered a role model. Also, FI 7 was mentioned as someone who could succeed at maintaining a senior (or upper-mid level)

position while having a child (by FI 12). Moreover, she was mentioned as someone who was promoted to a higher position when she became pregnant.

Although other women admitted that these women had successful and high achieving careers, this does not mean that they did not have difficulties maintaining them. The organizational pressure of not being in the right role as leaders was still an issue. One of the senior women recalled this story:

> *"I'm very interested in marketing and I was very encouraged by my boss about how I would love this position that would be absolutely right for me and what the heck 4 months later, no one would have believed it but the marketing manager was let go and suddenly there was this position and when I went to there, specifically that I wanted it and he said yes, yessss, but you have two little kids. And that you can't be here like that."* (FI 16)

This quote shows quite clearly that mothers, even if they are in senior positions, are still expected to devote more time to childcare when they have small children. As she continued to speak about her experiences of having a family, it became apparent that she continually had to face discriminatory practices in relation to her career, despite already having a senior position and having proved herself to be available to work long hours:

> *"There were comments that we can't move you up because your children are young and you can't stay here until 7 pm anyway...even though I delivered the work the same way, and I was often here at 7 pm, and many times I was on the highway at 8 pm coming up from a branch, but it didn't matter"* (F16)

First, she continued to face organizational non-approval in relation to her capability of reconciling career/work and life. Second, she fulfilled the organizational expectation of being available and working many hours. This quote perfectly illustrates that the societal expectation of mothers being unavailable for putting in long hours of work is so strong that it can override women's proven dedication to this organizational demand. In addition, this story reveals that the interviewee was told only informally that having children represents grounds for being refused a position. However, the reason why she was not a suitable candidate for the position was very clearly stated; this was her supposed non-availability for working long hours.

Other difficulties the senior/upper-mid level women managers experienced while building their career were somewhat connected to their private lives. They often mentioned their children in the context of feeling guilty about not spending enough time with them. The following quote shows at least two things that this aspiring woman had to face in relation to having a family:

> *"I got a lot of drawings saying I miss you Mum, they were always in my purse, I think they're still there, and I think that after a while they became very distant from me...and I tried to spend weekends together as much as possible, but that's not how children work, that's not how you can block out the time, children need to be present all the time, I've learned that."* (FI 2)

In addition, her marriage could not take the pressure of her building a successful career:

> *"...and the fact that we reversed roles, and it was unhealthy, so I was the breadwinner, the provider, my husband's income was nowhere compared to mine, after a while. It didn't cause conflict in a sense that it was overt but it did in the perspective, because it bothered my husband, that I was outgrowing him, and it broke up our marriage."* (FI 2)

This does not mean that they did not receive any support from spouses (*"my husband also encouraged me not to downgrade."* (FI 17). However, it seems clear this woman managers had difficulties with their marriages. This quote is also an example of how even women managers who reached high positions had internalized the perspective that their positions would cause a conflict related to perceived gender roles (*'was unhealthy'* FI 12). Their intense emotions that involved feeling guilty about not spending enough time with their children also supported their internalizing the view that being a senior/upper-mid level manager and a woman is a conflicting situation. Furthermore, four women managers out of the six were divorced at the time the interviews were conducted. Thus, corresponding to the literature about Hungarian top women managers (Nagy 2001, 2016), the interviewed women managers indicated that they had had to make personal sacrifices to achieve a successful career in the top rank of the organizational hierarchy.

To sum up this chapter, women managers reported various experiences and thoughts about how having a family had shaped the unfolding of their careers. One group of younger women managers wanted to slow down and have a career break (still shorter than the average in Hungary) as they were planning to have children. However, not all women managers wanted to put the brakes on their prosperous careers when they had small children. Another group of women who were more advanced in terms of their careers and had older children had no intention of reducing their working hours, and, for instance, applying a 'mommy track' strategy (or getting the chance to take advantage of the mommy track, as the story of FI 8 shows – she was leaving the company for a more balanced work schedule). Additionally, members of the latter group were very keen on having enough time, and quality time, with their children. We can distinguish this group of women managers from the previous ones, as they are more concerned about developing a career while trying to maintain and fulfil the societal expectation of intensive parenting (Christopher, 2012; Green, 2015). At the level of senior and upper-mid level management, the women managers did not appear to be employing an intensive parenting style to the same extent as mid-level women. However, they remained responsible for taking care of their children, and experienced strong societal pressure to be the primary care-takers. I also conclude that, despite the variations in their career trajectories, the mid-level women managers continuously encountered conflict between work and life independent of the age of their children and the position they fulfilled, related mainly to the challenges of balancing career/work and family.

Finally, despite the variability in career moves due to the impact of having a family and strategies for reconciling work and life, mid-level women managers wanted to maintain both their career and family without even considering giving up on either of these two domains of life.

6.2.4. Discussion

The point of departure for this chapter was the intention to explain how organizational processes construct careers in the context of the mid-level of hierarchy. In order to develop the analytical insight, I examined how particular elements such as the practices and all the visible and invisible internal processes, beliefs, and norms related to the specific gender regime at the researched organization ('the gendered nature of a specific organization') define and impact ('organizational practices doing the gendering') individuals' opportunities and situations when they construct their careers – in particular, the various forms and dynamics of career moves ('everyday practices').

Overall, the picture that emerges from women's stories is that career construction for mid-level women managers is a complex process with many controversies in it. This complexity is derived from the many contradictions and expectations of organizational culture and society, and from the often difficult and paradoxical situations that the woman managers have to face while maintaining their careers. One of the most striking issues was that many respondents, both women and men, were very positive about equal career opportunities and acknowledged the organization's active role in supporting these. The previous chapter introduced the fact that the dominant organizational perception was that gender equality exists in relation to career construction and opportunities. It was widely believed in the organization that woman managers can achieve their career goals at the middle-level as they plan, wish, or prefer. This belief was justified first by the organizational support and initiatives for career development that existed at middle management level, being accessible to both women and men. Furthermore, women managers were numerically equivalent in the middle-level organizational hierarchy to men. Indeed, some respondents made remarks about the difficulties and limited acceptance of women in senior positions. Nonetheless, admitting the existence of difficulties for women in terms of their careers did not diminish the organization's admitted role in supporting women.

Despite the dominant perception of gender equality, practices of gender inequality persist in organizations, as is well known from the literature (Acker, 2006a, 2006b; Benschop et al., 2013; Martinez, 2011; Tienari et al., 1998; Tomlinson–Durbin, 2010; Williams et al., 2013). Consistent with this literature, several differences and constraints have been found that are evidence that gender inequality is embedded in career construction at the mid-level of organizational hierarchy, although managerial careers were not reserved exclusively for men at all. Even women who awarded central value to career development received support (both from their family and the organization) and was high achieving experienced numerous

difficulties and challenges, similar to the findings in the literature (Benschop et al., 2013; Hochschild, 2001; Kumra, 2010; Nagy, 2016).

First, it is evident from the findings that gender differences arose from the beginning of career progression, showing that women and men managers do not experience the same patterns, timing, or decisions in relation to their careers. Therefore, women and men arrive to the upper-middle management level with different career stories and conditions, which ultimately affect further career progression towards senior positions.

A closer look at the career stories revealed that men could more easily follow a career pattern that fulfils the organizational requirements of spending a specific time in a position, which is 2-3 years, and rotating between departments more often than women do. Women managers also undergo job rotation, but this is more likely for those who work in the field of finance. Overall, it appears that men managers take on more positions due to their going through rotations, while the number of positions women managers hold increases due to the number of steps they take to reach upper-middle level or senior positions. Accordingly, when women managers arrive at upper-middle management positions, they have already 'collected' more positions because of such step-by-step, and sometimes horizontal, career moves. It also turned out that women tended to spend more time in positions compared to men, especially when they had relatively higher-level positions within the middle-level management.

To conclude, women managers typically built their careers systematically, and instead of taking rotations at various departments, they preferred to have power-related positions outside of headquarters. This is particularly true of women managers working in the field of finance. Their reasons for choosing a local branch over a position at headquarters were their higher level of autonomy and flexibility as managers of local offices. I also found examples of women, mainly from the fields of HR and marketing, who ended-up reaching the highest position they could at the upper-middle level.

Furthermore, the detailed analysis of career stories also revealed that a few informal promotional processes criteria are expected typically from women managers when aspiring for or receiving new positions. It turned out that the more higher women managers were promoted, the more they had to prove that they already had the right knowledge, talent, and attitude or professional experience prior to obtaining that particular position. Therefore, quite paradoxically, the 'right' to positions had to be earned in advance by accumulating the right knowledge and experience that the applied-for position required. In line with this finding, those women managers who reflected on their career achievements often emphasized the importance of professional knowledge and diligent work.

As we can see, women and men managers arrive with slightly different conditions to the upper-middle and senior management level that includes a long career-building process for women, and different skills and competencies that are obtained during the career trajectory, and a different power situation. One

of the constraints which is evident from these findings is that the career trajectory of women managers slows down due to their step-by-step career development, and need to spend a relatively long time in positions. Horizontal segregation is a well-known phenomenon in international (Billing–Alvesson, 2000; Gottfried, 2012; Martínez, 2011; ILO Report, 2015, 2018) and national career-related literature (Nagy, 2014), and its negative consequences in relation to career development have been clearly described. In addition, the expectation of alternating between positions and the need to be ready for changes are well-known phenomena in the literature. Not accepting enough rotations decreases the chances, and thus the choice, of advancing to higher, in-line management positions (Guillaume–Pochic, 2009; Williams et al., 2012).

The above-introduced gender-based differences in the process of promotion create a two-way selection practice that is more favourable for men managers that includes 'asking and negotiating about career', 'changing locations for career', sometimes 'postponing career steps', and therefore an active role in shaping their careers. Following this line of thinking, men managers' career patterns may be described more as a spiralist model (Guillaume–Pochic, 2009). I find this type of model particularly relevant for describing men managers' career patterns, because it is rotations that initiate career movements in and out of different departments, and taking rotations that improved their chances of moving up to higher positions. The conclusion is in line with those findings which describe organizational working culture as frequently expecting employees to be ready to change their jobs and locations where work takes place. It is common in large organizations that job moves within departments and locations create better career opportunities for aspirants (Guillaume–Pochic, 2009; Williams et al., 2012).

A closer look at the career pattern of women managers shows that it is more similar to a linear career model, as women are more likely experience a one-way selection practice, in which they are selected as potential aspirants, and receive offers for new positions. They progress relatively slowly and step-by-step in their careers, and rarely get side-tracked due to rotations. The linearity in their career, of course, does not mean that their career trajectory is without difficulty, constraints, and shorter or longer breaks due to having a family.

The findings also show that two other organizational processes – networking and adapting a work-centred culture – were relevant and essential determinants of successful career progression. In the case of women managers, it seemed that informal relations were not of the same significance as their performance and professional knowledge. This observation is in line with another finding demonstrating that women managers in the sample gained visibility and established recognition and merit typically through their professional knowledge and experience rather than through established networks. The importance of networking for career advancement is widely described in the academic literature, and the difference between women and men's networks. It is continuously pointed out that networking, both formal and

informal, on the one hand, remain a fundamentally important practice for identifying opportunities and articulating success, and on the other hand, that they remain quite problematic for women managers (Brink–Benschop, 2011; Carli–Eagly 2007; Madsen–Scribner, 2017; Pryce–Sealy, 2013; Williams et al., 2012).

This finding is in line with the literature that explains that women tend to rely less on their networks to prove their commitment to the organization and determination for career development (Carli–Eagly, 2007; Kumra, 2010; Pryce–Sealy, 2013; Williams et al., 2012). Based on the literature (Carli–Eagly, 2007; Pryce–Sealy, 2013; Williams et al., 2012) that explains how relying (not relying) on networks can create gender inequality (as platforms for formal and informal gendered organizational practices), women managers' lower level of participation in formal and informal networks could be understood as a result of gender-based discrimination against them. The conclusion by Kumra (2010) about the role of networking organizations applies to these research results as well: "The need to gain high-level sponsorship and access to important networks, supports a male model of working and one with which women may experience difficulty in complying" (Kumra, 2010, p. 239.)

Maintaining an ambitious career was also connected with having a work-centred mind with a commitment to working long hours (Hochschild, 2001; Kumra, 2010). Mainly, the stories of those women managers who had upper-middle or senior-level positions showed that adapting to a working long hours culture is a must for maintaining a career on this level of the organizational hierarchy. It is well-explored in the literature (Hochschild, 2001; Kumra, 2010) that the practice of working long hours and constant availability for work is a typical informal organizational requirements, and is understood as a sign of commitment, and total conformity to organizational demands. A managerial career unquestionably involves time availability (Guillaume–Pochic, 2009; Williams et al., 2012), which is a particularly crucial issue when they have a family. Therefore, when promotion is connected with this organizational practice of long working hours and hard work, committed women managers are disadvantaged based on the belief that they are not continuously available, mainly due to their having a family. It is again a gender bias against women that contributes to their disadvantage in terms of career (Kumra, 2010; Padavic et al., 2020).

I also found that this organizational requirement not only created a problematic situation for women managers because of the need to be responsible for managing family and domestic chores, but also in relation to the organizational disbelief in the possibility of reconciling career/work and life, especially when connected to positions at the higher echelons of the hierarchy. Corresponding with the literature (Acker, 2006a, Carli–Eagly, 2007; Nagy, 2016; Ridgeway–Correll, 2004), it was found that the societal expectation of mothers being unavailable to work long hours was so strong that it overrode women's devotion to fulfilling the organizational demands of long working hours, particularly in the case of women in higher-level positions. This kind of double-bind situation is well described in the literature about woman managers, especially in relation to those who work in top managerial positions (Carli–Eagly, 2007; Hochschild, 2001).

It can explain why women managers, when they aspire to higher positions, experience more difficulty than their younger colleagues reconciling career and family (private life). Not only do they have to bear the double burdens of work and childcare, but they also have to face the societal expectation of women managers not being capable of fulfilling senior positions when they have small children.

The findings above suggest that maintaining an ambitious career that requires constant availability and a continuous advancement becomes an issue especially when respondents have a family, at all stages of career trajectory. The stories of women managers provided clear evidence that having a family is still detrimental for women managers' career construction, which is well-known from the literature about Hungarian women managers (Geambaşu, 2014; Kispéter, 2012; Kalocsai, 2010; Nagy, 2001; Nagy–Paksi, 2014; Takács, 2013; Tóth, 2005; Primecz et al., 2014). I found strong evidence that having a family is not only a concern in relation to careers when women have small children. First of all, even 'planning to have a family' was a defining aspect of career moves for women managers (i.e., refusing to participate in a talent program, postponing an application for a new position, or planning by relying upon organizational practises for returning from maternity leave). It is pointed out in the literature (Kumra, 2010) that high achieving, career-oriented women who do not have children also perceive difficulties in relation to their career progression. The assumption that women managers are less available for work is based on their gender, not on their family status, or more precisely on the gender-based belief that their becoming mothers at some point will reduce their availability for work. In the case of the present research, it was expected that women would take a more extended career break when they had a family, as it was assumed that they would fulfil the societal norm of being the primary caregivers of children (Blaskó, 2005; Pongrácz–Molnár, 2011; Takács, 2013).

Second, it also turned out that the age at which to start a high achieving career ranged from 30 to 35 years, which coincides with the period when women managers often have their first child. In agreement with the literature about the negative impacts of having family on career (Acker, 2006a; Carli–Eagly, 2007; Hochschild, 2001), I heard several stories of women managers who talked about how having a family had defined, and in many cases negatively reshaped, their career. Accordingly, the majority of women who talked about family and career, including those who were planning to have a family, admitted to trying to find ways of fitting their careers better with family life.

Three different ways of reconciling career/work and family emerged; all of them are well known in the literature. One way was utilized by women who were typically in their 30s and who were focused on keeping their position when they had children. These individuals went on maternity leave for at least one year, and a few of them had even part-time arrangements. For these women, the reason for slowing down their career was connected to having small children, which is a well-known phenomenon in the literature (Halrynjo–Lyng, 2009; Hochschild, 2001). Using the term 'mommy track' (Benschop–Doorewaard, 1998),

however, does not entirely fit the situation of the women mentioned above, because motherhood (or plans for the period spent on maternity live), did not block their way back to the organization, or their career. The women respondents could all return to the organization, although they did not always get their previous positions back. Therefore, the work-life balance strategy of this small group of women and this period of their career trajectory is better described as a 'temporary mommy track'. This better expresses the fact that they take an 'organizational offside-position', a 'sidetrack' (Tiennari et al., 1998) which includes a delay/withdrawal from their careers due to adapting to the intense societal expectations associated with being the primary caretaker (Halrynjo–Lyng, 2009; Hochschild, 2001).

Second, most of the women managers at the mid-level of the researched organization were concerned about developing their careers, including by adapting to the working long hours culture, while trying to maintain and fulfil the societal expectation of intensive parenting (Christopher, 2012). The identity of the women who made up this group in relation to being the primary caretakers could be hardly distinguished from that of the mothers in the previous group. Thus, transitioning between these two groups seems to be easy after women managers run out of alternatives for working in alternative forms of employment.

Third, one group of women managers managed not to slow down their career path, but to work long hours according to organizational requirements when they had children. In their cases, their priority of having a prosperous career was not diminished by having a family. These women typically worked in the upper-middle or senior level of management at the time the interviews were conducted, but their stories revealed that they continuously maintained a career as defined on male terms.

However, what distinguished these women from those in the last two groups is that they organized their family life around their careers. They spent either a relatively short time on maternity leave or started to build their career after having children. Women in this group were committed to career development, even at the expense of personal cost and sacrifice, but their career-centeredness did not lead to less commitment to their families. In order to demonstrate their availability and commitment to the organization, they had to rely on a chain of other people for childcare and other daily domestic chores. They delegated childcare to others, actively shared it either with their spouses or with grandparents, and some of them purchased it privately. Therefore, in this way they remained primarily responsible for taking care of their children. Thus, for women in upper-middle level and senior positions, besides the right timing for having a family, having extra resources for child care was a must (Hochschild, 2001; Nagy, 2016). The stories of women of the third group also indicate how it is to maintain an aspiring career and be responsible for childcare, and thus these women show many signs of being 'superwomen' (Hochschild, 2001). This 'superwomen' status also means that the women in this group conform to gender norms about the societal role of women.

As we see, not all of the women managers wanted to withdraw from their prosperous careers when they had small children. However, despite the variations in their career trajectories, but corresponding with the Hungarian literature (Geambaşu, 2014; Kispéter, 2012; Kalocsai, 2010; Nagy–Paksi, 2014; Takács, 2013; Tóth, 2005; Primecz et al., 2014), they continuously faced the inherent contradictions between work and life, independent of the age of their children and the position they held, related mainly to the challenge of balancing career/work and family. Particular examples reported by women managers include all kind of day-to-day difficulties related to fulfilling the organizational norm of long working hours, the societal expectation of intensive parenting, and due to the blurred boundaries between work and family that involved women actively caring for family members while working. Furthermore, I found clear signs that women managers still had concern about slowing down their career trajectory when their children reached school age, as they understood that time spent at primary school was a crucial and significant period which required them to support their children more closely. Also, those women who had higher positions had to cope with the organizational pressure of not being in the 'right' role (assumed gender role) as leaders because of the gender-based expectations about availability. As we can see, reconciling work and life was always a concern for women managers, independent of the age of their children, which defined how they saw and developed their careers.

Due to the increasing number of working hours and stronger expectations about availability related to organizational demands at the senior level of the hierarchy, most of the women managers in the sample did not have the intention to reach senior-level positions. Additionally, their career stories also made it clear that they considered themselves ambitious managers, although their perspective of ambition did not include orientation towards upward mobility. This ambition was instead associated with developing oneself, deepening knowledge, and the women were more motivated to do high-quality work. They had concerns and plans about their careers and viewed work as a principal, identity-forming activity in their life. Accordingly, work and career appeared as a central component of their life. In this relation, mid-level management was presented as the level that allows development in work and fulfilling the ideal mother role at the same time. The differences in the way men and women approach ambition clearly signify that career construction is gendered. In line with the literature which discusses the relationship between managerial jobs and women (Billing, 2011; Linstead, 2002; Powell, 2012), this finding of women as ambitious managers does not conform to the discourse which understands that there is incongruence between managerial positions and women.

Additionally, in line with the acceptance of women in managerial positions, the existence of a firmly committed, career-centred group of women supported the organizational perspective that women and men have equal chances of having a high achieving managerial career at the researched organization. All these findings show that the understanding of organisations as inherently gendered is still a valid one,

but describing organisational practices and norms as only reflecting on men's work and life situation, including career advancement, is no longer of use (Billing, 2011; Williams et al., 2012). In particular, because women managers working at the mid-level of the organisation fulfilled many, although not all, elements of the ideal employee as being highly committed to their profession and work, working long hours while balancing work with their roles and commitments outside the domain of the work.

In this new context of the organization, wherein a sophisticated career system, support for work-life balance, and a general belief in equal chances (and hence in meritocracy) for developing a career exists, those women who do not have ambitious career plans in terms of reaching senior positions seem to make their decisions based solely upon individual preferences (i.e., the lack of power-driven ambition) and with the assumption for having their full capabilities to make decisions. Hence, the patterns and roots of gender disparities, the context of the organizational structure and the societal expectations on gender roles may be challenging to see (Hobson–Fahlén, 2009; Nielsen, 2017; Williams et al., 2012). This explains, in the case of this research too, why I found gender blindness about the situation of women managers in terms of chances, opportunities, and individual roles in career construction, so gender inequality in career construction was not admitted as a problem on the level of organization. Hence, the notion of gender equality was instead connected to women's individual problems, decisions and life situations - as it was admitted that they face several difficulties along the way of careers advancement.

Summing up, it is evident from these findings that structural constraints embedded in organizational promotional process and social expectations define, and in many cases limit women managers' career trajectory. The nature of the gender differences in career construction and the difficulties and challenges that women managers experience is related to the structural factors of organizations. Career development encompasses informal and formal practices, and norms and patterns concerning how a career should be created. This creates a situation for women managers in which the nature of their advancement; acknowledgement of their competence in terms of fitting into a position; receipt (or lack thereof) of sponsorship through networking and mentoring; belief in what the appropriate age for women is to receive a position; and belief about how to reconcile work and family is measured on a different scale to that used for men managers. Gender inequalities are manifested in the differences in the career construction of women managers, and in their experience that the contemporary practices of career-making are problematic for them.

6.3. Work-life balance and career

The findings in the previous chapter (6.2) show that women managers face difficulties arising from managing their career and family. The question then arises how the women managers accomplish work according to the organizational requirements of the researched organization, and in relation to this, what

their experience is about work-life balance. Therefore, in the present chapter, I explore the relationship of working culture, work-life balance, and career, and pay particular attention to how women managers manage to work long hours.[27] This chapter address the third research question and discuss how the work-life balance tools offered by the organization reproduce mid-level women managers' capabilities in relation to constructing their careers?

First, I focus on the organizational support for work-life balance and employees' experience of working in an organization which can be characterized by a culture of working long hours (Chapter 6.3.1.). Then I will elaborate on how women managers and professionals use part-time work in the researched organization in more detail (Chapter 6.3.2.). Three major themes emerge in relation to the issue of part-time work. First, the organizational intention to offer part-time work is introduced, which is then matched with the personal understanding of and opportunities for taking a part-time position (Chapter 6.3.3.). Then, I will discuss two themes that cover the experiences of women working part-time. The next section (Chapter 6.3.4.) examines how part-timer women can adapt to the organizational norm of long working hours. Next, I will explore the mechanism behind the sense-making of women in relation to choosing part-time arrangements (Chapter 6.3.5.). Last, I conclude about the place and role of work-life balance and part-time work in career construction and its organizational embeddedness.

6.3.1. Organizational support for work-life balance

When talking about everyday work life, the intensity of work was a significant part of the discussions in career interviews with both women and men. This was not only because I had already included a question on work-life balance in the interview guide, but because the topic always recurred. Therefore, on the one hand, interviewees shared with me how they maintained their everyday working practices, and what difficulties they faced having a family or working long hours. On the other hand, my participation in the project work provided comprehensive data about the work-life initiatives of the organization, and an up-to-date understanding of how employees use (do not use) the work-life balance tools and initiatives provided by the company.

The company made great effort to support its employees' work-life balance. In this sense, the project initiated by the HR department which sought to examine and improve employees' WLB satisfaction was not a one-off experiment or a unique initiative. I learnt about many other examples as well, such as another project that was under preparation to improve services for employees. In addition, the organization communicated its commitment to this issue on its website, where 'family-friendliness' appeared to be one of the critical factors for ensuring a better work-life balance for employees. Communicating the

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[27] This last part was written based on a book chapter (Oborni 2018a) and a paper (Oborni 2018b) that have already been published in a journal.

organizational policy online on the social responsibility concerning work-life balance, indeed, is not equivalent to everyday practice, but shows that the organization considers being a 'family-friendly environment' to be an organizational value, and takes responsibility for supporting work-life balance (Géring, 2016). A more concrete sign of the commitment towards improving work-life balance was that the company had received several national-level awards for supporting employees to build an excellent work-life balance and for being a family-friendly organization. Thus, the project I participated in as an observer formed an integrated part of the organization's overall approach to work-life balance.

To explain more clearly, the term I use here is 'work-life balance'; however, organizational members often referred to work-life balance as 'family-friendliness' when they meant work-life balance tools or awards. This is not a unique organizational phenomenon. We can learn from other studies (Kalocsai, 2010; Tóth, 2005) about Hungarian multinationals that work-life initiatives are often interpreted as being programs dedicated to women, and more particularly, to new mothers, just as in the case of the researched organization. Understanding work-life balance as 'family-friendliness' signifies that it is a gender issue, and that it concerns women more often. As the literature highlights, this gender association may be the reason why women do not take advantage of the organizational tools of family-friendliness, because using them creates disadvantages for their careers and reproduces gender segregation at the workplace (Kalocsai, 2010).

Participating in project work and the interviews conducted within the former allowed me to picture the tools and initiatives that were considered components of the organization's support for work-life balance (Table 9). Among these tools, flexible working time and atypical work arrangements (part-time arrangement, home office) were considered the most important. In addition, there were some initiatives for improving family-friendliness such as the child-friendly office room in the centre building, and giving financial support to parents (financial aid for new mothers, and for participation in a summer camp). During summer, I witnessed some employees bringing their children to work on a few days. As I heard later during interviews, it was common that school-age children would come with parents to the central office during their summer break. In addition, at the time of the research, a private nursery was about to open. Furthermore, there was a program for supporting the reintegration of new mothers when they come back from maternity leave called the Welcome Program.

Table 10: Overview of work-life balance tools and initiatives available at the company

Tools/services addressing work and working time	Other services provided by the company
Flexible work	Fringe benefits Supporting access to sports facilities

Welcome program for young mothers, Part-time arrangements	Health-care services at company headquarters
Home Office	Internal system for mortgage support and life assurance
Compulsory two-week long paid leave	A single premium granted to mothers upon giving birth
Child-friendly office room at company headquarters	A social fund supporting summer camps for employees' children
Private nursery at company headquarters	Free parking facilities

As can be seen, the company has a well-established system for supporting work-life balance. Employees' satisfaction with work-life balance was monitored every year through an Employee Commitment Survey. According to the results from the last two years, satisfaction with work-life balance slightly decreased (2014: 52%, 2015: 47%, 2016: 49%), but satisfaction with the situation in the HR department decreased most among all departments: employee satisfaction with work-life balance decreased by 9% by 2016 compared to the previous year. This was the reason why the project work focused on people working at the HR department, and asked them which tools they were using, how they cope with overtime, and what else they would require to create a better work-life balance. The presentation of findings follows, in which I focus on two aspects: one is the work-life balance tools and initiatives the asked employees use, and the next is employees' experience with working in an organization which could be characterized by having a culture of long working hours.

It is clear from the interviews and survey conducted within the project work that employees, in general, knew about and wanted to use the work-life balance tools provided by the organization. They all stressed that they needed a reduction in working time. Almost all of the survey respondents (27 out of the 30), for instance, reported working at least ten additional hours per week. During the interviews with the HR persons about work-life balance, it also appeared that overtime is a permanent feature of the department, both for women and men. What is more, employees reported that the fluctuation between periods when there was a bit more work and periods when there was no overtime had declined. Instead, a working culture had emerged in which the fluctuation was only between periods with less intensive and more intensive overtime.

Even those employees who insisted on consciously trying to avoid overtime still spoke of several examples of doing overtime. One of the typical ways of doing overtime was continuing work from home, as this quote by an upper middle-level HR manager (FI 2) illustrates: *"I work 8 and a half hours, no more and no less, and a little bit more if I add home time, so I'm cheating in that respect."* Another employee (a

male administrative worker) said that, although he had claimed before that he did not use to do overtime, *"I stay even a little longer because that's my principle"*. Because everyone was adjusted to the norm that work is never complete, it was easy to slip into doing overtime.

I also would like to share an ethnographic experience. The first meeting for the project work was dedicated to designing the mini-survey that was planned to be distributed to the 40 employees working in the HR department. A discussion developed about what kind of questions we should include, and it was agreed by all that overtime had to be the subject of one of the survey questions. Instead of a version asking whether the respondent did overtime at all, the question was the following: *"What do you consider overtime? How much overtime (minutes / hour / % of mandatory working time) do you consider overtime?"* I raised the point that asking this question presumed that it is common for employees to do additional work. Finally, the survey question remained in this form. Participants in the project argued that overtime is so widespread in the organization that there is no sense changing the question to a less biased one. Answers to the survey confirmed that the project team's argument was reasonable: out of the 31 respondents, only 3 answered that they understood that all additional working hours were overtime. All the other respondents – albeit with some variation – concentrated on explaining what amount of additional working hours counted as overtime:

> *"If I work an extra 1-2 hours to catch up, I don't consider it overtime, but rather only if I basically don't want/planned to work more that day, but have to."* (male, 30)

> *"Overtime is a problem when it takes time away from something that is more important to me in my personal life. If there is none, it doesn't matter how much I'm in for beyond 8 hours a day."* (male, 38)

> *"There are tasks, not working hours - and until they're done, I can't talk about overtime, but because there are so many tasks, there's always overtime."* (female, 42)

> *"It is difficult to break it down, for me it is a matter of commitment. You have to condense the SOS tasks for the day. If I can't do it while I'm in the office, I'll continue working remotely. Overtime of about 0.5-1 hour per day would be acceptable, but we work much more than that, currently, working time is not equal to office time, but extends well beyond it."* (female, 34)

What we can also see from the last quote above is that overtime does not always happen in the workplace. Second, the practice of doing overtime has become so normalized in the organization that it was accepted that this is how work has to be done in a large, competitive organization. The legitimacy of overtime was not questioned at all. In line with this, there was a general attitude during the project meetings – which the result of the work-life balance interviews also confirmed – that managing work-life balance and doing overtime is a *"matter of individual perception"*, therefore *"there is not a general solution"*.

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Meeting participants were very explicit about overtime too: *"Overtime is overtime for those who feel it"*, *"They beat the horse that drives"*. (fieldnotes) The project members even referred to the research organization as a workplace that has a "*culture of overtime.*" Consistent with this view, the project team did not look for changes or any solutions to the issue of overtime; instead, they started to focus on the individual responsibility for accepting and doing overtime. A couple of suggestions were made about how to overcome the problem of overtime. These included developing personal competencies for time management, communicating needs, and facilitating meetings more efficiently. Similarly, to other examples for literature (Burnett et al., 2010; Hochschild 2001; Padavic et al., 2020), the attention was given to the work-life balance narrative and its further improvement, but none of the suggestions included intentions to change the organizational level system the "*culture of overtime.*"

In line with the above findings about the culture of long working hours, informants in survey responses and interviewees also shared the view that the primary type of difficulty regarding work-life balance was time-based conflict. These experiences were even stronger in the case of those women who had children and appeared to be the primary caretakers of children and/or of older parents. In their cases, interviews revealed that besides time-based conflict, many examples of stress-based conflicts occurred too, such as constant fatigue, conflicts with spouses because of household duties, and feeling guilty because of not spending enough time with family.

Interestingly, those employees in senior positions, most typically male managers, did not necessarily speak of about difficulties and stresses although they otherwise did more overtime than average and did not take advantage of the work-life balance tools offered by the organization, except for flexible working time. Therefore, to be more precise, they reported employing a flexible working schedule, and often doing overtime, but did not report difficulties with work-life balance. Unexpectedly, those women who worked part-time at the time of the research or had any experience of working part-time previously were the least satisfied with their work-life balance. They often mentioned how tired they were, and even reported to doing overtime and regularly working at night (more details in the following sections).

'Flexible working' was communicated as a work-life balance tool. As such, it was mentioned on the website, and survey respondents and project team referred to it as one of the most crucial tools for supporting employees to reconcile their work and life. Interviews, however, confirmed that the picture about flexible working is much more complex, and controversy could be detected between the organizational perspective and intentions related to flexibly working, and employees' experiences with it. An often-mentioned example of flexible working was the opportunity for parents to bring their children to the workplace for a day (at least this was the practice at the headquarters of the company) during summer break in schools. In addition, interviewers often mentioned that if they needed, they could visit doctors, or take an older parent to the doctor's during the workday, and they did not need to take sick leave on these days.

Nevertheless, the most prominent example of flexible working was that employees did not have to start by 8 a.m., but could show up later, and could even take care of private matters at the workplace, if needed.

Despite the positive sides of flexible working condition, the requirement of the organization that employees have to be available in a flexible way (employer-driven flexibility) was more potent than employees' interest in flexible working when needed (employee-driven flexibility) (Hobson – Fahlén, 2009). First, it turned out that those working in a managerial position have working contracts that specify 40 hours of flexible working per week. Therefore, a flexible working schedule was not a matter of individual choice. Furthermore, those employees, most of the time women with managerial positions with children who have other obligations than doing paid work, were generally not positive about flexible work. The few stories about work and private matters that women related show that, first of all, they could use flexibility to only a certain extent, and second, they have little say about how much work, and how they can work, in practice. For instance, mothers (and fathers) said that they could stay at home with their children when they were ill, but the price for this was working at night. Even man managers spoke about the difficulties caused by flexibility: "it means 24 hours standby.", or as one women manager said – what is wrong with flexibility? "*only lower bound*", describing how she always has to be available and ready for work, which has no upper limit.

It is well known from previous studies (Hoschchild, 2001; Kalocsai, 2010; Padavic et al., 2020) that although companies introduce programs and tools designed to increase work-life balance, they do it in their own interests. For instance, flexible working supports long hours of intense work. As we could see from the above examples, such conditions of working long-hours *("it means 24 hours standby.")* and flexible working (employer-driven flexibility) characterize the work both for men and women. This is important in particular because literature reports that men managers too increasingly experience distress and difficulties connected to work-family conflicts due to the long work hours and flexibility-driven presenteeism – with the difference that they keep advancing in their career (Geszler, 2016; Padavic et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2013).

The examples mentioned above also demonstrate that flexible working and frequent overtime contribute to diminishing the borders between work and the domain of home (Acker, 2006a; Hoschchild, 2001). Respondents intensively used info-communication technologies to continue work at home, or even on the way to the workplace. An HR manager (male, married, three children, EI 1), for instance, explained that on the way to the central office, he makes phone calls to colleagues. Thus, when he arrives by nine in the morning, he has already been in contact with them, answered emails, and set up meetings. Reading and answering emails while travelling to the workplace was a common practice. Managers also said that they read and answers emails when at home, especially if an answer is needed urgently. Similarly to the findings

of previous research regarding work-life balance and working practices (Holth et al., 2017; Primecz et al., 2016), info-communication devices played a significant role in sustaining availability for work.

This finding clearly illustrates that having a successful work-life balance depends, at least in part, on individual experience and needs. However, it is also true that creating work-life balance does not entirely depend on individual needs and preferences, but also on the opportunities and abilities an individual can use in a given organizational and social context (Hobson–Fahlén, 2009; Hobson et al., 2011). In this research, it turned out that, despite flexible working being accepted and praised as an organizational norm, employees could not fully advocate for their individual interests when using a flexible working schedule. Flexible working primary met the needs of the organization (employer-driven flexibility, Hobson–Fahlén 2009), and was an integral part of a 'boundless time culture' (Kvande, 2009).

When asking about the need to ensure a better work-life balance, two different and distinct characters/settings derived from the culture of long working hours emerged, as these created difficulties for employees. First, I found that stress-based conflicts arose not only from the lack of time spent with family, but because work intensively enters into the space and time of the private sphere due to flexible working practices and overtime (also at home), as supported by the ICT devices. See, for instance, these answers given to a question about respondents' needs:

"...the amount of time for private life and tranquillity should be ensured."

"Work is confined to working hours, and the period after working hours is spent entirely to oneself, completely withdrawn from work..."

"...I have time to recharge, to do other things, without work interfering with my private life."

As we see, survey respondents expressed a strong need to maintain clear borders between work and home, and to have a work-free private life. The blurring boundaries between work and family/private life is a frequently discussed issue in the corresponding literature (Acker 2006; Hochschild 2001; Kumra 2010; Kvande 2009).

The other need the employees expressed was connected to a general work-related process that could be described as a 'meeting culture'. As I was told, both managers and employees in professional positions scheduled their working days around the number of meetings they were supposed to attend. Even the project team had enthusiastic conversations about how to improve and make meetings more time-efficient. This finding is line with those of Geszler (2016), who studied managers fathers' work-life balance and similarly found that due to the high number of meetings the managers had to attend, they lacked time for administrative and operational tasks.

In this research, it was often mentioned too by interviewees that a meeting culture prevented them from using the home office as often as they would like to.[28] The home office option was available at the organization but only to a limited extent. It was not a formally established system in the HR department. I learned from the interviews that those who could work at home had to negotiate this informally with superiors. This practice is well known from empirical studies that describe how in order to succeed with using work-life balance tools, women managers often have to rely on informal channels (Hochschild, 2001; Williams et al., 2013).

Some of the interviewees also talked about working at the home office, but it turned out that what they meant was that they regularly worked at home during the evenings, as they could not finish work at the office, partially due to the meeting culture. Although not many employees used a home office (i.e. a set working day at home), many of them mentioned this as a work-life balance tool they wished to use.

However, I only met three women (two of whom with small children) who used the home office not as an extension of their working time, but as a set working day once every two weeks. They used the opportunity to work at home to complete all the tasks they could not finish at the office, and to do those that required a higher level of concentration. Therefore, the reason they liked the home office was the calm and silent atmosphere that the home can provide, where they can work more efficiently and intensively. There are no meetings or other people to disturb them, and they could even save time on travelling. What is important here is that using overtime was not understood primarily as a work-life balance option, but rather an opportunity to complete tasks at home. Therefore, if the home office had a positive influence on work-life balance, it was achieved indirectly; i.e. by decreasing the time spent travelling between the office and home, and by decreasing stress related to an accumulation of tasks. Independent of this finding, the home office was mentioned by many respondents as a work-life balance tool they wished to use.

To sum up, the solution for a better work-life balance was seen on the one hand as reducing overtime, and on the other, as increasing work efficiency. As an additional need, employees also expressed their wish – mainly during the interviews – to make home office and part-time work available to a greater extent. The many requests for part-time work particularly contradicted organizational claims about the availability of this form of work. It was communicated via all kinds of channels (the website, survey results, senior managers' opinions at the workshop) that part-time work exists. In addition, I had already learnt during the expert interviews that part-time work was also considered a career-supporting option for women returning from maternity leave, and as such a means of improving equality (see Chapter 6.1.). I also found that part-time workers were not satisfied with their work-life balance.

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[28] At the time of conducting the research, use of the home office was not as widespread as it was at the time of submitting the thesis.

In essence, a few contradictions emerged about part-time work. Why did women express the need for part-time work when this option was already implemented in the organization? Why did women working part-time report difficulties with managing their work-life balance? Why did I rarely meet women working part-time at the researched organization? In order to get a more complete picture and to resolve the contradictions about part-time work, I turn to investigate the availability and the role of part-time work in the organization, which may be characterized as having a culture of long working hours.

6.3.2. Part-time work at the organization

As may be seen from the previous chapter, the organization offered a wide range of work-life balance practices and initiatives. Discussions with interviewees and survey results revealed that employees are aware of the availability of these practices and initiatives, and gender-neutral access to the work-life balance programs, in general, was emphasized. In the case of part-time work, however, the organizational message was clear: its primary intent is to support women with young children after their maternity leave. This was offered in the framework of the organization's "Welcome Back" program aimed at helping women who are transitioning from full-time motherhood. In this way, the organization provided targeted support and exceptional attention for women who become mothers.

In line with the organizational practice of offering part-time work, it was also very typical that in conversations during the work-life balance project meetings, and during the interviews, part-time work was always mentioned in connection with women. Using the framework of Hobson and Fahlén (2009), the Welcome Back program designed for returning mothers was a way in which the employer could differentiate among employees, and is thus a clear example of women being targeted as embodied workers through a work-life balance program.

The sources for the analysis of this section about women working part-time were primarily the field notes taken at project meetings and the (career and work-life balance) interviews with the small number of women who happened to have been part-timers during their employment history. The data is also complemented with those parts of the other interviews that were conducted with full-time employees, during which part-time work was mentioned by men or women managers too, or they shared experiences about working with part-timer women.

Overall, I met eight women (Table 10) who had some experience of part-time employment. Three of them were working part-time at the time of the research (an upper-level manager, married with one child, a lower-middle level manager, divorced with two children, and an HR professional woman, married with one child). Two women had previously worked in a part-time position at the company (a woman HR professional, married with one child, and a senior woman, married with one child). Two of the women out of the sample of part-timers worked at other companies in part-time positions (a senior woman, married

with two children, and a mid-level manager, married with two children). I also included a story of a woman whose request to work part-time was refused.

The weekly hours of part-time work varied between 20 to 32 hours per week, but the majority of respondents worked 30 hours per week. However, discussion with the women revealed that they often did overtime, similarly to those managers and professional who work full-time. Their roles ranged from upper-middle level to low level, as they were project managers and professionals in the field of marketing/PR and HR. Typically, they all received their part-time positions upon returning from maternity leave. Except for two cases, all the women had spent a relatively short period in this part-time arrangement. One of them, for instance, had had a part-time arrangement for less than six months. Despite the minor variation regarding positions, marital status, and number of children, I consider this group of part-time as women consisting of a homogeneous group, because they were all highly-educated and belonged to the middle class.

Table 11: Overview of the sample of part-time professional and manager mothers

	Level of Management/ Division	Marital status, number and (age of) children	History of part-time work
1.	Upper-Middle/ Manager at HR	Married, one child (11)	Working part-time for indefinite duration, 30 hours/3 days/week
2.	High/Manager at Marketing	Married, 1 child (1)	Previously worked part-time at the researched organization for 6 months, 20 hours/5 days/week
3.	Middle/Manager at Marketing	Divorced, 2 children (8, 2)	Working part-time for indefinite duration, but will change to full-time, 32 hours/4 days/week
4.	Mid-level Professional 1 at HR	Married, one child (4)	Working part-time, 30 hours/5 days/week The duration of part-time employment is unknown.
5.	Mid-level Professional 1 at HR	Married, one child (5)	Previously worked part-time at the researched organization at a lower level of management for 6 months, 30 hours/5 days/week
6.	Middle/Manager at HR	Married, two children (6, 4)	Previously worked part-time at the same level but not at the researched organization for 6 months, 30 hours/5 days/week
7.	Upper-Middle/ Manager at Process Management	Married, 2 children (11, 11)	Previously worked part-time but not at the researched organization at a senior level in an organization with a flat hierarchy, 20 hours/5 days/week

6.3.3. Conflicting interpretations about part-time work

Senior managers, male and female alike, strongly agreed that part-time work is already implemented at the organization, and is a work-life balance tool which exists and is available. I heard this said during interviews, and it was confirmed in the survey. In addition, when I participated in a meeting with senior managers from the HR department, I heard them arguing that they do not have to think further about part-time arrangements as their implementation at the organization has been accomplished.

When talking about career plans, young female managers and professionals especially appeared to believe that there is no reason why they should not be able to apply for a part-time arrangement after their maternity leave (see also Chapter 6.2.2.). They listed examples of women managers they knew who were working part-time. The interviewees, however, tended to repeat the same examples of part-timers over time, and I also met a woman working part-time, who, for instance, did not know about other women working part-time:

> "...as far as I know, I'm the only one who's part-time, maybe there's someone else who's part-time, but there's no one else in the bank who's part-time as a manager..."

In addition, when I asked those women who had expressed the intention of working part-time upon returning from maternity leave whether they know about the process of requesting part-time arrangements at the organization, none of them could refer to a formal system implemented by HR. Instead, they all mentioned that they would discuss it with their superior when it was time.

Despite the organizational narrative about universal (although gendered) access to part-time arrangements, I did not meet that many women working part-time. However, despite the common belief about the general existence of a kind of guaranteed right and the open accessibility of part-time work for young mothers, the individual stories of part-timers revealed a different story. Finally, I identified four interrelated factors that were essential for obtaining a part-time position at the company.

First, only those women could work part-time who had a working relationship with the organization before taking maternity leave. One of the mid-level HR women managers (a mother of two), spoke about why she did not ask for part-time work, although she would have preferred to have a part-time arrangement: *"...I came from the outside, so I certainly didn't ask initially"*. It seems that being a fresh employee at the organization was a reason for not requesting a part-time arrangement. The next factors, identified from the stories of the part-timers, offer more insight into the reason for the success in getting such a position.

The second factor is that obtaining a part-time position was determined by an informal process of negotiating with the part-timers' superiors before the period of maternity leave took place. Similarly, to the process described in the study on recruitment processes by Glass and Fodor (2011) (on individual negotiations, see also Kalocsai, 2010), the women experienced a kind of 'second screening process' when

returning from maternity leave. In some cases, negotiations about part-time arrangements had already started before childbirth, and continued while on maternity leave. Therefore, those who returned as part-timers were already familiar with this arrangement.

It was typical during the negotiation process that superiors established a starting date for the part-time positions. One of the women managers (Marketing, mother of two) recalled the process this way:

> "...I left with the idea that this position would be kept for me, and that I would return in a year and a half, but there were all sorts of changes here in the meantime ... and then [the manager] asked me to come back, and it was in May last year, that this would be set up, and it would be good if I could come back".

Here we can learn from this respondent's story that she had returned before she had planned. However, the fact that her superior was discussing her return and the possibility of a part-time position was not a surprise for her, as she had remained in relatively close contact with the latter. From a story of another interviewee (HR Professional 1, mother of one) it also becomes clear that there was pressure on women who were offered part-time arrangement while still on maternity leave to accept it:

> "My daughter was one and a half years old when I returned. Let's say, I could have stayed, but I was already approached with several offers that weren't so suitable, and then [my manager] approached me saying that there was a position here in the team, and it could be in 6 hours, and we worked together a lot, so I saw from the other side, quite a few projects that we had worked on together."

The above-quoted woman did not seem to feel this pressure – perhaps because it was not only the negotiation process which appeared to be an essential factor in the realization of a part-time arrangement, but also due to a pre-existing good relationship that the negotiation process with the superior could start. This result is so far in accordance with previous research findings that show that a formal policy is not enough for the uptake of alternative working arrangements, and superior play an essential role in the negotiating process about part-time work (Formánková–Křížková 2015; Glass–Fodor 2011; Primecz et al. 2014).

Therefore, what we can also see from the two last quotes is that superiors play a crucial role in the realization of part-time positions. Interviewees were aware of the role of their superiors:

> "But for this [part-time work], I think what it takes, not the area itself that gives it, but we have a boss who not only hears and says it, but also does it, so it's absolutely up to him to apply working from home, part-time work, all this in this way." (Marketing, mother of two)

The HR manager (middle manager, mother of two) who did not feel she had a right to ask for part-time arrangements as a newcomer explained the importance of the superiors' role more explicitly:

"So, in the end, in our place, all these measures depend on the employer's authority, ... there is no uniform regulation, so whether to allow home office or part-time work, so it is absolutely up to him or her."

From this quote we could conclude that senior managers decide about part-time positions based on their means, i.e., the existence of an open part-time position in their team. However, this assumption was contradicted by the same HR manager quoted above, as she told how she had facilitated the recruitment of two women into part-time positions which could be filled in the form of job-sharing. She completed the recruitment process, but the superior manager ultimately vetoed the arrangement due to his distrust of part-time work. This story perfectly illustrates that the positive attitude of a superior is an essential factor in the realization of a part-time position.

Given the above, when interviewees talked about the role of superior regarding part-time arrangements, they tended to frame them as benevolent individuals with good intentions. Thus, interviewees usually praised their superiors for allowing them to work part-time, like this:

"[the manager] he absolutely understands this situation and he's a partner in it and I'm grateful for that, otherwise I don't know how I would do it" (HR professional 1).

Finally, the fourth factor that defines the opportunity to receive a part-time position is independent of the superior's decision, attitude, or personality. Stories support the claim that part-time arrangements were almost none-existent at above mid-level positions. Therefore, the grade of the positions that mothers wanted to return to also turned out to be a determining factor. A female manager (Marketing, mother of two, divorced) working in a higher-level position, for instance, recalled that she wanted to return in a part-time position after six months of maternity leave, but her superior denied her request. She had raised her request to other superiors, but as she recalled *"...I was told not even to ask* [the HR department].*"* She was told that her position did not fit with a part-time schedule.

However, it seems that senior mothers could sometimes make minor compromises, as the example of another high-level female manager (Marketing, mother of one) shows. She returned after six months of maternity leave into the same position she had left before. She worked in a four hours/day part-time arrangement for five months. After this, her request to work in a six hours/day part-time arrangement was rejected by her superior, so she had no other option than to work full-time. She also added that she knows that she was the only person to have worked part-time in such a high-level management position.

Furthermore, there was only one case of an upper-middle HR manager (married, one child) who as able to secure her part-time position in the long term (she worked 30 hours per week). Additionally, she was also an example of how part-time arrangements and a high-level position were mutually exclusive settings. The price of her secure part-time position was that she often did overtime, was available at any

time, and worked on her days off. She also said during the career interview that she has no intention to aspire to a senior position because it would exclude the opportunity to work part-time. Similarly, another woman manager (Marketing, mother of two) explicitly claimed, while thinking about her plans for a career…:

> "I'd like to keep this work schedule, ... but I'm starting to accept that it might be at the expense of my career."

Therefore, it turns out that part-timers could take on positions up to the middle level or upper-middle level. In addition, other than the two examples of the women managers mentioned above, most of the women had held their part-time positions for no longer than one year, typically when their children were under the age of three. The women I interviewed represent exceptional cases, especially those who had a senior position while working part-time. They all achieved their part-time arrangements based on their previous employment relations, including good relationships with their superior. Following the 'agency and capability' conceptual framework, the interpretation strengthens this finding that taking a part-time position does not entirely depend on individual decision-making and control for choosing part-time. Inevitably, the gender norms legitimate when women choose part-time work; this is how communities and society may impact the agency freedom to make decisions or claims. Besides, we could also see, particularly in the case of women working at higher managerial levels, that they could not convert their individual resources into claims for part-time arrangement long-term (Hobson et al., 2011; Nielsen 2017). To conclude, the informal practices of obtaining a part-time position reveal that this arrangement is not available universally to everyone, as generally believed.

6.3.4. Adapting to a culture of long working hours

International academic literature reports that the ambitions of highly educated women towards work and career do not decrease when they have a family, even if they change to a part-time arrangement, although their level of ambition can decrease temporarily. Despite their aspiring career plans and commitment to workplaces, they face difficulties with career advancement because they work part-time; their career slows down, and they are directed into dead-end positions (Benschop et al., 2013; Dick, 2010; Tomlinson–Durbin, 2010).

The resent research shows that not all of the part-timer mothers were able to return to the same position they had before maternity leave, but when they returned, the position they obtained was at the same organizational level as previously. One of them said (HR professional 1, mother of 1) that she did not like her new job at first, but then accepted it knowing that it was temporary (it lasted 6 months), and she also added that *"so I didn't have to work overtime in the first period, it was so good"*. Her story eventually had

a positive outcome: when she worked again full-time, she returned to the same worksite as she did, before becoming a mother that was associated with greater professional challenges.

All the other interviewees valued their part-time positions positively, even if they could not do the same job, they were doing before. Instead, they talked about new challenges and opportunities to develop their skills. Furthermore, most of them had taken on part-time arrangements as a temporary solution; therefore, it was clear to them that when their children were older, they would return to full-time positions. They never talked about the 'eight-hour working day' as a form of pressure. When of the HR professional (HR professional 1, mother of 1) spoke of how she had changed back to a full-time arrangement, she said: *"After a while I could manage eight hours".* Similarly, to the earlier return to the workplace from maternity leave, the change to an eight-hour working day was not experienced as being problematic.

Thus, part-time work was considered a transitional period by all respondents; accordingly, none of them had their part-time position for longer than one year, except for two of the respondents who had secured their part-time position for the long term. In addition, these part-timer women managers did not aspire to senior management positions, as I learned from their career plans. In this sense, they did not disturb the organizational narrative that part-time arrangements are not compatible with top-level management.

I believe that part-time mothers' willingness to return to the workplace earlier than they had planned, and the short duration of these arrangements, show signs of a strong commitment to their workplace. Although the former admitted that they could not stay as late in the evening at their workplace as they had done before having a family, none of them seemed to think that their work and career was less critical. They still had plans for deepening their professional knowledge or accepting moves, although in a horizontal direction within the organization. So part-time positions were not understood as a choice to withdraw from their careers. Instead, part-time arrangements represented a period that helped them to combine work and family when they had small children. Therefore, in the cases of the women I interviewed, the reduction in working time did not correspond to a reduced commitment to work and career.

Corresponding with the perspective of part-timers as committed employees, I also found that, on the level of the organization, superiors and colleagues had a persistently positive perception of women who worked part-time. This was based on their experience that part-timers were available for work in the same way as full-time employers. Some of them even said that they did not find any difference between full-time and part-time employees regarding their availability or the quality of their work. A female senior manager (FI 2) explained: *"It (part-time work) causes much strain for our full-time employers, but only at the beginning."* Then she acknowledged that *"after (that) everything goes routinely"*. Another male manager said that *"part-time work does not cause any disruption to work (EI 1)"*, when he spoke about how he had experienced having a part-timer on his team. As we can see, the norm of long working hours is strengthened by comparing part-timer to full-timers. Similarly, a woman manager with a part-timer on her team also

agreed that she did not experience any difference between the availability for work of someone who works six or eight hours per day:

> "No, not at all with 6 hours workers, most parents would take 6 hours. It's not perceived at all, ... the 6 hours that would be most preferred is no longer perceived."

This positive attitude towards the part-timers at the company somewhat contradicts the international literature that describes a negative attitude towards highly educated women who work part-time (Benschop et al., 2013; Dick, 2010). The argument may arise that those part-timers who were interviewed perhaps did not want to speak about the organization negatively. Nevertheless, when concentrating on how part-timers work (for instance, how many hours they work in addition to the contracted working hours), it became evident that part-timers were not exempt from the organizational requirements of working long hours, and flexibly. According to the literature, part-time managers are not an exception in terms of providing long working hours and flexibility when required (Hochschild, 2001; Tomlinson–Durbin, 2010). The data analysed here reveal a similar situation, showing that part-timers are expected to be ready for work and be flexible in relation to the demands of employees (employer-driven flexibility, see: Hobson–Fahlén, 2009).

We can also see that while the availability and work performance of part-timers is rewarded, they are compared to those who work full-time, hence strengthening the culture of long working hours. The question then arises whether a mother who works part-time could be perceived as an employee who is available for work in the same way as a full-time employee. In order to address this issue, I explore the working patterns of part-time mothers.

Those women who work part-time represent an exceptional group within the group of highly skilled female employees working at the middle level of the company. However, this exceptional status does not mean that it is easy for them to manage their part-time positions. Consider this quote from one of the female managers during a project-work meeting: "... *she (part-timer mother) also works part-time, but, let us say, she works a lot during the nights*". Similarly, see the example of a mid-level HR manager (married, mother of two, worked part-time at another organization) in relation to the problems of part-time work in practice. When she announced her resignation, she was offered an upgraded part-time position, but did not accept the offer because she knew that *"managing part-time work is not possible here"*. Another part-time (upper-middle level manager, mother of one) mother shared her experience during an informal conversation, explaining that in the last few days she had worked until late, and that she often finished work at 11 p.m. at night. This kind of demanding schedule is not a manageable situation for a part-timer.

The day-to-day routine of maintaining work helps reveal more precisely that part-timers also internalize the culture of working long hours of the company with one small but substantial difference to full-timers: they did not have to be physically available outside of their contracted working time, but they

had to be available in terms of the time spent at work. Signs of doing overtime were well known to colleagues as well. For instance, 'overtime' was a big issue of discussion during project work; participants talked about who works too much, and participates in too many projects. I heard the following on these occasions part-time mothers were discussed: *"At home I think she works 8-10 hours, even on weekends, at night", "My colleague sits next to me, she never works six hours, but rather 7 or 8 hours."*

Part-timers could not avoid doing overtime, even on a day-to-day basis. Part-time mothers mentioned all kinds of occasions on which they had worked in addition to the work they did at their workplace. They reported that they take work home on a daily basis, and usually start to work again via a home office system when their children have fallen asleep. One professional mother (HR professional 1, mother of child) even said that she could hardly wait to become a full-timer again so that she would have enough time at her workplace to finish her work instead of taking it home.

In addition to work at home during the night, I noticed several other ways of doing overtime, which were not even considered by the respondent mothers as overtime. It was typical, for instance, that they finished working at the workplace a bit later:

> *"Well, right now, I'll put in an extra half an hour, I do that regularly, but not much more, not much lately. But if you had asked me that in April-May, it would have been more difficult."* (HR professional 1, mother of child)

> *"And by the way, it happens, so these 5 hours have recently slipped into half past five, and sometimes I'm here until 6:00 or half past six, especially when the children are at the grandparents', and at these times even longer."* (Mid-level manager, Marketing, mother of two)

The second quote not only illustrates that overtime is almost invisibly present in the working culture, but how it has almost invisibly become a greater part of the working day. It was also widespread that part-time employees were available for their superiors and colleagues outside of their working schedule, at any time when required. For instance, the interviewees shared that they often worked on their free days, too. I was also often told that, in cases when their children are ill, mothers stay at home with them, but instead of taking sick leave, they do as much work as they can from home during this time, and then they have an extended working schedule the next week after the ill child has recovered. See how this mother of two children explains this style of working:

> *"And then I was at home with him, but I was able to solve that by sliding and taking holidays, I didn't have to go on sick leave, but in return my Fridays don't look like I have a whole Friday, I often slip them, and after the many slips there's a lot of things piled up that take up my day, or for some reason there is only half a day of school, so I can't really use it that way."* (Mid-level manager, Marketing, mother of two)

An upper-middle level part-time mother (HR manager, one child) revealed that it is difficult to manage when there is a need for an unexpected, extended break from paid work. This woman shared that although she was not expected to be physically present at the workplace, she was expected to do her work despite her family issues. In these cases, it was also a common strategy that the women tried to catch up with work at night.

I was able to see for myself that part-timer managers were available for work when otherwise they were not supposed to be working. One of the project work meetings was held without the HR manager who normally led the meetings. All of a sudden, an HR professional said that we should call the Manager (the project leader, who was the upper-mid level HR manager working part-time), on her day off so she would not miss what we had discussed so far. We had a half-an-hour skype meeting with her, but she did not seem disturbed by this at all, because she was already working. Therefore, as it turned out, in general, part-timers were available for their superiors and colleagues. See also this quote:

> *"...so, they pretty much know now that I'm gone for a day, there's not much urgent, but if there is urgency, they'll find me."* (HR professional 1, mother of 1)

As can be seen, a duality of working part-time and being in a state of readiness was always characteristic of the lives of manager mothers. In addition, a readiness for work was not only due to the requests of superiors. As this quote from a female manager shows (Marketing, mother of two), being in states of readiness for work at any time could be internalized so deeply that it appeared to be an individual-level decision made about working time:

> *"But work is so much a part of my life and I think about it anyway.*
>
> *I don't experience it in such a way that it's at the expense of my work-life. And on Fridays, even if I'm not working or not working at all, I look at it one or two or three times, but it's different when you just look at it on your phone. When you open the computer, it's usually once a month, but then it's for a longer period of time."*

The quoted manager did not question the legitimacy of being available, and the necessity of doing overtime. She also said during the interview that "(the) work is never done". Additionally, we can also conclude that 'availability' refers to time availability, because, as we see, this manager had a working schedule with a day off on Fridays. Therefore, we can argue that fixed, contracted time appeared to be simply a reference to spatial availability (being physically present), but not to availability and flexibility in terms of time.

Being available in terms of time was supported by ICT. The need to be available via ICT seemed to have been internalized by the women to the extent that it felt natural for them to answer phone calls and check their emails at any time. As one of the part-timer mothers explained *"I do not work when I am at home"*, and then added, *"but I check my emails many times: in the mornings, then in the afternoons, and*

the evenings when I have to work". It is described in the literature that the technical background inevitably increases the temporal availability of part-timers and potentially influences their WLB, as they can access their work via ICT (Holth et al. 2017), although this also provides an opportunity for flexibility (Primecz et al. 2016). Furthermore, as the above quote also demonstrates, part-time arrangements are no exception in terms of the diminishing borders between work and home. The quoted mother remained available online; consequently, she did not finish working when she left the workplace but only paused work, then became available again for work online or by phone.

The working practices the part-timer managerial and professional mothers shared show that it is difficult for them to stay away from work for a longer time. All these instances demonstrate that a reduction in hours does not lead to a more natural way of fulfilling care responsibilities, as long as unpredictable and long hours are part of the organizational working norm. In addition, part-time work in itself does not protect mothers from devoting a significant amount of time to working outside of their contracted, actual working time.

The overall conclusion is that women who were working part-time did not question the norm of long working hours. As can be see, they accepted the calls of superiors, and remained contactable even on days off, and due to work at night. It should be added that those part-timer mothers who regularly reported working at night also mentioned how stressed and tired they were all the time. Instead of having the opportunity of questioning the legitimacy of the norm of long working hours, the women used several strategies to cope with these difficulties. First, many of them also reported that, despite their reduced working hours, they shared childcare with spouses and grandparents on a daily basis. Then, the interviewees often talked about focusing on the development of their personal skills. For instance, they spoke about learning how to prioritize tasks better, and organizing their task into categories according to whether they required a high level of concentration. They also arranged to be available at the workplace for face-to-face meetings, but to bring home all administrative types of tasks.

In sum, the part-timers themselves made it clear that they had intensive periods work when they were available for their superiors as required, and that they never finished their work at the workplace. These factors required them to do overtime similarly to full-time employees. However, the difficulties and the experience of doing overtime in a part-time position did not necessarily lead to dissatisfaction with their positions. Instead, using individual strategies helped them to cope with the difficulties of managing time and tasks in the two domains of work and home. The presence of these individual strategies also shows that internalization of a culture of long working hours is possible through part-time arrangements too. According to Williams et al. (2013), managers internalize the expectations of organizations concerning long working hours, and assume this position as an individual responsibility, and a matter of personal skill. As the former explain, highly skilled employees have the autonomy to be responsible for managing their working

schedules. I found that the case of the part-timers reported here is similar to as described by Williams et al. (2013).

6.3.5. Making sense of part-time work

Despite the managerial and professional part-timer mothers with negative work-life balance experiences, such as being constantly tired, they were satisfied with their situation of being part-timers: *"... basically I like this way of life"* (Marketing, mother of two) – said a woman respondent who was working part-time for an indefinite duration. The senior woman managers who had had a part-time position for six months similarly recalled this time in her life in this way: *"was a quality of life"*. Respondents provided consistent answers regarding the reasons for their positive attitude towards their part-time arrangements. Some of them mentioned the extra time that the part-time arrangement could provide them with:

> *"...I have the time to take care of the things I have to take care of with a family, ... it means a lot to me"* (Marketing, mother of two).

However, what they appreciated was the time they could free up for their children, and the corresponding feeling of fulfilling the role of being a good mother despite working a lot. The question arises here what it means exactly by being 'a good mother'. Let us see some examples. One of the HR managers (mother of two with a part-time position at her previous workplace) who could not have a part-time position at the present company but would have preferred to have one, said that due to long working hours she could not spend time with her children in a way she thought would be suitable for them:

> *"I experienced that a better work-life balance could be achieved (when working part-time), of course it also depends on me how much I can work and how much energy I have... Now, I feel I have to sacrifice a lot because of work, and this sacrifice is too big, because I am so tired at the end of the day that I do not have energy to provide attention to the people I love the most. I am too tired to give them attention. ... I do not have a chance at all to pick up my children from the kindergarten, and even if my husband can, because he works from home, as a mother it doesn't feel right."*

She was well-aware that part-time work does not in itself guarantee a balance between work and life; nonetheless, she agreed that part-time work could help create a working schedule which would allow her to be with her children and family when they needed it (most probably in the afternoons), not only when she was too tired to be with her family after a long working day.

The next quote again illustrates how this senior woman (married, mother of one) also admitted that part-time work does not automatically mean a better work-life balance. However, she argued that part-time work could create the chance for her to have a work schedule that allowed her to devote sufficient time and energy to her family. She recalled the days when she had worked part-time for a few months:

"If I could, I would work part-time. I have days when I just think about surviving at the end of the day… I can say that a 4-hour working schedule provided a quality of life. I could be present everywhere (work and home) in such a way that I even could dedicate time to myself. Now, I do not have time for myself at all, as all I want is to manage to be here 100% when I am here (at work), and to be with my child 100% when I am with her."

As we see, what she highlighted is not only that she wants to spend time, but the 'right' time with her child. Accordingly, the part-time mothers and those who had experience working part-time provided consistent answers regarding the reasons for their positive attitude towards their part-time arrangements, and the latter created quality time. This upper-middle level HR manager (mother of one) who had been able to secure a part-time position in the long term spoke more directly about her reason for preferring to work part-time:

"(I work part-time) … because of my child – in order to have such days when I can be her mother – for real".

The attitudes of the other respondents also show that childcare means more than merely carrying out everyday tasks related to taking care of children. What was important for these mothers was time appropriately spent with their children, and the ability to provide them with care and attention. As in the previous quote, the HR manager reflected on her parenting in the way that she called herself a "mother" in relation to providing the right time and attention to her child. Being in a good mental state was also part of being a good mother *("when I am with the child, I am 100% with him or her")*. All these claims reveal that mothers tried to fulfil the societal expectations of intensive mothering (Green 2015). It was evident to them that a good mother does not work long hours, and the reason for reducing (or having a desire to reduce) their paid working time was for them to become "real mothers". They felt that they could perform this role of being good mothers if they spent enough quality time with their children. As they saw it, part-time work allowed them to dedicate enough time and energy to their children. It is relevant to note here that independently of the managerial level, all women carried the strong feeling (often guilt) - internalizing the strong social expectations of ideal mothering - that too much work takes away time from spending with their children (see also, Chapter 6.2.3. on senior women and upper-mid level women feeling guilt because of not spending enough time with their children). So, this association that work conflicts with the interests of family and children were present, independently of the level of the managerial positions the women fulfilled.

All in all, working part-time work for the manager and professional mothers meant that they could both work and fulfil the role of mothering in a way they thought was the right way. In practice, the part-time arrangements represented a privilege for these women that made it feasible for them to spend quality time with their children, in contrast to those who were working full-time. It turned out that women in part-time arrangements could better rely on a set schedule when finishing work. Therefore, they could always

leave the workplace in the afternoon, or define Fridays as a day off, or work from home. I was also told that there was a short initial time during which part-timers developed a work routine when everyone, particularly those who had a closer working relationship with them, learned their working schedules. Therefore, the part-timers had the privilege of being able to rely on their working schedule. They could be sure that they could leave the workplace on time to pick up children from the nursery, and to spend quality time with their children. It was also a privilege to have a working schedule like this, because in contrast to that of full-time employees, they had a period during the day (in the afternoon, or on a day off in the week) when they could avoid being available for work.

Additionally, these mothers tried to fulfil the profile of ideal workers at least partially: they were available when their supervisors required it, and they were also willing to work overtime, and they could always be available online. Therefore, based on the description of Christopher (2012), they engaged in intensive mothering, but in an extensive way: while identifying themselves with and being committed to their work, they also accepted the role of being primary caregivers. They described themselves as being aware of the importance of spending quality time with their children and forming a bond with them, but their stories demonstrated that they shared childcare tasks with their spouses, grandparents, and paid help on a day-to-day basis. These helpers typically took their children to childcare institutions or picked them up. In this way, the mothers were not the only caregivers for their children, but remained the responsible ones.

6.3.6. Discussion

The analysis of the work-life balance tools of the organization and employees' satisfaction with work-life balance also created an opportunity to understand better the embeddedness of women managers working at the middle level. Data shows that the organization made great efforts to improve employees' work-life balance, and was very proud of providing part-time arrangements for women who were returning from maternity leave. Similarly to other findings about multinational companies in Hungary (Geszler, 2016; Kalocsai, 2010; Primecz et al., 2016; Tóth, 2005), I discovered that, despite the organizational efforts to support employees' work-life balance, the women managers, including part-time mothers too, experienced various forms of difficulty and stress when trying to balance their work and life. Their stories showed clear signs of the presence of 'employer-driven flexibility' at the organization (Hobson–Fahlén, 2009), and a 'boundless time culture' (Kvande, 2009).

Empirical findings about the working culture of large organizations show that flexible work can lead to constant overtime, even in the case of those managers who otherwise have greater autonomy in scheduling their working routines (Hoschchild, 2001; Kvande, 2009; Williams et al., 2013). Through the analysis of the work-life balance tools and initiatives provided by the organization, this research also

revealed, similarly to the literature, that the working culture could be characterized as having 'employer-driven flexibility' (Hobson–Fahlén, 2009), and a 'boundless time culture' (Kvande, 2009). The organization made a great effort to improve employees' work-life balance. Employers considered the researched organization to be family-friendly, although not in the way described by Hochschild (2001) –
that "work becomes home, and home becomes work". The company did not become home for the employees, but because it offered a number of supporting tools and initiatives it was evaluated as being family-friendly.

However, I found that the company required managers and professionals to be available to a great extent. Similarly, to other findings about multinational companies in Hungary (Geszler, 2016; Kalocsai, 2010; Tóth, 2005), overtime and constant availability was an integral part of the organization's working culture to such an extent that the majority of respondents referred to overtime as being natural; as part of a competitive working culture. As a consequence, many employees reported difficulties with reconciling work and life, and in line with this experienced intensive working, constant overtime, and the invasion of work into the private sphere. Investigations of large organization have demonstrated that in an organizational culture where long working hours and flexibility are an integral part of the culture, employees continually experience living in a 'time bind' (Hoschchild, 2001; Tóth, 2005). According to the stories and responses of the employees, they experienced being in a time bind, but this not only involved the scarcity of time spent on private life and family, but also a scarcity of time for dealing with a heavy workload. Those managerial and professional mothers who used many work-life balance tools and were well supported at the crucial life stage of returning from maternity leave also reported difficulties and constant tiredness due to their work-life balance.

In general, except for a few positive examples of what flexibility can provide to employers in the short term, this was rather experienced as a requirement than an opportunity. Therefore, it is true in the case of this organization that using work-life balance tools such as the home office or part-time work did not improve work-life balance per se. It turned out that both the efficiency and use of these tools, (home office, part-time work, and flexibility) depended on other factors, such as the level of the employee's position, relations, previous employment story, and social role of being a mother. These results are in line with the theoretical approach which argues that the efficient use and opportunity to use work-life balance tools do not depend entirely on individuals' preferences and personal decisions (Hobson–Fahlén, 2009).

Placing the responsibility on individuals to make decisions about work-life balance strengthens the organizational perspective that employees can reconcile work and life, and may explain why those (mainly male) managers who were working in senior positions at the HR department did not mention difficulties with their work-life balance, although they frequently did overtime. In addition, they praised flexibility, and did not express the need for further tools to ease stress and difficulties related to work-life balance.

Their experience and views about work-life balance show that they come closest to what is described as 'ideal workers' (Acker, 1998). As 'disembodied, unencumbered workers' (Acker, 1998; Hobson et al., 2011), they could experience uninterrupted work, and the freedom to be able to adapt to a flexible working schedule, and, as a result, the experience of a less stressful process of work and life reconciliation.

Nagy and Vicsek, in their study on Hungarian women managers working in a multinational company (2014), highlighted that the gendered nature of the organization is intertwined with the traditional perspective of society about gender social roles. I, similarly, observed that views about social roles were a strong determinant of the experience and use of organizational work-life balance tools. For instance, men managers were more likely to reported difficulties in relation to a heavy workload so as to better fulfil the role of the 'ideal worker', and rarely talked about not spending enough time with children. Women managers, however, including part-time mothers, more often reported to feeling guilty due to not spending enough (quality) time with children. Accordingly, the women expressed their need to take advantage of those work-life balance tools, including part-time work and home office, which would increase the time that could be devoted to family life.

The relationship between part-time work and gender was perhaps most evident among the work-life balance initiatives. First, part-time work was actively communicated as reserved for women, primarily those women of with young children and/or who were returning from maternity leave – reinforcing the traditional perspective in Hungarian society that it is women's role to be the primary caretaker (Takács, 2013; Hobson et al., 2011). Second, similarly to other examples from international studies (Benschop et al., 2013; Bleijenbergh et al., 2016; Dick, 2010), part-time work was seen as a means of enhancing women's reintegration and for facilitating careers after a long break due to childbirth. This association of part-time work with mothers returning from maternity leave again reinforced the presumption that it is women who are the primary caretakers of children, hence the need to their reduced working time. According to the literature, this presumption that women are the primary caretakers also reinforces the strong cultural perception that it is women's task/duty to deal with work-life balance issues within the family (Burnett et al., 2010; Hobson et al., 2011).

Similar to the few results that are available about part-time work in post-socialist countries (Formánková–Křížková, 2015; Glass–Fodor, 2011; Primecz et al., 2014), it turned out that the formal existence of part-time work at the organization did not ensure its availability to everyone. I found that access to part-time positions was limited to a particular group of women. This was because, despite a general belief in easy access to part-time work for mothers, informal practices and a good employment relationship before maternity leave, particularly with superiors/line managers, were conditions for succeeding in obtaining part-time arrangements. Furthermore, it was found that part-time positions were limited to middle-level management, and they lasted for a relatively short duration, with a few exceptions. It became clear that

having a part-time position was the result of a complex process that included both formal and informal organizational processes, in which the preferences of part-time mothers was not the only determining factor (Hobson–Fahlén, 2009).

Similarly, to full-time employers, the majority of the women appeared to have difficulties maintaining their workload within their contracted working time, and therefore they regularly, but to a various extent, worked from home in the evenings and on their free days. Specifically, those women who were able to secure their part-time position for a longer term routinely did overtime. As we could also see, conflicts were mainly time-based, and as the scarcity of time increased, strain-based conflicts emerged as well. We can also conclude, in line with the literature, that part-time work can support women with young children in their work-life balance, but a reduction in worked hours does not in itself create the perfect balance (Formánková–Křížková, 2015; Hoschchild, 2001; Primecz et al., 2014).

The above finding additionally also shows that part-time manager and professional mothers had internalized the culture of working long hours at the company. Other employees' experiences confirmed part-timers' availability, as they insisted that work was not interrupted due to the reduction in working hours. In line with the findings of other studies, part-time workers had internalized the expectation of constant availability via ICT in a way that their online availability was not always even considered an activity connected to paid work (Holth et al., 2017; Primecz et al., 2016; Williams et al., 2013).

Also, a key finding of the research is that each of the mothers communicated a favourable attitude towards the opportunity to do part-time work, despite their difficulties maintaining an excellent work-life balance. Accordingly, part-timer mothers' positive attitudes were connected with the possibility of engaging in intensive parenting. It turned to be especially crucial for the women to be able to predict the exact time they could leave the workplace or fix a day that they could spend at home. On the level of everyday practices, all of the part-timer women had a routine of leaving the workplace to pick up their children or going home in the afternoons. It turned out that the opportunity to leave the workplace at an exact time was part of an informal negotiation process between part-timers and other organizational actors. Their routine of leaving was learned, accepted, and respected by superiors and colleagues. Other than this, the mothers did not experience a greater sense of control in terms of scheduling their working time based on their demands. In contrast, they were expected to be available, at least in terms of time. In return for the opportunity of leaving the workplace in the afternoon, the mothers continued work at nights and on their free days.

Concerning women managers and their careers, the literature points out the importance to focus on cultural norms as they constrain the career moves, values, and expectations, even more than the objective constraints (Broadbridge, 2010; Halrynjo–Lyng, 2009). In line with it, gender expectations about women's and men's caring responsibilities can provide a 'rationale' in the organizational setting for keeping women

in certain positions (Acker, 2006b; Padavic et al., 2020). The part-time arrangements helped women to meet society's perceived requirements of fulfilling the role of the primary caretaker while working (Hobson–Fahlén, 2009), and the role of being good mothers (Christopher, 2012). As members of the middle-class, these women could fulfil this role through their part-time positions (Formánková–Křížková, 2015; Geambaşu, 2014). This finding accords with other research that examined part-time work in a post-socialist context and found that women can fulfil the traditional expectations of society about mothers by working part-time. Part-time work provides the opportunity for highly qualified, middle-class women to avoid having to choose between work and taking care of family; they can fulfil both social requirements about intensive parenting and the role of a working-mother (which is said to be a post-socialist heritage) (Formánková–Křížková, 2015; Geambaşu, 2014).

Agreeing with Christopher (2012) that when the justification for the reduction in working hours is derived from the intention to conform to the ideal norm of mothering, the ideal worker norm is not challenged, this may explain why mothers positively perceived their part-time work, despite the slowdowns and penalties regarding their career development. To conclude, the working mothers in the sample viewed their part-time positions as arrangements that could help them fulfil expectations about good mothering.

As could be seen, part-time arrangements at the researched organization did not cause any disturbance in the way that working patterns were maintained. Additionally, the organizations reinforced the perception of women as the primary caretakers by providing them with the opportunity, through part-time work, to be available both for their employers and their families, which eventually resulted in difficulty managing work-life balance (Holth et al., 2017). Research on managers and professionals indicates that working for long, uninterrupted hours signify their commitment and devotion towards work, which is the appropriate behaviour in the workplace according to the norms related to ideal workers (Hochschild, 2001; Holth et al., 2017; Kvande ,2009; Williams et al., 2013). In such a work environment, part-timers appear to be less devoted towards their work and careers as these do not correspond with the norms about the ideal worker (Burnett et al., 2010; Hochschild, 2001; Benschop et al., 2013; Bleijenbergh et al., 2016; Tomlinson–Durbin, 2010). In line with such an organizational logic – according to which long working hours define career construction – the reduction in working hours appears to legitimize the slowing down of careers (Acker, 2006a; Benschop et al., 2013; Dick, 2010; Tomlinson–Durbin, 2010). Therefore, I argue that in a working culture where "work is never done" and where a commitment to long hours and presenteeism is rewarded, leaving the office at a precise time is a privileged position. This finding makes it better to understand why part-time work was praised so positively in the organization. As such, it was not taken as straightforward gender discrimination in the career advancement for women managers (see similar findings, Benschop et al., 2013).

At the organization under analysis, I found that the organizational logic that part-timer mothers are not devoted to work was not applied to part-timer women managers and professionals at the middle management level. More precisely, their career plans did not change, and in general, there were no negative outcomes for their carers because of their working part-time. There may be several reasons for this. On the one hand, part-time work did not last for too long, thus the short period of part-time work protected them from negative career consequences. The two exceptional cases of women who had been able to secure part-time positions in the long term demonstrated signs of successful adaptation to a culture of working long hours, particularly for the woman manager who had an upper-middle level position. Therefore, as these women were available according to the terms of organizational requirements, they did not experience negative consequences in relation to their careers or performance evaluation. On the other hand – and this is the second reason why part-timers did not experience negative consequences in relation to their careers –, they wanted to fulfil their career aspirations only up to and including the middle managerial level, and did not plan to make any moves which would exclude part-time arrangements. The only woman who wanted to return part-time while already in a senior position could not break the organizational norm that long working hours excludes working part-time. In general, part-time working mothers remained ambitious, career-oriented women on their own terms that did not disrupt the organization norms about how to construct a career. From the perspective of Hungarian society, these women managers are nonetheless considered to be ambitious, career-oriented women, as they returned their workplaces earlier than the average Hungarian women.

To conclude, both the relatively short duration and the temporality of part-time work arrangements – with minor exception – together with the difficulties of applying for part-time positions at higher levels, strengthens the view that work-life balance programs are not capable of challenging the organizational norms about the 'ideal worker' (Burnett et al., 2010; Hobson et al., 2011). What emerged was that part-time arrangements were a way to induce high-skilled women to adapt to ideal worker norms, at least partially at the mid-level of the organizational hierarchy. Furthermore, the career aspirations of the managers and professional mothers working part-time did not disrupt the gender regime of the researched organization, which reserved more significant opportunities for man managers to succeed in senior positions.

7 CONCLUSION

This thesis addresses the 'gender regime' of a large multinational organization in Hungary in relations to the forming processes of mid-level women managers career at the organizational level. In the analysis, I relayed on the combination of Acker's (1990, 1998, 2006a) theoretical framework for gendering

organizational processes and the capability framework (Hobson–Fahlén, 2009; Hobson et al., 2011) for interpreting individual choices and preferences under the influence and structural circumstances of the organization and societal-level gender role assumptions. The overall intention of the analysis was to examine the 'gendering' of the organization with a particular focus on mid-level women managers' career construction. The analysis, therefore, primarily concentrated on the organizational-level gendered processes of career construction. Additionally, individual-level experiences and perceptions about career advancement (and equal opportunities, too) were significant layers of the examination. The analysis of these individual layers served the intention to make a link between the organizational processes, constraints and individual agency, attitudes.

The first research question helped to explore to what extent the organization under analysis supported men and women managers' equal opportunities for careers. The analysis showed that the dominant organizational discourse implied the existence of equal opportunities for career development. This organizational discourse was strengthened by the seemingly equal proportions of women and men managers at the mid-level and the firm belief that improvement for equal opportunity has to rely on individual work performance, knowledge and personnel intentions. Career moves were presented as being inherently premised on the freedom of individual decisions and choices. Corresponding with this view, there was a strong rejection of applying positive discrimination to improve gender equality in favour of women's career advancement, especially not concerning top management, although it turned out women have limited access to this level.

The second research question addressed the organizational processes that impacted mid-level women managers' career construction. A more in-depth analysis of mid-level women managers' career trajectories and the role of the organizational processes in it was carried out. The findings reveal contradictions between the organizational discourse of gender equality and the lived reality of career construction. The results show that organizational processes can both hinder and support career construction along gender lines. In concrete terms, the analyses indicated that men were more easily able to follow a managerial career pattern that fulfilled organizational requirements. Undoubtedly, women could achieve managerial positions at the mid-level of the organization. However, they arrived through a slightly different path to the upper-middle and senior management levels than men managers. The differences include that it takes a longer time for women managers and fewer rotations before being promoted into a position. Also, women tended to gain visibility and establish recognition by relying on professional knowledge and achievements instead of relying on networking activities to improve their careers. The role of superiors, however, seemed to be of similar importance in terms of making career moves, although, for the majority of women managers, plans for obtaining a senior position were non-existent.

Additionally, the stories of women managers provided clear evidence that having a family still has a detrimental impact on women managers' career construction. Women faced discriminating expectations in relation to their prospects of having a family (i.e. their future situation) and experienced difficulty when they actually had a family – at all stages of the career trajectory and independent of the age of their children. Significantly, senior women had to cope with the organizational pressure of not being 'ideal' leaders because of gender-based expectations about their availability, which were not fulfilled due to the demands of the family. As a consequence of these differences in career building and the challenges related to having a family, women managers progressed more slowly in their careers, developed fewer competencies in relation to line management (necessary for senior positions). Nevertheless, they often specialized in their professional fields and used strategies to improve their careers that included step-by-step progression, typically towards less power-centric positions outside of headquarters or in horizontally dead-end positions. It was also clear that the career aspiration of the women managers did not disrupt the gender regime of the organization. Accordingly, the company gave men managers more opportunities to succeed in mid-level positions, and to aspire towards senior positions.

The third research question asked how the work-life balance tools offered by the organization reproduced mid-level women managers' capability of constructing their careers. The analysis of the work-life balance tools of the organization and employees' satisfaction with work-life balance also created an opportunity to understand better the embeddedness of women managers working at the middle level. The organization made great efforts to improve employees' work-life balance, and was very proud of providing part-time arrangements for women returning from maternity leave. Similarly to other findings of multinational companies in Hungary (Geszler, 2016; Kalocsai, 2010; Primecz et al., 2016; Tóth, 2005), I discovered that despite the organizational efforts to support employees' work-life balance, the women managers (including part-time mothers too) experienced various forms of difficulty and stress when trying to balance their work and life. Their stories showed clear signs of the presence of 'employer-driven flexibility' at the organization (Hobson–Fahlén, 2009) and a 'boundless time culture' (Kvande, 2009), which are clear signs of internalizing the company culture of working long hours, which situation explains the challenges in work-life balance to a great extent (Holth et al., 2017; Primecz et al., 2016; Williams et al., 2013). Besides, I could observe that views about social roles were a strong determinant of the experience and use of organizational work-life balance tools (see, the case of part-time work). All in all, I found at the researched organization, that work-life balance programs, including the part-time arrangements, were not capable of challenging the organizational norms about the 'ideal worker'. The findings about women managers' work-life balance tools also support the view that social norms and adapted roles are strong determinants of the experience and use of the former (Burnett et al., 2010; Hobson et al., 2011). What

emerged was that flexible working, part-time arrangements were a way to induce high-skilled women to adapt to ideal worker norms, at least partially at the mid-level of the organizational hierarchy.

In summary, the analysis shows that women managers were not entirely powerless in terms of making progress with their careers at the mid-level of the researched organization. On the contrary, they were perceived to be 'congruent' (Billing, 2011) with managerial positions, at least with those at the mid-level managerial hierarchy. Thus, women appeared to be empowered managers who had obtained their leadership positions based on their abilities, performance, and personal preferences. However, it is also valid to argue that many of the organizational career practices and norms, and also social expectations and norms, implicitly and sometimes quite explicitly contributed to the high value awarded to male-type career building, thus the normalization of the masculine experience of reaching top positions (Williams et al., 2012). In line with the previous statement about male-type career building, the men managers in the sample were more likely to have senior positions despite women managers' relatively equal presence, high level of acceptance, and embeddedness at the middle-level of the organization.

The results of the analysis extends previous work on 'gender, organization and careers', and thus strengthens the argument that the gender regime is reproduced through organizational processes of career construction (Acker, 1990, 1998, 2006a, 2006b, 2012; Benschop–Doorewaard, 2012). More specifically the theoretical contribution of these dissertation is that it makes implications for theory in two ways. First of all, the findings adds to existing literature on analyzing gender regime (Acker, 1992, 2006a; Benschop–Doorewaard, 2012; Nielsen, 2017; Williams et al., 2012) with the particular focus on how contemporary careers are constructed in the mid-level of large organizations. The analysis extend previous knowledge and examples to describe how gender shapes organizational context that define individual opportunities for career construction and through which mechanisms contribute to reproducing gender regime of a work organization.

The case of the investigated organization serves as an example for demonstrating how structural and social practices are embedded in organizational life and have become normalized in a way that eventually the organization tends to favour men managers, and in this way contributing to the maintenance of inequality and further strengthen the ideal worker norm. In the case of the present research, a seemingly gender-equal level of middle management was identified, but a gendered organizational substructure was found to exist behind the contemporary career-making practices (Acker, 2006a, 2012; Williams et al., 2012). The analysis of the gender substructure provides a deeper understanding of the mechanisms behind the organizational-level gender processes of career construction that incorporate the interplay between structure and agency (Nielsen, 2017; Walby, 1996; Williams et al., 2012).

Two mechanisms can be identified in particular through which gender regime is reproduced at the mid-level of a large organization. First, a central intention was to explore the complex organizational

(gendered) processes forming mid-level women managers' career construction and opportunities and to identify how and to what extent career construction is gendered in the organization. The presented research documents the actual gender differences between careers. As Acker (1998, 2006a) explains, the inequality regime is both visible and invisible. The visible signs of inequality are often limited (Acker, 2012a), as is the case at this organization: the proportion of men and women at the middle level was balanced, and there was a strong organizational belief about the existence of gender equality in terms of leadership positions. By identifying those organizational processes for career construction that are mostly invisible, but creates differences for women and men, it can be revealed how the the unequal situation for mid-level women managers is created and maintained. The exploration in this research identified several and mostly invisible processes that contributes in the gender differences and unequal situations in career construction (see, for instance, men were offered promotion earlier, men participated in rotation more often and they needed to take less steps to get to promotion, women need to reach the adequate age to get promoted, women were required to demonstrate sufficient knowledge before promotion, having a good relationship with superiors supported men differently than women).

The other layer of the mechanisms behind reproducing gender regime can be identified in the strong narratives that strengthens gendered assumptions of how women managers maintain their career in an adequate way. These strong narratives are connected to the assumed gender roles of women and men in the society. First of all, I found many examples for women's expected social role of being the primary caretakers and the cultural concept that it is women's task/duty to deal with work-life balance issues within the family (Burnett et al., 2010; Hobson et al., 2011). Contrary to my expectations, conservative attitudes were strongly expressed by women and men, especially with regard to women's primary role in caretaking responsibilities for the family. However, it also turned out that women can find ways of combing professional and managerial work with family without giving up their belief in the importance of being the primary caretakers. The other striking example of gendered assumptions in the organization, with strong connection of the pervious one, was formulated about women managers not wanting to aspire to top positions. Women managers' career aspirations demonstrated a strong internalization of this assumption, as the examples of their career plans demonstrated the adaption to the social gender roles associated with working women/mothers in Hungarian society (Blaskó, 2005; Pongrácz–Molnár, 2011; Takács, 2013). I found that women managers' strong identification with the primary caretaking role and intensive parenting determined their choices about future aspirations regarding their careers. As a consequence, the majority of women related negatively to upward career mobility. Although at first sight this may seem as a contradictory situation, but I also found that mothers in senior or upper-middle level managerial positions were applauded for having a successful career if their work-life balance was also evaluated positively. All this signifies that that recognition for having a successful career was only awarded when women managers

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fulfilled the social norm of being the primary carers of their families, no matter what level of position they had.

Nevertheless, I found antipathy towards women managers who did not seem to be successful primary caretakers. Thus, although the examples demonstrate the reverse situation for women managers with young children, the same kind of logic exists: the conflict between the acceptance of women managers on the level of organizational rhetoric and the prejudice towards them in real situations based on the social expectation of their being of good mothers. So, independently of the organizational level of women managers' positions, the acceptance as leaders were interpreted in the context of the social gender role.

In the recent sample, women seemed to have deeply internalized the social expectation of being the primary caretakers and engaging in intensive parenting. Thus, the social-level expectation of motherhood was manifested and reinforced in the organizational-level discourse by acknowledging women managers' careers only if they could successfully reconcile motherhood and work-life at the same time. Drawing on Acker's early claims about organizational logic (Acker, 1992), this finding about career and motherhood can be understood as a strong element and organizing principle of gendered processes in career construction that contributes to the maintenance and reinforcement of the gendered substructure of organizations (Acker, 1992; Benschop–Doorewaard, 1998, 2012; Williams et al., 2012).

I further argue that independent of how high women managers aspired to reach, they had developed an identity of being ambitious managers: they spoke of how their ambition was associated with developing themselves, professional growth, mastery of managerial tasks, deepening specific professional knowledge, and, overall, that they were motivated to do a high quality job. As the majority of women managers wanted to fulfil their career aspirations up to and including the middle managerial level – and thus remained ambitious on terms that did not violate the organizational norms about who belongs in the ranks of senior management –, they did not articulate career experiences as being inherently discriminatory. On the contrary, having an identity focused on professional development helped them to accommodate to the organizational requirements for career development in middle-management. This adaptation implied that the majority of mid-level women managers interpreted senior management as an undesirable ambition, instead of seeing it as an unattainable aim.

Thus, women managers' focus on career aspirations at the middle level of management strengthened the organizational view about the incompatibility of senior management with women's roles in the family. This signifies that women managers' career advancement is determined by the stereotypical gender- and cultural expectations of society (Christopher, 2012; Halrynjo–Lyng, 2009, Carli–Eagly, 2007, Nagy, 2016; Ridgeway–Correll, 2004). As we can see, despite ambitions or career plans being introduced as individual intentions and choices, they are strongly linked with socially driven norms. Accordingly, the

higher the women aspired to go in their careers, the more that caretaking responsibilities defined their means and opportunities in relation to maintaining their careers.

To conclude about the first theoretical contribution of the dissertation, the identification of mechanisms behind the gendered substruction of organization (the invisible organizational processes forming career constructions, the organizational narratives assumption about women managers ambitions and primary care taking roles) deepen the understanding on how mid-level women managers' career development have became integrated part of gender regime. This detailed exploration of mechanisms could also reveal that gender regime on one hand is still resilient. It is clear that these characteristics of career development resonate with the description of the abstract, 'ideal worker' (Acker, 1990, 1992), who, in line with twenty-first-century organizational requirements, is willing (on individual preference) to be continuously available (being capable), and to prioritize work over family demands (Acker, 2012a; Hobson et al., 2011; Hochschild, 2001; Guillaume–Pochic, 2009; Kumra, 2010; Pryce–Sealy, 2013; Williams et al., 2012). However, changes occurs at the mid-level, as the example of women managers show that they are seem to be well-adapting to the requirements of the long hours and the characteristics of the ideal work norm at least partially at the level of middle management (Acker, 2006a, 2012a; Tomlinson–Durbin, 2010; Williams et al., 2012).

The second theoretical contribution of the dissertation is that the research contributes to the scholarship by providing empirical evidence on the gender regime of a large organization in the post-socialist context of Hungary. It notably offers a critical reflection on the local contextual factors of Hungarian mid-level women managers' career situation and, in relations to it, the workplace inequality. The research findings documented that mid-level women managers' career construction constitutes a conflicting, ambiguous situation and is detrimental as it keeps women on the mid-level management. The ambiguous and unequal situation the women managers experience and adapt to it, as the findings demonstrated it, is complicated with paradoxes.

The research documented a discrepancy between the strong organizational-level narrative of equal opportunity and the actual gender differences between careers. In addition, the findings demonstrated that women's presence, especially at the middle level of the hierarchy, is well embedded in the organization. The organizational narratives showed that women were perceived as being congruent with managerial positions at the mid-level. Accordingly, the mid-level women managers appeared capable of fulfilling (although not entirely on equal terms with men) or at least partially adapt to the ideal norm of employee (Acker, 1990). The presence of women in leadership was viewed as an achievement, and they were introduced as empowered women who had achieved their leadership positions based on their abilities, professional knowledge, performance, and personal preferences. In parallel with women's well-embedded situation in middle management, the lack of women on board, the limited number of women managers in

senior and top management, and women managers' decisions not to aspire to senior positions was not problematized. On the contrary, I identified a strong belief that career support is provided on an equal basis for men and women. In the light of it, the negative consequences of positive discrimination for men was a persuasive argument for not providing any special treatment for women based on their gender (instead, diversity   was   applauded).

Previous studies on organizational gender regimes have already demonstrated that gender inequalities can be portrayed as legitimate inequalities in the organizational culture (Acker, 2012a; Benschop–Doorewaard, 2012; Halrynjo–Lyng, 2009; Tomlinson–Durbin, 2010; Williams et al., 2012). Theory on the gender organization explains that the processes of legitimizing and hence normalizing gender differences in career are underlined by the gendered discourses and assumptions (Acker, 1990; Gherardi–Poggio, 2001; Nagy, 2014; Padavic et al., 2020). In the present research, a mix of two organizational discourses contributes to the legitimization of women managers' paradoxical career situation, namely that their well-embedded situation at the middle level is also a limitation of their empowerment for further career advancement.

First, the findings demonstrated that the researched organisation stands as an example for demonstrating a backlash against the application of gender equality policy and any actions in general, without even having the experience of the actual affirmative policies implemented in the organisation. Previous studies on multinational companies and senior women in Hungary (Nagy–Vicsek, 2014; Fodor et al., 2019) already explained that the rejection of policy measures for equal opportunity derives from a negative association with "reform society by command" – and is a contradictory legacy of the forced socialist emancipation from the socialist era (Nagy–Vicsek, 2014). So, today's refusal of supporting women managers' entrance into senior positions within the framework of gender equality is the controversial effect of the forced emancipation, which led to the de-legitimisation of the avoidance of gender issues at the work organisations   (Fodor,   2002;   Nagy–Vicsek,   2014;   Fodor   et   al.   2019).

My finding on the negative connotation of the gender equality policy and actions in women's interest is very similar. The application of affirmative action to increase the proportion of female managers in certain positions was considered unacceptable. Not only because it would involve unnecessary positive discrimination but also because it would have negative consequences for those men managers who would be disadvantaged according to the organisational view represented by the interviewed HR managers and many women and men managers alike. The detected backlash was strengthened by one of the effects of the post-socialist legacy on women's participation in the finance sector (Fodor, 1997; Nagy, 2001): the majority of the employees were women at the organisation, and the organisation was not in shortages of professional, well-educated women who have access to managerial positions. Besides, this backlash is also strongly connected to the wide acceptance of traditional gender roles for explaining why senior management is not

for women with children (Fodor, 2002; Nagy, 2001; Pongrácz–Molnár, 2011).

Second, the researched organisation, however, appeared to support women managers in several ways in their managerial career. It did not make a direct intervention into the status quo between women and men, but it neither can be stated that the organisation was entirely against gender equality. The dominant organisational discourse implied that everyone has the opportunity to realise their career plans by articulating individual needs and preferences. Career moves were presented as inherently based on the freedom of individual decisions and choices, and the individual characteristics of being an ambitious manager were emphasised as the component of successful career achievement. Accordingly, women managers in the researched organisation appeared, even when comparing their opportunities and roles to what they have in the socialist state, as free and capable individuals to decide on their career. This view quite paradoxically implied the incompatibility of senior positions with the role of being a women and a mother.

Thus, women managers' capability was not questioned even it was embedded in a discourse of a particular gender equality framework. Relying on other examples from literature (Lewis et al., 2019; Fodor et al., 2019), I find it valid to argue that behind this organisational rhetoric, which places importance on individual merit and characteristics in career development, the ideals of 'business feminism' appear behind the organisational rhetoric for empowering women managers. Business feminism is interpreted for legitimising the organisational belief that successful leadership, and hence the hierarchical relations, are based on merit combined with individual characteristics such as personal ambition, self-confidence and assertiveness. Following this concept, business feminism shapes the organisational setting, typically in large, multinational companies, in such a way that it facilitates the individual strategies in women managers' career development while leaving the structural, organizational-level inequalities unchanged (Lewis et al., 2019).

This logic that gender equality in career development depends on personal achievements, so to a large extent on women managers' personal intentions and actions could be detected in the researched organization. The prominent representatives of the company shared their commitment to women's advancement but with an emphasis on the individual's actions of the target group. So, it was true in the case of this research organization that the focus was placed entirely on the individual career development of the managers, instead of changing, for instance, any requirements for long work culture or the demands for fulfilling the ideal worker norm. Women's widely assumed role of being the primary caretaker and the difficulties in work-life were valid explanation that women do not want to aspirate further in their career.

Correspondingly, women managers were praised for their professionality and talent when they succeeded in their career. There was a considerable emphasis on talents programs, career development was accessible to all men and women, and especially on the importance of the role of the reintegration program

after childbirth in career support for women. Also, all the supports for talented women were aligned with the advocacy of family-friendly policies. The organization's understanding of women managers' unequal situation was strongly connected to their work-life balance difficulties and were eventually treated as an individual-level problem. Women were inherently presented as individuals utilizing their knowledge and talent for career advancement and making their own decision on their career based on their personal preferences and choices.

Also, the presence of those few women who had reached higher managerial positions justified the view that women and men have an equal chance of having a high-achieving managerial career at the organization under analysis. It was only the more in-depth exploration (i.e., during the career interviews, shadowing days, or observation related to project work) that revealed that there are subtle differences in how men and women, think about the concrete implementation of equal chances for career development. Nonetheless, acknowledging women's difficulties with careers neither diminished the dominant discourse on equality deriving from the logics of business feminism nor the view about the organization's stated role in supporting women in their careers.

In summary, the ambiguous situation of mid-level women managers constitutes a layer of the inequality regime which is underlined and legitimized by two discourses in the organization, the backlash against gender equality policy and the post-socialist version of business feminism. It is also a specificity of this Hungarian case that the two discourses are not in contradiction with each other. On the contrary, they contribute to the embeddedness of women managers at the mid-level organizational hierarchy at the cost of limited career opportunities and the legitimization of the unequal and constrained career construction for women. In addition, both normalize the organizational standpoint that women managers career support should be treated as individual empowerment instead of making steps towards structural changes and making provisions for policy on gender equality.

The third contribution of the thesis to the literature relies on the organizational ethnography used as the research method. This thesis is among those rare examples when a researcher could enter into the research site and complete a detailed organizational study. The research method implies that the generalization of results is always challenging when research findings are based on the qualitative exploration of a single organization. Consequently, it follows from the applied methodology that by examining one specific organization, the findings help to reflect on the specific social background of a gender equality-related issue. In order to overcome this limitation, not only data is described, but a reflection on the data collection process is included. According to the literature on ethnographic research, the provision of a detailed description of the case study, and a reflexive attitude, help demonstrate that research findings are scientifically valid knowledge (Cunliffe, 2003; Cunliffe–Karunanayake, 2013; Gill, 2011).

A primary value of this research is that not only interviewees were applied, but the participation

and shadowing days helped to document what actually happens in the organization and find the hidden layers of the individual experiences and perspectives of career construction. To organize shadowing days was not easy; it required a long negotiating process partly due to the busy schedule of the managers and partly due to the sensitivity this method offers to cover. At the same time, it was the advantage of the shadowing days (and the participation in the project work, too) that they yielded extensive and sensitive evidence by collecting individual perspectives and experiences. In some cases, the data collected from observation contradicted, in other cases strengthened the interview reports, but finally contributed to revealing the gendered processes in the particular organization more precisely. The methods also provided an opportunity to reveal the subtle differences in how men and women, and the older and younger generation of women and men, think about the concrete implementation of equal chances for career development. It also helped to avoid the thinking of women and men as only homogenous groups. All in all, the multiple methods used for collecting data strengthen the validity of the research. The study makes a methodological contribution by widening the local experience of conducting organizational ethnography.

The thesis results highlight several areas where more attention should be paid in the future. The interviews, for instance, provided a few insights on parenting showing changes both for women and men. Women reported that parenting had become an exceptionally long obligation for them in connection to the social norm of intensive parenting. While men, although reported of having parenting role, being good fathers and being involved in caregiving, still presented parenting very differently compared to what it means for women. Because parenting for men often resembled a leisure-time activity spent with their children. A new experience of men managers was also found, which might require further attention. Men managers also appeared to experience difficulties in work-life balance increasingly. Although most of them shared that they continued to advance in their career, those fathers who had young, one or two years old children acknowledged that they experienced a slow down in their career.

Another area where there is still room for further investigation is the characteristics of managerial work. It is argued in the literature (Martínez, 2011; Tienari et al., 1998) that women entering into management has led to the feminization of particular type of managerial works, which made it easier for women of becoming managers and be accepted as leaders. Nevertheless, the feminization of management devalues the status of being leaders. Those women managers in the researched organization who were heads of local bank branches talked about their everyday work life, how they lead their team, and the particular tasks they carried out. Their stories show close similarity with feminized managerial jobs, which could be examined how it contributes to or hinders their acceptance as leaders.

Further, the focus in this thesis was primarily on career, but much information was shared on the work-life balance and the workplace. The stories shared and also the field observation demonstrated that work and home are tightly connected, and boundaries are blurred more than ever. Since the research was

conducted, it has even become a more actual topic for scientific inquiry, as due to the pandemic, employees working at large organizations increased their experience of working in a home office. It raises questions about the dynamics of diminishing the boundaries between home and work and the effects of sustaining traditional gender norms and roles. According to recent studies (Özkazanac–Pan, 2020), the pandemic has already caused some regression in gender equality in the world of work.

Finally, this thesis intends to draw attention to organizations' role and responsibility on employees' career advancement and well-being as ensuring women's equal participation in managerial positions is not only of scientific concern but an economically and socially relevant issue. Gender diversity is a genuine business case at large organizations above all. Nevertheless, beyond this fact of gender equality is a business case, gender equality is a human rights issue, and promoting it is in the interest of society not to waste knowledge, talent, and the financial investment that has gone into the development of talented individuals. Therefore, the implications of this dissertation may encourage organizations to review their claims of gender equality policy and their associated organizational initiatives (such as family-friendly programs) in the understanding that organizational and societal-level gender patterns can hinder the emergence of equal opportunities for organizational career development, but continue to create gender differences and disadvantages. Based on the findings, organizations are encouraged to pay more attention to gendered meso-level issues when seeking to provide support for managerial careers.

As a final message to organizations, I want to highlight that they should have even more responsibility to acknowledge the gender-based origins of inequalities and therefore help to provide better options for women whose careers are at risk or slow downs. Large organizations, like the researched multinational company, nowadays do a lot for the interest of women's managers. Still, they could do much more in a truly effective and committed way to diminish not only the visible but the invisible obstacles too, that are hindering women's career. The organizations have the tools and power to do it, so eventually women managers would not pay the prize for maintaining a successful career.

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9 APPENDICES
9.1. Interview Guidelines for career interviews: structure and questions

This guide was shared with the HR manager (Expert interviewee 1), who helped me recruit the interviewers.

Interview guidelines for mid-level managers: structure and questions

Introduction, sharing information about the interview and the research
First, the participants are informed on the goals of the research.
Questions on the interview are answered including topics, timeframe, anonymity.
Participants are reminded again that the interview is taken anonymously and will be recorded by the interviewer. In addition to that, notes will be taken.
Participants' consent is asked again for recording the discussion during the interviews.

Background information
Before discussing career story and experiences, I ask questions on demographic data, education, marital status, previous employment experience(s), etc. To shorten interview time, all participants receive the same questions. In case the interviewee sends them back before the interview, we skip these questions, indicated below, and jump immediately to the interview questions.

Age:
Residency (Budapest/other municipality):
Highest education degree:
Field of highest education degree (where did you receive your diploma):
Marital status:
Number of children:
Age of child children:

Current position held:
When were you appointed into your current position:
How many hours do you work on average per week?
Do you work during weekends and/or (at) evenings? If yes, how often, and how many hours, from home office or from your office?

Please answer if you have a partner
(Partner's) education degree of partner:
(Partner's) current employment, position of partner:

The following list of questions are not sent to the participants beforehand; participants encounter them only during the interview.

Questions on current position, working hours and schedule.
1. Tell me about your average working day. What does it look like?
2. Does your partner have a similar working day and schedule?

Questions on career story and development
3. What are the major milestones of your career?
4. What do you think, what influenced your career development the most either in a positive or a negative direction?
5. What do you think, what was the most influential factor for the promotion to your current position?

Questions on career opportunities at the Company
6. How does the Company support your career development (and aims)?
7. What kind of support have you received so far? For instance, participating in trainings, etc.
8. What do you think, does the relatively high presence of female employees in the finance sector support the promotion of women into executive positions?
9. I am interested in your personal experience regarding the next question. What do you think, is the gender of the manager relevant in the context of having a successful career development?

Questions on work-life balance
10. Please, tell me about your work-life balance
In case the interviewee is a woman and has children: How and when did you return from maternity leave?
11. What happens if you have to leave work during the day due to a private matter? How do you solve such a situation?
12. What kind of organisational support or tools does the company provide for balancing your work and life?

Questions on career plans
13. How satisfied are you with your career achievements?
14. Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
15. What career advice would you give to those young employees who have just started to build their career in the same profession as you?
+1: Do you have any other topics that you deem important to discuss regarding the career development of mid-level managers?

9.2. Interview Guidelines for expert interviews
Questions exploring the organisational culture:

1. Do you like to work at this organisation? What are your preferences, if there any, to work here?

I want to ask you a few questions on equality.

2. In your opinion, do female and male managers have equal chance to reach the same level of managerial and/or leadership positions?

3. Is there an implemented Equal Opportunities Policy at this organisation? If so, can you tell me a bit more about it?

4. What do you think about diversity? How are diversity guidelines implemented in practise?

Questions exploring leadership, support for female leaders:

5. Can you describe the recruitment processes for leadership positions?

6. What are the main characteristics of a good leader? Who would you describe as a good leader at this organisation?

7. Can you describe the evaluation processes of the performance of those employees who are in leadership positions at any level?

8. Can you describe the organisational system, plans and intention for leadership competence development?

9. If it has not been mentioned so far: Is there a leadership program dedicated to women managers?

10. What do you think about gender quotas? What is your opinion on increasing the number of women managers? Do you think it is essential or not?

9.3. Summary of the characteristics of the work-life balance interviewees

No.	Sex	Type of position HR department	Work schedule	No. of years of employment at the organisation	Marital status (No. of children)
1.	Female	Leadership	Full time	18	Married (2)
2.	Female	Non-leadership	Flexible, full-time	13	Partnership
3.	Female	Leadership	Full time	16	Partnership (3)
4.	Female	Non-leadership	Part-time	-	Married (1)
5.	Female	Non-leadership	Flexible, full-time	1	Partnership
6.	Male	Non-leadership	Full time	-	Single
7.	Male	Non-leadership	Full time	10	Married (3)
8.	Female	Non-leadership	Flexible, full-time	-	Married
9.	Female	Non-leadership	Full-time	1	Married
10.	Female	Non-leadership	Flexible, full-time	10	Married (1)
11.	Female	Non-leadership	Full-time	2	Single
12.	Female	Non-leadership	Flexible, full-time	8	Married (1)
13.	Female	Non-leadership	Full-time	1	Partnership

14.	Female	Leadership	Part-time	10	Married (1)
15.	Female	Leadership	Full-time	4	Married
16.	Female	Leadership	Full-time	2	Partnership
17.	Female	Non-leadership	Full-time	10	Married (1)

9.4. Interview Guidelines for work-life balance interviews

This guideline for the work-life balance interview was created in close collaboration with the project team of the HR Department.

1. Questions exploring the extent of 'overtime' at the organisation (without using words 'overtime', 'overwork'):

What time do you arrive in the morning? When do you start to work?

Do you take a lunch break? For how long?

Do you regularly make phone calls on your way to the workplace?

What time do you usually leave work?

Do you ever work after arriving home? If so, how often and for how long?

Do you answer work related emails related outside normal working hours?

What type of work schedule do you have according to your work contract?

How often do you have to cancel evening activities because of work related reasons?

Do you have the same workload each day? Do peak periods occur? If so, how often?

2. What tools support your work-life balance? What is working well for you?
3. What difficulties do you experience in maintaining work-life balance?
4. In your opinion, how could you improve your work-life balance?
5. How could your manager/superior support you in having a better work-life balance?
6. Could you suggest best practices of work-life balance from your previous workplace?
7. Finally, please describe what your ideal working day looks like.