



**Exploratory study of leadership styles and gender:
an analysis of female HR managers styles over their
career trajectory in Ireland**

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Abstract

Purpose – To explore the leadership styles of female HR managers over their career trajectory in Ireland. The main objectives of the research are those of analysing the leadership styles of female HR managers; to examine the link between gender and leadership styles in HR managers over time; to assess if change in leadership styles occurs over the career development trajectory.

Design/methodology/approach - A qualitative mono-research approach with semi-structured interviews with 7 female HR managers is applied to the explorative study in order to gain deep insight of these topics.

Findings – The internal and external environments, the organisational cultures were found as having the most impact on female leadership styles in HR among women.

However, flexibility of approaches, employees' support and development, and reflections on HR roles are relevant themes connected to leadership change over time and along career developments.

Originality/value – This research adds knowledge and understanding to three areas (leadership styles, gender and HR) so far not considered together. The research updates the leadership styles development of women HR managers facing the global economic challenges. It also expands comprehension of challenges women HR managers face in their career development trajectory.

Key words - leadership styles, gender, HR professionals, career development, change, career trajectory

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List of Abbreviations

CIPD	=	Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development
HR	=	Human Resource
SHRM	=	Strategic Human Resource Management
TFL	=	Transformational leadership style
TSL	=	Transactional leadership style
WLB	=	Work life balance

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

Broadbridge and Simpson (2011) assert that despite the extensive research carried out in the last decades in the area of leadership and gender, challenges in the progression of women to more senior positions, are still present and need to be further analysed. Due to equal rights legislation, the problem of gender is often proposed as being solved. The reality however is that there are still barriers for women such the glass ceiling or the '*hidden dimensions of power*' (Broadbridge et al., 2011:477) that undermine female careers. Eagly and Carli (2007) claim women are not well represented in managerial positions, however instead of discussing negative barriers like the glass ceiling, they prefer to introduce the metaphor of the labyrinth. The shift of paradigm emphasises that '*for women who aspire to top leadership, routes exist but are full of twists and turns, both unexpected and expected*' (Eagly et al., 2007:64). The leadership styles adopted by women are still debated and generally associated with communal (female) versus agentic (male) styles undermining female options and freedom. Furthermore, within the HR profession new conundrums, due to economic changes, oblige leaders to become more strategic oriented. For these reasons Sears (2010:15) proposes the model of the '*insight-driven HR*' encompassing business, contextual and organisational savvies, challenging roles and leadership styles of women HR leaders.

1.2 Framework: Theories, Studies and Gaps

One of the most debated leadership approaches are those of transformational (TFL) and transactional (TSL) styles. Bass and Avolio (1990:22) claim that the TFL is the most effective way of leading people because the TSL is more focused on performance, whereas the TFL with its four basic characteristics (idealised influence, individually consideration, intellectually stimulation and inspirational components) leads to better results. On the other hand, Eagly and Carli (2003) through their meta-

analysis study explore the link between gender and leadership styles finding women are more transformational oriented than men; however female approaches could be undermined by prejudices and discrimination interfering with their career progression. Furthermore, Arnold and Loughlin (2013) show different findings about gender and leadership asserting that approaches applied depend on the leader's personality, the context and the situation in which they operate. In doing so, the authors move the research debate from differences to similarities between genders and leadership. Lastly, Berkery et al. (2013), based on their research analysing the dichotomy women more communal (relational) and men more agentic oriented (tasks), do not find significant differences. Nevertheless women seem to be more equipped to combine both styles and being able to shift to more different approaches.

Within the specific HR arena, Ulrich and Beatty (2001:294) have influenced the leadership approaches through their model known as '*The interdependent role of the HR player*' encompassing different functions ('*leader, conscience, facilitator, builder, architect and coach*'). Strong emphasis is put on people but also on adding value to the organisation. Recently, the CIPD (2012), also due to the impact of the global financial crisis, has promoted new leadership approaches HR leaders should apply, proposing different models. HR practitioners should be able to match three main areas: relationships, values (ethics) and focus on the context (environment). This combination would lead to more shared, engaging and authentic leadership styles.

In relation to gender and HR leadership styles, Pomeroy (2007:49) highlights the incremental progression of women within this profession asserting few have reached top positions due to challenges faced during the career progression and the recognition of being effective leaders. On the contrary, McGowan (2007) claims HR women experience more advantages than other categories owing the high presence in the sector and less competition towards men. In spite of this, the study carried out by

Brandl et al. (2008) show HR female directors, depending on the organisational culture, can be perceived still less strategic than male counterparts.

Although the substantial investigations related to leadership styles and gender as mentioned earlier, there are evident gaps within three connected areas: leadership, gender and HR (styles, development and career trajectory). Some researchers support further exploration of these subjects:

Brandl et al. (2007:642) claims *'there is much work to do in exploring gender differences in HRM, since gender issues are very much neglected in the present academic debate on the position of HR professionals'*. Boaden (2005:10), based on her leadership development case-study, states *'the lack of scholarly knowledge about leadership development [since] most models were developed for a more stable and predictable environment than now'*.

McGowan (2007:2) in relation to her CIPD survey asserts *'research on leadership development and talent management has indicated the important role that leaders can play what was not specifically been considered previously is the support required and received as leaders do take on more senior roles'*. The CIPD (2012:21) suggests *'leadership literature needs to keep developing and meeting the new need to understand what is required of leaders'*.

This research aims to consider the gap in knowledge which brings together the interlinked issues of leadership and gender within the context of HR. Specifically this research focuses on the domain of HR and what barriers female leaders face. This research is timely, topical and addresses an important issue which has both policy and practical implications for the future.

1.3 Research Questions

The aim of the dissertation is to study the leadership styles of women HR managers over their career trajectory in Ireland. In doing so, three main areas will be investigated: (i) their leadership styles; (ii) the link between female HR managers and leadership styles over time and (iii) if change in leadership styles occurs over the career development trajectory. Semi-structured interviews (mono-qualitative approach) will allow experienced female HR managers to express their viewpoints and offer variety of data to be systematically analysed.

1.4 Structure of the Dissertation

Chapter one (1) introduced the broad context of the research, the key literature related to leadership styles, gender and HR, the relevant gaps within these wide areas and showed the worth of investigating these topics. Research questions and how to answer to them were also examined.

Chapter two (2) critiques the literature surrounding the fields of leadership styles and female HR managers, linked to the research objectives, defining firstly leadership styles, the relationship between gender and women HR leaders. Secondly, different positions are reviewed in relation to leadership styles and gender in HR over time. Thirdly, diverse arguments about changes in leadership style in female HR over a career development are debates.

Chapter three (3) presents the aim and objectives of the study, the rationale for researching these topics and shows its originality. Within the research framework section, the most suitable philosophy, approach, strategy, methodological choice and time horizon are discussed fitting the research objectives.

Chapter four (4) shows the selective and thematic analysis, the discussion of the key topics drawn from the semi-structured interviews and highlights the links with the literature. The interpretation of findings allows debating critically leadership styles theories and models.

Chapter five (5) reflects on the entire research results and suggests some practical implications organisations should apply to facilitate the development and career progression of female HR managers, acknowledges limitations of the study but also proposes topics for further empirical investigations. In the next chapter, the researcher will debate the key literature around the research objectives topics.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

In the literature there is an extensive debate around leadership and best styles leaders can adopt in order to motivate subalterns and create competitive organisations. Predominantly, two are the opposite approaches discussed: the transactional and the transformational styles. The first is more short-term and performance focused, while the latter involves vision and people-followers' support (Bass et al., 1990). Based on research, when leadership styles are related to gender, academics draw different conclusions seeing women more transformational than transactional oriented (Eagly and Carli, 2007; Bass and Riggio, 2006), or denying any implications of gender over styles (Brandl et al., 2013; Oshagbemi, 2008). However, the impact of the personality of leaders, contexts and situations are the new elements recently linked to study leadership styles (Arnold et al., 2013; Brandt and Lahio, 2013), thus challenging the previous assumptions of gender and leadership focused on people-tasks perspectives. Inside the HR profession there is a high representation of women at low and middle levels, but few at the top (Churchard, 2013). Within these jobs, leadership styles are challenged by the fast evolution of HR roles and functions (Holbeche, 2010a) and it is crucial for these female HR leaders to develop the right skills over their career trajectory to be successful and efficient (Kahnweiler, 2006:29-30).

2.1.1 Women in HR Leadership: the Gap

It is difficult to find studies about female HR leaders despite the high representation of women in this sector (Brandl et al., 2008; Oshagbemi, 2008; McGowan, 2007). Oshagbemi (2008) suggests further investigation of the link between gender and individual leadership styles is needed, Boaden (2005) also notes the lack of studies about the development of leadership styles and encourages additional research in this field.

Research thus far has extensively investigated leadership, leadership and gender, leadership and HR as distinctive areas, but the triangulation of these three dimensions has not been addressed yet. Therefore, this study will attempt to fill the gap and try to give a wider explorative understanding of the relationships between leadership, HR and gender and subsequently to find out more about HR leadership styles over time and if change occurs within a career trajectory.

With the aim of investigating the relevant literature embracing these themes, the chapter will be divided into three parts: leadership styles and female HR managers, leadership styles and gender in HR over time and finally change in leadership styles in women HR leaders over a career development.

2.2 Relationship between Leadership styles and female HR managers

2.2.1 Leadership styles

2.2.1.1 Leadership Definitions

Among scholars there is no agreement around the definition of leadership (CIPD, 2012) even two of the main elements of leadership are evident in the literature and often highlighted as crucial: the role of a leader and the process of leading people (CIPD, 2012; Manning and Robertson, 2011; Yukl, 2006). For instance, Yukl (2006:8) emphasises both aspects stating that '*leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree what needs to be done and how to do it and the process of facilitating individual and collective effort to accomplish shared objectives.*' On the other hand, Manning et al. (2011:8) stress the '*process of transformative change both individually and as a team*'. However, the CIPD (2012:5) asserts '*it is almost impossible to capture [the definition]*' because '*there is no agreement of knowledge and behaviours that leaders need to perform effectively*'. The same institute ascribes these conceptual difficulties to the change of theories and

models over time, though the new academic research is focus more on the *'relational, value-based and contextual leadership'*.

2.2.1.2 Overview of Different Leadership Styles

In the last decade, two leadership styles have mainly captured the attention of academics and leaders: the transactional (TSL) and the transformational (TFL) theories, usually seen as opposite models. According to Bass et al. (1990:21) the transactional style *'is merely a base for effective leadership'* because missing the developing of followers and essentially the relationship is based on *'satisfying the requirements of the exchange between themselves [leaders] and the followers'*. Vice versa, the same authors emphasise the positive characteristics of a transformational style in particular they outline four positive key behaviours:

- i) Idealised influence
- ii) Individual consideration
- iii) Intellectual stimulation
- iv) Inspiration.

Similar negative view of the TSL is shared by Hetland et al. (2011) since this style is focus only on contingent reward and management, whereas the TFL through visionary leaders can inspire followers and increase their motivation. The other positive effects on employees are those of enhancing job satisfaction and well-being, with the benefit of increasing organisational performance and competitive advantage.

Bass et al. (1990) do not advocate dividing leaders into two categories, they argue that the same person could apply different styles depending on the situation. Furthermore, Bruch and Walter (2007) reflect on the influence of the hierarchy (the context) on leadership styles asserting that upper managers have more opportunities to apply transformative approaches than middle managers as their roles, tasks, level of autonomy, creativity and use of vision could be limited. This assumption

contradicts the theory of the CIPD (2012) who see leaders at any level of the hierarchy.

Both the TFL and the TSL model find their theoretical approaches under the twenty-first century framework (Huczynski and Buchanan, 2007:717), which considers the characteristics of the leader, the follower and the situation. Despite the advantages of the TFL broad approach, they highlight a crucial contradiction within these concepts which support the idea of visionary-charismatic leaders and at the same time *'informal leadership at all levels'*.

Moreover, according to Yukl (2006) the perspective of effective leadership behaviour has supplementary elements to be considered including:

- a) A task-oriented behaviour
- b) A relation-oriented behaviour
- c) A change-oriented behaviour.

Despite the extensive studies on the TFL so far carried out, Yukl (2006:274) asserts the need to have further investigation because 'much remains to be learned' on the efficiency of this style.

For other reasons, including the recent financial crisis and the fast change of the economic climate, the CIPD (2012:8) suggests new leadership paradigms (emergent models) in order to support leaders in their challenging roles. Three new orientations (relational, valued-based and contextual) should help leaders increase *'employee growth, interpersonal style and integrity and monitoring direction'*.

Leadership styles do not depend solely upon external factors. Some authors (Arnold et al., 2013; Yukl, 2006) have proposed that leadership styles are highly correlated with personality type which in turn some (Aldoory and Toth, 2004; Eagly et al.,

2003) have claimed is related to gender. The following section will discuss leadership identity and the influence on leadership styles.

2.2.1.3 Leaders' Identity

Identity is an important variable to take into consideration when discussing leadership styles. It is evident that leaders can adopt a variety of styles upon their discretion despite external pressures. Based on the three categories described by Yukl (2006) the leadership will vary and result more short-term planning (task), oriented to support followers (relations) or focused to encourage and facilitate change (change), according to the priority leaders set for themselves. The CIPD (2012) highlight the key role played by the leader identity in developing and shaping different leadership styles. Although, the literature is at its infancy in understanding the link between identity and personal leadership development, *'it does appear that including a focus on developing an individual's 'leader identity' and their sense of self and focusing on building a learning orientation in leaders may be promising areas of focus for future leadership development (CIPD, 2012:14).*

2.2.1.4 Towards New Leadership Styles

As new leadership paradigms emerge (CIPD, 2012), in the literature new theories about the 'authentic' (Nichols and Erakovich, 2013; Wong and Cummings, 2009; Garger, 2008) and the 'dynamic approach' (Manning et al., 2008) is evident. Wong et al. (2009) emphasise the need of having leaders who able to show ethical and moral values and behaviours, but it is difficult to find agreed concepts since they can differ among countries, people and organisations. In spite of the distinctive definitions of 'authentic leaders', the key component of 'self-awareness' is shared among scholars. Nevertheless, at this stage it is difficult to know if this theory will develop and detach from its TFL basis.

Additionally, the dynamic model proposed by Manning et al. (2011) takes into account the influence over change and the influence over others (people) producing new leadership styles (transformer, facilitator, driver, implementer and intermediate) in which the key aspects are tasks and creativity. But also in this case, due to the limited theoretical constructs and studies, it is not possible to understand if it really proposes a shift from the transformational/transformational or visionary leadership theories.

After having presented the definitions of leadership, introduced the main applied styles and discussed the trends towards new models, in the next section the relationship between leadership styles and gender will be examined.

2.2.2 Leadership Styles and Gender

The relationship between leadership styles and gender presents faceted and complex challenges with no agreed views if women reveal different methods of leading than men (Jonsen et al., 2010; Embry et al., 2008; Appelbaum et al., 2003). Consequently, in this section firstly the focus will be on assumptions, perceptions and stereotypes about gendered approaches, secondly on the analysis of several studies leading to diverse findings, finally the influence of the context causing the glass ceiling barriers,

2.2.2.1 Assumptions of Gendered Leadership Styles

In the literature, the discussion about gender and different leadership styles is focused on the TSL for men versus the TFL for women (Embry et al., 2008) or from agentic versus communal styles (Berkery et al., 2013) with the same sex distinctions. These conflicting categories associate male qualities (competence, efficiency, assertiveness, ambition, independence) leading to successful outcomes, whereas the female characteristics (warmness, kindness, helpfulness, cooperation and sympathy) put women in disadvantaged leadership positions (Berkery et al., 2013). On the other

hand, Eagly et al. (2003) assert that women are better equipped for applying transformational styles, thus being able to become effective guides for their followers. The same view is shared by Aldoory et al. (2004), who used a quantitative and qualitative research concluded the preferred styles of female managers, confirm that women feel more transformational than transactional oriented.

Within the academic debate, Arnold et al. (2013) challenge these assumptions highlighting the influence of personality, context and situational opportunities on leadership styles, however men seem to benefit more than women for displaying a transformational approach. Furthermore, Brandt et al. (2013) instead of focusing gender and diverse leadership, analyse the impact of personality on adopting styles and argue that leaders should evaluate more their strengths and weaknesses in order to become more efficient in their roles, despite the sex.

2.2.2.2 Controversial Empirical Findings

In the literature the need of studying the faceted and complex link between leadership styles and gender is evident from the amount of research carried out. In particular, a vast debate has been developed around transactional and transformational leadership theories and its basic needs starting from Bass et al. (2006), Yukl (2006) and Eagly et al. (2007). At the same time, other studies have investigated the link between gender and transformational/transactional styles (Arnold et al., 2013; Aldoory et al., 2004; Appelbaum, et al., 2003) mainly with the same outcomes: women prefer a transformational approach in their leadership. Conversely, other investigations (Brandt et al., 2013; Oshagbemi, 2008; Manning, 2002) have found no real implications about gender and leadership styles, but personality, managerial levels and age could influence the use of a more transactional or transformational methods.

2.2.2.3 Influences over Leadership Styles

Where empirical studies show different findings about the link between gender and leadership styles, an argument often cited in the literature is the impact of context (culture) on the development and applications of different approaches. According to Berkery et al. (2013) women in management are still assessed by men, consequently gender stereotypes and managerial characteristics are under their control and values. In their study, Arnold et al. (2013) strongly observe the link between context and leadership styles, shaping more participative versus more directive approaches or vice-versa. While Atewologun and Dolder (2013) suggest that male power, authority and privileges still need to be further investigated in order to understand how career promotions are supported and dealt.

2.2.2.3.1 The Re-masculinisation of Work Places

The re-masculinization of work environments and the impact on gender management and leadership has also been examined in the literature. For instance, Broadbridge et al. (2011) stress the phenomenon of silencing women voices and the trend to think that gender issues are solved due to equality legislation and fair organisational policies. In practice hidden issues still affect women, their career and their approaches to leadership, see for example the strong focus on performance and the request of high level of presentism.

After having debated the relevant themes linked to leadership styles, gender and its controversial debates, in the next section the relationship between leadership styles will be focused on the HR role.

2.2.3 Leadership Styles and Women HR Leaders

In this section the relationship between leadership styles and the HR profession will highlight its more underpinning discussions and presents challenges but also interesting opportunities.

2.2.3.1 Overview of Leadership Styles in HR

Leadership skills and management capabilities have traditionally been an area of considerable interest to HR practitioners and academics alike (CIPD, 2012). In particular the CIPD has developed different leadership frameworks and theories, basically divided into three categories (relational, values-based and contextual) in order to assist HR managers in accomplishing their evolving roles.

The needs of having '*efficient*' HR leadership within organisations is also underlined by O'Hara-Devereaux (cited in Grossberg (2012:11) when she presents the '*future shocks*' due to '*demography impact*', '*disaggregation of work*', '*smart machines and systems*' and '*data modelling*', as new challenges also for HR professionals. Nevertheless, HR leadership still presents '*knowing-doing gap*' as Adams (2012) asserts due to the complexity of the economic environments and constant changes and challenges. For these reasons, she proposes a '*HR strategic development program*' based on knowing the context, being strategic to lead people and managing change. Conversely, Sears (2011) proposes four levels of influence (people, culture, strategy and organisation future) putting strong emphasis on an '*insight-led*' approach for HR leaders. However, Holbeche (2010b:19) indicates another perspective that practitioners should consider claiming that '*... we are entering an era in which leadership by HR is needed more than ever before if organisations are to have the people, culture and capabilities required for sustainable success*'. In doing so, she challenges the traditional role of HR executors and suggests leaders to become more strategic oriented because of critical economic conditions in which organisations operate.

2.2.3.2 *Contrasting Definitions of the HR Role and Implications*

Among academics there are no agreed definitions of the role of HR as focus is put on different elements of leading people within the HR profession. Ulrich et al. (2001:305) propose a model of *'the interdependent role of HR'* with six functions: leader, conscience, facilitator, builder, architect and coach, asserting that *'HR leaders need to define clearly the behaviours they should demonstrate as leaders. They also must define clearly the results they must deliver'*. The limit of this model is that it does not consider the influence of external situations enough. Conversely, Holbeche (2010b:4) argues that *'as leaders of people dimension'* leadership is linked to persons and organisations, with strong mindset as *'thought and practice leaders'* requiring the ability to drive change and challenging the context.

Furthermore, based on the complexity of defining HR leadership, the CIPD (2013a) proposes a *'three-legged model'*: as business partner, as centre of excellence and sharing services, a concept that considers contexts, roles and services. Nevertheless, the same institute (2013b) claims there could be ambivalence, tension and misunderstanding in regards to leadership perspectives between HR and business leaders (CEOs, boards). HR professionals usually are people and long-term oriented (see talent development long-term perspective), while other directors within the actual climate show more short-term focus due to uncertainty about the future. However, the leadership styles of HR practitioners could also be short-focused because of the need of tackling though constraints and losing the opportunities to be more strategic oriented.

The difficulty of defining HR leadership is also due to the understanding of its function and the continuous challenges professionals meet in their context and within the level of responsibilities they operate. Holbeche (2010a:25) states that *'even the very notion HR exerting leadership is a relatively new concept, and a somewhat disputed one at that'*!

The research so far carried out has not investigated the relationship between leadership styles and female HR leaders, a gap which the present study addresses.

2.3 Relationship between Leadership Styles and Gender in HR over Time

Another important element to be considered within the HR leadership styles discussion is the evolution of the HR role due to the new challenges created by more complex economic climate obliging these professionals to adopt new leading approaches fitting the new realities.

2.3.1 Perception of HR Role

There are agreements in regards to the requirement of adapting the HR role in relation to new organisational needs (Kramar and Staene, 2012; CIPD, 2012; Sears, 2011; Murphy and Southey, 2003) and therefore to make a shift to a more strategic leadership style for HR leaders, however there is lack of consensus on competencies to be developed and how.

Based on their empirical findings, Murphy et al. (2003:85) argue that there are four trends influencing the perception of HR professionals contributing to organisational competitive advantage:

- *'be considered an organisational leader*
- *act as a HR group role*
- *have networking skills*
- *build a HR group climate'.*

The emphasis here is on the leader and on HR as a team. The key influential element remains the hierarchical position being held.

Kramar et al. (2012:144) consider the duality of people-business orientation, or soft-hard competencies. They propose that HR leaders should be able to *'bridge'* the gap in order to support other managers and senior executive to *'drive employee engagement'*. However, HR leaders need to reach a balance of *'competing values'* (strategic, ethical, legal and financial), and match short with long terms results.

2.3.2 Needs for Changing HR Role

The CIPD (2011) puts more emphasis on an *'insight driven HR role'* which implies new leadership skills. The theoretical framework proposed is *'the Organisational Insight Hourglass'*, divided into five stages, allowing the development of *'insight skills'* based on three type of savvies: business, contextual and organisational. Not an easy challenge for HR leaders.

Moreover, according to Sears (2011:34-37) HR leaders *will 'need to step into much more sophisticated role'* and:

- *'become more inquisitive and insighted-minded*
- *unlock the embedded insight that already exist*
- *turn masses of data into insights.'*

He also asserts that *'the future HR leaders will need to break away from the one model fits all orthodoxy'* and develop levered influential skills from processes, to culture, to strategy and *'actively seeking future growth opportunities'*. In doing so, HR leaders will have a strong impact on organisations, but they will also need to develop insight skills of their *'operational HR people and middle-managers'* if they want to become successful strategic players.

2.3.3 Leadership styles in HR over time

As discussed in the previous sections, HR leadership plays a great role within organisations in order to cope with modern challenges and there are strong efforts to support the development of leadership skills along the career trajectory for instance by the CIPD (2012). However it is difficult to find studies related to female HR managers and their developmental leadership styles over time, themes which still represent a gap within the literature.

Based on his study of 25 seasoned HR professionals (semi-structured interviews), Kahnweiler (2006) investigates the challenges women face in order to achieve and sustain success as HR leaders. The findings emphasise the importance of having '*self-management strategies*' when dealing with HR careers also in terms of developing skills and competencies. However, the interviewees highlighted key challenges like '*lack of power*', '*vulnerability*' and '*being overwhelmed*' which undermine their leadership styles (or options).

Inkson and King (2011) underline the change of the career concept and its challenges: boundary less, lateral or protean, corresponding to the new dimensions available to individuals. Consequently, some conflict could arise between the vocational developmental needs (for employees) and the organisational requirements of building careers based on their corporate strategic goals. In order to overcome this dispute, the authors propose a model which encompasses individual, organisation and the dimension of the psychological contract, aiming at finding (small) common ground for both short-term and long-term perspectives.

Another dilemma HR leaders have to face towards their career advancement is becoming specialists or generalists, with different implications on their leadership styles and skills development. The debate finds different views about a rigid separation of roles, however '*many HR leaders argue that this is not necessary, as long as they know what kind of expertise are required for different situations and how to access and use that expertise*' (Holbeche: 2010a:194).

Within the framework of leadership and evolution of styles among female HR managers there is no evident research, for this reason this study will attempt to cover this gap examining the possible links between these entities.

Having presented the key aspects related to leadership styles and the HR profession, in the last part of this chapter the attention will be extended to gender and highlight the key issues debated so far by academics.

2.4 Changes in Leadership Styles in Women HR over the Career Development

In the last section of the literature review the focus will be on leadership styles and women HR leaders considering the specific situations in which they operate.

2.4.1 HR a 'Pink Ghetto?'

A high female presence dominates the HR domain, however, there is a significant under-representation at senior levels (Churchard, 2013; Pichler et al., 2008; Pomeroy, 2007). Despite the advantage of having many women in the HR profession, Pomeroy (2007) underlines the risks of creating a 'pink ghetto' within organisations that still support more men than women at executive levels. Consequently, the challenges of women HR leaders to be recognised and promoted are similar to other environments.

In addition, in their study, Brandl et al. (2008) claim that the access and the integration of female HR directors depends on individual factors, organisational cultures, but also on societal influences (macro-level) of policies and practices supporting women and their needs. Removing practical obstacles would increase the number of women in strategic managerial positions, even though the gender-egalitarian legislation would not prevent the perception of women more suited in low HR status positions.

2.4.2 Specific HR Challenges

As noted earlier, the gap between high representation at low levels and the dearth of many women in HR executive positions also finds its roots in gender stereotypes. According to Pichler et al. (2008) descriptive stereotypes consider women good at lower HR levels due to their traits, while prescriptive prejudices assume men are better fit for senior positions. Unfortunately, a lack of *'fit model'* for HR leadership does not help women either, but support the male predominance in senior positions. Despite the evolution of HR roles, with strong strategic orientation (SHRM), more support and involvement of diversity, female managers are still disadvantaged. Moreover, Brandl et al. (2008) argue the position of HR female directors is perceived less strategic than that of men, but when men take these positions, the perceptions change more favourably.

Additional challenges affect women leaders in relation to their career breaks (Pichler et al., 2008; Pomeroy, 2007) due to family needs and children responsibilities that require more flexible work conditions. Thus women are penalised in their career and leadership recognition. Finally, despite the availability of career and developmental leadership tools, Pichler et al. (2008) highlight the lack of career strategies among HR women and consequently their low upwards mobility.

2.4.3 Valuable HR Opportunities

In spite of the low presence of women in top HR positions, undeniably the high number of women in this sector creates valuable opportunities, probably not possible in other professions. For instance, Churchard (2013) asserts that career routes are smoother when organisations try to balance better gender representation for HR roles in senior positions, as there are fewer men at lower level to be promoted.

On the other hand, Pichler et al. (2008) and Pomeroy (2007) note that women are well trained and have good competencies due to their experiential and education knowledge in HR. Pichler et al. (2008) emphasise the skills women have in applying

SHRM approaches in order to be efficient and successful as they show more involvement and support to employees. While Pomeroy (2007) stresses the importance of knowing all the hierarchical levels since women usually start their career at the bottom before reaching the top organisation echelon.

An additional advantage for female HR leaders that is they '*place better self-awareness first and second confidence*' in the priority skills to be developed by the organisations during their career transitions in order to become more efficient in their new roles. Consequently, they are more aware of needing support and developmental tools than men because they know the difficulty to be recognized as good leaders. The phenomenon of '*female chameleons*' leads women to fill in their gaps and transform challenges into developmental opportunities (McGowan, 2006:5).

In line with the suggestion of Boaden (2005), this study will address the gap of investigating the link between development of leadership styles of women HR leaders along their career trajectory.

2.5 Conclusion

The aim of the chapter was that of presenting and discussing the most relevant and contemporary theories and debates concerning the three objectives of the research: leadership styles and female HR leaders, leadership styles and gender in HR over time and change in leadership styles in women HR leaders over a career trajectory. Thereby the main issues and existing discussion within the literature were highlighted.

There are different leadership styles discussed in the literature and adopted by managers, however the two which have warranted extensive debate are that of the TFL and the TSL. Bass et al. (1990) assert that the first approach is more efficient because is more people supportive, but managers could apply both methods

depending on the situation. When leadership styles are related to gender, there are no agreements if women are more people-oriented and men more a business-performance-oriented. Nevertheless, Eagly et al. (2003), according to their meta-analysis study, consider women more flexible to adopt different approaches than men. Conversely, recent research (Arnold et al., 2013; Brandt et al., 2013) stress the importance of personality in taking one style over another denying gender influence. In the field of HR, the importance of leadership styles has been constantly considered by the CIPD (2012) underlying the need for HR managers to become more strategic. The same institute proposes a HR leadership model encompassing three areas: organisation, context and values driven. This new framework, insight focused, allows HR leaders to be more equipped towards the actual and future economic challenges. At the same time, the '*the interdependent role*' developed by Ulrich et al (2001) still influences HR leadership proposing different roles and adding value to the business.

Furthermore, since women are highly represented within the HR sector, they face peculiar challenges and opportunities, defined by Pomeroy (2007) as a '*pink ghetto*' in comparison to other professions. On the other hand, Brandl et al. (2008) argue that HR directors are perceived less strategic than men, however McGowan (2006) asserts they have more developmental tools than other women from other sectors. The female HR leaders also face the question of developing their leadership styles over a career trajectory – due to the evolution of roles - still with several problems to be tackled as Kahnweiler (2006) found out in her study, one of the rare in this area.

From the literature review, gaps related to the study of the three correlated dimensions: leadership styles, gender and female HR leaders are evident as well as the exploration of these links over time and within a career trajectory.

In the next chapter, the researcher will introduce the suitable methodology approaches helping to answer the research aims and objectives.

Chapter 3: Methodology Research

3.1 Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to explore the leadership styles of female HR managers over their career trajectory in Ireland. Specifically the research has three objectives:

- i. to analyse the leadership styles of female HR managers
- ii. to examine the link between gender and leadership styles in HR managers over time
- iii. to assess if a change in leadership styles occurs over the career trajectory.

3.2 Reasons for research

Despite the robust number of updated studies in the field of leadership and gender, there remains a gap in the literature concerning the relationship between leadership styles, gender and HR in an Irish context. In the literature scholars like Broadbridge et al. (2011:25) underline the importance of future research focused on '*monitoring gender in management*' in order to identify discrimination and disadvantages. Furthermore, Chin and Sanchez-Hucles (2007) (cited in Pegues and Cunningham, 2010:13) assert the need to investigate the '*potential leadership style and effectiveness*' resulting from '*gender*'. Finally, Oshagbemi (2008:1908) suggests that it is useful to examine '*the gender of managers whether it is associated with the use of any particular styles of leadership*'.

In the literature gaps related to leadership styles, gender and HR are evident and they have been highlighted by several academics who have expressed the need of carrying out further research in this field.

Firstly, Oshagbemi (2008) has conducted a study related to '*the impact of personal and organisational variable on the leadership styles of managers*' aiming at finding the link between consultative, participative and delegating styles adopted by

managers under the variables of age and hierarchical levels. The findings pointed out the influence of age over styles (more consultative style among older managers) and positions (also more consultative oriented and using flexibility of styles among top managers). However, the author, acknowledging the limitations of his research, suggests that the gender factor should be examined in association with *'the use of any particular styles of leadership'* (2008:1908). For this reason, the present study will attempt to address the gap between gender and leadership styles applied to female HR managers, hence examining the challenges these HR leaders face in their roles.

Secondly, Kramar et al. (2012) in their qualitative research about the *'emerging HRM – skills in Australia'* have explored the trends within the role of HR in general and the line managers in particular in managing people' (2012:139). The results showed a shift of competencies among HR professionals over time and highlighted the requirement for the HR practitioners to develop leadership skills among other competencies. The trends are those of an increased segmentation of roles and the necessity of developing *'different mix of competencies, depending on their career path and time'*. The researchers also have predicted an evolution of HR roles with more strategic focus practitioners need to address. (2012:139). Due to these shifts, the scholars invite other research to be carried out in the area of leadership styles and HR over time. Furthermore, the CIPD (2012: 13) outline the gap in the literature about theories of leadership development and how in practice styles develop over time, therefore they suggest further empirical research over these issues. The actual study aims at exploring the relationship between leadership styles over time having selected 7 senior HR managers who will discuss their experience about this topic.

Thirdly, in their theoretical paper, Inkson and King (2011) have investigated the implications of strategic HR roles, with specific leadership styles, and career management drawing attention to possible tensions among these dimensions and the risk of being incompatible. They have expressed the need of conducting empirical investigation to support (or not) their claims. However, Holbeche (2010b) introduces another challenge for HR managers in developing their career: becoming specialists

or generalists with distinctive consequences on their leadership styles. The last objective of this study is related to assess if changes in leadership styles occurs over the career development trajectory of the female HR leaders under exploration and its implications.

3.3 Originality

The study has the originality of matching three elements together: leadership styles, gender and HR and exploring their relationship in order to gain a wider insight of these topics thus contributing to add knowledge to the literature and covering some gaps in this field.

In the next section, the researcher will present and explain the most appropriate methodological framework undertaken for this study.

3.4 Research Framework

The purpose of this study is to explore leadership styles of female HR managers. The associated objectives are to analyse leadership styles in HR and to examine the link between gender and HR leadership styles over time and finally to assess if a change of styles occurs over a career trajectory. The research framework adopted has both considered the nature of research topic as well as the time constraints of the researcher.

The research framework is defined using the model of ‘the onion research’ developed by Saunders et al. (2012:128).It takes into consideration the methodology of studies mentioned in the literature section, as rationale for the methods that have been applied to this research. In doing so, the chapter is divided into six sections and discuss the most appropriate:

- Philosophy
- Approach

- Strategy
- Methodological choices
- Time horizon
- Techniques and procedures.

3.5 Philosophy

According to Quinlan (2011:95) *'every research project is underpinned by a philosophical framework which evidences the worldview within which the research is situated and which can be seen in every step of the research process. This is where the issue of 'fit' becomes critical'*. Nevertheless, the choice of a *'fit'* philosophical framework depends on *'the assumptions about reality that we bring to our work and consequently to our theoretical perspective'* (Quinlan, 2011:95).

Basically, there are two main categories dealing with these issues: ontology and epistemology, or *'positivist/interpretivist research philosophies'* (Saunders et al., 2012:129). In other words, positivism is linked to quantitative methods, whereas interpretivism is related to qualitative research. Ontology as a field *'concerned with nature of reality'* can be also distinguished between objectivism and subjectivism, in the latter the individual perspective is more important than objectivity (Saunders et al. 2012:130). On the other hand, epistemology *'concerned what constitutes acceptable knowledge in a field of study'* (Saunders et al, 2012:132) also implying three major frames: positivism, realism and interpretivism classifications.

Due to the exploratory nature of the study, the researcher has adopted the interpretivism philosophy because *'(it) advocates that it is necessary for the researcher to understand differences between humans in our role as social actors'* (Saunders et al., 2012:137). Furthermore, the values, the views and the beliefs of the researcher (axiology) have played a great role in deciding the topics to be discussed and the suitable questions for the interviews.

Finally, the interpretivism philosophy advocates '*small sample, in depth-investigation, qualitative [research]*' (Saunders et al., 2012:140) which fits the complex exploration of the link between female HR managers and leadership styles as well as possible changes and the evolution of styles due to career trajectory.

3.6 Approach

After having presented and justified the choice of adopting the interpretivism philosophy taken by the researcher, in this section the most suitable approach (induction versus deduction) will be discussed. For this reason, it is necessary to understand the concept of the opposite methods and the features of an explorative study.

Ketokivi and Mantere (2010) (cited in Saunders et al. 2012:143) state that '*deductive reasoning occurs when conclusion is derived logically from a set of premises, the conclusion being true when all the premises are true.*' On the other hand, the same scholars argue that '*in inductive reasoning, there is a gap in the logic argument between the conclusion and the premises observed, the conclusion being 'judged' to be supported by the observations made.*' Moreover, Saunders et al. (2012:146) emphasize the importance of the context in inductive approaches and the use of small sample that suits better this type of investigation.

Furthermore, Anderson (2011:147) claims that induction is a way of '*building theory*' with the aim of finding '*credible explanation behaviours that have been observed.*' She summarises (2011) the main characteristics of inductive approach that:

'investigates meaning and perceptions, takes context of data into account, allows for incremental development of the research process, collects qualitative data, accepts researcher involvement in the

processes being investigated, accepts the value of deep 'rich' data that is less generalisable.'

(Anderson, 2011:146).

Consequently, due to the nature of the explorative study about female HR and leadership styles, the researcher has applied an inductive approach which fits within the interpretivist philosophy.

3.7 Strategy

A methodological strategy in a study is crucial because it *'is a plan of action to achieve a goal'* (Saunders et al., 2012:173) and according to Denzin and Lincoln (2005) (cited in Saunders et al., 2012:173) *'it is the methodological link between your philosophy and subsequent choice of methods to collect and analyse data.'* The nature of explorative studies requires open questions in order to expand knowledge and understanding about a topic. Consequently there is the need of having flexible and adaptable strategies ((Saunders et al., 2012:173).

The researcher has decided to apply the grounded theory approach to the research due to the fact that its features fit better the aim of the study of exploring, investigating new dimensions of leadership styles, gender and women HR leaders so far neglected as a body of research within literature. Quinlan (2011:183-184) claims that *'grounded theory methodology is used when the specific focus of the research is on building theory from data [and] is very useful when researching phenomenon about which little is known.'* The researcher here thinks grounded theory is appropriate here.

3.8 Methodological Choice

This study has applied a mono-method choice based on qualitative data collection and analysis acknowledging the limitations of not using a multi- or mixed-methods due time constraints.

The rationale of adopting a qualitative data methodology and semi-structured interviews is based on Anderson who claims (2011):

'Answers can be probed, enabling interviewees to explain or build on what they have said. In this way data of a 'rich' quality can be gathered, that allow for people to provide information about their experiences, feelings and motives.'

Anderson (2011:188).

Nevertheless, the same author (2011:188) warns about the drawbacks of a time-consuming process (meeting interviewees, recording/ transcribing talks and data analysis), the difficulty to generate information and problems with the generalisability of findings. However the richness of the process overrules these concerns.

Bearing in mind the aim and objectives of the explorative study, the researcher has adopted a flexible and adaptable data collection approach in order to give the opportunities to the sample of female HR leaders to express their views, concerns and feelings about their leadership styles and articulate their opinions also in regards to sensitive topics, otherwise hardly grasped. In doing so, themes linked to leadership and gender, evolution of styles within their HR environments or challenges over a career trajectory, through open and probing questions, could have freely been discussed providing richness of views to the researcher. The detailed 'Interview Guide' applied is shown in the Appendix A as well as the transcribed and disguised interviews (Appendix C).

It is useful to acknowledge the methodology applied in other studies to validate the approach of the researcher, like Kramar et al. (2012) who used a qualitative approach (semi-structured interviews) in order to explore the trend in the role of HR professionals highlighting the risk of function fragmentation and career segmentation.

The research showed the trend of HR professional to be both people and business focused (transformational and transactional), but gender was not taken into consideration. Furthermore, Kahnweiler (2006:24) interviewed '25 *seasoned HR professionals*' in order 'to uncover the key challenges they have faced during their careers [in managing a successful HR career] and the specific strategies they have adopted to overcome this challenges.' The qualitative approach was applied because of 'lack of research investigating these issues' Kahnweiler (2006:25) about how HR professional manage their career effectively.

The researcher has decided to select a non-probability judgemental sampling technique in order to answer the research questions and focused the attention to a small group of female HR senior leaders in line with the Kahnweiler (2006) approach. According to Saunders et al. (2012:287) this option allows a variety of participants with different characteristics which produce '*the maximum variation in the data collection*'. The 7 senior female HR leaders, from different environments and with a broad HR experience, were able to provide insight on their leadership styles, understand the issues linked to gender, critically analyse the evolution of leadership within the HR profession and finally assess changes related to career trajectory. Furthermore, it was essential to reach data saturation to gain heterogeneous information.

It was necessary to conduct a pilot-test with the aim at verifying the appropriateness of questions and the type of answers provided (Appendix D). Thus, the unclear or ambiguous questions were avoided or reformulated in a better way. This step also allowed the researcher to deal with a small amount of data and being able to analyse them before undertaking the whole process as Anderson (2011:220) suggests the utility of carrying out pilot-tests also in relation to the data analysis phase.

For ethical reasons, a 'Participant Ethics Information Leaflet' (Appendix B), following the advice of Anderson (2011:82), was prepared with the aim of explaining the purpose, the content of the study, the methodology of collecting and analysing

data based on privacy and confidentiality. A written consensus was provided to the candidates in order to display some parts of the interview in the dissertation.

Lastly, the researcher was aware of the limitations concerning generalisability of qualitative data and mono-methods. Equally the limitations of the study due to the small number of interviewees were considered. Other issues linked to this slant, in comparison to a quantitative approach, were those of reliability, validity and potential interviewer or interviewee bias as underlined by Saunders et al. (2012:381-385). The same authors suggest ways to overcome these issues:

- Reliability (difficulty to replicate the same explorative research) can be overcome by adopting a rigorous research strategy and acknowledging the methodology of similar studies.
- Validity of semi-structured interviews should be carried out with the aim of clarifying topics, meanings and themes from different perspectives and add knowledge to the field of investigation.
- Interviewer bias can be overcome by improving the competencies to conduct interviews (good knowledge level, using open questions, questioning skills, ability to deal with unpredictable situations with the interviewees).

Overall, however the approach was appropriate.

3.9 Time Horizon

According to Saunders et al. (2012:190-191) there are two ways of designing research: '*the snapshot taken at a particular moment*' or '*a diary or a series of snapshot*' which leads to a cross-sectional or to a longitudinal research perspective. The same authors highlight the constraint of time available to the researcher as one of the main factors influencing the choices. The cross-sectional horizon is often applied

using both quantitative or qualitative (or mixed) research methodologies. The longitudinal studies have *'the main strengths to study change and development'* of phenomena, but take more time to be carried out. Considering the time constraint of the researcher, a cross-sectional horizon was applied to this study.

3.10 Techniques and Procedures

In this research, techniques and procedures were applied as following:

- Themes were drawn from the broad literature within leadership styles, gender and HR, consequently gaps were found and highlighted.
- Aim and objectives were drawn from the literature review based on evident research gaps and the most suitable research methodology was applied.
- Open questions were prepared upon the most relevant topics discussed in the literature review chapter avoiding risks of bias.
- For ethical reasons, the researcher informed the interviewees about the scope of the study and asked their free written consensus to be interviewed.
- A pilot-test was undertaken in order to verify the appropriateness of the questions and to assess the richness of answers given and when necessary the unclear items were modified.
- All the interviews were recorded and transcribed, consequently a thematic analysis was drawn through codes and categories; then themes were defined grouping the main emergent arguments using a constant comparative method (Appendix E).

- Finally a comparison of the research findings was established with the main topics present in the literature review.

In conclusion, in this chapter the most appropriate methodology research applied to the explorative study of HR female managers and leadership styles has been explained and justified according to the research philosophy (interpretivism), the approach (induction), the strategy (grounded theory), the methodological choice (qualitative mono-method) and time horizon (cross-sectional).

In the next chapter, the researcher will present and discuss in depth the findings of the study.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

This chapter will address the data analysis and findings from the data collection phase undertaken. The chapter will begin by setting out the demographic profile of the interviewees (Section 4.1). Such an analysis is an important starting point to understand the context of responses and experiences. Hence the approach to analysis of the interview data (Section 4.2) will be described. The remainder of the chapter will describe the findings relating to the three research objectives under study, namely:

- i) Analysis of the leadership styles of female HR managers
- ii) Examination of the link between gender and leadership styles in HR managers over time
- iii) Assessment of changes in leadership styles over the career trajectory.

The chapter will conclude with an overview of the findings and how they link to each other.

4.1 Demographic Profile of Interviewees

Similar to the study conducted by Oshgbemi (2008), the research has included context, working environment and qualifications data as important characteristics when looking at questions relating to leadership styles. As such Table 1 sets out the demographic profile of interviewees who participated in this study.

Table 4-1: Demographic Profile of the Female HR Managers

Manager held	Position held	Type of firm	Features of firm	Qualifications	Years in HR	Other previous experiences	Future perspectives considered
A	Senior manager	Irish private service organisation	transformation phase	degree in HR	10 years	public service	HR consultant
B	HR manager	international communication organisation	fast growing phase, learning organisation	MA in Int. Relation. HR certificates	6 years	sales	MD/ CEO
C	Team Leader	international communication organisation	merger phase	PGD in HRM & other degree	4 years	education	Manager of Team Leaders
D	HR manager	Irish non-profit organisation	restructuring phase	PGD in HRM & other degree	+10 years	education	further progression
E	Head of HR	international communication organisation	growing phase, learning organisation	MA in HR	+10 years	marketing	HR director
F	HR specialist	Irish service organisation	restructuring phase	PGD in HRM	16 years	customer service, sales	HR director
G	HR director	international service organisation	organic growth, learning organisation	MA in HR	12 years	retail	none at the moment

All the participants described in Table 4-1 were females, this was a purposeful choice borne out of the fact that this research concerns women's experiences as opposed to men's in leadership and HR. Within the sample there were interviewees selected from a range of firms, positions and experience levels, thereby providing a more comprehensive view of experiences across sectors. All candidates interviewed had a minimum standard of degree level education. Years spent working in HR varied from 4 years to 16 years. The next section sets out the data analysis method adopted.

4.2 Approach to Data Analysis

As outlined in the research methodology chapter this research is underpinned by an interpretivist research stance using a theory building approach. Interviews were used as the research tool. The data which emerged from the interview phase was value

laden and very rich in nature. All interviews were recorded and transcribed with the permission of interview participants. The interview transcriptions were exceptionally comprehensive with interviewees willing to divulge in some cases very personal experiences of their time in leadership and/or HR (A sample of Interview transcriptions are presented in Appendix C). Given the ‘richness’ of the data a detailed stage of analysis was necessary. The approach to data analysis of the extensive qualitative data was the use of coding, wherein several iterations and views of the data was considered at each coding stage. The research analysis coding comprised of three main stages. Stage 1 was open coding where line by line coding was undertaken for each interview question (a copy of the interview guide is contained in Appendix A). Thereafter the open codes were organised, reconsidered and organised into categories which led to the eventual development of themes for each question. Table 2 below shows a sample snapshot of the data analysis approach taken. The comprehensive coding path for each question is shown in Appendix E.

Table 4-2: Data Analysis Coding Path

Objective 1: Leadership style of female HR manager		
1.1 Description of leadership styles applied		
Open codes	Categories	Themes
Mixed styles	Mixed styles	FLEXIBILITY OF STYLES
Participative	Participative	
Adaptability	Transformational	
Transformational	Environment/context	CULTURE
Relationship with employees	Business needs	BUSINESS ORIENTATION
In reaction to stakeholders	Ethical values	ETHICS
Culture		
Inspiring people		
Performance reasons		
Create a new vision		
Organisational transition		
Ethical reasons		
People oriented		

The structure of the chapter follows the three research objectives and link them to the “Interview Guide” which consider ten areas of investigations, but participants were allowed to add other arguments they considered relevant.

The next section will describe the findings from the data analysis phase.

4.3 Data Analysis: Emergent Themes

The themes which emerged from the data analysis phase have been sub categorised into themes relating to leadership styles in HR female managers (Section 4.3.1), leadership style and gender in HR over time (Section 4.3.2) and leadership style over career (Section 4.3.3).

4.3.1 Leadership Styles in HR Female Managers

The participants through their answers offer a variety of themes when describing their leadership styles and in this section the main topics will be presented along with significant extracts of interviews. The key topics related to leadership styles highlighted by the participants are connected to culture, flexibility, business orientation and ethics. Challenges and opportunities are similar (people, HR aspects and economic reasons), but divergences are evident in gender and leadership perception.

4.3.1.1 Leadership Styles

Culture

In describing their leadership styles, most of the participants mentioned the role of culture as one of the main factors shaping or influencing their approach. For instance:

“.... This is a mindset that needs to be embedded in every employee by managers. The managers also need to lead by example, create the vision and influence the buy in from employees. This can be difficult.....”

(Manager E)

Organisations face different phases (transformational, fast growing, restructuring or merger transitions) therefore the HR managers have to adapt their approach accordingly to the culture in which they operate. Manager D adopted directive style during downsizing phases, in a different context manager B uses a participative

approach in her fast growing organisation while Manager A is more transformational oriented in her transformational organisational stage.

Flexibility

The majority of the female HR managers highlight the use of mixed approaches, mostly using TFL or participative styles, but when necessary they also apply directive or TSL methods. For instance Manager C asserts:

“At the moment it’s very much of mixed of styles.... I have a mixed of members, some of them are very mature and proactive..... I give them an idea and a deadline they will come back with the product..... There are others who are younger....I need to sit down ... and tell them what I need ...”

However, Manager A applies TFL with most of her staff, but a democratic style with more mature employees. Consequently, flexibility of styles is applied according to different people and situations, but also under discretion of each manager.

Business Orientation and Ethics

If HR managers are aware of the impact of culture, dealing with different employees and conditions, they also have to consider economic or performance aspects and become task-oriented like Manager E, who states:

“I apply this style because I know it works. The benefits are there for all to see i.e. profit, happy customers, engaged staff.... ”

Depending on the type of culture, performance could be more individual or team focused, however, another important aspect underlined by Manager A is the work ethics:

“I am focused in my approach to work and show motivational style in the way I work, in terms of having sets of work ethics, with certain elements of performance and standards to achieve.”

4.3.1.2 Reasons for Adopting Styles

Broad Context, Employees and HR Personality

In explaining the reasons why the participants adopt mainly a mixed of leadership styles, they emphasise the influence of the broad context (culture and external environment), the employees’ needs and their personality. However, the variety of perspectives is always based on personal views:

“The reasons.... I have chosen these styles ...[is] because of the parts I manage, with different stakeholders and basically it depends on the organisation...., it’s a joint-venture organisation. There is also the requirement from [top] management.”

(Manager F)

While Manager B affirms:

“In the second team, I have to be very very directive. You have exactly to explain to the guys what they should do because they are quite young and they are learning how to do the job. So, before I would expect people to guess, now I just tell them what to do.”

Additionally, Manager A presents another perspective:

“I apply TFL because it allows my values, ability and personality to be reflected in the way I manage. I can bring those elements to the many different leadership roles.”

Moreover, there are specific situations HR female managers have to handle like Manager D taking over a new role not previously covered by a HR professional:

“The reason why I am using this approach is because the organisation has been without a HR person, there have been serious gaps in the way HR has functioned and the reputations of HR.”

4.3.1.3 Challenges and Opportunities

All the participants were aware of facing challenges but also of having opportunities when they apply different leadership styles. Generally there are three areas of major concern and three of main satisfaction.

Employees' Issues, HR Involvement and Financial Constraints

Employees could not be ready to accept more autonomy or be frustrated to follow directive without having a say. The Manager E finds challenges when *‘people [are] not ready, don't fit the organisation’*, whereas the Manager B reflects on the fact that:

“if you don't have engaged staff members who are naturally to go extra miles, [it] is difficult because you will encourage them to participate and they would be waiting for work to be given.”

On the other hand, HR involvement could be very demanding and time consuming as stated by almost all the participants. Manager F claims *“the only thing managing time [with this style] is very challenging.”*, while other problems could arise in relation to top management as by Manager A suggests:

“I felt the challenges are those that can be difficult to implement strategies if top management does not support the way you portrait your leadership style.”

In addition, Manager C briefly states “*budget is always an issue*” but the impact on HR managers along with time constraints is significant.

People Support and Development, HR Image and Competitive Advantage

The female HR managers are also conscious of the opportunities they create through their leadership styles and they can be seen antithetical to challenges. Talent management, development better staff management are commonly agreed. The manager E summarises this perception asserting the use a mixed of styles creates “*greater opportunities for all, people reaching and exceeding their potential, greater ownership and creativity*”.

Being able to adopt the right approach could be beneficial for the HR reputation. Manager C showing respect for employees affirms that “*my leadership style works well because I treat people as individuals, they are not all the same We work with loads of different individuals here, but you need to be flexible as a manager, I think help.*”

In addition, HR managers have also to consider the impact of their approach to the financial return for their organisations. Having engaged, supported and developed employees could create competitive advantage. Manager E openly speaks about creating “*great profit*” as human capital is difficult to imitate!

4.3.1.4 Gender and Leadership

Perception of Discrimination and Diversity

The majority of the participants express perceptions of diversity towards leadership style and gender, or towards being discriminated due to gender, despite the different contexts in which they work and their particular role in HR. Manager B affirms “*I found difficult to cope with them [men in very senior positions] because I was a women and I was perceived differently.*” On the other hand, Manager E claims “*in a*

male oriented environment, no fluffy stuff please!” These situations show again the influence of the environment and perceptions of differences between genders.

However, a few managers completely refuse the relationships between leadership styles, gender and discrimination; all are from international and learning organisations. Manager F clearly affirms:

“I would have never thought, you know, I have to adopt different leadership styles because I am a woman.... I would adopt a leadership style based on the situation and based on the necessity, but not because of gender.”

Though, the same person acknowledges barriers to career development for women due to WLB issues and strong sacrifices to achieve high positions.

Moreover sub-themes emerged as Manager D argues *“gender and HR [are] overlapping”* as *“we try to fix things, whereas men tend to say get on with it”*. Or, Manager C highlights the importance of good female role models within HR *“it was a natural trust”* and the positive implications on her leadership approach.

4.3.2. Leadership Style and Gender in HR over Time

4.3.2.1 Change over Time: Evolution and Impacts

The majority of the HR managers acknowledge having changed approach over time recognising improvement of skills, development of competencies and highlighting a learning process as Manager A clarifies:

“I suppose I have tried to improve my leadership style, learning from each situation and reflecting on past experiences.”

As mentioned earlier, external factors influenced shaping styles and the respondents are able to draw a link between changes or recession and their approaches, like Manager D:

“What transformed me had to deal with difficult issues in HR, which were redundancy, pay cuts, significant ER issues.... I have grown as a person because I had to grow, I had to deal with so many issues.”

Nevertheless, all the interviewees agree to have improved their influence on people, acquired more confidence in their role and adapted to change. Manager G claims *“I think a lot comes with confidence as well.... and employees adapt to different directions.”*

4.3.2.2 Influence of the Role: Implications, Advancements and Other Effects

Due to the different environments, positions held and personalities, the participants give diverse perspectives how the role impacts their leadership style, however most of them consider people management very influential. Manager E states:

“Staff sees everything and if they see you chopping and changing your style when a new manager arrives, you will lose credibility and that won't work for anybody.”

Furthermore, Manager D affirms *“I was working for the management ... and I had to adapt my style to what they wanted”*. The new situation could be challenging in finding the right balance between people and management needs.

All the interviewees started their career from lower levels and progressed, consequently they took over new responsibilities as Manager F confirms *“I got promoted to a group-HR role, it means that my responsibilities expanded into other jurisdictions.”* Therefore, they face new situations and they need to be able to manage

them. Manager G says *“I have seen many leaders in the department over time, I have learned a lot from them, what I would do.”*

Other sub-themes are linked to acquiring confidence in their new positions and Manager D affirms *“I am lot more confident now dealing with difficult situations... reassuring managers... “* in comparison to the previous roles.

4.3.2.3. Influence of Culture, Values, Policies and Procedures

The Key Role of Culture

The participants are strongly focused on the influence of culture when reflecting on their leadership styles over time. Their reality have different characteristics (from open-door, to transformational to continuous change cultures), however all the HR managers have to take into consideration the key role plaid by organisational cultures. Manager F claims *“when you go into an organisation, you should be able to feel the culture... ”*. HR professionals promote culture but they are also under the impact of it.

For these reasons, the participants are conscious on the constant exchange dynamics among them, staff and top management, often with different needs and perspectives. In some circumstances it could be difficult as Manager D asserts *“I have to change the relationships and work on the relationships between the staff categories who felt that against the senior management team.”*

Additional sub-themes are the influence of their own personality (Manager D) or the top-down and vice-versa informal relationship (Manager F) shaping their leadership styles over time.

The Key Role of Values and Procedures

All the interviewees, as seen for culture, strongly agree about the role of values in adopting a style over another, but they need to differentiate types of values and find

the link among them. Practically customer-values are on the top of the list along with people-values, though others are added: ethical and diversity values (Manager A), *”collaboration among departments and training”* (Manager G) or *“developing people”* (Manager C). They also analyse the impact on employees such *“we are expecting our employees to go the extra-miles and you are not necessarily given them financial reward for that”* (Manager G). Nevertheless, Manager C considers little room and power for a HR professional to change values *“we don’t have a say in that, but we can interpret it a little bit ourselves.”*

The participants were asked to reflect on policies and procedures and to verify the relationship with their leadership styles. Most of them deny any link, but consider them *“tools of leadership”* (Manger B) or *“affecting practices”* (Manager C). The managers who answer affirmatively are those dealing with security, health and safety issues, therefore the only style adopted is the directive:

“Policies and procedures are there for a reason i.e. safety, security, etc. and usually they have to be applied in a consistent manner. If they have not being applied in the way they were meant to, that a more directive leadership style has to be applied.”

(Manager E)

4.3.3 Leadership Style Over a Career

The last part of the interviews is focused on leadership styles over the HR managers’ career with the aim of highlighting challenges, changes and evaluations of their approaches.

4.3.3.1 Challenges in Transitions Times

Nearly all the HR managers agree with the acquisition of new competencies and the need to change behaviours during transition times, moving from lower to upper

levels. Manager B for instance verbalises: “... *I moved to a coordinator role, I had to start to take myself more seriously and learn more about business and about business requirements.*”. Also visibility increases along with responsibilities:

“ *Now taking this jump to be HR director, you know everyone is watching you....*”

(Manager G)

The main challenges at this stage are related to the support HR professionals could receive or not receive from top management and from staff. Tools of support are those of mentoring, improve knowledge, learn the right behaviour towards people and trust. Manager D claims “*when you have to go to that transition it’s very important that you get that support.*”. However, there are also personal challenges linked to the HR managers’ personality: “*be competent and female*” (Manager D), “*developing a style that is consistent, authentic*” (Manager E) or “*the self as a challenge*” (Manager G).

Despite the successful progression of the participants, most of them reflect on their HR career and depending on their level and past struggles, they show positive (Managers G and C) or more grieved considerations: “... *there is not a huge amount of management support to develop you as HR*” (Manager A). Again, transitions depend on several personal and organisational factors.

4.3.3.2 Type of Change: People Support, Flexibility and Limits

Regardless the type of leadership adopted by the participants, people support and development are considered important changes in their approaches: more awareness of employee’s needs and the significance of training them in order to progress. Manager B states “*I listen to where they want to go in the future career and I try to organise work around these things..*”, while Manager D adds “*I had scope and I was dealing with staff, working with them, coaching managers on vary issues*”.

Another type of change is linked to more flexibility in applying leadership styles in comparison to previous roles and more confidence to use TFL when appropriate or more directive style under specific circumstances. In this regard Manager A affirms *“Now I am more confident and I have the ability to change and bring a more flexible approach to the HR role.”* The consequences are those of better decision-making processes, increase of assertiveness and higher understanding of business requirements.

Additionally, the participants underline specific environmental constraints influencing leadership approaches during their career, for instance recession could bring back to more directive styles:

“Probably it was also a little bit directive or autocratic, especially when I was going through the crises because we had to do it. There was no choice!”

(Manager D)

Lastly, lack of role models and lack of HR directions could slow down careers and have an impact on styles during professional advancements (Manager A) creating more uncertainty and fears.

4.3.3.3 *Leadership Style Assessment: Reflections, People Development and Influences*

The last question is related to the evaluation of the HR managers' leadership styles, what worked well and what did not, explaining the main reasons. The participants take the opportunity to think about their HR roles, styles and efficiency. They express a variety of opinions around these topics according to their personal needs, experiences and environments. For instance, Managers B and G underline the specificity of the HR field being very feminine, sometimes *“territorial and manipulative”* (Manager B) or with little (male) diversity for Manager G, who claims more gender diversification could increase efficiency in the sector.

As in the analysis of the type of leadership style change over a career, again the focus on people development is seen as an important achievement for the participants. Manager F affirms:

“As a leader, mentor or coach, your role is much more serious, I take it very seriously. So you have [to approach people], if you strongly believe to be a role model...”

However, Manager A presents another standpoint claiming:

“I would assess my leadership style as someone who has the ability to influence other people’s behaviour. Leading by example, by the time has proven to be very effective as a transformational leader.”

As foreseeable, the evaluation of approaches is also linked to diversified influences: from “*ethical values*” (Managers A and F), to “*the previous experiences with good or bad managers*” and “*diverse role models*” for almost the interviewees, to professional assessments and courses attended (Manager G) or to personality and specific needs (Managers C, F and G).

The data analysis and findings from the semi-structured interviews over the three research objectives have led to highlight four overarching themes: environment, organisational culture, people development and awareness of the HR role as shown in Figure 4-1. All these elements have been mentioned by the 7 HR female managers in describing their leadership styles, examination over time and in relation to change in their career trajectory.

Figure 4-1: Link to Overarching Questions



4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with the data analysis of the mono-qualitative approach and semi-structured interview of 7 female HR managers in order to fulfil the three research objectives attempting to add knowledge to the areas of leadership, gender and HR. In doing so, a “Data analysis coding path” was prepared and linked to the “Interview Guide”. The interviews were firstly analysed using open codes, then categories and lastly broader themes emerged from the participants’ answers. It was also necessary to list a “Demographic profiles” of the interviewees with the aim to find connections with their environments and experiences.

The themes were divided by the three objectives and then linked to topics presented in the “Interview Guide”. The richness of the answers received was analysed and grouped by main themes, but it was also necessary to select and to prioritise them due to the length of the research.

Within the objective of defining leadership styles in HR managers, strong emphasis was drawn on culture in shaping styles, however flexibility of approaches and focus

on business needs were also important topics discussed. In debating leadership styles and gender in HR over time, the participants underlined the evolution of their approaches and the importance of improving their competencies through constant learning processes. All agreed on the key role of culture and values in influencing their slants, but not on the role of policies and procedure, mainly linked to reasons of safety and security. Lastly, within the objective of leadership styles over a career development, the interviewees underlined the importance of receiving support from top managers, but also to the significance of helping and developing their staff and the influence of their role models.

In the next chapter a discussion over the interviews findings will link the main topics here presented with the previous research carried out in the same fields.

Chapter 5: Discussion

In this chapter the discussion of the key findings presented in the previous chapter will be interrelated with concepts and theories debated in the literature and results compared with previous studies conducted in similar areas. However, as mentioned in the literature review, the research linked to female HR managers and the development of their leadership over time is limited. The structure of the chapter will follow the three objectives questions and will emphasise the key topics which have emerged from the qualitative investigation.

5.1 Objective 1: Leadership Style of Female HR Managers

5.1.1 Transformational Orientation and Flexibility

All the interviewees confirm the importance of adopting a mix of styles and show robust focus on TFL aiming at balancing people, tasks and organisational requirements, even though the impact of type of organisation and kind of culture could lead to different combinations of slants and flexibility. For instance, Manager F asserts *'the reasons I have chosen these [mix of] styles is because I manage different stakeholders and basically it depends on the organisation'*. These findings are in line with Bass et al. (1990) who assert that TFL is more efficient than TSL because allows leaders to show effective influence on people, take into consideration individual needs, intellectually stimulate employees and constantly inspire their staff, however both styles can be applied according to different situations. Moreover, the stances adopted by the participants are also aligned with Yukl's assumptions (2006) who integrate three crucial elements of effective leadership: task-oriented, relation-oriented and change-oriented behaviours. This approach is clearly adopted by Manager C, D, E and F. In addition, in some cases the female HR managers have adopted the TFL because of organisational and top management requirements, but it could also be based on personal decisions (like Manager A) as confirmed by the CIPD (2012). Leaders' identity plays a key role in determining leadership styles, even

though the link between identity and individual slant development is still little known (CIPD, 2012). Similar assumptions are shared by Arnold et al. (2013) who found in their investigation a multiplicity of factors influencing leadership and a link among leaders' personality, context and situation in shaping styles. Therefore, flexibility of approaches derives from a variety of factors the participants have to face.

5.1.2 *Efficiency of Leadership styles*

According to Ulrich et al. (2001) HR managers should incorporate multiple roles in their functions (leader, conscience, facilitator, etc.). This theory is known as '*the interdependent role of HR*' and this stance has clearly adopted by the participants who show the ability and the responsibility to adapt to different roles. Nevertheless, the limited number of participants cannot reveal preponderance or minority of functions undertaken. Additionally, the interviewees show strong focus in their leadership on relationships, values and contexts in which they work, supporting the model of the CIPD (2012) being the best attitudes to face evolving professional challenges. However, problems arise when cultures and values are not aligned within organisations, thus creating problems for the professionals as Managers D and F confirm to have faced challenges during their organisational change transactions. Additionally, all the participants put strong focus on displaying good/ethical values towards people and openly discuss resistance from staff to change values in transformational organisational stages. In fact Manager D states '*... they [staff] know no different and they don't have sense of urgency to change...*'. Lastly, the interviewees display a mix of strategic influences, but they also seem to act under the robust impact of four key factors (people, culture, strategy and organisation future). These findings correspond with Sears (2011) '*the insight-led approach*', that claims that there are four underlying levels of influence to increase strategic focus of HR professionals.

5.1.3 Assumption of Gender Leadership Styles

The present study endorses the findings of Arnold et al. (2004) and Eagly et al. (2003) stating women leaders show more transformational than transactional approaches in their leadership and contradict the gender stereotypes asserting women being more communal (relationship-oriented) than agentic (business-oriented). While Hare et al. (1997) distinguish three different gender values' perceptions (dominant vs submissive, friendly vs unfriendly and accepting tasks-orientation vs opposite) leading to the assumptions why women are perceived more people-oriented than task-oriented. On the other hand, in their study Eagly et al. (2003:822) confirm '*women thus face discriminatory barriers mainly in male-dominated and masculine environments and with male evaluators.*' The present investigation discloses discrimination and prejudices towards female HR managers within predominantly male environment (Manager B), with lack of learning approaches (Managers A and D), factors that undermine women assertiveness and strategic orientations. In other type of cultures (fast-growing, learning oriented and global organisations), the interviewees claim good support received from top management, developmental tools (mentoring, courses) and role models apt to sponsor their transformational approach. Those female HR managers deny forms of gender discrimination, Manager F asserts '*... that is irrelevant whether you are female or male*'. While the other managers feel more under pressure of hostile environments toward their role and leadership styles as clearly Manager A claims '*gender male leadership style is different from female leadership style.*'

5.2 Objective 2: Leadership Styles in HR Female Managers over Time

5.2.1 Impact of Environment, Culture and Position Held

In the literature it is agreed that adapting the HR role according to the need of the organisation (Kramar et al., 2012; CIPD, 2012; Murphy et al. 2003) embracing stronger strategic leadership styles is important. Conversely, the same researchers express different views in regards to the type of competencies necessary to become

more strategic oriented. The 7 female HR managers present a mixed of styles independently of their middle or more senior hierarchic rank. However, they tend to use more directive or task-oriented leadership styles in previous lower roles (Managers B and C) and become more flexible in higher positions also due to personal maturity achievement (Managers A, B, F,G) confirming the research conducted by Bruch et al. (2007). Additionally, the type of organisation (fast growing, transformational or downsizing organisations) and culture have an evident impact on the way the HR women adopt leadership styles. Manager E claims '*your style needs to complement or compensate for their style* [top managers]' during transformational times. Moreover, the present findings partially contradict and partially confirm the results of the present study the study carried out by Oshagbemi (2008) investigating the relationship between genders, personal, organisational variables and leadership styles, the author found a link amid age, hierarchical level and experience and the use of one-two or more flexible approaches, though gender did not have any impact on them. The improved competencies and the ability to recognize the efficiency of an approach according to situations, people and business requirements allowed older managers to become more adaptable. However at top levels managers tended to use one or two styles, while at lower ranks they used a variety of approaches. Type of culture did not have any influence on managers' styles. According to the interviewees, gender could influence the use of a particular approach even though not unanimously agreed.

5.2.2 Development of Leadership Skills and Mix of Competencies

Another research conducted by Kramer et al. (2012) had the aim of highlighting the emerging skills and competencies of HR managers need to develop over time and explore the trends among these professionals in relation to the Ulrich's model of the "HR player". In doing so, the authors underline the complexity in which HR people work, having people responsibilities, knowledge of the business (performance focus) and at the same time be able to add value and create competitive advantage for organisations, evident approach in Managers A, B, C and G. The findings show an

increased expectation of people development for HR managers, driving culture of change, being able to create new culture and improve engagement of employees (Kramer et al., 2012:151). All these elements are present in the approaches adopted by the 7 women HR managers interviewed. It is also evident the trend of being architect of change and support engagement of staff at any level and under diverse circumstances. Manager D affirms '*probably HRs tend to take the first bullet when they deal with transformation of change agenda programs.*' Consequently the HR managers have acquired a mix of competencies pertaining human, business and strategies' areas as well shown by the participants and supported by the CIPD (2011) through the model of the '*insight driven HR role*'.

5.2.3 Talent Development Orientation

The participants demonstrate strong evidence and clear awareness of people development considering the variety of personal and teams' needs and specific business requirements. For instance Manager C declares '*... this is very good for developing people, develop their approach...*', while Manager A states '*developing young leaders by giving them support and guidance by providing more learning and development opportunities that will allow them to progress..*'.

Their support is both short-oriented (to achieve the required tasks and reach the performance target) and long-term focus on promote and facilitate career progression of their employees. These stances are in line with the importance of HR professional of being able to promote talent development within organisations is an element intensively supported by Adams (2012), Sears (2011) and Holbeche (2010a) in order to face future economic challenges. Holbeche (2010a:217) claims "*... HR leaders must be change agents and capability builders... They will drive management innovation to create forms of leadership which are fit for the future*". She also points out the value of developing teams and not only individuals. However, it is not clear if the participants in their positions are capable to "*create new forms of leadership*" that will be applied in the future!

5.3 Objective 3: Change of Leadership Styles in HR Female Managers over the career development trajectory

5.3.1 Challenges

The interviewees discuss several challenges met along their career development such as having more demanding roles (Managers B, G and D) or not enough experience (Managers C and F), partially echoing the findings reported by Kahnweiler (2006:26) on experienced HR professionals associated with *'lack of power, walking a tightrope, dealing with sceptical customers who view HR negatively, vulnerability, being overwhelmed'*. Basically, depending on the type of firm, the stage in which the organisation is settled and kind culture, the women HR managers could face all these difficulties. Then again, *'lack of power'* can be attributed to lack of support from top management and lack of recognition for the function of supporting and developing people as expressed by Manager A. Being viewed negatively, or having a negative reputation, appears in situations of enormous cultural changes or during downsizing times in which HR managers carry the responsibility of cutting jobs, salaries, etc. Manager D reveals *'you have to do things for the good of the organisation that staff might not like...'* when there are no alternatives to cutting jobs. Despite the extreme situations presented by the participants, a common condition is shared among them *'being overwhelmed'*!

5.3.2 Diversified Change

Most of the interviewees agree on having improved their leadership skills and competencies to support and develop people in comparison to previous roles in which task or performance focuses could have been more significant. Not always it is evident if this trend is primarily due to organisational needs, personal aspirations or both. However, the strategic orientation of the HR professionals finds its reasons in creating more competitive advantage. This trend corresponds to the theoretical frameworks of the *'engaging leadership'* (CIPD, 2012:7-8) in which new competencies are necessary *'supporting employee growth; interpersonal style and integrity; monitoring directions'*. At different levels, but with great enthusiasm, the 7

female HR managers display all these management competencies. Manager B verbalises *'I can see that people respond really well to this style [transformational] and you can see the amazing potential...'*. Additionally, most of the participants show a great sense of awareness of their role and responsibility, correlated to the key components of the *'authentic leadership'* as theorised by Wong et al. (2009).

5.3.3 Reflections on the HR Profession

Given the variety of leadership styles adopted, the different levels and roles of the participants, changes over the career trajectory could be very divergent. However, there is a factual agreement on the feminized environment of HR and findings stated by Churchard (2013) and Pomeroy (2007) in relation to the function of mentors and role models (or lack) supporting women HR managers and their careers development. Support can smooth career developments, on the contrary slowing and making more difficult advancements. Manager C asserts *'I have been very lucky that [with] all my managers I felt I had like a friendship with them'*, but Manager A had a different experience: *'there was limited support of guidance there, mentoring was lacking as well'*. The current study also confirms the trend of women HR professionals to start their careers from the bottom and move up to more senior positions (Pomeroy, 2007:51). This progression allows women to acquire competencies matching good experience and professional qualifications (Pichler et al., 2008; Pomeroy, 2007) as shown by the interviewees.

5.4 Unusual Findings

Before undertaking the qualitative investigation, the researcher did not expect to come across themes that the interviewees clearly presented in their answers:

- People development independently of leadership styles and hierarchical ranks
- High level of awareness and responsibility of the HR role in any work context
- Robust continuous learning process of the female HR managers.

5.5. Summary of the Key Findings

All the interviewees present similar assumptions in relation to three research questions and highlight common emergent topics within each area, as such Figure 5-1 sets out:

Figure 5-1: Summary of the key findings



5.6 Conclusion

In this section, the researcher has presented the key finding of the explorative study and attempted to find links with theories, trends and studies related to the three research objectives. Within the section leadership style of female HR managers, transformational orientation and flexibility, efficiency of leadership and assumption of gendered approaches have been confronted with the updated literature. Within the second objective, the impact of the environment, developments of leadership skills and talent development orientation have been confronted with similar studies. Lastly, challenges, diversified changes and reflections on the HR profession have been assessed according the last trends in the field. Despite the high correlation and similarities found with other studies, the researcher acknowledges the limitation of her findings due to the restricted number of female HR managers interviewed.

In the last chapter, the key findings of the explorative study of 7 female HR managers along with practical recommendations, limitations, further research and the personal learning statement will conclude the dissertation process.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In the previous chapters, the researcher has presented the aims and objectives of the exploratory investigation over leadership styles of 7 female HR managers over their career trajectory in Ireland. This study has examined the related literature review and gaps in the area, explained the rationale for the methodological approach taken and presented and discussed data. In the last chapter the key findings are highlighted along with the recommendations drawn upon the emergent themes extrapolated from the semi-structured interviews. In addition, limitations of the present study and possible further research will be underlined. Lastly, the researcher's personal learning statement will conclude the dissertation.

Key Findings

The most relevant findings related to the three research objectives (analysis of the leadership styles; examination of the link between gender and leadership styles over time; assessment of change in leadership styles over a career trajectory development) related to the 7 HR female managers under the semi-structured interviews examination can be summarised as follows:

Leadership Styles in HR Female Managers

Strong emphasis is put on the influence of culture in adopting an approach over another, but flexibility is also an element that they participants presented, lastly business focus and ethics were other important themes discussed. The reasons for using specific styles are mainly linked to the broad context, employees' needs and the personalities of managers. Challenges and opportunities seem to be the same: people, HR aspects and business attributes. In the section of gender and leadership opinions of perception of discrimination varies according to experience and environment.

Leadership Style and Gender in HR over Time

The main changes reported are those of improving approaches due to the development of competencies and through a continuous learning process. Other implications are related to the role held which are again linked to environments and personality of the manager. Additionally, reflection on career advancement is an important element to be mentioned along with new responsibilities and challenges. Lastly, the role of culture and values are crucial in influencing approaches over time and depending on safety and security reasons also procedures are taken into consideration.

Leadership Styles over the Career Development

The participants draw attention to support given to them by top management and staff as main challenges, but also subjective reasons like personality. The central type of change is associated with the improvement of people support and development, but also the acquisition of more confidence in using flexible styles in comparison to previous positions. They also underline diversified influences over their career trajectory linked to having had good or bad managers.

Recommendations

In relation to the research objectives and the key findings generated by the semi-structured interviews with 7 female HR managers, at policies and practice levels the following recommendations could facilitate women in their careers:

- Intervene at an organisational level promoting a culture of support, positive role models, avoiding gender biases and discrimination, aiming at facilitating the advancement of women HR managers starting from lower to upper ranks.
- Provide understanding, empathy and technical support to HR professionals during challenging phases of change, transformational or recession times, when responsibility towards employees creates high pressure and stress.

- Ensure female HR managers are involved in any strategic decision-making process, promote ethical values across organisations and are recognised for playing a crucial role in the support and development of employees.
- Consider the specific developmental needs of the female HR managers at any stage of their career and provide tailored support, mentoring programs, assessments, courses or network apt to facilitate their transition stages to upper levels.

Limitations

While this study has provided a useful and important addition to the body of literature concerning gender, HR and leadership it is not without limitations. The study is exploratory in nature and while this approach was correct in light of the research questions under study it must be recognised that this does infer a non-generasibility of findings. Secondly, the research took into consideration a sample of female HR leaders without focusing on any particular sector, therefore it was not possible to highlight trends among specific work environments. Thirdly, the leadership styles were investigated within an organisational context without considering other elements such societal or psychological factors influencing gender and leadership styles, such analysis would require both psychology training as well as significantly more time and was outside the scope of this study. Lastly, the female HR leaders interviewed expressed their personal and subjective views about leadership styles and no other actors (followers) were involved to support their assertions.

Further Research

It would be useful to expand the body of research related to leadership styles, gender and HR as follows:

- Apply the same questions using a mixed methodology (quantitative and qualitative approach) in order to increase the validity and reliability of findings.
- Consider three different working environments (private, state and non-profit) exploring the link between culture and leaderships styles, thus addressing the work specific limitation outlined above.
- Take into consideration the career development of segmented HR positions (junior to middle level, middle to senior level, senior to top managerial level) and their implications.
- Investigate the new leadership perspectives (insight-driven, ethical, authentic, distributed, etc.) exploring the impact on HR female leaders.

Personal Learning Statement

After having accomplished all the research process in order to achieve the aim and objectives of the dissertations, the researcher is more aware of the knowledge and the steps necessary to carry out a qualitative investigation and report the main findings. The author has learnt how to set academic goals, have a critical and lateral thinking towards topics and how to link research questions all along the exploratory examination. However, if the researcher were doing the study over again, she would match differently the creative-thinking with the structural and the writing phases and try to clearly highlight each stage separately, and of course revise them continuously!

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

a) Leadership styles of female HR managers

1. How would you describe your leadership style in your current position/job?
(examples of leadership styles: transformational, transactional, directive, participative, laissez/faire or a mixed of styles)
2. Why do you apply this leadership style, do you think it works? What other styles have you considered, have they worked? Why/Why not?
3. What are the main challenges/opportunities of using this leadership style?
4. In your opinion, does gender affect the choice of using a leadership style over another? Why/Why not?

b) Link between leadership styles and gender in HR over time

5. Have you changed your leadership styles over time? Why/Why not?
6. Do you think your leadership style over time has been influenced by the roles you have held, i.e. by your progression through the firm? Why?
7. In your opinion:

Does **organisational culture** influence your leadership style, can you provide some examples?

Do **values** influence your leadership style, can you provide some examples?

Do **policies & procedures** influence your leadership style, can you provide some examples?

c) Change in leadership style over a career development

8. In your opinion, which are the main challenges HR leaders' faces in their 'transition time' to upper levels (during the transition from lower to higher levels of the hierarchy, with different duties and responsibilities)? Are the same at each stage?
9. What kind of changes to your leadership style have you adopted during your career, if any? Why and how have you changed your style? What prompted you to change?
10. How would you assess your leadership styles over your career? What kind of leadership styles worked better for you and what did not? Why? Why not?

Is there any additional information you would like to provide at this time?

Thank you for your time

<Interview Closed>

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT ETHICS INFORMATION LEAFLET



Informed Consent Form

“Exploratory study of leadership styles and gender: an analysis of female HR managers styles over their career trajectory in Ireland”

The aim of this project is to explore leadership styles of female HR managers over their career development trajectory in Ireland. In doing so, three areas will be investigated: leadership styles of female HR managers, the link between gender and leadership styles in HR managers over time and lastly if change in leadership styles occurs over the career development trajectory. The originality of this study is the combination of three dimensions of investigation (leadership styles, gender and HR) that was never done before in the literature. This study is carried out by conducting semi-structure interviews with senior female HR managers. The interview will be recorded, then transcribed and lastly a thematic analysis of the qualitative data collected will be reported into the dissertation. The findings will be reported anonymously. The researcher will keep all the data strictly confidential and private and use them only in relation to the dissertation.

<i>I am undertaking this project: who I am, and how can you contact me if you wish so?</i>	I am a part-time student undertaking a research dissertation in order to get the master diploma in HR: My email is: mariarosa.nava@gmail.com My mobile phone is: 086 177 78 62
<i>What is the purpose of my project?</i>	To explore the leadership styles of female HR managers over their career trajectory in Ireland.
<i>What contribution am I</i>	To answer to questions related to: leadership styles as a woman HR manager; to examine the link between

<i>requesting from you?</i>	gender & leadership style over time; to assess if change in leadership styles occurs over a career development trajectory.
<i>How will the information be recorded?</i>	The information gathered during the interview will be recorded (tape) and the transcribed into 'interview-notes'.
<i>How will the information be stored?</i>	The data will be safely stored in my laptop in a file under a password protection.
<i>When will the information be gathered?</i>	During the interview.
<i>What arrangements will be made regarding confidentiality of information?</i>	The researcher will keep these data strictly private and confidential and use them only in regards to the actual research dissertation.
<i>What if you do not want to participate?</i>	Nothing happens.
<i>What will happen to all the data once it has been gathered?</i>	The data will be recorded, transcribed and analysed under a 'thematic approach'. When the dissertation will be assessed, the data will be completely destroyed.
<i>How will the findings be reported?</i>	In an anonymous way and only when strictly necessary for the understanding of the qualitative findings and discussion.

If the research participant wants to see the questions in advance, I can send them by mail.

To be completed by the research participant:

I confirm that I have read and understood the information on this informed consent form relating to this research. I confirm that I consent to take part to this study and I give my consensus to report some parts of the interview only for academic reasons in the dissertation:

Name (please write clearly)

.....

Signature:

Date:

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEWS TRANSCRIPTION

Codes

MANAGER A

Q1: description of leadership style

I would describe my current leadership style as being a transformational leader. I feel I have the **personality** and the **ability to influence people**, I also have a certain level of **emotional intelligence** and I know how to deal individually with people. I am very focused in my approach to work and show a **motivational** style in the way I work, in terms of having sets of **work ethic**, with certain elements of performance and standards to achieve. So, I would be driven by high level of performance in the area of service and orientation. My leadership style portrays a positive can do attitude and I feel colleagues look up to me as someone who is able to motivate and inspire people to engage more actively in their work. I think that helps people as well.

Q2: why do you apply this style

I apply TFL because it allows my values, ability and **personality** to be reflected in the way I manage. I can bring those elements to the many different leadership roles. I would have used a **democratic leadership style** with a small team in a pay roll department. The reason I would have used that style, it was because they were middle-aged ladies, they were competent in their roles, in order to run the department more effectively, everyone came together and voiced their opinions, which involved them in the decision making. They were able to have a say in the running of the department and their opinions changed. The 4-5 finance officers and payroll staff were mature and specialized in their area of expertise, so it worked in that situation as they were participating in the team work and through more effective decision making, they were able to run their department more smoothly. Having a say, the result was that of more corporation and team work. So that would be my big change in my TFL, I stepped back and let them take more ownership of what needed to be done. But I would not recommend this style for a large team, because it would be very difficult to get people to agree on certain changes and to start with a new process, it would not work.

Q3: challenges and opportunities

I felt the challenges are those that can be difficult to implement strategies if **top management** does not support the way you portrait your leadership style, this could be a **barrier**. And again, if it does not come directly from the **culture** of the organisation, e.g (if it does not come from the top down it is very hard to implement at middle management leadership level). One of the main challenges that I came across in one of the company I worked for, the board of directors would not necessarily appreciate my leadership style, the way I did.

Opportunities: create open communication that would improve the **motivational** level, if you have clear dialogue with your staff and they know exactly what is happening, they will become more engaged and want to be involved this will allow higher levels of productivity and help to improve staff morale. People take on more ownership when communication channels are clearer. You can change attitudes and motivate people to work collaboratively towards achieving the goals of the

organisation. I think people are influenced by somebody who is fair and open and where there is transparency that enables people to work for the good of the organisation. When clearer direction is given everyone feels more of a sense of ownership and they show more responsible towards their own individual input. **Development** of staff is a critical point and I think if you have emotional intelligence, you can communicate with the individuals and see exactly where they fit into the company. Maybe, look from a horizontal point of view, if there is anything you can do as leader, maybe consider more flexibility by providing additional training to allow them to work in different roles within the organisation. The advantage you can see their abilities, maybe some area within the organisation that is suitable to them and you can try to bring their potential to a higher level. Developing young leaders by giving them support and guidance by providing more learning and development opportunities that will allow them to progress and be constantly learning. Implement development plans and try to have a road map for progression and further development
TSF is easier for staff development because you can bring in the **coaching** element into it and provide more mentoring, this is important as it allows you to be inspirational in their journey and you can monitor progression.

Q4: leadership style and gender

Yes, I think gender affects the leadership style (male and female). Gender male leadership style is **different** from female leadership style. Male gender style is more assertive, more business oriented when it comes to the top level, they are more directive, take decisive actions, while women will tend to look more at emotional side and will not be as aggressive in their approach, maybe. I do think gender has an impact on leadership style.

Q5: change leadership over time

Yes, I suppose I have tried to **improve** my leadership style, learning from each situation and reflecting on past experiences. I tried to be an authentic leader, so I always found effective ways to work with different teams and tried to get the best out of teams, which work well for themselves, to have focus and to think outside the box with a problem-solving approach. I think from any situation you can learn from. I suppose I tried to develop people further.

You also change because you know what works well and you know what you can take from being this type of leader. So, you know what areas you need to improve, but also you develop techniques because you have the ability to motivate people. I suppose your emotional intelligence brings in a lot of extra competencies that you work on and develop through the transformational leadership.

Q6: influence by the role

Yes, I think that the **previous work experience** had played a significant part in shaping my leadership style. I was probably motivated by colleagues who were in the same situations. We may have started at the same level and we progressed along the chain of command in terms of being promoted to supervisor, to duty manager, to active manager, to joint-manager and finally to general manager. So you would have

been much focused on standards and being part of managing a centre of excellence. That would have been every area we dealt with, and one of the critical areas would have been people management: having the flexibility to train people in three-four different areas within the organisation, allowed more flexibility and productivity back. For me it was all part of how HR worked at the beginning, because I was able to see the ability of people, have the flexibility to train people, to develop them and see the benefits back to the organisation. Then, productivity from the staff was remarkable and it gave individuals a great chance to learn how other departments ran and a chance to work in those areas if further positions became available.

Q7: influence from organisational culture, values, policies & procedures

I was involved with a Transfer of Undertakings at one point in my career, when the new management took over the company. There was a lot of uncertainty and worry among all the staff. A complete new clear communication strategy was implemented. From the beginning the new management was able to spend a lot of time and resources working with a staffing of 65 and 8 different departments. Through clear direction from the top and a collaborative approach involving all levels of staff, we were able to agree on a unified mission statement. That would give us an opportunity to look at this **new organisational culture** that had been developed and how it was instrumental in influencing people. A new strategy was brought in and it would have had an impact on me as leader in HR as well.

Example: In the old company, the culture of the organisation and the strategy was not clear, it was not for the best interest of the organisation, so trying to manage in that situation was very demotivating. It would affect what you knew as a leader, but in terms of having directions, guidance, or support, nothing was there. The new takeover meant that this company had a new vision for the future, had a 5-year plan and motivated us and we felt inspired by this senior management. They involved all staff from the cleaners upwards. It gave everyone a sense of belonging and I suppose more confidence that someone from the top cares. Now you could actually put your HR experience into practice and find new ways of doing things again. So, people began to feel wanted again and felt a sense of pride in their work and most of all for the organisation and the new culture it had created. As a leader you could **retain your staff** and make them feeling appreciated and part of the team, 'yes, this is going to be the centre of excellence', like it was promised. We were going to have standards and we were able to make them work. It gave us all a sense of purpose again.

Values play a significant part in the way you manage your leadership style. If you have a **high level of integrity, respect, self-fairness and purpose**, you will automatically bring these qualities into your leadership style. These aspects are very important if you deal with all types of diverse groups, I think, especially if people can witness that from leaders in terms for instance within performance review or appraisals. If it's quite clear and transparent what you want, the company can tell the individuals their expectations and portray clarity. They might think you are open, if there is fairness and they know that they can deal with you. You feel this respect and trust is gained, it works well.

Policies & procedures: I don't think they have impacted my leadership style. In the organisation I worked for service orientation, we were dealing with the public, so in terms of policies they were there more or less to protect the employees and the

organisation. They guided and directed people, but I don't see affecting my leadership style, from my point of view.

Q8: challenges in the transition times

Yes, I think there are quite a few challenges: there is **not a huge amount of management support** to develop you as a HR. I think you learn on the ground as it happens.

There is not enough **mentoring or coaching** or guidance given if you need support, I think. I also felt that HR doesn't really make any impact on the bottom line, it's not taken that seriously, it's there but it not as high significant. Each department will have their monthly review, HR is not valued as it should be, it should be more focused on key performance indicators and getting return on investment for your HR and where HR is valued in the organisation. The **heavy workload** can be restricting or prohibiting HR managers from training other managers with the skills how to manage their teams. So, a lot of your time can be taking up with other departments that have managers and they have not been trained to deal with the day-to-day responsibility. From my experience some managers feel that it is the role of HR to deal with all issues that arise with people management. In large organisations, your time could be spent adding more value and I just feel there needs to be more time to be given to training HR managers instead of managing themselves.

I suppose that at higher levels, you tend to delegate a little bit more and you will be more organised about your structure. As you develop, you have more skills in time management, so you are able to plan better, but in terms of workload it can be difficult to focus on the key areas that are going to matter in managing HR as a leader.

Q9: change of leadership style over a career

I suppose from my work experience, my own personal development was returning **back to further education to complete my degree**. Now, I am more confident and I have the ability to **adapt to change and I can bring a more flexible approach to the HR role**. I suppose this would allow more assertiveness, decision-making and more opportunity to apply culture techniques in the development of all staff. I think that I have changed my leadership style during my career, now I am more decisive in terms of decision-making. I would be more efficient and feel more confident and I have the ability to know how it works and to how manage and lead people better. It was very important for me as a young leader in the industry I was in, to feel that if I had more support about my development and some kind of guidance. I could have got up to higher levels probably at a younger age, instead having the experience but not the academic knowledge. I had to go back to college later in order to obtain my degree, but it could have happened quicker. I suppose, because I was ambitious and eager to learn and be promoted, it worked out well in the end. However, definitely if there was some kind of support or role modelling given, some kind of directions or path from an HR person or Senior Manager, it would have been a lot easier for me, maybe to qualify earlier and advance to a more senior level at a quicker pace.

Q10: assess your leadership style over a career

I would assess my leadership style as someone who has the **ability to influence other people's behaviour. Leading by example**, by the time has proven to be very effective as a transformational leader. I suppose, I exhibit clear focus on consistent behaviour which has generated trust among the colleagues and people I have worked with, portraying a good level of emotional intelligence, having awareness of the different diverse working groups, and knowing the working environment and a good understanding of the business. Overall, the transformational leadership is more effective for me, but I also feel it depends on the situation you find yourself in and the culture of the organisation has probably a great impact to play on that as well. As I progressed through the different stages in my career, It was my own ambition and passion to develop further. HR presence was lacking in terms of leadership development. For me, there were no set management development programmes that could have helped me as a leader who wanted to go back to education. There was limited support or guidance there, mentoring was lacking as well. I think there should be more focus within organisations to see the value of HR. These professionals should be more involved at board level. HR should have a say and should be taken more seriously. HR Professionals need to be able to challenge action and show results to succeed in today's working world.

INTERVIEW WITH MANAGER C)

Codes

Q1: description of leadership style

At the moment it's very much a **mixed of styles** you mentioned in your question. I have been working with my current team for 1 year with one team and for 2 years with another team. So, I have done a lot of recruitment of the people I work with. So I feel very confluent and I feel comfortable in their ability and their skills. I don't micro-manage, I stand back a lot, I would give them tasks to do and would give a time-line and then I would expect to have them done. I generally have results because we have created a practice where they feel they can go and do their work. So, I would say I am very hand off approach with my team. I see them every day and I talk to them every day, I know what they are doing, but I don't watch them what they are doing.

In my current team members, I have a mixed of members, most of them I hired myself, some of them are very mature and pro-active, very autonomist, with those people I know that if I give them an idea and a deadline, I don't have to give them details, they will come back with the product. There are others who are younger, they are graduates in their first job, so, at the beginning I need to sit down with them, tell them what I need. I might stress few points, to more details and I would give them a deadline. Both groups deliver very well but I have to provide more details to the second group, they are less experienced.

Q2: why do you apply this style

For reasons mentioned earlier. What does work:

I think some of the team members I work with know the area very well, they know the activity they do, they do better they I do, because they are doing all the time, I coordinate, you know. It would be very strange and very unusual to get into details and try to medal and get involved. Also I think I like having younger, more inexperienced people in the team as well because I think we have a **good learning environment** where I work. It's the first exposure to an office life, to a corporate life, HR and to shared-services which we work in. So I like the idea of having a nice introduction to them in their first job in HR, or even in an office. All they want to do is working in an office.

People respond very well feeling trusted and it's July and we are in our mid-year review period, **I get feed-back from my team about my leadership style**, such as I received today. And lot of feedback was that I obviously trust them, I don't micro-manage, I am totally approachable if they need me, I am there. If the launch ideas, I give them a good feedback or good guidance, they like being trusted, they feel trusted and that's important to them.

Q3: challenges and opportunities

Challenges: if you have someone in the team who does not respond well to be given a lot of autonomy, suddenly you have to treat him/her very differently. And this is very hard for me as a manager because it's mess up my routine, I only have to spend 10min. or 15min. of the day checking the rest of the team, but I might need to sit with this person and coach him a little bit more, it's more time consuming. This is

challenging because time is precious. You also have to be very careful not to make this person feel quite isolated from the rest of the team. The goal is to bring them up to a level of autonomy and accountability as the rest of the team has. You have to work hard in coaching that person and make clear what is expected from him and sometimes you simply have a person who doesn't respond to that. They have their own way of working, they need a lot of support, some of them after 6 months they need a lot of support. They are actually a drain on resources and it's not sustainable for a long term. So the team would be very forgiving for someone who is new, either they come from another team or they are brand new to the company. The team is very supportive but they definitely notice when someone needs more support. I had a case last year when I had someone who after 6 months she still needed a lot of coaching, spending a lot of time with me, I had to be very explicit on what I expected from her, and she still struggled to deliver. So, the team did not know this, but I had a coaching plan with her, I actually I was very very strict with straight target for her. But I know that the team was aware I was spending a lot of time with this person. And they did not think that this person was contributing enough to the team, to deserve that time. This was a challenge!

On the other hand, my leadership style works well because I treat people as individuals, they are not all the same, so I can say that to some people it can be given an idea and a deadline, they know exactly what I am talking about and they come back, maybe because they know me very well. Others need more details because they do not have so much experience. We work with loads of different individuals here, yes there are policies, procedures and processes, that are standard, but you need to treat people like individuals, being flexible as a manager, I think help.

Challenges: big team 17 people , in my opinion it's too big to manage, it's hard to give people real value. Even if you have help and support, in terms of development it's hard to give the time they need and it's hard to find opportunities in the team for them to develop more. Other challenges are with the review-times at the end of the year and look back on their performance. Yes we have very strict measurable objectives but if you also assess them on the behaviour and the soft side of how they achieve their objectives, it could be very subjective, but if you have 17 people it's hard to remember, it's hard to give relevant feedback sometimes. Literally this is a challenge.

On the other hand, budget is always an issue, if someone leads the team and if you want to hire in other people, you always challenge your manager. And sometimes they move slowly towards the need of the team –see the approval of headcounts.

As a TL has a long experience I am able to support my team because at this stage I have come across to so many situations, I probably heard many times the questions and the problems that I am not surprise. I will probably know what to do. I think I keep things running, I don't present any problem to my manager.

Q4: leadership style and gender

In experience of being an employee I had mostly female managers. I think the personal relationship it's very important for female managers. I have been very lucky that all of my managers I felt I had like a friendship with them. It was a natural trust and I feel that I do the same with my people as well. You know, I give them a piece

of information about the week end, holiday. We don't socialise together, but I would feel confident going out for a drink with them or we often go for lunch together. So, I think that definitely, in my experience with my female managers I am able to do the same with my people, feeling the personal connection it's very important. Again it builds trust among people and they know you listen to them and this has a big impact in building connections and it make easier in the day-to-day relationship later on. Role model: I think the manager I am today, is definitely that of having aspects of my last three managers in this role. I have definitely taken something from each of them. My manager 1 was very people oriented, very soft, very emotional, Nr. 2 was very strict, all was about numbers but I also had a good relationship with her. With my current manager I really have an open, straight relationship. She tells me very straight what she wants, but she is very honest and open. I think I have taken a bit from each of my previous/actual managers.

Q5: change leadership over time

I think when I first became a team-leader, 3 years ago, I was definitely more into the details with people, I watched them more closely, I wanted to know the details of what they were doing. I thought my role as a team-leader was more about getting the job done, making sure that they were doing the right job, then being a people manager and develop them, develop them in their career, in their skills, this kind of things. So, my style was more transactional, I think. I was very very focused on the actions rather than people themselves. I think this because I was promoted from a junior role, I was doing their job and then I became their team-leader. So, I knew how to do the job, and I found comfort in going back into the details of the job. I wasn't thinking about the development of their skills of things like that. I was thinking 'you did not ask these questions correctly, you only answered 5 out 10'. I knew all about this job and I knew exactly what I would do when I was doing that job. Then I suppose with the leadership development that I had here in this company and the guidance, examples from my colleagues, who were team-leaders, from the previous managers I had, I began to say 'ok, you need to create an environment for people who works on their own, you don't need to get into the details all the time'. You need to recognise when to get into details because otherwise you don't add any value if you are in their face, in their work every day. You need to add value by saving time for yourself, because this is very useful, a good way of using your time. But also, I add value to them by developing them, making the more autonomous, making more professional. I have 17 people, 2 teams one of 5 and the other of 12 people.

Q6: influence by the role

Definitely, when I was working in education, I was coordinating teachers. It was very much about scheduling, time-table. There was nothing about them as people or about developing their career. Moving into this kind of environment, I am in a global corporate environment, where we have leadership development, personal development, performance management, suddenly all these things started to impact my leadership style.

Every interaction I have with the person it will remain me of something I discussed to them in one-to-one meeting. If they express dislike about certain kind of tasks they

have to do, I think maybe in the future I will train them in something else, to focus them in a different way. I look more at people's skills, what they are good at and I try to cater for that, I suppose a little bit more. It's more natural now, I think, it's not just transactional.

There are certain jobs that have to be done, a number of cases you have to process every day, that is 'our bread and butter', this is what we have to do. But there are other aspects of what we do, that are important and that gives people loads of scope for development. So we focus a lot on continuous improvement, we ask people at what they do every day and ask them if it is efficient, or if we can get rid of or if we can step away from. This is very good for developing people, develop their approach and their perspectives, making questioning things. It also challenges them and enforces them to develop. In technology they started to use different kind of technology in order to do their job fast and better. We also talk about their career goals, where do I want to be, do I want to be a HR business partner, or do I want to be a team-leader, or I want to be a project-manager?

We will look at the activities we have in team, is there is anything that can be reviewed, some of the skills to do that. So I cannot transform someone from HR advisor into a project-manager, however, maybe I can give them a mini project to do in the team and they can apply their project management skills and they learn on the project. And that will give them some ammunition if they apply to a role of project-manager roles.

Q7: influence from organisational culture, values, policies & procedures

Definitely as an organisation, we can see the impact from culture on leadership styles, because we a HR department, a HR shared-services, we can see the impact of having poor management. We have managers who aren't prepared or don't know policies or don't know how to build relationship with people, or who don't know how to deal with situation early, before it escalates. That has a big impact on the business.

We have fed back to the business, and they have responded by doing a lot of leadership development for all people managers across the company. This influences from performance management, for instance how to have a difficult conversation, how do manage bad feedback, how do you manage good feedback, how do you challenge them. Myself as a team-leader, sometimes I don't challenge my people, even though someone is very good at this, so I keep on giving more on this to do. I don't necessarily look for something she is bad at and try to brave her. How do you feel, why should I push someone who doesn't feel good at, or is she not good at, this is another conversation.

We have a culture of developing good managers and you have happy people who are creating revenue. This is the bottom line.

The values here, I am a marketing person-dream, I definitely I let me buy into the culture. The values are those of developing people and bring them along. Our values have changed in the last years and they have become more about achieving our goals and becoming technologically advanced and they have become a little less about people collaborating, working together. And this is something I dislike. When I look at my measurements of people by interim and annual-review, this is very little I can say, assess them on how they collaborate with colleagues or other teams, because this

company's focus now is much on achieving, changing things, delivering. There is no conversation around how you work with people.

I think locally I can intervene, in my department about collaboration and team-work and it's expected because we work in teams. We have people who collaborate well and we can give people feedback on that, even though it is a hard measurable objective. However, I think the global performance strategy, it cascades down and everything is global it's part of the model. In terms of changing the model is not possible. We don't have a say in that, but we can interpret it a little bit ourselves. It's more challenging if you know that there is not a special box that you can tick, you have to interpret.

P & P I think having policies there, every manager should have a least a month review one-to-one with people, and making sure that the manager gives their people fair and measurable objectives. In terms of creating practices or good practices or good people management yes. In terms of influencing styles, I don't think so, some managers would have a monthly one-to-one because they have to, it might be good quality or poor quality. I think P&P affect practices but not styles.

Q8: challenges in the transition times

I think when I became a team-leader suddenly I was responsible for the development of this team advisor, but I was and advisor, 'five minutes ago' and definitely the biggest challenge for me was stepping up and look at their career, trying to give them career guidance, but it was difficult. So I found it hard because I did not feel had the experiences or the professional maturity to give them guidance on career, really.

At the time I became team-leader, we did not have anything in place. So, during the time I have become team-leader I have developed those leadership courses, I have availed them, but at that time I certainly had to start doing one-to-one and I had to think how to do one-to-one. This person wants to be director in the future what do I tell her to do? I did not know and I had not had any HR diploma at that stage, it was definitely hard to manage. I was supposed to be the senior person here and have the knowledge, but I had to get that knowledge.

I used the people around me, my fellow team-leaders, my own manager and I relied on them heavily.

Q9: change of leadership style over a career

I think I treat people like individuals and I don't expect everybody to work in the same way, I definitely observe what are people's strengths and try to organise the team-work in a way that we can maximising these people getting from my self-perspective I am getting the most out of them. But I also think it is important they feel they are contributing and being successful as well.

I have changed style since I started to be a TL, I would have led the work saying 'this is the way of doing it', 'everybody goes and do it'. But now I would really listen to what people feel that they are good at. I listen to where they want to go in their future career and I try to organise work around those things, while at the same time delivering the services that need to be delivered. But why not care for people professional, career, personal needs at the same time?

Q10: assess your leadership style over a career

Overall, if you have strong relationships with everybody in the team, you don't have to be a friend or the best friend, but if they know you listen to them and you respond to them, that really help. I think, my style has definitely changed, I care more for the individuals and to have create lot of trust between myself and the individuals. They can approach me if they need something and I can ask to do a piece of work I know it would get done. Previously I would have been more 'this is the job, you are doing the job, go and do it'.

It's funny one of the first module we did in our diploma was leading and managing and it was the first time I came across different leadership styles. I have never bothered which style I used. Then, I suppose I realized that if someone poses the question 'this is my L S and everybody has to adapt, or do you adapt your L S according to whom you are dealing with? There is a part of a manager that will always be the same, you have a certain personality, you have a certain style and this is not going to change radically. However, on some level you have to be able to realise, recognise that you deal with individuals, human beings and they have different needs and different ways of working, they respond differently. So, the way I explain it to people is 'if you say to some people - can you do me a favour? And you see their face falling and they want to run away. However, if with the same person you say ' I have a really complicated issue here and I wondering if you can help me to solve it, it's quite a complex task', their face light up and they want to solve this problem, they want to help you. I think, recognising those little personality's dreams, that what helps get the job done.

Extra:

If someone goes to people management, he **needs to have a genuine interested in people**, he needs to connect with people, but if and when he moves into that into more senior roles, where they are responsible for development and the day-to-day running of a team, he needs to support and have all those new conversations, those development conversations, one-to-one. He needs to know **how to coach and mentor at that level** of a career. If I had the prospect of being promoted up to the levels, certainly I would be the manager of what the team-leader, I think I would need to do some serious homework and get some support from my new manager to be able to again to promote the needs and the career needs of these team-leaders. Right now , I am a TL and can barely think about myself, I can barely think 5 min. what I will be in 5 months or 5 weeks in the future . To become the manager of the other TLs would be a big step up. Having support would be important and be able to speak with my manager about the individuals involved.

APPENDIX D: PILOT INTERVIEW GUIDE FEEDBACK

1	Clarity of questions
2	Logics & flow of questions
3	Difficulty of the topics discussed
4	Type of support, clarification received from the researcher
5	Suggestions, comments, etc.

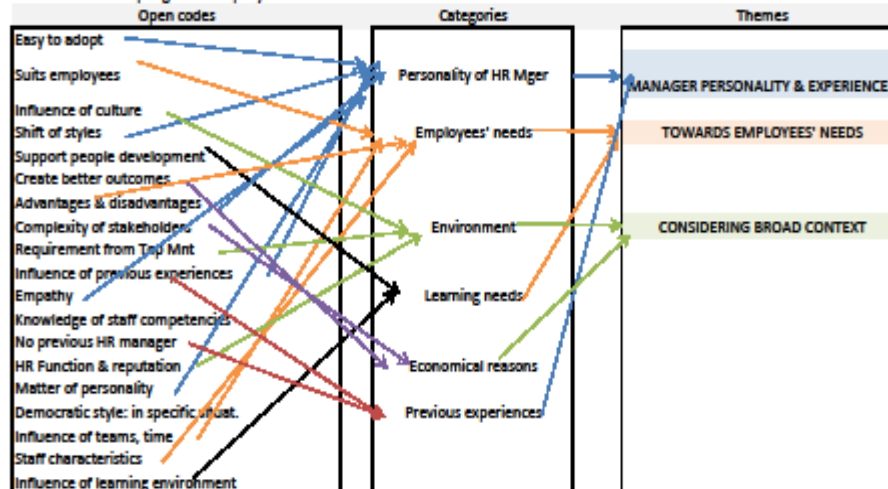
APPENDIX E: DATA ANALYSIS CODING PATH

Objective 1: Leadership style of female HR manager

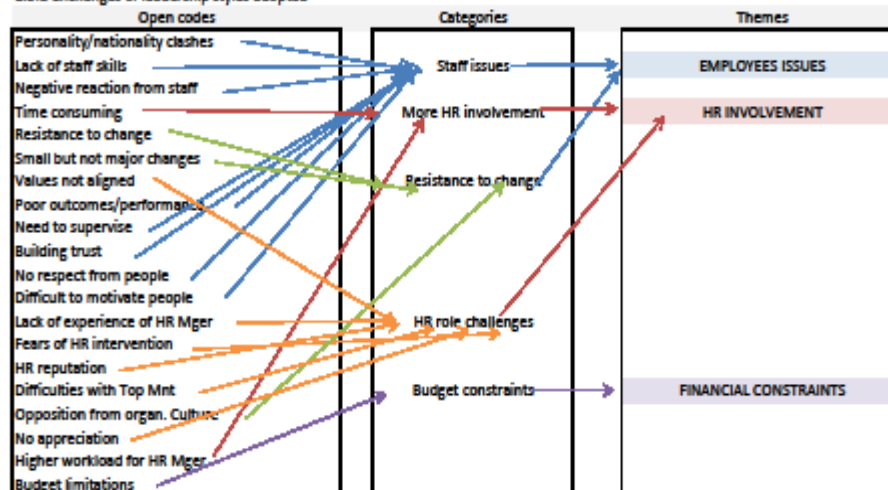
1.1 Description of leadership styles applied



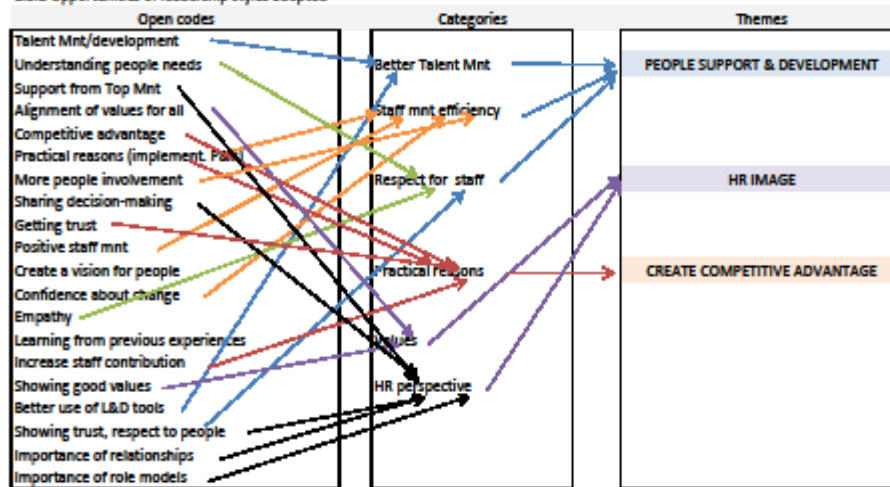
1.2 Reason for adopting leadership styles



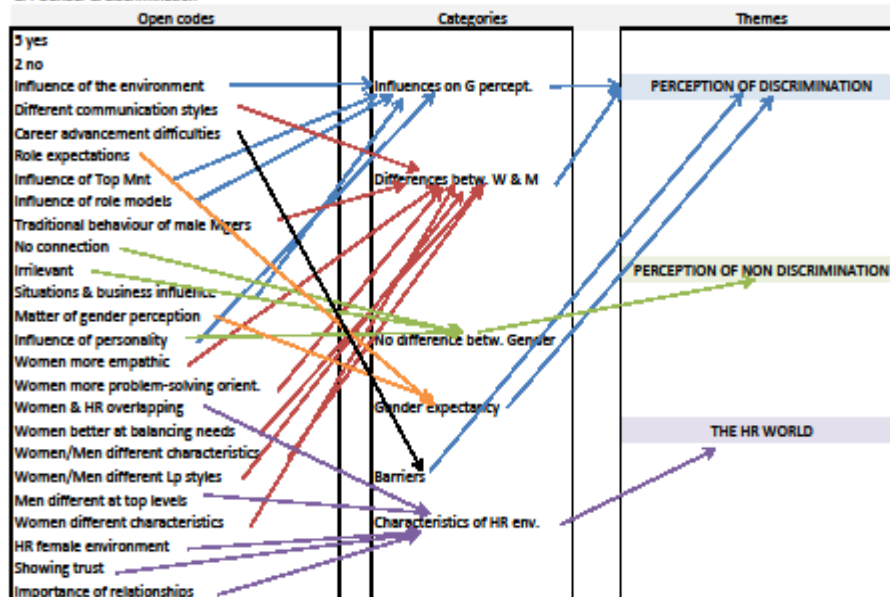
1.3.1 Challenges of leadership styles adopted



1.3.2 Opportunities of leadership styles adopted

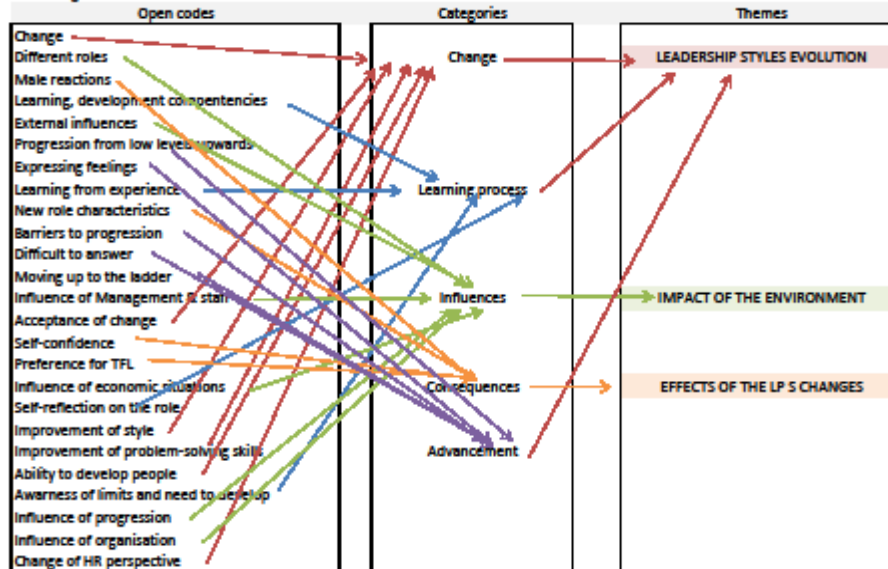


1.4 Gender & discrimination

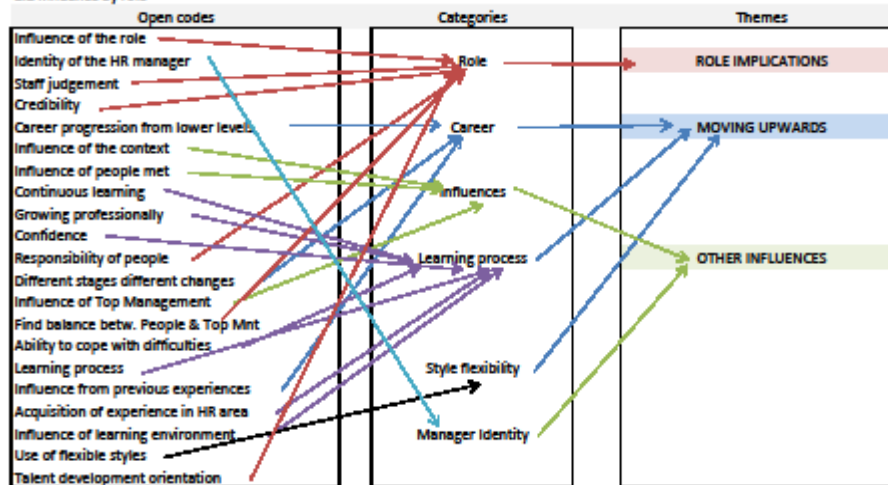


Objective 2: Link between leadership style and gender in HR over time

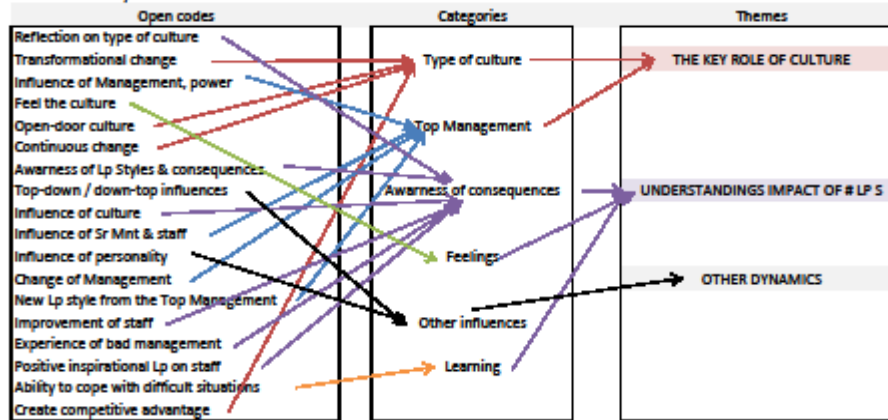
2.1 Change over time



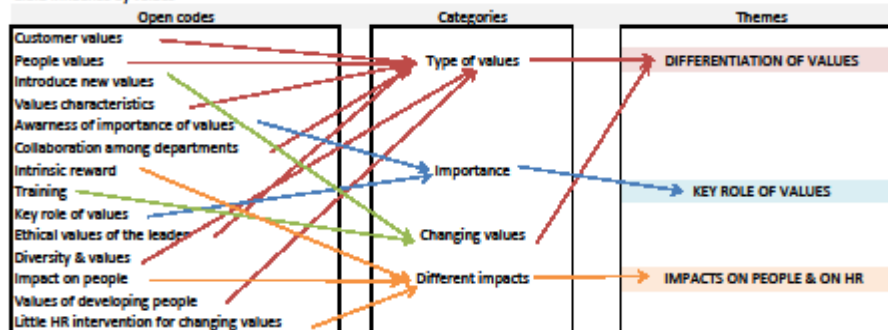
2.2 Influence by role



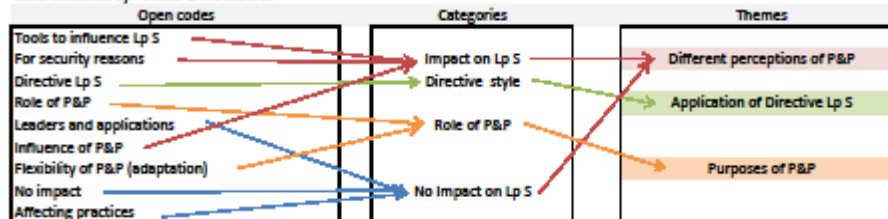
2.3.1 Influence by culture



2.3.1 Influence by values



2.3.1 Influence by Policies & Procedures

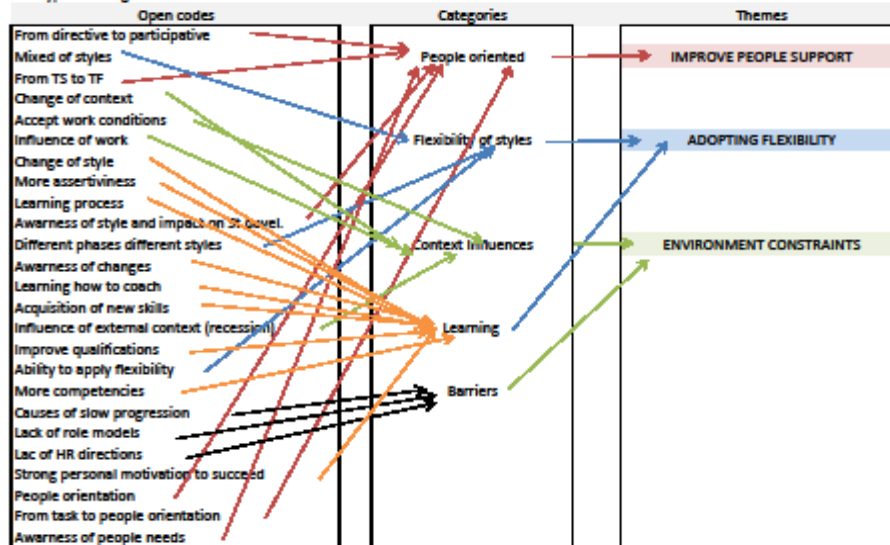


Objective 3: Change in Lp styles over a career development

3.1 Challenges in transition time



3.2 Type of change



3.3 Lp Style assessment

