Women in business: Barriers faced by women and how to overcome them in leadership roles in Thailand

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Abstract

Purpose - This study explores barriers faced by women in leadership roles and solutions to overcome them in business in Thailand. In addition, to investigate the opinions of others who have experience in working with/for females in leadership roles and to encourage more women leaders into Thai society, which in the future may help to close the gender gap in Thailand.

Design/methodology/approach - A qualitative research with open-ended questionnaires. The sample group is divided into two groups, namely: women in leadership positions and people who have experience working with/for women in leadership roles in Thailand, in order to understand insight of this topic.

Findings - Barriers do exist for female leaders in business in Thailand. Female leaders accepted the existence of the following barriers; glass ceiling, gender stereotyping, sexual harassment, social structure and limited support or promotion from managers/companies. The degree of impact depends on each leader. Male-dominated industries have more of barriers for female than other industries. Therefore, the solutions recommended by women leaders are education, support from government and other agencies, including women's groups, private groups, employers, personal strength and social awareness. Another part of the findings are the perceptions others have of female leaders, with advantages and areas for improvement of having female leaders.

Originality/value - This study gains knowledge of barriers faced by female leaders as well as solutions to overcome barriers in Thai society. As the researcher believes there was research done to investigate barriers for female leaders in Thailand, but not many have offered solutions to overcome barriers. The research uses the literature and identifies barriers faced and solutions female leaders believe can help to break or prevent barriers which should be beneficial to women and other researchers in the future.

Keywords - Female Leaders, Thailand, barriers, solutions, people's perceptions.

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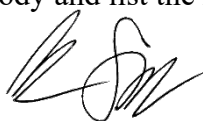
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Chapter 1

Introduction

For decades, the discussion about women leaders in business has been a popular topic for organisations (Vivatanapaiboonlap, 2020). Grant Thornton is one of the organisations which revealed in their recent women in business report (2021) that the proportion of females in leadership positions globally, accounted for almost one third across the key markets. Natural HR (2021) interestingly states that enterprises with high numbers of women in leadership roles are more profitable than those without them. McKinsey & Company (2020, p.13) have also found that organisations in the top quartile of gender diversity, are 28% more likely to perform better financially than their counterparts. Furthermore, Knight (2019), specified that women are becoming more prominent in the global market, not only as workers, but also as managers, entrepreneurs, investors and consumers. Studies show results of faster economic growth when the gender gap in workplace participation is reduced.

In contrast, Frankiewicz (2020) argued through The World Economic Forum that the topics of gender egalitarianism and the increasing number of women in leadership roles are trendy but in reality, progress is significantly slow with regard to fulfilling women leaders and equality at work. Workplace (2021) stated on their website that the world needs more women leaders, but there are obvious impediments that women in leadership positions encounter in organisations, namely: discrimination, stereotyping, shortage of access to mentors, less flexibility at work, less connections, cultural resistance, and lack of women in senior positions to promote them. These cause significant issues among women leaders even in the leading economic countries. Despite the extensive studies of barriers faced by women in leadership, they are still present and need to be further examined (Broadbridge and Simpson, 2011)

Based on the literature review, it is argued that women in leadership roles face barriers everywhere, even in big companies such as Facebook. Sheryl Sandberg, the Chief Operation Officer, argues in her book 'Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead' that there are still obstacles preventing women from rising to leadership positions in the

occupational field. Sandberg also identifies that women create barriers for themselves, by internal societal gender roles and discrimination and women need to break down these barriers by aiming for and working towards management and leadership positions. (Sandberg, 2013).

One more story regarding barriers faced by women in management roles is about the U.S. woman leader, Carly Fiorina who journeyed from being a secretary at Marcus & Millichap to becoming a female CEO at Hewlett-Packard Enterprise (HP). She was listed among the "Most Powerful Women in Business" by Fortune 500 from 1998 to 2004. Fiorina pointed out during the presentation with Columbia business school (2006) that during her career, it was very disappointing that the media and people around her always focused on her gender rather than her accomplishments. Besides that, she wrote in her book that she was treated differently than men and has encountered harassment and sexism at workplaces throughout her career. Yet, she still believes that the world needs more women leaders.

In Thailand, women hold 34% of management positions in mid-market companies according to a survey of 101 organisations, which is higher than the world average (30%) and also greater than the Asia Pacific average of 28%. Interestingly, it is evident that in Thailand, women hold high positions in the workplace both in private and public sectors (Grant Thornton, (2021). Thailand is performing relatively well with women occupying the high positions. One factor proving Thailand's progress of having women in top positions was when in 2011, Yingluck Shinawatra was elected and became the first ever female Prime Minister, the one and only Thai female Prime Minister so far in their history. However, based on the Women in Business Report (Grant Thornton report, 2021) the improvement of women in leadership roles in Thailand's private sector is slow, with 15.6% held by women members in Parliament in 2021. Thailand has also improved the standard of education for women. The enrollment and graduation rate of women has increased and ranks relatively high among other countries in the region (The World Bank, n.d.). The country has also made noteworthy changes in their legislation and policy, The Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand B.E. 2560 (Thailand's Constitution, 2017, p.12), which states 'men and women shall enjoy equal rights'. The Gender Equality Act 2015, which was legislated in 2015, established a committee to Promote Gender Equality (CPGE) to enact the Act's legal policies and mechanisms to advance gender equality (UN Women, 2020).

Despite the fact that Thailand has supportive practices and policies for women and gender equality, the country still ranked 79th out of 156 countries worldwide when it comes to gender balance. Iceland ranked number one twelve times since this research started, while Ireland ranked number nine on the chart (World Economic Forum, 2021). The reports show that there is still room for improvement in gender parity in management, or in other words, there is space for more women to become leaders in business. In order to bridge the gap, or have 50:50 gender diversity, understanding the barriers that women encounter in leadership roles, the restrictions preventing them in their leadership roles, and most importantly the ways women leaders overcome those obstacles and perceptions other people in workplaces have of women leaders is crucial.

The research topic 'Women in business: Barriers faced by women in leadership roles in Thailand and how to overcome them' is the research area that the researcher is passionate about, as in 2021, the researcher received the 'Women in Business' scholarship from the National College of Ireland. Prior to that, the researcher had the opportunity from their previous employer, Horton International Thailand, to join the Australian Chamber of Commerce's Thailand 'Women in Leadership' events. This presented opportunities to learn from other empowering women about how to become a leader and encouraged the researcher to delve into this area further. Another reason is because although there are researchers examining barriers that women in leadership roles face in Thailand, not many offer viable solutions to overcome those obstacles. The author therefore, expects to research deeper into this area. Furthermore, it is because the researcher is a human resource student who hopes to become one of the strong and successful women leaders in Thai society one day in the future, as Thailand is the researcher's home country.

The aspiration of contributing to this certain area is to achieve and expand this research in global and national debate and hopefully the findings of this research can give insight to women to better prepare, learn, improve, become leaders and close the gender gap in Thai society in the future. It will also identify solutions that women in leadership roles use, to overcome barriers in the workplaces, which may be used as a benchmark for future women's leadership.

Qualitative research methodology will be used to answer the research questions, the questions for demographic profiles of participants then open-ended questionnaires by Google Forms are conducted as a primary data finding in this paper. Secondary data is

from the literature review, reflecting the set of information related to women in leadership roles, barriers and the solutions to handle barriers in business in Thailand. The questionnaires last approximately 20 minutes. The sample size is 20 Thai women in leadership positions from Senior Directors to Managers and 6 people who are mixed between male leaders and male and female staff who have experiences working with/for women in leadership positions in business in Thailand.

Chapter 2

Literature review

2.1 Introduction

As mentioned, in Thailand women hold 34% of leadership positions in mid-market businesses (Grant Thornton, (2021). However, there are still barriers that women in leadership positions face in their workplaces. An example of barriers found, Waileardsak (2020) states that in Thailand, gender stereotypes within organisation cultures and the overlooked measures of work reconciliation and family responsibilities are found as major obstacles for female leadership. Napasri and Yukongdi (2015) also examined from interviewing 30 female executives about their career advancement restrictions, the findings show that those barriers are from four factors; individual factors, interpersonal factors, organisational level and societal level.

This chapter will look through relevant literature and see what are the main obstacles that women in leadership positions face as well as solutions to overcome those barriers. The literature will also identify perceptions from people's experiences about the women leaders too. Moreover, the review of literature is categorised by headings and subheadings focusing on the business sector globally, Asia and mainly in Thailand.

An insightful study into women in leadership roles may help answer the primary research question "What are the main barriers women in leadership roles encounter and the solutions to overcome barriers they face in Thailand?". The study seeks to understand these groups of women in leadership positions and their experiences in the advancement of their career. Particularly, how these women have managed to break those barriers to reach higher positions. The following sections which examine the research literature are composed of three headings, namely; barriers for women leaders, solutions to overcome barriers and advantages and disadvantages of working with/for women leaders.

2.2 Barriers for women leaders

2.2.1 Glass ceiling

The glass ceiling is a form of discrimination which significantly effects women in workplaces, impacting women's power and status at work (Hansatit, 2014). The glass ceiling made women struggle to step up to the top of corporate rungs and stick at the middle ladders (Facchinetti, 2012). According to leadership positioning, the "glass ceiling" concept is one of the main factors that impact women rising to executive leadership positions (Bolat et al., 2011). The literature review indicated that the glass ceiling refers to an invisible ceiling blocking women to step up to high-level roles in workplaces (John et al., 2013). There are many studies examining glass ceilings in many societies over the world.

In America, Kagan (2022) states that when Hillary Clinton ran for election to become president in 2008 and 2016, she repeatedly announced that her goal of being America's first female president is to break the "highest, hardest glass ceiling". Furthermore, Kamala Harris, America's Vice President broke the second-highest glass ceiling in America when she became the first Black Vice President and first female. She was also the first woman and first Black and South Asian attorney general of California. In Europe, more recent research and studies tend to confirm the existence of glass ceilings. For example, research in Sweden showed that a glass ceiling effect was still significant, despite considerable management of gender differences in education, industry and occupation. (Albrecht et al., 2001). Moreover, a glass ceiling at workplaces is still an obstacle for women in 2021 in many countries across Europe, while women in less developed regions seem to encounter more glass ceilings than those in more developed countries (Bouronikos, 2021).

In Asia, Curran (2020) states in her study, which interviewed 15 Asian women leaders, that culturally, the level of glass ceiling experience varied and depended on career stage, personal situations, intercultural and self-development, providing a variety of factors that could support or hinder their career path. In Oman, gender-bias affects women's work development (Omair, 2010). In Malaysia, Sherene Azli and Jasmine Ng reveal on Lifestyle Asia by Chin (2021) that a glass ceiling still exists in Malaysia, moreso in less developed areas, but it is still there and women need to keep up with the demands of technology, pushing and stepping up to shatter this barrier.

In Thailand, Amornvivat (2015) states that in all business sectors, the typical Thai organisations tend to have a glass ceiling that obstructs women from stepping up to managerial roles. The old gender norms also shape the decisions and preferences of Thai women today, creating internal barriers that affect their level of confidence, ambition and career aspirations in male-dominated industries significantly (Buasuwan & Niyamajan, 2019). All sectors should be aware of these glass ceilings as it blocks the potential growth of Thai women and the growth of Thailand (Amornvivat (2015). Nowadays, more women in Thailand reach higher education and have more opportunities at the workplace. However, a glass ceiling phenomenon still causes the slow motion of career growth.

2.2.2 Gender Stereotyping

In China, Zhaopin, the online recruitment platform indicates that gender is still a barrier for women in employment opportunities and career development (Qian, 2021). Many regions in Asia reveal compatible findings for women's career advancement. The main hindrance for Asian women relates to gender stereotyping (Napasri and Yukongdi, 2015).

From the literature review, gender stereotyping is considered as another factor that causes career progression for women in leadership roles. In terms of gender bias, there are two types of it that affect women, namely; descriptive and prescriptive bias. Descriptive bias is the labels we attach and associate with certain social groups and communities, while prescriptive bias is how they are expected to behave. "Women are conventionally supposed to be kind, polite, warm, compromising, emotional, fragile and so on, and men tend to be decisive, rational, objective and capable." (HRZone, 2022) Therefore, "when it comes to promotion, these characters are sometimes impulsively prescribed by gender without thorough detail of their traits, thus males, in general, are assumed to be a better fit as a commander" (HRZone, 2022).

Despite Thai women's higher levels of education and greater social and political involvement than the past, women are still experiencing some profound traditional gender-based inequity and have not participated in significant numbers in management at the highest levels, where they could have direct influence upon national policies related to gender equity in all fields (Hansatit, 2021). "Although Thailand has supportive practices and policies for gender equality, stereotyping of gender roles persists within the country" (Vivatanapaiboonlap, 2020) and by legislation, even though women are protected at their workplaces, many Thai women experienced discrimination, particularly

in male-led companies (Patanasophon, 2022). Aligned with the research from Cho et al. (2015), shows that although people realised the importance of gender equality and women have more job opportunities, strong traditional beliefs still shape gender stereotypes in the society. Kosaikanont (2019) also mentioned gender bias for Thai females in start-up companies too. Futhermore, there was the 27 years old lady who got rejected 17 times before getting offered her dream job of Civil Engineer (Patanasophon, 2022) and that before she got offered the job, the employer asked if she could provide the same contributions as men (Patanasophon, 2022). However, Thailand is improving, JobsDB which is the leading job search platform in Thailand and Asia recently established the policy for job posts, not to add gender, age nationality, race, and other details that show discrimination, many companies from private and public sector also joined this campaign (Thai news, 2021).

2.2.3 Sexual harassment

The literature review states that sexual harassment discourages women from taking leadership roles in the workplace, on top of the many other barriers standing in women's way such as norms that prohibit long work hours, friction in family life, and perceptions of unlikability when women act in agentic ways (Rudman and Glick, 2010). Thus, in the workplace, it is essential that management deeply understand the impact of sexual harassment and to what extent sexual harassment can obstruct women from seeking leadership positions. This could help prevent an organisation from facing such an issue, which could highly impact their business.

Interestingly, Folke, et al. (2020) states that women in higher positions experience more sexual harassment than for lower ranking female employees, therefore, sexual harassment at work is dangerous and can prevent females from pursuing leadership positions and in turn, repeat gender gaps as a result. The survey also specifies that in the UK, the Young Women's Trust found that around one five of women aged between 16 and 30 experienced sexual abuse at work but only approximately 10% have reported it for reasons of being afraid of losing their job (Darmody, 2019). Sexual harassment affects women's mental health, safety, job progress, learning and occasionally forces people to quit a job (Miller, 2022).

In Thailand, sexual harassment remains and stick in the society (The International Labour Organization, 2021). YouGov research found from their survey that twenty-one percent

out of 1,107 women in Thailand faced sexual harassment but half of them never report this matter (Khidhir, 2019). Furthermore, the laws are weak by the definitions of what constitutes sexual abuse, harassment or victimisation. Some behaviour such as whistling, showing pornography, or telling dirty jokes may not be taken seriously as sexual harassment by the person who displays such behaviour, despite it creating harmful effects on a recipient's feelings. The International Labour Organisation (2021) interestingly gave a series of recommendations about sexual harassment with regard to laws, policies and actions to implement to prevent sexual harassment. Sexual harrasment result in an unsafe and hostile working environment for the person experiencing it, as well as for witnesses and co-workers who might wonder if such occurrences will also happen to them one day (Sumano and Aneksomboonphon, 2021).

2.2.4 Structural barriers

The social role theory (Eagly and Wood, 2016) is the idea that males and females are assigned different roles in society because of their gender. Women in management often experience limited access and are excluded from participating in networking events which professional men often join, such as golf tournaments, parties etc. This turns women into outsiders and this can obstruct women's ability in communication and participation as equals with male colleagues and managers (St. Catherine University, 2021). It also blocks women from developing rapport with these groups of people (Sage Reference, nd). Furthermore, according to social structure, female managers in South Korea, Hong Kong, China, Thailand, India and Japan revealed that they were offered and appointed jobs as specialists or less important roles, while men were allocated to higher positions or decision-making positions. This report created male-dominated organisational structure in management level (Napasri and Yukongdi, 2015)

Less developed female leadership networks are also one of the structural barriers that affect women in leadership roles (St. Catherine University, 2021). In addition, family care is one of the barriers preventing women from progressing in leadership roles, with many women acting as the primary caretakers for their families (Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 2009). Balancing work and family can be a challenge that limits women from seeking leadership roles.

In Thailand, societal factors that were perceived to impede career progress were those relating to traditional values, religious beliefs and social attitudes toward women,

including gender role stereotyping (Yukongdi, 2009). For instance, if a family had limited financial resources and had to make a choice between which of their children should receive the best educational opportunities then, generally, it would be the son who would be given priority (Davidson n.d., p. 17). In the organisation setting, Thailand's society is also hierarchical in both workplaces and private life (The Unusual Trip, n.d.). It can be seen in Thailand that organisational leaders are often run by roles related to gender identity and that these roles are developed from a consensual belief within society that the women and men have different attributes based only on gender. (Hansatit, 2014)

2.2.5 Lack of support by employers and managers at the workplace

In Japan, in terms of closing the gender gap, flexibility at work for women seems necessary for employers after the global Covid-19 pandemic. Offering flexible hours and other features such as work equipment, paid leave and parental leave are important (Wangkiat, 2021). In Thailand, according to Yukongdi (2005), women felt that they were offered fewer opportunities to advance their career in comparison to their male colleagues. The selection processes for promotion to senior positions were usually determined by predominantly male committees in the public sector. This male-dominated selection process meant that qualified women were likely to have less chance of being offered the sought position (UNDP, 2006). Companies essentially need to create culture and all necessary elements to fully support women as well as understand barriers women encounter at workplaces. Employers also need to raise awareness of a more inclusive culture to empower women (Miller, 2022). Lower pay can also be considered under this category as it makes female managers feel that they are not likely to be promoted to the management positions. It is argued that since the major changes in corporate practices in the areas of development, training and remuneration for women were in the last 20 years, it is too early to expect the change. However, almost all of the leading companies in many countries have women in management roles and actively promote women to move to management positions (Hansatit, 2014)

2.3 Solutions to overcome barriers

2.3.1 Education

Human capital theory recommends that human capital through education improves the productivity of the persons. "The OECD regularly recommends countries to reform their education and training systems. Economists often refer to this as improving 'human capital'. Yet, at the macroeconomic level, quantifying the effects of human capital on growth and productivity has often proven frustratingly elusive, both in the academic literature and in OECD work" (OECD, 2019). Furthermore, it also suggests that investing in women's human capital gives greater return than investment in other areas or in men's human capital The reason for it is because investing in women not only affects themselves, but people who are under their care, such as children or families (Warunsiri and McNown, 2009). Therefore, providing opportunities for education and training to women will improve their potential and will increase the country's overall productivity. It can also be said education is one of the most important factors facilitating women's progress into management positions, especially in developing countries such as Thailand.

Despite full access to education for women in Thailand, Thai society still remains conservative and stereotypes still exist in the way that women are expected to take the role of homemaker and caregiver to children and family members (Yukongdi, 2005). Providing equal education to genders in both rural and urban areas inThai society may help to tear down barriers for women and decrease the gender gap in the future. Consequently, this might help to narrow the economic and social disparity between women and men. However, it is argued that, although Thai women have made marked advances in education, there remains a long way to go (Benson and Yukongdi, 2005). Furthermore the literature review found that Thailand ranked 46 out of 78 countries in terms of educational attainment for females. Despite Thailand having elected their first-ever female Prime Minister and possibly may elect a second one soon, female representation in politics is dire. Increased educational opportunities will do Thai women little good if they remain restricted to directing them to 'female' occupations and deprive them of a voice at the highest levels of political policy-making. Wiriyapong (2021) interviewed Alisjahbana on Bangkok post, she says that the two most important factors to help women in terms of closing the gap and career advancement are education and upbringing.

For the gap of gender workers in Thailand, Kosaikanont (2019) stated in his paper that the research by Nakavachara (2010) specified that the wage gap between men and women in Thailand had decreased from thirty-four percent in 1985 down to nine percent in 2015, because of the increase in female education. Regrettably, the wage gap has gone up again in 2020 (Kargol, 2021).

2.3.2 Government support and support from other agencies

In terms of the support from the government, as stated Thailand has made noteworthy changes in their legislation and policy. Moreover, in order to ensure women participation in business alongside Thailand 4.0 development plan, the Ministry of Labour of Thailand has also created the STEM training program (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) for female workers in the electronics sector, to enhance women's skills and shape them to be efficient employees for the future (The International Labour Organisation, 2019). The question is, is the support from government/politics enough to close the gender gap or build more women to become leaders? It is not certain that they can help to break down barriers, as it seems on paper that Thailand are performing well, but in reality, the government led by Prime Minister (PM) Prayuth Chan-ocha, the military head who took power from Yingluck Shinawatra. Shinawatra was the first and only female Prime Minister in 2014, working alongside a royal family which still does not allow women to take the throne. "The monarchy, the military, and monkhood - are dominated by men and have little or no place for women" (Loos, 2020). These facts hardly guarantee that these important institutes of Thai society will help more women to step up into leadership positions.

Support from other areas in Thai society can also help women break barriers they face.T= This includes support by employers. Leadership training should be established as well as diversity awareness. The success of leadership training depends on all how employees understand the rationale of diversity awareness (Jugulu and Wood, 2011), this includes the promotion for women to move to management positions (Yukongdi, 2005). Safer workplace with policies preventing discrimanation and harassment can also be created by employers, as it may help reduce incidents of harassment and discrimination in the first place (Miller 2022). Moreover, launching successful mentorship programmes can help retain female employees and advance their careers" (Miller, 2022)

There is some support from groups of women who run events to inspire and empower women appointed by foreign economic chambers in Thailand, the UN and other private groups. These events are a forum where women can network, share challenges and provide support to each other professionally will help empower and encourage women in the society.

2.3.3 Breaking the glass ceiling by women self

For women in developed countries, the literature suggests the need to break the glass ceiling that has prevented many women from securing senior level positions in organisations. For women in industrialising countries such as Thailand, the challenge in management may be different. Little is known about the specific challenges that Thai female managers have encountered, apart from perceptive roles. Given the increase in gender diversity in the workplace, it is critical that women feel assured of an equal opportunity to reach top management positions (S&P Global, 2021). It is not only important for the success of the organisation but also for the improvement of society as a whole that women are involved in strategic business decisions. Furthermore, Bouronikos (2021) also said that breaking the glass ceiling is crucial as it can highly benefit the society and having more women in leadership roles can expectantly build greater human development, egalitarian and help on economic growth.

2.4 Advantages and disadvantages of working with/for women leaders

In terms of advantages, Kelley (2019) outlines five benefits of having women in leadership positions. These include; 1) offering skills such as motivating, encouraging, and inspiring dedication which can increase productivity, 2) Helping to increase revenue, 3) working as a team, 4) solving conflicts and 5) more efficient and better communication. In addition, female leaders help with increased organisational collaboration, more diverse problem-solving, higher engagement from employees and improvement in how the company performs financially (Getsmarter, 2022). In America, the majority of people notice little difference between men and women leaders in terms of qualities and competencies to become effective in leadership roles. However, there are some groups of people who can distinguish between both genders from how compassionate, empathetic and compromising they are. These findings are viewed as advantages of having women as leaders (Horowitz, et al., 2018). A research by Sriarunluck (2021) claims that in the engineering industry, female leaders tend to help improve the effectiveness of teams,

create job satisfaction, and are positive role models who can increase team performance with effective communication. In addition, one study by van der Boon (2003) reveals that patience, sincerity, honesty, harmony, diligence, adjustability and an eagerness to learn were mentioned as required features linked to career accomplishment.

In contrast, the literature review also reveals disadvantages of having female leaders, with women's emotions considered as one of the disadvantages of having women leaders. It is a common perception that women are more emotional than men (Fielding, 2021) and "Because emotions are important for leadership, this puts women at a disadvantage similar to running with leaded shoes" (University of Cambridge, 2022). However, it is argued that men and women have the same emotional fluctuation (Weigard et al., 2021).

In Thailand, there is only a little research investigating characteristics required to be successful in management positions. However, in Thailand, Femininity in Thai culture can be displayed by the desire for compromise and flexibility which may lead to a lack of decisiveness (The Unusual trip, n.d.). Sriarunluck (2021) adds two points for women leaders to improve, namely; making decisions faster and being more open-minded to listen to followers.

2.5 Conclusion

According to the literature review, barriers may arise from many factors, including the glass ceiling which happens to women all over the world. In Thailand, the glass ceiling seems to block women from progressing to management positions, impacting self-confidence and self-esteem, passion and aspirations in their career (Buasuwan & Niyamajan, 2019). Traditional culture and the old norm of gender stereotypes is also one of factors that is very interesting to further discuss in Thailand, as well as discrimination & sexual harassment, structure barriers and the neglect of support from employers and managers at the workplace which all block women from advancing their careers.

The second part of the literature review is about the possible solutions to overcome barriers, including education, support from government and groups of people in society, breaking glass ceiling barriers, and what women can do themselves. The research also found that people who experienced working with/for women have both positive and negative feedback about female leaders. To continue studying this area, qualitative research is in place to get the opinions of women in leadership roles from different companies, workplaces, cultures and women leaders' own experiences.

Chapter 3

Research methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the methodology selected will be justified, providing rationale for the research approach selected. The sample used will be described. The research techniques and procedures utilised to collect and analyse the data to get to the conclusions will then be detailed. Ethical considerations will be also advised, along with any limitations.

3.2 Research questions

1. What perceptions do people have of female leaders in business in Thailand?

2. What are the main barriers women in leadership roles encounter in business in Thailand?

3. What are effective solutions for women in leadership roles to overcome barriers they face?

3.3 Research objectives

1. Explore barriers faced by women in leadership positions in business in Thailand in the 21st century and investigate the solutions from their perceptions and experiences to overcome those barriers. The researcher believes that there is some research that reveals barriers for women leaders, but not much which investigates the solutions that women leaders can use to overcome barriers they face in Thai society.

2. Investigate opinions of others who have experience in working with/for females in leadership roles in Thailand. The findings may encourage more women leaders in society as well as helping women to understand others' opinions of working with them, both positive opinions and what women can improve on. In addition, the recommendations given by others may help women to improve themselves in the future.

3. Help other researchers, both in Thailand and internationally, who wish to study further in this area, to learn in-depth about barriers for career progression faced by women in Thailand.

3.4 Reason for this research

This research used a qualitative approach as a method in order to collect data, which is the best choice from the researcher's academic perspective for the research topic. Qualitative approach is appropriate to describe barriers that female leaders face and the possible solutions to overcome them. It also examines other people's perceptions from working with/for women leaders, reflecting their personal experience from their own viewpoints. Qualitative research is formed from open-ended questionnaires, online via Google forms. The participants of the research are divided into two groups. The first group is women in leadership roles, from Manager to Senior directors in business in Thailand. Each woman is from a different company across various industries. The second group is people who have experience working with/for women in leadership roles, these participants are both male leaders and male and female staff. The reason for only using one approach to research is because, firstly, it is more time efficient and there would not be enough time to get all necessary information if using two approaches at the same time. Furthermore, the quantitative method might not be as useful to collect accurate information, since the purpose of the research is to get perspectives from the experiences of female leaders and those working with/for women leaders information, which cannot be measured in numbers or statistics.

The research framework used the 'onion metaphor' model to display the so-called 'core' of a piece of research, such as data collection and data analysis" (Saunders et al., 2012). The research philosophy, approaches, strategy, methodological choice, research timeline and techniques and procedures will be explained in next paragraphs.

3.5 Research philosophy

The outermost layer of the research onion model consists of three key philosophies, which are; interpretivism, positivism and pragmatism. Based on the nature of this study, the researcher has integrated the interpretivism philosophy to ground the current research work. Interpretive research refers to a research paradigm in which the assumption of social reality is formed by ontology or human experiences and social factors (BRM, n.d.). This study is carried out by exploring the nature and experience of individuals from their workplaces. Their experiences and views which the researcher is interested to investigate and may be considered as to be more subjectivist. How people view the world and interpret situations differently is subjectivist (Saunders, et al., 2012). The researcher seeks to

understand the primary data from participants' perspectives from their real viewpoints, a phenomenological approach is being taken, as the researcher is interested in the experience of those who are living the experience (Quinlan, 2011). In this case, women in leadership roles and people who experience working with/for them.

3.6 Approach

Interpretivist philosophy is what has been chosen as the suitable research philosophy based on the nature of this research. This part, a suitable approach will be discussed between deductive and inductive. Saunders et al. (2012, p.143) explains that "deductive thinking happens when assumption is derived rationally from a set of properties, the assumption being true when all the premises are true". The main concepts of inductive approach are "examines meaning and perceptions, takes context of data into account, allows for incremental expansion of the research process and collects qualitative data, while also accepting researcher participation in the procedures being explored, also accepts the value of deep 'rich' statistics that is less generalizable." (Anderson, 2011, p. 146). Therefore, this exploratory research is about women in business, barriers encountered and possible solutions to break those barriers will be established, so the researcher applied an inductive approach which suits the interpretivist philosophy. Inductive reasoning is a suitable approach for this study and with this method, after understanding the concepts and trends of the data, the hypotheses, general conclusions or theories can be developed (Crossman, 2016).

3.7 Strategy

A good research strategy has to be selected through research questions and objectives, the extent of the subject existing knowledge, suitable time and resources available, and the philosophy of the researcher (Saunders et al., 2012). To find out real work experiences and views of barriers that women leaders face and how they overcome them and perspectives of people who have experience working with/for women in leadership roles in Thailand, open-ended questionnaires are conducted to allow two groups of participants to communicate based on each individual's story. To collect the participants, the researcher used the purposive sampling technique to get 20 women in leadership roles in Thailand, from different business industries and backgrounds to obtain specific data. Six of the participants were mixed between male leaders and staff who work under female leaders were also collected to get insights into their views. In order to contact those

participants, the researcher used LinkedIn to contact them and also through business connections from when the researcher worked in Thailand. Table 1 in appendix displays the questions used in this research, categorised by finding factors respectively. The nature of explorative studies involves open-ended questions in order to delve into information and understanding about the topic.

3.8 Methodological Choice

According to the methodology choice, data can be collected by quantitative or qualitative methods. For this exploratory study, the researcher used qualitative methods, because the researcher is interested in the flexibility that the qualitative methodology choice allows. The researcher has also taken into consideration practical implications regarding access to participants (Bryman and Bell, 2015). The researcher is also aware of the limitation of qualitative methodology choice. There is some argument against qualitative methods in that the interpretation and data collection may be open to bias and error from the researcher. Therefore, the researcher has decided to select a non-probability judgemental sampling technique (Purposive Selection) in order to select the group of participants and focus the attention to a small group of female leaders, male managers and male and female staff who experience working with/for female leaders. However, there are challenges, the participants may feel the need to agree with the literature and not give their honest opinions. The 20 female managers/leaders, from different industries and workplaces culture and environment were able to provide insight based on their experience with linkage to glass ceiling, gender stereotyping, discrimation and sexual harrasment and other factors that restrict them from career advancement. The other group of people were also able to explain advantages and improving aspects of having female leaders..

Limitations: Although, the aim of this research is to get insight from women in leadership roles about barriers faced by them and the possible solutions to overcome those barriers, based on their own experience, there were limitations that occurred from the women themselves. As stated, the participants were divided into two groups. 1) Women in leadership roles. The limitation for this group is because of Thai culture, that shapes how to behave in workplaces, some participants may not feel comfortable answering some questions honestly. Particularly, questions that related to discriminations or sexual harassment, due to Thai culture that women should not reveal personal information as they are quite conservative and talking about sexual topics is taboo in Thailand (Symons,

2021). 2) People with experience working with/for female leaders, some of them could not tell much experience due to the lenge of working experience with female leaders. Timing was also the issue. Initially, the researcher intended to interview all participants via call or video, but the time difference between Ireland and Thailand and time consumption of this method influenced the researcher to change the interview to an open-ended questionnaire online. Language is also taken into account, as some participants responded in Thai, translating is time consuming.

Although the researcher did face some difficulties as mentioned, hopefully this research will be beneficial to people who later research in related topics and it will help women who are looking to grow in their career in Thailand to value themselves, notice barriers and focus on solutions to overcome those difficulties.

Data Analysis: All data obtained by the researcher came from collecting responses from the demographic profiles' questions and open-ended questionnaires. The data was analysed to show individual perspectives. All responses divided into two groups have been compared with the up to date literature review. Thematic analysis applied to this research as it could be used to identify common data categories across multiple participants. All written data within a theme represents that theme and is related to other data within that theme, representing varied dimensions of the same phenomenon. (Statistics Solutions, n.d.). MS Excel was then used to code and track themes in qualitative data.

Ethical consideration: Some participants may be concerned that their data could be shared, so the heading of the questionnaires clearly stated that the data is confidential and kept only for academics. "The secure storage of the data collected was an ethical consideration too" (Quinlan, et al., 2015). Information was saved on Google forms and securely transferred to the researcher's laptop for analysis. The laptop the researcher used is protected by password and only the researcher can access it. The data will also be completely deleted after five years of storage. More importantly, National College of Ireland operates an ethical conduct which can also be provided to the participants.

3.9 Research timeline

The questionnaires started being sent out on 20th of July, 2022, with all expected responses received by 31st of July, 2022.

3.10 Techniques and Procedures

In this research, the researcher used procedures and techniques as following;

- The purpose and objectives of this research have been drawn from the literature review, based on research evident gaps, the suitable methodology and approach have been applied.

- Demographic questions and open-ended questions were provided to get answers from participants based on the most relevant research that were prepared in the literature review without bias insofar as possible.

- Both groups of participants were told about the ethical reasons, study scope and the conditions of answering the questionnaires.

- Thematic Analysis has been chosen to analyse the data which in this research, themes are built through the literature review then grouped from the main arguments using a constant comparative.

- Lastly, the comparison between findings and main literature review were conducted.

3.11 Conclusion

To summarise, this chapter is about the most suitable methodology that this research has applied to explore the study of barriers faced by women in leadership roles in the business sector in Thailand and how to overcome them. The researcher has clarified and identified the use of the qualitative method, interpretivism philosophy, the induction approach, the purposive sampling technique to select the participants and thematic analysis to set the theme for the findings. The primary data was provided by questionnaires sent to all participants located in Thailand. The secondary data which can present applicable aspects of methods, was collected from books, journals, articles and the internet throughout the period of research. In the next chapter, the analysis and findings will be discussed.

Chapter 4

Analysis and findings

4.1 Introduction

After conducting qualitative research by questioning participants in business in Thailand, through demographic questions and open-ended questionnaires, the findings from the two groups of participants were analysed. This chapter aims to analyse the responses from both groups under various themes, to get information and draw relevant interpretations which align with the research objectives and literature review above. The findings are divided into three main cores:

1. Examining the perception of people who have experience working with/for women in leadership roles.

2. Discussing barriers for women in leadership roles.

3. Identify solutions to overcome barriers faced by women in leadership roles.

100% of the questionnaires sent out to both groups of participants have been completed and returned.

4.2 Demographic profiles of participants

Similar to the research studied by Edwards (2016) and Sriarunluck (2021), the research consists of the participants' background, namely: age, organisation types, years of working experience, level of education and current position held by each individual. For the second group, the gender of the participant has been added. Table 2 and table 3 in appendix shows the demographic profile of participants in this study divided into two groups.

The participants in Table 2 are women in leadership positions ranked from manager to director, in various sectors of business, based on the rationale that this research concerns women's experience of barriers and solutions to overcome said barriers. Table 3 illustrates people who have experience working with/for women leaders, with length of experience and gender stated to investigate the different perceptions of each respondent. This group was generated from a mix of men in leadership roles, from manager to senior director and

employees across two genders, to give a wider understanding of how they view female leaders based on their experience.

4.3 Thematic Analysis

The themes from the data thematic analysis for this particular research have been divided into three head themes as mentioned on research questions which are 1) Women leaders' barriers in Thailand 2) Solutions to break barriers 3) People perceptions to women in leadership roles in Thailand. Each head theme is divided into suitable sub-headings as follows;

4.4 Barriers faced by female leaders in Thailand

In order to identify the barriers for women in leadership roles in business in Thailand, related questions have been asked via Google forms in relation to setting up the themes. The results from individuals from different backgrounds generated different answers, separated into the themes listed below.

4.4.1 Glass ceiling

In terms of the views from respondents, most of them agreed that a glass ceiling still existed in Thailand and opined differently based on their experiences and perceptions. For example, Leader A stated that *"in my opinion the glass ceiling for the advancement of women at workplaces is still a significant issue for women in senior positions today especially in my company which is a project control company, I think it is a factor that made me work harder to be accepted"*. Leader C added *"because in Thailand most of the leaders are male so connections amongst women is limited for me and sometimes I was excluded from decision making"*. Leader E gave the opinion that *"yes, the growth of women in most industries in Thailand is still a problem, particularly, at non-international companies, where male leaders are preferred over female leaders, some women do not even believe how great they are"*. Leader F explained that the glass ceiling for her is evident: *"it impacts the progression of women but it is depending on the organisation and their top level executives to manage it as it is manageable"*. As well as Leader T who claimed that *"Yes the advancement of women in the society is still an issue, but I think we, men and women have different talents or expertise, we just have to be in the right position that we are good at and show the world our best. I don't think it's an issue if you can do the job better than any other"*. Leader N, who is working as a Director in an insurance

company, strongly expressed her viewpoint, reflecting that *"in some male-dominant industries there is no way women can be in a senior position before men"*.

Some leaders rarely face a glass ceiling at their workplaces but believe that it is there, such as Leader J: *"Luckily I barely faced any glass ceiling at my work, not much yet anyway. However, I believe that personal insecurities and fears for women themselves can restrict their own growth"*.

In contrast, 6 out of 20 leaders stated that there is no glass ceiling in their workplace stopping them from career advancement, such as Leader G and H. Both were of the opinion that at their workplaces, there are numbers of women holding high positions, so no issue for them related to this theme. Leader I also underlined that *"it could be in the old days but I believe it's changing as many more females are being perceived just as tough and capable as men"*. Leader Q also agreed that *"no glass ceiling blocking women's progression, as women in the modern world have an equal opportunity to advance in a senior role, even as c-suite executives, if they are really competent and qualified"*

Additionally, there are two Leaders who agreed with the theme and added compelling points. Leader O, who sees the improvement of gender equality in Thailand, particularly where she works, which is at an international firm and Leader P who works in engineering who remarked that it depends on an individual, nothing can stop the women from growing except themselves. In terms of gender diversity, all of the respondents agreed that Thailand needs gender diversity, only Leader K who said that there is no need for gender diversity in Thai society.

According to the literature review, a glass ceiling impacts women in workplaces, this statement is true based on the majority of these female leaders reponses. However, the degree of impact depends on each female leader and industries they are in.

4.4.2 Gender stereotyping

More than half of respondents never experienced gender stereotyping and they don't see this theme as an obstacle for them in their workplaces. This group of leaders also do not believe that there is preconceived belief in Thai society that men are leaders and women are followers. For instance, Leader A supported the denial of this heading that *"based on my experience I would say all my colleagues treat each other and respect each other well, there is nothing to do with gender as long as women are qualified for the jobs. But I can*

understand in the engineering field business being a woman might have conflict in terms of physical site work". A noteworthy point from Leader L, was that though she has not yet faced gender stereotype issues, if it happened and if it could not be changed, she would resign and not stay at that workplace any longer.

However, almost one third of the 20 leaders admitted gender stereotypes are one of the barriers female leaders face. Leader B said *"yes, I think lots of people where I previously worked think men are stronger and were always appointed to be leaders, unless women were very tough characters to beat them and I had to work much harder to prove myself".* Leader D also agreed and opined that *"gender stereotypes still exist in Thailand. People think this world is a manpower world, they think women will get married, take maternity leave and give more concentration to kids than work which can impact work performance".* Leader E explained that gender stereotypes are *"not in my current workplace. But in my previous industry (engineering) it was very male-dominated. And I felt that my opinions didn't matter as I was viewed as too young and female by my male boss".* Leader K also claimed that she noticed gender stereotypes, even when she interviewed a potential job candidate. Leader N then specified that she experienced gender stereotypes sometimes. Leader B also added a point based on her experience that *"although I am not confronted by any barriers now, but when I worked in the construction industry, my manager was really aggressive and did not really trust in my abilities so it made me feel that I was not valued, no matter how hard I worked. In the end, I got promoted but I left. That experience made me feel a lack of confidence until now".* This group of leaders believe that it is a preconceived belief in Thai society that men are leaders and women follow.

Gender stereotypes exist in some workplaces where these groups of female leaders especially in the male-dominated industries, however, not all those surveyed faced it.

4.4.3 Sexual harassment

Participants were asked about sexual harassment in the workplace and the responses can be separated into three groups, detailed below:

15 out of 20 respondents stated that they never faced sexual harassment. While the findings show that four of the women in leadership positions faced sexual harassment. Leader B added that she has not faced this barrier but her friend has been sexually harassed

at her company. Leader P added that "*It depends on the mindset of people*" which the researcher is not sure about the meaning of her statement.

4.4.4 Social structure

The question for this theme asked for the participants opinion on the following statement: "In Thailand women's responsibility is to take care of children/ageing parents at home and not socialise or party." Ten of the women agreed with the statement, with three out of the ten adding more opinions on this theme, including Leader N who said "*I think males and females should be equal, especially for those families where couples work, so they spend time working and when they are at home they should have equal housework*". Leader O, also specified that "*Most Thais believe that, but I do not follow this statement, I believe in equality.*"

On the other hand, nine leaders specified that they did not agree and think that social structure is not considered as a barrier for women in Thailand anymore. For instance, Leader H specified that "*Yes in the past, but now, those social responsibilities can be under either male or female depending on the needs*", or Leader I who stated that "*It was an issue in the past but now it is changing*". Interestingly, Leader A said she was not sure about the statement if it is true or not.

That social structure is a barrier for women in leadership roles in business in Thailand seems somewhat true, considering half of the women leaders agreed with this, while one respondent was not sure about it.

4.4.5 Limited support or promotion from managers/companies

Promotion for women in the workplaces is also one of the barriers to consider. Each respondent gave a different statement on promotion at their workplace. Eleven leaders stated that there are opportunities for promotion and some support from their current workplaces. In contrast, nine of them don't see opportunities for promotion feel there is a neglect of support from their manager and or their company, for instance, Leader D said it was mainly her manager who caused the promotion issue for her: "*my manager may forget or need more time to see my performance, he promised I would be promoted but it is not happening.*" She also responded that "*because of lack of support from the manager too, when I was sick from Covid-19, I got no support at all and needed to work while being sick. It created unhappiness at home. not only during the pandemic but when I have*

menstruation periods too". Leader G claimed that the company has a limited budget, therefore no opportunity for promotion for her, as well as Leader J who said *"the business is not expanding and stopped the promotion for employees"*. In addition, Leader K holds the highest position in the company (director) and has no room for promotion. Leader L also clarified that promotion may not have happened for different reasons: *"Maybe because of performance, gender bias & or network of/from superiors/boss stops promotion"*.

It can be concluded that limited support or opportunities for promotion may or may not be be barriers, depending on companies and managers. If these two variables give enough support then this barrier can be erased for women in leadership roles.

4.5 Solutions to break barriers

In terms of breaking barriers, there are solutions offered based on the experience of female leaders, categorised by the following themes:

4.5.1 Education

The vast majority of the 20 female leaders totally agreed that higher education for women is important. Leader B said that *"Education is important, at least women can have more knowledge to compete with men when it comes to a high level of decision making or problem-solving"*. This aligned with Leader Q's view, who added that *"Actually, equal opportunity to be well educated is necessary for Thai society too"*. On the other side, Leaders I, K and P stated that there is no need for women to have higher education and as Leader K put it; *"experience is more important"*. While the last group, which consisted of five leaders, stated that they agreed education is important but there are other factors to consider alongside education, such as Leader O, who outlined that *"Yes, higher education is important, but it depends on the leader's behaviour too"*. In summary most of the respondents agreed that education is important. However, there are many other factors to consider aside from education.

4.5.2 Support from government and other agencies, including women's groups, private groups, employers, etc.

With regard to support schemes/systems from the Thai government and other agencies in society to help remove barriers for women in leadership roles, this theme is split into three groups. The first group is for women leaders who admitted that the government could

possibly help break barriers, fifty-five percent of respondents agreed with this. Among this group, Leader A stated that *"I think good help from the government could break the mindset and change culture, hopefully one day. However, we had only one woman Prime Minister, therefore I am not sure with this government if they will provide more support or not, not enough yet anyway"*. Leader H remarked that the government support could be helpful. Leader B also mentioned that *"Yes, support by the government and women's groups might help too, particularly the government, but first they should do more on gender diversity. I know they have STEMP and other legislation but now it is not solid enough. Not a lot of people know about it. Perhaps, the current government led by the head of military does not really care about gender diversity much I suppose"*. Leader O also underlined that *"Projects by the government may help and one day it may help to change people's belief that women also can be good leaders, the same as men"*.

The second group held thirty-five percent of the proportion, believing that this theme is not true and the government does not help breaking barriers women face. Leader K said *"Culture and mindset are the most relevant factors, not the government"*. Leader F supported this statement and later opined that *"No, the government does not help now, but in the future I am not sure. Well, the impact won't be significant if there are only a few campaigns from them I believe."*

The last group represents ten percent of female leaders who are not sure if the government can help women leaders breaking barriers or not. Leader E explained that *"I'm not sure because the current government does not have gender parity among their own members, how can they help people?"*.

In terms of support by women's groups or other private groups, 100% of the sample group agreed that it would help break barriers faced by women, empowering more women to become leaders in workplaces too.

According to the support or promotion from managers/companies, Leader E stated that *"Strong mentorship programs for women and more opportunities should be provided, especially in industries that are traditionally viewed as male dominant (eg. engineering)"*. As well as Leader P who said *"Listening more and giving us a chance from employers or managers will be the ways"*. Leader Q also explained that *"Setting good examples and promoting more women to management roles or the top management level, such as c-suite*

roles in any business industries, especially the male-dominated industries are in my opinion great ways to reduce barriers women face."

4.5.3 Personal strength

As mentioned in the literature review chapter, the glass ceiling is one of major barriers for women's advancement everywhere, in Thailand. Therefore, breaking the glass ceiling is one of the solutions specified by some of the respondents. Leader B mentioned that *"Women should be strong and try to prove they can do it, work hard but care.",* while Leader K said *"In terms of others, I have no hope to help women break barriers, only to suggest to women ourselves to not let anyone pull you down, you know what you are capable of".* Leader Q also agreed with this theme and added the importance of EQ for women leaders is a way of breaking barriers too. Furthermore, one of the important questions has been asked about their personal solutions they used to overcome barriers they faced at the workplace overall. Seven of the women leaders stated that being confident and professional are the keys. Leader A claimed *"I was being myself and being professional to beat barriers".* As well as Leader G who revealed that *"I tried hard to prove that I could do and passed those barriers professionally".* Leader K also claimed that *"Actions speak louder than words, so I demonstrate my strength through my actions".* In addition, Leader E explained that *"Be confident and more vocal. But also listening to others is my way of dealing with these difficulties".* Leader C interestingly added that *"not only use personal strengths (confident, professionality), personal connection is important too".* Leader N then stated a different and interesting opinion that *"Yes, prove it. Be confident, but once you try your best, but it is not successful, you have to ask for their help and never show that you are better than them. Being compromising may help on some occasions".* In summary, all of the female leaders offered the solution that their own personal strength is vital to cross the barriers they faced at their workplaces.

4.5.4 Gender diversity awareness

As stated, the vast majority of the respondents specified that gender diversity is very important for Thai society. To support this statement, Leader A said *"we need to encourage our people about the importance of gender parity. Any gender can become a leader as long as he/she is capable and qualified for that role".* Leader F declared that *"Gender diversity awareness can start from job advertisements. Employers should stop advertising to specify men or women only, which also creates discrimination issues".*

Leader O also agreed that *"the first thing we should consider in terms of breaking barriers is to change people's mindset to accept women and men are the same"*. One personal point from the Leader Q stated that *"for me, I would be happier if Thailand can gain understanding of the importance of gender diversity to close the gender gap. I belived if we all understand it, gender discrimination, gender steryotyp as major barriers for us in the society will be gone too"*

In contrast to this theme, only Leader K stated that *"there is no need for gender diversity in Thailand"* and Leader R who is not sure if gender diversity is important to consider.

Gender diversity awareness is needed for Thai society, and it is the first thing to consider in breaking barriers.

4.6 People perceptions to women in leadership roles in Thailand

This section emphasises people's experience and perceptions of working for/with women leaders in Thailand business. In other words, it explains the perceptions of people on positive and negative (need improvement) of having women leaders. Six people included male leaders and employees of both genders responded to the questions here..

4.6.1 Improve performance

All respondents agreed that having female leaders in the workplace gains a better performance on their job. Respondent X who is a Director in an education industry interpreted that *"in my view, we performed well having women leaders, in terms of performance, collaboration, productivity effectiveness, maybe because of the relationship orientated, empathy, communication skill, friendship women leaders have"*. Respondent Y, a Managing Director for a service business in Thailand also opined that *"We perform well while working with women management as it is easier to share work problems with a female leader - men can be more judgemental about another man, seeing him as weak if he asks for help"*. As well as Respondent S who stated that *"My team has several female leads and I find it more productive than with male leads. There is a greater sense of ownership of the work and greater commitment to deliver excellence, particularly when they are empowered to make the decisions. They demand performance from the rest of the team"*.

4.6.2 Detail oriented

All of the respondents have been questioned how it is different working with men and women leaders. Most of the respondents agreed that women leaders tend to be more focused on details and detail oriented, the Respondent U said *"Yes, female supervisors seem to focus on more details and provide the clear instructions of work. They have more patience and understanding"* while Respondent W explained that *"Women are good for more detailed work, often be more formulated when compared to male, but often more tough since they seem to be more picky and more precise in some particular detail when compared to a male supervisor, which it made me work more actively than working working with male supervisor"*. Respondent W also said *"Some women leaders are very detailed and more careful in sensitive things plus women are more attentive in details than men"*.

4.6.3 Empathy and relationship orientated

The majority of respondents agreed with this theme, Respondent U said *"Women leaders are understanding and conscience at work"*. As well as the Respondent X who opined that *"Women leaders have a sense of empathy and friendship more than men leaders, however sometimes relationships took priority over the task"*. Respondent Z explained too that *"women leaders who I work and used to work with are open minded, kind and accept other opinions"*. Respondent V also asserted that *"Women leaders are calm, people focused and easy to be friends with"*. Respondent Y added one interesting point that *"having female leaders much less of the need to assert authority that some male leaders have, more desire to form consensus before moving ahead and it is easier to share work problems with a female leader - men can be more judgemental about another man, seeing him as weak if he asks for help"*.

4.6.4 Aspects to improve

In relation to society, Respondent V said *"In Thailand some males are promoted because of seniority, rather than ability. This can lead to poor communications and any challenge to authority introduces the risk of "loss of face", female leaders need time to gain trust in their authority from Thai staff. There can also be an initial reluctance to accept a female leader, particularly from male peer group"*. This statement matches with gender stereotypes.

In terms of family, the respondent V informed the researcher that *"unfortunately for working mothers, the ability to work extended hours/OT can be impacted by family/childcare commitments"*.

Personal aspects, it seems that women leaders make decisions slower than men and not only because they are concerned about the effects of their decision, they are afraid of failures that can occur too. Respondent Z identified supporting this statement that *"male is better at making decisions because women take longer time than men managers, I see even with an easy decision"*. Respondent Y also added *"Men may seem to be more decisive but this sometimes hides bullying behaviour, or the need to be seen to be strong"*. The position of women influenced the decision making tool *"The woman I worked for was the company owner, so it was 'her way or the highway"*. Respondent Y.

In addition, the Respondent Y also stated based on his experience that *"I've experienced moodiness; distractions due to rivalry with other females in the office - usually around physical looks rather than anything to do with work; sometimes overly assertive to make a point when dealing with men"*.

4.7 Conclusion

The findings and analysis from this qualitative research by questionnaires over the research questions and objectives can be highlighted overarching themes as following conclusion;

1. Main barriers women in leadership roles in Thailand encounter are comprised of four themes namely: glass ceiling, gender steryotype, sexual harrasment, social structure and limited support or promotion from managers/companies. These affect women in leadership positions differently based on where they work.

2. Solutions to overcome barriers, the themes are 1) education 2) support from government and other agencies including women groups, private groups, employers etc, 3) gender diversity awareness in the society 4) personal strength. All solutions have been mentioned and stated that those may help blocking and or breaking barriers for female leaders or women who wish to progress their career.

3. Perceptions from people who experience working with/for women leaders. Six of the respondents have been specified into five themes, themes under this category are 1) good performance 2) detail oriented 3) more structured and organised 4)

empathy and relationship orientated 5) improving aspects. These findings may encourage more women to pursue leadership positions in the future.

Table 4 will describe the connection between themes over the research questions. The next chapter, the conclusion and discussion which will be in place alongside literature review with the aim to respond to the three research questions as specified.

Chapter 5

Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter highlights the key findings that arose after interconnecting between the findings in Chapter 4 and the literature review in related areas in Chapter 2. The discussion will be instructed by the research questions and objectives which is mainly to find out what barriers faced by women in leadership positions in the business sector, in Thailand. Solutions to break barriers and the perceptions from people who have experience working with/for female leaders. Note, the literature review is limited based on the research of the topic.

5.2 Barriers

After comparing findings and literature review, it indicates that most of the finding elements are similar with the secondary data. In terms of barriers experienced by women in leadership roles in business in Thailand, the findings are as following:

The glass ceiling:

The results indicate that most women leaders from the sample group accepted the existence of glass ceilings at their workplaces and described their phenomenon from their own perceptions based on their background and experience. Most of them agreed that it impacts their career advancement. Align with Buasuwan & Niyamajan (2019) which state that the glass ceiling originally creates internal barriers and accordingly affects their level of confidence, ambition and career aspirations, it is also match with the theory of the glass ceiling which explains women's struggling to step up to the top of corporate rungs and they are not able to reach the top and pin at the middle ladders (Facchinetti, 2012). However the data indicates that the glass ceiling can be manageable by employers as suggested by Leader F, or using women leaders personal strength to manage it as indicated by Leader Q. In the companies such as engineering, project control and Thai traditional companies are also a variable to discuss the existence of a glass ceiling too as mentioned by Leader A,E,N. Align with Amornvivat (2015) who states in her research that in

Thailand the glass ceiling is in all business sectors, particularly in the typical Thai companies, which tend to have more and in male-dominated industries significantly (Buasuwan & Niyamajan, 2019). It can be concluded that this barrier impacts female leaders' work performance, career advancement and creates issues to them differently depending on the individual, in line the literature review that glass ceiling impacts women rising to executive leadership positions (Bolat et al., 2011). Luckily, nowadays, more women in Thailand reach higher education and have more opportunities at the workplaces. Gender equality is also improving (Leader O), moreover, it depends on leaders too, if they don't let the glass ceiling stop them then nothing can stop them from growing.

From the discussion on glass ceiling, it is evident that women leaders from the sample group have the same outlook as literature review.

Gender stereotyping: Literature review states that gender stereotyping is the main barrier for women in Asia (Napasri and Yukongdi, 2015) that impacts women's career progression. Thailand is however a feminine culture but believes that males are leaders and females are followers (Jermsittiparsert, 2016). Being respectful, friendly and compromising which can possibly restrict women to become a leader especially in male-dominated industries for example engineering, which requires aggressive and strong characteristics (Buasuwan & Niyamajan, 2019) more than other industries and usually prefer men rather than women as employees. The finding however agreed with previous research but it is only just under one third of the sample group admitted it. The results build on existing evidence of Leader B, she suggested that her manager in her previous company believes that men are stronger than women or gender stereotypes occur more in male-dominated industries as especially if you are too young, Leader E explained.

In contrast, the greater group of female leaders in the sample group never experienced gender stereotyping at the workplace and do not believe the norm of preconceived belief of men as leaders and followed by women. Leader A suggested that as long as women are qualified then there is no gender stereotype to be worried about and that there is no gender stereotype at her workplace. From the overall views of all women leaders, it can be interpreted that there is not a wide range of gender stereotypes as a barrier for this group of women in leadership roles in Thailand, it is only partially matched with the previous research. Therefore, further research may be established with a greater group of women leaders to give a clear picture on this. Note, there is one literature review from

Kosaikanont (2019) mentioned about gender bias for Thai females in start-up companies, this should be further research as in this research, all of female leaders are working in corporations, none of them from start-up environments.

Sexual harrasment: The results indicate that sexual harrassment is still occur among women leaders. Among the ladies 20% experienced sexual harassament. While 75%, which is greater of the whole group of leaders, never experienced this barrier. The result in line with International Labour Organisation (2021) which states that in Thailand, sexual harrassment are stick and in the society however, only one gift experience seual harassment (Khidhir, 2019). It shows that Thailand may improve on this matter. However, discrimination and sexual harrasment no matter to what extend it is, it results in an unsafe and hostile working environment (Sumano and Aneksomboonphon, 2021). Noteworthy, according to the statement by Leader B that she never faced any of these barriers but her friend did which was sexual harrasment in the workplace, futher reseach in more various industries should take in to account. The researcher also know the limitation of the question related to sexual harrasment in this reseach, none of those four ladies who experienced sexual harassment gave more detail about thier situation. This in line with Symons (2021) that talking about sexual is taboo in Thailand.

Social structure : Based on literature review, social structure is one of barriers to consider for women, such as women often set as a gender that meant to stay at home, taking care of children and old parents, as literature says female and male are assigned different roles in society because of their identity (Berger et al.,1980). Social structure is considered as one of the factors that restrict women in their career growth as well as obstruct women to develop rapport with men (Sage Reference, nd) perhalf because they are not out partying and participate in the men even such as playing golf etc. As a research result, half of respondents agreed on this trait, however Leaders N suggested that men and women should be equal in both workpaces and at home in relation to taking care of children and parents. In contrast, almost half of participants do not agree on this theme because they see the improvement of Thai society as such. This barrier somehow is women leaders' barrier in Thailand after interconnecting the findings with literature review because ten of female leaders agree on it while 9 disagree. Only one respondent who was not sure if there is social structure as a barrier for women to consider anymore. The results also indicate that there is a change of Thai society about social structure by Leader H, N, O.

Limited support or promotion from managers/companies: One more factor that restricts women in Thailand to perform in leadership roles is the limit of support and promotion from managers or employers. Based on the literature review, many said that especially after Covid-19, only work flexibility is not enough to serve women in the workplace, other types of support should be prepared for them too (Wangkiat, 2021). Leader D indicated that there was no support for her at all during Covid-19 especially when she was sick of it and had to be isolated at home, it made her family unhappy which is matched with the research by Deloitte (2022) examines that women stress more after Covid-19 with the new working style and it made them want to leave companies. Shortage of promotions is the main barrier under this category, which may not happen because of the limited budget or a company expanding its business so they freezed employees' promotions. The impact of gender bias could block women's promotion as well. Lack of mentoring and learning support seems an issue too. In contrast, more than half of respondents received support and promotion from companies they work for.

The outcome of this research is somehow in line with previous research as almost half of female leaders agreed on this theme as a barrier in workplaces. Furthermore, they also suggested that it depends on companies and management, if these two elements give enough support then this barrier can be erased for women advancement to leadership roles.

5.3 Solutions to break barriers

Education

The result that emerged from the group of women leaders is highly matched with the previous research. The vast majority of women leaders from the sample group agreed that higher education is important for women in Thailand as it helps reduce barriers in workplaces. In line with the theory of education by OECD (2019) that it helps improve human capital.

Education is the element that women can use to compete with men as suggested by Leader B which is considered as a glass ceiling, and the need of equal education to all genders which will help in gender diversity. Furthermore, among the greater group, many leaders stated that although education is important, there are other factors to consider too, such as

experience, behaviour of women leaders etc. Consequently, education might help to narrow the economic and social disparity between women and men. Wiriyapong (2021) interviewed Alisjahbana on Bangkok post, she says that the two most important factors to help women in terms of closing the gap and career advancement are education and upbringing. In contrast "though women's participation in higher education is increasing, a number of Asian nations have yet to fully close the gender gap" (Olson-Strom et al., 2020).

On the other hand, the minority of the sample group think that there is no need for higher education to break barriers for women, other factors are.

Support from the government and other agencies/women groups/private groups/employers

As stated, gender equality is necessary for breaking barriers for women in any society. Therefore, the support from the government and other parts of the community is essential. According to the help from the Thai government, the results suggested that fifty-five percent of women leaders agreed that the government can help and consequently lead to the change of the culture in the future. Although they are not sure about this military government as what people see now is only a paper, nothing solid and clear and not a lot of people know about the gender diversity campaign by the government.

While another one third of the group disagreed and suggested that there was no need for help from the government. The last group are not sure about the government as they don't have gender parity among themselves. These statements match with Loos (2020) which specified that, it is not certain that the government or other related agencies in society help on this matter, they are not equal themselves plus the monarchy which is the top institute of the country is not yet accepting women to take the throne

In terms of other public functions, all of the sample group agreed that other institutes help breaking barriers. As they help encourage more women in the workplaces in society (TAT Newsroom, 2022). Support of employers such as providing promotions, mentorship for women also help particularly in male-dominated companies as Leader E suggested, these elements can also help retain women at their workplace. Furthermore, good promotions and listening more and giving women a chance will be one of ways to break barriers, stated by Leader P and Q.

Personal strength

In terms of breaking the glass ceiling, employers and women themselves can help each other. Bouronikos (2021) states that breaking the glass ceiling is important, not only for women but the society as it may help increase numbers of women leaders. In Thailand glass ceiling is the major issue to block women advancement, confirmed by the numbers of women amongst this sample group of women. Personal strengths are the voices suggested by all of the women leaders which include being strong, being confident and more vocal, being competent and trying to prove themselves, not letting anyone pull them down, keep learning and supporting each other. Interestingly, 10% of this group suggested that women should ask for help if they tried their best but still were not successful without showing that they are better than men. It can be concluded that personal strength is required in terms of breaking the glass ceiling.

5.4 Extra finding

Before starting this qualitative investigation, the researcher did not anticipate finding extra themes in the research, however here are some themes that came from participants' suggestions through their additional points of recommendation.

Gender diversity awareness

The vast majority of this group of samples agreed that Thailand needs more awareness of gender diversity at workplaces. Traditional Thai thinkers still believe that women and men contribute to society differently, as per the phrase men are leaders, women follow (Jermsittiparsert, 2016). People should be made aware of the importance of gender equality, as suggested by Leader A. At workplaces it should start with job advertisements, where ads should not specify genders for any position, as it should be irrelevant. This significant issue could be a topic to research further if job advertisements in Thailand continue to discriminate by gender. In most countries, you can not advertise jobs for women or men only. Therefore, society needs to influence people about the importance of gender parity, as suggested by Leader F.

In respect to this theme, the majority of the respondents think that gender diversity should be made aware of and considered in Thai society to break barriers, particularly the glass ceiling. This finding shows how important gender diversity is for Thai people and in this

case the group of women in leadership roles. Only 5% are not sure to consider gender diversity in Thailand.

5.5 People perceptions to women in leadership roles in Thailand

Improved performance

The results indicate that having women leaders benefits workplaces, improving performance and productivity effectiveness. The results align with the literature review, where Kelley (2019) states that it increases revenue and productivity. Respondent Y also added that he and his colleagues perform well because they can easily share ideas with women. Greater sense of ownership, better communication skills and particularly when they are empowered to make decisions create good performance at the workplace where most of the employees are women. The findings are also supported by Sriarunluck (2021), that one of the advantages of having women leaders is to increase team performance by offering effective communication skills.

Detail oriented

Attention to detail. According to Shambaugh (2017), women tend to absorb more information through their senses and store more of it in the brain for other uses than men do. Therefore, women generally have more interest in details and pay more attention to them than men do. In this qualitative investigation, most people specified that women tend to be more focused on the details than men. Respondent W suggested that women are more calculated than men but more picky as well. Respondent U stated that women are more patient, so they use this skill to focus on detail.

Empathy and relationship-oriented experience

"The importance of vulnerability in a leader is that it creates connection," says Harvard Business School professor, Robin Ely, who stresses that vulnerability is not a gendered attribute, though we often associate this quality with women. She also cautions that "women leaders who exhibit stereotypically feminine traits tend to have a harder time winning respect in the workplace." (Baskin, 2021). This is similar to Respondent X's view, that his female leader has a better sense of empathy than male leaders. Women seem to be more kind, calm people-focused and easy to begin friendship with according to Respondents U, Z and V. In summary, five out of six respondents viewed female leaders as having more empathy and being more relationship-oriented.

Aspects to improve

There are two aspects for improvement, as stated by this sample group. The first one is related to society, which can be difficult to improve. Thai society is hierarchical (Hofstede, 2022) in which female leaders need time to gain the trust of their staff in order to be accepted. This statement is different from the literature review, in other words, it is a new trait that emerged from this research. The second finding relates to working mothers. According to one participant, once women in leadership positions have children, they don't have time to work overtime. Further research should be conducted to investigate this matter further.

According to the results, there are also aspects for improvement with women themselves. Women tend to take longer time than male managers in making decisions, which matches with the previous research by Sriarunluck (2021), who says that one area for improvement for women is to make decisions faster. The job position of women is considered when making decisions as well. Leader Y stated that when he worked with the company owner, her own way of making decisions was quick, this may be better for further research. Being moody or emotional is something to be considered too, according to Respondent Y, it aligns with a study that women more often face stronger negative emotions (Pascual, et al., 2012). This also would require further research and investigation.

5.6 Conclusion

The discussion chapter is where the literature review presents the key findings. Within the first section of barriers faced by female leaders in Thailand, five barriers were found, which are; the glass ceiling, gender stereotyping, sexual harassment, social structure and limited support or promotion from managers/companies. These barriers have been mentioned among the sample group, which is as expected from the literature review. The second section, which details solutions to overcome barriers, reveals what the respondents think are necessary actions to break barriers. The first of which, education, which most women leaders opined that it is important. Secondly, support from the government and other agencies/women groups/private groups/employers is one of the solutions that may help break this phenomenon. Next, breaking the glass ceiling by women's personal strength. The extra findings beyond expectation are gender diversity awareness, which the sample group believe will also help encourage women to become leaders. The perceptions of other people in workplaces are also important to encourage women leaders. All of the

participants from the sample group revealed that there are more advantages of having women leaders, such as improved performance, detail-oriented and empathy and relationship-oriented experience. However, some aspects for improvement were revealed. Despite the matching of the findings and literature review, the researcher acknowledges the limitations of this study, such as how small the sample groups were, or some gaps that may need to be investigated further. The interpretations from female leaders and people who experience working for/with them can be seen as recommendations for women in leadership, or women who anticipate being in leadership positions in the future.

Chapter 6

Conclusion and recommendation

6.1 Conclusion

This research aims to explore barriers women in leadership roles face in business in Thailand, identify solutions to help overcome those barriers and investigate perceptions of people who have experience working with/for them to help encourage and improve women leaders. Furthermore, it aims to help other researchers if they wish to study this area.

According to the research questions, the research has been investigated from 20 women in leadership positions and 6 people who experience working with/for women leaders. The group of women leaders answered the set of questions related to barriers that women face and solutions they think can help break barriers, based on each individual's experience. The second group of participants answered the set of questions related to perceptions they have about having women leaders. In relation to comparing the literature review and this qualitative research, it reveals that most of the findings are similar to the secondary data. However, there is an extra finding that came out from people's own perceptions as the open-ended questionnaires are open to explain their views.

In terms of barriers women that leaders face, the findings are also in line with the literature review, with the result showing that barriers women in Thailand face in workplaces are the glass ceiling, gender steryotyping, discrimination and sexual harrasment, social structures and lack of support by employers and managers at the workplace.

- **Glass ceilings:** It is an invisible barrier and it is evident that this barrier exists in almost every workplace, based on the sample group. Particularly, at male-dominated industries like engineering, project control or non-international Thai companies. Glass ceilings restrict women from their career advancement, work performance and make women lack confidence. The impacting degree depends on each woman leader. However, it is manageable either by support in the workplace

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or individuals. Higher education, personal strength and gender equality will help reduce this barrier.

- **Gender stereotyping:** It is the main barrier for Asian women. However, it seems like gender stereotyping is not the main barrier for women leaders in Thailand, based on the results of this qualitative research. It may occur more often in male-dominated industries, where women need to appear strong and tough and only one third of women leaders ever faced this barrier. Further investigation may need to be established to get a clearer picture.

- **Sexual harrasment**: Sexual harassment impacts on women's mental health, career growth and it may make women leave their job. However, Thailand is improving as it is evident that around seventy-five percent of women leaders in this sample group never experienced it. Note, there was one point from one woman leader revealed that her friend faced sexual harassment, a wider variety of industries should be taken into account for future research.

- **Social structure:** This barrier refers to a lack of equality when it comes to joining events such as golf and parties that were originally in the social structure meant for men. It often restricts women from career advancement, stopping women from participating in what are perceived as men's activities and building rapport with men. However an improvement in Thai society is evident, based on this qualitative investigation, that men and women are now more equal. Furthermore, in terms of taking care of children and parents, men and women are becoming more equal based on the research results.

- **Limited support or promotion from managers/companies**: This barrier occurs when employers do not provide enough promotion, mentorship, flexibility, equipment, pay, etc., to women which might happen because the company does not have a budget or from manager bias. Women can feel not valued and it impacts working performance, particularly with the Covid-19 pandemic. Gender bias could be the reason for lack of promotions as well. Furthermore, the results suggested that this barrier more or less depends on companies and management. If they provide enough support to women then this barrier can be erased.

With regard to solutions women think can help them overcome barriers, the results reflects that there are possible solutions, namely:

- **Higher education**. It is essential for women leaders and can help them compete with men. It is an important element to help improve an economy and influence gender parity in Thailand. However, there are other factors to consider as well.

- **Support from government and other agencies/women groups/private groups/employers.** The government can help to break barriers ideally, but not a lot of people believe that this government, which is controlled by the military, can help. Legislation and law about gender diversity is not really clear either. Other agencies in society such as women's groups and private groups can help more.

- **Personal strength:** The glass ceiling is the main barrier women face in Thailand in the workplaces. Therefore, women should be strong and help each other, encouraging each other to be a leader. Personal strength is required but some say women should ask for help if necessary.

- **Gender diversity awareness:** People in Thailand should acknowledge the importance of gender diversity. At workplaces, discriminatory job advertisements that seek only one gender should be stopped as both genders are equal and can work in any sector, as long as they are capable and qualified.

In respect to encouraging women to become leaders from people's perceptions of Thai female leaders, these are considerations for having female leaders:

- **Improved performance:** women leaders can improve work performance in workplaces as well as productivity because women are good in communication and easy to share ideas with.

- **Detail-oriented:** women are detail-oriented and interested in details more than men. However, if it is too much then it can create frustration for employees.

- **Empathy and relationship orientated:** Women are more empathetic than men, they tend to listen and care more about their employees needs. Vulnerable people can create relationships and a smooth working environment. However, it is hard to get respect from people if they are too friendly.

- **Aspects to improve:** In terms of societal aspects which are difficult to improve is how women gain trust from employees and it may take longer than men. Personal aspects, such as taking longer to make decisions, need to be improved. However, it depends on the positioning of women in an organisation. Furthermore, another aspect is their family expanding may impact work performance. However, it depends on the individual. The aspects to improve should be further researched.

6.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions mentioned, the recommendations suggested are as follows:

- Create awareness of barriers women face.

- Gender diversity awareness.

- Breaking the glass ceiling by women themselves.

- Clear promotions policies and procedures for women.

- Establish further research.

6.3 Implementation and costs estimate

- To improve companies' performance and productivity, employers should understand barriers exist in workplaces for women and prevent or manage them effectively. Particularly in male-dominated and Thai traditional companies.

- The government should pioneer gender diversity awareness in more solid ways and set schemes or laws that people can understand and use effectively. Job advertisements that discriminate by gender should not be acceptable by law.

- In order to break glass ceiling barriers, women should start with themselves first. Organisations can help with this as well by providing training for females to be strong and value themselves.

- Promotion policies and procedures should be clearly written to encourage women at all levels in companies, in Thailand, not only women in leadership roles. As well as other types of support such as mentorship, flexibility, equipment and compensation, etc.

- As the limitations mentioned in the methodology chapter, alternate samples could be considered as well as longer timing for future research. Companies and industries should be more varied too.

6.4 Personal Learning Statement

After completing this qualitative research investigation, the researcher is more mindful and understands the importance of research processes and the importance of these findings for Thai society. Furthermore, the researcher has cultivated how to write academic goals, critical thinking skills about the topic and linkage to previous research alongside research questions and objectives. However, the researcher also knows the limitations of this research. If this research is further examined by the researcher again, the proper structure would be set with wider sample groups, more varied business sectors and assign more time to get greater insight.

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Apendice

Table 1 : Open-ended Questions.

Finding Factor	Open-ended Question
Challenges and Barriers and solutions to overcome barriers	- What are your opportunities for a promotion after this role? Please list job titles if applicable.
	- If no promotion list on question two, why is that? - In your opinion, what barriers/challenges do women in leadership roles face? (Choose all that apply) - What barriers/challenges have you experienced as a woman leader in your industry?
	- How have you managed and overcome these barriers/challenges? - How have these barriers restricted you from being a female leader in your industry? - Have you experienced gender stereotyping as a barrier for you as a woman leader in your workplace? If yes, please give an example and how to dealt with it? - The advancement of women at workplaces is still an issue in senior positions today. What are your views on this statement? - Do you think there is a preconceived belief in Thai society that men are leaders and women follow? - Have you experienced harassment in the workplace on your career advancement? - Do you think gender diversity is important to consider in your workplace? - Do you think societal structure in Thailand is that women's responsibility is to take care of children/ageing parents at home and not socialise or party? - In your opinion, do you think higher education for women will help break barriers for women in leadership roles? - Support from the government help to remove barriers for women in leadership roles. What do you think about this statement? - Do you think support from other agencies in society help women breaking barriers? - Do you have any suggestions of solutions to overcome barriers faced by women in leadership positions?
Perceptions do people have of female leaders in business in Thailand	- Based on your experience, does it make a difference whether your manager is a male or female? Why or why not? - How long have you experienced working with/for a female leader/female leader? - What do you like about working with/for female leaders, could you please explain? - Have you experienced working with/for male leaders? If yes, what are some differences between male and female leaders? - Have you had a problem or conflict with any of your female leaders? If yes, how did you and your leader handle it? - How would you describe your female leader's management style and performance? - How would you describe yourself and your team while working with/for a female leader in terms of performance, collaboration, productivity, effectiveness etc.? - Please briefly describe the advantages and disadvantages of working with/for a female leader?

Table 2 : Demographic profiles of women in leadership roles.

Code	Age	Type of organisations	Years of working experience	Level of education	Current position
Leader A	31-40 years old	Project Control	11-15 years	Bachelor's degree	Chanel Manager
Leader B	31-40 years old	Services	11-15 years	Master's degree	Senior Principal consultant
Leader C	31-40 years old	Services	16-20 years	Master's degree	CFO
Leader D	41-50 years old	Engineering	16-20 years	Bachelor's degree	Principal Project Engineer
Leader E	31-40 years old	Services	11-15 years	Master's degree	Manager
Leaders F	31-40 years old	Commercial development	11-15 years	Master's degree	Senior project manager
Leader G	41-50 years old	Engineering	21 years plus	Master's degree	Contracts Manager
Leader H	51-60 years old	Engineering	21 years plus	Bachelor's degree	Project Procurement Manager
Leader I	41-50 years old	Services	21 years plus	Master's degree	Director Customer Experience
Leader J	41-50 years old	Services	11-15 years	Master's degree	GM
Leader K	31-40 years old	Technology	11-15 years	Bachelor's degree	Director
Leader L	41-50 years old	Project Management	16-20 years	Master's degree	Snr.Project Management Manager
Leader M	51-60 years old	Services	21 years plus	Master's degree	Regional role
Leader N	51-60 years old	Insurance Broker	16-20 years	Bachelor's degree	CEO
Leader O	31-40 years old	Engineering	16-20 years	Master's degree	Manager of engineering, General manager
Leader P	41-50 years old	Engineering	16-20 years	Bachelor's degree	Human resources management, Employee engagement & Relation, Administration
Leader Q	51-60 years old	Manufacturing	21 years plus	Bachelor's degree	A regional role or a corporate role
Leader R	41-50 years old	Import/Export	16-20 years	Master's degree	Director
Leader S	41-50 years old	Quality Assurance	21 years plus	Master's degree	Senior manager
Leader T	51-60 years old	Services	21 years plus	Master's degree	Snr Operations Manager

Table 3 : Demographic profiles of people who have experience working with/for women in leadership roles.

Code	Age	Gender	Type of organisations	Years of working experience	Level of education	Current position
Respondent U/R	31-40 years old	Female	Non-profit organization	11-15 years	Master's degree	Finance Assistant
Respondent V/S	51-60 years old	Male	Engineering	21 years plus	Master's degree	Manager
Respondent W/T	21-30 years old	Male	Engineering	1-5 years	Bachelor's degree	Industry Engagement Officer
Respondent X/U	51-60 years old	Male	Education	21 years plus	Doctorate	Director
Respondent Y/V	51-60 years old	Male	Services	21 years plus	Master's degree	Managing Director
Respondent Z/W	41-50 years old	Male	Services	21 years plus	Master's degree	Senior IT director

Table 4 : The connection between themes over the research questions.

Barriers

1) glass ceiling,

2) gender stereotype

3) discrimination and sexual harassment

4) social structure

5) limited support or promotion from managers/companies

Solutions

1) education

2) support from government and other agencies including women groups, private groups, employers

3) breaking glass ceiling by women self

4) gender diversity awareness

5) culture change

Women in leadership roles

Perceptions of people

1) good performance

2) detail oriented

3) more structured and organised

4) empathy and relationship orientated

5) Improving aspects