Women in Real Estate
A Swedish study of career barriers and opportunities

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# Master of Science thesis

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Abstract

The following thesis is a qualitative study of career barriers and opportunities for women in commercial real estate in Sweden. Additionally the purpose is to make suggestions for positive change opportunities for the industry as a whole. The Swedish real estate industry is currently experiencing a rather substantial generational change in addition to a shortage of interest from the younger generations. It is male dominated and still largely considered to be conservative in its values and practices. There is a need for re-branding and enhanced marketing of the industry as interesting and open to change as well as a large untapped potential in the talent pool of women in the working population.

The study has been performed through a literature review of current research and an interview study. Eighteen women were interviewed about their individual experiences and their views about the industry. The interview guide is partly designed to mirror the inequality regimes set forth by Joan Acker (2006). The results show that there are many underlying processes and structures found in theory that can be indentified in the Swedish real estate industry today, even though much work currently is done in many organizations to change the skewed distribution of men and women, particularly in management positions.

Without doubt, there is enormous potential for change in the industry and using the information in this thesis could prove very useful.
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Foreword and acknowledgements

I am the first to admit that when I first started thinking about this topic for my master thesis I was living in complete oblivion as to some of the issues at hand. My interest in real estate is deep and long held, manifesting itself in my choice of education. So that part of the topic for the thesis – focusing of the real estate industry – seemed natural. On the other hand, gender and equality issues had never really been anything I had paid attention to. During the process of writing the thesis, my interest, knowledge and understanding for gender and inequality issues has increased enormously. In addition my knowledge and understanding for how organizations work and in particular the real estate industry has also increased, it has indeed been very inspiring. Growing up in Sweden one is used to thinking about our society as one that presents everybody with equal opportunity. I am largely raised by a single father and had never come in contact with any of these issues, I now feel that writing the thesis has only increased my will to help out in that process. It has been with great enthusiasm that I have thrown myself into the topics and I hope that my work will in some small way contribute to the ongoing positive development of the industry.

I am eternally grateful to my two inspiring and helpful supervisors Dr Niklas Arvidsson and Dr Lotta Snickare, who have encouraged and supported me all through the process with their enthusiasm and knowledge. This gratitude also extends to all my interviewees who have participated in the study; they have all taken time out from their hectic schedules in order to share their experiences with me and have all contributed in various ways with inspiring stories, interesting viewpoints and new ideas. I am humbled and inspired by their experiences.

In addition I would like to thank my family for the support and understanding that they have lent me during this process. In particular my husband who has been an invaluable discussion partner helping me to stay on the path and not lose sight of the goal, my children for all the love I get, my mum for all her love and help and my dad for raising me to who I am today.

Marie Thorsson Hyslop
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Introduction

The area of women working in commercial real estate in Sweden has previously been fairly overlooked in terms of scientific research.

Today many more women work in real estate than traditionally but they are still under represented in positions of power. But the numbers are increasing and many companies in the industry are working towards greater equality between the genders, so is this an irrelevant topic? In my opinion the answer is no - not at all, since increased understanding of a problem always leads to better solutions. Increasing the number of women in real estate will give the industry a chance to interpret and interact with customers and society using a broader and more nuanced perspective leading to a continuously financially successful future. In collecting information and knowledge from the women actually working in the industry, women aspiring to work there can be presented with useful information, positive role models and realistic expectations.

The perspective of this thesis is that there are processes within organizations that continuously reproduce and thereby establish inequality regimes (Acker, 2006). These processes are often difficult to detect and even though much work is being done in order to eradicate inequality and embrace diversity in organizations, many still suffer from an unbalanced distribution between male and female employees.

As pointed out by Wahl et al (2001) in “Det ordnar sig – teorier om organisation och kön” this topic often has an emotional charge for many individuals. Men can feel accused of wrong- doings - past and present - and women can feel as if they are categorized into a group of lesser value and/or ability. Therefore it is highly important to point out that this thesis is written in order to research current organizational issues and not individuals as well as to present ideas for positive change for the future, not in order to assign any blame for the past. There are obvious differences between a man and a woman and to welcome diversity is partly to acknowledge and respect these differences. Within each group there are such large variations that they on average have very little importance on an individual level (Fagerfjäll, 2003).

The thesis is a literature review of current theory and a qualitative interview study answering the following research questions;

- How do women in real estate describe their career and work life situation?
- How can this be interpreted in terms of opportunities and barriers?
- How can this information be used for positive change in the real estate industry?

Suggestions for positive change within organizations are to continuously offer alternative work schedules such as flex time and potential for working from home; encourage, develop and practice mixed-gender teams in order to increase diversity awareness; introduce and include women in leadership training and mentoring programs; offer diversity awareness training and increase communication about compensation structures. Suggestions for individuals are to continuously build knowledge in order to acquire the needed competence; to build self-confidence in order to develop courage; business-skills to better be eligible for top level promotions and pro-actively build networks, formal and informal; to practice leadership and show accomplishments along with catching opportunities where this is possible.
1.1. Background

The real estate industry is divided into two major fractions, one traditionally very hands on – maintaining physical buildings, the other – administrative, financial and customer related. This provides for a division between categories of employees in real estate and also the gender distribution between them. Maintenance staff has traditionally been male and that trend continues, while administrative staff and customer relations personnel have a varying degree of male versus female staff. In general the lower and middle level administrative staff is female and the upper level management is male.

For some time now it has been acknowledged that the Swedish real estate industry is facing a future major challenge of finding and hiring enough new employees in face of coming retirements. As many as 5 000 employees will disappear from the industry in the next few years and up to 15 000 within the next ten years (Wiblom, 2007). This will coincide with the exceptionally large retirement wave of the baby boomers between 2005 and 2014, which could amount to as much as 20% of the working population (Wiblom, 2007). The baby boomers leaving, not only reduces the actual amount, but the number of experienced workers since they take their knowledge and experience with them (Philips & Roper 2009 citing Dychtwald et al. 2006) As pointed out by Fastighetsbranschens Marknadsråd (FM) this scenario poses a massive challenge for the industry because of competition with other sectors in attracting new employees. Furthermore the need to attract the most talented and knowledgeable workers is adding difficulty, with the term ‘talent’ being defined as a core group of technical experts, leaders and key contributors who will drive the organization forward (Philips & Roper, 2009 citing Society for Human Resource Management). This situation is one that it shares with many other industries, especially those traditionally dominated by a single gender. The industry is not unaware of the situation and the demands of today’s society upon it, there have been many attempts already to change the current situation as many of the organizations are acutely aware of the skewed distribution between men and women and foster a desire for change.

In order to meet the challenges ahead, the industry has initiated several projects and co-operations, e.g. Fastighetsbranschens Marknadsråd, a collaboration between employer organisation Fastigo, the magazine Fatighetsnytt and real estate companies Stronghold, ISS, Vaskronan, Klövern and Fabege. Another example is Fastighetsbranschens Utbildningsnämnd (FU), founded in 2006, aiming to market the industry and to serve as a connection between the educational system and the industry. New Bachelor degree programs specifically targeting students interested in real estate, for example Fastighet & Finans at KTH in Stockholm has started.

In 2009 FU commissioned an extensive GAP-analysis, following the results from a limited analysis in 2008 which indicated that the need for new employees was vast. The aim of the 2009 analysis was to survey short term and long term needs for new employees, partly in order to estimate the number of additional educational places needed. The results from the analysis clearly indicate a large need for many different categories of new employees. In addition, the study points to the problem of increased competition from other industries for the same competences. In many cases the need for new employees largely supersedes the loss through retirement. To illustrate how dire the situation is, FU estimates the need for new building engineers and technicians at about 7100 individuals, representing only two of the categories needed. This is to be compared to the total number of employees in the real estate business; generally estimated at between 85 000 and 100 000, including cleaning staff.
Byggföretagens Bransch- & Arbetsgivarorganisation using SCB’s latest classification system gives a lower estimate at 66,000 individuals in 2008 (SNI 68), where 34% are 55+ and almost 21% are 60 years or older (Sveriges Bygindustrier, 2011).

The future challenge is partly due to the large “change in generations”, but also to the fact that many young individuals do not see the real estate industry as an interesting future employer. A study by Svensk Byggtjänst show that only 12 % of the interviewees (aged 15-19) were interested in either construction or real estate, of those with foreign backgrounds only 9% were interested and of the girls only 6%. Interestingly enough, 69% of managers in real estate believe that young individuals are in fact interested in the industry and 50% of them believe that they will handle all recruitment needs without major complications in the coming few years (Samhällsbyggnadssektorn och ung arbetskraft, 2009).

The lack of interest from youth, individuals of foreign background and young women indicates a need for more positive and better marketing of the industry, but also for a need to improve diversity as pointed out by both FU and FM. Today there is an ongoing transition from product focus to customer and service management focus within the industry. Siw Wiblom (2007), CEO of FU states that new market ownership structures also pose a challenge; many international investors require a high degree of patency and visibility, demanding new and challenging tasks from staff - requiring new competence. This in addition to the technological shift that the industry is experiencing with increasingly complex systems running buildings and the cost effectiveness of having the right individual on the job, all add up to an increasing need for employees with a new and different set of skills. Alvesson (2004) points to the importance of employee networks and relationships, which helps in developing an efficient organization; an increase in the diversity of the staff would lead to an increase in the diversity of the networks and relationships as well.

Today the industry is still male dominated and predominately Swedish. Statistical data from Statistics Sweden indicate that there are 78% men and 22% women in management positions, making it an example of a skewed industry (Yrkesstrukturer i Sverige, 2011). In addition to the overall gender distribution, there is a rather significant lack of women in higher managerial positions even though the numbers are increasing, as well as a substantial wage gap. Statistics Sweden published data (SCB, 2011) on pay levels, indicates that there is a wage gap on all levels and in all categories (position, educational background and sector). The magazine, Naturvetare (2011:3), states that women fall behind in the pay stakes already from the start of their careers.

A gender pay gap is in fact illegal; the European Union has clear rules that are in effect in Sweden, on equal treatment in all conditions and aspects of pay and the banning of discrimination on basis of gender (European Commission, 2011). Such inequalities are not in line with official general policy of Sweden, where it is considered an important social goal for government to lay groundwork for equal opportunities in the work force, and where companies are expected to incorporate this into their daily activities. Additionally Sweden has a non-discrimination law (SFS 2008:567), which clearly states that men and women should be treated equally in all possible ways and that employers are to work especially hard at achieving equal pay for equal work. The law contains a paragraph requiring all employers with more than 25 employees to every three years make a gender equality plan that covers working conditions; actions taken in order to facilitate for a combined work life and parenthood; anti-harassment actions (sexual and others) and other actions in order to avoid having anyone having to deal with reprisals in connection with their gender or ethnicity etc;
actions towards an equal recruitment of genders and the equal treatment of all applicants and in addition ensure that the organisation is well educated about these issues so that an equal distribution is possible.

In order for the industry to stay relevant and continually successful, the mind-set and traditional way of conducting business needs modernizing in many organizations. By welcoming diversity and by creating even more opportunities for women, the industry could continue to develop.

A key task in a continually more globalized and market oriented business environment is to embrace and handle diversity. Companies who do not welcome different viewpoints and other differences will suffer financially, in contrast to more talented and creative companies who will have a higher degree of success in the competitive market, especially when focus is shifting from routine work to knowledge work (Fagerfjäll, 2003).

In the process the added benefits of having a larger working population to choose from as well as an increase in its attractiveness could occur. Practical reasons for increasing diversity in any organization and in commercial real estate organizations in particular is according to the American CREW Network that diversity collectively allows them to become more effective, just, productive and creative, bringing more experience, talent, backgrounds and interest to the industry. It gives organizations a chance to assemble a deeper employee pool, develop stronger ties to the community, a more comprehensive supplier base and appeal to a broader customer base as well as contributes to more marketplace recognition and stronger branding; all these reasons provide improved economic value on the bottom line. In addition, the successful management of diversity engages all stakeholders to leverage contacts, experiences, development and personal backgrounds more efficiently in order to find and utilize untapped and emerging markets and potential corporate partners. Reduced staff turnover is an additional benefit from improving talent management in the industry, Philips and Roper (2009) state that the estimated hidden cost for employee turnover is between 30 and 300 percent of yearly salary.

1.2. Purpose

The aim of this thesis is to describe and understand career opportunities and barriers for women in commercial real estate; and thereby increase the knowledge about the processes and structures that continue to reproduce the skewed distribution of men and women in leading positions in the industry.

By performing and analyzing eighteen interviews with women working in commercial real estate; eleven holding management positions and seven holding lower level positions, the following research questions are answered:

- How do women in real estate describe their career and work life situation?
- How can this be interpreted in terms of opportunities and barriers?
- How can this information be used for positive change in the real estate industry?
1.3. **Limitations**

The main focus of the thesis is to study women’s experiences in the commercial real estate industry in Sweden today, thereby partly excluding other perspectives.

Even though related, other areas of gender research such as biological differences or upbringing are not specifically covered in the thesis.

The study has eighteen interviewees whose input is based on personal experiences and views. The resulting analysis should therefore be interpreted as such, making generalizations for the whole industry more uncertain.

The theoretical framework used, where organizations are looked at from a gender perspective is limiting, in that many other social dimensions such as ethnicity and background, class (position) and age are partly overlooked even though they potentially play a major role in the regeneration processes as well.

In contrast to the focus on Sweden in the empirical study, a considerable part of the theoretical framework is developed internationally, even though as much relevant Scandinavian research as possible has been used.

1.4. **Outline**

The first introductory chapter is followed by a chapter containing the theoretical framework. This section contains theory about equality, knowledge work, company culture, and gendering of organizations, followed by research on perceptions of work and female leadership in addition to barriers and facilitators to career advancement. The third chapter contains the empirical study, where the choice of method is described in section 3.1, followed by data and materials, participants and a short discussion about anonymity and lastly the procedure of the study. The presentation and analysis of the results of the empirical study in relation to the theoretical framework is in chapter four, containing a section on individual experiences followed by interview analysis and an analysis of processes and structures. A discussion of the analysis and the views of the author follow in chapter five. The final chapter contains the conclusions formed.
2. Theoretical framework – literature review

2.1. Equality, inequality and inequality regimes

The labor market in most western countries is still vertically and horizontally segregated and there are very few jobs or sectors that are equally distributed between the sexes (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009). According to the authors the presence of approximately equal numbers of men and women in leadership positions is an indicator that a society has achieved gender equality. But commonly the top positions are still populated by men (approximately 90%) (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009). There is an ongoing discussion whether there is a ‘glass ceiling’ – a metaphor for gender barriers producing such patterns – present. Göransson (2003) states there is an obvious glass ceiling in Swedish business, and women generally do not hold the ‘line’ positions or the positions where top management is selected from. Acker (2009) suggests using ‘inequality regimes’ instead of glass ceiling as a more accurate metaphor as it incorporates more factors.

Diversity as a concept has been discussed ever since the 1960’s partly due to the changing labor market. A lot of research has gone into whether it is in fact good for the work groups to be diverse or if it worsens the performance. There are mixed results in research, some say that it enhances creativity and performance while others point to the risk of in-group bias and how it can be threatening to feelings of cohesiveness and identity. As a result many researchers now focus more on knowledge, belief, values, attitudes and skills differences more than on demographics. Basically the issues are very complex and there are no clear answers to be found in research (Rink & Ellemers, 2009). On the other hand when research into board of director diversity (Erhardt et al, 2003) pointing to the combination of large pressure on boards in a business climate with ever increasing due diligence and findings of increased financial performance in firms with diverse boards; it only makes sense to increase board diversity.

Lack of equality can be considered a substandard usage of existing human capital, which is assumed to be less profitable and also inefficient. This standpoint holds even if the view of men and women being essentially different is prevalent. The lack of female interpretations of reality, because of women’s lack of positions of power is problematic, since power is something to be used in order to create and define reality – for example in organizational design (Wahl et al, 2001; Göransson, 2007).

Many jobs have traditionally been given a masculine flavor (Eagly & Carli, 2007) and in many organizations it has been difficult for women to balance the need for being viewed as competent enough and the same time as sufficiently feminine as to not break with gender expectations (Alvesson & Billing, 2009). What currently is considered to be ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ respectively is culturally defined, dependent on definitions historically given to the terms; these definitions are ever-changing (Billing, 2010). Typical jobs given to men or to women are often viewed as each others complete opposites, but this is also ever-changing and these days there are crossovers occurring (Billing, 2010), where women enter predominately male areas such as real estate.

The inequality regimes put forward by Acker (2006) is an attempt to uncover the processes which at the same time are practical activities for how to organize work as they are complex systems that reproduce inequality. In the framework for analyzing an organization, Acker defines inequality regimes;”loosely interrelated practices, processes, actions, and meanings
that result in and maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities within particular organizations” (Acker, 2006). Where inequality in an organization is defined as ”systematic disparities between participants in power and control over goals, resources, and outcomes; workplace decisions such as how to organize work; opportunities for promotion and interesting work; security in employment and benefits; pay and other monetary rewards; respect; and pleasures in work and work relations” (Acker, 2006). The framework is composed of six components; the basis for inequality which varies between organizations, but commonly processes involving class, race and gender are present. The next component is the shape and degree of inequality, which often is related to the shape of the organization - whether it is hierarchical or flat. Under this component, wage gap issues are included. The next component is organizing processes that produce inequality. The fourth component is the visibility of inequalities. The fifth component is the legitimacy of inequalities and the last component is control and compliance.

Having children is becoming more of a luxury in today’s cut throat business environment according to some; many companies expect highly paid consultants, managers, analysts and other specialists to work around the clock and at irregular hours with no regard of family life (Fagerfjäll, 2003). Studies indicate that well educated men with children and a working spouse are falling behind in pay and promotions compared to men with a stay-at-home wife who cares for the children, interpreted as that they cannot deliver as much face time at work as their peers (Fagerfjäll, 2003). Billing (2010) on the other hand state that all the female managers in her study have families and therefore they have not felt the need to completely give up on the idea in favor of a career. Swedish female managers do not have fewer children than the average population according to Boschini (2004).

It can be argued that organizations are to be considered arenas where different actors negotiate which definition of equality that will prevail within the organization. Given this, many different views of what equality is can be present and the dominant view will be based on the power structure in the organization (Wahl et al, 2001). This view will reflect how equality is discussed and who will discuss it, if any changes are possible and how these are implemented in addition to which results that will be obtained. If the view is seen through rose colored glasses, where comparisons to the past present the current conditions as positive, then much needed work will go undone (Schmitt et al, 2009). A rather common viewpoint is that equality is in fact a problem that stems from the women themselves; according to Wahl et al (2001), particularly organizations which have been lacking in conscious efforts to increase equality often hold this view. The issues are then believed to belong to the women themselves and also that women lack the right qualifications or self esteem to make the problem go away. Whereas organizations which have been more pro-active in the field, view inequality as a pure organizational issue and therefore the issue is viewed as a chance to utilize valuable resources and competences and as something that can increase both profitability and efficiency of the organisation. There are five types of positions towards equality taken by men: the candid opponent, the concealed opponent, the neutral man, the careful activist and the gender equality activist (Wahl et al, 2001).

2.2. Knowledge work and talent management

A ‘knowledge’ organization or job is one where the focus is on analytical or intellectual tasks and which generally are considered to require extensive experience and theoretical education (Alvesson, 2004). The current and ever evolving business environment that Swedish real
estate companies operate in presents challenges in terms of a new financial reality, new technology and new ideas and values (Wiblom, 2007). Even though the real estate industry is not a clear cut knowledge industry like for example investment banking, it does contain substantial amounts of specialized units, both financial and technical as well as customer related; both in traditional real estate management companies and especially in real estate consultancy. Philips and Roper (2009) refer to today as the era of the knowledge worker. They cite Dychtwald et al (2006) who claim the emphasis is shifting away from a product focus and towards the “bells and whistles that attract the people that represent the asset” in the real estate industry. The shift is partly explainable by society moving into the age of knowledge or intellectual capital and leaving the industrial age behind (Fagerfjäll, 2003; Masui, 2004; Philips & Roper, 2009).

Every time an employee comes into contact with a client or customer is an opportunity to create a meaningful relationship or bond. If these interactions are handled badly this will have a negative effect on the company and can potentially lead to the client turning to a different provider instead. In line with this theory, lies the realization that the employees themselves and their behavior is becoming the brand itself (Philips and Roper, 2009). This is why the authors emphasize the importance of attracting and selecting the right staff and also state the best way to avoid having employees who are disengaged and performing poorly is to be proactive in engaging, developing and retaining the staff. Many believe that the real estate industry is moving towards a greater customer focus and away from a product focus (Wiblom, 2007). It is only in an ideal market or in a situation of full information about the value and quality of the product/service that no attention is paid to who sells and delivers it. An uncertain market instead puts a lot of emphasis on the nature of the social relationship and opinions about the business partners (Alvesson, 2004), giving further weight to the argument.

For the real estate industry to actively focus on human resource management is partly a new development that goes hand in hand with the development of the market, away from the industrial age. The strong focus on the motivation and quality of the employees is something that sets knowledge organizations apart from other types of organizations (Alvesson, 2004). There are two different types of advantages in relation to employees and employee efficiency; one from human capital - the usage of individual talent, and the other from the processes involving human governance - how well the organization facilitates for co-operation and development - in their processes and systems. Each organization must make the decision where to put the emphasis - to hire the absolute best employees using fewer resources towards optimizing systems and processes or vice versa (Alvesson, 2004).

An organization can, in order to attract and retain qualified staff, present a mix of different means to the employees, a combination of monetary compensation, other financial benefits and career opportunities in addition to interesting tasks, good social relationships, opportunities for learning and development (Alvesson, 2004). Philips and Roper (2009) present a framework to use for talent management specifically aimed at the real estate industry; consisting of the five key elements of attracting, selecting, engaging, developing and retaining employees. They state that attracting talent in today’s work climate is a challenge especially since most of the potential workers will be from generation Y (1980-2001). The authors claim these individuals are used to getting large amounts of recognition and praise; in addition they have been taught to be independent thinkers and they have seen their parents work very hard and long hours resulting in work related stress symptoms. Altogether this leads to generation Y entering the workforce with a whole set of new and different expectations. They want regular feedback; to be recognized and to feel the employer values
their opinions; demand flexible work hours and a good balance between work life and private life. In addition they tend not to plan to stay for extended periods of time with one employer; the average job tenure of workers under the age of 35 is less than three years. When an employee leaves, the money, time and energy invested in them disappears and the replacement employee start at the bottom of the productivity and quality curve after costing time, money and energy to find (Philips & Roper, 2009).

2.3. Company culture

A way to maximize advantages is the development of a strong company culture that facilitates cooperation and a well developed organization. Such a culture can co-exist with both the recruitment of the best employees and the use of excellent systems and structures that cause positive synergies (Alvesson, 2004). Alvesson and Billing (2009) uses the word or concept of ‘culture’ as something which over time has developed and is shared by many as a way of categorize a set of symbols, ideas and meanings, in other words a way of looking at the importance of symbolism. These are legends, myths, stories and rituals about how to interpret experiences, ideas and events shared amongst the group and at the same time influenced by its members. A ritual is, for example, how to call a meeting, dress for the meeting and how to behave in the meeting. A cultural artifact is furniture, office, building, a corporate logo or dress or other material things. When dressing for work, managers are particularly constrained (Alvesson & Billing, 2009), female managers maybe even more so in that they should neither appear too masculine or too feminine.

Studying organizations from this viewpoint centers on the idea that the culture is, if not the most important at least a very important feature of the organization. Company culture is an ever changing process with influences and roots in both social and material practices, which is reinforced (or weakened) and recreated in actions, language and material structures. Alvesson and Billing (2009) strongly point to the use of organizational metaphors meaning the vocabulary used in the organization. A metaphor is a verbal symbol that appeals to feelings, intellect and imagination. They state that organizations generally have a mix of masculine and feminine culturally charged metaphors which varies between the organizations in how and which one is dominant.

Each organization varies in its attempts to create an atmosphere with motivated and satisfied employees, using many of the above mentioned tools at hand; but it is also possible to mold individual’s perception of what is important and their ideas about advantages and disadvantages in their work situation, using company culture especially the use of rituals and artifacts and thereby creating an identity intertwined with that of the organization’s (Alvesson & Billing, 2009). The connection with gendering organizational theory is that it provides a way of looking at the cultural manning of verbal expressions, actions and actual physical objects in relation to the specific mix of sexes (Alvesson & Billing, 2009). The authors state the tolerance for deviations to the norm described in the company culture is often rather low in organizations. Many of these aspects favor being a so called team player – someone who is similar to us and who acts like us and protects us.
2.4. Gendered organizations

The study of organizations from a gender perspective is today a well developed field of research (Gunnarsson, 2007). According to Acker (1990); “to say that an organisation, or any other analytic unit, is gendered means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine”. Gender equality - originally a political concept - which was introduced in the 1960’s, is a social phenomenon in society that has consequences on an organizational level (Wahl et al, 2001). Gender is a key concept and crucial in order to fully understand how individuals are affected in organizations in regards to support, suffering, skepticism and encouragement (Alvesson & Billing, 2008).

Organizational culture is built from (many times unspoken) understandings, values and meaning, this culture is then displayed through the use of dress codes, office arrangements, the language used and the symbols that represent the organisation, as stated above. Many of these are according to Eagly and Carli (2007) peppered with male attributes and masculine values. Blanchard (2007) adds attitudes, behaviors and beliefs as part of organizational culture. The focus on masculinity can partly be explained by the phenomenon homo social behavior (Wahl et al, 2001; Göransson, 2003). In their relation to female colleagues, men are divided into four categories by Kvande & Rasmussen (1994) based on how they act towards them; the cavalier, the competitor, the comrade and the comet. They all vary in relation to how they view their female colleagues.

In male dominated industries, women are in the minority. This can have three structural effects; visibility, contrast and assimilation (Wahl et al, 2001). The authors also believe that many organizational changes are gender ‘blind’, in that even though the issue of gender equality is a part of the process, many of the actors still do not perceive it as such. In any situation when mainly one perspective is represented, gender can be difficult to see since the individuals of the organization then view this and their own behavior as representing the ‘human perspective’ (Acker, 1990). Any following processes or organizational structures are believed to be gender neutral. If and when gendered approaches, like acknowledging that the men and women are in fact differently affected by the organization, are presented it is often argued that these basically contaminate an essentially gender-neutral structure.

There are different ways of not acknowledging gender equality issues as a problem within an organization, three main view points have been identified by Wahl et al (2001); one is to view the issues as non-issues or something of the past (within ones own organisation) as in ‘we already have gender equality or gender equality prevails in society already’; another common view is ‘that it used to be a problem but no longer is’ or that it might be a problem for others but not for us and lastly that it is only to do with how individuals organize their private lives. In summary – the problem exists but it is altogether someone else’s.

The second type of denial suggests that it is a generational issue which younger generations will auto-correct or will happen by a natural development. These ideas create a notion of that any actions towards gender equality are exaggerated and or unnecessary as well as neglect the underlying work that has been done historically in order to promote change in these areas. The final view point is to consider the way things are to be natural. In other words, that men and women have been given different abilities and tasks by nature and that the order of men working and women looking after children and other domestic tasks is not to be disturbed.
Given this view, any actions in order to achieve greater equality give women an unfair advantage as well as not natural and should be avoided.

Acker (1990) states that, gender actually is deeply embedded in organizations and patterns of gender segregation and the gender identity of occupations and jobs is continuously reproduced. It is not an addition to the processes but rather an integral part and they cannot be properly understood unless gender is taken into account. An early attempt to describe and analyze organizations from this perspective was made in the late 1970’s by R. M. Kanter in ‘Men and women of the corporation’, where many - now classic - themes and expressions where coined. She focused on the ‘gendered realities’ (Acker, 2009) that managerial women encountered and also on the difficulties for women to get top jobs. Kanter has since been followed by many researchers who further developed theories presented by the author, for example the structural placement in the organization as the underlying cause of problems for women or how women often end up as tokens or in dead-end jobs. So called dead end jobs are found to more often be allocated to women than men in a study by Bihagen and Ohls (2007).

Common concepts used in organizational theory, such as hierarchies and (abstract) jobs assume a universal and disembodied worker, but this worker is actually the image of a social man according to Acker (1990). She argues that this leads to the organizational practices that continue to recreate patterns of inequality; the gender segregation of work, the division between unpaid and paid work, the status and income differences between men and women, the reproduction of cultural images of gender as well as individual gender identities.

Women working in male dominated organizational cultures are part of a subordinate group, and as such they become representatives for the minority. They are often viewed as symbols for all women or tokens (Kanter, 1977; Wahl et al, 2001); this can cause considerable amounts of stress since not only do they have to perform well in their job for their own sake but also for the sake of all women who they represent. A failure of any sort would mean a symbolic failure for all women according to Wahl et al (2001). Kanter also points out that these processes are not due to femaleness per se but to the “rarity and scarcity”. She continues that there are three “perceptual tendencies” that token women face, firstly - they get attention - which can be both positive and negative, and there is a “law of increasing returns” where the smaller the number of women are in relation to the entire group each woman has the potential to catch a bigger part of the awareness given to them. The second situation or tendency is that the women are targets of polarization and that the differences between them and the men are magnified. Lastly is the common use of stereotypes, where the women find themselves conforming to the stereotypes already conceived in the organisation (Kanter, 1977). In addition she finds tokens often to be expected to exhibit a certain amount of loyalty towards their male colleagues. They can be put through loyalty tests and if failed then the consequence is further alienation. In some cases, the loyalty test involves turning against other women.

All organizations follow different agendas in working towards greater gender equality, Wahl et al (2001) have made a compilation of eight methods that are common amongst organizations. These are surveying the current state of the organization; recruitment; quotas; education; leadership development programs; gender mainstreaming; using job classification systems in order to set salaries and actions against sexual harassments. While Fagerfjäll (2003) has studied Swedish organizations trying to groom female candidates for management positions and has divided them into three categories; those who try to get the women to act more like men, as in becoming a bit more aggressive and to understand male hierarchies etc; those who try to adjust the male dominated structure to a more feminine reality, to offer career
paths that are supposedly more attractive to women etc and lastly those who welcome diversity and want the differences to be visible (Fagerfjäll, 2003). Many times an individual organization utilizes a mix of these strategies, women learn to hunt and take saunas; mentoring is initiated in order to compensate for the difficulties to join male networks; new and improved terms for maternity leave is introduced etc. Those who aspire to welcome gender diversity offer courses to increase gender awareness. Research indicates that using mixed work groups to indentify specific issues within the organization that cause women to fall behind and men to get ahead can be very useful (Fagerfjäll, 2003).


2.5. Work life

In the not so distant history, difficulties of career advancement were due to social class as well as gender. New is a different set of difficulties, prevalent with individuals of foreign decent. Alvesson & Billing (2008) state that today it is common knowledge as well as empirically substantiated that men and women face different options and privileges in life and particularly in their working life. Working and having a job is something that today is just as important for the identity of women as for men (Billing, 2010).

Phelan et al, (2008) state that humans generally perceive leadership as masculine and this then causes a conflict between that image and the associations of women, basically of what women are thought to be and what leadership is thought to require. This can lead to women being deemed unsuited for certain jobs since they lack some leadership attributes or in contrast they can be criticized for actually displaying such attributes. This phenomenon is what Eagly and Carli (2007) call the “double bind”. Research show that women often adjust to the situation and actively avoid male dominated industries and especially jobs that traditionally are given to men; basically when they encounter barriers they stop, turn and go in another direction career wise (Masui, 2004).

In order to be considered for a top level position, it is important to previously successfully have held a position with clear performance accountability, such as head of sales. Other jobs such as head of human resources or information are in contrast not jobs that easily can lead to a C-suite job (Masui, 2004). Today there are ‘female’ and ‘male’ middle management jobs, where the female jobs are head of finance, staff or information while the male jobs are, apart from CEO, almost all technological and/or production related positions (Fagerfjäll, 2003). In other words, men hold ‘line’ jobs and the women deal with softer issues such as human resources, ethics, environment etc. Many women report that it is difficult to get the really tough jobs needed to acquire enough experience to ever be in the running for higher level positions (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

To gain access to resources and to advance career wise, social networks have been spoken of as instrumental conduits (Hunt et al, 2009). These social networks are connections between individuals, but vary on several dimensions; in how formal they are, their strength, if they cross gender line, level of status, if they are psychosocial or instrumental etc (Hunt et al, 2009). Social capital is affected by gender, since women often have less than men. This is in contrast to the fact that many women view informal networking and informal mentoring relationships as crucial to them growing as leaders (Masui, 2004; Eagly& Carli, 2007). The
benefits that one collects from social network connections are what constitute one's social capital (Hunt et al, 2009). Building social capital both within and outside the organisation involves establishing good relationships with colleagues through interaction, offering advice and help, supporting fellow workers, having mentors, networking with both women and men (many more powerful networks are male-dominated) and to form relationships with individuals more senior and/or more powerful (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Professional capital – experience and other valuable assets - can on the other hand be acquired by either a long working relationship with an organization, by holding many different management positions, by working in many different industries or areas, by working internationally etc (Jordansson, 2007).

Some claim that the reasons why not more women hold top positions is that there are just not enough competent women available. This view is statistically proven to be flawed in a study made by Arbetslivsinstitutet, cited by Masui (2004), where women more often are over qualified for their position then men. Other times the reasons behind why women are not offered top jobs is said to be that they do not hold the right education, this is not true either according to Masui (2004) who states the recruitment base is large enough. She also cites a study which indicates that Sweden in actual fact is worse at recruiting women to higher level positions than for example Italy and France, when compared as a percentage of the recruitment base. According to Holgersson (2004), when a Swedish company is looking for a new CEO, they choose between white, male candidates in their 40’s or 50’s, who are married and have an academic degree and a long history of working for the organization at hand.

Having a family and especially children appear to have different meaning and lead to other consequences for women compared to men. Mothers have had experiences that give them another orientation that in fact will make them behave differently from men in their managerial jobs (Alvesson and Billing, 2009). This can - even when not correct - be taken as a fact by senior management and others, resulting in women being denied promotions or challenging or important tasks because they are wrongly assumed to hold this family orientation. Many women in management positions have in fact no children, even though this is changing according to the authors. Today more women work and have children and want a certain balance between the two. Strong cultural norms still play a strong role but contemporary individuals have a much higher degree of choice here. Many still consider female employees to be more risky because of the possibility of them becoming mothers. In Sweden today, women take a larger part of parental leave than men and are generally carrying a heavier burden in regards to the children (Boschini, 2003). Women more often work part time once they go back to work. The fact that Swedish women run twice the risk of being laid off during parental leave or pregnancy than women without children, are joint negative effects of childrearing on the careers of women (Masui, 2004).

Sweden has a very generous system for parental leave compared to most other countries, where the parents get a total of 240 days of paid leave. 60 of these are reserved for each parent, leaving an additional 120 to be divided between them. If this is done on an equal basis (each parent taking half of the days) the family can additionally be rewarded an equality bonus (Försäkringskassan, 2011). The pay received is a percentage of income previous to the birth of the child. The fact that fathers often make more than mothers has become a common argument for women taking more of the parental leave, leading to smaller financial losses for the family as a whole, according to Masui (2004) who proposes changes to the taxation system in order to make it more attractive for high income individuals to take parental leave.
This would then lead to a more equal division of the perceived riskiness of male and female employees.

2.6. Female leadership

Some leadership scholars do distinguish between management and leadership by viewing leaders as the ones inspiring innovations, setting new directions and enabling successful adaption to changes while managers are the organizers and those who control the work flow. Even so these two roles are intertwined in organizations today (Eagly & Carli, 2007). A vital part of being a leader in the future is to be able to create equal relationships and to lay the groundwork for co-operation and partnerships, qualities that women generally are viewed as competent at doing (Masui, 2004; Eagly, 2007). Leaders are both born and made according to Eagly and Carli (2007) who claim that personality is vital to leadership. There are psychological predispositions that can predict leadership; such as being trustworthy, honest, and open to new ideas; sociable, assertive and conscientious human beings can become effective leaders. As well as having a fairly high level of general intelligence. Neither of these traits gives men an advantage over women though (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Women unanimously report the importance of creating and maintain a professional network for being successful as a leader. Furthermore they point to the importance of knowing yourself well, both strengths and weaknesses, to be responsive and to promote some parts of one self while holding back others. They say that courage is a very important trait and to see and act on the opportunities that present themselves (Masui, 2004).

Being a biological woman and therefore a female manager does not necessarily mean it can be taken for granted that she will use a very feminine management style (Billing, 2010). Eagly, (2007) states the appropriateness of a certain leadership behavior depends on features such as organizational culture, characteristics of followers and societal values, always in a specific context. While Cohen and Huffman (2007) concludes that female managers have a very specific and important role to play in an organization; to serve as positive change factors on gender wage inequality for non-managerial workers in the organization.

Copp Poirier (2009) interviewed 13 successful female real estate professionals, in order to study both facilitators and barriers encountered on their way to top management positions. The study highlights the importance of a mentor and the impact female leaders already active in the industry can have on the social landscape and career paths of women following in their footsteps. A large Swedish study on female leaders shows that many of them have been ‘daddy’s princess’ while growing up. These women report having a present father who supported, acknowledged and encouraged them. Many of them are the oldest out of their siblings, have grown up in a rather privileged environment such as upper middle or upper class, and have felt pressure to get a good education (both from their families and from within) (Masui, 2004). Göransson (2007) discusses the importance of fathers and mothers educational and social background in shaping successful careers. In another study by Billing (2010), one third of the women relate wanting to become and becoming a manager to their childhood, the importance of taking responsibility and having control early on in life feature as reasons why they chose to pursue the career. This was particularly common amongst the older women in the study.
Eagly (2007) discusses the complexities of the female manager role, stating that women more and more are acknowledged to have an excellent skill set to be leaders and that they are associated with effective performances. At the same time they are met by a number of resistances to female behavior connected to the expectation that women should be communal. These are; resistance to dominant or directive and assertive women; resistance to self-promoting women, resistance to women in masculine domains and leadership roles and resistance to agentic women by men. Furthermore they can encounter doubts about ability related to the concern that women lack agency; these are doubts about female leadership competence and shifting standards of competence. Particularly a study by Phelan et al (2008) indicate that social skills could predict hiring more than competence for certain women deemed agentic, while competence outweighed social skills for all other applicants. These doubts and resistances are all considered part of prejudice towards female leaders. Additionally Moss-Racusin and Rudman (2010) conclude that women experience economic and social penalties for self-promotion, since it generally clashes with female gender stereotypes. But unfortunately for women it is necessary to do in order to reach professional success. The authors also state that women show strong tendencies for peer-promotion.

Billing (2010) state, many women develop an increased interest in management roles once the children have grown up and cite international studies which show that women are on average four to five years older than their male counterparts when they become managers. One aspect of being a manager is accepting a larger amount of responsibility, which naturally can lead to being forced into some unpleasant decision making, a task many women find difficult because of the effect it has on relationships with fellow employees. Another aspect is to have to comply with the overall goal of the organization, which is to make a profit, things they might not have had to deal with at other levels in the organization. These aspects combined often leads to a certain amount of loneliness as a manager (Billing, 2010). The many conflicting demands of being a female leader does take its toll on many of the women; statistics from Alecta cited by Masui (2004) show that many female managers suffer from stress related problems.

There is empirical evidence stating there is a new trend in the female manager area, Eagly and Sczesny (2009) report that the concept of a good manager is changing and is becoming less agentic and more communal. The authors also point to changing trends in management theory and practice as helpful in this regard.

### 2.7 Barriers and facilitators

Tokenism, the expression initially used by Kanter to describe the very few women or the only woman in an organization and the special conditions that she had to work under, is still an image that can be used. The increase in absolute numbers from one to two can have a large effect on the women’s situation. It was shown Kanter (1977) to reduce stresses in the token situation as well as giving the woman an ally, offering a chance to both demonstrate other abilities than just being a woman as well as they could share the responsibility to represent their gender.

The positive effects on a woman in a token situation are rather few but in some situations Kanter (1977) suggests that it can have self-esteem enhancing potential. If the woman has sufficient support outside the organisation then her ability to master the tricky situation of being the token and also achieving things that not many others have can have positive effects.
on the self-esteem. Already in early research, the tendency for token women to protect their status as the only woman or one of the very few was focused on by Kanter (1977). She found that this tendency would keep the skewed distributions intact unless societal pressure, like anti-discrimination laws etc forced changes to happen.

Houge et al (2010) state that expectations of pay play a key role in the gap between the genders, in order to study this topic they surveyed 435 students (both male and female) and had them state their expectations about entry level pay as well as pay level at the peak of the career. The authors’ primary interest is in how gender affects the outcome as well as how the participants self-view and job intentions affected the outcome. Their results indicate that men expect to be paid more at both times as well as that individuals who plan a career in a male dominated industry expect to be paid more than those who plan a career in a female dominated industry. The authors conclude there is prevalent pay gap between the genders using official US Census material. Studies and data from Statistics Sweden show the same pattern in Sweden. “The structure of the labor market, relations in the workplace, the control of the work process, and the underlying wage relation are always affected by symbols of gender, processes of gender identity, and material inequalities between women and men. These processes are complexly related to and powerfully support the reproduction of the class structure” (Acker, 1990).

At the same time as women are acknowledged to be good leaders, research show it is harder for women to become leaders especially in male-dominated leadership roles (Eagly and Carli, 2007). Women do meet more barriers than men to their leadership and their authority, in the everyday behaviors in organizations. An additional point that should be made is that many of the men who reach the absolute top positions are in fact often over the age of fifty, so age is an important factor in discussing career advancement. Fewer women have traditionally had the right age to be able to have enough experience to meet the criteria to be considered for top positions, something that will change over time as more and more women occupy middle management positions (Fagerfjäll, 2003).

Being part of a small minority is particularly bad, especially if the woman is the sole representative of her gender in the group. This disadvantage often leads to the women’s ideas being ignored or overlooked (Eagly & Carli, 2007). A common role for the female manager in male dominated organizations is then to become the ‘gate keeper’ where the main task is to close out other women, in order to not come across as too loyal towards other women. Many women find this role traumatic as they have to abandon personal ideals. Worst case they end up seeing themselves (and are sometimes viewed by others) as traitors (Masui, 2004).

Many women report getting labeled by stereotypes such as the mother, the iron lady or the seductress and often they discover that it is easier just to accept the stereotype rather than to fight it (Kanter 1977; Masui, 2004). This inevitable leads to not being able to use the full set of competence that they hold, which for many women is frustrating especially when many female managers feel that they need to perform even better than their male peers.

Experiencing disapproval for masculine behaviors such as being firm and authoritarian as well as their feminine behaviors for example being supportive of others is another common theme (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Female leaders can encounter the perception that they should in fact be grateful for how far they have gotten, while other women had not, and then by definition not hold any more aspirations, like wanting a promotion or to be dissatisfied with
the situation (Kanter, 1977; Masui, 2004). Currently there is a trend of women displaying more of the culturally masculine traits than before (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

A problem for female leaders is the fact that men especially find it threatening when women lead in a dominant way or display skills in male domains. According to Eagly and Carli (2007) a solution for this situation is to acknowledge that not every good leader is liked by all. The solution is basically to continue to be competent and assertive while at the same time being nice and friendly enough but not too much to undermine authority. Cikara and Fiske (2009) conclude that women who gain status as they climb the corporate ladder, and observers grudgingly admits that they are competent, run a risk of loosing their perceived warmth. By emphasizing loyalty, warmth and sincerity women may be subject to ideas of less competence. This risk is shared by men of power as well, but the risks are bigger for women according to the authors.

When companies demand a lot of face time, they indirectly make it impossible for women (and maybe some men) who choose to have a family, it could in fact be the biggest obstacle for women in career advancement as well as an obstacle in achieving harmonious and equal marriages where the needs of the children are of primary focus (Fagerfjäll, 2003). Demands for relocation, plenty of business trips and long working hours work against women, basically the extreme demands from employers at the top levels are very difficult to reconcile with family obligations (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Women who aspire to leadership role use different strategies to deal with the issues at hand, some remain single, some childless and some delay childbearing in order to establish their careers first (Fagerfjäll, 2003; Eagly & Carli, 2007). The advantages of such strategies is that once they do have children their incomes are often good and the women can then share the burden and delegate parts or all of the housework to hired help. This is to be considered a non-compliance with the current view and societal expectations of a rather intensive parenting style though. Many of the successful women who feature in ‘Through the labyrinth’ acknowledge that having a supportive and helpful husband who supports them both in their work life but also with family life, often sharing the responsibilities for raising the children with their wives, is very positive. Flexible work hours and work can help women overcome the barriers related to domestic issues (Eagly & Carli, 2007).
3. Methodology

3.1. Choice of method

In order to lay the theoretical foundation for the study, a literature review of current and relevant research was performed. The literature cover conditions in Sweden, Scandinavia and internationally, on an array of topics, which are to be considered universally applicable in most regards. Even though there are some cultural differences and some differences in conduct between countries, these differences are often outbalanced by other factors, which make the research applicable to Swedish conditions. In the area of women in real estate in Sweden there is a considerable lack of scientific research, which is one of the reasons why this study has been performed.

After surveying research (Kanter 1977) and recent Swedish studies about women in male-dominated industries (Cettner 2008; Kvist 2009; Ulmfelt & Jonsson 2008), organizational theory and more specifically organizations from a gender perspective (Acker 1990, 1999, 2006, 2009; Kvande & Rasmussen, 1994), women in real estate (CREW 2007; Johansson & Lindqvist, 2008) and research focusing on female leadership (Eagly & Karau 2002; Eagly, 2007; Foric 2007; Paulusson 2008) I set about to make my interview guide. The choice of a qualitative approach, using interviews seems natural and is, in my opinion a good way of uncovering personal views and experiences. The alternative method of sending out a survey is much more prone to problems with low response rate and in addition the lack of follow up questions in order to fully understand the meaning of what is stated is a limitation avoided using face to face interviews. In the case of surveys the researcher also looses the valuable input of the interviewee’s behavior during the interview. While conducting the interviews, I found it very interesting to study the individual and her actions as well as the environment.

3.2. Data, materials and interview design

The original guide consisted of fifteen questions with many of them consisting of several sub-questions in addition to the main question. This original version was sent out to four interviewees via email in a shorter version lacking all the sub-questions in preparation for the interview. After conducting the first three interviews and discussing the results with my supervisors I decided to revise the original interview guide. Some of the questions could be considered as leading and that was and is not my intention, so in the revised version they are made more gender neutral and less leading and in addition some questions were completely omitted and replaced by new questions. The end result consists of sixteen questions, all with sub-questions attached with the exception of two questions that are single questions. The new interview guide was then distributed to all remaining interviewees in advance via email in preparation for the interview.

The questions are focused on how the women perceive the industry and partly formulated using the theoretical framework regarding inequality regimes presented by Acker (2006). The analysis and approach put forward in this article is the result of many years of research into the inner workings of organizations as well as how power is distributed throughout an organization, both by the author herself and others. Many of the my interview questions are specifically designed to uncover and mirror the inequality regimes presented in the article which was published in Gender & Society 20:4, 2006. The framework is composed of six
components; the basis for it, the shape and degree of it, the organizing processes that produce it, the visibility of it, the legitimacy of it and control and compliance with it. The organizational processes that produce inequality are divided into five themes; informal interactions while doing the work, wage setting and supervisory practices, recruitment and hiring, organizing class hierarchies, organizing the general requirements of work (Acker, 2006). These themes are all organizational processes with the potential to produce and reproduce inequalities or in contrast to reduce it. I have tried to capture the essence of both the components and the themes in my questions. Specifically questions 3, 4 and 9 focus on the shape and degree of inequality. Question 5 on the theme of organization the general requirements of work; question 12 on organizing class hierarchies and in particular wage setting while question 14 focuses on recruitment and hiring. Question 3 also covers some of the informal interactions while doing the work in addition to question 8 which also covers this theme.

In addition to the Acker framework, questions were also derived from reading among other publications the Minding the gap report by the CREW network (2007).

The original intent to collect and compare policy documents from each organization had to be abandoned, since only one of the approached participants was able to provide me with the material. Some organizations do present their general intentions on their websites, but these are of course part of the general marketing of the organization and can not be considered as completely relevant.

3.3. **Participants**

The empirical study is based upon interviews with women working in commercial real estate in a number of different roles, companies and at different levels. The choice to only interview women is a conscious decision based on the belief that this will give a good enough and accurate image of the processes that are present. In addition it is important to limit the scope of the thesis so that it can be executed during the given time period.

Of the organizations the women represent, five are listed companies on the Swedish stock market and two are listed abroad. Company size varies from 11 employees to over 350; there are advisory firms and real estate management firms in addition to property owners. Some are privately held while others are owned by large financial institutions and government. One interviewee is working in real estate academia after a long career in commercial real estate.

All the interviewees are from different companies except for two, but these women work at different levels of the organisation. The reasons for interviewing women who both hold management positions as well as other positions is the belief that a more complete picture will be acquired by doing so. In addition, the women who have succeeded in securing a management position, since they still are not that many, could easily be accused of possessing unique qualities and would therefore not provide a “true” image of the industry as it is today.

All interviewees and their contact details were found using the company home pages and contacted directly via email. Initially twenty women were contacted, some replied fairly quickly while some required another email in order to respond. Out of the final total of 29 women approached for the study 9 declined to participate in the study and two never replied to any of the emails. The underlying reasons for why these women declined or failed to answer are not easily interpreted as very few of them gave any reasons for their decision not
One interview was a referral by an interviewee, who suggested I interview a former colleague. In the end the number of interviewees totaled 18. Out of these eleven women hold management positions ranging from CEO to head of different divisions, while seven of them do not. The women interviewed are a representative cross section of women working in real estate as they represent many different categories and levels within the industry. The number of interviews performed is consistent with the practice of once a certain level of saturation - as in no new processes or occurrences being discovered - was achieved no more interviews were performed.

The majority of interviewees were happy to appear in the study using full name and company information while a minority made it clear that they felt a need to stay completely anonymous (3). The rest were slightly hesitant and wanted to decide once the thesis is finalized; in order to further increase their semi anonymity, for the most part their initials are used and the company name is omitted in the thesis. In one case, an interviewee changed her mind at the last minute to anonymous, once she had had a chance to view the quotes intended for use. The women range in age from 24 to 58 and their work experience in real estate range from a little over one year to over 35 years.

### 3.4. Anonymity

In any interview based study the researcher must make a conscious decision as how to balance the need for validity of the study and the desire to get as close to the ‘truth’ as possible. In my study the balance between getting the names and positions of the interviewed women to give the study increased validity and the truthfulness of their answers - given that their names would be published - was a difficult one. In the end the choice was made that the validity of the study is very important and that I would offer those who prefer to be anonymous the opportunity to do so. Hereby my hope and intention is to get answers as close to the ‘truth’ as possible. The chance of any of them answering the questions differently had they been told this was an anonymous study from the onset is of course a possibility but nothing I can speculate on.

If some of the respondents still have felt a need to answer the questions in a ‘politically correct’ manner then this could be interpreted that they felt even more strongly that the issues at hand are somewhat controversial and that one cannot share ones opinions in public.

Hopefully this is not the case, but rather that all respondents have felt that they can indeed speak their minds, and that the study gives an accurate picture of the real estate industry today.

### 3.5. Procedure

Each interview took the better part of an hour and were usually conducted in a meeting or conference room at the organisation where the women work; three interviews were conducted over the phone for practical reasons as the geographical distance to their workplace was too great, i.e. in other cities. All interviews, both via the telephone and in person were recorded on a digital recorder except for one, where the respondent chose not to give permission to record;
hand written notes were taken instead. In the end, due to conflicting schedules, one respondent answered the questions via e-mail. After conducting an interview, the entire contents of the recording was transcribed and translated, resulting in over 100 pages of interview material. Many times this is a tedious and time consuming activity, but the process increases the quality of the research as the author is given the chance to hear the interview both live and recorded, to write it down and translate it, adding to the intimate understanding and familiarity while also increasing the scope of analysis and discussion.

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<td>Interview International Director</td>
<td>Charlotte Strömberg</td>
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<td>Britt-Marie Einar</td>
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4. Empirical study

For the empirical part of the study, I have interviewed eighteen women in commercial real estate. They represent a cross section of different positions, ages and career paths. This provides a broad range of experiences and personal views which the following analysis tries to capture. Many aspects of individual work life experiences display similarities between the women but they also represent fundamentally different views about the state of the industry and the quality of efforts made in order to reduce inequality.

All women in the study hold university degrees, varying from a bachelor to master or licentiate. The vast majority is civil engineers, but some have a different educational background such as a degree in business or law. All face-to-face interviewees agreed to meet me at their place of work, and they all greeted me at the reception area or in a similar environment. At many of the organizations I was required to sign in as a guest and to specify who I was visiting. From this can be concluded that even though some of them wanted to stay more or less anonymous, they still felt at ease at receiving visitors. They all insisted on having a closed door between us and the rest of the staff except for one (where the interview was conducted in the open atrium like area close to the reception – where our table occasionally was passed by other people), but this fact can also simply be interpreted as not wanting to disturb the fellow employees. In most of the cases the interviewees seemed at ease in general and there was some small talk and offers of beverages and such.

All women were asked for permission to record the interview and all but one agreed to it. In addition they were asked if they allow the usage of their names in the thesis. Six women gave unconditional permission to use their name while seven game permission dependent on how and in what context it would be used, they also wanted to be contacted before the use of any direct quotes. Two respondents wanted to decide later and in one of the cases the use of only initials was suggested by her. The three interviewees who wanted to stay completely anonymous seem to do it out of different reasons, the first woman works for a male dominated organisation with a very strong lack of equality, in general making it a difficult working environment for her. She also seemed the most nervous out of all the interviewees and would not allow me to record the interview, only to take written notes. She always made sure to lower her voice even more every time anyone was overheard walking past outside the meeting room. Without ever saying so she sent out signals that she felt like she was snitching on her bosses and organisation and that there could be negative consequences for doing so. The next woman who wished to remain anonymous works for an organisation which prides itself with welcoming both women and diversity in general, but where she felt that there was a lot more talk than action in this regard. This particular organisation is headed by a female manager. The third woman, wanted to stay anonymous out of principle, based on the belief that this type of studies should be performed in such manner.

In addition to the most anonymous of the interviewees there were some women who also lowered their voices when talking more critically about the organisation or the practices used within it. Especially one respondent, who is the only female representative of her management group, was very softly spoken when addressing such issues in order not to be overheard from outside the meeting room. In addition she very strongly pointed out that some of her comments or feelings about these issues were her personal beliefs and not ones that she felt comfortable using at work. In her organisation, management describes itself as gender neutral but according to her recount do not act accordingly.
In several interviews the specific comment – do not quote me on that - was made, where the woman held views she knew would not go down well with management or other employees. This oxymoron, mentioning it but not wanting to be quoted, can be interpreted as the development of some level of trust between the interviewer and the interviewee. This comment was most often being made during the later stages of the interview, when the conversation moved more freely.

4.1. Individual experiences

The first part of the analysis of the interviews is focused on individual accounts of how the women perceive their own work life and how things have evolved for them personally. The quotes presented reflect their individual ideas and feelings about different topics such as private goals, motivational factors, advancement, how to combine children with work, colleagues and company culture and the male dominated industry they work in. Lastly is a short section on similarities in the organizations where the respondents work.

Career planning and goals

The women can roughly be divided into two distinct groups in regards to career planning and goal setting for their work lives, those who claim to have had and still have goals and those who do not.

“I have not had any career goals; I have simply gone from one thing to the next”
Karin, S. MAH 2011-03-15

“Never really had any clear goals, but knew I wanted to work towards clients so therefore consulting felt right”
J, A. 2011-03-08

“My goal was to get a job in real estate, my choice of education and applying for this job was only because I knew that this is what I want to do”
Maria, U. Hemfosa 2011-03-23

“Already early on I knew I wanted to have a career, ever since I started I have had this drive and been very eager to get further”
Anonymous, 2011-04-29

While many of the respondents say they lack goals, a majority still see tasks or positions which they are interested in trying, with a common theme being an ever increasing knowledge and personal development. This can be interpreted as the discrepancy between the softness of personal growth and the hardness of a direct goal, which in addition needs to be defined.

“Not any direct goals but without doubt, I have always wanted to continue to develop and grow the entire time”
Cecilia, F. Humlegården 2011-03-22

Many also cite an increase in responsibility and/or potentially managing others as things they are interested in. In contrast one of the respondents has taken the active decision to not set any
goals for the future, she feels she is in a good place and is content with what she has achieved and decided to value things as they are. This would indicate an abundance of women in fact interested in higher positions than they hold today. Obviously there is no significant lack of ambition and desire to advance amongst the women in commercial real estate, making statements about lack of potential candidates less potent.

When talking about their previous work experiences leading to the current position mainly the same groupings appear but the individual methods for changing jobs vary a lot, a typical response from the un-planned group is;

“I look at my current job and try to figure out what I like and dislike and then choose from there where to go next”
J, A. 2011-03-08

While the planned group obviously works using different methods, signified by planning and strategies;

“I had a plan - I will do this for two years, then I will have acquired all the important knowledge, in asking for this new challenge I made a clear career move, (it was) all part of the overall strategy”
Anonymous, 2011-04-29

Motivational factors and career focus

One of the questions that seem to evoke the most enthusiasm in the respondents is the question of when and why they decided to concentrate on their career (or work life, since many do not identify with the term ‘career’). Instantly they all then start describing motivational factors and what continues to drive them, why they work hard and why they want to work in real estate. Basically there seem to be a strong connection between the motivational factors, the desire to work and decisions to focus on a career.

Motivation and Drive

“If you have the attitude that you want to do a good job, this often results in you putting in a lot of time into work, and if you also have the advantage to spend time in a stimulating environment – then it is usually not a sacrifice”
Charlotte, S. JLL 2011-03-16

“To create positive spirals, positive momentum and have fun while we work”
Ulrika, B. SFV 2011-03-10

“I have always had an interest in learning new things; I do not want to settle so that things get boring or uninteresting”
Britt-Marie, E. Klövern 2011-03-17

Title, Salary and Appreciation

The underlying reasons for why one chooses to work and the motivation behind it also seem intricately intertwined with the descriptions on how they feel about career, title, monetary compensation and other perks. Many of the women are driven by a desire to contribute to
society or a desire to be recognized, acknowledged or appreciated, while others cite meaningfulness and creating long lasting values. Others are driven by a desire to make money – most often not for the sake of money itself but - for the things they want to be able to do in life. Additionally some respondents mention their upbringing as an underlying reason for the hard work. Something many have in common is the view that monetary compensation can be viewed as proof or a type of grade in relation to how appreciated you feel by your employer, or as one woman put it “appreciation is not a soft value, it is a hard value measured in money” Anonymous, 2011-03-21

“(For me) it is important to be part of the decision making process, to be responsible and to affect the development. Obviously a reasonable compensation is important, monetary or otherwise. The compensation should be in relation to what one contributes but cannot replace the liberty of decision making or being able to affect the development”
Agneta, J. DTZ 2011-04-11

“Basically meaningfulness is very important to me, more so than salary..”
Ulrika, B. SFV 2011-03-10

“I am driven by appreciation, basically I do not need to do an objectively good job, but I do need to get appreciation for it”
J, A. 2011-03-08

“(Salary as a motivator) is not as a primary force, not anymore.. for me it is and always has been the recognition.. be seen and get fair recognition and in that of course is monetary compensation an important part – to feel that I am on par with my peers”
Charlotte, S. JLL 2011-03-16

“Well of course it is important, since it is hard work being a manager and it is hard work always being in the spotlight.. it can be hard work to push other people to perform.. (then) there is a connection between money and appreciation.. but the exact level is not that important”
Britt-Marie, E Klövern 2011-03-17

“For me it has always been very important to have a high salary, I want to be able to travel and before I settle down and have a family I want to feel comfortable financially.. the idea of having a career just in order for someone else to think you are doing a great job - is not ‘it’ for me, it is simply not worth all the work, I do it for the higher salary”
Anonymous, 2011-04-29

One interviewee in particular feels privileged and very humble in having made it to her position, in particular in terms of the level of pay that she receives;

“Since I now work for an organization that pays really well, I would never demand more money, (even though I probably have a lowest level where I would not feel appreciated enough) now I only feel more privileged and very humble.”
Anonymous 2011-05-03

Overall the importance of driving forces seem very high, and the respondents in the empirical study are aware of their worth and understand to ask for appropriate compensation for the often very hard work put in.
Advancement

Many of the respondents state that they are willing to work hard in order to achieve their goals or just simply work hard.

“I was raised to be dutiful and to work hard and I like many other women just want to do a good job. I feel a duty to do it, so that I am pleased myself and for others to be pleased as well, and then to work some more”
Christina, G. IPD 2011-03-28

There are numerous accounts of how important it is to show a keen interest in new challenges as well as your current tasks. Additionally to show willingness for and a capacity to work hard and to challenge oneself seems to go hand in hand with the other tools used by the women. An overwhelming majority of the interviewees refer to coincidences and seeing opportunities, as well as having the courage to grab them when they appear - often this seem to coincide with changes in company structures such as take over’s, fusions or new divisions being made - as further tools for advancement. Many respondents have then been exposed to new opportunities in the process, why this is the case is uncertain, but an organization that is undergoing large internal and external changes might be more open and accepting in hiring decisions as well.

Many of the women report being head hunted for a new job and the real estate business is often referred to as being rather small. In this lies the opportunity to make a name for oneself and additionally the visibility of women in the minority.

Combining children and work

Out of the women, twelve are mothers, with children ranging in age from still little to young adults. All the women acknowledge that it has been or is a struggle to find a good balance between work life and family responsibilities, but they all claim to have found ways of dealing with the situation. Some of them have relied on husbands to carry a larger burden and some on helpful grandparents. Two respondents have decided to only work 32 h weeks instead of the normal 40 h week. Many relate to the family-work puzzle as something that one has to find an individual way of solving; basically that there is no generic solution that would work for all families. The more difficult issues to work around are when the children get sick or the feeling of not being able to spend enough time with them.

Those who do not yet have kids acknowledge the struggle that they see their colleagues going through, but hope that things will work themselves out if and when they have children of their own.

The women who have children have taken maternity leave for the most part, but the length of the leave has varied, some have taken long maternity leave and some shorter ones. The differences seem to generate from which organization and at what level the women work. Especially if part of the leadership group, the position is often left open, but lower down in the organisation and especially if working for a large organization; the position is left to someone else and then when it is time to come back it remains to be seen what other positions are open. The underlying reasons for the differences in length of maternity leave are as many as there are interviewees, but there are women who have taken slightly shorter maternity leave than
they would have wanted. The respondents rationalize this by them having been new at a job and wanting to get back to work quickly in order to maintain status quo.

Some of the women state that they in fact have it easier than men in the same situation, because it is more widely accepted to take maternity leave and especially lengthy leave, than paternity leave in some of the organizations. While other women state that the understanding for men wanting and needing to prioritize family - as in staying home with a sick child - is increasing. Basically they see a trend of changing attitudes in many of the organizations they work for.

Overall the general consensus amongst the respondents is that maternity leave should not affect your career opportunities; even though there is the fact that you do lose a few years of working life and that in general the career will not move forward during those year; but they are not in agreement whether this is indeed the reality or not.

**Colleagues and Company culture**

An overwhelming majority of the women describe their colleagues as peers and that they also feel like their colleagues view them as such. In many of the cases the interviewees hold a higher position that many others in the company, but still seem to feel mutual respect and equality for and from other employees. Very few cite any perceived differences between male and female colleagues. Notably this is not completely in line with other comments about the overall equality and attitudes in the industry; which can be interpreted as once individuals get past the early stages of getting acquainted – working together – then the atmosphere changes and more respectful and positive interactions occur.

The importance of a good company culture and the resulting effects on women is generally acknowledged. Many of the respondents argue that the views of the top management affect the whole atmosphere of the company. In addition they agree on that the basic values and attitudes of the organization are very important in establishing a positive or negative environment for women. The role of management in establishing ground rules for how you are allowed to interact with others is crucial; an example given is when younger female employees were feeling mistreated by older male colleagues, and the female head of the organization went in and deemed the behavior as inappropriate and sent the male employees on “male classes”.

The feeling of trust from the management and that they rely on you is a trigger for increased work efforts. To feel as part of the team where all individuals are equally important and each and everyone’s contribution is valued appear to give a large amount of job satisfaction and create a large amount of devotion and loyalty towards the employer.

“The management trusts the staff, for me it is important not to let them down, I perform better knowing that they need me and trust me”. ’Here we are like a soccer team. We (all employees) receive a bonus once we have reached our goal – this is very good it gives me an incentive to work hard, I really don’t want to be the one letting everybody down”

Carina, H. Fabege, 2011-02-24

These statements are connected to the perceived large joint (team) focus on customer satisfaction and a goal orientation within this particular organisation – together we achieve something and then we are all rewarded. The soccer reference is not uncommonly used in
many team building efforts and organizational theory. It could be interpreted as a masculine
description of a group but is common in a soccer mad country like Sweden, where a large
majority of individuals come in contact with soccer one way or another.

Overall the respondents refer to the atmosphere of their respective companies as nice and
friendly, even though some experience a slight alienation as they are part of a small minority.
For the most part the women agree on that increased diversity and mixed work groups have
many positive effects; among others creating a more open and better atmosphere. Added
benefits are noted as men getting used to working with women and getting acclimatized to
new constellations and the opportunity to view results first hand.

Several of the interviewees mention that the younger generation of men are more used to
gender diversity having grown up in a society where these issues are more on the agenda. In
addition many young men who start working in the industry have girl friends or wives who
also pursue a career and demand equality at home. The respondents report having seen this
development and how it has a positive effect on the climate in their respective organizations.
Yet again there appear to be an inbuilt belief in future improvements, particularly in regards
to the generational change that is occurring in the industry. The statements can also be
interpreted as a sign of a certain degree of optimism, which many of the respondents seem to
hold as part of their personalities.

As a sidetrack to company culture the issue of capital – what is important and how it is
presented within organizations is brought up by some respondents. They discuss the focus on
what is the main capital is varies in different areas of the real estate industry, in consultancy it
is very obvious the human capital while in some more traditional real estate owning
organizations the focus is still on properties. The amount of work and attention paid to the
employees and their abilities varies accordingly. In consultancy;

“They work very much with how you are as a person, how you perform your duties and
(increasing) your abilities and knowledge”
J. A. 2011-03-08

Male dominated industry

The statement - the industry is male-dominated is presented to the women and then they are
asked whether they feel affected by that fact; if they ever have felt a need to prove themselves
or if they believe there are assumptions made about how they should behave. Many of the
respondents do not feel affected by the male dominated environment, some suggesting being
brought up by a father could have helped, or being used to that type of environment from
previous work experience or entering the industry at a high level carrying a lot of experience
with them. These explanations implicitly acknowledge the fact that the industry is male
dominated, but that it has not personally affected them.

There are also those who used to feel a certain way but have experienced a change in
emotions as of late;

“I don’t feel that way anymore but in the beginning (of my career) I could feel that it was
important to be just a bit better than the guys.. women need to learn to stand up for
themselves and not back down, that has probably been the most important lesson for me”
Agneta, J. DTZ 2011-04-11
"Back then I always felt they made me feel welcome.. but what has always felt like a barrier is a feeling of alienation - me not being at the same stage in life, not being interested in the same things, not living in the same area and so on”
Rebecca, E. Vasakronan 2011-05-09

There are those who find being in the minority to be positive;

"Only ever in a good way.. I have found so many good role-models.. I try to copy their behavior and learn from them” Anonymous 2011-04-29

While some find the environment affecting them in other ways;
"I do believe that I would have had more advantages back in -97 if I had been male.. men have a different language and a way of selling (or forcing) their opinions upon others which I believe gives them an advantage.. while I (as a woman) have to work very hard to convince others”
Christina, G. IPD 2011-03-28

"I feel like I need to communicate in a certain way, (but that is partly due to) we are all very different as individuals”
K. H 2011-03-09

The respondent who appears to feel the most exposed to the intricacies of working in a male dominated business describes her every day work situation as follows;

"(it has not affected) me personally no not really, but our department has 19 men and 6 women, this obviously affects how we dress for work. Of course it would be so much more fun to be part of the gang, they do a lot of joint activities, for example sauna and then dinner. Officially we are invited but it would not be fun.. it would only feel awkward and uncomfortable to join them in the sauna while only showing up for dinner afterwards when they have already been social for a few hours is not ideal either.. you mostly feel like you are interrupting something. This is a real boys club; they do a lot of male inspired activities that indirectly excludes us women”.
Anonymous 2011-03-23

When asked whether she ever felt a need to prove herself she says; "yes, very much at times, especially when meeting new people”. Other things that affect her every day work life is "the fact that there are calendars with naked women hanging in the maintenance office”
Anonymous 2011-03-23

She also comments on the practicalities of working with men on general maintenance assignments, such as it being unsuitable to wear a skirt when inspecting ventilation duct, but understands that this is part of the job. The comments made by this interviewee are more controversial and much more critical than many of the others. The contributing organizational issues in this particular organization seem to stem from a different attitude towards employees within management. What can be understood from her account is that management does not view women in the same positive manner as in many other organizations, and many barriers are in place even if most of them are not necessarily put up intentionally by management.
Age discrimination is a surprisingly common subject brought up by the interviewees, even though their experiences vary widely because of their own age, a younger woman has experienced it at a previous work place:

“the only discrimination I experienced (there) was age-discrimination, more so that older (individuals) are supposed to be boring and young ones are fun”
J. A. 2011-03-08

Equality rating

The women were asked to rate the real estate industry on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is completely unequal and 10 is completely equal, and to then motivate their choice of rating. The numbers given for the industry in general varies, from the lower ratings like 3, with the motivation that “more women are coming into the industry, but many structures need changing” Karin, S. MAH 2011-03-15 or a strong 3½ “I have never encountered a single company in the industry that officially or unofficially works proactively to promote equality” Anonymous, 2011-03-21; to a 4 because “there are fewer women in decision making positions” Anonymous 2011-03-23

Some are more positive about the structure of the industry and give ratings in the middle of the spectrum, with a 6 motivated by “I believe that something is happening right now, there is a generational change and many younger men here have working spouses, it all makes them value life outside work differently” C, L. 2011-05-10

While a rating of six to seven is motivated by “the challenge for the industry is to encourage more women to want to work here, we do not reject women per se, but very few women want to” Anonymous 2011-05-03, and by “(the industry) is not completely equal, and still very male at the top..” Christel, A. D. 2011-03-21

Higher ratings are at the 7-8 level “while I think that many men still choose men and many have note yet realized or faced the problem, I do believe it (the problem) to be getting smaller.. many of the election committees are not doing such a great job and they should work harder” Britt-Marie E. Klövern 2011-03-17. And the highest rating is 8 motivated by “there are probably still moments when women are not being treated equally but they are rare” Agneta, J. DTZ 2011-04-11

Neither of the respondents rates the industry at a full 10 points, nor at 1 or 2, which are results to be expected with the ongoing changes in the industry. The higher ratings are all given by women who have gotten far or very far in the industry and the lower ratings are by those who are at lower levels in organizations. The underlying reasons for this discrepancy in unknown, but could be interpreted as women in higher positions have more power over their situation and as such do not experience the same processes. Another interpretation is that the women holding higher positions possess certain personality traits or instincts that make them less susceptible to these processes.

Organizational similarities

There are some distinguishable trends in the organizations where the women work; the finance department is mainly female, the building maintenance staff is only male, office support functions are female dominated, lower level and middle level management are mixed,
but upper level management is mainly male. Boards are often completely male, with some notable exceptions. In many of the organizations there are women holding the HR-management position as well as head of communications or information position, and in addition in some organisation the legal affairs officer is female. These positions are examples of areas where women have had access for some time now. Importantly though they do not constitute any performance accountability and could in addition be viewed as examples of tokenism.

4.2. Interview analysis

The second part of the analysis, that follows, is focused on how individual accounts of work life and industry perceptions can be interpreted in relation to indentifyable barriers and opportunities. The respondents accounts of topics such as general attitude towards equality, the division of the industry, possibilities for advancement for women, equality, how to combine family and work, organizational culture, networking, mentoring and general diversity are covered.

The interview guide used in the interviews for the study, was specifically designed with the intent to get a picture of both the individual experiences of the women and to indentify potential barriers and opportunities present in the commercial real estate industry today. Uncovering them will increase the understanding for underlying processes that continue to recreate the skewed distribution of men and women.

In the Swedish real estate business today, there are more men than women holding higher positions, but should be acknowledged that there have been many positive changes taking place during the past ten years in the industry, particularly clear increases of the number of women holding middle management positions has occurred. There is currently larger gender diversification in property management, valuation and analysis, while positions in departments such as general administration, human resources and hospitality traditionally have been and still are female dominated. The areas still mainly male dominated are; top positions and technical specialist positions in addition to transactions and maintenance divisions. Given this pattern there are many pre-conceptions about how and where men and women fit into real estate organizations. These ideas and preconceptions permeate through organizations unless a conscious effort is made to change them. The opportunities and barriers that women meet during their careers in real estate appear to be a combination of both how the organizational processes work and individual personality and perception of the environment.

During the interviews a visible pattern of two basically diametrically different perceptions of barriers to career advancement appear, either the interviewee believes it is difficult or very difficult to have advancement within the industry - especially past a certain level - or she believe it is fairly easy or even easy. When looking at how the women interpret their environment, the above mentioned groups converge but differ in other aspects such attitudes towards the environmental factors. There are those who believe that the industry is very accommodating and allowing and things have been easy for them personally; those who believe that it is in fact difficult to have career advancement but this has not affected them personally and lastly those who see the industry as difficult and where their personal experiences are further proof of this.
The varying accounts of barriers and opportunities appear very closely related to which organisation the woman works for and the prevailing company culture and also very closely related to who their closest manager is or has been. As every coin has two sides so does this issue, where there are barriers there are also opportunities and many times, they are intricately intertwined. Sometimes the same process can be a barrier in one organization and an opportunity in another organization; the differences are due to how they are managed. The attitudes and ideas of management have the appearance of playing a major role in how a career plays out.

**Attitudes towards equality**

One interviewee suggest that the real estate industry is still rather far behind many other industries when it comes to equality issues and facilitating for women interested in career advancement. She believes the underlying reason is, that it traditionally has been dominated by men and that many of these men still harbor old fashion ideas about the suitability of women in certain positions.

She states; “I believe that there are still challenges that (the industry) chooses not to address. I notice a tendency to always talk about the issues in very politically correct terms when addressing them in public.. always showing a good façade.. but the reality is in fact different.. actions do not follow policies.. ... the industry is behind in raising awareness about equality issues... the attitudes still follow old patterns”

Anonymous, 2011-03-21

At the same time she acknowledges that there are some very active advocates for equality in the industry and she sees them doing a great job, especially when sometimes it is a hard battle to fight. Here the importance of correlation between management attitudes and actions is underlined, as well as the power of actual actions. This issue is a prime example of the dual nature of the barriers and opportunities, if never acted upon then a powerful barrier but if (not just spoken but also) acted upon a great chance for improvement.

**Divided industry**

There seem to be a rather significant division between the different areas within real estate organizations, as mentioned above; women work in areas of analysis and valuation as well as property management and leasing. While basically all aspect of transactions are male dominated, these differences also mirror the division between working where the big money and the most prestigious positions are or not.

“There is a clear division between women and men.. when you look at who does the billion kronor deals – they are basically all men”


Why this is and what the underlying processes are can only be speculated about. Especially, what is the cause and effect can only be suggested, is it so that men are more attracted to jobs that involve large sums of money and women not, are men generally more attracted to high status jobs or are the two basically always the same?

There is a very common connection between dealing with large sums of money (a lot of responsibility) and having a high salary, which in itself partly leads to a higher job status.
Generally a high status job that affects many different factors pays well. But the underlying processes of cause and effect are difficult to pinpoint, is it so that the higher status (bigger sums) and income attract men or is it so that it for some other reason (maybe just the fact that men used to be sole providers and women traditionally stayed at home caring for children and home) attracted men originally and which led to it becoming very male dominated and then a high income, high status area?

Whatever the background and underlying reasons, the reality today is that it is an area where it is difficult for women to enter,

“on the business side there are very few women.. it is a very tough environment.. it is very competitive.. you need to be available 24/7.. people just are available the whole time.. that is part of the culture... maybe women do not want that” Anonymous 2011-05-03

A reason often brought up during the interviews for why the industry has been and still is male dominated is that more men, in fact are interested in construction and technical things and that this naturally leads to mostly men working within those areas. Traditionally many employees come from the construction industry and other technical backgrounds. It is also often stated that this can be seen at many of the universities where the technical educational programs still attract a majority of men. Another reason why there are still many men is that traditionally private real estate owners were all men, and that it was considered a male activity to own such investments. Apparently there are many contributing reasons why the industry is shaped the way it is and some are likely to be due to human individuality and differences between the genders. This is not to say that active measures to combat the effects of such differences should not be done, only that there are differences that need acknowledged and taken into account when trying to work around inequality issues.

Advancement

Future

Many of the women present a positive outlook for the future; many of them believe it will be easier for women to have career advancement once the large generational shift has happened. Unfortunately this does not convey any great faith in the older generation of men working in the industry or their ability to change, obviously this is not a question that has been posed in the empirical study so the respondents have not been given the chance to answers but it can be deduced from their responses. Many believe that things will get better when “new people come in.. young and with fresh ideas” Cecilia, F. Humlegården, 2011-03-22.

It is also pointed out that it is important not to make the issue out to be a bigger problem than it is, and compared to many other industries; where there are similar challenges; things are moving along fine. “One should not over dramatize.. there are quite a few (women) around these days.. I can only compare to professional services such as investment banking and accounting firms.. I do not believe it to be harder in real estate” Charlotte, S. JLL, 2011-03-16. She is supported in her view by Britt-Marie, E. Klövern 2011-03-17, who suggests that being faced by a male dominated environment is natural as soon as you get to a certain level, no matter which industry you work in. Again there is an acknowledgment of the nature of the industry and comments and behavior could be interpreted as women resigning to the fact of the matter and adjusting themselves to the patterns.
While acknowledging that there are some good opportunities for women in real estate today and maybe especially in government departments and municipality owned companies Ulrika Bergström, SFV, 2011-03-11 points to the fact that women have not yet reached all the way and often have to pull a large load in many organizations. This in addition to the fact that even if there are many women working it the organizations she is familiar with, many are still owned by men, so the final decision making power lies with men.

Levels

One interviewee points to the difficulties of advancement, where as she feels there are no particular problems getting a job with similar tasks or on the same level – once you have a proven track record - but to get a job on a higher level is much harder. She puts this down to the lack of trust in ability from decision makers and her own lack of consistency with the image of how someone holding such a position should be. If such ideas are prevalent obviously they could cloud the decisions and be another powerful barrier towards advancement.

Potential for advancement into management or into higher positions is generally viewed as something that gets harder and harder the higher up you get, amongst the interviewees. The competition between the candidate’s increases higher up in the organizations, and it is always important to possess the correct competence. Many refer to the lack of women with experience from jobs with performance accountability. An increase in appointments of women to such jobs, in order to increase the recruitment base for top level jobs, would obviously lay the foundation for the future. Without experience from so called “line” jobs women will never be able to hold these positions. A point made is that in addition to the general difficulties in joining the staff of directors, additional difficulty can be added, in the special case of working in a company run by working owners/partners, because then “it is impossible to join them” J. A. 2011-03-08, but this difficulty would apply to both men and women.

Hiring and recruitment

The effect of unfamiliarity affects hiring and recruitment situations, where many interviewees account to believing in fear as a barrier in the advancements of women. They mention boards being fearful, managers being fearful and HR-staff being fearful of the unknown or the uncertainty of hiring a different kind of candidate or of the candidate not fitting into the team or not being able to do the job properly, as potential issues.

It seems to take courage not only from women to grab opportunities but also from those making hiring and recruitment decisions to step out of the known territory and hire someone slightly different. Acknowledging how this has the potential to increase diversity in gender distribution, ethnical and educational background and personality types is a good starting point. During the recruitment process; the analysis of what ‘correct competence’ for a certain task is, becomes a very important ingredient. Hiring situations can very easily be rationally explained as pure competence issues when in fact decisions about recruitment often in the end are about personality and chemistry between individuals - the candidate and the recruiter. While of course these parts of the recruitment process are vital - the candidate obviously needs to fit into the organisation - it is important to evaluate how the mold for such fit is
designed. If the criterion is to be as similar as possible to the current employees then there is simply not much room for diversity or change.

**Top positions**

A barrier to not reaching all the way to the top, is described as; “personal competence – always felt that there was a small part of the way where I could never reach all the way – because I was not in the ‘soccer change room’ or not out drinking with the bosses’” J. A. 2011-03-08 who continued by saying that maybe it was her personality that lacked that last “go” needed.

Furthermore it takes time to acquire enough experience in order to ever be in the running for top level jobs. While there have always been some women working in real estate, now that the numbers are increasing this should facilitate an ascent to the top, since more women get enough years of experience to be viable candidates for nomination.

A generally more common explanation for lack of women in top positions amongst the respondents in the study is that men in power simply choose men as their employees and heirs. The fact that women are working in real estate proves this not to be the whole truth but there are indeed situations where this has been and still is a contributing barrier to female candidates. Some of the interviewees actually mention this scenario, while many more of them prefer to simply refer to ‘male structures’ and ‘male networks’ as factors making it more difficult for women. A few mention that being older can have negative effects on career advancement, as the general consensus is that one then should not aspire to new challenges but rather cut down on the work load and focus on other issues in life instead.

**Manager’s role**

When presented with the question of possible obstacles (barriers) in their path many of the women also refer to the incident of a negatively minded boss. If he or she is not interested in your growth or development, then the career will come to a halt. The best advice given then is to simply change jobs - there are no positive effects from putting up with barriers in the form of unwilling management – the general agreement is amongst the women. Obviously if turned around a positively minded manager can have many positive effects and create many opportunities for career advancement.

**Facilitators**

Factors that instead facilitate their career advancements are the ambition to always let your boss know how you feel about advancement. It appears to have great positive effects on careers when women have been open about wanting to learn more, do more and move forward.

Company size is mentioned as a facilitator, where large organizations in general seem easier to navigate through partly due to the larger actual numbers of staff turn over and where there is more potential for moving between different positions, acquiring more experience and knowledge.
Another positive aspect is having nice colleagues and a nice working environment, which facilitates enjoying what you do. Oftentimes enjoyment and being good at the activity goes hand in hand.

Other factors appear to be a raised awareness in general in the company about gender issues and a positive outlook where the focus is on positive change and opportunities instead of a negative view focused on conflicting interests.

Some of the more senior interviewees refer to how it feels to be considered a female role model; there are those who object to being called a role model just because of their gender but they all acknowledge the importance of role models. In particular Charlotte, S, JLL 2011-03-16 point to an - in her mind very curious occurrence - that once there is a female leader in place, there seem to be an increase in the number of female employees further down in the organisation as well. This is particularly fascinating when no real conscious efforts are made to increase the numbers; the tendency can be interpreted as if there is a different kind of leader in place (as in female), then this signals a more allowing atmosphere and company culture which attracts different kinds (women) of candidates to apply for positions at these organizations.

Equality

Some of the respondents state they have never really encountered any problems in relation to being female even though they acknowledge that the industry is still lacking in equality in many respects. Others who share this more positive view of the industry genuinely believe that it has changed a lot for the better.

A prime example of never feeling personally affected by the industry’s lack of equality is Christel, A. D. 2011-03-21, who states that “during my career I have ever only once encountered any resistance because I am a women, all other times it has not been an issue.. I have been hired because of my competence and my experience”.

Given her long career in real estate this is remarkable, several others point to the big changes that have occurred during the last decade in the industry.

“I have seen a very conscious effort.. at least what I have experienced is that large amounts of work has been put into changing the distribution of power more equally.. if there has been a skewed distribution then recruitments have been made to correct that.. it is only at the absolute top where the problem still exists”

Rebecca, E. Vasakronan 2011-05-09

Her experience is shared by others who claim that there is a strong momentum in the industry today to recruit more women, in actual fact some interviewees suggest that in fact an advantage to be female when applying for jobs these days. C.L 2011-05-10 says “there might be a glass ceiling somewhere but I cannot honestly say that I have seen it.. one reason could be that the pressure on the boards and appointment committees is so high, they are scared to fail to present excellent results and then this fear could potentially lead to a barrier to female advancement.. to take on someone who is different.. the question being can she handle the pressure and so on.. that can probably have a negative effect on recruitment higher up in the hierarchies but not lower down.. I see a clear pattern of wanting to promote women, partly
because of a desire to be politically correct.. at least at all big companies I think it works like that.”

The view that things have gotten so much better in the past decade is obviously partly related to the sheer length of ones career, longer work experience gives a wider view. In addition, international experience also adds perspective, particularly represented by Agneta, J. DTZ 2011-04-11, who states that there are very large differences between the Swedish situation and that of other countries, where the situation is far direr. This difference between countries is important to keep in mind and can be used as a relevant bench mark and also gives an important understanding of how it would be to work internationally for women in real estate. It is also important to acknowledge the fact that just because Sweden is in many ways ahead of other countries in this development this does not mean it has reached all the way it could go and therefore should rest on its laurels.

One interviewee’s experience is that the organisation she works for used being female as a criteria for recently hiring new employees, “we did it in order to become a better real estate company.. I think it is because of the founders.. they think in different ways than many others” Maria, U. Hemfosa 2011-03-23

“I can only look at myself.. it has never been a problem.. I believe it is a lot about attitude, how you are as a human being, if you are good at dealing with people and want to get ahead.. all these things I think my bosses have recognized. That I have the courage to make decisions, to fix problems, have common sense, not afraid and have the guts to push forward. I have a whole room of men listening to me, a young female and why – because I know what I am doing and I understand the goals and framework of the deals, I run my projects within them and I make sure I have happy customers” Anonymous, 2011-04-29

Combining family and work

Many of the interviewed mothers acknowledge the difficulties of balancing family and a hectic work life. Some point to Swedish society in general as a reason for this being the case, with women in the work force and many putting up very ambitions life plans for how life should be played out. Moreover many individuals do their utmost to cram a lot into the years between twenty five and forty, starting a family, building a career, maintaining a certain material living standard and often along with that trying to keep fit, stay in touch with friends and family as well as focus on personal growth.

Since the age range of the respondents is quite large, there are those who have not started the balancing act, those who are in the midst of trying and those who are now at the stage where all that is behind them. As it happens none of the interviewees have very young children, so all have left the stage where the children are infants. However there are some who still have children attending day care, but most of the women have children in school and five of the interviewees have children who are young adults.

The issues connected with having a family and in particular children can cause problems on many different levels in relation to career advancement. The most obvious issues are maternity leave where time is lost career wise and there are risks involved in loosing contact with the work place as well as being assigned a new position when returning. Another issue is when the children become sick, which often is a more acute issue when children are still very
young and still at day care. Being forced to not show up at work on numeral occasions is generally not viewed upon as a positive thing even though many organizations view it as natural, something which has to be accepted or tolerated. Furthermore there are the issues of dropping off and picking up from day care or school, which also affects the potential time spent at work. Here the issues of over time, flex time, face time and general organisation of work come into, play for example the scheduling of meetings etc. Slightly less serious issues are for example the opportunity to attend children’s activities, last day of school and other events; here the general attitude of the organisation towards such activities and who should attend them is crucial for how equal the work place can be considered and if this will cause any barriers or not.

All respondents seem in agreement to that active choice in how to balance the different priorities is the only way to conquer the issues. Neither have they just breezed through the period with no difficulties nor have they just sat back and let it all work it self out.

The biggest adjustment for family life amongst the interviewees’ is made by two of them, who both now work part time. Rebecca, E. Vasakronan 2011-05-09, states it is possible since she works in a very allowing and mature organisation, in addition to her position being of the nature it is; "I can plan and schedule my work (around other things)... and there are very few exceptions when it does not work... it is independent in its nature and in addition we have a very good team where everybody shows a great deal of loyalty to each other and the company... if needed we help each other out... of course we have dead lines when we are expected to deliver but if nothing else we learn from our mistakes and try to plan things better next time”.

When a company culture is allowing and there is a good portion of team spirit there seems to be very few, if any repercussions for the women. Flex time seem to be a quality that more mature organizations - from a gender equality perspective - have more than others, which facilitates for women to combine work life and family responsibilities. The organizations who do not allow this and which require large amounts of face time seem to also coincidently be less mature from an overall equality perspective.

Being able to combine work and family is very important to both women and men according to many of the interviewees, and many acknowledge the personal growth resulting from becoming a parent. Many times this leads to more maturity and individuals are considered to become better employees in the process. Interestingly as discussed above; many of the interviewees have taken maternity leave, but the majority has kept it rather short, especially if they had multiple children. This can be interpreted as the further you ascend the career ladder the higher the pressure to keep leave to a minimum is.

Many of the women bring up the importance of having a life partner who is willing and able to actively participate in up-bringing of the children. Some say that they have been lucky in finding such a partner and some say, that at the time they did not take that particular aspect into account and have therefore had a heavier burden to carry compared to some of their peers. Since “the biggest disadvantage you have as a woman (as you have reached a certain level) is that you often take more responsibility for children and other private life related issues.. this is of course up to us women to make that choice when deciding who to have children with.” Britt-Marie, E. Klövern 2011-03-17 says, and she continues with “I would encourage all younger women to make a conscious choice when choosing a partner, make sure you choose someone who is supportive of you having a career if that is what you want”.

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Obviously as Agneta, J. DTZ 2011-04-11 points out “love is much more important than strategic thinking in these situations”.

Another crucial part of balancing family and career is the presence of a reliable network - previously discussed in the section of individual experiences - to fall back on if needed. Some also suggest that during certain parts of life, things might just not be all that balanced, but you live through it and by the end you feel proud to have succeeded in doing so.

The active choice of a supportive life partner and the presence of a reliable back up network seem to be great facilitators for women interested in a career, while at the same time a non supportive partner and/or the lack of a supportive network is a serious hindrance.

Many employers today in real estate are fairly open to flexible working hours according to the interviewees, so the tools to make it work are present. But according to C.L 2011-05-10 “if you want to have a career you need to work hard (at times) so you need to make choices in order to find a balance that suits you and your family...you simply cannot put 100% effort into work and 100% effort into family at the same time... you need to find solutions that allows you to achieve a lot at work if and when you want that and then you do that (and spend less energy on your family) or if you want to spend more time on family then you do that.. but understand that it might have consequences for your career”.

Having worked very hard to get to where I am today is a very common comment by the women “I have fought a lot to get further (up in the organisation)” J. A. 2011-03-08. While Ulrika, B. SFV 2011-03-10 recognizes that she has worked very hard, sometimes too hard “I have worked too much basically all my life.. it is not until now that I feel that I have a better balance in life... I have pushed myself an awful lot.. it comes from within this pressure.”

**Personality**

Personal choices when it comes to where one is interested in working seem to play a role as well. Ulrika, B. SFV, 2011-03-10 states that “women seem to like the idea of working for the greater good, to take social responsibility and do good.. focus on product quality and many soft issues.. government and long term estate management are then attractive areas”. This area is generally not as well paid as others and one of many reasons why women make less than men in the industry. Another statement, "it might be a bit easier in municipal companies... but I believe it is really hard in the commercial sector” made by Karin, S. P. MAH 2011-03-15

A general consensus amongst the interviewees is that women might suffer from a disadvantage in specific situations involving negotiations, for example salary discussions. The respondents believe that in general women present themselves and their accomplishments differently to men; many feel that women less often point to their own positive contributions made during the period discussed but instead present themselves as on par with their peers. Whether the respondents feel this way because of their own feeling of short comings in such situations or if they only have witnessed it first hand is hard to deduct, many do seem to compare the behavior of women to men’s and in there find a large difference. The tendency to not negotiate well is a barrier in monetary terms but could also potentially affect job access and advancement, within this lies issues of personality and/or especially female personality traits vs. male personality traits. The whole subject is very tricky as all individuals differ and
rightly so, but in this context the increase in self promotion, self esteem and the ability to stand up for oneself would obviously help. Interestingly many of the women refer to internal barriers, with personality or belief in ability being on the list, but most common is the comment about not wanting to take certain tasks on and the effects that such choices might have. In addition the need to be street smart and to understand how other people think and work, the ability to read other humans should not be underestimated even though many credit their experience, competence and hard work as reasons why they have gotten as far as they have. The lack of such personality traits is a serious disability and one that is difficult to change and the same argument as used above stands.

One respondent found the related area of what women might have to give up as they ascend the career ladder particularly interesting to discuss, whether women who reach high level positions have to give up some of their more feminine qualities in the process, in order to succeed. She felt this was in fact a reality in the real estate business today and she has encountered women who seem to have changed their public personas in order to better fit the mold. She also felt that the women who did this were faced with the not so pleasant reality of then not being particularly well liked by employees. Whether this is a reality of the past or if it is something that will need to continue is not possible to predict. But the aspiration seem to be that with the changes that are occurring a more welcoming and allowing atmosphere will prevail, allowing women to be themselves and still be able to make it to the top.

**Organizational culture**

Very few of the women want to or feel any need to point to differences between male and female colleagues, in terms of how they are treated - as mentioned in the section on individual experiences - but almost all have accounts of encountering men who have treated them differently because of their gender. This is always described as something happening either in the past, something of no great importance or most commonly - in other organizations or at interactions with generic members of the industry at for example conferences or similar occasions. Receiving comments about suitability or achievements is not completely uncommon amongst the respondents. The trend here seems to be that these are comments most commonly made by semi-strangers or in the beginning of working relationships. Once working together these trends seem to disappear, which in many ways seem natural. Unfamiliarity easily leads to awkwardness while familiarity provides for a much more positive climate and view point.

As discussed above many of the respondents state that there are groups that they cannot enter or where they are not welcome. This seem to apply to a few different kinds of groups, some mention not belonging due to a different life situation; not being part of the inner circle due to not sharing the same interest or simply not being of the right gender for sauna meetings etc (see section on individual experiences). Overall the respondents acknowledge the presence of such groupings but do not seem to feel that this affects their potential for doing a great job that much. What does affect their actual work situation are the male networks that they cannot join, due to their gender, when these networks are used as a recruitment base or a deal-making facilitators "(since I am not part of it) I will never get the 'buddy-deals' when someone calls up and says – hey I thought of you in this deal". Christel, A.D. Stena 2011-03-21.

Being in the minority does give women some benefits, for example many of the interviewees mention the attention and visibility that comes with being the only woman or one of very few. Furthermore some also state that there are some other perks associated with being the single
representative for the female gender, such as not having to pay for taxis or being treated to lunch, but additionally many focus more on the importance of how easy it is to make a name for oneself (which can be very dangerous if things do not go well) in the industry as a woman. A negative effect of being the single representative is that interviewees sometimes have experienced that their views, opinions or input are simply overlooked or ignored.

**Networking**

The positive effects of networks and networking seem like they cannot be exaggerated, most of the respondents are great believers in networks even though some say they have had to cut back on networking activities due to lack of time. Many have networks that go back all the way to university, but all have added to these networks during their working years. The impression created from their stories is even though they feel like they benefit from their networks, "every time I have been contacted by head hunters it is usually someone I know who has tipped them off" Rebecca, E. 2011-05-09, not all respondents are actively part of any formal networks such as organizations or clubs. Instead all seem to have informal professional networks that they rely on.

In fact many suggest that the best informal networks for using as sounding boards are networks that consist of professionals from different industries. This gives an added depth to the experiences and the possibility to compare both similarities and differences between the industries. The presence of viable networks has the appearance of being a great facilitator while the lack of them is an obvious barrier instead.

Interestingly many of the interviewees suggest that women in general are worse than men at networking and additionally a lot of contacts are in fact lost during the hectic child rearing years, which could serve as a large negative barrier towards career advancement if that is the case. Not only are valuable contact lost, but also differences between men and women’s networks would increase during those years, when men potentially could continue building networks while women loose part of theirs.

**Mentoring**

Mentoring is generally considered a good thing; many name their immediate boss as an informal mentor.

“I get informal mentoring from my senior colleagues – they help and teach me a lot..”, Carina, H. Fabege, 2011-02-24

This does not seem to be affected by whether the boss is female or male; in general the differences in management style between different leaders are not view as differences between genders but rather differences between individuals. It should be mentioned here that several of the interviewees have never experienced having a female manager, at least not in the real estate industry and some have never had one at all. This is a thought to be a generational issue which probably will change over time.

**General diversity**

In every interview performed there was a significantly similar reaction when the question about diversity was put forth and examples such as ethnicity and handicaps were brought up.
Every single woman reacted with a sense of revelation that - wow I have thought about us not being as many women - but you are correct - everybody working in the industry who I have met are very similar in backgrounds and now that you mention it there is no-one with a foreign background, not to mention any disabilities.

The industry appears, by the respondents’ account, to be very Swedish and very conformist in many ways in addition to gender, which in its defense it shares with many other industries.

This section has looked at the accounts of eighteen women working in real estate and related their experiences and views to potential barriers and opportunities. Every single indentified barrier can just as easily be viewed as an opportunity for an organisation if the tables are turned. The chance of promoting an organisation as flexible and modern and giving women an increased incentive to apply for positions there is ripe for the picking.

One important topic in discussions of inequality - the wage gap issue - is unfortunately difficult to approach since there is a culture of not discussing these matters with colleagues, and all of the respondents except for one state they do not know salary levels of others. This has made the analysis of the wage gap from an interviewee point of view impossible. The statistical data presented in previous chapters indicate the prevalence of a gap and this is a very important issue to address, something that needs to be done both internally in the individual organizations as well as on a general industry level. The issue is further discussed in the following sub-chapter.

### 4.3. Processes and structures

The last part of the analysis of the interviews from the study is focused on how the accounts of the interviewees can be related to the current theoretical framework presented in chapter two. The purpose of the thesis is to study career experiences and the potential barriers and opportunities encountered on the way. The personal experiences of the interviewees on an individual level have been covered extensively in the section on individual experiences. The performed empirical study has revealed as many individual experiences as there are interviewees, a result that can be expected since, as Fagerfjäll (2003) points out, within each group there is such large variation that each individual has its own version of reality. But when the joint accounts of the women are analyzed as a group and from an organizational standpoint (instead of an individual) the abundance of relevant commonalities and many classic attributes described in theory, are clear. There are representations of theory of work life experiences, gendering of organizations and organizational theory concerning equality, all through the joint accounts. The empirical study uncovers processes and structures in many organizations within the commercial real estate industry in Sweden today, which have the capacity to either facilitate for women or the potential to hold up the advancement of women.

**Organizational equality**

Many of the questions in the interview guide are intended to focus on pattern and process detection, in order to uncover what the respondents have been able to detect during their work life; often the personal experiences and the discovered patterns cannot be divided into separate entities as they are seriously intertwined.
In order to understanding patterns, the use of the inequality regimes framework put forward by Acker (2006), comes in handy. The framework is composed of six components. The initial component is the basis for inequality which varies between organizations, but commonly processes involving class, race and gender are present. Traditionally gender and class were intimately intertwined working together as barriers for women, these days as women are more and more present in the work force, especially in Sweden which has a large female working population, class has been substituted by ethnicity in many cases. Throughout the empirical study though there is a varying degree of gender inequality (while class and race inequality is not the main focus of the thesis, there are definite patterns of at least race inequality in the industry) between the organizations but it still tends to be the main basis for inequality found.

The next component is the shape and degree of inequality, which often is related to the shape of the organization whether it is hierarchical or flat (Acker, 2006). This component is also focused on the distribution of decision making power as well as ideas about how to be a good employee, and how the company culture is developed and interpreted. Acker (2006) here makes the distinction between job (“a particular cluster of tasks in a particular work organization”) and an occupation (“a type of job”) and states that the desegregation at the occupational level is lower these days, while it still is rather high on the job level. For example, the occupation – manager is rather evenly distributed between men and women, but when looking at the jobs that they actually hold then it is still clear distinction between male and female titles and decision making power.

The many issues covered in the second component are in many cases easily detected amongst the organizations in the empirical study. There are vast differences between the flatter, less hierarchical organizations which appear to also have more allowing company atmospheres and more micromanaged hierarchical organizations where many times the organizational culture is more restrictive. In all the varieties of organizational structure there are differences in decision making power between men and women, with a clear pattern of many women holding ‘female jobs’ with less or no performance accountability. This has a large potential for change in most organizations since the reality today - deducted from the empirical study - is that there is still a division between ‘female’ and ‘male’ middle management jobs, where the female jobs are head of finance, staff or information while the male jobs are, apart from CEO, almost all technological and or production related jobs. This is reported by both the interviewees and it was reported back in 2003 by Fagerfjäll (2003), so the development even though it is moving forward appears to be doing it at a rather slow pace in this particular regard. The interviewees are not in agreement as to why this is, some argue that women in general in fact do not aspire for these kinds of positions, while others believe that there is a glass ceiling in place or that there are at least some ‘male structures’ that are barriers in this development.

According to Eagly and Carli (2007) who report the same structures, it is imperative to get enough experience from these really tough jobs to ever be in the running for higher level positions. As with every rule there are some striking exceptions, who in fact have been interviewed in the study, women who have reached all the way and now hold very senior positions. Obviously they are in the minority, but the importance of their achievements is not to be underestimated. Cohen and Huffman (2007) concludes that female managers has a very specific and important role to play in an organization (apart from the tasks involved in the job) - as long as they are promoted to high enough positions and where their status is acknowledged throughout the organization - which is to serve as positive change factors on gender wage inequality for non-managerial workers in the organization.
Under this component, there is also the wage gap issues which is the only issue not thoroughly covered in the analysis, but as stated before it is a difficult topic since very few of the interviewees have anything to report as their knowledge about salary levels of fellow employees is very limited. As such, any comments given by the respondents are mostly speculations and cannot be the proper basis for an analysis. On the other hand Statistics Sweden publishes statistics about the topic and from that can be concluded that there is in fact a wage gap between men and women in the industry. This is not unique to the industry as a study by Boschini (2004) state there is an economic glass ceiling for women in Sweden and definite differences in pay between men and women overall. The current situation is a potential area for future change in order to reduce inequality.

Organizing processes is the third component producing inequality (Acker, 2006), these are ways of trying to reach different organizational goals, for example written material provided by either consultants or developed internally, all influenced by demands and information from outside the organization. Here are practices such as; required face time at work; job classification systems in use; how recruitment and hiring is done with a special focus on competence issues; wage setting; who assigns job tasks and many of the informal interactions that occur in a workplace, for example in meetings. The many topics covered by this component are featured in many of the previous sections of the analysis, which shows both how critical they are but also in many cases how difficult and subtle they can be. It requires a lot of conscious work to increase the awareness about the actual effects on women from these practices. For example, to require abundant face time will inadvertently lay out barriers for women with families, the empirical study contains accounts of this. In contrast it also depicts several accounts of how allowing for more flexibility facilitates for women.

The fourth component - the visibility of inequalities (Acker, 2006) - is how aware the organization is about inequalities and whether this level of awareness is intentional or nor; as well as the difficulties for individuals with privileges to acknowledge them as privileges. This component is probably the least covered by the study and the analysis, but there are some accounts to where management presents itself as gender neutral, while in actions prohibiting the development towards greater gender equality. For example not allowing female networking since it is a ‘gender neutral work place’ (but there are numerous male networks in place – unofficial though and therefore they ‘do not count’). The difficulties of privileged individuals to acknowledge their situation would in this study be signified by men’s attitudes towards women as presented in theory. The empirical study does not cover this more explicitly than that.

The fifth component - the legitimacy of inequalities (Acker, 2006), is closely related to the fourth component and focuses on the differences between how to justify the inequalities that exist within the organization. Inhere is the role of management to set the standard for what is accepted and what is not - many times a very subtle process, but other times a conscious effort to raise awareness within the organization - a topic that is discussed and brought to the surface. Lack of discussions lead to disappointment with some of the respondents but in other cases the awareness in the organizations leads to some staff being encouraged to attend ‘male’ courses. The differences in attitude towards the processes will make all the difference in reducing or enhancing inequality.

The last component is control and compliance (Acker, 2006) where different mechanisms for control are discussed; there is direct control for example different types of rewards or
punishments; indirect controls are unobtrusive but still effective, such as restricting time on
the Internet etc; and the last type is internalized controls, like the belief in rules and the
division of power. The organizations that use micro management and are controlling in their
nature also appear to be active in more competitive markets - while this cannot really be
interpreted as viewed as a prerequisite for success - it is an interesting testament about the
atmosphere and corporate culture. There is neither a lot of room for free interpretations as to
how and by whom the tasks should be performed, nor is there much room for different types
of diversity.

In connection with personality type diversity there are also other aspects to the concept, such
as ethnicity or educational background. As the study shows there is very little diversity in the
Swedish real estate industry today which also is concluded in the report made by Wiblom
(2007). The interviewees all agree that the industry has in fact come a long way in gender
diversity if compare to other types of diversity, where the progress appear to be very slow.
Many of the respondents agree that this obviously also needs improving, especially since
modern society and life is not as homogenous as the industry.

**Knowledge work and talent management**

Overall the recent decade has proved a time of change for many organizations in real estate in
Sweden; the focus has shifted from a strong product focus to a focus on the motivation and
quality of the employees which as Alvesson (2004) points out is something that sets
knowledge organizations apart from other types of organizations.

Wiblom (2007) presents the many challenges the industry is facing in terms of a new financial
reality, new technology and new ideas and values. The industry has many specialized units
both technical and financial as well as customer related that makes it a knowledge industry,
both for traditional real estate management companies and especially in consultancy. Every
time an employee comes into contact with a client or customer is an opportunity to create a
meaningful relationship or bond, Philips and Roper (2009) state in this lies the realization that
the employees themselves and their behavior is becoming the brand itself. This leads to
increased importance of selection of staff and issues concerning staff satisfaction. The
empirical study clearly indicates this transition, as many of the respondents point to a
changing focus. The trend indentified in theory is apparent in reality based on the joint
accounts of the respondents. The awareness level of the importance of hiring the ‘right’
people is very high (partly mirrored in the caution used by nomination committees) in some
cases it needs to be revised as who is the right person for the job in order to increase equality
and to better mirror the customer base. Talent today is not necessarily the same as talent was
before, and there are untapped resources both in the industry and outside, in the shape of
women and individuals of foreign decent or different educational backgrounds.

Organizations are in addition experiencing new advantages in relation to the human capital in
that the usage of individual talent is increased and furthermore in how it affects many
processes regarding organizational structures and human governance, basically how well the
organization facilitates for co-operation and development. Here the empirical study shows
large differences in maturity between individual organizations. Some organizations are
operating under completely new and much more allowing terms, especially when looking at
how the contribution and roles of women is viewed.
Gendering of organizations

In male dominated industries, women are in the minority. This has three structural effects according to Wahl et al (2001); first is visibility, in that the women get more attention than the majority of men, which in many ways can be positive but also lead to stress as well as a limitation of maneuvering room. Second is contrast, in that the presence of women makes the majority (men) more aware of its own similarities at the same time as they are reminded of the potential threat to their group. This can lead to exaggerations of the dissimilarities between the groups. The third effect is assimilation, which is the process of making generalizations about the members of the (minority) group on a group level rather than looking at them as individuals. Since the number is smaller and the minority is visible this is much easier to do than to apply generalizations or stereotypes about the majority group. The visibility issue is well established and covered in the empirical study, while contrast and assimilation have to be turned around in order to be relevant for the study. There are accounts of how women feel when being in the minority and bringing these forward could highlight the processes that lead to contrast and assimilation and thereby increase the awareness of gendering in individual organizations.

For the majority – men in this case - there is always a choice in how to relate to female colleagues and Kvande and Rasmussen (1994) has categorized the approaches into four groups; the cavalier, who generally is an older man skeptical about women’s capacity as managers, partly because he views them as rather fragile but also based on a traditional view on gender roles. While he supports male subjects he does not support female subjects and therefore indirectly and passively work against them. The competitor on the other hand is positive towards equality in theory but not in reality as he feels threatened career wise by work towards greater gender equality. He explains the subordination of women as voluntary, self-chosen and natural. The comrade is typically a younger man who either lacks enough experience to seriously climb the corporate ladder yet or lacking an interest in it. He acknowledges that women are suffering from different conditions than men. The last group consists of men who already at a young age got to a position of power where they now feel secure, they are positive toward female colleagues and female career advancements. All of these approaches have been indentified in the empirical study but more indirectly as the respondents talk about individual managers in general terms and not their specific approach. Even so the most commonly indentified group would be the last mentioned, where many accounts do tell of the positive effects a motivated and enthusiastic (about female peers) male manager has on the career advancement of the respondents.

In most of the researched organizations in the empirical study and in many corporations in general there is still a larger number of men working, compared to women, but some organizations are more extreme than others, where the few women working there, become representatives for the minority (Kanter, 1977; Wahl et al, 2001). This tendency is getting less and less prevalent and the empirical study does not depict any organizations as extreme as only having one or very few women working there. But if looked at from a ‘level’ point of view, then many organizations still display these patterns, where one or very few women are present at the top levels and then often become symbols for women in general. This can cause considerable amounts of stress since not only do they have to perform well in their job for their own sake but also for the sake of all women who they represent according to theory. Tokenism, the expression initially used by Kanter to describe the very few women or the only woman in an organization and the special conditions she has to work under, is still a usable term. “The token does not have to work hard to have her presence noticed, but she does have
to work hard to have her achievements noticed” Kanter stated already back in the late seventies. None of the interviewed women have expressed such problems explicitly, but there are accounts of having to work hard to show ones worth.

The empirical study reveals some very traditional organizations which display a resistance to change while others have made dramatic changes in structures and process within the organization, as stated above. The underlying reasons for the differences can be understood in terms of embedded patterns present in the organizations, as Acker (1990) states gender segregation and identity of occupations and jobs can be continuously reproduced and they are an integral part of organizational life, which cannot be properly analyzed unless gender is taken into account.

Acker (1990) continues that gendering of an organization occurs in several processes that are interacting; the first is often obvious both to individuals in the organization as well as outside observers namely the division along lines of gender; divisions of power, of labor, of allowed behaviors, of physical space etc. The second set of processes is the constructed images and symbols that express, explain, reinforce or oppose the above mentioned divisions. Thirdly are the interactions between individuals, including all interactions that enact submission and dominance. Fourth are all processes that create individual identity in terms of gender, such as clothing, self-presentation, language use, choice of work etc. Processes that create and conceptualize social structures such as friendships, family and organizations are the fifth interacting element. If the actor or actors who set the agenda in the organisation or arena, are not harboring a positive view towards gender equality then this will affect equality and how it is discussed and who will discuss it, if any changes are possible and how these are implemented in addition to which results that potentially will be obtained, according to Wahl et al (2001).

The empirical study shows that women have encountered men who harbor differing viewpoints towards women and equality during their ascent; Wahl et al, 2001, has divided these into five different types; the candid opponent who believes in the natural order of gender division and also that the differences should be honored and preserved. The concealed opponent, who harbors skepticism towards gender equality which in his mind is exaggerated, but he will not make any public announcements instead he discreetly disadvantages women and helps men. The neutral man has a passive standpoint and believes that if women really are disadvantaged then it is up to them to prove it. The careful activist feels that there is a question about justice for the women but not necessarily for the men, but he is positive towards actions by men in order to achieve more gender equality especially in fields other than his own. The gender equality activist is pro gender equality in all contexts.

Work life and company culture

Meeting direct resistance from colleagues can be difficult, but many times the resistance encountered is rather subtle and not very obvious in the studied organizations. Today in Sweden there are probably very few, if any individuals who would feel comfortable in stating resistance to female career advancement in any sort of public arena. One way of subtly resist the development, can be to not take ideas or suggestions put forward by female colleagues into account when decisions are made. Some of the interviewees are aware of working in organizations where this is a reality, but no-one has any suggestions for as how to correct it except for change of management.
In general the attitude of management and atmosphere of the company appear to play a major role in facilitating or put up barriers for the women, as the actions performed by management set the standards for the rest of the organization. From this perspective any organization can be viewed as a pyramid even though not always hierarchical, because everything that happens at the top will also have to happen at the bottom. Setting a good standard of conduct that transcends through the company will help women and men to lead productive and satisfying work lives even though there are many differences between what they desire and how they go about trying to achieve their goals.

Many women are thought to feel uncomfortable about boasting about their own achievements, this is often related to cultural aspects such as that this behavior can be interpreted as a lack of niceness which the women are supposed to display. Eagly and Carli (2007) state that even if women do believe that they are on par with men they use fewer superlatives than men to describe themselves. A study covering 700 male and female managers show that women are worse at marketing themselves compared to men. According to the study; which used twelve learnt behaviors that stop individuals from making contact and giving out signals about being interested, competent and present; women present many more of these behaviors than men. Therefore they are less prone to marketing themselves which potentially can lead to the perception of not enough competent women around (Masui, 2004). As already stated above, many of the interviewees account for increased success, if instead using self promotion and showing interest in advancement. If this means that women are in fact adopting more male behaviors as suggested in some research or if this also is a generational issue, where younger women growing up under different circumstances display other personality traits than women who grew up previously, is very difficult to determine. But it implies that these are indeed good things to actively learn and practice if they do not come naturally to an individual. Of course the individual must first analyze whether adopting new behavior in order to be more successful career wise is something that she feels comfortable with and as with all decisions the pros should always outweigh the cons.

Interpretations of female leadership

According to Eagly and Carli (2007) personality is vital to leadership, but the interpretations of suitability are discretionary, so even if there are women in the organizations who have the suitable personality, they do not necessarily get acknowledged as such and promoted. On the other hand if management and the organization have a different viewpoint in these matters many female qualities such as being able to create equal relationships and to lay the groundwork for co-operation and partnerships, will serve the organizations well. Masui, (2004) state these qualities are all vital parts of being a leader in the future. If one agrees with Eagly and Carli (2007) who claim that leaders are both born and made then an important part of facilitating for women is to allow for alternative models of leaders as many women do not fit into the classic image of the ideal leader. While at the same time not take for granted that just because someone is a biological woman and therefore a female manager does not necessarily mean that she will use a very feminine management style (Billing, 2010). An obstacle in this development is the fact that many individuals generally perceive leadership as masculine and this then causes a conflict between that image and the associations of women. This can lead to women being deemed unsuited for certain jobs since they lack some leadership attributes or that they can be criticized for actually displaying such attributes. This phenomenon is what Eagly and Carli (2007) call the “double bind”. There are some accounts in the empirical study indicating this problem, with women mentioning not fitting into the mold and in other cases how female leaders have lost some of their femininity. None of the
respondents have suggested this to be a problem for themselves, but most likely this is something which is difficult to pin point about one-self, it is rather something others might perceive. The occurrence of traditional ideas about who is suitable for management positions is playing a part in these processes. Many women do, in fact work in real estate, even in the organizations that are less pro active in creating more gender equality. As reported in the empirical study some departments even display a majority of women, especially general administrative staff and divisions dealing with softer issues such as human resources and hospitality.

One aspect of being a manager is accepting a larger amount of responsibility, which naturally can lead to being forced into some unpleasant decision making, a task many women find difficult because of the effect it has on relationships with the other employees. Also having to deal with the overall goal of the organization - to make a profit - adding difficulty they might not have had to deal with at lower levels in the organization. These aspects combined can lead to a certain amount of loneliness as a manager (Billing, 2010). In these instances it can be very valuable with networks, both informal and formal, as showed in the empirical study many of the women rely on such social capital to use as sounding boards and compare notes in general; in addition to the purely social aspects of human interaction such as friendship. According to research social capital is affected by gender, and apparently women often have less than men, and the empirical study supports this. In contrast to the fact that many women view informal networking and informal mentoring relationships as crucial to them growing as leaders (Masui, 2004; Eagly & Carli, 2007).

The many conflicting demands of being a female leader does take its toll on many of the women; statistics from Alecta cited by Masui (2004) show that many female managers suffer from stress related problems. Other research show that levels of stress related hormones drop in male managers after the end of the working day while in female managers they increase. Masui (2004) draws the conclusion that women experience an over all larger amount of stress since they also are stressed at home. The topic of stress levels was not directly covered in the interview guide, however several women mention being stressed and having conflicting emotions and responsibilities in relation to the children, especially in the incident of them being sick a lot. As one interviewee put it – could feel almost panicky when she (the daughter) started coughing on Sunday night, thinking please no - don’t get sick - not now. Otherwise there is not much evidence in the empirical study of large amounts of stress, or differences in perceived stress levels between the respondents and their male counterparts, which can be interpreted as either that interviewees have a tendency to play down negatives and up positives or simply that these women are good at handling their situations.

Women who aspire to leadership role use different strategies to deal with issues of clashes between work and family: some remain single, some childless and some delay childbearing in order to establish their careers first (Fagerfjäll, 2003; Eagly & Carli, 2007). The advantages of such strategies is that once they do have children their incomes are often good and the women can then share the burden and delegate parts or all of the housework to hired help. This is then to be considered a non-compliance with the current view and societal expectations of a rather intensive parenting style. Part of the image of the ‘good mother’ today in Sweden is amongst many other things the ability to spend lots of time with the children, especially so called quality time. To delegate responsibility for the children completely to someone else is not fully accepted but in contrast to have the financial privileged of hiring a nanny for picking up the children in the afternoon is not looked down upon.
Further identified barriers and facilitators

The lack of women can have a large effect on how many traits, other than ability, are in the focal point, for example physical appearances. Women can be forced into being very careful not to make mistakes and to keeping secrets in order to maintain their carefully projected public façade according to Kanter (1977) who also found that there is a tendency towards trying to hide inner feelings behind a public persona. All these findings seem to still apply to some of the interviewees situation, where many account for being easily recognized and remembered for being a women, as well as having to adjust clothing and appearance to fit in. None of the respondents seem to acknowledge the need to hide inner feelings or such though.

When dressing for work, managers are particularly constrained (Alvesson & Billing, 2009), female managers maybe even more so in that they should neither appear too masculine or too feminine. This often applies to the whole organization as many professionals wear a ‘uniform’ at work to comply with company policy and to appear professional. Basically in order to get the job done. Several of the interviewees indicate that it is in fact very important to play your cards right and be aware of power structures and processes in which decisions are being made, this obviously also applies to men, but the focus of the study is female experiences.

Many of the interviewees refer to courage as a very important part in getting somewhere, the courage to take advantage of opportunities that present themselves. This is strongly supported in the theory and especially by Masui (2004) who report exactly the same findings in her study, that successful women say that courage is a very important trait and to see and act on the opportunities that present themselves. Furthermore her study also points to the importance of knowing yourself well, both strengths and weaknesses, to be responsive and to promote some parts of one self while holding back others. All these personality traits are great facilitators in open organizations, but play a much smaller part in non-allowing organizations because not so many opportunities present themselves there.

A failure of any sort would mean a symbolic failure and something that will quickly spread; many of the women in the study commented on, that your name, easily made but also easily tarnished if you fail. Obviously a damaged reputation has a very bad effect on possibilities for career advancement. The study seems to indicate that a good reputation instead can have many positive effects, such as being recommended to head hunters or for other recruiting efforts. In order to ever be considered for a top level position, it is important to successfully have held positions with clear performance accountability, such as head of sales; this is evident from both the study and theory (Masui, 2004).

In order to reach as far as these women have in a largely male dominated industry a strong drive to succeed is required, obviously in addition to broad knowledge, great competence, people skills and many other personal qualities. The drive to succeed is often described as an inner go by the women in the empirical study and a strong motivator. Additionally many mention that being appreciated and acknowledged for ones achievement is also very important to them. Studies by both Masui (2004) and Billing (2010) indicate the importance of upbringing and childhood for choosing to become a manager, these topics have not been specifically studied in the empirical study but some of the interviewees have talked about how being brought up as an ethical and hard working person has shaped their working life, as well as, already previously mentioned, many cite recognition and appreciation as important motivators. Additionally many of the respondents speak of a personal (or in general female) desire to make a difference and contribute to society as another driving force. In this lies the
desire not just to make a difference around the office but in a large context, which obviously becomes more and more possible as one move up the career ladder.

While trying to find their way through labyrinth (Eagly & Carli, 2007) business wise, the interviewed women are also faced with trying to balance family life with the demands of work. Fagerfjäll, 2003, argues that having children is becoming more of a luxury in today’s cut throat business environment; many companies expect highly paid consultants, managers, analysts and other specialists to work around the clock and at irregular hours with no regard of family life. This might be true, but compared to other countries probably Sweden has the most generous and allowing system for parental leave in the world. This in itself does not mean that all organizations live by the same guiding principle as government, but the prerequisites are in place. All the female managers in a study by Billing (2010) have families and have apparently not felt the need to completely give up on that idea in favor of a career. Neither have any of the women interviewed in the empirical study.

Many of the successful women who feature in ‘Through the labyrinth’ (Eagly & Carli, 2007) acknowledge that having a supportive husband helps them both in their work life but also with family life, often sharing the responsibilities for raising the children with their wives. The topic of choosing the right partner who will support and help during the working years is heavily covered by the interviewees, and seem to comply exactly with theory, where having a supportive partner is a great facilitator and lacking one can be a barrier, so then the women have to find other solutions instead. Which in many cases appear to be in the shape of a supportive network, and not uncommonly the grand parents. Many interviewees talk warmly of the positive effects of grandparents and children interacting and building up an ever important relationship while at the same time facilitating for the parents. Analyzing the complex role of the female manager, Eagly and Carli (2007) suggest that women of the 21st century do find their way through the labyrinth, often with a detour during the hectic years when the children’s needs clash with the career. Which is clearly established in the empirical study, while the interviewees acknowledge the difficulties they sometimes encounter, they have all found viable solutions to the problems and no-one has given up on having a family (some are not mother yet, but intend to be eventually) as has been reported in some research as a potential strategy for succeeding in the business world.

Flexible work hours and work can help women overcome the barriers related to domestic issues (Eagly & Carli, 2007). All the interviewees who work in organizations that allow flexibility in working hours and face time indicate this to be a very important facilitator. The common attitude from the employers convey the impression of being that as long as you get your work done on time and accurately it is acceptable to be flexible in working hours. In other organizations where micro management is more used those who work there acknowledges the difficulties that this causes.

The second last topic covered in the interview guide; which has partly been covered in the analysis already; is the lack of women in the most senior positions, where all of the respondents are in agreement that there is need for change. An important point which should be made is that many of the men who reach the absolute top positions are in fact often over the age of fifty, so age is an important factor in discussing career advancement. Fewer women have traditionally had the right age to be able to have enough experience to meet the criteria to be considered for top positions, something that will change over time as more and more women occupy middle management positions (Fagerfjäll, 2003). Something that is also supported by the empirical study, where all interviewees agree that if the recruitment base is
ever to increase for top level positions the place to start is at the bottom of the pyramid. Furthermore some of them point to the important work performed by nomination committees which is where the process must originate. On this topic is also the theory about management preferences of wanting to only hire individuals of the same gender as subjects. Many of the respondents have stated though not to be able to detect the patterns presented in theory, rather many feel there are many men who prefer having women as subjects and female managers who rather have men as subjects; in other words not in line with the current research. In addition many of the women seem to strongly believe that managerial potential is very much down to individual personality, making the grouping of managers according to gender somewhat oblique.

The very last topic covered in the interview guide in the empirical study is whether there is a need for more actions in order to achieve greater gender equality, whereas the current research is very sure about the need for improved gender equality, some of the respondents; even if they agree about the issue in general; feel that things will probably work themselves out automatically especially when the large generational shift comes, which unfortunately can be interpreted as a lack of belief in the ability to change within the older generation. An interesting aspect is how to market the industry as interesting to young individuals and to improve its brand. As stated above it is still considered by many to be a conservative boring old mans club which only deals with brick and cement. This is in stark contrast to the great potential presented by the respondents, in the fact that it is an industry that deals with aesthetics and design, customer relations, sales, and marketing in addition to the technical aspects and therefore should have the potential to attract young individuals of both genders as well as people of different backgrounds and interests.
5. Discussion

The original intent of the thesis was to study the real estate business from a female perspective, in order to try to get an accurate picture of how far the development within the industry in regards to equality has come. Sweden is in general considered to be one of the world’s most equal countries and we have a very large female working population. This is not a new phenomenon; women have been in the work force for decades. Given this it could be expected that they would be fairly evenly distributed through different industries, but as we all know this in not the case and probably never has been or will be either. There are female dominated industries and there are male dominated industries in Sweden in 2011. In many ways I do not feel that this is a problem as I believe that there are major differences between men and women and that we should not try to eradicate these but rather to embrace them. There should be room for everybody to be able to contribute to society in the places where their individual skill set and personality serves the greatest good.

The real estate industry is a prime example of a traditionally male dominated industry; being it because of large recruitments from construction or by tradition of ownership or other reasons. But it deals with very many aspects of our daily lives, everything from where we are born, go to school, work, do leisure activities and where we are cared for when old or sick; where we sleep at night and where we eat. It covers such a wide scope of activities within the structures it handles that in some ways it is amazing that it is considered one industry. The commercial real estate sector deals mostly with areas for working, shopping, care and leisure activities. In general a lot of human activity is indoors in Sweden, due to its cold and dark climate. With women entering the industry a whole new set of ideas follow and this will help out in the process of interpreting reality and shaping future society. The customer focus that has developed in the industry will only be further improved by more viewpoints and inputs as they correlate with what half of the customers demand from the industry. It can of course be argued that interpreting and understanding what the other gender really want and need is something that can be done by representatives of the opposite sex, but I do not agree. Therefore to me it seems like a natural development that women enter and stay in the real estate business and that they can contribute valuable input and experience.

This topic can obviously also be looked at from many other perspectives such as justice or human rights. But I prefer to think of it in business terms; all corporations are in existence in order to achieve one goal – to make as large of a profit as possible. Additionally other goals can be added to the agenda and many are, based on different underlying reasons, be it corporate social responsibility or a general desire to do good; be it forced upon them by policy makers or general opinion. Whatever the underlying reasons are, increased gender equality in real estate companies moves somewhere in this gray zone and it is happening right now. Obviously there might be some individuals who are not happy about this development; most likely they find it difficult to gain public support for their views but, they can and do partly resist the changes without making a big fanfare about it.

During the interviews it became blatanty obvious that even though the issues are up for discussion in public and many companies display diversity and gender equality intentions on web sites and in other information material, in actual fact many of the interviewees seem slightly unwilling to bring the issues out in the open. Obviously very few employees are keen to appear to speak negatively about their organizations, and their behavior; wanting closed doors and asking not to be quoted on certain comments; indicate that maybe the issue in not
quite as straight forward as one might have hoped based on published intentions. In general there seems to be a strong correlation between overall company culture, the general atmosphere between employees, and actions towards greater gender equality and how comfortable the women seemed to be in addressing the issues and specifically how willing they were to become publically known for their views.

It can be argued that there is a need for a change in perceptions; that the notion of the woman as fitting to a leadership role needs to develop further in society. This might be true but in the end change can only come one step at the time and it will only happen if someone initiates the process. There are many organizational processes that can work against women trying to ascend up the corporate ladder; these are among others beliefs and stereotypes held by individuals within organizations which results in an organizational norm; in here is the important role of top level management to lead by example. To speak and act in a diversity friendly manner and to reprimand behavior that is not compliant with this view. This is a very complex and demanding task as management need to avoid micro management and show trust in the ability and loyalty of the employees at the same time as making sure that policies are followed. The challenges of management positions continue to be great but must in many ways also be rewarding when the results show. These challenges can appear too great to some individuals and therefore it is not completely unthinkable that some women actively chooses not to try for higher level positions. This study shows though, that there are plenty of women who are interested and that for them the pros outweigh the cons, based both on individual experiences of interviewees and their accounts of other women.

The organizational process of planning and executing work hours and face time can prove to be a barrier to women due to the division of labor within families that enables fathers to work much longer and later work days than mothers, to show more face time and attend meetings etc at odd hours. Suggestions for the organizations are - based on the empirical study results - to offer and allow for alternative work schedules primarily flex time and the opportunity to work from home, which will facilitate for women who are mothers. In Sweden today; many start a family while at the same time working hard to move up career wise during the years between approximately 25 and 45. Obviously it can be argued that this is not a good idea to try to combine the two, but given the fact that before the age of 25, many acquire a relevant education and after 45 it is unfortunately either too late to have children or there are age discrimination issues at play.

The difficulty of accessing male networks for women is an issue which has come up over and over again during the study and features in theory as well. This can be a subtle issue or a blatantly obvious one. Many networks are not official and many times the activities are not directly excluding women but do so in a more indirect way, due to the nature of the activity or the timing of it. To participate in typically male activities is of course an alternative and some women do enjoy more masculine flavored outdoor pursuits and other things, while others do not, but they choose to participate anyway. This is not such a grave problem but instead rather when the activities are such that women feel uncomfortable or just not welcome. One way of organizing networking to facilitate for women, is to do it around activities that can be interpreted as more gender neutral and additionally to include all members instead of discreetly excluding some.

In the theoretical framework there is a notion of how male executives harbor a resistance to working with humans dissimilar to themselves, obviously this can be the case but as discussed in the analysis there are many nuances to this behavior. The attitudes can range from directly
averse to welcoming, during the study I found few examples of male executives who could be pinpointed as directly averse, but there where many examples of discreet resistance. This is unfortunately just as difficult, if not more difficult to address since there are very few things (if any) to directly criticize. Instead the behavior is hidden in recruitment decisions or organizational practices used, all explained using rational sounding arguments and statements. This sounds like a very sinister interpretation of male behavior, but many times I believe, in the male executive’s defense, that the behavior is not necessarily intentional, it stems from a lack of awareness and socialization from working in a traditional industry. Increasing awareness and setting good examples for others to follow is a potential way forward. Because even though some women have already reached high level positions, (this fact can potentially reduce the motivation to continue the efforts to reduce inequality), they are still under-represented compared to men.

In the theoretical framework there are indications of how women are in fact worse than men at building and maintaining social capital, that it is in fact affected by gender. This is very interesting and useful information for women actively seeking ways to be successful at work. In general, I would guess most humans would say that women are great at nurturing relationships and form close bonds between themselves and others. Part of the explanation might be found in this, women tend to form strong bonds but they (in general) might put higher demands on the quality of the relationship before they acknowledge it. In other words, to be a woman’s friend you need to spend a lot of time with her and also give and receive information about yourself. In contrast men (in general) might find it enough to have met a few times and maybe had some joint activities or such. This approach is obviously an advantage over the female approach as networks grows quickly and manifests itself. Many of the interviewees find that pro-actively building networks, both formal and informal is a very valuable source of positive feedback, both in job recommendations and as private and official sounding boards. So based on that information the conclusion can be that women are increasingly working on building their networks.

In addition to increasing the awareness of organizational processes and the effect they have on women there are other suggestions for how to turn barriers into opportunities; deduced from the empirical study results. To introduce, develop, encourage and practice mixed-gender teams in order to increase diversity awareness and additionally look into the general issues of diversity in order to further mimic the customer base and thereby the understanding of business opportunities that lie therein. The enroll women in leadership training and different mentoring programs so that they also are groomed for top level positions.

For organizations where diversity still is not yet up on the agenda and there is a need for an increase in diversity awareness one solution is to send employees and management on diversity awareness training. In order to address the issues of the wage gap, which obviously is a very sensitive topic, both because of its connection to equality and the following implications and in relation to non-discrimination laws and other societal pressures; it is also a matter of results and profits. If all employees at the same level were to have the same wages, as in women getting same level wages as men, then profitability would decline. Basically it is cheaper to keep things as they are, but this is not a viable solution for the long-term. Some adjustments are going to have to happen; but before the first step is to encourage and increase communication about compensation structures in place today.

Obviously it is not just up to the organizations to provide a fertile ground for career advancement; the women themselves can and must do a lot to show that they are good
candidates for more advanced positions. All corporations are profit generating organizations and in that environment the goal is to recruit the candidate who will maximize profit. The most common way to do that is to recruit whoever has the most experience and who has a proven track record. Based on the empirical study, here are suggestions for individual women who are interested in career advancement; to continuously build knowledge in order to acquire the needed competence, since without that no-one, man or woman will be in the running for top level positions. Experience and proven track record are two corner stones for advancement but also to practice leadership and show accomplishments. In order to acquire the ‘right’ experience - one advice given in the empirical study - is to not narrow down too soon and become a specialist (unless that is the one thing you are interested in) instead try to widen your knowledge and stay a generalist for as long as possible. Most importantly if interested in top level positions you must apply for “line” positions with performance accountability. In addition women need to develop better business-skills to understand and be able to participate in deal making and result generating activities. Many women both in research and in the empirical study give testament about how these positions are indeed hard to come by. In here lies again the role of the management to facilitate.

A very important but obviously very difficult task is to build self-confidence in order to develop the courage needed to welcome challenges. There are as many ways of doing this as there are individuals and every person needs to find their own way of achieving it. A general observation is that younger generations appear to have more confidence in themselves and they are much more used to being seen and acknowledged. Additionally they are much more driven by lust than by duty, all attributes that will add new effects and pose new challenges for employers and fellow employees, as these young individuals are more fickle and if not happy they will not linger around for long. One way of keeping generation Y motivated is to continuously seek their opinion and input as well as provide an acknowledging environment.

During the course of the interviews I have encountered many women who have gotten very far in their work life and still state that they have not really hit the glass ceiling. Yes, there have been obstacles on the way absolutely; they have worked hard and then they say that they have been lucky. In hearing this I must admit that I agree with Masui (2004) who claims that luck in this regard is in actual fact large amounts of positive thinking and a positive outlook on life. And yes, those who are born with an optimistic outlook and a personality which is challenged by some resistance instead of viewing it as unbeatable obstacle are indeed lucky in some way. Possessing personality traits that thrive on challenges and a go-get instinct is of course very important, but there is always a small part of the equation that is down to personal choice. Many of the women who I have met, have similarities to the ones that Masui (2004) interviewed, they have definitely not been sitting around waiting for things to be handed to them. Many, if not all of them, mention the ability to see opportunities and then to have the courage to grab them while you can.

That women are not common in the top-level positions could in some small part also be due to deliberate choices to prioritize family roles over a larger and maybe more precarious work role. Not all individuals are attracted to large amounts of responsibility over staff and resources, and especially for some, the work load associated with a top level job might lower its attractiveness. Women who do not possess the same ‘go’ as many of the respondents will most likely also suffer from a common dilemma facing many women, which partly is about lower confidence and less belief in one self, but also stems from wanting to come across as modest and not to self-promoting. A possible way of handling this is to work around any potential negative reaction by being friendly and promote oneself in a collaborative manner.
It seems that the general consensus is that women do not ask for or negotiate effectively enough for higher monetary compensation. It has been suggested that women might be more uncomfortable with performance based pay structures, which is something that the interviewees did not agree upon – some state that this is the case, some that it is not. Another general observation here is that men go for the money, basically they choose jobs with money making potential and status and women do not in the same way. This could be down to biological differences or other things but personally I believe that is a lot about socialization and traditions. In many ways it could be advantageous for women to follow the men’s lead, but in my view only to a certain extent; learn from them and mimic them in some ways, pick out the sound and business savvy pieces of advice but stay true to oneself. Otherwise the point is partly lost if all the advantages of diversity are washed away in the attempts to fit into the mold too much. Embrace the differences between women and men and use them to increase profitability by utilizing the different interpretations of reality that we all bring.
6. Conclusions

This study, of women working in real estate and the barriers and opportunities they encounter as well as their individual experiences increases knowledge about the state of the industry. Women and men today often face different experiences at work, in that women face obstacles that men do not. Women are hindered by social forces in their ascent of the corporate ladder, these come both from perceived normative pressure to conform to stereotypes as well as socialization. The relevance of the chosen topic is proven through the empirical study in that many of the issues discussed are covered in theory dating back to the early days of both organizational theory and gendered organizations, and still are present in work life today. From the conduct of the interviewees and their stories it can be deduced that the topic of gender equality is still controversial and it can cause counter productive emotional responses, which is why it has to be handled with finesse. It is important not to assign blame for the past but to look forward with the best intentions.

The empirical study clearly indicates there are many underlying subtle processes, which if not tended to can continue to reproduce old patterns of inequality. On the other hand the study also shows that with conscious efforts to raise the awareness levels organizations can come a long way in a relatively short period of time. In this process the attitude and motivation of the top level management followed by concrete actions are crucial in achieving change. Basically the role played by management in improving company culture appears almost impossible to exaggerate. The examples set by management in attitude, decision making, and everyday work routines will cipher through the organisation and create an atmosphere that is either positive towards change and allowing in its nature or not. Most of the barriers can be turned around to be opportunities, and in there lies great positive potential for the industry.

Suggestions for how to turn barriers into opportunities; based on the empirical study results; are to offer and allow for alternative work schedules primarily flex time and the opportunity to work from home, avoid micro management and show trust in the ability and loyalty of the employees. Introduce, develop, encourage and practice mixed-gender teams in order to increase diversity awareness and additionally look into the general issues of diversity in order to further mimic the customer base and thereby the understanding of business opportunities that lie therein. The introduction and inclusion of women in leadership training and different mentoring programs is vital so they also are groomed for top level positions. Increase diversity awareness by offering diversity awareness training. Encourage and increase communication about compensation structures.

Suggestions for individual women who are interested in an ascent up the corporate ladder are to continually build knowledge in order to acquire the needed competence and to apply for “line” positions with performance accountability. To build self-confidence in order to develop courage, which every individual need to find a personal way of achieving. Develop better business-skills to understand and be able to participate in deal making and result generating activities in order to be eligible for top level promotions that require such experience. To pro-actively build networks, both formal and informal. To practice leadership and show accomplishments along with last but not least actively look for and grab opportunities where this is possible.

The combined interviewee experiences show that there is a positive ongoing development towards greater gender equality in the real estate industry; it also shows that this development
is completely dependent of which organisation is studied. Obviously one cannot change a
corporate culture in one day and the process must be allowed some time. Some organizations
are making great efforts and are achieving many improvements for women working for them.
While others are not bringing the issues up on the agenda; these organizations still have a long
way to go until any sort of gender equality is achieved. Over time chances are that the more
pro-active organizations will gain an advantage over the more resistant organizations in being
able to attract and retain the best employees. Younger generations, both men and women are
not particularly interested in working for conservatively organized and closed organizations.
The industry still needs to work on marketing itself as more exciting and modern and in that
lies being more diverse. In discovering and presenting this spectrum of different attitudes and
conduct, the researcher has achieved the goal of giving women aspiring to work in the
industry realistic expectations about the state of the industry.

In order to increase the number of women at all levels only one way seem to lead forward, to
start at the bottom, with a wide recruitment base. In order for there to be potential female
candidates at the top where competition is stronger it is imperative to have a large female
recruitment base. This can only be achieved by hiring female candidates at lower levels as the
siphon narrows and individuals make personal choices not to go all the way.
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Appendix I – Interview guide

QUESTIONS

1) Describe yourself, your interests, your career path hitherto and what originally attracted you to the real estate business and what your expectations were.

2) State your previous and future career goals and have they been fulfilled / do you think they will be fulfilled? If, when and why did you decide to concentrate on your career?

3) The real estate business is male-dominated. Has that affected you? For example: Have you ever felt a need to prove yourself and your ability/knowledge more than men? Would you say that there are certain assumptions made about how you as a woman “should” behave in your organisation?

4) How do you view the balance between career and family? Are the two complicated to combine and what are the repercussions for your career?

5) If you have children; did you take maternity leave and was it short or long – how was that perceived?

6) Career, monetary compensation, other perks – how significant are they to you?

7) What were/are possible obstacles/barriers in your path and are there any factors that made/would make it easier for you to move up the career ladder?

8) Do you feel that your colleagues accept you as their equal and/or superior? Are there any differences between male and female colleagues? How would you describe the general atmosphere in your company?

9) How are decisions about hiring and recruitment made? Who decides what ”suitable competence for a job” is? Do you feel that there are differences between your possibilities and that of others? Are there any groups within the organisation that you are ”not allowed into”?

10) What are your views about mentoring and networks – formal and informal?

11) Describe how you perceive the real estate business in regards to women’s careers (attitudes, barriers, opportunities). What are the advantages and disadvantages as a female manager in relation to male counterparts (you as a manager or your experience with female managers)?

12) Do women make less than men in this industry – if so why? Do you think women are less likely to accept performance-based compensations than men?

13) Do you have any experience of gender differences in management preferences (e.g. men like to manage men and women like to manage women)? What has been the most difficult for you while working in real estate?
14) Please rate equality in the real estate industry on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is completely unequal and 10 is completely equal, and please motivate why you chose the rating you did.

15) What could real estate companies do (if anything) to facilitate the career advancements of women? Do you consider the industry/your organization to welcome diversity in general? What changes are needed, if any?

16) Why are women not obtaining top positions as often as men – in your opinion?