

CRANFIELD UNIVERSITY

Andrie Georgiou Michaelides

FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS AND SUSTAINABLE
CAREERS: A STUDY OF SWEDISH WOMEN MANAGERS IN A
MALE-DOMINATED ENVIRONMENT

Cranfield School of Management
PhD

Doctor of Philosophy
Academic Year: 2013 - 2019

Supervisors: Prof Susan Vinnicombe CBE and Dr Deirdre Anderson

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ABSTRACT

Women's career advancement rate to senior management positions continues to lag behind men's. One frequently cited obstacle within the work-family and career literature is women's compromised career decisions in trying to balance career, self and others as they still, unfairly, bear the brunt of caregiving and home responsibilities. Organizational flexible work arrangements (FWAs) have been advocated as one potential avenue to facilitate women's career advancement. These are intended, for both women and men, to alleviate conflicting demands arising from their career and home roles. In practice, however, FWAs are a predominantly female phenomenon due to the gendered division of labour. Despite the explosion of research on FWAs, the results have been far from unequivocal. Various types of FWAs, organizational culture and supervisor attitudes have been found to impact on utilization and work-family interface and career consequences differentially. This study draws on the lived career experiences of 43 women managers with FWAs, across all levels of a Swedish organization. Examining how the women engaged with FWAs retrospectively and over time revealed that, by using tailored FWAs and having schedule control, the women were better able to cope with the demands from their work-family interface as those changed with career and family stage. However, the key determinant of women's career sustainability was Sweden's policy of long and shared parental leave between the women and their husbands, which shaped gender egalitarian home roles, and family-supportive supervisor attitudes. Furthermore, utilization of FWAs disadvantaged the women by triggering work intensification. In exchange for having flexibility and autonomy to manage their career and home demands, the women worked additional hours at night and on weekends, which was particularly pronounced in the experience of those at senior levels. Supervisor sponsorship and partnership with husbands were additional factors contributing to the career advancement of the women who reached senior levels and the fact that they never worked part-time. This study makes three key contributions. It is the first study to provide empirical evidence on the role of FWAs in women managers' career experiences across all levels of an organization, facilitating comparisons of different points of career and family stage. Secondly, the study extends Tomlinson *et al.*'s (2018) flexible and sustainable career determinants' model by demonstrating the salience of the parental context as an additional determinant. Sharing parental leave sets up routines for life whereby each parent can flex their career to help

one another. Thirdly, this study furthers understanding of how work intensification is perceived and experienced. While the women described having “balance” in their lives, they also talked about working additional hours at home to reciprocate for using FWAs. The paradox of work intensification and “balance” poses a threat to well-being and career sustainability and contests the positive portrayal of “balance” in the sustainable careers’ literature. This study has a number of implications for policy and practice. Improving women’s career sustainability and advancement requires a synergy between society, organization and family. Public policies directed towards working mothers and fathers have the potential to accelerate change towards gender equality at work and home. Organizations, by offering FWAs and safeguarding against work intensification, may contribute to employee career sustainability and well-being.

Keywords: women managers, women’s careers, national context, Sweden, parental leave, work-intensification, work-family balance, supervisors

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FWAs	Flexible work arrangements
GEI	Gender Equality Index
KCM	Kaleidoscope Career Model
SET	Science, Engineering and Technology
VP of HR	Vice-President of Human Resources
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States of America

1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to explore the role of flexible work arrangements (FWAs) in women managers' career experiences. Section 1.1. explains the research rationale broadly situated within relevant literature, my personal interest in the topic and the national context where the research is conducted. Section 1.2. defines the key terms used throughout this document. Section 1.3. provides an overview of the contribution this thesis makes and section 1.4. describes the structure of the subsequent chapters of this thesis. This chapter concludes with section 1.5., the chapter summary.

1.1. Research Rationale

The impetus behind this research is the pervasive under-representation of women in senior management positions. Recent European-Union-wide statistics (Eurostat, 2018) make a compelling case: although women represent nearly half of the European Union's labour force and more than half of the tertiary graduates, only one out of three managers in the European Union is a woman (36%). The picture worsens as positions become more senior, a phenomenon commonly referred to as the leaky pipeline (Cabrera, 2009). Women account for only 27% of board members of publicly listed companies in the European Union and 17% of senior executives (Eurostat, 2018). Statistics from around the world converge to the same conclusion: in the US, women hold 21.2% of board seats and 26.5% of senior executive positions in S&P 500 companies (Catalyst, 2019) and globally, women account for 24% of senior roles (Grant Thornton International, 2018).

In ongoing debates about factors impeding women's advancement to leadership roles, a frequently cited obstacle is that women are still most often the primary caregivers in dual parent households even if they are pursuing a career (Allen, French and Poteet, 2016). This translates into a higher number of paid and unpaid working hours for women compared to men, leading to added stress in reconciling career and family, which often results in compromised career decisions or career interruptions (Lyonette and Crompton, 2008; den Dulk *et al.*, 2010; Lewis and Humbert, 2010). Mothers and women with caregiving responsibilities have the highest employment gap. In 2016, over 19% of women not working had left employment due to caregiving responsibilities (European Commission, 2018). Furthermore, women spend twice as many hours daily compared to

men on caregiving and household roles (Catalyst, 2018). Gender inequalities in caregiving are also evidenced by the Gender Equality Index (GEI) in the European Union which measures gender inequalities in six domains, including the domain of time defined as the allocation of time spent on care, domestic work and social activities (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2019). The domain of time index worsened in 2015 compared to 2005 and stood at 65.7 points out of 100 (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2017). The picture varies widely among the Member States with Sweden, the context of this study, being the most gender equal with an index at 90.1 points and Bulgaria being the least gender equal at 42.7 points. Moreover, as many as 10% of women across the European Union do not work, or work part-time, due to care responsibilities compared to only 0.5% of men (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2019).

Organizations are increasingly offering flexible working arrangements (FWAs) which have been championed as one avenue to facilitate women's retention in the labour force and improve the leaky pipeline phenomenon. The rhetoric on FWAs' potential to alleviate conflict between work and family demands is directed at both women and men. In practice however, given the gendered division of work and care (Lewis and Humbert, 2010) as discussed above, FWAs and especially part-time arrangements have been overwhelmingly utilized by women (Gatrell and Cooper, 2016). FWAs clash with the ideal worker norm (Acker, 1990) and can lead to career penalties such as constraining career advancement opportunities (Gatrell, 2007), which further exacerbate the leaky pipeline phenomenon.

Despite the proliferation of research to date on FWAs and their consequences, literature exploring the role of FWAs in women's career sustainability and advancement to senior management roles is scant and inconclusive (Leslie *et al.*, 2012; Kalysh, Kulik and Perera, 2016). The few studies which have explored this relationship have found no effect (D'Agostino, 2011), negative effects (Tomlinson and Durbin, 2010) and in rare cases positive effects but only within certain contexts and after a time lag (Kalysh, Kulik and Perera, 2016).

Some of the issues which could explicate the ambivalent findings on the role of FWAs in women's careers can be attributed to the fact that most studies have examined bundles of FWAs, assuming that all types have similar career facilitating or hindering outcomes

(Bourdeau, Ollier-Malaterre and Houlfort, 2019), or that they examined FWAs in isolation and independently from context (Kelly *et al.*, 2008; de Menezes and Kelliher, 2011; Bessa and Tomlinson, 2017). Furthermore, the majority of studies focused on outcomes such as work-family conflict or work-family balance, decoupled from career outcomes. As Moen and Sweet (2004) argue, there needs to be a shift from work-family to flexible careers over the life course due to the shifting nature of employees' flexible working needs as they go through different life stages.

In a similar vein, there has been a disconnect between career theory and career models with the work-family interface and how it is both affected by and affects career decisions (Greenhaus and Kossek, 2014; Beigi, Wang and Arthur, 2017) despite the fact that this interconnectedness has long been established by Kanter's seminal work (1977).

Therefore, the limitations of current studies both in careers and FWA literature create research opportunities to study the link between the two fields, thereby explicitly recognising the interplay of work-family interface and how it influences and is influenced by career decisions over time. Employing a qualitative method, this research captures the lived career experiences of 43 women managers across all managerial levels of ABC, a large multinational organization in Sweden. Having participants across all managerial levels facilitates the comparison of women's experiences with FWAs across career and family stages.

The research question and sub-questions of this study are:

- How do women managers engage with FWAs during their careers?
 - How do women managers perceive the impact of FWAs on their career advancement?
 - How do FWAs affect women managers' perceptions of work-family balance?

Outcomes of this research could inform both theory and practice as to how FWAs can support women's careers, by addressing their flexibility needs as they shift through life stages, and ultimately contribute to flexible and sustainable careers and thus diminish the leaky pipeline phenomenon.

1.1.1. Personal Context

My interest in this topic stems from my personal experiences pursuing a career in several countries while having a family and working flexibly during different life stages starting when my first child was born. Prior to having my first child, I matched many aspects of the ideal worker norm (Acker, 1990). I could not imagine that anything would get in the way of advancing my career. Eager to get ahead in my career as a management consultant, I had no issue with demonstrating commitment by taking on additional projects even when I was already working over capacity. This continued during an expatriate move with my husband when I started working with a US multinational, notorious for expecting extremely long hours. If anyone left the office before 7 pm, that person was subjected to comments such as “half day again?” I had my first child when I was 31 and after three weeks of maternity leave (as stipulated by labour law in the host country), I remember returning to work and feeling extremely stressed and exhausted. My husband had a regional role in his organization and was constantly travelling. The host country’s culture and working norms embraced the male breadwinner/female homemaker career model and it was unheard of for men to change their working patterns to share home responsibilities with their wives. I spoke to my supervisor at the time who, to my surprise, agreed that I could work from home and only go to the office as needed. This was the first arrangement of its kind in that organization and probably a very rare occurrence in the host country. Through this arrangement I was able to sustain my career. Soon after that, my husband was relocated with his company and my organization offered me an adjunct role where I would continue in my capacity as divisional HR director and work remotely from abroad. The only caveat was that I would travel to the office during busy periods which translated to one week every month. This continued through one more relocation when I finally decided that I could not travel as often with a five-year old and an infant, especially since my eldest had started school. I resigned and stayed at home for two years until my youngest joined pre-school. I was able to find a similar role locally with a non-profit organization (in the Netherlands at the time) but only after I had been introduced to the Director of the organization through personal contacts. In our last relocation back to my home country, Cyprus, I accepted a much more junior role as opportunities for women managers were limited. While content for the first two to three years, I decided to pursue a Doctoral degree to combine my knowledge acquired from practice with research and

ultimately move to academia to research gendered careers. Overall, while I was able to maintain my career through flexibility and networking, the move to academia was only enabled by a joint decision with my husband to give up my full-time job so that I could focus on my doctoral studies.

When I started out as an ambitious, strong and career-driven woman, I never imagined that I would have to change paths or compromise depending on life circumstances. While I am extremely happy with the way things have turned out, I am passionate about exploring how women's career journeys can be sustained while being flexible to accommodate their demands from shifting family and life circumstances. As will be discussed further in section 3.5.1. (Reflexivity), I acknowledge that my career experiences have influenced my research topic, my research questions, the way I conducted the interviews and my interpretation of the outcomes. At the same time, I feel that my unique position also enabled me to gain greater insights into the topic of interest and to delve deeper into my interviewees' stories.

The following section explains why I chose Sweden as the national context of this study.

1.1.2. The Swedish National Context

Scholars have been calling for the inclusion of national context in the study of public and organizational policies to facilitate work-family balance (Kassinis and Stavrou, 2013) as employees' so-called "private" decisions are in fact bounded by what they perceive is possible within the contexts of their family structure, organization and country (Ollier-Malaterre *et al.*, 2013; Hobson, 2014; Ollier-Malaterre, 2017; Ollier-Malaterre and Foucreault, 2017).

I have chosen Sweden as the national context of this research firstly due to the fact that it constitutes one of the leading countries in the adoption of FWAs (Peters and den Dulk, 2003) and secondly because it is the most gender equal country in the EU according to the GEI (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2017). The GEI measures how far or how close the EU and its individual Member States are from achieving gender equality in six domains: work, power, time, money, knowledge, and health. The higher the value of the index, the lower the inequality. As shown in the breakdown of the GEI domains in

Table 1, the EU-28 average GEI stands at 66.2 out of 100, while Sweden ranks first with 82.6 points.

As also indicated in Table 1, Sweden ranks first in the domains of work, power and time which are relevant to gender equality in career opportunities, FWAs, representation in senior positions in government and industry, and time spent on care, household work and social activities. More specifically, the domain of work includes measures of opportunities available to men and women to have stable careers and prospects and quality of work, in terms of FWAs, and the ability to reconcile work and private life. The domain of power measures the gender gap in positions of power, whether government or corporate. Finally, the domain of time captures the allocation of time to care, domestic work and social activities. It therefore measures the gender segregation in unpaid work and activities. Sweden’s overall score for gender equality in time spent on care, domestic work and social activities is 90.1, compared to a staggeringly low EU-28 score of 65.7 (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2017).

Table 1: Gender Equality Index 2015 by Domain for EU-28 and Sweden (EIGE 2017)

Domain of GEI	Overall	Work	Power	Time	Money	Knowledge	Health
EU-28	66.2	71.5	48.5	65.7	79.6	63.4	87.4
Sweden	82.6	82.6	79.5	90.1	87.5	72.8	94.1
Sweden’s Rank	1	1	1	1	3	2	1

A third reason for choosing Sweden as the national context of this study is the country’s political and legislative strategies, which facilitate women’s working lives through publicly funded childcare, fostering gender equality through the school curriculum, parental leave for both parents and other measures related to the right to return to the same position after parental leave. In 1974, to foster gender equality at home and increase men’s domestic involvement, parental leave replaced maternity leave. Each set of parents receives 480 days of paid parental leave per child, which can be taken until the child is eight years old. Men now claim about 24% of total parental leave taken. As of January 2016, three months of this paid parental leave is reserved for fathers. If untaken, the three months are deducted from the parents’ combined leave entitlement (Gender Equality in

Sweden, 2016). Sweden's publicly-funded day-care which starts when a child is one year old and is typically before parental leave ends, also enables working parents to resume work without the added emotional and financial stress of securing affordable and quality care for their newborn. The fees range from zero for low-income families to a maximum of SEK 1,382 (about £113) per month for affluent families. This means that no parent pays more than £113 per month per child. In addition, there is a cap of £32 per month for the third child and no fees for the fourth child. Childcare costs in Sweden are the lowest in the EU. This is a major contributing factor in helping both parents work and care compared to the contrasting picture in the UK for example, where in inner London, parents of children under the age of two are paying up to £175 per week for part-time childcare (under 25 hours) which results in many parents and mostly mothers, being locked out of work (Lucy Warwick-Ching, 2019).

As one of the countries at the top of the GEI, Sweden, with public level policies which aim to support fathers and mothers to work and care, and a widespread usage of FWAs, constitutes a national context conducive to exploring the role of FWAs in women's careers and their representation in senior management positions. Increasing understanding of the role of FWAs in women's careers within a specific national context could inform theory in the career and FWA fields and provide valuable lessons for policy and organizational practice as well as cultural attitudes which underpin both.

1.2. Defining Terms

Flexible work arrangements (FWAs): I use de Menezes and Kelliher's (2017, p.1053) definition which states that FWAs are "arrangements that allow employees to vary the amount, timing or location of their work and are designed to enable them to balance demands of their work and non-work lives more effectively which include remote working, flexibility over working hours and reduced hours (part-time)". The authors distinguish between formal and informal arrangements as follows:

Formal FWAs: These are arrangements which have been established through an organizational policy which normally involves a written request from employee to supervisor and often the Human Resource Department. It may also involve a contractual change as, for example, in the case of reducing work percentage (part-time).

Informal FWAs: These are arrangements which emerge through a discussion between employee and supervisor and do not involve formal requests or contractual changes.

While FWAs is an umbrella term encompassing several different types of arrangements, I examine the following three distinct types of FWAs available within ABC, the organizational setting of this study: reducing work percentage (part-time), remote working and adjusting office hours. These are defined below.

Reducing work percentage: This arrangement involves a contractual reduction of work hours and is therefore a formal arrangement. In Sweden, this is a legal entitlement for working parents who can reduce their hours by up to 25% and until their youngest child becomes 12 years old.

Remote working: Remote working allows flexibility in the location of work, for example working from home or in general outside the work premises. Many studies use the term teleworking to denote this type of flexibility. Participants in this study engaged with remote working by working from home on an *ad hoc* basis through an informal arrangement with their supervisors.

Adjusting office hours: This type of arrangement allows flexibility over schedules of work such as starting and finishing times. In this study this was an informal arrangement in which the women used to ramp up and down their hours in the office depending on their home demands and in coordination with their supervisors.

Both remote working and adjusting office hours were arranged with the participants' supervisor and resembled Hornung, Rousseau and Glaser's (2008) flexibility I-deals which are informal and individualised arrangements between employee and supervisor utilized on an *ad hoc* basis and initiated by the employee.

Flexible working strategies

These are strategies employed by the participants which may include one or a combination of FWAs, whether formal or informal in addition to shared parental leave – a Swedish policy.

Work-family, work-life or work-home balance

Work-family balance encompasses both positive and negative outcomes of the work and family interface and is a contested term with multiple definitions (Greenhaus and Allen, 2011). The term work-life balance was later introduced as a more gender-neutral construct to broaden the concept of work-family to include other life roles instead of focusing on home responsibilities typically associated with having young children. However, both terms are used interchangeably in the literature and even when work-life is used, it still refers to home responsibilities (Fleetwood, 2007). The terms work-home balance and work-non-work balance have also been used in studies, albeit less frequently. Throughout this research, I use the term work-family balance as my study focuses on women who utilize organizational policies, i.e. FWAs, to mainly manage work and family. “Work and family are the two roles in many people’s lives in which they have the greatest amount of involvement and with which they identify the most” (Greenhaus and Powell, 2017, p.3). I also use the term work-family interface to denote the management of the two domains.

I adopt Greenhaus and Allen’s (2011, p.174) definition of work-family balance which is “the extent to which an individual’s effectiveness and satisfaction in work and family roles are compatible with the individual’s life role priorities at a given point in time.” I believe that this definition captures the shifting nature of life role priorities which has not been directly addressed in work-family literature, as discussed in Chapter 2.

1.3. Overview of Contribution

Guided by Tomlinson *et al.*’s (2018) flexible and sustainable careers model, this study both confirms and extends the model by demonstrating that parental context is a key determinant to be included in women’s career sustainability and advancement, in addition to the influence of national context and organizational culture. This study also confirms that work intensification is an unintended outcome of FWAs (Kelliher and Anderson, 2010; Cañibano, 2019; Padavic, Ely and Reid, 2019) and extends current understanding of the construct by revealing its paradoxical co-existence with the perception of “balance”, thereby threatening career sustainability. Finally, this study, to the best of my knowledge, is the first to provide empirical evidence on the role of FWAs in women managers’ career experiences across all levels of an organization which enables an

examination of “work-life inequality” (Kossek and Lautsch, 2018, p.8). Secondly, it deepens understanding of how women managers engage with FWAs during different career and family stages (early career, motherhood and career and older children and career). The study demonstrates that while using FWAs the women were better able to maintain their careers after motherhood, and the public policy of parental leave was much more powerful in facilitating the participants’ career sustainability by fostering an egalitarian parental context and family-supportive behaviours of ABC’s supervisors.

1.4. Thesis outline

Within this first chapter I outlined the rationale for my research, contending that there is a need to further explore the role of FWAs in women managers’ career experiences as one avenue of helping to address the leaky pipeline phenomenon and to improve gender equality in senior management roles. I highlighted the dearth of studies exploring the relationship between FWAs and women’s career sustainability and advancement, and the ambivalent findings of a small number of studies which did so. I then explained my personal interest in researching the role of flexibility in women’s careers and presented the Swedish national context where this research was conducted. I subsequently defined the key terms which underpin the topic of this thesis: FWAs (formal and informal FWAs, reducing work percentage, remote working, adjusting office hours), flexible working strategies and work-family balance. Lastly, I provided a brief overview of the contribution of this thesis and ended with a chapter summary.

In Chapter 2, I present two main bodies of literature, namely FWAs and women’s careers. I then critically synthesize the literature pertaining to what is known about the role of FWAs in women’s careers. I then present the newer concepts of flexible and sustainable careers. After summarising the limitations of the work-family and women’s career literatures, in line with Moen and Sweet (2004), I argue that additional research is warranted to connect the two fields by moving beyond studying the work-family interface and careers independently, to flexible and sustainable careers across the different life stages. I then present the rationale for this thesis and the research questions.

Chapter 3 describes the constructionist ontology and interpretivist epistemology and the research strategy underpinning this research. I explain the rationale for conducting semi-structured interviews and describe the sample of 43 women managers who participated

in this study. I also provide an overview of the Swedish multinational organization (ABC) in which I conducted the research and describe the thematic approach I followed to analyse the data generated from the women's accounts.

In Chapter 4, I present the findings on how women managers from all levels of ABC's managerial pipeline engaged with flexible working strategies, shared parental leave and three types of FWAs: reduced work percentage, remote working and adjusting office hours. I report on how these strategies impacted on women's lived career experiences and describe women's flexible working patterns during three key stages related to before and after having children: graduating from university and early career; motherhood and career; and older children and career. I distinguish between the stages of transitioning to motherhood and having children older than 14, as the age of children can alter the extent of home demands. I discuss timing of utilization during the women's careers, circumstances and factors affecting utilization, career and motherhood values. I show that flexible working strategies, combined with support from relational actors, help retain mothers in their careers after childbirth. I then present the outcomes of all flexible working strategies on work and home management, including unintended consequences. I also report on any differences across organizational levels, illustrating that further career advancement was dependent on additional factors. I close the chapter with vignettes of five women who are all above 50, have been working with ABC for at least 10 years, are married and have at least two children but currently hold positions which span across all managerial levels to illustrate whether (non-)utilization of FWAs could explain the differences in their organizational level.

In Chapter 5, I discuss the findings of the study in relation to the extant literature which entails the different elements of sharing parental leave and the women's career experiences with utilizing three types of FWAs.

Finally, in Chapter 6, I discuss the three main contributions this study makes to the literature: confirming and extending Tomlinson *et al.*'s (2018) flexible and sustainable career determinants model; clearly demonstrating that work intensification is an unintended consequence of FWAs; and extending understanding of its paradoxical co-existence with "balance". This is the first study to the best of my knowledge, that provides empirical evidence on the role of FWAs in women managers' career experiences across

all levels of an organization which advances understanding of how women managers engage with FWAs during different career and family stages (early career, motherhood and career and older children and career) and demonstrates that FWAs do not explain career sustainability or advancement unless other factors are in place. The study demonstrates that while using FWAs the women were better able to maintain their careers after motherhood, the public policy of parental leave was much more powerful in facilitating the participants' career sustainability by fostering an egalitarian parental context and family-supportive behaviours of ABC's supervisors. I then discuss the implications of the thesis for work practice and policy, as well as the limitations of the research design, before concluding with directions for future research.

1.5. Chapter summary

In this introductory chapter I have presented the research rationale and the research questions guiding this thesis regarding the role of FWAs in women managers' career experiences. I also explained my personal experiences and interest in this topic. I then described the Swedish national context in which the study is situated and defined the key terms: FWAs (formal and informal FWAs, reducing work percentage, remote working, adjusting office hours), flexible working strategies and work-family balance. I then provided a brief overview of the contribution of this thesis and ended with an outline of the structure of the thesis. In the following chapter, I will review the literature concerning FWAs and women's careers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter I present two main bodies of literature, namely flexible working arrangements (FWAs) and women's careers. Subsequently, I synthesize the literature pertaining to what is known about the role of FWAs in women's careers.

Section 2.1. introduces the stream of literature on FWAs in terms of motivations or antecedents of adoption and consequences of utilization, at individual and organizational levels. Section 2.1.1 provides the evidence on the consequences of utilizing FWAs on the work-family interface and section 2.1.2 examines assumptions of existing studies regarding availability of FWAs versus utilization. Section 2.3 distinguishes between formal and informal FWAs. Sections 2.1.4 and 2.1.5 examine the inclusion of organizational and national contexts respectively in this stream of literature. Section 2.2 provides an introduction to women's careers. Sections 2.2.1 presents extant literature on women's career models and career decisions. Section 2.3. synthesises the literature on FWAs and women's career consequences. Sections 2.3.1 to 2.3.3 present the findings of extant literature on FWAs and career advancement, reduced work percentage and career advancement and bundles of FWAs and career advancement. Section 2.4 examines the developing literature on flexible and sustainable careers. Section 2.5 summarises the literature and presents the research question and sub-questions. Section 2.6 provides a summary of the chapter.

2.1. Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs)

Demographic, social and technological changes and the 24/7 business culture create increasing tensions for women and men attending to multiple life roles, such as pursuing a career and looking after dependants. Many organizations have responded to these tensions through the introduction of flexible work arrangements (FWAs) recognizing that such flexibility has advantages for both the individual and the organization and therefore addresses the dual agenda of benefitting both employee and employer (Rapoport *et al.*, 2002). Flexible working arrangements facilitate the work-family interface of women and men by reducing tensions arising from simultaneously managing demands from this interface (Allen *et al.*, 2013). Such demands and tensions have often been expressed as

work-family conflict since Greenhaus and Beutell's original work in 1985. At the same time FWAs are deemed to benefit organizations through attracting and retaining talent (Allen, Shore and Griffeth, 2003; Den Dulk et al., 2013), and lead to increased commitment and productivity (Lewis, 1997, 2010). More recently, other scholars have argued for a triple agenda which benefits employees and organizations and also contributes to social justice which includes "enhancing gender equity, social mobility and inclusiveness, enabling workers to fulfil care responsibilities and addressing the work-life balance needs of the vulnerable and low-skilled as well as those traditionally referred to as talent" (Lewis et al., 2016).

Over the last thirty years there has been a proliferation of research on FWAs which is an umbrella term encompassing the various formal and informal arrangements put together by organizations aiming to assist employees to manage their multiple life roles. FWAs include a variety of temporal and spatial arrangements, such as remote working, teleworking, staggered working hours, compressed working week, shift-work, fixed-term contract work, reduced percentage (part-time work) and job-sharing.

Existing literature has mostly focused on employee-level outcomes of FWAs while some studies examined factors affecting employee utilization. Other studies employed an organizational level of analysis regarding outcomes of FWAs such as the business case or antecedents for organizational offering of FWAs.

Research on organizational-level antecedents for offering of FWAs, as shown by a recent systematic literature review (Ollier-Malaterre and Foucreault, 2017), examined the influence of public policies and legal structures in various national contexts (e.g. den Dulk, Peters and Poutsma, 2012) while others examined the influence of national culture focusing mostly on cultural dimensions of Hofstede (1980) and Project Globe (House et al., 2004) such as individualism/collectivism and gender egalitarianism. Studies on organizational-level consequences examined employee commitment and retention (Allen, Shore and Griffeth, 2003), financial performance and productivity or the business case (Lewis, 1997; de Menezes and Kelliher, 2011) as mentioned above.

Research which addressed motivations of employee utilization mainly examined factors such as the extent of family-supportive behaviours of organizations (Thompson, Beauvais and Lyness, 1999), supervisors and colleagues (Dijkers et al., 2007). Studies on

employee-level consequences of FWAs, explored outcomes such as, employee satisfaction (De Menezes and Kelliher, 2017), work-family conflict (Anderson, Coffey and Byerly, 2002; Eby et al., 2005) or work-family balance or fit (Kelly, Moen and Tranby, 2011) and to a much lesser extent, career advancement (Kalysh, Kulik and Perera, 2016).

The bulk of literature on employee-level consequences focuses on the effects of FWAs on various constructs of the work-family interface as explained in section 2.1.1 below. Clearly both men and women are susceptible to tensions from their work and family domains. Despite the rhetoric on FWAs' being directed at both women and men, in practice, organizations offer such policies mainly to foster women's "balance" in fulfilling their family roles while simultaneously maintaining their careers. Given the gendered division of work and care (Lewis and Humbert, 2010), FWAs and especially part-time arrangements have been overwhelmingly utilized by women (Gatrell and Cooper, 2016; McDonald, Brown and Bradley, 2005; Smith and Gardner, 2007). I would argue that if FWAs help women reduce tensions from the competing demands of their work-family interface, then they may facilitate women's retention in the labour force and improve the leaky pipeline phenomenon.

Relatively few studies have explored whether FWAs contribute to women's career maintenance and further advancement and produced mixed results. Some studies have found no effect (e.g. D'Agostino, 2011), others showed negative effects (e.g. Gatrell, 2007; Tomlinson and Durbin, 2010) and some found positive effects but only within certain contexts and after a time lag (e.g. Kalysh, Kulik and Perera, 2016). Therefore, despite the abundance of research on the various outcomes of utilizing FWAs (as described above), their efficacy in contributing to women's career maintenance and further advancement via alleviating tensions in their work-family interface, remains in question. This is of particular interest in this study.

In addition to reviewing the literature on the consequences of utilization on employee-level level and specifically on women managers' career experiences, research on contextual factors encouraging or discouraging utilization is also presented.

Sections 2.1.1 to 2.1.5, which follow, examine how FWAs have been studied so far. I begin with presenting the current state of the literature regarding consequences of FWAs on the work-family interface.

2.1.1. FWAs and the Work-Family Interface

The literature shows that individuals use FWAs to improve their work-family interface (Allen, 2013). However, the literature lacks clarity in the way the work-family interface is described as it has produced a multitude of often overlapping negative and positive constructs. Work-family conflict (Greenhaus and Allen, 2011; Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Moen, Kelly and Huang, 2008) constitutes the most frequently studied construct in the work-family field (Kelly et al., 2008). While many studies have focused on the strains of this interface, the benefits of combining work and family were also examined using several related concepts such as work-family enrichment (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006) work-family facilitation (Frone, 2003) and positive spillover (Hanson, Hammer and Colton, 2006). Work-family balance, a term which ostensibly encompasses both positive and negative outcomes of the work-family interface, has increasingly become a focus of the work-family discourse (Greenhaus and Allen, 2011). Despite being frequently used, balance lacks a common definition. Frone (2003) defined it as the absence of conflict between work and family roles. Greenhaus and Allen (2011, p.174) defined it as “an overall appraisal of the extent to which individuals’ effectiveness and satisfaction in work and family roles are consistent with their life values at a given point in time.” Yet even in defining it as such, Greenhaus and Allen (2011) have critiqued the work-family balance concept as it seems to invoke an image of equal involvement in work and family in order to achieve it. Others have suggested the term work-life integration (Rapoport et al., 2002) with a continuum from integration to segmentation, referring to the way individuals manage their work and family or broader life roles. Furthermore, work-family balance ignores both the subjective nature of employees’ involvement with work and family roles, and the contextual influence of cultural, structural and organizational contexts, which can facilitate or constrain this state of balance (Lewis, Gambles and Rapoport, 2007). These include work constraints such as continuous career structures, the ideal worker norm, and societal norms and attitudes regarding gender roles at home. Subsequently, work-life balance was introduced as a more gender-neutral construct to broaden the concept of

work-family balance which focused on women and especially those with young children. Nevertheless, work-life balance remains a contested term with “life” often referring only to the narrow area of home responsibilities (Fleetwood, 2007). Kelliher, Richardson and Boiarintseva (2019) also critique the term of work-life balance for ignoring other aspects of life especially those of non-parents and failing to consider changes in employment relationships focusing on traditional working arrangements.

Both work-family balance and work-life balance take for granted that the responsibility to balance rests with the individual, ignoring the need for organizational or societal and structural changes (Lewis, Gambles and Rapoport, 2007) and neglecting the temporal element of work and family priorities which may change according to career and family stage (Moen and Sweet, 2004; Tomlinson et al., 2018). Moen (2011) proposed the term life course fit, to capture the more dynamic nature of the work-family interface, which incorporates employees’ subjective evaluations of having sufficient resources to meet the shifting demands of their work and broader life roles as those change through their life stages within contexts such as community, organization, occupation, family and gender.

The several and overlapping constructs of the work-family interface employed in studies on the consequences of FWAs on this interface, create complexity in drawing conclusions as to their efficacy in facilitating it. For example, some studies have found that utilization of FWAs reduced work-family conflict. In a quantitative study which examined both antecedents influencing the use of FWAs and consequences for employees, Smith and Gardner (2007) demonstrated that utilization was related to reduced work-life conflict and increased commitment both of which were related to turnover intentions. Other studies found no effect (e.g. Beauregard and Henry, 2009). Lastly, some studies found that utilization of FWAs did not decrease work-family conflict (Hammer et al., 2005) and others that they increased work-family conflict due to work-intensification, an unintended consequence of FWAs (Kelliher and Anderson, 2010; Cañibano, 2019; Padavic, Ely and Reid, 2019).

De Menezes and Kelliher (2017) found that informal FWAs i.e. those agreed with direct supervisors, rather than formal FWAs which involved a contractual change, were more likely to result in work intensification as they were perceived by employees as favours or concessions. Kelliher and Anderson (2010) drew on social exchange theory (Emerson,

1976) to study the process through which work intensification arises; they found that utilizing FWAs may impose, or enable work intensification, or trigger reciprocity where employees exert additional effort in return for utilizing FWAs. Imposed work intensification occurs when employees switch to reduced-load, but their workload remains the same. Enabled work intensification occurs when employees engage with remote working in order to avoid interruptions and work more effectively. Cañibano (2019, p.455) built on the notion of reciprocity, using psychological contract theory to explain the interplay of the organizational offering of FWAs as “inducements” or rewards and employees reciprocating with extended hours and effort as “contributions”. Padavic, Ely and Reid (2019) used systems-psychodynamic theory (Menzies, 1960; Petriglieri and Petriglieri, 2015) to argue that organizations, as a social defence, attempt to ‘fix’ employees’ work-family conflict which can cause stress and burnout by offering FWAs. However, utilization of FWAs can lead to work intensification, which may also cause stress and burnout - the problem they were trying to ‘fix’.

As shown by the studies above, the disparate results increase the complexity of advancing the field.

2.1.2. FWAs: Availability or Usage

Another issue of existing studies which renders comparison of results difficult, is that in analysing the effects of FWAs on the individual level, many studies examined the availability of FWAs within organizations (e.g. Shockley and Allen, 2007) while others examined actual utilization (e.g. Hill, Ferris and Mårtinson, 2003). Availability of FWAs does not imply utilization nor does it capture the complex processes shaping employees’ decisions to utilize them (Cornelius and Skinner, 2008; Hobson, 2014). Evidence emerging from literature and practice has shown that the gap between availability of FWAs and employee utilization still remains, and uptake of FWAs is low in many European countries (Hobson and Fahlén, 2009a; Kozjek, Tomazevic and Stare, 2014; Eurofound, 2017). Therefore, examining the number and availability of policies offered at the organizational level as a proxy for utilization in predicting/exploring work-family outcomes of FWAs, can produce different findings. For example, the existence of FWAs within an organization may not translate into utilization unless employees perceive that an organizational culture is supportive (Thompson, Beauvais and Lyness, 1999). A

supportive organizational culture encompasses the attitudes of the organization, the supervisor(s) and colleagues, all of which shape employees' decisions to opt for FWAs (Thompson, Beauvais and Lyness, 1999; Dikkers et al., 2007; Sweet, Pitt-Catsoupes and Boone James, 2016). Otherwise, employees may refrain from utilization due to fear of career stigma. The organizational context and the extent to which it has been included into the FWAs literature will be further discussed in section 2.1.4.

2.1.3. FWAs: Formal or Informal

As defined in section 1.2, formal FWAs are contractual agreements between employees and the organization, stipulating the type of FWAs to be used, the frequency and duration. Informal FWAs can be individually tailored arrangements which are informally agreed between employee and supervisor and utilized on a more *ad hoc* basis. Another issue with existing literature is that many studies do not distinguish between formal and informal FWAs (de Menezes and Kelliher, 2011) even though they have been shown to produce different outcomes while much of the existing literature focuses on formal FWAs, despite evidence that the use of informal FWAs is widespread (de Menezes and Kelliher, 2017).

2.1.4. FWAs and the Organizational Context

In examining the availability of FWAs rather than utilization, much of the literature ignores the organizational context. Organizational cultures and attitudes of supervisors (Thompson, Beauvais and Lyness, 1999; Sweet, Pitt-Catsoupes and Boone James, 2015) can shape employees' decisions to utilize FWAs. If an organization values long-hours and face-time, employees would be reluctant to use FWAs for fear of career stigma, even if the organization offers such arrangements. A seminal study by Thompson, Beauvais and Lyness (1999) examined the influence of work-family culture on the utilization of FWAs and outcomes at the employee level. The authors developed a measure of work-family organizational culture based on three dimensions: supervisor support of work-family culture, negative career impact of using FWAs and organizational expectations regarding face-time, i.e. long hours at work and other similar concepts which may conflict with family roles. Their findings indicated that employee perceptions of family-supportive organizational culture were related to employee commitment, lower intention to leave the organization, and less work-family conflict, notwithstanding the availability of work-family policies. Dikkers et al. (2007, p.157) extended the work-family culture

model of Thompson et al. (1999) to include supervisor and colleagues' support for using FWAs and reclassified all dimensions into two categories: employee perceptions of "support" for FWAs by the organization, supervisor(s) and colleagues and "hindrance" which refers to employee perceptions of organizational expectations of time investment and negative career impact impeding the decision to utilize FWAs. They found that perceived "support" was a more crucial dimension than perceived "hindrance".

Supportive organizational cultures can alleviate negative career impact, as shown by Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002). Briscoe and Kellogg (2011) conducted a longitudinal study in a large US-based law firm to determine the actual career impact of using FWAs and found that initial assignment to a powerful supervisor protected users of FWAs from negative performance judgements despite the fact that utilization of FWAs took place in later years. McDonald and Bradley (2007) affirmed the importance of a supportive organizational culture in enabling employees to utilize FWAs and added two new dimensions of work-family culture which may influence the gap between provision of FWAs and their utilization, namely "gendered perceptions of policy use" and "co-worker support" (McDonald and Bradley, 2007, p.613). If FWAs within an organization, are perceived to be addressing women's care-giving needs, then men influenced by their socially prescribed gender roles as breadwinners, will not be inclined to utilize them even if they would benefit. Furthermore, if co-workers are unsupportive of utilizing FWAs, this can also discourage others from doing so.

Other studies, for example Pas et al. (2011), found that a supportive work-family culture positively affected the motivation of female doctors in the Netherlands. One important finding of this study is that neither motherhood nor the age of the youngest child impacted on career motivation. In a similar vein, Walsh (2012) found that a law firm's work-family culture constituted the most significant factor influencing career aspirations and perceptions of opportunities for promotion of female lawyers. Motherhood and their need for FWAs did not have a negative impact on the career aspirations of female lawyers, notwithstanding their perception of reduced opportunities. The women's perceptions of reduced opportunities were a result of the culture of their organization and not their preferences. Tomlinson (2006) argues that women's career aspirations sometimes do not

materialize as they make constrained choices based on their employment status, care networks, national policies and work-family needs.

2.1.5. FWAs and National Context

Another limitation of the work-family scholarship is that it has often assumed that work-family decisions are private problems of individuals (Ollier-Malaterre, 2017) with most studies which focused on the individual level of analysis ignoring the context in which they took place (De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans, 2018; Tomlinson et al., 2018).

Including the national context in the work-family and careers literature has been advocated by previous studies calling for future research to explore FWAs and their role in work-family interface (Lewis, Gambles and Rapoport, 2007; Powell, Francesco and Ling, 2009; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013) and career (Moen and Sweet, 2004; Tomlinson et al., 2015) in a more holistic manner. These studies contend that government policies to support working parents influence women and men's beliefs about their roles (in terms of who works and who cares), their consequent career decisions and experiences, and whether their careers are sustainable during different life stages.

Thus, studies on the effects of FWAs could usefully assess whether results might be linked to the country in which the data were collected. To date, the national context and the way it shapes employees' work-family experiences and careers has been under-researched in the work-family literature (Greenhaus and Powell, 2017; Ollier-Malaterre, 2017). Ollier-Malaterre and Foucreault (2017) conducted a systematic review of conceptual and empirical work on the national-level cultural and structural factors affecting the work-family interface at the individual level and at the organizational level and found that studies have only just begun to examine national level factors and have produced disparate results. For example, family leaves were associated with lower work-family conflict in nine European countries and the US (Ruppanner, 2013), while studies using European Union data suggest that public policies have either no effect or a negligible effect on alleviating work-family conflict (Crompton and Lyonette, 2006; Strandh and Nordenmark, 2006; Van Der Lippe, Jager and Kops, 2006; Steiber, 2009). Ollier-Malaterre and Foucreault (2017) argue that these contrasting findings are due to the multi-disciplinary and piecemeal approach of studies focusing on either national cultures or structures and failing to integrate both. For example, a national culture may

have egalitarian gender role ideologies regarding the division of work and care but if national structures such as parental leaves and day-care provisions to support men and women to work and care are not in place, gender equity is not achieved. The interaction of culture and structures affects “social practices” (ibid., p.114) on work and family, defined by the authors as the way employees experience their work-family interface and the decisions they make regarding this interface, such as the involvement of work and care within the family, and whose career is prioritised.

The interaction of national culture and structures also affects organizations in several ways, such as the adoption of FWAs, their work-family culture, and supervisor and co-worker attitudes on the work-family interface. For example in many countries, such as the US and the UK, utilization of FWAs or parental leaves is predominantly a female phenomenon, one reason being the lack of financial support for paternity leaves compared to Nordic countries (Gatrell and Cooper, 2016) and as women still bear the brunt of care and household responsibilities (Lewis and Humbert, 2010). Therefore, supervisor attitudes are underpinned by gendered assumptions regarding the users of these policies (Lewis, 1997), which discourages men from utilizing them. However, if supervisors are socialised into gender egalitarian norms regarding the division of work and care, they can exert a positive influence on male employees to utilize FWAs. Otherwise, men’s lack of involvement with care and home roles becomes an issue for men and women in that it further reinforces gender inequalities at work and home.

In contrast, studies from Scandinavian countries show that fathers using parental leaves and FWAs leads to a more equal division of care and home roles between mothers and fathers facilitating their work-family interface (Fernandez-Mateo and Kaplan, 2018) in addition to positive outcomes on children’s development (Almqvist and Duvander, 2014). Therefore, research needs to delve deeper into the effects of specific national contexts with regard to their culture and structures, the organizational adoption of FWAs, their utilization by employees and the career experiences of the men and women who use them.

I now turn to the literature on women’s careers and the issue of combining career and caregiving responsibilities at home.

2.2. Women's Careers

Gender inequality in senior management positions and the decreasing representation of women as positions become more senior are pervasive. Despite overcoming overt discrimination which imposed entry barriers to the workplace and achieving an ever-increasing presence in the workforce and in higher education, women came across new barriers referred to as “second-order discrimination”, defined as the barriers women face after accessing the workplace (Sturm 2001 in Bailyn, 2011, p.99). Second-order discrimination comprises a covert and complex type of bias which may be without conscious intent and underlies assumptions and beliefs in societies and organizations which advantage men and disadvantage women (Bailyn, 2011; Patton, 2013). Among these hidden obstacles are: gendered career structures which fit men's working lives; lack of female role models which influences women's perceptions of the possibility to succeed in senior positions while having care responsibilities (Gibson and Lawrence, 2010); beliefs about leadership skills being incompatible with women's caring nature; and, exclusion of women from informal networks which typically consist of men and may influence development and next promotions (Ibarra, Ely and Kolb, 2013).

Another issue which pertains to women and not men, is that women enter the workforce seeking gender equity through paid work and career attainments, while also retaining the responsibility for doing the unpaid care work at home. This dual responsibility creates pressures for mothers, yet society and organizations do not question this gendered life course and continue to assume that unpaid care work is a private problem of mothers more than fathers (Moen, 2011). Therefore, mothers who pursue a career are faced with a time squeeze and pressure (Törnquist Agosti, Bringsén and Andersson, 2017) to a larger extent than fathers due to their second shift of unpaid work at home and may exit or disrupt their careers owing to family responsibilities. This gendered life course is incompatible with the notion of the traditional career which consists of a series of work experiences in an upwardly and continuous path within a single organization. Career advancement in traditional careers comes with expectations of ideal worker behaviours (Acker, 1990, 1998) involving long hours and complete devotion to work, unencumbered by responsibilities outside work. Many feminists and gender theorists argued that this notion of career is problematic for women. Nevertheless, beliefs such as the career mystique, which assumes that “working hard and putting in long hours continuously

throughout adulthood is the path to occupational success, personal fulfilment, and a secure retirement” (Moen, 2005, p.189), and the ideal worker norm of continuous and complete availability to paid work (Acker, 1990; Bailyn, 2006), are pervasive (Hall et al., 2012; Moen, 2011; Moen and Roehling, 2005). Such entrenched beliefs which undergird the male breadwinner/female homemaker career model marginalise women who seek career development through paid work and career attainments while also retaining the responsibility for doing the unpaid care work at home.

In addition to the traditional and continuous career model within a single organization, other career patterns have emerged to reflect the fast-changing global business environment, substantial changes in technology, diversity of family structures and intensification of work and home demands on women and men. The boundaryless career (Defillippi and Arthur, 1994) and the protean career (Hall, 2004) depict this changing nature of careers and are characterised by short-term employment relationships, inter-organizational mobility and FWAs shaped by employees’ attempts to respond to demands from their personal circumstances (De Hauw and Greenhaus, 2014; Kossek, Baltes and Matthews, 2011; Valcour, Bailyn and Quijada, 2007). These models are based on the notion that rather than being committed to a single organization for most of their lives, employees pursue alternative career paths within their organization, move to other organizations, or become self-employed for career development and more independence in managing their work and life outside work according to their values and goals (Greenhaus and Kossek, 2014; Powell et al., 2019). However, these models place emphasis on individuals to self-craft their careers and do not explicitly acknowledge how context, i.e. national, structural, and organizational environments, influence one’s agency for career formation and mobility over the life course (Tomlinson et al., 2018). Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) argue that for women who often face career interruptions, due to their caregiving responsibilities, and the discriminatory attitudes of employers, the notion of a boundaryless career i.e. interorganizational mobility is unsatisfactory. Instead they proposed the kaleidoscope career model (KCM) to explain women’s career development and the relational context in which they make career decisions. The KCM will be discussed in the following section along with other women’s career models which highlight the relational aspect of their career decisions.

2.2.1. Women's Career Models

In parallel to contemporary career models described above, women's career models emerged to reflect women's career shifting patterns in trying to balance career, self and others.

Powell and Mainiero (1992) conducted a review of early theories on women's career development and career success definitions which found that they failed to account for the influence of their life outside work. To address this, they proposed a conceptual framework which captures this influence (family and relationships outside work) and their seeking of balance between these two domains in their career decisions. Moreover, they contended that individual, organization and societal factors may impose constraints on women's career decisions. Their framework depicts women's shifting priorities between career and outside work over time, using the simile of crosscurrents in the rivers of time. At any point in time, women may place more emphasis on career success at work or on family and relationships outside work or may try to achieve balance between both. The authors described women's concerns with family and relationships as *relationship success* outside work and women's concerns with career achievements at work as *career success*. They argue that women place more emphasis on how "they are feeling about their careers" (p.220) which constitutes subjective criteria as opposed to what their career "looks like" (p.220) i.e. management level, salary and promotions which comprise objective criteria. In trying to balance work and life outside work, women seek satisfaction with success in both domains (O'Leary, 1997; Powell and Mainiero, 1992).

The kaleidoscope career model (KCM) developed by Mainiero and Sullivan (2005), is another women's career development model which depicts women's relational careers and shifting patterns and priorities. The authors suggest that it's not that women opt-out of their careers, it's just that they place a different level of importance on authenticity, balance and challenge (the three parameters proposed by the model) depending on their life circumstances at a particular point in time. Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) posit that typically women during early career seek challenge, while in mid-career they seek balance to manage career and family responsibilities. In late career women, most likely unencumbered by balance issues, seek authenticity. However, this model, just as with the one by Powell and Mainiero (1992) discussed above, assumes agency of women to

change their focus during their careers according to how their needs for balance shift as they go through life (Fernando and Cohen, 2013).

Similar to the KCM, O'Neil and Bilimoria (2005) posit that women adopt a relational approach to their career development and created a model with three age-linked career stages, assuming that women within a career stage share similar interests and that these change as they move to another career stage. Phase one comprised women of ages 24-35 ('idealistic achievement'); phase two was the 'endurance phase' with an age range of 36-45; and phase three was the 'reinvention phase' with women of ages 46-60. The authors found that there was a significant difference in the relational context between the three career phases. Women in phase two had the highest relational context: their growth and development were organised and developed in the context of important relationships. This means that women in a career stage likely to include middle to senior management levels consider significant relationships such as spouse and dependents when making career decisions. This finding was reinforced in their later study (O'Neil, Hopkins and Bilimoria, 2008), where they argue that for women and especially the ones in mid-career, career success and satisfaction are directly connected with broader life issues. Critics of this model suggest that the age-linked career stages may not be universally applicable (Chen, Doherty and Vinnicombe, 2012). Furthermore, the claim by this model that women's interests change significantly as they move from one career stage to another may not apply across cultural contexts (Fernando and Cohen, 2013).

In Sullivan and Mainiero's (2007) study on whether gender differences affect the enactment of careers, they defined two career patterns: alpha and beta. The male participants in this qualitative study followed a more linear career path where issues of challenge and advancement came first, followed by authenticity and then balance (alpha career pattern or C-A-B). For women, as with men, issues of challenge and advancement dominated early career, while unlike men, issues of balancing work and family took over at the end of early career and during mid-career (beta career pattern). "The beta career pattern, challenge in early career, balance in mid-career and authenticity in later career (C-B-A), was born from the adjustments and compromises these women made while integrating their relationships with their careers" (Sullivan and Mainiero, 2007, p.249).

A review of literature on women's careers by O'Neil, Hopkins and Bilimoria (2008) and a second one a few years later (2013) found that patterns arising from research and paradoxes due to the mismatch between research outcomes and the way women's careers are enacted in organizations, were pervasive. The first paradox is that while academic research has shown that women's careers and broader lives are entwined, organizational realities and career paths assume a separation of work and broader life. A second paradox is that, despite the centrality of career and family in women's lives and calls for organizations to facilitate work-family balance through FWAs, their utilization and efficacy is debatable. A third paradox is that even though women's careers exhibit a wide range of forms, organizations still seem to reward continuous and hierarchical career paths which are typically male constructions of work and career success. The authors' second review in 2013, found that, irrespective of career stage, women strive to balance work and broader life contexts.

The women's career development models presented above, show that the impact of family responsibilities on women's career decisions cannot be ignored and may lead to compromised career "choices" as women strive to balance the two domains.

Women's career decisions after childbirth whether they utilize FWAs, exit their careers or switch to more junior roles are often presented as a personal "choice"; however, this argument ignores contextual factors such as national culture and structures and organizational cultures and career structures each of which can constrain real choice (Broadbridge, 2010). Choice is a term which assumes agency in deciding according to one's preferences. Attributing decisions to switch to part-time work or exit a career to accommodate simultaneous demands from career and family to personal "choice", ignores contextual factors which constrain the choices women would have made if they had the agency freedom to choose (Hobson, 2011). Women make "choices" based on their employment status, care networks, national policies and culture and work-family needs (Anderson, Vinnicombe and Singh, 2010; Tomlinson, 2006). Furthermore, presenting a career decision which may ultimately lead to compromising further career advancement as "choice" not only obscures the obstacles and constraints which bounded a women's decision to change her working pattern but also removes responsibility from

organizations and societies to implement policies which support gender equality in work and care.

Placing the bulk of responsibility on the individual was the topic of a recent public debate sparked by Sheryl Sandberg's message to women, during her *Lean In*, Ted Talk and subsequent book (Sandberg 2013). Sandberg argued that it was up to the women themselves to succeed if they tried hard enough. This essentially blames the women for making career compromises and silences the need for systemic change. Arnold and Loughlin (2017: p.105) argue that the conversation should be about how to increase women's representation in corporate leadership roles as opposed to talking about changing women so they can get there. Contrary to Sandberg's suggestion, it is not that women do not lean in to get to senior roles, rather it is the organizational cultures which keep women out by valuing long hours thereby suggesting that having career and spending time with family is an either/or proposition (Rattan et al., 2018).

The previous sections, 2.1 and 2.2, reviewed extant literature on FWAs and women's careers respectively. The following section examines the intersection of these two main bodies of literature in order to synthesise the evidence on the role of FWAs on women's careers.

2.3. FWAs and Women's Careers

As shown in section 2.1.1, the majority of studies on outcomes of FWAs on the individual level have focused on work-family balance or work-family conflict. Relatively few studies so far have also evaluated the effect of FWAs on career-related consequences (e.g. McDonald et al., 2005; Straub, 2007; Halrynjo and Lyng, 2009; Brown, 2010; Tomlinson and Durbin, 2010; D'Agostino, 2011). Kalysh, Kulik and Perera (2016) posit that evidence linking FWAs to women's career advancement is not only scant but also contradictory. These disparate research findings are now discussed in section 2.3.1, below. Studies focusing on career consequences for men were also included, with studies set in the West (Europe, north America and Australia).

2.3.1. Career Advancement or Career Stalling?

Some studies which examined actual utilization of FWAs, showed a positive association with women's career advancement. For example, Konrad and Yang (2012) conducted a

quantitative study on the utilization of seven types of FWAs across a variety of organizations in Canada and examined the relationship with promotions over two years. They found that use of FWAs was positively related to further promotions and argued that utilization reduced employees' strain in managing their work and non-work roles and therefore led to better performance. They posit that consistently high performance would eventually outweigh initial negative career stigma regarding job commitment (Konrad and Yang, 2012). Dikkers, van Engen and Vinkenbunrg (2010) examined the link between ambition and utilization of FWAs, and between FWAs and career outcomes in the Netherlands. They found that ambitious parents, through utilizing FWAs other than part-time work or other reduced-hours contracts, were able to combine career and home responsibilities. Their flexible schedules (e.g. teleworking, flexible hours, compressed working weeks), allowed them to invest more hours in their work roles while caring for their dependants at the same time, which, as in Konrad and Yang (2012), increased their performance.

Two other studies examined successful implementation of FWAs albeit specifically offered to valued employees. A distinctive study by Hill *et al.* (2004) examined the effects of 'new-concept' part-time work of working mothers on career progression and work-life balance, and found no negative perceptions or impact on career opportunities. However, contrary to most part-time employment positions, this 'new-concept' part-time work entailed reduced hours for high-status, career oriented, professional mothers, working for IBM, receiving pro-rated salaries and benefits. This study was a survey of a single company's (IBM) already established professional female employees who were mothers of pre-school children and may not be generalizable to professional or managerial women who are new to other large companies and have not yet proven themselves. Expanding on successful FWAs and their characteristics, Kossek and Lee (2008) conducted a case study investigating both employer and employee views on the implementation of a reduced-load work arrangement to retain top talent. They found that successful arrangements had the following characteristics: "Targeted high talent individuals with a track record; were redesigned, monitored and fine-tuned over time; and followed principles of communication, coordination and challenge management". The authors posit that formal FWAs are often ineffective as they rearrange how work is done and do not reduce the workload (Kossek *et al.*, 2006 in Kossek and Lee, 2008, p.50). Both studies (*i.e.* Hill *et*

al., 2004; Kossek and Lee, 2008) focused on already established talented individuals whose retention was very important for their organizations (Kossek *et al.*, 2016; Rousseau, Tomprou and Simosi, 2016). I argue that this positive organizational attitude in granting informal and tailored FWAs which led to positive outcomes for these individuals may not apply to employees in more junior levels or those who are new-hires. This also raises social justice questions, i.e. whether FWAs are accessible to all employees irrespective of organizational status (Kossek and Lautsch, 2018). Therefore, more studies are needed to determine whether FWAs are truly accessible to all employees and are not reserved for ‘talent’.

D’Agostino and Levine (2010) and D’Agostino (2011) reported no significant effect of utilizing informal FWAs on women’s attainment of executive positions within government organizations in the US. Furthermore, flexible working schedules were preferred to formal policies such as reducing work percentage as the latter was perceived to be career-stigmatizing and therefore was not utilized. Those authors argue that formal flexibility policies will not succeed unless organizational and societal gender barriers are considered. This is in line with the limitation of the literature on FWAs and work-family research as discussed above, i.e. the fact that most studies have failed to address contextual factors such as national culture and structures (Ollier-Malaterre *et al.*, 2013). It also points to different outcomes of formal and informal FWAs (discussed in section 2.1.3) and as shown by Hill *et al.* (2004) and Kossek and Lee (2008) above.

A study of Irish senior managers and their experiences with work-family balance by Drew and Murtagh (2005), revealed that both women and men perceived that FWAs were not open to senior position holders and that the existence of such policies within the organization does not translate to utilization or acceptance by the members of the organization. The prevalent factor preventing utilization of these policies was the long-hours culture that discouraged supervisors from granting requests for flexibility despite recognizing the importance of work-family balance.

Other studies found that FWAs resulted in hindering further career advancement as shown in the following section.

2.3.2. Reduced Work Percentage (Part-time)

Negative career consequences, in terms of reduced opportunities for further advancement following utilization of FWAs, have been associated with reduced work-percentage (part-time). For example, McDonald *et al.* (2005) conducted a qualitative study within an Australian university on the perceived efficacy of FWAs and found that certain types of FWAs, such as flexible working schedules and remote working, were reported to contribute positively to a group of academic and professional non-academic women's work-family balance and productivity. However, the participants perceived that other types of FWAs, such as reduced percentage work or job sharing, were career-limiting and that in order to be promoted they would have to switch to full-time status.

The adverse career impact of part-time work as compared to other types of FWAs was confirmed by several other studies. Gatrell (2007), through investigating career mothers' experiences with fractional working, posits that career women who opt for fractional working post maternity leave, do so at a great personal cost, i.e. they forego further promotion and, in some cases, accept a demotion in order to switch to less than full-time status. She argues that it is not the fractional working *per se* which limits these women's career opportunities, but the fact that employers associate opting for fractional working due to having children, as reduced work commitment. Tomlinson and Durbin (2010), when examining female part-time managers' career trajectories, also found that their careers stalled after switching to a part-time arrangement. The participants had full-time managerial positions prior to opting for part-time work. The majority of these part-time managers perceived a lack of promotion opportunities and mobility within their organization, despite working longer than their contracted hours. Lyonette and Crompton (2008) found evidence that women's care and home responsibilities hindered their career progression within accounting firms and that part-time work and/or remote working had negative career consequences in terms of status and earnings for the women who utilized them.

Other studies also found that women managers perceived that promotion "eligibility" required full-time work (Tomlinson and Durbin, 2010) and that managerial attributions of commitment were often conflated with face-time (Leslie *et al.*, 2012).

Stone and Hernandez (2013) interviewed women who opted out of their careers and found that the use of flexible working strategies (mostly part-time or parental leaves) resulted in career penalties for the women. It is noteworthy that the women, instead of perceiving their stigmatization as unfair, accepted it as justifiable as they ascribed to professional time norms.

Two other studies of mothers and fathers within organizations operating in the SET sector, which is highly masculinised, highlighted the career penalties associated with switching to part-time and the gendered use of FWAs. In Lewis and Humbert (2010), a study of mothers and fathers working for organizations in the SET sector in France, it was the mothers who reduced their work percentage in order to work four days per week in line with school hours so that they could be with the children when they were home from school. The women who did so, became more efficient at work in order to cover their workload, which mostly remained unchanged, in four instead of five days and also worked in the evening. Nevertheless, due to their reduced face-time, they were perceived as less committed even if they successfully carried out their work responsibilities. Switching to part-time work hindered the opportunities available to them for further career advancement. In contrast, fathers in the study rarely asked to reduce their work percentage expressing that “it is not in the culture (in France)” for men to do so (p. 248). Herman and Lewis (2012) compared how scientists, mothers and fathers, sustained their careers within organizations in the highly masculinised SET sector, in three national contexts. They defined career sustainability as staying in one’s career and also progressing. They found that while prior to motherhood women engaged in ideal worker behaviours, being the norm within the SET sector (Faulkner, 2013), most women felt that such long hours and full-time working patterns were no longer sustainable after childbirth. Many began to utilize FWAs and specifically reduced their work percentage which translated to forfeiting further career advancement, something the women accepted as normal. The authors ascribed the women’s acceptance of the career-limiting nature of part-time work to the influence of the national context. In this case, national context and socially prescribed gender roles also prevented the fathers from reducing their work percentage. Lewis and Smithson (2001) also posit that working parents’ expectations of national and organizational support to work and care is underpinned by social values and gender roles in the particular national context.

National context in terms of support for working mothers and cultural norms of motherhood roles and responsibilities are central to new mothers' career decisions and perceptions of the likelihood of managing both career and family. Hobson, (2014) argues that the extent to which fathers take advantage of work-family policies and are involved with unpaid work at home is impacted by attitudes and norms regarding gender equality prevailing in each country. For example in welfare states such as Sweden and Finland, 80% of parents believe that women should not have to compromise or give up their career while in more central and eastern European countries, 45% and 67% of parents respectively, believe that it is the women who would have to assume the primary care giving role in a household and may therefore have to reduce their working hours to look after the family (Hobson and Fahlén, 2009a). For example, Sweden, classified as a gender-egalitarian welfare state (Hofstede, 1980), introduced the policy of shared parental leave which, as previously discussed (in section 1.1.2), includes reserved paid leave for each parent which is lost if untaken. A study by Duvander, Haas and Thalberg, (2017) showed that the reserved months motivated Swedish fathers to take advantage of the parental leave. Fathers perceived that this also contributed to their wives' return to work full-time as opposed to switching to part-time work, a coping strategy often employed by women to manage career and caregiving responsibilities. However, even in an egalitarian country such as Sweden it is mostly fathers of high educational attainment and middle to high income who do so (Sundström and Duvander, 2002; Ma, Andersson, Duvander and Evertsson, 2018.) exposing inequalities across different types of workers and social classes.

The above studies have shown that despite organizational discourses on supporting utilization of FWAs and valuing work-family balance, career and reward structures revolve around the male model of ideal worker who is constantly available for work (Acker 1990). Socially prescribed gendered roles for work and care leave the gendered nature of organizations unchanged. Therefore, in gendered organizations when mothers utilize FWAs and more specifically reduce their work percentage to manage demands from work and family, they violate the male model of the ideal worker which often leads to career penalties (Herman and Lewis, 2012) and perpetuates gender inequality in the workplace (Lewis and Humbert, 2010). Women who follow Schwartz's (1989) highly debated "mommy tracks", are being enabled by their organizations to work flexibly and

seek “balance” in their work-family interface, while at the same time, they come up against barriers to advancing to senior management positions as a result of exercising this “choice”.

Bourdeau, Ollier-Malaterre and Houlfort (2019, p.4) assert that “not all work-life policies are created equal” and that studying bundles of FWAs assuming that they have the same career consequences, has produced diverse findings as now shown in the next section.

2.3.3. Examining Bundles of FWAs

Research which explored career outcomes of bundles of FWAs produced mixed results. For example, Straub (2007), in a cross-national quantitative study, explored FWAs and other work-family balance related practices such as leaves (flexible hours, remote working, paid sabbaticals, job protected maternity leave arrangements above the statutory minimum, and pay for maternity leave above the statutory minimum), to determine whether they enhance women’s career advancement to senior management positions. She found that only additional maternity leave payments were positively related to the women’s representation in senior management positions. Straub’s (2007) study did not examine organizational cultures and whether utilization of FWAs and other work-family balance practices were encouraged, nor did it examine how many women utilized these practices and for how long. It may well be that these practices had not been taken up if they were perceived to be incompatible with organizational cultures. Dreher (2003) found that the number of FWAs offered by 72 organizations was positively associated with the percentage of women in senior management positions in these organizations after a time-lag of five years. Kalysh, Kulik and Perera (2016) in their quantitative study of 675 organizations in Australia using data collected from 2002 to 2014, hypothesised that the number of FWAs offered by organizations would be positively associated with the proportion of women in management in subsequent years. They found an overall positive effect but only after eight years and in organizations where the women constituted at least 43% of employees. They also found that leave arrangements were more strongly related to the number of women in senior management but only when women constituted 51% or more of the workforce. It follows that, in male-dominated organizations, the effects of FWAs and specifically leave arrangements, flexible hours, remote working and on-site facilities, e.g. day-care provision, are likely to be less effective. This may partly be due

to the presence of gender stereotypes in such organizations, regarding women as being more suited for care roles than career roles. Therefore, utilizing FWAs may be more problematic for women in male-dominated work environments. A common limitation among the three studies mentioned above is that they examined the organizational adoption of FWAs and not utilization by women, as previously mentioned. Moreover, the quantitative nature of these studies does not capture the women's experiences with utilization of FWAs and their effectiveness. Kalysh, Kulik and Perera (2016) posit that future research would benefit from case studies which are more suitable in providing evidence on the efficacy of FWAs in facilitating women's career advancement.

In conclusion, the relationship between FWAs and career advancement is still unclear owing to the somewhat contradictory findings and limited studies examining this relationship. In addition, methodological differences in conceptualising FWAs by not distinguishing between consequences of FWAs related to single policies or bundles of policies, formal or informal, availability or utilization, add to the lack of clarity. Therefore, more research is needed to clarify the role of FWAs in career advancement.

Incorporating flexibility and the work-family interface into careers research has led to the newer concepts of flexible and sustainable careers discussed in the following section.

2.4. Flexible and Sustainable Careers

Despite having recognised the connection between the work-family interface and how it shapes and is shaped by career over time (Kanter 1977), organizational careers have often been studied independently of the work-family interface (Greenhaus and Kossek, 2014; Beigi, Wang and Arthur, 2017). As previously discussed, traditional career structures were based on the male breadwinner/female homemaker model, with a series of upward career experiences within a single organizational setting expecting long hours and constant availability to work. These structures which are still 'alive' today, disadvantage women who are carrying out most of the care and home responsibilities while managing their careers (Moen, 2011) and are therefore more at risk of increased stress and burnout threatening their well-being.

More recently there has been a focus on how the workplace affects employees' physical and mental health. The combination of long-hours work cultures and the demands from

the work-family interface have been eroding employee well-being (Hall *et al.*, 2012; Kossek, Valcour and Lirio, 2014) as employees are increasingly expected to work harder, faster, and smarter, yet their mental and physical health remains their own responsibility, especially in periods of economic downturn (Lewis *et al.*, 2017). The concept of sustainable careers suggest protecting and fostering career development without depleting employee well-being, just as sustainability of environmental resources refers to resources being used without being depleted (Pfeffer, 2010), with a focus on renewal and balance (Newman, 2011; Kossek, Valcour and Lirio, 2014). These newer career concepts are also characterised by positive career experiences, enabling employees to maintain their careers over the life course, and benefit both employees and organizations over time (Newman, 2011; Herman and Lewis, 2012; Kossek, Valcour and Lirio, 2014; Van der Heijden and De Vos, 2015).

Several recent studies explored the career sustainability concept from various angles and included in its definition, explicitly or implicitly, flexibility and the need for work-family balance or fit, i.e. a successful management of their work-family interface (De Hauw and Greenhaus, 2015; Kossek, Valcour and Lirio, 2014; Newman, 2011; Valcour, 2015; Vinkenburg, Van Engen and Peters, 2015). Table 2 below shows how studies conceptualised career sustainability in various ways which arguably are similar in recognising that the work-family interface affects and is affected by careers (Greenhaus and Kossek, 2014).

Table 2: Conceptualisations of Sustainable and Flexible Careers

Article	Sustainable career definition	Work-home balance definition
Greenhaus and Kossek (2014)	“Sustainable careers ... depend upon the spillover of flexibility, energy, renewal, and well-being between work and home over the life course.” (p.381).	No explicit definition. Job and career fit with the core values in employees’ lives.
Kossek, Valcour and Lirio (2014)	“Sustainable career provides: (1) security to meet economic needs; (2) fit with one’s core career and life values; (3) flexible and capable of evolving to suit one’s changing needs and interests; and (4) renewable so that individuals have regular opportunities for rejuvenation.” (p.309)	Satisfaction and perceptions of success in meeting work and non-work role demands, low levels of conflict among roles, and opportunity for inter-role enrichment. (p.301).
Van der Heijden and De Vos (2015)	“the sequence of an individual’s different career experiences, reflected through a variety of patterns of continuity over time, crossing several social spaces, and characterized by individual agency, herewith providing meaning to the individual. (p.7)	“...individual’s career and private needs ... have to be aligned with organizational objectives and cannot be separated from the individual’s broader life context in order to balance ...the individual’s work, career and private interests...and the employer’s interests” (p.8).
De Hauw and Greenhaus (2015)	“A career in which employees remain healthy, productive, happy and employable throughout its course and that fits into their broader life.” (p.224).	“An individual’s overall evaluative judgement of how successful they are with their multiple roles at work and home.” (p.229).
Valcour (2015)	“A sustainable career is characterized by four primary attributes: (1) alignment of work with the individual’s strengths, interests and values; (2) ongoing learning and renewal; (3) security via employability; and (4) work–life fit over the life course.” (p.22).	“Work-life fit over the life course: individuals are able to modify their working arrangements and to turn the level of work intensity up and down over the course of their careers in order to achieve a satisfactory integration of work and non- work commitments.” (p.24).
De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans (2018)	“Sustainable careers are characterized by mutually beneficial consequences for the person and for their surrounding context and should be considered by taking a long-term perspective.” (p.4).	“Three groups of indicators of a sustainable career: health, happiness, and productivity.” (p.4). Authors link happiness to satisfying work-life balance needs.
Tomlinson, Baird, Berg and Cooper (2018)	“A flexible career is one that meets the individual’s needs and preferences for flexibility and sustainability as life circumstances change and is influenced by the institutional environment, organizational factors as well as individual career decisions.” (p.6).	“the ability of workers to shape the duration and timing of work to fit their needs and preferences at various life stages.” (p.12).

More specifically, Greenhaus and Kossek (2014) argue that to achieve career sustainability over the life course, employees need to factor their work-family interface into their career and home decisions so that they have sufficient time and energy

(resources) to meet their needs according to their values across the life course. De Hauw and Greenhaus (2015) propose a conceptual model to examine how work-family balance affects employees' career decisions which can enable or hinder the crafting of a sustainable career. The authors define work-family balance as "an individual's evaluative judgement of how successful they are with their multiple roles at work and home" (p.229) and sustainable career as "a career in which employees remain healthy, productive, happy and employable throughout its course and that fits into their broader life" (p.224). Their definition builds on the studies of Greenhaus and Kossek (2014) and Kossek, Valcour and Lirio (2014). While this model adds insights as to the different effects of low and high work-family balance on career decisions, it assumes an agentic role of employees in making career decisions and ignores the constraints and opportunities arising from organizational and national contexts. The authors posit that future research is needed to explore these contextual influences.

The importance of incorporating context is illustrated by Vinckenburg, Van Engen and Peters (2015), who argue that gendered societal beliefs influence the sustainability of combining career and care. They posit that if the taken-for-granted norms of who works and who cares and the ideal worker remain uncontested, organizational policies such as FWAs may hinder the sustainability of combining career and care. They use the example of the Netherlands, a country considered as a model for providing FWAs to facilitate parents to continue to work and care. Part-time work is very common in the Netherlands and it is job-protected. However, it is mostly the women who switch to part-time for care reasons. Only 18% of Dutch men switch to part-time compared to 67% of women (OECD, 2012). This has led to the Dutch model of one-and-a-half incomes in dual income couples. While this model increases women's labour participation, it has negative effects on the women's advancement to senior roles, consistent with the reduced commitment stigma associated with part-time work as shown in section 2.3.2. Therefore, unless gendered beliefs about who works and who cares are challenged, policies to facilitate the work-family interface end up reinforcing that mothers are the primary carers and their careers take a back seat (Daly, 2011).

De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans (2018) argue that the foundation of sustainable careers is the interplay between a person, their context and changes over time.

Furthermore, they propose that the indicators of sustainable careers are health, happiness, and productivity over time. The authors argue that happiness is about being satisfied with a career which fits employees' goals and needs for work-family balance over time.

The studies on sustainable careers presented above, refer to FWAs or flexibility indirectly by incorporating work-family balance as a prerequisite of career sustainability thereby highlighting the link between flexibility and sustainability. This link has been implied by an older study (Moen and Sweet, 2004) which introduced the concept of flexible careers across the life course. In spite of not referring to sustainable careers, the authors through their critique of traditional career structures valuing long-hours which places employee wellbeing at risk, implied that these structures threaten career sustainability. Building on Moen and Sweet's flexible careers concept, Tomlinson *et al.* (2018), propose the concept of flexible careers which they explicitly link to sustainable careers as shown in their definition (Table 2). Through their flexible career determinants model, the authors call for studies to incorporate the influence of multiple contextual factors on employee agency in crafting flexible and sustainable careers to suit their needs as those change through the life course (Model depicted in Figure 1).

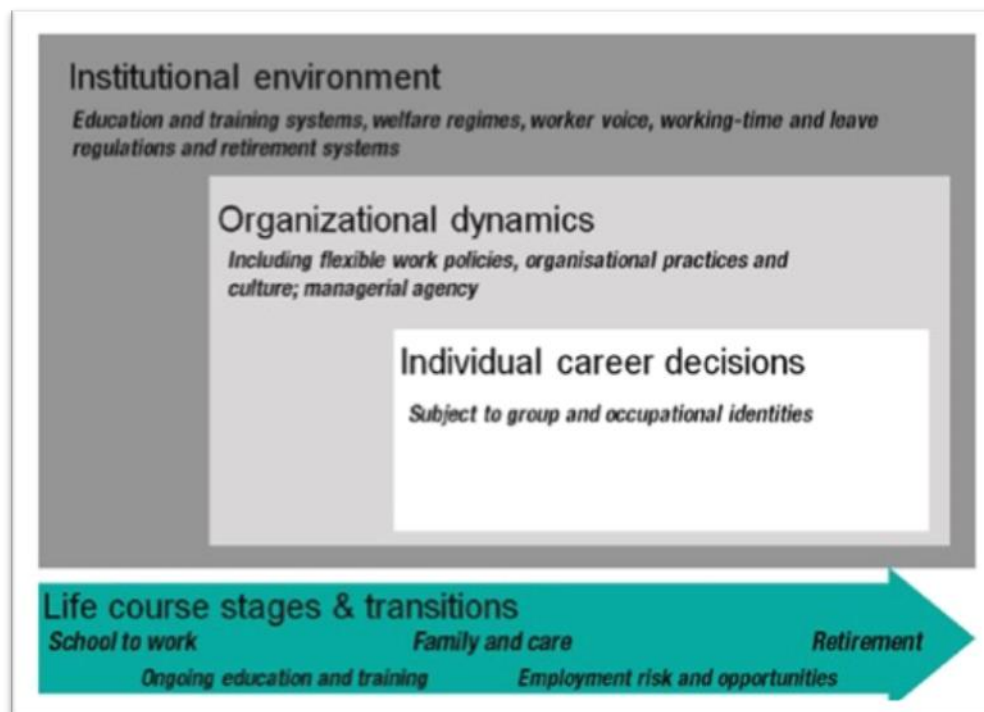


Figure 1: Determinants of a flexible career (Tomlinson *et al.*, 2018)

Tomlinson *et al.* (2018) critique career models such as protean and boundaryless for assuming agency of individual career actors and ignore contextual factors which affect their career decisions. As shown in Figure 1 above, considering the institutional environment, a welfare regime (for example) which values gender equality may adopt public policies to facilitate work and care. This, in turn, may affect the organizational dynamics by inducing a positive attitude by supervisors (decision makers) and organizations to actively encourage the use of FWAs and protect employees from potential career penalties associated with reduced commitment. It may also be the case that when a specific institutional environment through its legal structures helps working parents, there is less need for organizations to offer an extensive range of FWAs. The opposite will hold true in liberal market economies where public policies are inadequate or inexistent, as in the US for example, and therefore FWAs are employer driven based on market forces (Kossek, Lewis and Hammer, 2010). It is widely acknowledged that the welfare regime of the US provides the least government support for working families in contrast to, for example, Sweden which is a social welfare state with public policies designed to facilitate parents to both work and look after their children (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Therefore, the institutional environment can influence organizational dynamics, which in turn can increase or constrain employee agency to craft flexible careers to suit their circumstances as those change through life stages.

Furthermore, by adopting a life course perspective instead of a snapshot at a point in time, Tomlinson *et al.*'s (2018) model captures how contextual factors change as individuals go through life transitions which in turn influence their career sustainability. For example, only a few recent studies have explored utilization of FWAs over a period of time (e.g. Chung and van der Horst, 2017) while most previous literature, due to its cross-sectional nature, focused on key moments ignoring how employee needs and circumstances change across family and career stages (Darcy *et al.*, 2012; Greenhaus and ten Brummelhuis, 2013). This shortcoming also limits our understanding of which types of FWAs can meet employee needs during different career and family stages (Tomlinson *et al.*, 2015, 2018).

2.5. Summary and Research Questions

This review has shown that there is an abundance of research on various outcomes of utilizing FWAs. However, their efficacy in succeeding to alleviate tensions and contribute

to women's career maintenance and further advancement remains in question. Several recent literature reviews have identified a number of reasons for the equivocal results of previous research.

There is a need to distinguish between availability and usage of FWAs. Previous literature often assumed that availability implied usage (Allen *et al.*, 2013) which could not capture employee outcomes following utilization. Studies that examined utilization of FWAs were mostly of a quantitative nature and therefore the efficacy of the FWAs examined cannot be established as other factors may have influenced the outcomes.

To reduce the complexity of comparing studies on FWAs, future studies exploring bundles of FWAs, will need to explore the consequences of each type of FWA as the literature has shown that they may result in different work-family interface and career-related consequences. Previous studies explored a bundle of FWAs while others focused on a single policy (Kelly *et al.*, 2008) assuming that they have the same consequences (Leslie *et al.*, 2012). Furthermore, most studies focused on formal FWAs, while evidence shows that the utilization of informal policies is widespread (de Menezes and Kelliher, 2011) and may have different outcomes (Kossek and Lee, 2008; D'Agostino and Levine, 2010; Walsh, 2012).

More studies are needed to evaluate the effect of FWAs on career-related consequences, such as career maintenance or subsequent advancement (Bourdeau, Ollier-Malaterre and Houlfort, 2019). The majority of studies examining consequences on the individual level have mainly focused on work-family-related outcomes, such as work-family balance or work-family conflict, which constitute two of the most studied constructs. Perhaps this can be attributed to the cross-sectional nature of existing studies, which examine outcomes at a point in time. Longitudinal studies could better explore the effects of utilizing FWAs on subsequent career outcomes.

Finally, according to Bessa and Tomlinson (2017), outcomes of FWAs are context dependent; nevertheless, not many studies have examined FWAs and career consequences taking into account the influence of contextual factors. For example, contextual factors, such as family-friendliness of the organizational culture and supervisor support, parental and family support, and national culture and structures, can enhance or curtail employees' agency to utilize them.

Despite having recognised the connection between the work-family interface and how it shapes and is shaped by career over time, organizational careers have often been studied independently of this interface (Greenhaus and Kossek, 2014; Beigi, Wang and Arthur, 2017). Therefore, traditional career models valuing the ideal worker do not accommodate the need for flexibility or shifting career patterns more common in women's careers (Valcour and Ladge, 2008). Career models which depart from the traditional male breadwinner/female homemaker model have incorporated the relational nature of women's careers in trying to accommodate simultaneous demands from work and home roles such as the KCM (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005). However, these models failed to account for national and organizational factors which shape women's career decisions and career formation over the life course (Tomlinson et al., 2018). The shifting nature of employees' work-family interface needs as they go through life stages and the multiple contexts influencing career decisions over time are better captured by the newer concepts of flexible and sustainable careers.

Based on the outcomes of this literature review, I argue that the potential of FWAs to facilitate the work-family interface of women and improve their representation in senior management positions has not yet been reached. Therefore, further research is needed to determine whether and under what circumstances FWAs could facilitate women's work-family interface, career sustainability and further advancement to senior management positions.

Using Tomlinson *et al.*'s (2018) flexible and sustainable careers framework, this study responds to this gap and aims to deepen understanding of the relationship between use of FWAs and career experiences. Specifically, the study does so by examining how women managers at different career and life stages, within one organization in Sweden, engaged with FWAs during their careers. While this is not a comparative study across national and organizational contexts, I draw on the Swedish public policies in place to facilitate working parents and the organizational culture to frame the analysis.

The research question and sub-questions of this study are:

- How do women managers engage with FWAs during their careers?

- How do women managers perceive the impact of FWAs on their career advancement?
- How do FWAs affect women managers' perceptions of work-family balance?

2.6. Chapter summary

In this chapter I positioned my thesis at the intersection of two fields: FWAs and women's careers. I examined existing studies in both fields and presented their limitations. I synthesised the literature concerning utilization of FWAs and outcomes on women's careers. My critical evaluation of career models indicated that while some contemporary career concepts and models have emerged, portraying women's shifting career patterns to address work and family needs, they fail to address contextual factors shaping women's career decisions. I then presented the newer concepts of flexible and sustainable careers which account for the dynamic nature of women and men's work-family interface needs situated within the context of national and organizational factors and closed the chapter by presenting my research question and sub-questions.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I present the rationale for the research approach I have taken to answer my research questions. In section 3.2., I discuss the philosophical assumptions underpinning the choice of research strategy and the selected methods. In section 3.3. I explain my choice of social constructionism as my philosophical stance and in section 3.4, I explain my methodological choices, ontological and epistemological positions and chosen qualitative research design. In section 3.5, I address the criteria of establishing rigour in qualitative research and conclude with a summary of this chapter in section 3.6.

3.2. Research Strategy

Social inquiry begins with identifying a research problem and constructing research questions to address it. Once the research questions have been defined, the researcher needs to decide on the research strategy, i.e. the approach to answer the research questions that will generate new knowledge and contribute to theory.

Many considerations are taken into account when carrying out social research. The choice of methods is bounded by different philosophical assumptions regarding the relationship between theory and research, the nature of social reality (ontology) and how social reality should be studied (epistemology). Another consideration is how researchers' values and beliefs can influence the research process and outcomes.

Philosophical paradigms are differentiated by their inherent ontological and epistemological assumptions and influence the research design and methods, as described in the sections which follow.

3.2.1. Relationship between theory and research

Two main questions determine the relationship between theory and research: the type of theory and whether the data collection tests theory or builds theory. According to (Hatch, 2012):

'Put most simply, theory is a set of concepts whose proposed relationships offer explanation, understanding or appreciation of a

phenomenon of interest.’ (Hatch 2012, p.5).

Merton (1938) defines middle-range theories as those which, notwithstanding their level of abstractness, are close enough to data to guide empirical inquiry. Middle-range theories are intermediate to grand theories, which are more general and involve a high level of abstractness rendering their deployment in research complex (Merton, 1967).

The research strategy, which is broadly concerned with whether the data collection tests or builds theory, will be discussed in section 3.2.4.

3.2.2. Ontology

Ontological assumptions in social sciences are concerned with what the nature of social reality is and whether or not there is a social reality independent of human conceptions and interpretations (Blaikie, 2014). These two contrasting ontologies are referred to as objectivism and constructionism/subjectivism. Objectivism assumes that social entities have a reality external to social actors which is beyond their control, i.e. external reality exists independently of people’s beliefs about it or their understanding of it. Therefore, observers should discover the same reality about them. Subjectivism assumes that social entities have no inherent meaning and they are social constructions built up from the perceptions and actions of social actors, i.e. reality is fundamentally in the mind of the observer therefore, different observers discover different realities (Blaikie, 2014). Constructionism does not agree with either of the two aforementioned views. Constructionism argues that reality or meaning is not discovered but is constantly constructed and re-constructed (Blaikie, 2014). Constructionism is “the outcome of people having to make sense of their encounters with the physical world and other people” (Blaikie, 2014, p.22). Therefore, knowledge is constructed by people instead of being accepted passively by them (Ritchie *et al.*, 2013). Constructionism has two branches: constructivism and social constructionism. What differentiates these two categories is whether sense-making is individual or a social process. Before I discuss my affinity to social constructionism (section 3.3), I will briefly explain another key philosophical issue underpinning the choice of approaches to social enquiry, namely, epistemology.

3.2.3. Epistemology

Epistemological assumptions are concerned with how we can learn about reality and what forms the basis of our knowledge. The two main epistemologies at opposite ends of the spectrum are known as positivism and interpretivism. The key question is whether or not we can employ the same research process in studying social sciences as we do in natural sciences. An objectivist ontology generally leads to a positivist epistemology (Bryman, 2012). Positivism supports the use of the scientific model in social research and takes the view that scientific methods can help develop an objective “truth” (Van de Ven, 2007). It focuses on explaining social phenomena which should be objectively measured. Antithetically, interpretivism is critical of the use of this model and posits that the subject matter of the social sciences is fundamentally different from the objects studied by natural sciences (Bryman, 2012). An interpretivist epistemology is usually linked to a constructionist ontology and generally focuses on the understanding of human behaviour. The researcher interprets the interpretation of the researched. A third interpretation takes place when the researcher has to situate her/his interpretation within a theoretical framework of existing literature. Interpretivists critique positivists in that they do not capture insights into human behaviours.

This research lends itself to an interpretivist epistemology as it seeks to elicit the participants’ constructions of the role of FWAs in their career experiences and gain insights into their constructions of the social world.

3.2.4. Choice of Research Strategy

Key epistemological questions deal with the role of theory in research, such as how knowledge is best acquired, through an inductive or a deductive approach, which constitute the two most commonly known approaches. An inductive approach derives and builds theory from analysing the collected data and is associated with an interpretivist epistemology (Bryman, 2012). In contrast, in a deductive approach, hypotheses deduced from theory are tested by the data and ultimately support or reject the theory. A deductive approach is associated with a positivist epistemology (Blaikie, 2014) and is undertaken when the researcher deduces hypotheses from existing theory and, through the data collection, aims to put theory to the test. The hypotheses are either confirmed or rejected, leading to a revision of the initial theory.

However, Blaikie (2014) argues that there are no purely inductive or deductive research strategies as, for example when interpreting the data to arrive at theory (inductive approach), the researcher does not have a blank mind. The data generated, the questions asked, and the arising themes would have been influenced by assumptions deductively derived from previous work in the field. On the other hand, when employing deductive approaches, some data interpretation must have preceded the deductive approach, i.e. in building hypotheses and using data to test them in order to support or reject existing theories (Blaikie, 2014).

In addition to the inductive and deductive strategies presented above, Blaikie (2014) also refers to retroductive and abductive strategies. Retroductive strategies have the same point of departure as deductive strategies but they seek to explain underlying causes of the observed patterns working back from the data. Abductive strategies aim to discover social actors' constructions of reality and their sense-making of the phenomenon under investigation. Therefore, the researcher "enters their world" to explore reasons behind their actions. The researcher then, drawing on their language, reconstructs their actions and reasons behind them and seeks to provide an understanding of their actions to ultimately derive theories (Blaikie, 2014, p.10).

I believe that an abductive strategy is well suited to this study's phenomenon of interest: the role of FWAs in the women's lived career experiences. I seek to provide an understanding of how the women constructed their experiences of engaging with FWAs from their perspectives and their conceptualisations and language used.

3.2.5. Researcher's Stance

Another epistemological consideration is how the researcher's values and beliefs influence the process of social research, and specifically the choice of research problem, research questions and method, and the interpretation of data and findings (Bryman 2012). It is therefore important for the researcher to be self-reflexive and transparent about her/his values and beliefs. Blaikie (2014) posits that social researchers have to choose the type of relationship with the researched. The researcher is either distanced from the researched (outsider) or enters their world, is influenced by and influences the researched (insider). For example, during the interviews with the participants I may influence the way they think about their experiences with FWAs and they may influence

the way I think about this phenomenon. Given my interest in the research topic and my past experience with holding a managerial position and engaging with FWAs, I believe that I am an “insider”. Furthermore, Blaikie (2014) argues that researchers have to make another choice between being an “expert” or a “learner”, i.e. whether the researcher has established ideas based on existing literature or wants to learn from the participants’ own constructions of the phenomenon of interest. Despite having acquired knowledge in the field of FWAs and careers through engaging with relevant literature and my personal experiences with FWAs, I believe that my stance is one of a “learner” as I seek to gain understanding of the participants’ constructions of their career experiences and the impact of FWAs. Another decision which the researcher needs to make is whether the research is on people, for the people or with people (Blaikie, 2014, p.12). Doing research on people involves being an “expert” and the people are merely participants for the researcher’s benefit. In the second case, for the people, the researcher is a consultant who carries out the research on behalf of someone else. Doing research with people is when the researcher acts as a facilitator to assess a policy or solve a problem. I consider myself to be doing research for the people as I hope to be able to increase understanding of how FWAs can help sustain and advance women’s careers to ultimately improve gender equality in management.

3.2.6. Qualitative Methods of Enquiry

Ontological stances drive epistemological positions, which influence the research strategies. Objectivist ontological positions tend to lead to positivist epistemologies, which influence the choice of methods, most often being quantitative. Constructionist and subjectivist ontologies lead to interpretivist epistemologies that lend themselves to qualitative methods. While representing contrasting strategies in the link between theory and research and their ontological and epistemological assumptions, qualitative and quantitative methods can be combined into what is referred to as mixed methods (Bryman, 2012).

There are several diverse qualitative research methods, yet they all aim to build theory from analysing rich data focusing on how people make meaning of the social world. In line with an interpretivist epistemology, my research seeks to deepen our understanding of the role of FWAs in women managers’ career experiences. To study this research

problem, a qualitative strategy is adopted as it is well suited to the exploring and interpreting of social phenomena that are complex and occur over time, revealing the perspectives of the participants and understanding the role of context (Bryman, 2012; Ritchie *et al.*, 2013).

Furthermore, the dearth of research on utilization of FWAs and career outcomes lends itself to a qualitative design through which new connections or paradoxes may emerge, rather than a quantitative design which would statistically test relationships between FWAs and career outcomes. Qualitative research fits with the ontological and epistemological assumptions of constructionism and interpretivism.

There are several interpretivist epistemologies including Weber's (1947) “Verstehen”, hermeneutics, phenomenology, symbolic interactionism and social constructionism (Bryman, 2012). I argue that a social constructionist perspective lends itself to the study of women’s career experiences with FWAs as discussed below.

3.3. Choice of Philosophical Stance: Social Constructionism

Social constructionism is a theoretical approach which takes a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge (Burr, 1995) and challenges positivist epistemologies and their view that knowledge is based on objective and unbiased observations of the world (Blustein, Palladino Schultheiss and Flum, 2004). According to Gergen (1985), knowledge is constructed through relationships arising from historical and cultural contexts. Therefore, our ways of understanding are not necessarily better than others in terms of being nearer to the truth. Knowledge is constructed through social interaction and therefore what we consider to be true is only our current accepted way of understanding the world which constantly evolves (Burr, 2015).

Blustein *et al.* (2004) advocate that social constructionism is very powerful in bringing research close to those researched:

‘Social constructionism provides a powerful means of locating scholarship close to those we seek to understand. As we examine the working lives of people across time frames and cultures, we are strongly encouraged to converse with and give voice to the experiences of individuals who engage in the diverse activities, plans, and

interactions that comprise a working life.' (Blustein et al., 2004).

Adopting a social constructionist approach in my research, I aim to deepen our understanding of the experiences of women managers, who have worked flexibly. The participants' lived career experiences with FWAs have been socially constructed through their interaction with people who influence their career, i.e. organization, family, and society, over time and space. The focus is on what the women are thinking and feeling, and how they talk about it. The constructionism associated with this research lies in its emphasis on constructing meaning and interpretations based on those of the participants, and the events and people significant to their career experiences, challenging the taken-for-granted.

As a feminist researcher adopting a social constructionist approach, I aim to give voice to the women's experiences and challenge the taken-for-granted which resonates with liberal feminist critiques of the androcentric nature of science (Harding, 1987) i.e. men dominating the positions of power (Blaikie, 2014). My approach also resonates with the feminist standpoint epistemology (Harding, 1987) which suggests that those who are marginalised (women in organizations) can illuminate the problems which need to be addressed by research in contrast to those who occupy dominant positions (men) who are not able to critically question the *status quo* (Harding, 1993). Therefore, giving voice to the women and their career experiences in this research, aims to provide a better understanding of the issues they have faced and the people who were significant to their experiences.

3.4. Research Design and Method

In line with a constructionist ontology and interpretivist epistemology, I believe that knowledge is socially constructed and can only be understood from the point of view of the people who are involved. Thus, I employ a social constructionist approach which lends itself to a qualitative design to explore rich data arising from semi-structured interviews aiming to deepen our understanding of the role of FWAs in women's career experiences.

The previous chapter which presented a review of the literature on FWAs and career outcomes (Chapter 2) has shown that there is an abundance of research on various

outcomes of utilizing FWAs. However, their efficacy in succeeding to alleviate tensions and contribute to employees' career maintenance and further advancement remains in question. The aim of this study is to answer the following research question and sub-questions:

- How do women managers engage with FWAs during their careers?
 - How do women managers perceive the impact of FWAs on their career advancement?
 - How do FWAs affect women managers' perceptions of work-family balance?

As shown in the interview protocol in Appendix A, during the interviews I explored whether access differed between organizational levels, the circumstances leading to utilization and timing in terms of the participants' family and career stage, whether types of FWAs changed over time, duration of engaging with FWAs and their influence on the women's career experiences and work-family interface. Finally, the women were asked to reflect on how any other supports or obstacles along the way specific to career and family affected those outcomes.

The remainder of this chapter describes the method, fieldwork and the data collection and analysis. It ends with a section on the criteria for evaluating the rigour of qualitative research, followed by a summary of the chapter.

3.4.1. Method

Adopting a social constructionist perspective which gives voice to the lived career experiences of the women (Blustein, Palladino Schultheiss and Flum, 2004) lends itself to qualitative research which is well suited to exploring and interpreting complex social phenomena occurring over time (Ritchie *et al.*, 2013). This facilitates a collection of rich data on women's career experiences retrospectively and over time, rather than an analysis of isolated career episodes.

3.4.1.1. Selecting the Organization

Purposive sampling was used to identify large multinational organizations who supported utilization of FWAs and had women managers who had engaged or were still engaging with FWAs. Through personal contacts I contacted two such organizations which fulfilled these criteria, which I was familiar with, one in the financial sector and one in the technology sector. Access was granted by ABC (pseudonyms have been used for the organization and the participants). ABC is a large Swedish multinational (16,000+ employees) operating in the technology sector. It was established over 100 years ago and constitutes a major player in its sector. The organization is well known for its Swedish culture in having embraced the country's norms of promoting quality of life and gender egalitarianism. ABC promotes its commitment to developing female managers through tailored training programmes and mentoring schemes, which are also referred to in its Annual Report. Based on 2018 worldwide figures, 21% of employees are women, and 20.5% of management level positions (Levels 6 to 1 – Level 1 being the CEO) are held by women. The picture is slightly better in Sweden, which is the context of this study, where women account for 24.6% of employees and 23.1% of managers (further discussed in section 3.4.1.3.). ABC, commensurate with the norms of the Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) sector, is a male-dominated organization which is taking steps towards gender equality through development and FWAs.

To support working parents, women and men, ABC offers FWAs which are arranged informally with supervisors. ABC's family-friendly culture is not directly referred to in its Annual Report; however, its organizational objectives include a strong emphasis in promoting employee well-being and a friendly, informal working environment. In addition to informal FWAs, other support for working parents in Sweden includes public level policies of parental leave, subsidised day-care and the right to reduce work percentage, all of which constitute legal entitlements, as explained in Chapter 1, Section 1.1.2.

3.4.1.2. Access

Access to ABC was gained through a contact in senior management who introduced me to the Vice-President of Human Resources (VP of HR). After sending an introductory letter to her, we arranged a meeting via Skype during which I explained the aim and

design of my research. The VP of HR, after describing the prevailing culture of ABC regarding flexibility, elaborated on the corporate objective to increase women's representation in senior management and emphasized that she was very happy to help with recruiting women managers working for ABC.

Before beginning the recruitment process, I submitted my research design and all relevant documents which were to be used in my communication with the potential participants to the Cranfield University Research Ethics Committee. After obtaining approval, I wrote to all ABC women managers in Sweden explaining the objective of my research as part of my doctoral studies at Cranfield, that their participation was entirely voluntary and that the conversations would be treated with utmost confidentiality and anonymity to protect their identity. This communication was sent by email through the HR department (Appendices B and C).

3.4.1.3. Sample

ABC has a total of 256 managers in their headquarters in Sweden comprised of 61 women (24%) and 195 men (76%). All 61 women managers were invited to participate in the study and a total of 43 women managers across all levels of ABC's managerial pipeline, ranging from Level 2 to Level 6, responded indicating their willingness to be interviewed.

Within ABC, managerial levels range from Level 1, being the CEO, to Level 6 representing the lowest managerial level in the organization. Level 2 corresponds to Executive Vice-President, Level 3 to Business Unit President or Functional Vice-President and Level 4 to General Manager or Head of a Global Role. Level 1, the CEO position is currently held by a man. The percentage representation of sample participants in each level is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Number of Women and Ages by Organizational Level

Level	Population of female managers Sweden	Sample's female managers Sweden	Age Range of Sample
2	3	2	49 to 55
3	9	9	42 to 53
4	24	13	39 to 53
5	16	12	38 to 50
6	9	4	32 to 58

An overview of all sample participants' characteristics in terms of managerial level, age, tenure with ABC, ages of children, where applicable, and marital status, is presented in Table 4. To further preserve participant anonymity, the ages of the children were classified into three ranges: pre-school, school and 18+.

Table 4: Details of Participants

Pseudonym	Level	Age	Tenure	Child 1	Child 2	Child 3	Marital status
Siri	2	55	33	18+	18+	-	Married
Kirstin	2	49	3	School age	School age	School age	Single
Sigrid	3	46	5	18+	School age	Preschool	Married
Ellen	3	43	8	School age	School age	School age	Married
Elinor	3	53	10	18+	18+	School age	Married
Robin	3	52	28	18+	School age	-	Married
Freja	3	51	12	18+	18+	-	Married
Eva	3	52	3	18+	18+	-	Married
Lykke	3	50	15	School age	School age	-	Married
Wilma	3	49	13	School age	School age	-	Married
Felicia	3	46	10	School age	School age	-	Married
Vera	4	51	22	18+	18+	18+	Married
Elise	4	41	23	-	-	-	Married
Saga	4	50	1.5	18+	18+	-	Single
Hetta	4	52	1	18+	-	-	Single
Elvira	4	39	7	School age	Pre-school	-	Married
Ines	4	48	7	School age	School age	-	Married
Mette	4	53	1	School age	School age	-	Single
Elsa	4	42	13	School age	School age	-	Married
Emelie	4	45	10	School age	School age	-	Married
Leah	4	47	17	School age	School age	-	Married
Tilde	4	50	23	School age	School age	-	Married
Melissa	4	45	5	School age	-	-	Single
Matilda	4	42	23	School age	School age	-	Married
Ella	5	47	16	18+	School age	School age	Married
Cleo	5	41	6	School age	School age	School age	Married
Philippa	5	47	25	18+	School age	-	Married
Ebba	5	50	13	18+	18+	-	Married
Clara	5	48	12	18+	18+	-	Married
Ida	5	38	10	Preschool	-	-	Married
Maja	5	41	4	School age	Pre-school	-	Married
Bianca	5	40	9	School age	Pre-school	-	Married
Mira	5	42	18	School age	School age	-	Married
Creta	5	41	1	School age	School age	-	Married
Svea	5	42	4	School age	School age	-	Married
Alice	5	43	3	School age	School age	-	Married
Tuva	6	46	3	School age	School age	School age	Married

Pseudonym	Level	Age	Tenure	Child 1	Child 2	Child 3	Marital status
Emilia	6	32	4	-	-	-	Married
Pia	6	58	30	18+	18+	-	Married
Rut	6	46	10	School age	School age	-	Married
Hannah	3*	48	22	18+	-	-	Married
Agnes	3*	53	22	18+	-	-	Married
Astrid	3*	42	19	School age	-	-	Married

*Non-Swedish participants

In terms of tenure with ABC, 15 women joined the organization immediately after completion of their university studies, while others held positions with various companies prior to joining. Average tenure with ABC was 12 years, with the longest being 33 years and the shortest one year (as of December 2017).

All but two of the women (41) had at least one child. Thirty-eight women with children were based in Sweden and three were non-Swedish and currently worked abroad. Out of the 38 mothers in Sweden, 33 were married and part of dual career households and five were single mothers. Twenty-one women had at least one child under 14 years old, while 17 women had children above 17 years old.

3.4.2. Data collection

The chosen method for data collection is semi-structured interviews which have the capacity to generate rich and in-depth accounts of the participants' constructions of the research phenomenon (Ritchie *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, interviews are more appropriate when the phenomenon of interest involves a reconstruction of past experiences (Bryman, 2012).

Semi-structured interviews include a list of pre-defined open-ended questions and topics to be covered. The structure is often referred to as the interview protocol or the "interview guide" (Bryman, 2012, p.471) and allows flexibility in that the interviewees can elaborate on the topic and the interviewer can ask follow-up questions to probe further on important and sometimes unexpected themes that may arise during the conversation (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015). Semi-structured interviews also allow the interviewer to vary the sequence in which the questions are asked depending on the flow of the conversation (Bryman, 2012). While the interview guide includes questions for each theme to be explored, it allows new themes to emerge as a result of the conversation.

Some of the participants will be reflecting back on engaging with FWAs while others are currently utilizing them. This recollection of past experiences may be subject to leaving out events or details which may portray a less accurate picture of their stories (Van de Ven, 2007).

For this research, data were collected through 43 semi-structured interviews conducted via Skype. An interview protocol was developed with pre-defined open-ended questions and appropriate follow-up probes. The protocol was piloted with two senior women managers who had utilized FWAs and worked with another organization. Probing questions were added to gain a deeper understanding of the women's career narratives which were discussed and finalised with the guidance of my supervisor. The final interview protocol in Appendix A contains the main questions which guided the interviews as well as probing questions which were used as necessary. All conversations were recorded with the permission of the participants having reassured them of anonymity and confidentiality.

Before commencing each interview, it was reiterated to the interviewees that participation was voluntary and that they could terminate the interview at any point. After explaining the objectives of my research again and my own background and interest in the topic, I invited the participants to talk about their current job role and whether they were utilizing FWAs at the time and how they engaged with FWAs during the course of their career. They were asked about their thoughts and experiences of utilizing FWAs and the outcomes on their work-family interface and career. This allowed them to elaborate on any difficulties they faced and support they drew on and how these influenced their career experiences. Finally, the participants were asked to reflect on the key factors which had contributed to their career success so far.

Initially the most senior managers in the sample were interviewed, namely Levels 2 and 3. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the 11 most senior women managers (all mothers). Women within these levels had utilized FWAs at some point in their careers and some still do. Subsequently, I interviewed 32 women managers in the sample across the remaining levels of ABC's managerial pipeline to investigate how they engaged with FWAs and whether they (Levels 4, 5 and 6) had the same access to FWAs as their more senior counterparts. The aim was to determine whether there was equal access to FWAs

and similarities or differences in the career experiences of senior compared to junior level managers. As shown by the literature review in Chapter 2, senior managers may enjoy more flexibility in their working patterns compared to more junior level managers by virtue of their strategic roles and their demonstrated performance.

The interviews lasted between one and one and a half hours. It should be noted that the participants were comfortable conducting the interviews in English as they were all near-native speakers. In addition to recording the interviews, I also took notes on the main and most interesting points raised by each participant.

3.4.3. Data analysis

The research question and sub-questions focus on the career experiences of women managers and therefore the level of analysis was the individual. As the sample is situated within one organization in Sweden (with the exception of three participants who work for ABC outside Sweden), the organizational and national culture are treated as a constant. However, the organizational/supervisor and macro/institutional influences (cultural and structural context) in Sweden were also captured.

I took a thematic approach to analysing the data of the interview transcripts which entails searching and interpreting patterns and integrating them into overarching themes (Ritchie *et al.*, 2013).

All conversations were transcribed verbatim, resulting in 860 pages of text. I transcribed the first 10 interviews to gain a general sense of the data. The rest of the interviews were professionally transcribed. Subsequently I listened to each transcript to ensure accuracy of transcription and to immerse myself in the women's stories. After listening to and checking all the transcripts, I went back to the participants inviting them to review their transcripts to ensure I had accurately captured their stories. I then uploaded the transcripts to NVivo using pseudonyms to protect anonymity and ensure confidentiality and began the coding process.

After coding the first five interviews, I discussed the preliminary coding structure with my supervisor and subsequently began grouping the codes which were similar under a common group or theme – a node (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013). This was an iterative process of collapsing codes into groups which I recorded in a research diary so that I

created an audit trail of the iterations. This enabled me to re-trace the decisions I made in grouping and re-grouping the codes, thereby facilitating reflexivity which is addressed in section 3.5.1. The process also entailed re-reading of content when important ideas emerged so that relevant passages were not missed. To ensure inter-coder reliability, team coding was performed with my supervisor for three interviews which led to a discussion about the emerging themes and facilitated a fresher approach towards the interpretation of the data.

Coding and grouping the codes into nodes was a challenging process. For example, during the initial coding stages, the emphasis was to identify the main themes emerging from interrogating the data in terms of flexible working utilization such as motivations for utilization, mode of utilization and how the women experienced engaging with FWAs. The approach was to store similar coding into nodes. Due to the “fear” of omitting interesting data which could potentially inform the research questions and the fact that I found many fascinating things expressed by the participants, the number of nodes proliferated quite early in the process and I had to go back and review what I had coded. This helped me to refine the content of each node by identifying similarities and merging nodes or shifting content under different nodes. Some of my ideas regarding what was relevant changed. For example, I still had quite a number of interesting passages which did not seem to be directly relevant to engaging with FWAs and any of the nodes already created. One example was content-related to a female leadership development course. Instead of trying to force this into the existing node structure, I tested the content of this node for common text and intersection with other nodes. This exercise, or query as referred to in NVivo (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013), revealed that the training programmes were associated with content regarding career advancement and in many cases training programmes preceded promotion to a new role. Further queries on content regarding training and any connection with the participants’ organizational level, showed that several of the women in senior levels had participated in this programme which also enhanced the women’s visibility in ABC and their network. Therefore, content on *Training and Development* became a child node to *Career Advancement*.

Once the initial coding structure was complete and in keeping with the abductive research approach (Blaikie, 2014, p.101), I moved from codes using the participants’ language to

clustered themes and overarching themes. Following a presentation to my panel, I revised the structure and themes to ensure that they reflected the data more accurately. Table 5 shows how I arrived at the overarching themes based on codes which retained the participants' language (Corley and Gioia, 2004) and the clustered themes.

Table 5: Data Structure

Code	Clustered theme	Overarching theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My husband stayed home for six months. It was the best way to get back to work. • Peace of mind as my husband stayed home with the children. • Good for men to see the whole burden [<i>looking after a baby and doing housework</i>] and it creates a different understanding. I see it in my managers. • We are lucky in Sweden [to be able to stay home for so long with the children]. • You go back to work and don't feel guilty about leaving the baby because the father is there and not nannies or other family. 	Smooth return to work after parental leave	Shared Parental Leave
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free to leave the office when I want, it's flexible hours as long as my work is done • If I need to pick up the children early, there is no problem to leave work. 	Adjusting office hours	Engaging with informal FWAs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the children are sick, I work at home. I just tell my manager out of courtesy. 	Remote working	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have freedom with responsibility. • No one looks at your hours, it's your results that are important. • Less control by management in Sweden. No one asks if you are not at your desk. 	Schedule control	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility helped me put the life puzzle together. • Everything comes to together, having children and building your career so for those 10 or more years, it is tough. Without flexibility you cannot do this. • Without flexibility I could not have stuck it out and got where I am today [in my career]. 	Career and home supported by FWAs	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family acceptance of people's private lives. Not only the flexibility in saying that I work from home because my children are sick but also the acceptance for me to say that I have to stay home today because my children are sick, and I cannot work! • Can say no to late meetings or travel. • Can push back on workload. 	Family-supportive organization	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Important to have an open dialogue with your manager about your needs for flexibility. • I used to put in more hours than my work percentage in the past, but I would say that I always had very good managers to support me and make me go home to my family. 	Family-supportive supervisor	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a single mother it was really difficult to cope so I chose my children over career and reduced to 85%. Not a good career move as you are not seen for promotions. 	Reducing work percentage	Engaging with Formal FWAs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility is an exchange. When the children were small, I left work around 3 and then I worked every evening after I put the children to bed. • When children were small, I worked much harder at the office so I could leave early. • Important to be home for dinner and work afterwards. I work 2-3 hours every night, but I am able to continue my career. • I take the night shift [work from home in the evenings] but I wanted a career and family. 	Tensions in utilizing FWAs	Paradox of work intensification and "balance"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a high workload, but I can manage it myself, and then I don't feel that I am a victim to work or someone else's schedule. I would rate my balance high. • It has gotten easier and I have balance because the kids are older now, so you don't feel it [the long hours]. 	A sense of "balance"	

Code	Clustered theme	Overarching theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You cannot succeed in your career if you don't have a good relationship with your manager. My supervisor mentored me and it would have been much more difficult to believe in myself, had he not been there supporting me. You need to have a supervisor who shows confidence or faith in you. Always helpful to have a manager who really believes in you and gives you the opportunity to grow and trusts you. 	Sponsorship by supervisor	Career Maintenance/Career Advancement <i>(slightly revised title)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> My husband helped me seize opportunities. My husband stayed in Sweden with the children for one year while I worked abroad. My husband followed me to China and stayed home with the children. We are two taking care of the children and it's not an option otherwise. We share everything at home. 	Partnership with husband	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am one who keeps on going and I have no time to fail. I had no time but at least I had a supportive environment at home. I work 2-3 hours from home every evening but not always – maybe one week a month I do not. 	Ideal worker hours	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Left previous role for a smaller one so I could be there for my children. Took a smaller role to reduce travel. Left previous role as no understanding of family life 	Changing roles	Career Compromises
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When children are small, not a good time to go for a promotion. 	Declining promotions	

The following table (Table 6) links the overarching themes above (Table 5) to the way the findings are presented in the next chapter (Chapter 4). Specifically, it maps the overarching theme(s) to each section and sub-section of Chapter 4.

Table 6: Map of overarching themes as presented in Chapter 4: Findings

Section Number	Title of Section	Title of Sub-section	Overarching Theme
4.1	Introduction		
4.2	Early Career / No children		Engaging with FWAs (<i>formal and informal</i>)
4.3	Career and Motherhood		Engaging with FWAs
4.3.1		Shared Parental Leave Benefit	Shared Parental Leave
4.3.2		Formal FWAs: Reduced Work Percentage (Part-Time)	Engaging with formal FWAs
4.3.3		Informal FWAs: Remote working, Adjusting Office Hours	Engaging with informal FWAs
4.3.4		Returning to Work without FWAs	Engaging with FWAs (or not)
4.4	Career and Older Children		Engaging with FWAs
4.5	Flexible Working Strategies and Career Maintenance		Career Maintenance
4.6	Flexible Working Strategies and Career Advancement		Career Advancement
4.6.1		Work Intensification	Paradox of Work intensification and “Balance”
4.6.2		Sponsorship by Supervisor	Career Advancement
4.6.3		Partnership with Husband	Career Advancement
4.6.4		Age of Children and Promotions	Career Advancement
4.7	Flexible working Strategies and Career Compromises	Changing roles Declining promotions	Career Compromises
4.8	Career Experiences of Women without Children		<i>No directly associated theme</i>
4.9	Vignettes of Women Across Levels *		Engaging with FWAs
4.9.1		Siri	
4.9.2		Elinor	
4.9.3		Vera	
4.9.4		Ebba	
4.9.5		Pia	
4.9.6		Five Ways of “Doing Career at 50”	

*Lightly Revised section title to better reflect content

3.5. Trustworthiness of Qualitative Research

What determines the quality of qualitative research? Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that evaluation criteria for quantitative research cannot be applied to qualitative research as the latter does not seek to establish one “true” account of social reality. The authors propose trustworthiness and authenticity as the main criteria for assessing qualitative research.

According to Bryman (2012, p.390), trustworthiness comprises four criteria: “credibility” which involves reverting to the participants in order for them to validate their constructed accounts; “transferability” which means providing thick descriptions of the culture so that others can judge whether the findings apply to other situations; “dependability” which is an auditing approach by peers; and, “confirmability” which ensures that the researcher has not knowingly allowed personal experiences or values to influence the findings of the research.

Firstly, in terms of credibility, I invited the participants to review their transcripts and respond with any issues regarding the accuracy of my conclusions. I only received two responses. I also had several discussions with the VP of HR regarding availability and utilization of FWAs, who corroborated my findings.

Secondly, by including a detailed description of relevant aspects of the national context of this study, I addressed the transferability criterion which entails providing a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of the contextual uniqueness of the study so that others can evaluate whether findings are transferable to other contexts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Sweden is a very specific national context which has developed extensive public policies to facilitate parents to stay in employment while looking after children and ranks first in the GEI, as presented in section 1.1.2.

Thirdly, with regard to dependability, I regularly discussed the coding and my constructions of the participants’ accounts with my supervisor. In addition, I presented my findings and received feedback during a doctoral colloquium at Cranfield University, a meeting of Cranfield’s CICWL and two international academic conferences which helped me question my interpretation and re-evaluate as needed.

Finally, to address confirmability, I reflected on and explicitly stated my own values regarding flexibility throughout this research. My reflections on my role in interpreting the findings throughout the process were recorded in a research diary. My panel reviews and the frequent discussions with my supervisors helped me reflect further, challenge my interpretations and become more self-aware of my own biases.

3.5.1. Reflexivity

According to Van de Ven (2007) “most phenomena in the social world are too rich to be understood adequately by any single person or perspective. Consequently, any given theoretical model is a partial representation of a complex phenomenon that reflects the perspective of the model builder”. It is impossible to be completely neutral in the collection, analysis and interpretation of the data gathered (Ritchie *et al.*, 2013). Reflexivity is a process by which researchers are mindful of their own influence in the research process. Researchers’ topic choices are often influenced by their personal experiences and values (James and Vinnicombe, 2002).

My past experiences of being a senior manager and a mother who engaged with flexible working, sustained a career and continued to advance, have positively predisposed me to the benefits of utilizing FWAs, hence my interest in exploring how FWAs could constitute an avenue to improve women’s representation in senior management. However, through engaging with literature and in discussions with my supervisors and friends in different countries, I came to the realization that this positive lens reflected my own perspective. I was therefore mindful of my assumptions regarding FWAs during the interviews and throughout this research and how those shifted as I engaged with the participants and others with whom I discussed this study. For example, once the initial coding was done and there was a broad node structure, what seemed clear was that all the participants working in Sweden engaged with some form of flexible working and expressed positive sentiments about it in terms of their work-family interface. This observation was consistent with my personal experience with FWAs. Looking at Matilda’s transcript below as an example, one can infer that flexibility leads to positive outcomes such as “balance”.

I used to work from home when the kids were sick. I mean if they are really sick and have a cold and fever, they sleep anyway so then I could

work but if it was the last day before going back to school or pre-school then I couldn't work as much, so it's flexibility. I think that's the biggest benefit. Especially when you have a family, then it is [you have] work and life balance.

However, being conscious of my own assumptions, I read again through the content coded at the node *Flexible work arrangements*. This resulted in identifying subtle contrasts in the way some women talked about the benefits related to utilization. While they expressed that it was very important to be able to control their schedules and leave work early or work from home to attend to their children's needs, when looking into their working hours, I began to identify cases such as Matilda below who talked about extended work at home in the evenings and weekends:

I did not work long hours. My mother died in 2008 so I promised myself to give all my time to my kids, so when I get home, I am home with them and then I can work in the evening when they go to sleep but I think I left the office in good hours every day. I mean sometimes you need to stay, but not every day or every other day or every third day, maybe once a week.

What's typically a normal day for you in terms of hours?

I used to be at work at 7:30 and then I would go home at 4:15, and then we would have dinner at home and the kids would go to sleep at 8 and then I would work perhaps a few hours after that.

I then conducted a search of all the passages where any participant talked about their working hours or working after hours and other related content such as negative outcomes. The passages revealed tensions in utilizing FWAs which triggered extending work hours at home for most of the women.

Furthermore, being a feminist mother pursuing a career and researching similar issues faced by other mothers, I was mindful of my potential influence on the women's construction of their experiences. For example, qualitative research from a feminist perspective aims for women's voices to be heard by eliminating boundaries between the

female researcher and the researched (Blaikie, 2014). There is a concern that when women research women, issues of dominance may arise as the researcher may occupy a stronger position compared to the participants unless the researcher takes steps to reduce such boundaries. One way to address this issue is for female researchers to establish rapport and reciprocity with the women they are interviewing (Finch 1993 in Gattrell, 2006, p. 244). Therefore, the researcher gives and receives in the course of fieldwork (Bryman, 2012), in contrast to structured interviewing where the researcher refrains from expressing views or answering questions posed by the researched. Approaching the interviews as an “insider” could influence the way the participants answer the questions. Being mindful of this dilemma between engaging with the participants and minimizing my influence on their answers, when asked about my experiences, I answered the question but at the same time, I kept emphasizing that this research was about *their* experiences and *their* views. This was facilitated by positioning myself as a “learner” and not an “expert”, as discussed in section 3.2.5.

3.6. Chapter Summary

In this chapter I discussed my philosophical assumptions underpinning the choice of the research strategy for this research. I then described the research design and method, including the setting of the study. Subsequently I described how I collected and analysed the data. Finally, I discussed how I addressed the criteria for ensuring trustworthiness of the study.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I present the findings on how women managers within ABC engaged with flexible working strategies, (shared) parental leave and three types of FWAs: reduced work percentage, remote working and adjusting office hours. The sample consists of women from all levels of ABC's managerial pipeline. I then report on how these strategies impacted on the women's lived career experiences. As 41 out of the 43 women in the sample are mothers, I focus on describing the women's flexible working patterns during three key stages related to before and after having children: graduating from university and early career, motherhood and career; and older children and career. I distinguish between the stages of transitioning to motherhood and having children older than 14, as the age of children can alter the extent of home demands. In section 4.2. I describe the women's early career experiences after completing their education, their working hours, their career values and important career actors. In section 4.3. I report on mothers' access to flexible working and utilization of formal and informal flexible working strategies. Formal strategies comprise (shared) parental leave, which is a legal entitlement and reduced-work percentage or part-time work, an FWA. Informal strategies include two FWAs, namely remote working and adjusting office hours. I discuss the timing of usage during the women's careers, circumstances and factors affecting utilization, career and motherhood values, and report on any differences across organizational levels. I show that flexible working strategies combined with support from relational actors help retain mothers in their careers after childbirth. In section 4.4. I describe how mothers with older children alter their flexible working strategies, their attitudes to career and any important relational actors during this stage. In section 4.5. I present the outcomes of all flexible working strategies on work and home management and show that both formal and informal FWAs fostered a sense of work and home "balance", despite the accompanying work-intensification. Within this sample, the feeling of "balance" helped sustain the mothers in their careers but was complemented by additional factors: ABC's family-friendly organizational culture and supervisors providing women with schedule control, and an egalitarian sharing of home and care roles between the women and their husbands. I then explain how one formal flexible working strategy, i.e. reducing work percentage

seemed to carry a career stigma, despite the small reduction in working hours, while informal FWAs, i.e. remote working and adjusting office hours, had no taxing career impact. In section 4.6., focusing on the experiences of the mothers who advanced to senior levels, I show how further career advancement was dependent on additional factors: supervisor sponsorship, an egalitarian partnership with husbands and ages of children. In section 4.7. I discuss the factors which led some of the women to compromise their careers. In section 4.8. I present the career experiences of the only two women in the sample who have no children, to highlight their perceptions of flexibility, work-family balance and career. In section 4.9. I compare five women who are all above 50, have been working with ABC for at least 10 years, are married and have at least two children but currently hold positions which span all managerial levels. The objective is through a cross-level comparison of women of similar age, marital status, number of children and tenure with ABC, to explore differences and similarities in their career stories including how they engaged with FWAs which could potentially explain their differential career advancement rate. Section 4.9.6 compares and contrasts the five women's career stories. Finally, section 4.10 presents a summary of the chapter.

4.2. Early Career

In their narratives, the women described their career in a biographical and retrospective manner starting from their first job. Irrespective of their current management level or age, the women's accounts of their early career experiences shared several common features. These were about getting the first job(s) after university, which matched their education and interests, and, in some cases, moving to several other companies for career development opportunities such as gaining experience in different areas or functions. Most participants felt free to spend long hours at work and focus on building their career as they had no family yet, thus home demands were low.

I joined ABC after university when I was only 24, so from a family point of view, there were no children, and no husband at that time, so I could devote my time to work as much as I needed without thinking about other people, it was more about myself. [Robin, 52, L3]

Robin implies that if she had a family, she would take them into consideration with regard to her working hours, which highlights the relational nature of women's career decisions, i.e. taking into account important relationships.

A second dominant discourse in the women's early career experiences is the salient role of their supervisor in boosting their self-confidence and sponsoring their promotion. This was emphasized by several participants who felt that their access to a managerial position at a young age or within a line role typically held by men, was made possible by their supervisor.

In an ideal world I would have waited another half year or one year to be more prepared for this role, but I am also very grateful that my manager dared to take this opportunity and promote me...I know some of the candidates I was competing with and just from a CV perspective, some of them were a lot more experienced. [Elsa, 42, L4]

The encouragement from her supervisor compensated for Elsa's hesitation to take on a new role for which she did not feel entirely ready, hence her gratitude. Similarly, Tilde below attributes her career success to sponsorship by her supervisors during her early career in boosting her confidence to take on new roles. Several women perceived that gender affects decisions to take on more senior roles differentially, in that women are more reluctant to put themselves forward if they do not feel entirely ready, compared to their male counterparts who seize opportunities more readily. This tendency of women to be more cautious and less assertive about their credentials for more senior positions, indicates that the role of supervisors is vital in sponsoring women's further career advancement, as Tilde indicates:

Having had a couple of good managers early in my career, helped me a lot. They believed in me and that gave me the chance. But, it's equally important to be given the chance and to take it. They have been instrumental in me taking the opportunities and helping me. Definitely enabling. That might be the most important factor {of my career success}. [Tilde, 50, L4]

Emilia, who joined ABC straight after university and is currently still in her early career stage, was not happy during her first year in ABC and was looking for work elsewhere. However, after she openly expressed her concerns to her supervisor; he then played a significant role in retaining her by involving her in more interesting project work and sending her to various international offices of ABC to network and get to know the organization better.

During the first year, I was actually applying for other jobs because I wasn't really happy with my situation...I felt the environment was rough, mainly men and older than me. Also, our department was a bit isolated... but then I talked with my manager and he helped me so I could interact with the other departments by sending me to visit all the manufacturing sites in the world. I then had to do a special project on that and after working for two years, I got the chance to become a team leader for a group of eight people. [Emilia, 32, L6]

Emilia was courageous enough to speak up. This elicited a positive response by her supervisor who also sent her on a leadership course and organized an external mentor for her. Both actions contributed to Emilia's retention, career development and her satisfaction with the role as she indicates below.

For me to get that role was really uplifting because I felt that I could participate and be a part of the development in the way we work in my department— you know that advert with the Duracell batteries and the rabbit which keeps on going? I felt like that in my group – I was so enthusiastic, 'let's do this or let's do that, this machine can do that!'

Emilia's case illustrates the significance of having the confidence to speak up, which can lead to positive change – in this case, a series of actions by her supervisor to retain her and facilitate her further advancement.

Most women with an engineering background (20 women) talked about being held to higher standards by their male colleagues or team members due to their gender and/or young age.

My promotion was like a milestone in the history of the company (employer prior to ABC) because there had never been a female in that position before. I was quite young (I was only 27) and I had a university degree, so the combination of those three things was a culture shock for the older men, between 55 and 65, who had been working at the factory for almost their entire lives. [Creta, 41, L5]

Facing these double standards and doubt over their abilities, which arguably comprise negative career experiences, is likely to erode women's self-efficacy in pursuing roles that are more senior. However, in this study, the women who faced gender discrimination regarding their abilities to perform their roles, worked harder and proved themselves by delivering results and building relationships with their colleagues rather than being discouraged from exerting additional effort in these roles, as Creta exemplifies.

It was a tough situation, but I liked the challenging atmosphere and to surprise people, and I really worked hard and made sure that there were no mistakes... and I asked people around me "I plan to do this, is this the right way of thinking within the production planning?" So, I had people supporting me, but every little problem came right back at me. Some people were looking out for my mistakes but that triggered me to learn the process and the product and try and really have the answers because I was challenging the old way of working as well...

Several other mothers who were subjected to gender biases during their early careers responded in a similar manner to Creta. This suggests that their persistence in surmounting these gender barriers must have been enhanced by unchanged strong self-efficacy, complemented by the support of their supervisor.

Generally, this stage was characterised by hard work and long hours. Work intensification was evident, as the women were driven to prove themselves at work while not being constrained by demands from their home life. The work-family interface did not appear to be an issue at this stage; therefore, there was no mention of needing flexibility or utilizing FWAs, with the exception of one participant who teleworked twice a week due to her long commute to work during her early career and before children. Instead, several

participants emphasized that, as they had no family at this stage, they were able to spend long hours at the office. Furthermore, obstacles due to gender biases were evident during their early career, which were possibly amplified by a combination of gender, young age and job function. Interestingly, gender biases were predominantly discussed by women engineers and only in one case by women of other educational backgrounds. This is typically the case with the SET sector which traditionally, has been significantly dominated by men.

Common themes in the next section revolved around fitting career with family: how the women engaged with various flexible working strategies and factors obstructing or facilitating these strategies. All sample participants with the exception of the three women based outside Sweden and two who do not have children, engaged with FWAs once they became mothers. The focus of the findings is therefore on women managers who are mothers and their flexible working strategies.

4.3. Career and Motherhood

The women's transition to motherhood precipitated changes in their working patterns. Findings revolve around flexible working strategies, i.e. when and how they engaged with one or a combination of such strategies in order to manage career and home and the consequences on career and home, and can be classified into the following overarching themes:

- Shared parental leave
- Formal FWAs
- Informal FWAs
- Work intensification and “balance”
- Career maintenance
- Career advancement
- Career compromises

I begin by presenting the findings regarding flexible working strategies. Flexible working strategies employed by mothers in this study comprise a long parental leave benefit, a national policy in Sweden, which for dual parent households can be shared facilitating both mothers and fathers to work and care, and three types of organizational FWAs, namely reduced work percentage (part-time), remote working and adjusting office hours. Reduced work percentage is a formal FWA stipulated by Swedish law. Remote working and adjusting office hours constitute informal and individualised FWAs agreed with supervisors.

4.3.1. Shared Parental Leave Benefit

Out of the 41 mothers in the sample, three lived and worked outside Sweden and 38 were based on Sweden. Thirty-three out of the 38 mothers in Sweden were part of dual parent households and all but one shared parental leave with their husbands, something increasingly happening in the country, especially among well-educated professionals. The remaining five were single mothers who took the full parental leave.

Having a legal entitlement to a generous (shared) parental leave was a dominant discourse in the women's stories, as they expressed how important it was for both parents to spend time with the children. Twenty-two mothers shared parental leave equally with their husbands, six months each of full-time leave. Nine mothers took longer leave (9 to 12 months) than their husbands, who stayed at home from 1.5 months to five months. According to several women who are now over 50 with adult children, the norm used to be that mothers took a longer leave than fathers.

When I had my first child, 22 years ago, it (sharing parental leave) started to become more and more common and the father also took some time off. Now they take longer periods. Back then fathers took one to two months. [Freja, 51, L3]

One reason was that it was not as accepted by employers that men who became fathers stayed at home for a long time (over three months). The Parental Leave Act was amended in 2016 by adding the three-month exclusive leave clause for each parent to encourage fathers to exercise the right to take leave and foster a culture change in employer attitudes. Eva perceives that her husband was a trailblazer in standing his ground and exercising his

legal right to take a long paternity leave, which took place much earlier than the amendments in the Parental Leave Act:

Yes, he made it...he had been very firm and that was early days in the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s and I am a little bit jealous as the men now are supposed to be home and have much more generous paternity leave whereas my husband and I had to fight for it much more at the time – so I had it a little easier than he did – he always had to fight more for the legal rights to do it but he was really quite firm on this...so I have been lucky! [Eva, 52, L3]

A significant finding emerged when I compared the careers paths of the mothers who took longer leave to those who stayed at home for six months: the length of the maternity leave did not seem to have any adverse effects on subsequent promotions. No important differences emerged between the duration of parental leave for the mothers who advanced to senior levels compared to others who have not. In fact, some of the mothers were promoted upon returning to work or during parental leave.

The VP of the department posted a couple of jobs (more senior) when I was very, very pregnant and I didn't actually apply for any of the jobs because I was also quite happy with my position and I thought my job was quite exciting. Then I went on leave because I had my child. And I think when the baby was two or three months old, I got a phone call from the VP about whether I could come in and discuss the position if I was interested. I was of course very flattered and also very interested. It seemed like a really great challenge. [Leah, 47, L4]

Leah's supervisor promoted her while she was away on parental leave and shortly after the birth. This suggests that the supervisor was not held back by gendered role perceptions about motherhood being incompatible with career and senior roles. Such gender biases often limit career opportunities for mothers.

Furthermore, mothers taking leave for one year or longer after childbirth, was well accepted within this organization and none of the participants perceived that being away for long had any adverse effects on their careers. This finding, as well as Leah's

supervisor's attitude, are most likely the outcomes of Sweden's legal structures which foster a family-supportive attitude in organizations by securing employees' right to take leave and at the same time the right to return to their position (or another position at the same organizational level). The participants who had children while working in other organizations prior to ABC and took long parental leaves, also perceived that this was the norm, suggesting that this is a prevailing attitude in Sweden and not just in ABC.

Shared parental leave facilitated the women's return to work in more ways as shown here:

If you share the parental leave, the husband must take care of the routines for the children. For us that was a success factor and I trust my husband to take care of the family as well as I do, when I'm away travelling. So, I don't keep track of my family and that takes away the stress and lets me focus on my work. [Elvira, 39, L4]

Many of the women felt that giving men the full responsibility for looking after the children and home life during shared parental leave, is a key factor in the family dynamics which contributes to women resuming their career after childbirth. For example, Elsa talked about "letting go", suggesting tensions for women in stepping back from the enactment of their role as mother, which carry deeply ingrained and socially prescribed expectations of assuming full responsibility for the children.

It's really important for men also to take the chair of staying at home and having the full responsibility of the house and the family. Otherwise they don't know what to share if they have not seen the whole burden. They have to see what it's like and be responsible for it. And for us women to really let go. That was the best way to kick-start your career after maternity leave. [Elsa,42, L4]

Felicia's comments illustrate how her husband's commencing of his parental leave mitigated tensions for her in worrying about the children when returning to work.

When I went back to work, my husband went on paternity leave for six months and it was great! I could focus at work and not worry about the children. [Felicia, 46, L3]

Many other women expressed similar sentiments. For example, Freja expressed her relief that her husband was at home for six months. This way, she did not feel guilty of “abandoning” her children.

The women portrayed the values of gender egalitarianism in Sweden as facilitating men to not only step out of their traditional breadwinner roles and share parental leave but to subsequently continue to share the care and household responsibilities.

Sweden is special in many ways because of this equality thinking encouraging men to also stay home with the children during parental leave. It is well accepted that both men and women in Sweden share family life and taking care of children. [Ella,47, L5]

The Swedish culture and legal structures encourage men to embrace egalitarianism which, in addition to increasing their direct involvement with care and home issues, fosters a more family-friendly attitude of male supervisors.

I think it influences our male leaders as well, for sure... I saw it in my bosses... I think a lot of men here take parental leave, especially these days. They understand what the burden is when you have sick children and work from home for some days and the man takes this responsibility instead of the woman. [Ella, 47, L5]

In summary, all participants expressed very positive sentiments towards Sweden’s family-friendly policies, such as providing both parents with shared parental leave and subsidised childcare. Shared parental leave seems to catalyse a divergence from prescribed gendered roles still prevailing in most societies, in that it puts fathers in the position of the main carer of the children and helps mothers’ re-entry into their work roles after maternity leave, alleviating tensions from enacting the roles of mother and worker simultaneously. Secondly, it influences supervisors to be more understanding of employees’ care responsibilities and ultimately their need for flexibility. In addition, it gives women and men more time to come to grips with their new roles as parents and going back to work.

I don’t really remember, because my husband was home, he was on

paternity leave, which was good. I think that was really good as when I got home from work, he was there and the kids had been really happy because he had been home with them all day and we could talk, but I think if he had worked as well, I think it would have been hard. So, I came home to like a happy environment and I think that was what kept me going. [Matilda, 42, L4]

Single mothers in the sample stayed at home with their children for the full duration of the parental leave and relied on extended family, friends, neighbours and, less frequently, on hired help when they returned to work. As expected, it was more stressful for them to return to work compared to the mothers in dual parent households. This led them to either reduce their work-percentage or exit senior roles, as will be shown in section 4.7. Career Compromises and Career Stalling.

The next section analyses the findings on how mothers engaged with one or a combination of three types of FWAs: reduced work percentage or part-time, remote working and adjusting office hours, and highlights the circumstances leading to the utilization of each type.

4.3.2. Formal FWAs: Reduced Work Percentage (Part-Time)

Parents in Sweden are entitled by law to reduce their work percentage by up to 25% until their youngest child is eight years old. This is a formal contractual change arranged with their organization.

Within ABC, this is the only formal flexible work arrangement. Even the maximum reduction of 25% corresponds to a small decrease in working hours. Only a small number of mothers (seven) reduced their work percentage upon returning to work after parental leave and one, who still has school age children (under eight years old), continues to do so. One mother worked part-time for two months, three mothers worked part-time for two years, one for four years, one for six years and two for eight years. The reduction in their work percentage ranged from 5% to 25%, with only two out of seven reducing to the full 25%. Despite the small reduction in hours, it is noteworthy that none of these women is currently in senior organizational Levels 2 and 3 and only one woman is in Level 4.

For all seven women, challenges in managing competing demands from their career and family domains triggered their decision to reduce their work percentage.

Both my husband and I worked part-time for some time, at 80% and then 90% after shared leave. This was not only to look after the children but also for my mother who was very sick. That was actually my husband's suggestion for both of us reduce our load in order to cope.
[Alice, 43, L5]

Alice's husband shows an egalitarian approach in managing career and family. He seems to consider this as mutual responsibility and therefore changed his working patterns so that both he and Alice were able to fulfil their roles as parents and workers.

I think one key thing is that me and my husband had agreed on how we divide things at home...we still have a good split in responsibilities so that is definitely one key thing for my career.

Bianca and her husband both reduced their percentage to 90% for four years after shared leave so that they alternated in taking one day off every other week to spend it with the children. Bianca states that she continues to work part-time at 95% to be able to attend to her children's needs. However, her percentage reduction amounts to as little as two hours per week.

I still work at 95% now. The children are 10 and 6 years old and it can be very stressful sometimes as their activities often start very early in the evening and so you need to leave work very early. I leave early some days or once in a while I take half a day off...It's such a positive thing when you are free to schedule your hours. [Bianca, 40, L5].

Working part-time is a formal contractual arrangement, yet Bianca does not have set days during which she works less than full-time. Instead, she reduces her hours when she needs to, based on her children's activities and her husband's work commitments. Paradoxically, she seems grateful for being free to schedule her hours and perceives this "freedom" as a benefit, even though she is contractually entitled to work fewer hours in exchange for a corresponding reduction in her pay. Bianca is one of two mothers within

the sample who prefers to contractually reduce working hours rather than use informal FWAs, for example, to adjust office hours as needed in coordination with her supervisor. She has recently separated from her husband and perhaps being formally entitled to take half a day off once in a while or leave half an hour earlier every day reduces her stress from having to leave work in a rush and drive the children to their activities. This contradicts her statement above of being “free to schedule your hours” and actually points to hesitating to have a say in determining her work schedule as the majority of the women in the sample do, as shown in section 4.3.3. Informal FWAs: Remote Working, Adjusting Office Hours.

Other women who worked part-time ended up working additional hours over their contractual ones, therefore foregoing pay but not workload. Philippa, a Level 5 with two children, worked at 80% (4-day week) for one year after the shared parental leave for her second child ended. She said that her two children were very close in age, something she found difficult to cope with despite sharing with her husband. In practice, however, she explained that she ended up working longer each day and often worked from home in the evenings as she felt that she could not delegate her managerial responsibilities to others. Philippa seems to be grappling with wanting to be there for her children and working part-time. She compensates for her non-working day by putting in additional hours. As with Philippa, Creta reduced to 80% for a year after her second child was born as her husband’s work required him to frequently do afternoon and night shifts which meant that he could only look after the children in the morning. Creta went home early every day but found that she still had to cover her full workload and therefore ended up working every evening at home for several hours after the children went to bed. Working longer than contractual hours was also the case for Tuva who reduced her load to 75% after the shared parental leave with her first child ended (prior to joining ABC). She perceived that this was not helpful, as she explains below, and reverted to full-time after two months.

After maternity leave with my first child, I tried working 75% but then it did not work out for me at all as I had to do everything at home and 100% of my job in fewer hours. So, I only did that for a couple of months. Then my husband and I split everything. I dropped off and he picked them up at 3 or 3.30. It worked out pretty well for us. When they

were ill one of us stayed home. We both had flexible jobs and we could rearrange our work accordingly. The kids are still in school now, so this continues. Sometimes they can stay at home by themselves. [Tuva, 46, L6]

Having to manage career and family as a single parent, led Saga to work part-time. She was one out of two women in the sample who reduced her load by 25% which is equivalent to about 10 hours per week.

When I was 40, it wasn't very easy to have a career and wanting to be there for your children. So, I chose them. So, I worked at 75% for some years, for their sake. And it was not a good career move because when you work part-time you are not seen (considered) as much for senior positions. [Saga, 50, L4]

Saga was working for another organization at the time. When her children became teenagers and were more able to do things for themselves at home or, for example, take the bus to activities, Saga moved back to full-time and subsequently to a larger role with another employer. Despite expressing pride in having been offered a managerial role with many direct reports, which benefited her professional development, Saga decided to resign due to a long-hours culture which prevented her from spending what she considered enough time with her children.

That was not a very friendly environment for having children. And it wasn't a good career move but I did it because I didn't want to sacrifice my life with my children and my private life even though they were grown up then. It was more important for me than to have a big job.

When Saga perceived she was presented with the dilemma of keeping a senior role which would benefit her career development but would reduce her time available with her children, she prioritised being a mother over her career. This highlights the struggle of balancing motherhood and career. Saga talks about not sacrificing her “private life”, yet when asked whether she had any hobbies or interests outside work, she reiterated how raising children and being a single working mother left her with no free time. This is often the case for mothers who have no or limited support in raising their children (in Saga’s

case being a single mum) and exit their senior roles if they perceive that they are incompatible with looking after family. While such coping strategies appear as career “preferences” or “choices”, they are often circumscribed by workplace constraints such as face-time and long-hours cultures, societal and institutional constraints such as gendered beliefs, norms and expectations regarding family and household responsibilities.

Saga’s words describing her next role were that it was “a climb down” but what mattered most for her was to be there for her children rather than to have a senior role. Saga exhibits her attitude of prioritising motherhood over career. She is new at ABC (1.5 years) and is happy that she no longer needs to reduce her work percentage, as the children are now over 20 years old. Notably, even though she was promoted to Level 4, she is one of the older Level 4 women, which could point to career stalling after her work percentage reduction and subsequent compromised career decisions in accepting lesser roles to accommodate family.

The women perceived the effects of part-time work on their career in contrasting ways. Some did not feel that part-time work affected their career advancement within their previous employers or within ABC. For example, Bianca, two years after joining ABC and while working at 90%, was promoted to Level 5. Currently she still works at 95% and even though she does not feel that her career has been adversely affected by her reduced work percentage, in reality she has remained in Level 5 for the last seven years despite an increase in her responsibilities in 2017. Philippa, who also worked part-time within ABC, also feels that her career was not affected. However, she was promoted to Level 5 a year ago. At 47 years old, she is one of the older women in Level 5, suggesting a slower career advancement rate.

In contrast, Svea, currently a Level 5, suggests that part-time work carries a negative connotation as she perceives that within ABC the norm is to work full-time.

Everyone works full-time here at ABC. So, if you work part-time you are different! I don't know anyone who works part-time actually, even though they have small children. Um, and I know that I would have to do the same job as I would full-time. So that's why there's no reason to reduce your working hours. [Svea, 42, L5]

Svea worked at 75% initially and then went up to 90% with her previous employer until her youngest child was eight years old.

I was not a manager then so that was ok. I worked four days a week and then I worked 90%, so I had four hours a week off for a few years. I left one hour earlier on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. I mean it's just four hours per week—Uh, but it's a huge difference for the children I must say. I did not want to worry about leaving early on given days. It made me feel less stressed. [Svea, 42, L5]

It's interesting that Svea feels that working part-time was “ok” when she was not a manager. This suggests associating managerial roles with being present at the office. Saga also perceived that a reduced load with her previous employer was a bad career move but perceived that she had no choice as she was the sole carer of her children.

Despite their aspirations for further career advancement shown by discussing next career steps, women who had a higher degree of caring duties gave their home roles priority over their work roles. More caring duties resulted in a bigger time squeeze for the women and arose from one or a combination of three home situations: being single mothers, having additional home demands such as more than two children close in age, or elder care and children, and in cases where husbands could not help with the children. For example, Rut's husband was only home for the weekends as his place of work was very far from where they lived. This meant that Rut was on her own taking care of the children and home during weekdays.

None of the women in the senior managerial levels of ABC currently works part-time nor did they do so during their careers. This could point to a slowing down of career advancement for at least as long as one continues to work part-time. This finding is further strengthened by the data on women in more senior levels (L4, L3 and L2) where, except for Saga (L4), none had worked part-time at any point in their career. Therefore, despite the insignificant reduction in working hours, the stigma associated with working less than full-time still seems to apply. Another adverse effect of part-time work was that most of the women ended up working additional hours from home in the evening in order to cope with their workload which remained unchanged, despite the contractual decrease in pay

and hours. Notwithstanding the small reduction in contractual hours, the women felt that they were able to attend to their children by going home earlier which helped reduce stress. However, the price was work intensification and, in most cases, stalling of their career advancement. This could explain why reducing work percentage was not a popular flexible working strategy for the women in this sample. Nevertheless, the women who worked part-time decoupled the negative consequences, i.e. the injustice of being paid less, working more and forfeiting career advancement opportunities, from the benefit of being in a better position to be there for their children according to their values. They focused on the positive outcomes of this arrangement which were consistent with their motherhood values. Findings regarding work intensification and career outcomes will be presented in section 4.5. Consequences of Flexible Working Strategies.

4.3.3. Informal FWAs: Remote working, Adjusting Office Hours

All mothers in the sample who were based in Sweden (38), conveyed that during this family and career stage when their small children needed to be dropped off and picked up from day-care or attended to at home when ill, access and utilization of FWAs became salient in managing their work and home demands.

All participants sent their children to day-care at the end of shared parental leave or maternity leave for single mothers. As previously mentioned in section 1.1.2., day-care fees in the country are heavily subsidised constituting a very attractive childcare option for working parents.

Most mothers in the sample expressed their satisfaction with the Swedish government policies aimed at assisting parents to stay in their jobs. Emilia, a young manager who currently does not have children reflects on this benefit.

*In Sweden with the help of government policies, we have kindergarten (day-care) and schools so that both parents are able to work. It does help because from one year old, your child is guaranteed a place in kindergarten and the children are taken care of while you work.
[Emilia, 32, L6]*

Almost all mothers, including the ones who reduced their work percentage after parental leave, utilized either a combination or one of the following two types of informal FWAs while their children were under 14 and in a few cases until they finished school:

- remote working (working from home) when the children were ill or when they had appointments for the children or themselves or attended school events.
- adjusting their office hours, leaving early as needed to drive the children to their after-school activities or pick up from day-care and to be able to spend time and have dinner with the children before they went to bed. Some started work later so that they could drop the children off at day-care without having to rush them in the morning.

Both remote working and adjusting office hours were informally agreed with the women's supervisors and utilized in a tailored manner, i.e. when needed, rather than according to a fixed schedule. Utilization was normally preceded by an open discussion with the supervisor about the women's flexibility needs in order to cope with their family circumstances at the time. This was not a process of obtaining formal approval but more of a casual conversation about needing flexibility as both Wilma and Elinor indicate.

We have no rules regarding working from home as to how much one can work from home and it's better because then we have a dialogue with the people and there is an understanding that people can do it on a need basis. And it is working well...people use it when they need it because we have a life outside work and nobody would say "why are you not in the office?" You have to manage employees by giving independence. [Wilma, 49, L3]

The guideline is actually to have a talk with your manager. I don't think that you get the best out of a person by fixing their working hours. For example, "my child needs to go to the doctor and then I'll work from home that day", that's fine. Of course, we need flexibility to take kids to school etc. so yes of course, I would say we are very flexible here and that definitely helps parents do what they need to do at home with the children. [Elinor, 53, L3]

Women in more junior levels also perceived this independence to control their schedule in coordination with their supervisor.

ABC is a great company in terms of flexibility – you can work from home during school vacations and have flexibility at the start of the day, at the end of the day, you can leave early to get the kids from school and you just arrange it with your manager. [Mira, 42, L5]

Only a couple of women talked about some boundaries in utilizing flexibility which were more of an understanding than a rule. For example, Freja and Ebba said that it is expected that when people adjust their starting or ending times to try and be in the office between 9 and 3 which is when most meetings are scheduled. One contrasting example is Melissa's quote in which she asserts that while there are official working hours, she is free to decide her hours provided she gets her work done.

On a piece of paper, you work from 8:30 to 4:30 but, in practice, it's any kind of hours really, which suits me better...if I finish off something late in the evening or over the weekend, as long as I do my job it's fine so I can pretty much come and go when I want to. [Melissa, 45, L4]

Creta perceives that this independence in scheduling her work priorities and working hours is one of the factors which contributed to getting where she is today in her career.

You have people (your manager and colleagues) around you that trust you and give you the responsibility and also the authority to really make decisions; they let you prioritise and work independently and they look at results and not hours, which is really supportive for your career. [Creta, L5, 41].

Most mothers (33 out of 38) teleworked occasionally and other times adjusted their office hours depending on their children's ages, activities and generally their home needs and the extent of their husbands' involvement with home and care roles.

A significant finding emerging from the data is that access to either type of FWAs was available to all, irrespective of management level. Frequently, employees in senior levels have more autonomy in their working schedules; however, no differences emerged in this

study based on the women's accounts from lower levels. This indicates a family-supportive organizational culture and the managerial agency of supervisors to arrange individualised flexibility deals with members of their teams.

Here I differentiate between the experiences of women who transitioned to motherhood prior to joining ABC and those who did so during their tenure with ABC. Twenty out of 38 participants had their first child prior to joining ABC. Some talked about issues with utilizing flexibility in their previous organizations and others about having to be available 24/7.

For example, Kirstin and Freja stated that their decision to resign from their previous employers had to do with receiving no understanding about their needs for flexibility to manage home demands. Kirstin was in an extremely difficult situation with a seriously ill child while going through divorce and felt frustrated and disappointed with her organization.

This was a very tough period – {with the sick child} and my husband who could never leave work to look after the children...I was given absolutely no support from my manager or employer and nobody ever asked me how I was doing even though they knew about my situation – no one ever asked me if there was anything the company could do to help me. [Kirstin, 49, L2]

Kirstin resigned to accept a more junior position within ABC which would allow her to work from home when she needed to be with the children and also to avoid frequent business travel. What motivated her to accept this lesser role was the open conversation she had during the interview where, after explaining her situation, her future supervisor showed understanding and committed that Kirstin would have schedule control, i.e. manage her hours at work according to the needs at home. The only caveat was that she had to be there for important meetings.

Freja did not want to continue in a role where she could not be home with her children after day-care. This exhibits her beliefs regarding the role of mother which influence her career decisions despite having an equal partnership at home in terms of childcare and household responsibilities.

I faced difficulties when my children were really young, and I worked in another company. And there I had two female managers who had grown their careers when it was much harder, and they were not so understanding about family and that's actually why I left that company. For example, when they started to tell me... "there are nannies you know", I felt that I don't have two small children to hand them over to nannies. For me it's enough that they are in day-care for seven hours a day. So there were no hard feelings, it was more like no... I don't want to do that ... I need more balance. And that's when I felt the need to change my career. So, I started to look for another job. [Freja, 52, 13]

Both Freja and Kirstin's decisions to resign due to struggling with conflicting demands from their work and family, was further prompted by the lack of empathy and understanding exhibited by their employers. Therefore, perceptions of both a family-supportive organizational culture and supervisor influence decisions of working parents to stay in their roles or change organizations.

Ellen stresses that the expectation by her previous employer to be constantly available, ignoring her life outside work led her to seek a new position, joining ABC after she had her second child:

There was a lot of workload, a lot of stress! And especially the fact that I was never, ever free—never! I mean, always available—I think that took a lot of my energy and I felt that was not the way I wanted my life. So then in 2008, I applied for a position in ABC and that had actually a lot to do with getting more balance in life. [Ellen, 43, L3]

Ellen had her third baby shortly after she joined ABC and expresses her pleasant surprise with how much time she has available for her family with three children:

I think it's quite fantastic that I can have this job and have 3 children and actually have this much time with them as I have...the big difference is that here people don't expect you to be available...the management are pretty good in conveying that you need to have

vacation and you need to have your weekends—I mean this is a marathon rather than a short distance!

Ellen's use of the simile, "a marathon rather than a short distance" suggests that she has a long-term view of her career and therefore would need to conserve energy to keep going. She talks positively about ABC's management having a similar attitude in encouraging employees to have time off work. Ellen was very recently promoted to her current Level 3 position. Even though her new role requires longer work hours, being able to control her schedule instead of being constantly available, makes her feel that she is in a better position compared to colleagues in other organizations. For example, she stands firm in declining meetings after hours and pushing back on unrealistically tight deadlines.

The remaining mothers (18 out of 38) who had their children during their career with ABC also perceived a family-supportive culture which facilitated their return to work after childbirth. For example, Elsa decided to return to work three months earlier after her first child (after 9 months instead of 12) because she felt that she was "indispensable" as she explains while laughing. Her supervisor and colleagues showed concern that she came back early. This reaffirms a culture which perceives extended leaves from work which are related to parenthood to be justified and natural.

Having the freedom to control their schedule and location of work, was considered as key to their career by most women.

That is part of the secret why I made it in my career. That I didn't always have to be, you know, it wasn't one of these jobs where you had to be in your office, same spot every day from this time to this time. I mean I could decide when and where I worked. [Leah, 47, L4].

Lykke and several other mothers highlighted the positive effects of ABC's culture of trust based on results and not hours at the office. This was not only about accessing and utilizing FWAs but also about being trusted to work when and where they wanted without anyone disputing their commitment.

I got to where I am today because... I would say it's a mix of different things, and definitely the possibility to work from home, to leave the

*office earlier, to look after the children and be able to make up for those hours in the evening instead of sitting at a desk from 8 to 5 every day and then have trips on top of that...that would have **never** worked for me. In ABC it's really big, I mean everybody trusts each other, so the culture in itself is very good. [Lykke, 50, L3]*

Robin, with a tenure of more than 30 years with ABC and not having worked in another organization, perceives that a family-friendly culture is the norm amongst Swedish organizations. This was not always the experience of some of her colleagues who joined ABC having left previous employers.

I found it was accepted by supervisors and colleagues. The organization really values work-life balance and shows understanding towards people looking after their family responsibilities when they need to. I think we have a good model in Sweden...that the companies are flexible with providing flexible working hours, but also that you can work from home. [Robin, 52, L3]

Philippa, who has been working with ABC for 22 years, perceives that access to flexible working is open to all employees, as previously conveyed by her counterparts:

I think ABC as a company, they are very flexible when it comes to this {having work and home balance}, I strongly believe that's all very flexible and not only if you are a manager... If someone needs to go to school or needs to be home with the children, I mean of course, yes! That is very good here! [Philippa, 47, L5]

The findings show that there were no major differences in the women's view of ABC's culture in that there is understanding that employees need flexibility in order to simultaneously manage their work/career and home. If anything, the women who left their previous organizations to join ABC, were more emphatic in characterising ABC as a family-supportive organization. However, a few of the women with short tenures (between one and four years) perceived that flexibility was more supervisor-driven. This could be due to being less familiar with the organization and other departments or

functions. When flexibility is supervisor-driven, then inequalities in access and utilization can be created, which would negatively affect workers and the organization.

Even when FWAs were not frequently utilized, the participants considered this ability to work remotely, or ramp up and down their hours at the office as needed, to be one of the most important organizational benefits that facilitated them to stay in their careers.

Flexibility to work from home when needed is the biggest benefit, especially when you have children. Also, to leave early and to be able to work at night. I think I would apply for another job if I did not have flexibility. It is very important for me, even if most of the days I am at the office from 7:30 to 4:15. It is still good to know that you have the flexibility to work from home, to stay at home with your kids when they are sick, to leave early sometimes because you need to go to the dentist and to be able to work at night and do the hours when you feel able to do them. [Matilda, 42, L4]

Matilda's comments suggest that having the autonomy to control her schedule based on her home and care responsibilities was a necessary condition for her to stay in her role. Interestingly, she considers the ability to work at night as a benefit, which is incompatible with the notion of utilizing flexible working strategies to alleviate stress from the conflicting demands of work/career and home. While most mothers portrayed the freedom to control their work schedule as an important enabler to their career advancement, they sanctioned the accompanying expectation to make up for those hours at night. Irrespective of which type of FWAs the women used, the majority of mothers frequently continued to work at home in the evening. Lykke's characterization of her manager as "very understanding" indicates a positive sentiment regarding his family-friendly attitude when at the same time, she overlooks that she works very hard after hours in exchange for having schedule control.

I can schedule my hours as I need to. I just let my manager know but it's not permission, it's out of courtesy. He is very understanding that we have a life outside work and we need to take shorter days or not come in the office if we are looking after ill children or we need to take

them to activities. We work very hard {in the evenings} but I can do this. [Lykke, 50, L3]

Almost all the participants in dual career couples adjusted their office hours or worked remotely from home depending on whether they were getting the children from day-care or dropping them off in the morning and in coordination with their husbands who also varied their workday accordingly. Sharing childcare and household roles with their husbands was another key contributing factor to the women's careers. The findings relating to the husbands' role in the women's career maintenance and advancement will be presented in section 4.6.3.

Single mothers emphasized that flexibility was crucial in helping them stay in their careers and continue to advance. Given the extent of her caring duties, Mette did not have any expectations of advancing in her career.

When the kids were young, being able to have flexibility made a difference as I was in a key position and it enabled me to keep working in that position... Yes, I would say it was one key element because when I had my children, I did not have the support at home as a single parent. So, I expected that my career would flatten out, so I was quite proud I managed to balance my career and home commitments and get where I am today... And I could not have done it without it {flexibility}. [Mette, 53, L4]

Before joining ABC, Mette clarified during her interview whether she would have flexibility in remote working or leaving early when needed. She felt that her question was well received and therefore concluded that flexibility was accepted in ABC. Mette's work-life voice was not detrimental to her hiring by ABC, which confirms the company's family-friendly values.

Despite having schedule control, being the sole carer of a child was particularly tough for single mothers who were facing the dilemma of wanting to be there for their children and continuing in their careers:

It was really hard. I mean I always prioritised him [my son], so I

stopped working in the afternoon to go and get him from the day-care and then I worked during the nights. So that's how I coped. It has been a struggle, but it worked in terms of managing work and being there for him. [Hetta, 52, L4]

In summary, the two informal types of FWAs, i.e. remote working and adjusting office hours as needed, were both important for all mothers to stay in their roles. Remote working was used mostly during the family stage when younger children (below 14) were ill and adjusting office hours was used throughout until the children left home. Whatever the case, the majority of women worked very hard in the evening in exchange for their schedule control. Findings on work intensification will be discussed in section 4.6.1.

A few mothers (6 out of 39) who mostly adjusted their hours and rarely teleworked, had support from their parents or in-laws who looked after the grandchildren when they were ill. Others explained that their husbands were the ones who stayed at home with the children. It is noteworthy that one mother who has line responsibility and a husband who can stay home when needed, prefers that she works in the office and not remotely. She has agreed a schedule with her family regarding which days she can leave work early to be home for dinner and which evenings she will be working at home. In this group of women, five out of six worked in operations, a male-dominated function and more hands-on in terms of meeting customers. Arguably, they had extensive help from their husbands and/or extended family but perhaps were also more reluctant to be absent from work as some of these women, such as Elsa and Astrid, were held to higher standards by their male colleagues when they started working in this function during their early careers.

The factors which led to the decision to work remotely or adjust office hours, or both, were the ages and number of children, the level of care and household roles assumed by the husbands in dual career households, and the level of support by their supervisors. For single mothers it was the level of help from friends and family or outside help, and the support from their supervisors. The influence of husband and supervisor's support will be discussed in section 4.5 in connection with career outcomes.

4.3.4. Returning to Work without FWAs

Three mothers in the sample who did not use any form of FWAs after the end of their maternity leave, worked with ABC outside Sweden and were non-Swedish. They are all Level 3 managers. Their experiences of pursuing a career while having small children and how they managed their work and family interface show that despite not utilizing FWAs themselves, their husbands flexed their careers instead. In Astrid's case, her husband took on a more junior position, leaving his international role and moving to a local role with fewer demands on his time, so that he could be more available for their child. This took place when Astrid had just been promoted to general manager at the age of 31 and six months after she gave birth. Alice expressed that this was a significant promotion and after many discussions, she and her husband decided that he would temporarily switch to a less demanding role. Astrid maintains that as a result, she could focus entirely on her work while being at the office, indicating her work and home boundary segmentation preference.

It helped me a lot...if you rely on your husband you have a free mind because you do not need to carry into work what goes on at home. Because I think for the women who are trying to combine it and also for the men, it is very difficult because you are partly here and partly there so in reality you are nowhere. You don't know actually what to focus on. [Astrid, 42, L3].

It should be noted that Astrid is a very dynamic and assertive senior manager who overcame gender prejudices as a young woman in engineering and subsequently as a young female leader of an engineering company. Customers and colleagues initially questioned her competence until she convinced them otherwise. Her story suggests that despite many discussions, she also convinced her husband to take on a less senior role. Astrid can be characterised as a trailblazer due to not only her top position in a male-dominated function and company but also in breaking away from prescribed gender roles prevailing in her country.

Agnes, also a senior manager (Level 3), explains that when she had her daughter, the notion of FWAs was rare in organizations operating in her country; however, as with Astrid, her husband became the main carer due to having a more flexible career in an

academic environment. According to Agnes, neither she nor her husband had to compromise their career as the flexibility inherent in his role was sufficient. Agnes can also be characterised as a trailblazer because later on she accepted an expatriate assignment with ABC in Sweden and worked there on her own for three years as her husband could not leave his role in their home country. What made this decision easier was that their daughter was at university at the time and therefore had left home.

The experiences of Astrid and Agnes indicate that in order for them to advance to a senior level, both the women and their husbands deviated from the norms of male breadwinners/female caretakers prevailing in their countries at the time. This finding highlights the facilitating role of husbands' involvement with care and household roles in the women's continued career advancement to senior levels, which will be discussed in section 4.6. It also shows that women with high-self efficacy who dare to take on challenging roles are more likely to advance to more senior roles.

Hannah, another Level 3 manager, attributed her success in becoming the general manager of ABC in her country, to the support from her husband and mother. Hannah could not work flexibly. She said that it was "impossible" in her country at the time. In coordination with her husband she looked after their son much like her Swedish counterparts. As they both had demanding careers which included travelling, Hannah's mother stepped in when they were both busy at work. The difference between Hannah and her female colleagues in Sweden is that she considered herself lucky because both her husband and her mother supported her decision to pursue a career, which was not the norm in her country.

For me it was very important that my husband and my mother supported me in this decision to work. It would be much more difficult [without the support], yeah...If it was now, then the men could be the solution, but at that time it was not so popular for men to help out. Back then, even getting help at home with cleaning was resisted by my family. But I did it because I had too much on my shoulders. [Hannah, 48, L3].

Hannah shared more care responsibilities with her husband compared to Astrid and Agnes and also relied on her mothers' help and hired household help. As a female leader of an

engineering company she also had to exhibit strength and persistence to overcome gender biases in her country. She also deviated from the traditional female carer role.

4.4. Career and Older Children

During this family and career stage, the women adjusted their hours to enable them to take the children to their after-school activities in coordination with their husbands. Others used this schedule control enabled by their supervisor to leave work early and become involved in their children's sports and other activities. Therefore, children's age was a differentiating factor affecting the utilization of remote working or adjusting office hours, which strengthens the argument that one-size-fits-all FWAs may not satisfy workers' flexible working needs as those change across different family stages.

The data show that mothers, while their children were under the age of 14, tended to work from home when the children were ill and adjusted their office hours to pick them up or drop them off at day-care. Those in dual career couples mostly took it in turns with their husbands. When children became older (14+), mothers relied less on FWAs and especially remote working as the children were better able to look after themselves if they were home alone for a few hours, as shown in the next section.

Women emphasized how managing work and family was much easier once the children were older. Several of these mothers have children who are now at university and have left home. Their discourse regarding this family and career stage included words such as "fortunate" or "privileged" to be able to put in so many hours at work as the children had their own interests now or have left home. Their working patterns of utilizing FWAs and finishing their work at home in the evenings when the children were small changed to spending longer hours at work feeling undeterred by home and care responsibilities. This mirrors the early career stage during which long hours at the office was the norm. While they perceived that they had complete independence in scheduling their working hours or place of work, most women did not utilize any FWAs during this stage and could stay at the office as long as needed. They worked hard and had a free conscience that no one was waiting for them at home. They felt entitled to focus on themselves and their careers without having to consider relational contexts.

Since my children became 15, I no longer have to consider my hours at

work. Building a career, a family and a house all happens at the same time, so the last 10-15 years have been tough and that's why it was so important to have flexibility. But now, I am not in a hurry to get home.
[Melissa, 45, L4]

A number of women reflected on how pursuing a career and having a family happen simultaneously over a period of 10-15 years. This is a tough period to get through but after that, work and home management become easier. However, this was not the case with one participant with older children. Siri went on a very challenging expatriate assignment during which she had to re-organize the company and gain support from employees.

The first 6 months were really tough and drained all my energy. I went to the office every morning at 7 and felt that I had so much energy and I could change the world, and everybody would be happy but then I went home late at night exhausted. I was so relieved that the kids had not moved with me by then so I could afford to just care about myself and my work. My husband stayed with them in Sweden and then my family moved when I had all the work mess behind me. [Siri, 55 L2]

Irrespective of her children's ages, Siri could focus entirely on her work only if she felt that her children were being looked after, suggesting that if that were not the case, she would have to do something else. Siri is a very strong woman who has an extremely high drive to succeed. However, she faced tensions related to balancing career and motherhood which were eased by a partnership with her husband. Siri's story will be presented in more detail in section 4.9.1. Siri.

The following section presents the findings on the consequences of engaging with shared parental leave and three types of FWAs on mothers' work and home management and career. Findings on the role of the women's supervisors and husbands in their career outcomes are also shown.

4.5. Flexible Working Strategies and Career Maintenance

All mothers based in Sweden, (38) exercised their legal entitlement to parental leave, which was shared with the husbands, except in the case of single mothers, albeit in different ways. Returning to the position they had before childbirth or at least a position at the same organizational level is also protected by law in Sweden. The re-entry and focus back at work after parental leave ended, was smoother for mothers in dual parent households compared to single mothers, as their worries of leaving the children behind were eased by the fact that they were being looked after by their husbands. Upon returning to work, all mothers, irrespective of their organizational levels, engaged with one or a combination of three types of FWAs: reduced work percentage (only seven mothers), remote working, and adjusting office hours. There were no issues of access and most perceived that the organizational culture and supervisors were family-friendly, enabling employees to have a work-life voice, i.e. pushing back on late meetings or unreasonable completion schedules and utilizing FWAs. Many of the women asserted that without having this schedule control they would have had to make career changes which some of them did when they left previous organizations and joined ABC (section 4.5.3). Their autonomy to control their work schedule in accordance with their family commitments created a sense of “balance” in their ability to manage their work and home roles. This sense of “balance” and freedom in deciding to work from home or adjust their working hours on a given day, helped retain the women in their careers.

Most women perceived that ABC’s culture allowed “pushing back” on workload and after-hours meetings which, in combination with FWAs, contributed to their feeling of having “balance”.

I’m very happy here at ABC, I think that ABC is good at this compared to my previous workplace where there were more expectations... we would all agree that ABC is a good place for work and life balance, and it’s accepted to say “I cannot do this meeting because I need to be home” ...so I am very happy. [Alice, 43, L5]

Supervisors played a central role in encouraging the women to speak up about needing FWAs and adjusting their workload.

I learnt a lot from my managers and they also helped me balance my work and look after my family. As I said before, there was understanding about taking care of family. That work is not all.
[Bianca, 40, L5]

Some participants perceived that the Swedish culture also fostered an expectation to seek “balance” and say “No” to extra workload, travel or after-hours meetings, which several women did when needed. Melissa talks about her return to Sweden after an overseas assignment.

Oh, it feels great to be back in Sweden! It does! I can tell you that life here is a lot easier! It is also because of the culture that we are a little bit more outspoken and a little bit more confident in saying no I'm not doing that! [Melissa, 45, L4]

Even with autonomy to engage with FWAs and control of their work schedules, most mothers talked about struggling with work and home roles when the children were young. Notwithstanding the participation of their husbands in home roles, it was still no easy task to manage both domains according to their values. Nevertheless, enjoying their work roles was another contributing factor in staying put. For example, Philippa talked about how it was all a lot of work but when asked whether she considered leaving ABC given that she faced this challenge, she indicated that being happy in her role was a strong factor in staying in her career. Many other women expressed this salience of enjoying work, feeling happy and having fun at work. This suggests that the women used subjective criteria to evaluate their careers and in deciding to continue or make a change.

When I worked for 4 days, I worked more hours each day. There was a lot of work at home as well. I liked my job very much and I still do and that was a strong factor I would say in trying to make it work. I was home one day per week (working at 80%) and I would spend it with my children and family. So, for that reason I think I got more balance. So, no, I didn't consider changing or moving. No! [Philippa, 47, L5]

Wilma [49, L3] said that her role involved a lot of work, yet ABC did not have “a crazy work culture” and she managed to have “balance” by limiting travel and overtime through

the support of her supervisors. This was complemented by her husband, who worked part-time, was there for the children, and did much of the housework. She suggests that mothers should find what they don't want to sacrifice and not compromise on those things. In her case, she never arranges meetings before 8.30am, so she could allow her young children the time to get ready in the morning without pressure and arguments.

Other women said that they had no social life due to working constantly to compensate for when they had to leave work early. While they admitted that it was tough, they were still grateful for having this flexibility.

To be honest, my life at home has been a lot of work with my kids and at work it has been a lot of work... and in my free time I worked to compensate in case I needed to leave work and I guess you can look at that as being tough. It has been ok, but I have no social life whatsoever.
[Kirstin, 49, L2]

At least half of the participants when describing their career after children, used phrases such as “not much free time”, “cannot do both career and family perfectly”, “perhaps not a good time for big promotion”, “hard work and not smooth sailing”, “very tough”, “not used to much sleep”. Nevertheless, they expressed that ABC's culture and supervisors' mindset of focusing on results and not hours spent at the office was vital in allowing them to continue with their career and spend time with their family – “in solving the puzzle of arranging home life and work life” thereby having a positive career experience. For this they were grateful and appreciative.

Their actual experiences, however, tell a different story. This was a stressful life stage during which the women coped with demands from work and home through sheer hard work in both domains. They felt satisfied and worked very hard in exchange for having this “balance” which they considered essential to continue in their career. “Balance” was described as follows by Matilda:

My husband could not work from home, so I did when the kids were sick. If they were really sick, they slept anyway so then I could work but if it was the last day before going back to school or pre-school then I couldn't work as much but still I had the flexibility to be with them. I

think that's the biggest (organizational) benefit when you have a family, then you have work-life balance. [Matilda, 42, L4]

The women so valued having dinner with their children that they were happy to make up for the work later in the evening after the children were asleep.

I still worked a lot but at least I had the possibility of being with my kids while they were awake and when they went to bed early, I took the night shift as we called it. [Ines, 48, L4]

When asked about how satisfied she is with her work and home management, Felicia, also expresses this duality of “balance” and hard work in the evenings.

I feel I have balance... I work hard but I have control of my schedule most of the time, unless we have these group management meetings where I have to be present. [Felicia, 46, L3]

Felicia controls her schedule but is also flexible when she needs to stay longer at work. Some of the women used the phrase “flexibility was an exchange”. Several women talked in a similar manner to Felicia about “balance”: working hard but able to plan the work schedule as needed to accommodate the home roles. Alice felt that the expectation to constantly check emails in the evenings, weekends or during holidays is more self-imposed than a real expectation of supervisors and that employees should resist rather than adjust to current ways of working, i.e. showing commitment through face-time and long hours.

In summary, “balance”, as expressed by the women, was not an ideal state of harmony between work and home roles but a constant attempt to piece the work-family puzzle together, i.e. performing at work and spending time with the children and family through supportive supervisors granting flexibility and sharing the home roles with their husbands. Flexibility from work did not alter their demanding workload but enabled them to schedule work in such a way that they could see their children before bed in the evening and then continue to work from home. The women juggled work and home by working all hours at work and home to manage demands from both domains conforming to ideal worker norms while spending time with their children according to their values. This

points to the fact that they did not have expectations of managing a career and family in a stress-free manner and accepted that to have both they had to “keep on going” as several of them said. This work intensification will be further discussed in conjunction with career advancement in section 4.6.1. They felt happy that they had the independence to schedule their work around what they needed to do with the children. This enabled them to stay in their careers.

While all three types of FWAs were perceived by the participants to have contributed to their career maintenance by providing them with schedule control, thereby reducing tensions arising from conflicting demands between work/career and family, they did not suffice in helping these mothers advance to senior levels within ABC. Additional factors were at play which impacted on women’s career advancement. These are presented in the following section.

4.6. Flexible Working Strategies and Career Advancement

In examining how women were distributed across levels in terms of age, it is evident that some of them did not advance. As shown in Table 7, some women over 50 work in Level 2, which is to be expected, as typically workers rise through the ranks through acquiring more experience, among other factors. Other women however, who are over 50 are still in Level 6, the most junior managerial level. While many factors apart from age could influence the rate in which one’s career progresses, the common factors emerging from the experiences of the women who advanced to senior levels are presented below and compared to those of the women who are in junior managerial levels. Furthermore, the experiences of five women who are currently in different organizational levels but share similarities in age (over 50), tenure with ABC (over 10 years), marital status and number of children, are elaborated in section 4.9., the purpose being to identify what led to their different rates of advancement, given their many similarities.

Table 7 focuses on sample participants within ABC in Sweden (40 out of 43) and shows the average age and range of ages by current organizational level. The sample’s pattern of progression by age is linear in terms of average age by level; however, the range of ages within each level varies widely. For example, participants in Level 6 are between 32 and 58 years old. Table 7 also shows that the average age of the population of female

managers in Sweden is very similar to the average age of the sample participants, apart from slight differences in Levels 5 and 6.

Table 7: Age of female and male managers in ABC, Sweden, by Level.

Level	Average Age of Sample (Female)	Age Range of Sample (Female)	Average Age of Female Population	Average Age of Male Population
2	52	49 to 55	52	55
3	49	42 to 53	50	52
4	47	39 to 53	45	50
5	43	38 to 50	45	48
6	46	32 to 58	44	47

I also examined age by organizational level for the population of the male managerial pipeline within ABC in Sweden to explore whether men were accessing the higher levels at a younger age compared to the women. Interestingly, men’s average age by level was slightly higher than the women’s. Therefore, gender could not explain level progression within ABC.

In order to identify other factors which may have created synergies with FWAs in contributing to the women’s career maintenance **and** further advancement, I conducted a further analysis of the data by organizational level. I compared the experiences of mothers in senior levels with those in junior levels. Senior management levels within ABC comprise Levels 2, 3 and 4, which correspond to Executive Vice-President, Business Unit President or Functional Vice-President, and General Manager or Head of a Global Role respectively. This section summarises the similarities among mothers who advanced to senior levels (Levels 2, 3, and 4) juxtaposed against those of mothers in lower levels (Levels 5 and 6).

In the work domain, just as with women in lower managerial levels, senior women emphasized the significance of having schedule control, i.e. being able to work remotely (from home) or adjust their hours at work so that they could manage career and home roles. However, one important difference regarding the type of FWAs utilized, is that women who advanced to the most senior management levels had never worked part-time except for Saga, a single mother in Level 4. Instead, they used informal FWAs, i.e.

worked from home and/or adjusted their office hours. Neither of the two types of informal FWAs seemed to have a negative effect on career advancement, as shown by the evidence of all 11 women who rose to the most senior ranks (Levels 3 and 2) and had utilized both types of FWAs; eight of them still do as they have at least one school age child.

Therefore, the only formal FWA utilized by this study's participants, i.e. a reduction in work percentage, appears to carry career stigmas in contrast to informal FWAs, i.e. remote working and adjusting office hours. Reducing work percentage was driven by the degree of women's caring duties, as discussed in section 4.3.2. Formal FWAs: Reduced Work Percentage. In doing so, some of the mothers who reduced their work percentage expressed that they were conscious of its potential career stalling effects; however, being the main carers, they prioritised their family demands upon returning to work and for as long as the children were small and required more care. Most of the women who worked part-time are currently in more junior management levels in spite of the small reduction in their work percentage ranging from 5% to 15% for most. Only one participant reduced her work percentage by as much as 25%. Nevertheless, even a small reduction of work percentage still impacted on slowing down further career advancement when compared to remote working and variable hours.

All mothers who utilized FWAs (38 out of 41), irrespective of their management level, perceived that they could control their schedule which they attributed to a family-supportive organizational culture and a supervisor who trusted them to control their work schedule independently as long as they delivered results.

The supervisors...that's a very important factor. And that there is an understanding, you know. There has never been that: "Oh why are you leaving now?" There has never been that kind of questioning or underlying doubt whether or not things were taken care of before I left. There is trust! [Leah, 47, L4]

Furthermore, supervisor support for individualised schedule control in remote working and adjusting office hours was expressed as one of the main elements contributing to maintaining their careers after childbirth by women in all levels.

I have often said, I would not be able to do what I do without schedule

control in my life – if I compare my work to a doctor’s or some other job where I was not in control of my schedule and could not say “now I need to go”, it would have been much harder to stay in my job. [Mette, 53, L4]

My supervisor is very understanding. I can communicate openly and say what I need in terms of taking care of family. I think ABC is a good company for family matters. There is flexibility to do what you need at home so you can stay in your job. [Cleo, 41, L5]

Personalised schedule control was a result of open conversations with supervisors about the women’s needs. Most participants emphasized the importance of having a family-friendly supervisor who sets the example for the team. Their willingness to be open with their supervisor about needing to delay business travel or reduce workload, adjust their hours or work from home, helped the women cope with their multiple roles. What is noteworthy is that the women were satisfied with the perception of having control over their work schedule, even in cases where they did not really take advantage of it.

I cannot say that I have not left when I needed to; I mean, I always received understanding when I have needed it. But I haven’t used it very much. [Tilde, 50, L4]

Several other women talked about their supervisors being role models of prioritising family over work by attending their children’s events and avoiding business travel on weekends, setting an example for their teams and encouraging a work-life voice. The ability to have this work-life voice seemed to mitigate the stress experienced by the women in managing their multiple roles.

4.6.1. Work Intensification

While informal FWAs and schedule control were perceived as necessary and led to a sense of “balance”, the resulting work intensification was unconsciously accepted by the women. Even though women across all levels occasionally worked in the evenings or on weekends during intense work periods, this was more pronounced in the career experiences of participants in higher management levels (L2, L3, L4). Most of them worked every evening, after the children went to sleep. So, while they perceived that

FWAs kept their career going, further advancement and greater responsibility came at a high personal cost for the women in terms of stress and hard work.

My supervisor never questioned whether I was doing my job or not and that was very important...And so was the flexibility to deal with what was going on at home. I could work from home and leave early when I needed to...But it meant that very often I worked until 2.00 am in the morning but I was able to do this because I felt I was given this flexibility. [Kirstin, 49, L2].

The women worked extremely hard to make up for this “freedom with responsibility” which led to work intensification, evident in most of the women’s career accounts, albeit in different forms. They worked more intensively when at the office and were stressed trying to finish up and collect the children from day-care; some worked longer than their contractual hours, even in cases of reduced load; and most worked at home in the evenings when the children went to bed, taking the “night shift” as some called it. In a couple of cases, the husbands took the “night shift”.

Eva continued to work from home during her parental leave to finish a project so “there would be no harm to her work”, perceiving that her transition to motherhood and going on parental leave would hinder the progress of her project:

I said “ok, I am going to have this baby, but I will still be working for this project... I have a plan” – so I made it easy for my managers by providing them with a plan to work from home, so I could continue to cover the project remotely... [Eva, 52, L3]

Eva did this again when she had her second child.

Ines and Elvira work in the evening most days:

*I had three shifts, one at the office, one with the children and another one at home for the office after the children went to bed...It was tough, but I wanted to be there for my kids **and** have my career, so I just did it. [Ines, 48, L4]*

Elvira has a break from working in the evening for one week per month but talks about her load in a matter-of-fact-way, accepting it as normal.

Sometimes, I have to go home early to pick up the children ... then I have to really focus on my work when I'm at work, and then I go home and focus on them for a couple of hours. After I put them to bed, I typically pick up my computer and work for one or two hours. I relax a little bit and then I sleep. In intensive periods, I take work home every evening. But not always. Maybe for one week per month I don't do that.
[Elvira, 39, L4]

Despite her incredibly long hours, Elvira still feels that she works fewer hours compared to before she had children. She exhibits a work-life voice by pushing back on work when she feels that she reaches her limits:

For me it's all about communicating with my boss: "Right now I don't have time to do this, just so you know, I will handle it when I have time, but right now these are my priorities" ... as a manager, you need to have sleep, and you need to have a balance in life, or else you will not work long-term.

Her comments above suggest that being in control of her schedule and receiving understanding from her manager, alleviates her exhaustion from working additional hours very frequently and gives her the illusion of "balance".

Despite long hours and resulting stress, the women talked about their "freedom with responsibility" in very positive terms and did not perceive their work intensification as a negative issue. They felt that having flexibility was "a huge benefit" when the children were young.

Flexibility has helped me continue my career. As a single parent, I did not think I could have accepted a bigger position and have time for my children. [Mette, 53, L4]

Lykke blames herself for working excessive hours stemming from her attitude and passion towards her job:

During these 15 years there have been very few periods where I have worked normal hours, very far and few between, so, I don't want to blame the company for that; it is also something within me that I like to try change, I like to take on projects, you know, I have a passion for my work, so it's more than just going to work and doing your hours so you can finish and go home. [Lykke, 50, L3]

Having schedule control triggered an exchange process whereby the women continued to work for hours at home in the evenings. Despite the evident work intensification, the women felt that they had “balance” and were satisfied with the way they were managing their work and home roles, accepting that this was the way to have a career and family. In summary, FWAs and schedule control contributed to the women’s perceptions of having “balance”. In reality, they conformed to ideal worker behaviours in exchange. Paradoxically, the women ignore their constant race against time to be there for their children and for their career and feel lucky for being in this position. ABC’s family-friendly culture unconsciously disadvantages the women who utilize FWAs by not safeguarding them from work intensification.

4.6.2. Sponsorship by Supervisor

Whilst all mothers perceived that they were trusted by their supervisors to control their work schedule, another important difference between the experiences of senior and junior levels was that women who advanced to senior levels, highlighted other types of supervisor support which had contributed to their further career advancement.

Career Planning and Promotion

Senior women talked about being grateful that their supervisors encouraged and sponsored them in terms of significant next promotions over what appeared to be more experienced male candidates and sometimes involved functional areas typically dominated by men, such as operations and sales.

I was very happy that the VP of HR gave me the chance and she pushed for me to get in, and the manager I had at that time, he really believed in me... because it was not so easy to get into operations. [Elsa, 42, L4]

The women seem to attribute the support of their managers in career development and promotion to being lucky for having been given the chance. This feeling of being lucky could be pointing to socially constructed constraints affecting the outcomes which women (mothers) perceive are entitled to at work and home.

The interviewees gave many examples of the role of supervisors in facilitating their further career development, engaging in conversations to determine the appropriate next step, and giving feedback and encouragement regarding when to move on.

All my managers in ABC were supportive... we discussed what will be the next step for me and gave me feedback and when the time was right, they supported me to move on. Yeah...very much so. [Freja, 51, L3]

Furthermore, the supervisors nominated the women for development programmes which enhanced their network and included mentors from senior management.

Development, Mentoring and Networking

ABC is an organization which has a well-developed approach to gender diversity, and this includes a women-only leadership programme, which was extensively discussed by some of the women who participated. This programme includes the assignment of a mentor from the top management tier and is offered to women at middle management level (typically Level 5 and rarely Level 4) who are nominated by their supervisor. Attendance on the programme and the subsequent experience of being mentored was a key factor for the women in identifying career competencies, developing their career plans and strengthening their network and visibility among senior managers. The women felt that ABC saw such a programme as essential in maintaining talent. Overall, the women described the programme as an important aspect of their career success in accessing senior levels, beyond the formal educational elements, and networking to include strong bonds between the women attendees, as indicated by Tilde:

The programme continues developing you from where you are, and you get a fantastic network of wonderful women in ABC. It becomes a bond that is extremely useful when you have something you would like to just bounce off, or just somebody who understands you and your situation.

So, I am a very strong advocate for the programme. [Tilde, 50 L4]

This programme also aided the development of their social capital. This was an important aspect of the women's experiences when discussing their career success. For instance, they talked about the benefits of networking with other senior women.

That is a global programme here in headquarters ... purely for female leaders... for ABC to promote and make sure they retain the talent in the company. ...we were a group of 10 to 12 females, and I was part of the third wave and then we were assigned mentors in Level 2 or Level 3. Career planning was part of the programme...Possible career path, competencies I would need to develop, it's really important to get feedback and to have a mirror sometimes to be able to see what you do. And also, networking...to create a stronger network, that is one of the key elements of the programme I think. [Elsa, 42, L4]

The next section presents the findings regarding how the women construed the support from their home domain related to their career advancement and success in reaching senior levels.

4.6.3. Partnership with Husband

One significant finding which emerges from the data is that for most of the women in dual career couples, having an egalitarian partnership with their husbands in their home domain was considered a key contributing factor to their careers. The women and their husbands flexed their careers in order to manage home roles during intensive work periods.

I think one key thing is that my husband and I had agreed on how we divide things at home. So it can be for certain periods of time when we know that one of us has to work long or travel. There was a time when I had to work a lot, very long hours, and I was not able to pick up the children or be available so we had to decide if either I would decline the role or ... then we decided that my husband would reduce his working time and take full responsibility at the time. [Alice, 43, L5]

Alice and her husband prioritised her career during her transition to a more demanding role. She suggests that this was an ongoing coordination which was something that they were prepared to do for each other's career according to the circumstances.

In terms of home life, one difference with women in more junior levels, is that six senior women (L2, L3 and L4) emphasized the central role of their husbands in their career development by actively encouraging them to gain valuable experience through international assignments within ABC. These husbands became trailing spouses who stayed at home to look after the children.

My husband has always been extremely supportive, and he was just ... of course you should do that... so, there was no chance that I would say I couldn't do it...when it comes to getting an offer for a new challenge, he was only extremely supportive. So, I have no personal time, but I have a very understanding environment! [Siri, L2, 55]

Siri indicates that feeling supported in her career makes up for her lack of free time. Emelie accepted an international assignment with ABC in order to gain valuable experience towards a future L3 promotion and her husband gave up his senior career in Sweden, became a trailing spouse and stayed at home to look after their children. Emelie was able to work long hours, being the norm in the receiving country where flexible working was not a very common practice. Emelie asserted that her husband has been “super equal” in sharing home and care roles from the start:

And even when my husband was CEO for four years when the kids were small, he used to stay at home on Fridays. And he always left very early in the morning and he came home early in the afternoon so he could pick up the kids from day-care. So my husband has been super equal. I discussed this with him before this interview and I said that for me it's not so much the flexibility at work with working from home and so on, it's more the support from my perfect husband. It was the support that I have outside the workplace—that's helped my career. [Emelie, 45, L4].

For Emelie, her partnership with her husband contributed more to her career than flexibility from her organization.

Breaking out of traditional gender roles, both Siri and Emelie's husbands followed their wives to their overseas assignments. Another four women who completed international assignments with ABC, had trailing spouses who stayed at home with the children.

All senior women in dual career couples, just as the junior ones did, talked extensively about sharing family roles with their husbands and how that was integral to their career continuation and further advancement. However, a second distinction between senior and junior level women is that several senior women's husbands took a larger share of household and care responsibilities than the women who were frequently away on business travel.

My husband tried not to travel that much for work. If you work for ABC, in most central functions, you have to travel to a certain extent, so I can't see how it would have worked if both of us had been travelling, so he has definitely been key to my career development. [Lykke, 50, L3]

In fact, it is noteworthy that the husbands of two Level 3 women, Wilma and Robin, formally reduced their work percentage to take on a bigger role at home with the children to accommodate their wives' careers, as Wilma asserts:

*No! I did **not** need to go down in time. I had the freedom to be flexible. At home, we share things, yes for sure. My husband has had his paternity leave and he has been working part-time since the kids were born as I was always travelling quite a bit. He is the stable one at home, he is the one making dinner and being there when the kids come home. [Wilma, 49, L3]*

Robin's husband has been working at 80% since the children were born and continues to do so in order to drive their teenaged children to their activities as Robin is frequently away on business. Robin husband's greater involvement with the children allows her to focus on her career knowing that someone as close to the children as she is, is looking after them. After shared leave, there was a harmonious coordination of dropping off and

picking up their daughter from day-care. After their second child, Robin started travelling more and working longer hours so they decided that her husband would reduce his work percentage. The quotes below show that there was career flexing between Robin and her husband.

After parental leave ended and we were both back at work, our daughter was in day-care – it is very common in Sweden. This is the way. And it worked out fine because we had an arrangement that maybe one day I dropped her off in the morning and then my husband picked her up early afternoon. Then I could work, you know, my day was maybe starting a little bit later and ending later. And we also took turns so it worked for both of us.

After having a second child, Robin and her husband reassessed their situation:

With two children...and the need for travelling...I have always been travelling in all my roles more or less. This meant that my husband had to take a much bigger responsibility than I did for the children and our home. So, what we did—the compromise we did—is that he reduced his working time to be able to take care of everything while I was doing my job and travelling. So, my husband was the flexible one here.

Robin's words highlight that, together with her husband, they approached the work-family management issue and found solutions for their circumstances in an egalitarian manner i.e. without falling back on traditional gender role arrangements. Robin's career required travelling and therefore her husband accommodated her career needs and their family needs by reducing his work percentage.

Leah talks about how she and her husband were able to work many hours outside the office:

My husband...his work is not a normal 60 hours job, and it's flexible—the way he works. I'm a morning person, he's a night owl, so we've been able to do a lot of work outside normal office hours and I think that's what made our family and career possible. Because when the

kids came home there was someone here who was also mentally awake while they were awake. [Leah, 47, L4]

It's interesting how Leah characterises a "60 hours a week job" as "normal" which is common to many other senior women's career and family attitudes: working extremely hard and long hours was the way to have a career and family. When Leah and her husband both had to be away on business, they had additional support from her parents who moved in and looked after the children.

Most of the husbands of women in the top levels (Levels 2 and 3) had also worked flexibly after shared leave and while the children were young. A few gave up their demanding careers and compromised with less senior roles so that they could look after the children, and some adjusted their work schedule to fit with their responsibilities at home in coordination with their wives. Others ended up working intensively at home so that they could leave work early if they were picking up the children.

So, my husband and I, we have always worked it out between us...so I started work early and then left early to pick up the children from day-care. My husband dropped the children off later in the morning and worked longer in the evenings. So, we coordinated well. [Eva, 52, L3]

Partnership with their husbands in carrying out their home roles complemented the sponsorship by their supervisors. Creta, in offering advice to young women in their early careers, talks about needing two levels of support at work and home:

In terms of your work and your family, try to find a supervisor that can support you to have the flexibility to manage your time – having the independence to say, "now I need to be at home" or "now I need to be at work" and also a supervisor who cares about your development and your promotion. But your husband at home also needs flexibility – so that you can share the family responsibilities. [Creta, 41, L5]

The women and their husbands were in harmony in terms of supporting each other's careers while looking after their children according to their values.

As expected, simultaneously managing a career and family was much tougher for single mothers. Participants in those circumstances relied more heavily on support from their supervisors in schedule control and workload management. Kirstin, a divorced mother in a senior position with a child who was seriously ill, almost burnt out in her previous employment and took a less senior position with ABC in order to be able to have schedule control and telework when she needed to be with her children. Single mothers made more compromised career decisions so that they could look after their children. This will be discussed in section 4.7. Flexible Working Strategies and Career Compromises.

4.6.4. Age of Children and Promotions

It is noteworthy that most women who were either promoted or hired in Levels 2, 3 and 4, had children who at the time were at least eight years old, while most were older than 12. The majority of women within these levels were promoted to their current level above the age of 40 and when their youngest child was at least eight years old.

While it is expected to have older women with older children in more senior levels, several women perceived that their senior roles would be incompatible with young children and expressed relief for currently being able to stay as long as necessary at work since no one was waiting for them at home. Some talked about not accepting senior roles which involved long hours and travel while their children were younger than 10 years old. Wilma took on a senior role after being strongly encouraged by her supervisor.

If I had known how big this role was, I would have thought that I could not combine it with my family. I have this old prejudice that women tend to have, that now I have to take this responsibility to take care of my kids. But I was pushed by the manager and given the fantastic manager I had, it has turned out very nicely. [Wilma, 49, L3]

Wilma's struggle to accept a senior role when her children were young points to conforming to cultural and societal beliefs regarding motherhood, which continue to influence women's career decisions, despite having an equal partnership at home in terms of childcare and household responsibilities. The perception that a senior role could hinder their ability to carry out their role of mother seems pervasive.

In summary, extensive support from their work and home domains were vital to the senior women's career advancement in terms of FWAs and schedule control, complemented by career mentoring, development, planning and sponsoring next promotions and a partnership with their husbands. In return, the women worked extremely hard both at work and at home.

Absence of a sense of "balance", largely due to unsupportive supervisors, led the women to seek new roles within or outside their organization or move to less senior positions as shown below.

4.7. Flexible Working Strategies and Career Compromises

Several women who had some or all their children before joining ABC, left their previous organizations due to face-time cultures expecting total devotion to work and discouraging the use of FWAs. Some of the women moved to smaller roles to gain more control in managing their work and home demands. A family-supportive organizational culture and supervisor is therefore integral to mothers' career decisions. The women who worked additional hours without having freedom to schedule control, felt compelled to make a change. Kirstin talks about her previous employer and what led to her resignation:

I was almost at breakdown point because as a manager in this field, there are pressures and often things happen at night, and I started to feel unwell. I felt that I was not doing enough for my kids and not doing enough for my job and so was not feeling very well so I decided to look for another job...as I was given absolutely no support from my manager or employer. [Kirstin, L2, 49]

After moving to ABC, Kirstin felt that there was understanding and support from her supervisor and she started feeling positive about her new role:

I was completely open with that manager... she was very supportive of the fact that sometimes I needed to be at home with my kids and work from home, and she was very open to any working hours that I could work – the only proviso was that if there was a meeting I needed to be there, otherwise I could work pretty much where I wanted to work, as

long as I did my job. That was the turning point for me because that is where I started to gain confidence in myself again from my job perspective and I felt I had the freedom to take care of my kids when I needed to, without feeling guilty. [L2, 49]

Kirstin worked very long hours within ABC in exchange for having flexibility. However, she ignored this work intensification due to having schedule control enabled by her supervisor. Kirstin was later promoted to Level 2 thus in her case compromising with a more junior position did not limit her further career advancement. She attributed her success to feeling confident again in her career and being in control of her home life.

Several women explained how they left previous employers when their work interfered with family. This was attributed to unsupportive managers, regarding flexibility with work hours, frequent travel or long commutes, all of which eroded their time at home with the children.

It is noteworthy that negative sentiments such as “guilt” or “feeling like a bad mother” were expressed by the women when they were not able to spend as much time with their children as they wanted to. Wilma talked about an “old prejudice” constraining her from assuming work roles which she perceived would interfere with her responsibilities as a mother. Wilma would have rejected this senior role if she had not been encouraged to take it.

If I knew how big this role would be with 45 days travel, I would have probably said no! I am a mother of two children and cannot travel that much. But ... everything works out due to my extraordinary managers and husband. [Wilma, 49, L3]

Ines feels guilty and disappointed when she relies on extended family to look after her children:

Fortunately, I have both my mother and mother-in-law living close by and they are both retired so I have a lot of support, which is good, but it still does not take away the fact that I gave life to these children to be with them and not to farm them out to my mother and mother-in-law –

that was not the purpose. [Ines, 48, L4]

Ines experienced amplified tensions due to a sense of guilt for leaving the children behind even when the grandparents stepped in to assist. It is evident that despite being dynamic, ambitious and wanting to succeed, the women struggle to break away from prescribed gender roles and expectations of the maternal mandate. The struggle to solve the work and home puzzle was more pronounced in cases of single mothers or ones whose husbands could not help with care and home roles. For example, Saga gave up a senior role requiring long hours with her previous employer as she did not want to “sacrifice her children” (section 4.3.2). Rut was at the verge of a breakdown due to struggling to meet demands from her career and family according to her values:

My husband had his own business and he was working on the weekends as well. But then the culture behind me (South Mediterranean) puts the responsibility on me for the education of the children and to be home for them. During the first two years of my career I felt that I was not home enough for them and that I had to do more for them ...at work I was giving everything to my job and at home everything to my children and husband and forgetting about myself. I also have my identity and given that I was moving from another country, I felt lost during that period. I was a mother, I was a woman, a manager and I was not well. So, then I decided that I had to prioritise myself too, because then if I feel better, the family will feel better as well. [Rut, 46, L6]

Other women talked about “necessary compromises”, such as letting go of expectations that work and home can be perfect at the same time and that “having it all is not possible”. Mette talks about her dilemma of going for a promotion while her children were in day-care:

This is the most critical time when everything comes together... after childbirth and when the children are younger.... especially if you have children when you are 30. You have to choose, and it can be hard...this might not be a good time for a big promotion or to start a family. [Mette 53, L4]

Wilma, a Level 3 with a husband who works part-time and takes on a larger share with the children, suggested: “stability and support at home supports a stable career”. Therefore, mothers who had little or no support for their home life struggled even more to stay in their careers, which stalled or advanced at a much slower rate when their children were older.

4.8. Career Experiences of Women without Children

Despite having only two women without children in the sample, it is noteworthy to briefly present their perceptions about flexible working strategies and career. One participant is 32 years old and very committed to her career advancement. She currently works very long hours and takes on additional projects, never saying no. While she is very happy at the moment and feels that she is supported by her supervisor for her further career development, she says that things will have to change when she has children:

...as I said before, I don't have a family, I don't have kids , I do have a boyfriend now and I do like to go home sometimes (laughs) but I really enjoy having lots to do and being involved in many small projects, taking part in decision making...If I had kids I would concentrate more on the day to day business and my team and their development and less on those wider projects which I enjoy as I would need to reduce my own workload... so I hope when I step up a level, I can still keep this balance between work and personal life because I think it is better to have the balance so you can be healthy for a longer time. [Emilia, 32, L6]

Emilia suggests that she has “balance”, despite the fact that she works long hours, as was the case with the career experiences of mothers. As with the majority of the women in the sample, Emilia conforms to ideal worker norms, yet feels she has “balance”.

The second participant also works long hours and, while on an expatriate assignment in Asia, started to think about the implications of working long hours:

I don't have children...so I haven't experienced that part of the work-life balance ...the first time I reflected on it was when I started my assignment in Asia with bigger responsibilities. Then it's not as easy to

just leave the work in the office when you leave... sometimes it is a bit too much. [Elise, 41, L4].

When she was in Sweden, Elise associated needing “balance” with having children. However, she did experience an absence of “balance” when during an assignment in Asia, her working hours became even longer (staying in the office until 10pm), and she could not switch off at home. Currently, back in Sweden, she feels her work is manageable and she can pursue her hobbies.

4.9. Vignettes of Women Across Levels

In this subsection, I present the career stories of five participants. I have chosen to focus on the career stories of Siri, Elinor, Vera, Ebba, and Pia who are currently in Levels 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 respectively. All five women are similar in age (over 50 years old), tenure with ABC (over 10 years) and family status (married with at least two children). The rationale for presenting these cases is explained below.

The findings of this thesis show that women across all managerial levels of ABC had access to FWAs, both formal and informal. This was an unexpected outcome as frequently, informal FWAs are “awarded” by supervisors to those employees who have already proven themselves and have therefore gained their trust to work independently and produce results (Rousseau, Tomprou and Simosi, 2016).

As previously discussed in section 4.6, some of the women managers were at the lowest managerial levels (Levels 5 and 6) despite their age or tenure with ABC. For example, Pia, who had been working for ABC for 30 years was at Level 6, the lowest managerial level within this organization. In contrast, Siri, who was of a similar age to Pia, had also been working for over thirty years with ABC, ascended to Level 2, reporting to the CEO. To further explore this differential rate of advancement, I have chosen to present the cases of five women managers of similar age, tenure, marital status and number of children, who are positioned across all ABC’s managerial pipeline from Level 6 to Level 2. The five cases are presented in sections 4.9.1 to 4.9.5, followed by a comparison of commonalities and differences in the women’s career stories discussed in section 4.10.

4.9.1. Siri

Siri, a 55-year-old Executive Vice-President (Level 2), has been working with ABC for 33 years in Operations. She is the most senior female manager in a line function and has a Master's in engineering. Siri is married with two children who are above 19 years old. Siri is a very driven career person who enjoys her job very much. She has risen through the ranks of ABC since university and has held many different roles in sales and operations, both in Sweden and overseas. Siri and her husband flexed their careers to look after their children. Her husband is an entrepreneur and has been very flexible and willing to adjust his working hours to look after the children. When the children were born, he took three months of parental leave and then coordinated with Siri to pick up or drop off at day-care and stayed at home when the children were ill. She gave an example of their arrangement when the children were ill whereby her husband would stay home until midday when Siri would return home, having started her workday at 6am. Siri had schedule control and was able to adjust her hours accordingly through using informal FWAs. When the children were small, she started work as early as 6.30am so that she could leave by 2.00pm. When Siri took on an overseas assignment, her husband stayed with the children in Sweden for one year and then joined her but had to commute to Sweden for his work.

Five years after joining ABC and immediately after returning from maternity leave with her first child, Siri was promoted to a management position.

During my maternity leave, I got a phone call from my boss who asked me if I wanted to take his position when I came back. It suited me well because before with my sales support position I was travelling to all our sales companies around the world and this new position would be building a sales support unit at the headquarters and managing 10 people, so a lot less travel.

Siri attributed this sponsorship by her supervisor to the fact that they had built a good relationship working together for three years during which she had proven herself. From then on, Siri was promoted every three to four years.

In her career story, Siri relayed two important transitions during which she grappled with career and motherhood roles. The first transition involved a promotion when her children were young (below 10 years old):

From a career point, you can say that it was the worst part of my life because then my daughter was six and my son was nine. They both had many activities, but they could not do anything themselves, so we still had to take them everywhere. I was in charge of a big company we acquired, and I had to manage sales, operations, R&D and everything. Many things were new to me and it was not a good time, to be honest, because I had too many direct reports and too many new things to manage and the kids were too little. However, I was happy that it was a short period in my life (two years) because it was too much, and I would not have managed that job well for a long time.

Siri's description of this role indicates a struggle between career and home. She was managing a demanding position in terms of workload and assumed new and unfamiliar responsibilities while her children were still small and required attending to.

What kept me going? Well, I am somebody who keeps on going, I'm just self-driven, I don't need somebody to tell me to do this or that, I have been given this challenge, it was a fantastic challenge and a fantastic job, and I wanted to do it.

On the one hand, she perceived that it was a great career opportunity but on the other hand, she felt that it conflicted with her role of mother, given the young age of her children. Her husband's involvement with the children appeased the tension she experienced:

Again, my husband has always been extremely supportive encouraging me... "of course you should take this role..." so, given his support, there was no chance that I would say I couldn't take an offer for a new challenge Therefore, I had no time but a very understanding environment at home. During those two years when I had this job, I had no time to fail... I think if it went on longer, I would have needed to

make a change. It is most important to me that the kids were doing fine and my husband was there for them ... that was my criterion... if I feel that the kids are not fine, if they are not happy then I need to change something and in the long run that was the biggest challenge.

Siri persisted by working extremely hard, having no free time, but rising to the challenge, feeling that her work role was manageable because her children were happy. Her motherhood values would have led her to change roles if she perceived that the children were unhappy. Two competing schemata are evident in her construction of the experience above: the work devotion schema and the family devotion schema. Siri followed both at the same time by sharing with her husband and working very intensively.

The second transition Siri described was during an expatriate assignment, which constituted a promotion to a much larger role as the managing director of a European region. This promotion came at a time when her children were older and at an age during which changing schools and countries after the academic year had started could have been detrimental to their studies. Her husband's role in encouraging her to take it was integral to her acceptance of the position. They decided that the family would not move with her until after the children completed their school year. Siri felt relieved that her family was not there during the first year as she faced many obstacles in trying to reorganize the company, something which was very stressful and absorbed all her energy.

I was lucky to have all the mess behind me by the time the children came. When the kids came down...my son was 15 and my daughter was 12...when you move kids that age they don't love to be moved. My son hated it and so did my daughter. So, you need to have the energy within you to make the kids like the place, so I was happy that I had the work mess behind me when the family finally came down.

This experience highlights the family and career clash once again, which was mitigated by her husband's willingness to stay in Sweden with the children for one year. This enabled Siri to devote all her energy to her new role, without worrying about her children's adjustment to the new country and school and engage in ideal worker behaviour.

Siri was aware that this assignment was a prerequisite to her further career advancement to Level 2 (group management), yet she first had to be certain that this move would not have any adverse effects on her children. This is an important finding as it shows the dynamic nature of relational contexts impacting on women's career decisions. Siri, encouraged by her husband stepping up to assume full responsibility for the children back in Sweden, chose to focus on her career and took this expatriate assignment, having peace of mind that the children would be happy and looked after by her husband. She had very long days at work and commuted to Sweden 2-3 times per week to see her family which involved several hours of driving.

Without those years abroad, I would never ever have had the job I have now, never! The basics are that you should have experience from the central organization, and you should have experience from being a managing director in a sales company. If you have done both and you have done well then of course you put yourself in a good position to come into group management. If I did not have the expatriate assignment as a managing director, then there would not have been an opportunity for me to be promoted to group management.

Siri's comments above show she engaged in career self-management by building up experience and seeking opportunities that would make her eligible for a Level 2 position with business responsibility. She worked very intensively and enjoyed the work challenges – provided she was confident that her children were being well looked after by her husband. She adjusted her hours at work to suit her children's needs in coordination with her husband and worked again in the evenings when the children were asleep. When asked about the key elements to her success, Siri said:

I think the evolution of my roles as the company was continually changing, not simple changes but real challenges every three or four years. Also, I was fortunate to have managers who really believed that we deliver best results when we enjoy the work and have fun. So that has been the guiding star... we should have fun when we work because we work long hours, and we should have independence and not be told you what to do. Even if you have all the support in the world at home

from your husband and supportive managers... if the work in itself is not fun you're not going to stay...but also, it was because I felt good about my work and I felt good about taking care of my family.

Siri emphasized that she has “balance” and that was something she always aimed for. During normal work periods, she works around ten hours per day. Being in top management, she accepts these as normal hours and expects that during intensive periods, she needs to work like “crazy”, conforming to ideal worker norms:

I feel I have balance. I always felt I had it. I mean that is typical of our company. I would say all my colleagues in group management (Level 2) would say that we have balance. Of course, if we have an exhibition or we have a conference, we work like crazy but normally I am in the office around 8 o'clock and I will be home again between 5.30 and 6 o'clock. I think that it's perfectly fine. It's not the culture here to evaluate people by how long they stay at the office. There are so many other things we evaluate but not how late one stays. I mean today when we work and have our smartphones and iPads, most people end up working more than they used to. Even if they stay fewer hours in the office, they do more work because they always pick up their email as it can be done easily.

Siri is passionate about her work and loves her role. She also enjoys change and challenge and frequently engages in ideal worker behaviour. Her assessment of the roles she has held so far is based on subjective criteria, for example whether the roles were fun, challenging and interesting and whether she worked with good teams. She makes a very small reference to objective criteria such as remuneration, only to emphasize her satisfaction with her work.

I have the most interesting work I could think of, I love and enjoy my work, I get paid well, I think that's fantastic, and I am so fortunate.

Despite her brief reference to external or objective career success criteria regarding being well-paid, Siri mostly uses subjective criteria to describe what being successful and satisfied with her career means to her. She talks about having balance, being satisfied

with work and home life i.e. ensuring her family/children are happy which she articulated as a prerequisite in persisting with or taking on new roles. Siri attributes her sense of balance to having flexibility and schedule control. However, during her two challenging career transitions which she perceived as central to her advancement to Level 2, she maintained ideal worker behaviours throughout, enabled by her husband who became the primary caregiver, looking after their children and home. This in turn enabled Siri to focus on her work roles and put in as many hours as needed. Siri also attributes being happy and satisfied with her career to enjoying and having fun at work and in her teams; the ability to work independently; and, the challenge of taking on new and interesting roles every few years. The only time she refers to her level is when she talks about the significance of completing an overseas assignment for promotion to group management suggesting self-career planning. However, her subjective evaluations of why she is satisfied with her career transcend her objective success in terms of status/level.

According to many other participants, Siri is considered a role model for women in ABC who aspire to reach top management. However, her success came through sheer hard work and personal sacrifices, such as having no free time to herself and being separated from her family when her children were still at school. ABC rewarded her hard work and commitment but did not protect Siri and other women in this sample from work intensification.

4.9.2. Elinor

Elinor, a 53-year-old Human Resource Manager, (Level 3) worked for six years at her parents' company after secondary school, as was unsure of what to study at university. She became interested in working with people and pursued a degree in Human Resources. She is married with three children who are 23, 21 and 15 years old. She has been working with ABC for 10 years. Immediately after university, she completed a summer internship and was subsequently offered a temporary job (to replace someone on parental leave) as a Human Resources manager with the same company. Elinor felt that her manager was brave in offering her this big step up, despite not having gained enough experience. His faith in her was a big boost to her confidence. After two years in that position she went on maternity leave and had two children in two years. She was therefore away from work for almost three years. Upon her return to work, she was offered another position with the

same company as a Human Resource manager. In 2007, she joined ABC as a business partner.

Elinor emphasized the salient role of her supervisor in boosting her confidence. Additionally, she perceived that having open conversations about career planning for both short- and long-term career goals and being sponsored for the next promotion were key elements which led to her further career advancement to Level 3.

Within ABC, my job included many roles in one, so it was really tough... After some years I told my manager that things are not working so he had confidence in me, or he was crazy (laughs), and gave me the freedom to work in a team and come up with new ways to organize the department!

As Elinor stated, the project above was added to her high workload but as she was very interested in it, she did not mind the extra work which gave her the opportunity to work with a great team.

On the family front, Elinor engaged with FWAs asserting that it was well accepted to leave early or start late, depending on family needs, or work from home, all being informal arrangements agreed with the supervisor. She feels that for FWAs to be effective, they need to be informal arrangements, as long as employees produce results. As a user of flexible working and a Human Resources manager, she claims that having to adhere to formal and set flexible arrangements would demotivate employees as everyone has different flexibility needs. This is consistent with most of her colleagues in ABC, who use informal and individualised FWAs to sustain their career and look after their family.

Equally important to Elinor's career was the fact that her husband, who has his own company, assumes a large part of the house and childcare responsibilities. Elinor asserts that this partnership is not about counting whose turn it is but, depending on circumstances at home and work, either her husband or she steps in so that they can manage their work and home demands. She gives the example that, for their first two children, her husband could not take much parental leave due to work commitments, so Elinor stayed at home for almost three years but then for their third child, her husband took one year of parental leave so that Elinor could focus on her career. Today in Sweden,

while professional dual income couples tend to share the parental leave equally, it is seldom that the father stays home for the most part of the leave. Elinor's husband was a trailblazer in doing so over 20 years ago which facilitated her re-entry and focus on her career.

Elinor is a senior manager and, as with Siri, she makes no references to her high status or other objective career evaluation criteria. In fact, unlike Siri, she does not consider herself as very career-driven in terms of advancing to higher levels but expects to have fun at work and have the opportunity to take on new responsibilities. However, through sustaining a high workload conforming to an ideal worker norm for several years, she signalled her work commitment to her supervisor who gave her autonomy to work on changing the structure of the HR function. Like Siri, she places value on being able to work independently and instil change while enjoying her work content. Despite her high workload, she is satisfied with utilizing FWAs in coordination with her husband so that they can look after their children.

4.9.3. Vera

Vera, a 51-year-old Managing Director and Finance Manager (Level 4) for one of ABC's sites in Sweden, has been with the company for 22 years. She is married and has three children who are all above 20 years old and at university. She studied Finance and then earned an MBA degree. Prior to ABC, she worked with various companies for four years in the finance department. Her first position with ABC was a controller and she was replacing someone temporarily.

Her career narrative began with a statement that her mindset, of daring to seize opportunities despite not feeling entirely ready to do so, was key to her career advancement. As in Elinor's case, Vera portrays herself as someone who does not have a clear career path in terms of ascending to higher levels but focuses on working hard, having fun and seeking meaning in her role by improving things. She perceives that taking on projects helped her build a network with other colleagues and was a door opener for opportunities to do new things. She wants to be recognised by others as one who makes a difference.

I need to see the point in my role, and I like to improve things... to do it

in the best way and I think that has helped me in the ABC environment. I wanted to improve things, to change things so people see that I want to improve things...

Having three children close in age, Vera talks about how it was tough to manage work and home. She refers to ABC's culture of focusing on results and not hours (enabling flexibility) which she perceives worked well for her in managing both domains. When she returned to work after her third child, Vera faced some difficulties in her relationship with her supervisor:

The tough thing was that I had to prove myself and show what I could do. My supervisor did not have trust in me, so I had to show him what I was able to do – it was personal, and it was about being a woman... that was nearly 20 years ago. Respect and culture (gender biases) have changed so much over the years and across the country as a whole, not just in ABC. It is quite different now because, in Sweden at least, the man can stay at home and watch the kids as well, so it is a totally different picture. So, my journey is not so different from that of our society. To succeed, you must be strong and keep on doing your job and not let those things stop you because that is when you can't go on with your journey.

Vera did not take any steps to change supervisors and endured the situation at work. When asked about what sustained her in her career at the time, Vera emphasizes the sharing of home roles with her husband and using FWAs. She also refers to showing flexibility towards ABC by working at night or during the weekends in exchange for utilizing FWAs. As with Siri and Elinor, Vera portrays working intensively as normative, despite the fact that she had difficulties with her supervisor.

Sharing with my husband was the first thing and by being flexible, coming home early and using evenings and weekends to finish work – the children were not ill very often... We also coordinated day-care pick-up and drop-off and then going home early or staying home.

She did not appear to engage in career self-planning, stating that opportunities will come to you if you have passion for your work and perform. Vera adopts a passive approach to career development, as before reaching a senior level within ABC, she maintained her previous role for nine years and the one before that for 12 years. She does not appear to be inclined to take initiative or seek opportunities to further advance in her career.

Similar to Siri and Elinor, Vera derives her satisfaction with her career from subjective evaluations and not her senior level. In her case she seeks meaning in her work and values being recognised as an expert in her field who can make a difference in her organization. When she faced difficulties at work with having to prove herself to her supervisor, she perceived that what helped her get through this phase, was having flexibility and sharing the home life responsibilities with her husband. She described flexibility as being able to leave early and continue working at home in the evenings and weekends. Even though this points to work intensification which she described as flexibility towards the organization.

4.9.4. Ebba

Ebba, a 53-year-old Quality Manager, (Level 5) has been working with ABC since 2004. She started work after secondary school in 1985 with another organization, as an administrator. She does not have a university degree and has always been working with quality. In 1995, she was promoted to her first managerial job. In 1999, there was a reorganization and she applied for a much larger role which she did not get. She resigned and joined a construction company where she worked for nine months and then lost her job due to a reorganization. Subsequently she was unemployed for two years and so was her husband. Ebba describes this as a very difficult transition for her family but asserts that their strong family bond kept them going. She felt supported by her family (husband) in her search for new career opportunities that lasted for two years.

To manage your career and what comes with it, I think you need to have a strong family situation in place which makes you feel supported. I have supported my husband throughout his career, and he has supported mine. We have never thought that it is more important for the man to do certain things. I know in some countries it is really important for the man to be the number one person in the family, but

not in Sweden. Anyway, in my family, it has never been an issue of who is earning the most money or who has the highest management position. The most important thing is that we are together, and we are one family.

The significance of being an egalitarian couple, departing from gendered breadwinner/caretaker roles, exhibiting strong support for each other's career, is emphasized through Ebba's words. The role of national context in fostering this deviation from traditional gender roles also emerges here.

In 2004 she applied for a job with ABC and was successful. She stayed in the same role for 10 years. Ebba was happy with her role and perceived that ABC's informal culture and its low power distance created a great working environment.

I really enjoy it. I like the company very much because people are really nice and down to earth. Even if you talk to high-level managers, they do not act like they are above you. So, it's a really good atmosphere, culture and attitude, and good people. I think we have a really good working environment and it really helps that you can be open and can discuss things to help you develop.

In the last two years in this role, Ebba was looking for a change. However, it proved to be quite difficult, which she attributed to the nature of her function being small and specialised with limited opportunities for advancement. Ebba perceived that there would be many more openings in sales but felt that she lacked the skills to succeed in such a role. She initiated an open discussion with her supervisor about wanting a role change, who was very supportive and helped her identify possible roles. Ebba asserts that being supported by your supervisor is not sufficient for further career advancement. In her case, she also self-managed her career by putting herself forward, being open about wanting a change and networking with other departments and managers. As a result, in 2014, she took an expatriate position in Italy and moved there with her husband and children who were 17 and 15 years old at the time. Her husband became a stay-at-home dad, looked after all household and care responsibilities while Ebba "just worked". In 2017, they returned to Sweden and Ebba was offered a Level 5 role.

Ebba aspires to bring promoted to a role with global responsibility within the same function. Just as with many participants, Ebba's focus seems to be more on the job content and less on the job level. Despite being a lower managerial level compared to Siri, Elinor and Vera, her story reveals a person with career aspirations and determination. Just as with Vera, Ebba asserts that the seniority of a position is not important for her. She states that her career satisfaction emerges from ABC's nice working environment, enjoying the role, performing and being recognised as a professional in her field. She also asserts that for her, work is not important enough to "destroy" one's family and she would therefore have declined the expatriate assignment in Italy if her children had been unhappy to go. Unlike Siri, Ebba suggests that she would not have moved if she could not be with her family. Competing devotions of work and family emerge through her story – which were appeased by the contribution of her husband.

4.9.5. Pia

Pia is a 58-year-old Research & Development (R&D) manager (Level 6) who has been working with ABC for 30 years. She is married with two children who are both above 25 years old. She has a Master's degree in engineering (materials technology). After completion of her studies, Pia decided that she did not want to work in a pure research environment and was very interested in product applications. She joined ABC after university and held various positions, doing research for product materials, design and leading projects. She became a manager for one of ABC's affiliated companies after returning from parental leave with her first child. The company closed down after five years and Pia struggled with having to let people go.

It was tough to tell people that they were losing their jobs and I knew for a while that the business was closing down...but I was lucky and got a new management position in ABC's materials lab in another city where I worked for some years. At some point I felt I can do this with my eyes closed, there are no new challenges, so I talked to my manager and said I wanted to find something new.

Pia indicates that to enjoy her work, she expects to have a challenging role, which she can learn and develop from. She therefore initiated a conversation with her manager about

needing a change and together they identified an opportunity for her in R&D for another product division. This was a dual role of project manager and group manager. Pia found that the dual role was very demanding in terms of workload and placed more emphasis on the projects compared to managing people in the group. This reveals her preference for the technical aspects of work over the managing people aspects.

Subsequently, ABC restructured the department and Pia expressed a preference for the project manager role, which she kept for five years. She then was away from work on sick leave for a year. When she returned, she took a temporary position filling in for someone on parental leave and then moved to a specialist role for another five years. In 2017, Pia became a design manager, another technical role.

During her career journey, Pia held several specialist roles within R&D and, while she perceives that she has progressed in her career by taking on more challenging roles, she is in the lowest managerial level. Nevertheless, she is satisfied with her career and feels that she has had supportive managers who helped her identify and take on new opportunities. As with the other four women, Pia appears to be placing importance on subjective and internal career success criteria; for example, she seeks new roles which can increase her knowledge and lead to her development. She is more interested in working with the technical side of things rather than people management, something commensurate with her technical background. Level promotions do not seem significant to her, as shown by the fact that she talks about getting to “higher” positions in terms of job content but not level or pay.

When asked about the key factors that facilitated her to get to the position she has today, she highlights the roles both of her supervisors and husband:

I think that one really important factor is your supervisor really supporting you and having confidence in you. If you want to grow, do new things and dare to take on new responsibilities, including managing a team, you need your supervisor's support. I have been very fortunate with my supervisors. And of course, to share equally with your partner... having a partner who shares the childcare and work at home obviously helps. There has never been a time when my husband has not taken an equal share of the family responsibilities – in fact, it

is something I do not even think about – it could not be anything else.

Pia's husband had to be very persistent with his employer in order to work part-time as part of his parental leave. When his employer resisted, Pia's husband exercised his legal right to take full-time parental leave for six months. This was almost 30 years ago at a time when it was frowned upon for men to take a long parental leave. Therefore, Pia's husband was a trailblazer in deviating from the norm prevailing at that time.

Pia is very satisfied with her science-related role and does not seem interested in ascending through ABC's ranks. She considers developing and taking on technically-challenging roles as growing in her career even if such roles do not necessarily lead to advancement into senior management roles. Therefore, Pia seems happy and does not attribute any importance to the fact that she is at the lowest management level.

As with Ebba, Pia works within a highly specialised function where opportunities for advancement to higher management levels are more limited. Based on the women's accounts, working within operations or sales presents the most opportunities for accessing top management levels.

4.9.6. Five Ways of “Doing Career at 50”

Comparing the experiences of these five women with similar ages, tenure, marital and family status who are in different places of the managerial pipeline, revealed similarities and differences. I begin with presenting the similarities.

Firstly, as with the rest of the sample, the five women perceived that flexibility and schedule control was essential for them to stay in their careers which was enabled through a good relationship with their supervisor. Their supervisors supported the women's self-initiated tailored and informal flexibility needs based on their changing circumstances at home which resembles idiosyncratic or I-deals (Rousseau, Tomprou and Simosi, 2016). This tailored flexibility was overtly supported by the organizational culture that placed importance on results instead of face-time, allowing individualised deals to be agreed between employee and supervisor as needed. As mentioned above, all five women engaged with informal FWAs. They all had schedule control and adjusted their hours or stayed home when the children were ill in coordination with their husbands. Most importantly, none of the women perceived that utilizing informal FWAs had any negative

consequences for their career. There were no references to career stigma and negative supervisor attributions for utilizing informal FWAs by any of the women, including those who did not continue to advance to higher management levels. Therefore, I argue that informal FWAs do not account for the differences in these women's management levels but seem to have helped the women to maintain their careers. This finding is consistent with the experiences of the rest of the participants in the sample: FWAs were perceived as necessary in order for them to stay in their roles after shared parental leave and until the children were in their early teenage years (14+), however FWAs did not explain career advancement for those who advanced nor lack of advancement for those who remained in the lower managerial levels. It's important to note that none of these five women had engaged with formal FWAs i.e. part-time which, as discussed in section 4.3.2, was found to have taxing consequences on career advancement.

Secondly, the women's home life was interwoven in their career stories as they all faced tensions from competing demands between work and family. For example, Siri expressed that the most important consideration for her to persist in her struggle with a new and difficult role was that her children were happy. Otherwise she would not have continued in that role. This finding lends support to Greenhaus and Kossek's (2014) advocacy of adopting a work-home perspective in the study of career sustainability and success thereby accounting for how home/family life and career influence one another. Home/family relationships can restrict career opportunities if one cannot engage in career-enhancing activities for example, working long-hours, taking on overseas assignments or frequent business travel. Furthermore, this interconnection between career and home/family in the women's stories reinforces extant research on the relational nature of women's career decisions. Women consider how current or new demanding roles may impact on their home/family life which could ultimately restrict their vertical career mobility (Powell and Mainiero, 1992; O'Neil and Bilimoria, 2005; O'Neil, Hopkins and Bilimoria, 2013, 2008). For example, Ebba, asserted that if her family had not been happy to move to Italy, she would have declined this opportunity which subsequently led to a level promotion. It is noteworthy that the husbands of the more senior women, frequently assumed a larger or full share of caregiving and household roles to enable them to focus on and sustain challenging and intensive roles which facilitated their further advancement.

Satisfaction with their work-family interface was central to their career satisfaction. All five women appraised their career in ways inextricably linked to how effectively they managed work and family during their careers, which is associated with valuing subjective rather than objective career success (Sturges, 1999; Finegold and Mohrman, 2001; Friedman and Greenhaus, 2011). The main elements of their career satisfaction common to all five women's accounts were: enjoying and developing in their roles, finding meaning in their roles, being recognised for doing their job well and wanting to improve and change things, and being able to perform at work and look after their families. For example, Pia considers herself successful despite being much older than the average age of women in Level 6. She makes no reference to salary, rank and other similar and commonly-accepted criteria which suggests that she placed little value on advancing level-wise. She was very proud of being successful in her function as a research and development specialist suggesting she valued the technical aspect of her work as being commensurate with a 'good engineer' (Faulkner, 2013). Overall, the women's satisfaction with their career was not about ascending within the managerial pipeline. This confirms previous research on gender differences in the conceptualisation of career success and the importance placed between objective and subjective career success (Sturges, 1999; Konrad *et al.*, 2000; Heslin, 2005).

A third similarity in the women's accounts, was the concept of "supervisor having confidence or faith in you" which emerged for three of the five women except for Siri and Vera. Three women talked about being "pushed", i.e. being strongly encouraged by supervisors or colleagues to apply for a promotion position. This could be attributed to working for a male-dominated organization, in a male-dominated sector where traditionally women's 'ability' to perform well is questioned by the *status quo* i.e. engineering is associated with masculinity (Faulkner, 2013). Vera felt that she had to prove herself as one of her supervisors did not 'trust' her which she attributed to gender biases related to the sector.

Finally, the fourth similarity was the egalitarian approach of the women and their husbands, in sharing the home and care responsibilities in accordance with their family/motherhood values and career values. Their work schedule control was complemented by their husbands' flexibility in their working hours and patterns. The

extent of husbands' involvement with home and care responsibilities, played a major role. While all the women and their husbands shared the responsibilities of their home domains, the husbands of those who advanced to the highest levels (Siri and Elinor), were able to take a larger share or become the primary care-givers of the children for extended periods of time as needed. This partnership of work and home responsibilities affirms the "egalitarian couple" typology in a study on dual earner couples' typologies and identities (Masterson and Hoobler, 2015). In egalitarian couples, both partners combine career and family roles in their family identities. I argue that this departure from traditional dual-earner-couple arrangements, where women are still the primary carers despite pursuing a career, has been facilitated by the national context in Sweden.

I now turn to the differences in the women's career stories as articulated by them. Many different factors could have affected the five women's diverse positions within ABC's managerial pipeline, which renders comparison difficult.

One difference emerging from the women's accounts and a possible explanation is lengthy career interruptions. For example, Ebba's career (Level 5) was interrupted by three years of unemployment and another two years of temporary and part-time work. Pia (Level 6) was away from work for a year due to illness and upon her return she took on a temporary role for another year. Elinor (Level 3) was away for over two consecutive years on maternity leave with her first two children as her husband was unable to stay at home for long due to work commitments. He then stayed at home much longer with the third child, enabling Elinor to re-focus on her career and advance further. Siri's career story (Level 2), on the other hand, reveals that her career journey was continuous. During her two most challenging career transitions which required extremely long hours, she and her husband prioritised her career in that her husband stepped in to compensate for her long working hours by looking after the children while during her second transition, he stayed in Sweden with the children for over a year. Therefore, Siri, was able to focus on her new roles and successfully rise up to their challenges. Siri asserted that if her children had not been happy, she would not have persisted with those roles. It follows that if either husbands or partners are not in a position to "lean in" (Sandberg's (2013) popular expression which relates to leading something instead of following) to care and home roles, due to not having real access to flexible working or because they are reluctant to do

so, i.e. affected by gendered roles for work and care, the women prioritise family and may make compromised career decisions. This begs the question of who else can “lean in” to bring about change in the gendering of work and care. I argue that organizations need to “lean in” by changing the structures of work which expect and reward ideal worker behaviour i.e. total devotion to work (Lewis and Humbert, 2010; Lewis, Gambles and Rapoport, 2007).

A second difference between the women in the lower levels which does not apply to Siri, shown by Ebba and Pia’s stories, is that they both worked in highly specialized functions with limited career advancement opportunities, something which did not seem to have an adverse effect on their career satisfaction. They both expressed a preference for technical roles over management roles, while in Siri’s case, she always held management roles with business responsibility. Elinor and Vera also worked in support functions, Human Resources and Finance respectively. However, these are functions with many employees and include opportunities to rise to senior levels positions within the functions. Again, the career paths available to workers in these functions are narrower compared to those in Sales and Operations.

A few other important differences emerge through Siri’s career story, which highlights her passion and high drive to do well in challenging roles. Siri was the only one out of these five women who had a clear career objective to build up experience and demonstrate results so that she could be promoted to group management. In contrast, Vera talked about how opportunities come to you when you work hard and showed no initiative to seek career advancement opportunities or make a change even when she had issues with her supervisor and therefore remained in her position for several years.

While most of the five women worked intensively at some point in their careers, for Siri it was the norm. She exhibited ideal worker behaviours yet, despite her consistently long hours, Siri perceives that she has “balance” and that she “always had it”, obscuring her work intensification and that her success to reaching Level 2, involved personal sacrifices: being separated from her family for over a year when her children were small and having no free time to herself. Finally, Siri is the only one who does not talk about “being pushed” to take a new role, suggesting a high level of self-efficacy. She asserts that she never had any issues with being held to higher standards by her male colleagues, despite

being among the very few women managers with business line responsibilities. I argue that her hard work and self-efficacy were differentiating factors which also contributed to her continued career advancement. These were combined with a supportive family context, which reassured her that she was not compromising the well-being of her children while pursuing career advancement, and supervisors who sponsored her next promotions by making her visible within ABC, resulting in Siri being considered for more senior job opportunities.

In conclusion, the five cases presented above, highlight the centrality of the work-family interface in the women's career stories which led them to engage with informal and individualised FWAs, remote working and adjusting office hours. They articulated that being enabled to have this schedule control was essential in managing their work-family domains and sustaining their career. Being satisfied with how they managed their work-family interface was central to the way these five women managers evaluated their careers. While they defined their career satisfaction in broad and somewhat different ways, they all referred to balance when articulating its meaning and most also included having fun at work. Others felt that being recognised as technical experts and making a difference was most important in addition to balance. Objective criteria such as salary and level were only briefly mentioned by Siri as discussed above. All five women felt satisfied with their careers based on their own personal evaluations. I argue that the women's self-referent career satisfaction criteria shaped their diverse career paths and differential advancement rates. Therefore, FWAs facilitated the women to stay in their careers by contributing to their career satisfaction but do not explain their differential career advancement rate.

4.10. Chapter Summary

This study was designed to increase our understanding of the lived career experiences of 43 women managers across ABC's managerial pipeline and how these were affected by flexible working strategies utilized by the participants. Flexible working strategies consisted of shared parental leave for mothers in Sweden (38) and three types of FWAs: reduced work percentage or part-time, a formal and contractual arrangement which was employee-initiated, and remote working and adjusting office hours, constituting informal, employee-initiated and tailored arrangements agreed with the supervisor. The experiences

of the three mothers outside Sweden and the two women without children were also explored. Access across organizational levels, circumstances leading to utilization by the women and timing, in terms of family and career stage, were explored for each type of strategy as well as contextual factors and resulting consequences on the women's work and home management and career outcomes.

The women's accounts of their career experiences showed that utilization of FWAs were coupled with family responsibilities and therefore were not part of their early careers. Only one mother had her first child during this stage and while she was at university. All women invested long hours at work during this stage, undeterred by home demands. This included the participant who had a child during this stage who stated that she worked intensively from home during her parental leave so that "there would be no harm to her work"! Another finding was that several women faced gender biases during their early careers and young age, which were more pronounced for the women engineers who worked in related functions such as operations and sales of engineering products. Nevertheless, the women persisted and demonstrated their competence through high performance and building relationships.

Utilizing flexible working strategies became important only when the women transitioned to motherhood. After childbirth, the women went on parental leave which, in the case of dual career couples, was shared with their husbands. The share of each parent varied according to both parents' work circumstances and their overall family situation. Typically, the women took at least 6-9 months while most of the husbands took 3-6 months. Younger mothers and fathers took a more equal share of parental leave, although some of the older women had husbands who took a long leave despite the fact that 20 years ago this was not the norm in Sweden. Sharing parental leave for over a year benefited mothers and fathers. It eased mothers' anxiety of leaving the baby(ies) and returning to work, thus helping their re-integration. It also gave fathers the opportunity to be the main carers of the children at home which fostered their continued involvement with care and home roles after parental leave ended. Following parental leave, when both parents returned to work, the women engaged with one or a combination of three FWAs: reduced work percentage (a formal contractual arrangement), remote working and adjusting office hours, both of which were informally arranged with their supervisor and

utilized on an *ad hoc* basis. The study showed that within ABC, access to FWAs was open to all women managers based in Sweden, irrespective of organizational levels; however, they were only utilized for care responsibilities and not for pursuing non-work interests or personal recreation. A perception that the organizational culture and supervisors were family-friendly, enabling the women to have schedule control in determining when and where they worked, dominated the conversations regarding this stage. The three non-Swedish mothers in the sample worked outside Sweden in countries which were not conducive to flexible working. These women's husbands and extended family took over or shared the care roles at home.

A second discourse during this stage with young children, which was common to most women's career stories, focused on the tensions between motherhood and career which discouraged some of the women from taking on larger roles at work. Despite their egalitarian home domains and sharing care roles with their husbands, some of the women struggled to "let go" of the maternal mandate which prescribes total responsibility for their children. In several cases, this dilemma was mitigated by sharing parental leave with their husbands during which they became more accustomed to worry less about home when at work since there was a parent at home with the children.

Women with older children (14+) reverted to working longer hours at the office and felt a sense of relief, as managing work and family became less stressful during this stage with the children needing less hands-on care. Some used schedule control to enable them to drive their children to their afternoon activities in coordination with their husbands.

Within the context of this study, utilization of all three types of FWAs helped the women cope with the demands arising from their work and home domains, thereby enabling them to stay in their career. In exchange, the women worked additional hours at home in the evenings or during the weekend, feeling grateful to have such autonomy and perceiving this as "balance". Working for a male-dominated company and sector where ideal worker norms often prevail, triggered the feeling that FWAs were "favours" which were paid back through work intensification. Therefore, while utilizing FWAs, they enacted the ideal worker norm through work at the office and later on at home after the children went to bed, accepting this work intensification as a fair exchange. Lack of access to flexibility, or when flexibility was frowned upon by supervisors, led several women to leave their

previous organizations and seek positions within family-friendly organizations. In some cases, during their hiring interviews with ABC, the women were upfront about their needs for flexibility, which they perceived was well-received.

The findings show that FWAs helped to keep the women of this sample in their careers along with other factors, but they were not sufficient to facilitate their further career advancement. Career consequences following utilization, differed for formal FWAs, i.e. reduced work percentage and informal FWAs, namely remote working and adjusting office hours. Reduced work percentage was perceived as career taxing. Despite a small reduction, which in most cases did not exceed 20%, participants who reduced their work percentage are still in more junior managerial levels, despite having extensive experience. In contrast, those who advanced to the most senior management levels had never worked part-time but worked from home or adjusted their office hours instead. Therefore, remote working and adjusting office hours had no career-taxing effect. All the women in the most senior management levels had utilized both and some still do.

Engaging with FWAs may have kept the women in their careers; however, the experiences of the women who advanced to the most senior levels of ABC, reveal that additional contextual factors were at play. Firstly, senior women had supervisor sponsorship in terms of mentoring, career planning, development and providing opportunities for further promotions. This was complemented by a partnership with their husbands, prioritising one career over the other as needed. For example, these women's husbands participated in childcare and home roles often to a larger extent than the women did and, in some cases, reduced their work percentage or made compromises in their own career to accommodate the women's high work intensity periods. Furthermore, several husbands followed the women to their overseas assignments and became stay-at-home fathers. Overall, the women who advanced to the most senior level coordinated their home roles in harmony with their husbands who stepped in and supported the women's important career transitions by looking after the children and home.

Advancing to senior levels, notwithstanding the contextual facilitators already mentioned, came at a high personal cost for the women: hard work at the office and again at home after the children went to bed. Work intensification was very evident in the way all the women, and especially the ones who advanced to senior levels, worked extra hours at

home in exchange for their freedom to control their work schedules. Paradoxically, the women did not view their additional effort as a negative experience but as a state of “balance”. They internalized and accepted the professional time norms of ideal workers and perceived their work intensification as justifiable and in exchange for their organization’s and supervisors’ accommodation of their flexible working patterns.

I argue that FWAs, despite seeming to help retain the women in their careers and sometimes helping them advance if other contextual factors at work and home are in place, paradoxically and unintentionally trigger a sense of gratitude which women feel they have to “pay back” to the organization in the form of work intensification, thereby burdening their already stressful lives in striving to be perfect mothers and ideal workers. Secondly, shared parental leave played a major role in fostering a family-supportive attitude within ABC and its supervisors, and an egalitarian sharing of care and home roles between the women and their husbands. Therefore, public policies such as shared leave in this case contribute to a culture change in attitudes regarding who works and who cares, paving the way for gender equality at work and home.

The next chapter situates the findings of this study within the literature.

5. DISCUSSION

This chapter sets up this study's contribution to knowledge in relation to relevant literature which will be presented in detail in Chapter 6. The chapter begins with a brief summary of the findings which were presented in detail in the previous chapter. I then situate the findings, which entail the different elements of sharing parental leave and the women's experiences with utilizing three types of FWAs, within existing literature. I then present secondary findings and close with a brief summary.

5.1. Summary of the Findings

This study constructed an understanding of the role of flexible working arrangements on the lived career experiences of 43 women managers across the managerial pipeline of ABC, a large multinational organization in Sweden. I begin with a brief summary of the findings.

Findings present evidence on engaging with three types of FWAs available within ABC and notably on parental leave, a national policy which emerged as a key factor in assisting the participants to manage career and family. Sharing parental leave between the women and their husbands emerged as the bedrock for fostering gender egalitarianism at home and a family-supportive culture and supervisors at work. The three types of FWAs utilized by the women were: reducing work percentage, a formal type of FWA, and two informal types, i.e. remote working and adjusting office hours. For each type of strategy, I explored whether access differed between organizational levels, the circumstances leading to utilization and timing of use, in terms of the participants' family and career stage. Utilization of FWAs was a dynamic process which varied with the women's degree of caring duties as those shifted according to family stage, i.e. ages and number of children, elder care and extent of husbands' involvement with care and home roles. Flexible working strategies were available to women across all organizational levels. Using FWAs assisted the women to manage their work and family demands and to stay in their careers, as opposed to making career changes to accommodate such demands. Those who previously worked for organizations whose culture was perceived as unsupportive of flexibility, either resigned or moved to roles which did not require long hours. Within

ABC, the women perceived that having access to flexibility was overtly supported by the culture and their supervisors. This enabled them to manage work and home by having a sense of “balance”. However, “balance” led to work intensification whereby they worked additional hours at home after the children went to bed and sometimes on weekends. Notably, in addition to extending their working hours, other contextual factors were in place for the women who advanced to senior levels: sponsorship by their supervisor for further development and promotions; and, a partnership with their husbands in putting one career ahead of another to cope with demanding career transitions and looking after the children and home.

The findings of this research speak to the role of FWAs in the women’s lived career experiences. In the following sub-sections, I position the study’s main and secondary findings within the context of current literature. I first discuss one of the most important findings which relates to the women and their husbands availing themselves of Sweden’s parental leave benefit (presented in detail in section 1.1.2). The parental leave benefit unexpectedly emerged as a significant contributor to the women’s career sustainability and/or advancement and was a forerunner to ABC’s family-friendly culture supporting the utilization of FWAs. I then discuss how the findings regarding the role of the three types of FWAs on the women’s careers, their perceptions of balance and the resulting work intensification, relate to existing literature. Subsequently, I present similarities and differences between the consequences of formal compared to informal FWAs and move to secondary findings, situating them within the context of current studies. I end with a conclusion to this chapter.

5.2. Parental Leave Benefit

This study’s findings show that the Swedish system of sharing paid and job-protected parental leave was a key determinant in the women’s return and re-integration in their career after childbirth. The women’s accounts provide evidence for the positive outcomes of sharing parental leave and its role in their career decisions. All participants based in Sweden took parental leave, which was shared with their husbands (for those in dual career couples) albeit not always equally. Notably, several older and more senior-level participants discussed how their husbands, typically of high educational attainment, exercised their legal right to stay at home for longer than the minimum duration. This was

despite workplace reactions to men being away from work for caregiving roles, which was not as common a couple of decades ago (Hobson, 2014). This finding confirms Ma and colleagues' (2018) study of fathers' uptake and duration of parental leave in Sweden, in which they posit that highly educated fathers are increasingly staying home longer than those who are low-income earners and have lower educational attainments. The latter may take no leave at all. The women perceived that access to their chosen duration of parental leave was a given within ABC or previous employers and therefore simply announced their plans regarding timing of leave and the intended duration. This suggested a sense of entitlement to this national work-family benefit, something expected in countries where gender equality in work and care underpins its welfare policies (Lewis and Smithson, 2001; Lewis and Humbert, 2010; Herman and Lewis, 2012). The women perceived that this was also the case for their male counterparts within ABC; however, one limitation of this study is that it did not examine the experiences of male managers with parental leave.

This study provides empirical evidence on how parental leave had a number of significant benefits within this sample. First, sharing parental leave increased both the women's expectations to sustain their career after childbirth and their husbands' work-life voice, i.e. to also engage with flexible working in order to share the care roles at home and spend time with their children (Lewis and Humbert, 2010; Herman and Lewis, 2012). Despite Sweden's gender equality culture, being pulled by the role of mother and worker created tensions for most of the women. Several of them talked about having difficulty in "letting go" when they stayed late at the office or when they travelled. However, findings show that having a husband who also experienced the primacy of looking after the children and home helped mitigate this tension. For example, once returning to work and giving the reigns of childcare and home management to their husbands, the women referred to having peace of mind. Thus, they worked very intensively, trusting their husbands to care for the children, as opposed to worrying about them getting used to hired carers. This finding reaffirms existing literature on Sweden's parental leave in that it facilitates women's re-integration in their careers after childbirth (Sundström and Duvander, 2002). Ollier-Malaterre and Foucreault (2017) also posit that the parental leave benefit explains why mothers in Sweden can more easily return to work full-time, given that the fathers can share the paid and job-protected parental leave and stay home with the baby(ies). In

contrast, parents in the US may have to request unpaid leave or negotiate a part-time arrangement with their employer.

Secondly, the women's accounts suggest that sharing parental leave increased their husbands' understanding of managing career and home and engendered a continued egalitarian attitude in sharing the home roles with them. This in turn led to making joint decisions regarding each other's career and care involvement – a continuous process which evolved with family and career stages. Therefore, the findings indicate that sharing parental leave catalysed a change in gender dynamics in the family and at work. This research concurs with Ma *et al.* (2018) who posit that parental leave contributes to the further weakening of gendered norms on the division of labour in Sweden. Further, by supporting gender equality both in work participation and at home, parental leave fosters “a new norm of masculinity calling for active caregiving” (Duvander, Haas and Thalberg, 2017, p. 141).

Thirdly, another positive outcome of shared parental leave is that it influenced the organizational context and attitudes of supervisors. Male supervisors, who by definition were highly educated, were more likely to have shared parental leave with their wives (Ma *et al.*, 2018). Being exposed to home and care responsibilities, male supervisors would therefore be more inclined to encourage their teams to utilize flexible working, without attaching low commitment attributions to the ones who did. While this study did not interview male supervisors, many women talked about their supervisors, the CEO being one example, being role models of prioritising their family over work. For example, they left work early to have dinner with their children, urging their teams to do the same. This finding supports Bourdeau, Ollier-Malaterre and Houlfort (2019) who posit that supervisors who are socialised into family-supportive norms are less likely to stigmatize employees who work flexibly by, for example, excluding them from promotions considerations.

Further, Leslie *et al.* (2012, p.1409) in studying supervisor attributions regarding utilization of FWAs, argue that these may have negative or positive career outcomes, depending on whether supervisors attribute use of FWAs as “self-serving” or “organization-serving”. Their argument is based on signalling theory, which states that supervisors use employees' observable behaviours such as utilizing FWAs, to make

inferences about less observable behaviours such as job commitment. As their study took place in the US, a masculine culture where ideal worker norms prevail and “individuals live to work” (Hofstede, 1980), employees who utilize FWAs to accommodate home life depart from ideal worker norms. Therefore, in such a case, utilization would be considered “self-serving” and supervisors would then attach low commitment attributions to such behaviours. The authors hypothesised that such attributions may be mitigated by national cultures and called for studies to examine whether in feminine cultures where “individuals work to live” (Hofstede, 1980), supervisors make similar attributions regarding utilization of FWAs or not. My study responds to their call by carrying out research in a feminine culture and shows that supervisors within ABC, who were most likely to be socialised into Swedish norms, which support life outside work and men’s involvement with caring duties, did not seem to attribute the use of FWAs to low work commitment. I argue that Sweden’s parental leave policy has created a fertile ground for supervisors within ABC to support life outside work and utilization of FWAs instead of condemning it as a “self-serving” act signalling low work commitment. Moreover, ABC seems to have embedded the Swedish culture and norms ascribing gender equality in work and care by being supportive of working parents’ flexibility needs.

The salience of incorporating national culture and structures in the work-family and careers literature has been advocated by previous studies calling for future research to explore FWAs and their role in work-family interface (Lewis, Gambles and Rapoport, 2007; Powell, Francesco and Ling, 2009; Ollier-Malaterre *et al.*, 2013) and career (Moen and Sweet, 2004; Tomlinson *et al.*, 2015) in a more holistic manner. These studies contend that government policies to support working parents influence women and men’s career decisions and experiences and their beliefs regarding whether their careers are sustainable during different life stages. Thus, studies on the effects of FWAs need to assess whether results might be linked to the country in which the data were collected. Nevertheless, national context and the way it shapes employees’ work-family experiences and careers has been under-researched in the work-family literature (Greenhaus and Powell, 2017; Ollier-Malaterre, 2017). This research adds to work-family literature by highlighting the influence of the Swedish national context, with its public policies related to work and care, on the organizational level and the participants’ work-family interface and career decisions.

After parental leave ended and both parents were back at work, all mothers based in Sweden (38), engaged with one or a combination of three types of FWAs: reduced work percentage (part-time) a formal FWA; remote working and adjusting office hours, both comprising informal FWAs. The second important finding of this study relates to the role of the aforementioned FWAs on the women's career experiences, which is discussed below in relation to existing literature.

5.3. Career Maintenance, Advancement or Stalling?

Three common discourses emerged from the women's accounts regarding their career experiences. The most common discourse among the participants was that FWAs were necessary to help them stay in their careers upon return to work after childbirth and shared parental leave. A second discourse was key factors to career advancement, especially for the women who are currently in senior levels with this organization. A less common discourse revolved around career stalling during transitions to part-time work, a type of FWAs utilized by only seven participants. A related topic was making compromised career decisions, for example leaving previous organizations or switching to less demanding roles due to not being able to utilize FWAs. The following sub-sections discuss these findings regarding the role of the three types of FWAs on the women's career experiences and specifically career maintenance, advancement or stalling.

5.3.1. Career Maintenance

The second important finding of this study is that the three types of FWAs helped the women stay in their careers after transitioning to motherhood but did not play a significant role in career advancement unless other major contextual factors at work and home were in place. I argue that FWAs following parental leave may contribute to reducing further attrition from the managerial pipeline; however, on the negative side, they are insufficient in facilitating advancement to higher levels and also trigger work intensification perceived as "balance". The paradox of having a sense of "balance", despite work intensification, is the third important finding of this study and will be discussed in section, 5.4.

This study has shown that parental leave followed by any or a combination of FWAs enabled the women to stay in their career instead of leaving their organization to cope

with their home life demands. All three types of FWAs were perceived as necessary after transition to motherhood and while the children were small (under 14). This is supported by strong evidence as the majority of the women asserted that without the flexibility to accommodate both their family and work life, they would not have succeeded in getting to where they are today in their careers. Several of them left their previous organizations due to prevailing face-time cultures discouraging the use of FWAs. This finding is consistent with the literature on women's relational career decisions which entail exiting their careers or declining further promotions if they perceive that they are unable to look after their work and family roles according to their values (O'Neil and Bilimoria, 2005). The legal entitlement to parental leave fostered a positive return-to-work experience for the women as their husbands were home with the children. Reduced work percentage provided the women with a few day-time care-giving hours per week after parental leave. Some stayed at home for half or one day per week, others left an hour early certain days a week, all of which constituted a contractual change. Informal flexible strategies, i.e. remote working and adjusting office hours, led to schedule control to vary hours at work and sometimes work from home which helped them address conflicting and sometimes *ad hoc* demands arising from their roles, such as a sick child staying home from school. Based on these findings, this study contributes to the literature on FWAs by providing empirical evidence on utilization and consequences for each type of FWA examined. The study links utilization of FWAs to work-family and career outcomes and confirms the salience of the work-family interface and the degree of caring duties in women's careers and career decisions (Greenhaus and Kossek, 2014; Beigi, Wang and Arthur, 2017).

5.3.2. Career Advancement

The role of flexible working strategies on the participants' further career advancement was ambivalent. Additional contextual factors, along with utilization of FWAs and the resulting autonomy in schedule control, were in place for the women who reached senior levels in ABC. This research highlights these contextual factors which, in addition to FWAs, facilitated the women to maintain their careers **and** advance further. Firstly, participants who are currently in senior levels were sponsored by their supervisors through mentoring, career planning and development, further promotions and being evaluated based on results and not face-time. This is also shown by the women's

references to the central role of a good relationship with their supervisor which allowed open conversations about their needs and was key to their further career advancement. Secondly, supervisor sponsorship was complemented by a partnership with their husbands. In terms of family participation in home roles, the findings show that the women who advanced to the most senior levels had husbands who took at least equal and more frequently a larger share of the home management roles. Despite doing long hours and frequent travel, the women “kept going”, as several of them indicated, because they had peace of mind that the children were being taken care of by their father. Feeling reassured that the children were safe and happy, the women could focus on their career when at the office and still extend themselves by working from home at night. At the same time, controlling their schedule gave them the freedom to be with their children while they were awake, something which they valued and was central to their perceived role of a good mother. The husbands departed from traditional breadwinner roles and enacted care-giving roles. Several husbands reduced their work percentage or requested access to other FWAs from their employers. Additionally, some became trailing spouses and stay-at-home fathers who looked after the children when the women went on expatriate assignments with ABC. Siri, one of the most senior women in ABC asserted that without accepting a challenging expatriate assignment she would not have reached her current level (Level 2). Therefore, her husband’s willingness to let his career take a back seat so that Siri could develop hers, was a major factor in her career advancement. This reflects the gender egalitarian values of the national context in which this study was conducted. Furthermore and as previously discussed, this could be a consequence of sharing parental leave which promotes gender equality both in labour participation and at home, confirming the study of Duvander, Haas and Thalberg (2017). Based on the interview conversations with the more senior women, they all attributed their success in reaching these levels to the sponsorship by their supervisors and partnership with their husbands. I argue that notwithstanding the women’s intensive working and drive to succeed, supervisors and husbands by espousing the Swedish culture of gender egalitarianism, “leaned in” which fostered the women’s further career advancement.

5.3.3. Career Stalling

Findings show that career stalling was more closely associated with the only formal FWA, reducing work percentage or part-time. Reducing work percentage up to 25% is a legal entitlement in Sweden for parents of children up to eight years old. It is therefore a formal arrangement and a right which a few of the women in this study took up, mostly when parental leave ended and until the children were of pre-school age. This was a flexible working strategy employed when the degree of their caring duties was high, and the women perceived that they could not cope otherwise. Only seven out of the 38 women based in Sweden reduced their work percentage, four of whom were single mothers. For most, the reduction was marginal and amounted to just a few hours per week.

Notwithstanding the small reduction in contractual percentage, the women's accounts reveal contrasting discourses as to whether reducing work percentage hindered their career advancement. Some felt that they were not eligible for promotions when working part-time while others perceived no effect. The findings do show however, that none of the women who advanced to senior levels within ABC had ever worked part-time and that all but one of those who did, are currently in more junior management levels (Levels 5 and 6). Moreover, irrespective of the women's perceptions on career consequences of working part-time, those who did work part-time were among the oldest women in their management levels. This points to career stalling for at least as long as they continued to work part-time and echoes the extant literature (Tomlinson and Durbin, 2010) on part-time work having an adverse effect on career advancement. Working less than full-time seems to go hand in hand with perceptions of career stigma, irrespective of the extent of work percentage reduction, and is most likely due to deviating from gendered assumptions of the ideal worker (Acker, 1990), whose mode of working is full-time and unencumbered by family responsibilities.

A second adverse effect of part-time work was that the women's workload did not always decrease in line with their work percentage. Some ended up working in the evening to be able to deliver on their work responsibilities, exceeding their contractual hours (Kelliher and Anderson, 2010). This is an unexpected finding given that in Sweden, reducing work percentage and by extension workload, is a legal entitlement. This can perhaps be explained by a weaker expectation to work reduced hours within an organization in the

SET sector where typically companies are predominantly masculine and have a reputation of equating commitment with full-time work and long hours. Herman and Lewis (2012) in their study of doing motherhood in the SET sector in three different national contexts, show that women adopted four strategies of being mother and engineer/scientist. Three of these strategies entailed accepting the prevailing ideal worker norm, continuing to enact it or perceiving the applicable penalties as a given, i.e. mothers who switched to part-time work expected their career to slow down. Only one strategy adopted by the so-called “mould-breakers”, challenged the *status quo* and made no apologies for working part-time, expecting their career to take off regardless. In my study, the majority of the women who worked part-time accepted the slowing down of their career as a natural consequence and expected it to take off again once they switched back to full-time.

Career stalling due to a reduction in work percentage is also contrary to ABC’s family-supportive organizational culture. Notably, the majority of the participants who worked part-time did so with previous employers.

I argue that the reduction in the work percentage carries ingrained expectations of career penalties. It was therefore not a preferred flexible working strategy for the participants in this sample as it was a small reduction in office hours (5-20%) yet was perceived to slow down career advancement. As expected, only a minority of the women in the sample utilized this type of FWA.

One limitation of this study is that slow career advancement or career stalling may be due to factors other than working part-time, including timing of available opportunities, function, personal values and aspirations, and other family situations.

Compromised career decisions were made by several women. Some had left senior roles with previous organizations due to perceiving that they were incompatible with their family roles or due to prevailing face-time cultures discouraging the use of FWAs. This reinforces the existing literature regarding career decisions, which may appear as career “preferences” or “choices”, but in reality are circumscribed by workplace constraints such as face-time and long-hours cultures, which conflict with family and household demands (Broadbridge, 2010; Cabrera, 2009; Drew and Murtagh, 2005).

5.4. Balance and Work Intensification

The third important finding of this study is the paradox of “balance” and work intensification, which were interlinked in the women’s lived career experiences. The women’s schedule control created a sense of “balance” and satisfaction with the way they managed career and family. A common discourse among the participants was that they felt grateful for this autonomy granted by their supervisors which in turn fostered an underlying “duty” to deliver results through heightened productivity. This finding confirms the extant literature identifying work intensification as an unexpected consequence of FWAs (Kelliher and Anderson, 2010; Cañibano, 2019). Utilization of FWAs resulted in intense effort and stress for the women – something which paradoxically was not perceived to be a negative consequence of FWAs. Therefore, the women’s sense of “balance” obscured their perceived responsibility to give back to the organization by working additional hours at night and on the weekend and being available to stay at the office for long hours when needed. I argue that this finding adds to current debates in the work-family literature by exposing the increasingly contested construct of “balance” as more of a myth than an ideal state of harmonious management of employees’ work and non-work demands. The construct lacks a common definition (Greenhaus and Allen, 2011) and assumes individual responsibility for achieving it, ignoring contextual influences (Lewis, Gambles and Rapoport, 2007) and the temporal element of work and home demands which may change according to career and family stage (Moen and Sweet, 2004; Tomlinson *et al.*, 2018). It also obscures the unintended consequence of work-intensification, evident in this study, which could increase employee stress and threaten well-being (Kossek, Valcour and Lirio, 2014). Kelliher and Anderson (2010) in their study of flexible workers identified three ways in which work intensification occurs: imposed, resulting from a reduction of work percentage but not workload; enabled, resulting from being able to concentrate better when away from work for example; and, as a form of exchange, i.e. giving back to the organization in return for being able to utilize FWAs to accommodate personal circumstances. Within this sample, all mothers worked intensively, i.e. extended their working hours, albeit to a different extent. While their work intensification arose in all three ways identified by Kelliher and Anderson (2010), it was mostly in an effort to reciprocate for having autonomy to adjust their hours at the office or work from home in an entirely *ad hoc* manner (informal FWAs) depending

on their work and family needs on a given day. The autonomy or control over where and when they worked was an informal arrangement between the women and their supervisors and was described by many of them as “freedom with responsibility” which was perceived as “having balance”. This finding reinforces de Menezes and Kelliher’s (2017) contention that informal arrangements were more likely to result in increased work effort as the women perceived that their supervisor, through enabling an informal arrangement, had accommodated their own personal needs and therefore, they owed something back. On the one hand, the women perceived FWAs as a valued benefit enabling them to spend time with their children while making it possible for them to stay in their careers but, on the other hand, FWAs levied a high personal cost: that of work intensification. The women perceived that their additional effort in working longer hours was a fair exchange for their schedule control. This lends support to a very recent study by Cañibano (2019) who advocates that schedule control is an inducement provided by the organization and work intensification is a reciprocal contribution by employees to the organization.

The extent of the women’s work intensification varied. Some worked every evening while others worked when needed, e.g. during intensive work periods which were seasonal or when late meetings were scheduled. Notably, work intensification was more apparent in the stories of the women who advanced in their careers and progressed to senior levels, yet none of these women complained or perceived their additional hours of work at home as exploitation. This begs the question ‘Why did the participants view work intensification as simply giving back to the organization instead of being overburdened with work?’ Literature has shown that work intensification results from perceptions of having to reciprocate the “favour” of being able to work flexibly (Kelliher and Anderson, 2010; Cañibano, 2019). If flexibility is perceived to be a favour, then it follows that women have a weak sense of entitlement to flexible working (Lewis and Smithson, 2001). This is consistent with previous studies conducted within organizations in highly masculinised sectors such as SET, where presenteeism is the mode of working. In such sectors, utilizing FWAs is not normative and contradicts the ideal worker norm (Acker, 1990; Faulkner, 2013). Therefore, users of FWAs perceive that they are granted an out of the ordinary benefit which they feel obliged to make up for by exerting additional effort in their roles, as explained by social exchange theory (Emerson, 1976). However, this

finding was unexpected, as participants perceived that ABC's culture was family-supportive and encouraged access to FWAs across employee levels and functions.

An alternative explanation to work intensification being obscured by a sense of "balance" could also be explained by applying Padavic, Ely and Reids' (2019) argument that the analysis should be moved from the individual to the meso level, recognising the interplay between organizational policies and employees' emotion-regulation strategies. Organizations use policies and practices as social defence, for example, to help employees' work-family management issues resulting from the 24/7 work culture. Employees unconsciously engage in emotion-regulation strategies in an attempt to protect themselves from facing two contradictory choices or emotions, such as a sense of "balance" accompanied by work intensification. In this study, ABC supported the use of informal FWAs by promoting "freedom with responsibility". The women used unconscious defence mechanisms by focusing on their sense of "balance" arising from utilizing FWAs, feeling satisfied with their work and home management and being able to attend to their children's needs, while at the same time they ignored the resulting work intensification. Padavic, Ely and Reid (2019) used systems-psychodynamic theory, a multilevel, psychological theory of unconscious, emotional dynamics in organizations (Menzies, 1960; Petriglieri and Petriglieri, 2015) to argue that organizations, in an effort to reduce work-family conflict and improve the leaky pipeline phenomenon which they call the presenting problem, unconsciously create a substitute problem, that of work intensification.

Work intensification affected the participants in different ways depending on the extent of family contributing to home responsibilities. For most, sharing home roles with their husbands mitigated the stress resulting from this balancing act, despite often including a night shift for the women. While alluding to the fact that a night shift was tough, the participants stated that this was the way to carry on with pursuing a career while having a family. The women were willing to sustain their increased work efforts in return for schedule control. Work intensification was evident throughout their career trajectories. The women worked long hours during their early career with no children at home. They continued to work hard and after hours at home during the transition to motherhood, in

return for being granted schedule control. When the children became young adults or left home, they worked long hours again as “it was quiet at home”.

However, when husbands were unable to contribute to home roles at least as much as the women, then the pressure intensified, once again highlighting the salience of family support in the women’s careers. Two participants in lower managerial levels with small children, went on stress-related leave and another two were at the brink of a breakdown. In all four cases, the women with the support of their supervisors took measures to reduce their additional hours or tasks, which had led to their burnout. This affirms the managerial agency of supervisors within ABC to alter employees’ workloads and schedules to support life outside work (Tomlinson *et al.*, 2018).

Sustainable Careers and “Balance”

This study’s findings on the antithetical co-existence of “balance” with work intensification contradict the nascent sustainable and flexible career concepts’ portrayal of “balance” or work-family fit as a state of harmony between work and home. Instead, this research reveals that “balance” was a constant struggle to carry out work and home roles according to the women’s career and motherhood values which resulted in additional hours and intensive work. The women perceived that working hard at work and home was the only way they could sustain and advance their careers while having a family. This clashes with the definition of career sustainability, which suggests protecting and fostering career development, just as sustainability of environmental resources refers to resources being used without being depleted (Pfeffer, 2010) with a focus on renewal and balance (Newman, 2011; Kossek, Valcour and Lirio, 2014). Contemporary career models examining necessary conditions for women and men to achieve sustainable careers over the life course, include “balance” or work-family fit as a prerequisite (Newman, 2011; Kossek, Valcour and Lirio, 2014; De Hauw and Greenhaus, 2015; Valcour, 2015, Vinkenbunrg, Van Engen and Peters, 2015). For example, De Hauw and Greenhaus (2015) define work-family balance as “an individual’s evaluative judgement of how successful they are with their multiple roles at work and home” (p.230) and sustainable career as “a career in which employees remain healthy, productive, happy and employable throughout its course and that fits into their broader life” (p.224). Their definition is based on Greenhaus and Kossek (2014) and Kossek, Valcour and Lirio

(2014) who advocate that to achieve career sustainability over the life course, employees need to factor their work-family demands into their career and home decisions so that they have sufficient time and energy (resources) to meet their needs according to their values. Tomlinson *et al.* (2018, p.7) define a flexible career as “one that meets the individual’s needs and preferences for flexibility and sustainability as life circumstances change and is influenced by the institutional environment, organizational factors, as well as individual career decisions”. I argue that the women’s career journeys, and especially those who continued to advance, entailed working intensively at work and home which poses a threat to their well-being and health, and is contrary to the meaning of sustainability, i.e. using resources without depleting them. Therefore, these models need to shift responsibility to organizations to “lean in” as “balance” and career sustainability cannot be achieved unless organizations prevent work intensification.

This research concurs with Tomlinson and colleagues’ (2018) model with regard to the importance of context in flexible and sustainable career determinants. As shown in Figure 1, the authors posit that crafting flexible and sustainable careers is bounded by the support of multiple actors: the extent of a supportive society/institutional environment and organizational context i.e. FWAs, culture, supervisors.

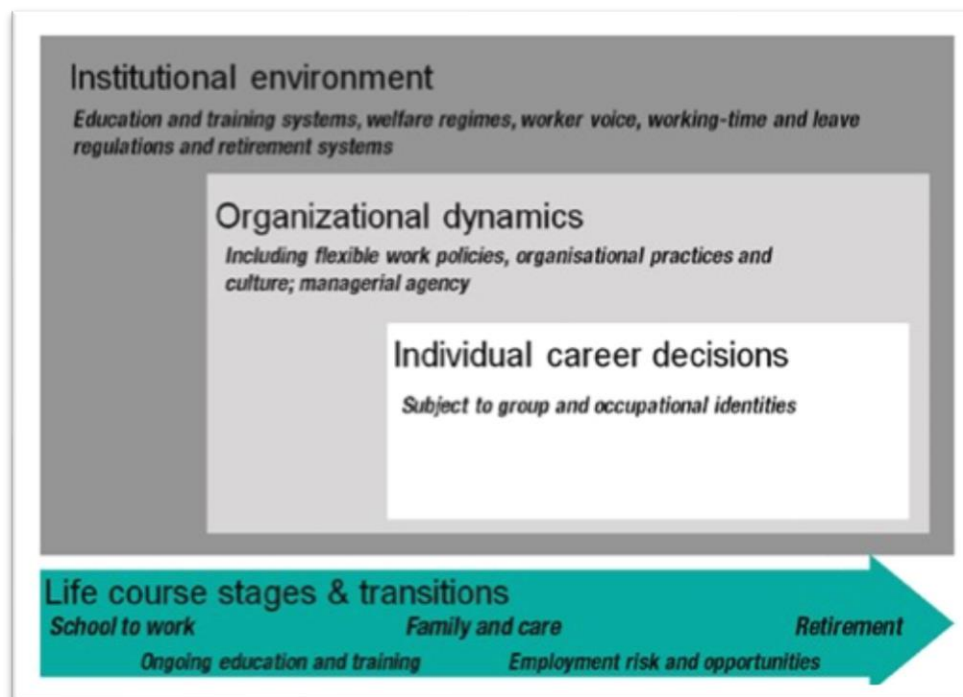


Figure 1: Determinants of a flexible career (Tomlinson *et al.*, 2018)

I argue that this study's findings extend Tomlinson *et al.*'s model by demonstrating that the women's career decisions and beliefs regarding their career sustainability, were also bounded by their parental context in terms of having an egalitarian partnership with their husbands. Each partner was willing to take a back seat to allow the other's career to develop, therefore their career precedence fluctuated depending on work and family circumstances. Those participants who achieved career success by reaching senior management levels resolved conflicting demands between career and family mainly through their careers taking precedence over their husbands' when needed. For example, when the women were posted overseas, their husbands accompanied them, putting their careers on hold and became stay-at-home fathers. This will be further explained in Chapter 6: Contribution and Conclusions, section 6.2.1.

Sustaining careers and advancing to senior levels, was also a result of the women's work intensification. I argue that as long as organizations attempt to offer flexible working policies aimed at reducing the women's attrition from their careers, they may end up disadvantaging the women by unintentionally triggering work intensification. Unless organizations "lean in" to reduce long hour expectations, the 24/7 culture, and do away with ideal worker expectations, trying to "fix" women's advancement through FWAs will continue to disadvantage the women in their quest to pursue a career and have a family. By utilizing FWAs, women adapt to ideal worker norms and unconsciously accept work intensification perceiving it as "balance". For FWAs to serve their intended purpose, organizations should not only take measures to safeguard against work intensification but should also find ways to support men's use of such arrangements so that FWAs will become more mainstream and will not be considered as "favours" by their users. This will also help to de-gender norms of who work and cares. Otherwise, FWAs can defy the very reason they are offered: to alleviate stress from competing time demands of managing work and family so that employees can sustain their careers according to their values as they go through life stages.

5.5. Formal vs. Informal FWAs

A fourth finding of this research is that it highlights the different outcomes of the two informal FWAs, i.e. adjusting office hours and remote working, compared to the formal arrangement of reducing work percentage.

Formal FWAs are contractual agreements between employees and the organization, stipulating the type of FWAs to be used, the frequency and duration. Informal FWAs can be individually tailored arrangements informally agreed between employee and supervisor and utilized more on an *ad hoc* basis. This study reaffirms that the use of informal FWAs, i.e. remote working and adjusting office hours within ABC, was much more extensive (38 mothers) compared to the one formal FWA namely, reduced work percentage which was utilized by seven mothers. This finding adds to the few studies on FWAs which distinguish between formal and informal FWAs (see de Menezes and Kelliher, 2011). Much of the existing literature focuses on formal FWAs, despite evidence that the use of informal FWAs is widespread (de Menezes and Kelliher, 2017).

Moreover, through distinguishing between formal and informal FWAs, the study revealed different career consequences. Reduced work percentage (part-time) was perceived to carry career stigmas, despite the small reduction in work hours as previously discussed in section 2.3.3. In contrast, remote working and adjusting office hours did not reveal any adverse career consequences, as shown by the women who advanced to the most senior levels of ABC and had utilized both types of informal FWAs.

All mothers in the sample, irrespective of organization level, utilized one and most utilized a combination of the two informal FWAs namely, remote working and adjusting their office hours. Both types of FWAs played an important role in providing the women with autonomy to manage their work schedule so that they could accommodate their home demands, e.g. work from home so that they could look after ill children, leave work early to take children to their activities, or start work later in the morning so that they could take the children to school. The women perceived that having independence to control their schedule was essential in coping with their work and home demands. Furthermore, the ability to ramp up and down their hours of work from home in an *ad hoc* manner, alleviated the mothers' worry of having to find other carers for their children at short notice or using up their annual leave, as is often the case with workers who have no access to FWAs. Both alternatives can be detrimental to workers' well-being as they require extensive time and energy and increase stress (Törnquist Agosti, Bringsén and Andersson, 2017).

Studies on FWAs have mostly focused on formal FWAs. This is expected, given that the latter are more transparent. This study extends the existing literature by providing evidence on utilizing informal FWAs and by illuminating the salience of autonomy in varying the frequency of utilization and the type of FWAs, i.e. remote working or adjusting office hours to suit one's needs as they change from day to day. Further, it concurs with Darcy *et al.* (2012) who assert that one-size-fits-all FWAs are often ineffective because they fail to address the changing needs of employees as they go through different life stages. Therefore, I argue that informal FWAs, which can be crafted by employees based on their individual non-work needs, work best in facilitating career and family interface compared to formal agreements, which are more limiting due to pre-agreed schedules of when and how flexibility is utilized.

A common outcome of utilizing formal and informal FWAs within this sample, was that both types of arrangements led to work intensification. Notably, work intensification was more evident and frequent when utilizing informal FWAs (de Menezes and Kelliher, 2017) especially for the women who advanced to senior levels.

The following section presents other interesting findings of the study in relation to access to FWAs, timing and mode of utilization, motherhood values and career, and career and older children.

5.6. Secondary Findings

5.6.1. Access to FWAs

One of the aims of this study was to determine whether there were inequalities in accessing and utilizing FWAs based on the organizational level of the women at their time of need. Findings showed that access did not vary by level, contrary to existing studies which posit that senior managers often have preferential access to FWAs as organizations and supervisors use tailored flexible working arrangements or idiosyncratic deals to attract, motivate and retain valued professionals (Rousseau, Tomprou and Simosi, 2016). Further, Kossek, Thompson and Lautsch (2015) argue that senior managers, by virtue of their strategic roles, are more independent in organizing where and when they work compared to more junior level managers and sometimes can also receive preferential access to flexible working being the "superstar employees". Bourdeau,

Ollier-Malaterre and Houlfort, (2019) in exploring differential outcomes of FWAs in terms of career consequences, claim that employees' work ethic prior to a new request for utilizing FWAs has a differential effect on supervisor attributions of employees' commitment, which in turn may lead to negative or positive career consequences. For example, employees who exhibited commitment by being available to come into the office for meetings on a day during which they were supposed to be at home, will be protected from negative work devotion judgements by their supervisors and will be granted further flexible working requests (Kossek *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, questions remain about whether the managerial pipeline and especially more junior levels (including new-hires) have equal access to flexibility, given that they may have not demonstrated their work ethic nor proven themselves yet. In such cases, requesting flexibility can be detrimental to their career, especially since management expectations of professional employees very much centre around the ideal worker norm and often equate commitment with face-time (Acker, 1990; Bailyn, 2006).

The findings of this research do not support the differential access to flexibility depending on seniority level or "star" status: perceived and actual access to flexible working evidenced by utilization was independent of organizational level. A perceived family-friendly organizational culture and supervisor understanding of the needs of working parents encouraged utilization and a work-life voice for the participants. Furthermore, the findings show that several participants who were newcomers to ABC and were open during their hiring interviews about needing flexibility, perceived no adverse effects on the hiring decision by ABC nor their subsequent access to FWAs. This indicates that supervisors did not attribute these open conversations to low work commitment despite not having experience of the interviewees' prior work ethic. Bourdeau, Ollier-Malaterre and Houlfort (2019) argue that in such cases, supervisors tend to use employees' social identities as a proxy for their work ethic, for example, relying on gender stereotypes considering women as more likely to prioritise family and men as more likely to prioritise their career. However, this research does not support this argument. The women who expressed their flexibility needs during the interviews with ABC were not classified as having a higher family centrality compared to their career centrality by the organization or their future supervisors. I argue that supervisors' values on work and family involvement were influenced by the organizational culture of ABC but also by the

Swedish norms and public policies which mitigated negative work commitment attributions to the women's flexible working requests.

5.6.2. Changing Flexible Working Strategies by Career and Family Stage

While participants of this study were interviewed at a moment in time, they were asked to describe their lived career experiences so far and trace their engagement with FWAs during their career journeys. Therefore, through the women's accounts, this study captured both current and retrospective engagement with FWAs over time. Given the retrospective nature of the women's lived career experiences, I was mindful of survivor bias issues and used probes to clarify and confirm as needed. Findings show the dynamic nature of FWAs by providing evidence that the women's decisions regarding when and which FWAs to utilize, varied according to their degree of caring duties which changed with family stage. Only a few recent studies have explored utilization of FWAs over a period of time (e.g. Chung and van der Horst, 2017) while most previous literature, due to its cross-sectional nature, focused on key moments ignoring how employee needs and circumstances change across family and career stages. This shortcoming also limits our understanding of which types of FWAs can meet employee needs during different career and family stages (Tomlinson *et al.*, 2015, 2018). Therefore, this study adds to the current dearth of literature which explores employees' changing needs for flexibility as they go through different life stages. For example, prior to motherhood, the women accepted and conformed to ideal worker norms by working long hours unencumbered by home demands and prioritising their career (Acker, 1990). For the 38 women with children in ABC Sweden, engaging with FWAs commenced when they transitioned to motherhood. Work and home management became a balancing act of grappling with increased demands on their time from the home domain combined with pressures from work. Work demands such as business travel and late meetings created further tensions in the women's efforts to manage both domains successfully, i.e. spending time with family while pursuing a career according to their values. Findings show that utilizing FWAs in coordination with their husband's work schedules was a way for the women to attend to their children's needs and stay in their careers. I argue that this seamless coordination and flexing of both careers reflects the national context in which the data were collected. For most women in the study, this stage of juggling work and family was very intensive and

lasted for a period of over 10 years and until the children were early teenagers. Once the children left home, the women worked long hours at the office and did not utilize FWAs.

5.6.3. Doing Motherhood and Career

The women's career stories highlight the participants' motherhood centrality, especially in the case of single mothers or those with a higher degree of caring duties. Several participants in these groups felt that senior roles were incompatible with family when children were small and either changed roles or declined promotions (mostly with previous employers). Adhering to their care-giver imperative, professional women with a higher degree of caring duties made career compromises to accommodate their childcare responsibilities as highlighted by a frequently used expression of "not wanting to sacrifice my children". Their ability to manage work and home was impacted on by their family's participation in sharing these care responsibilities (Fernandez-Mateo and Kaplan, 2018) and therefore when perceiving that their children would suffer, they reduced their work responsibilities despite living in a culture where gender equality is a norm (Halrynjo and Lyng, 2009).

Further, even though mothers in dual career couples considered that their husbands' adjusting working patterns or compromising their own careers for care responsibilities was normative, they engaged in a contrasting discourse articulating that they were "lucky to have super husbands" who did so. Despite living in a social welfare country promoting fathers' involvement with care roles through shared parental leave and subsidised day-care fees (Sundström and Duvander, 2002), the women are still torn by a clash of work and family demands (Stone and Hernandez, 2013). I argue that even in this egalitarian country, women often perceive that having a young family is incompatible with senior management roles. Therefore, organizations need to provide role models which show that attending to work and family need not be mutually exclusive. Furthermore, they need to train supervisors to support women and men in managing both roles.

Existing literature on FWAs suggests that as FWAs are being mostly used by mothers and not fathers, FWAs reify the gendering of work and care (Moen, 2011; Allen, 2016). One limitation of this study is that it did not examine male managers' engagement with FWAs, which limits conclusions on the gendering of utilization within ABC. However, it is noteworthy that the women's stories regarding their harmonious partnership with

their husbands in terms of looking after the children and home roles, point to a lower gender segregation of FWAs usage, which is possibly related to the specific national context. While the effects of organizational/supervisor and parental contexts were examined in this study, one limitation is that it has not conducted a cross-national comparison on the effects of national cultures and structures on women's career experiences. However, based on the women's career stories, the Swedish policies of shared parental leave and subsidised day-care played a crucial role in fostering egalitarian families by helping the women and their husbands share the care responsibilities for young children while staying in their careers. Furthermore, as expressed by several study participants, shared parental leave facilitated an egalitarian division of unpaid work at home as fathers had the opportunity to experience being the primary carers of children at home while their wives re-focused on their careers, which confirms the study by Sundström and Duvander (2002). This may have also facilitated an increased expectation of the fathers to utilize FWAs, as shown by the husbands of some of the more senior women.

5.6.4. Career and Older Children

Findings on participants with older children (18+) pointed to resuming long hours at the office without utilizing any flexibility. Their discourse regarding this family and career stage included words such as “fortunate” or “privileged” to be able to put in so many hours at work as no one was waiting for them at home. This is when women get past the pragmatic endurance stage (O’Neil and Bilimoria, 2005) and are focusing on their careers wanting advancement, spending longer hours at work feeling undeterred by home and care responsibilities. This mirrors their early career stage and their enactment of ideal worker behaviours. While they perceived that they had complete independence in scheduling their working hours or place of work, the women did not utilize any FWAs during this stage. They worked hard and felt entitled to focus on themselves and their careers without being constrained as much by relational contexts which, as with the previous stage, during which they had with small children.

Comparing this career stage with older children to O’Neil and Bilimoria’s (2005) reinvention stage (which follows pragmatic endurance) reveals two important differences. The authors’ reinvention stage is age-linked and specifically includes women between

the ages of 46-60. In this study, findings show that the stage during which the women were less pulled in opposite directions by family and work demands is linked to the ages of their children, again reaffirming the relational nature of the women's career decisions (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005; O'Neil and Bilimoria, 2005; O'Neil, Hopkins and Bilimoria, 2008).

The second difference relates to O'Neil and Bilimoria's (2005) pragmatic endurance stage which ends at 45 years of age. I argue that this stage should be extended as today professional women tend to start a family at a later age and therefore the period during which their children reach adolescence may not even begin before the women are in their late forties. Further evidence for this is provided by the age of the participants when they first had children. Out of the 41 mothers in the sample based in Sweden and elsewhere, 20 had their first child when they were over 30, including five who had their first child after turning 35. Out of the remaining 21 mothers, eight had their second and/or third child after reaching 30. Therefore, a total of 28 mothers in the age range of 41 to 54 still had young children (2 to 14 years old).

Another finding related to the age of children at the time of women's promotion to senior levels, highlights that for most mothers, promotion to senior management level materialized after their children were at least eight years old. As shown in section 4.3. Career and Motherhood, during the stage when the children are small, some women talked about making changes in their work roles to either spend more time with their children, or when they perceived that the children were not happy. Arguably, they were reluctant to put themselves forward for more senior roles if they perceived that these roles were incompatible with their family stage. However, this was not a matter of lack of confidence or not "leaning in" as suggested by Sheryl Sandberg's popular book, *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead* (2013). I argue that it was a matter of being affected by doubts about whether success would be likely (Fernandez-Mateo and Kaplan, 2018). Such doubts are influenced by the organizational context and family participation in sharing care and home roles. This resonates with previous research positing that women do not lack confidence, rather that organizations, by valuing and rewarding the ideal worker norm, portray the simultaneous management of work and home as impossible, and unconsciously discourage women from applying for such roles (Rattan et al., 2018).

Within this organization, the majority of the women did not consciously perceive that the ideal worker norm was valued; however, those with less or no support from home (e.g. single mothers) in sharing care and home roles believed that success in advancing to roles with more responsibility might infringe on managing their family roles according to their values. Other studies have shown that women compare themselves to other women when for example they evaluate the possibility of succeeding in a demanding role while having young children (Gibson and Lawrence, 2010). If there are no such role models, which is often the case and especially within male-dominated sectors, then women would be more reluctant to put themselves forward unless the organization takes measures to encourage them to do so. For example, Wilma, an external Level 3 hire, said that the interviewers “tricked her in the positive sense” and if she had known what she knows today about her role, she would not have taken it. But now with autonomy for schedule control and a husband who works part-time and takes a larger share of home roles, Wilma feels happy that she has done so. Therefore, organizations and supervisors need to “lean in” to encourage women to take on roles they perceive incompatible with raising a family and at the same time ensure that there are enough role models from senior management who manage demanding roles and spend time with their family.

5.7. Conclusion

In summary, the national policy of sharing parental leave, nurtured a gender egalitarian partnership at home and a family-supportive attitude of supervisors. This laid the foundation for FWAs within this study to be overtly encouraged by ABC and supervisors, which helped keep the women in the managerial pipeline. However, if FWAs continue to be perceived as “favours”, employees will reciprocate for having this sense of “balance” by working intensively. In fact, unless organizations take measures to safeguard employees from work intensification, their well-being will be threatened leading to sick leaves and frequent absences. Furthermore, this study has shown that FWAs are not the answer to improve women’s ascent within the pipeline and reaching top management positions. When comparing the career experiences of five women with similar demographics but varying job levels, the finding that FWAs played a role in helping the women stay in their careers was confirmed. Most importantly, however, FWAs did not explain their further career advancement in and of themselves unless other contextual

factors were at play. Firstly, career advancement was dependent on sponsorship by supervisors in terms of mentoring, career planning and development, further promotions and being evaluated based on results and not face-time. The latter was a result of managerial agency in providing flexibility which was enabled by the organizational culture. Secondly, a partnership with their husbands in home roles, the extent of which increased during the women's intensive periods at work or business travel, was essential in reducing the women's motherhood guilt from not spending enough time with the children. Supervisor sponsorship and egalitarian partnership with husbands/partners at home are salient in women's decisions to go for bigger roles often requiring longer hours or travel. If these roles are perceived to require ideal worker behaviours and therefore bring out the clash between the role of mother and worker, they might hinder women's decisions to apply for such roles. Organizations need to showcase role models in senior management who have advanced to senior roles and have been able to look after their family according to their values. A synergy between societies, organizations and families would improve women's retention and career advancement rate. Societies, as in the case of Sweden, could implement policies to bring about change in gendered perceptions regarding care roles by incentivising men to take an equal share in parental leave. This could have a snowball effect in changing family demographics and gender biases at work, i.e. that women are less committed to organizations as they are the main family carers. Egalitarian families can lead to a culture change of work and care, and act as role models for the children and the new generations. Organizations, in addition to encouraging employees, men and women, to craft flexible working according to their needs, need to change the structures of work and rewards which are based on ideal worker norms. One way would be to re-evaluate and redesign work roles so that load and time pressures are realistic and do not lead employees to burnout.

In the next chapter, I summarise the purpose of this research and its findings, and present the contributions to knowledge, the implications for practice and policy, and end with the study's limitations and future research.

6. CONTRIBUTION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this section, I summarise the purpose of this research and its findings, and present the contributions to knowledge, the implications for practice and policy, and end with the study's limitations and avenues for future research.

6.1. Overview of Research

Research objectives

This thesis was driven by the increasing popularity of FWAs intended as one avenue to ease employees' time pressures due to competing demands from their work and family domains. In practice, FWAs are more directed towards employed mothers' conflicting demands from work-family interface. Thus, FWAs have been advocated as a strategy which could potentially "fix" the women's leaky pipeline phenomenon towards senior management roles.

A review of the literature on FWAs and career consequences showed several limitations. Firstly, few studies so far have examined career experiences following utilization of FWAs due to their cross-sectional nature (Greenhaus and ten Brummelhuis, 2013). Despite having recognised the connection between work and home and how it shapes and is shaped by career over time, organizational careers' studies have been critiqued for often studying careers independently of the work-family interface (Greenhaus and Kossek, 2014; Beigi, Wang and Arthur, 2017). More recently still, Powell *et al.*, (2019, p.64) posit that "work-life theory would benefit from a further integration of career-related phenomena such as career stage with nonwork aspirations, responsibilities, experiences, and outcomes".

Secondly, studies which did explore career consequences subsequent to utilization produced ambivalent results (Leslie *et al.*, 2012) due to several reasons: different FWAs were bundled together assuming they have the same career consequences (Bourdeau, Ollier-Malaterre and Houllfort, 2019) or were studied as isolated policies independent from context (Kelly *et al.*, 2008; de Menezes and Kelliher, 2011); availability was used as a proxy for utilization (Allen *et al.*, 2013) which in reality remains low across most countries (Hobson and Fahlén, 2009a; Eurofound, 2017) as uptake is impacted on by the

extent to which an organizational culture and supervisors are supportive (Thompson, Beauvais and Lyness, 1999; Sweet, Pitt-Catsouphes and Boone James, 2017).

Thirdly most studies focused on formal FWAs when, in reality, use of informal FWAs is widespread and can have differential outcomes on career (de Menezes and Kelliher, 2017).

The critiques of the literature concerning FWAs and career consequences prompted a study which sought to synthesize what can be learnt from the lived career experiences of women managers with FWAs, working for a particular organization in Sweden, across all levels of its managerial pipeline (most junior to most senior). Examining how women managers across all levels of this organization engaged with FWAs, facilitated a comparison of experiences at different points of career and family stages. This was expected to shed more light on access to and the role of FWAs in these women's career experiences and the circumstances under which FWAs can support women's career sustainability and further advancement throughout different career stages.

The research question and sub-questions of this study are:

- How do women managers engage with FWAs during their careers?
 - How do women managers perceive the impact of FWAs on their career advancement?
 - How do FWAs affect women managers' perceptions of work-family balance?

The interview questions explored whether access differed between organizational levels, the circumstances leading to utilization and timing in terms of the participants' family and career stage, whether types of FWAs changed over time, duration of engaging with FWAs and their influence on the women's career and work-family outcomes. Finally, the women were asked to reflect on how any other supports or obstacles along the way specific to career and family had affected those outcomes.

6.2. Contribution to Knowledge

In answering the research question and sub-questions, this study makes three contributions to the literature. Firstly, it makes a theoretical contribution to sustainable careers by extending Tomlinson and colleagues' (2018) flexible and sustainable career determinants model with the inclusion of parental context as a key determinant. Secondly, it clearly demonstrates that FWAs trigger work intensification and extends our understanding of how this phenomenon is experienced and perceived. While the women described having lives that were in "balance", they also reported working additional hours at home in the evenings in exchange for being able to use flexibility. The women's heightened effort in return for using FWAs is conceptualised as work intensification. The paradox of work intensification and "balance" can compromise career sustainability by depleting instead of protecting employee energy resources and well-being. Thirdly, to the best of my knowledge, this is the first study which provides empirical evidence on the role of FWAs in women's career experiences across all levels of one organization which advances understanding of how women engaged with FWAs during different career and family stages. The study demonstrates that while using FWAs enabled the women to maintain their careers after motherhood, the public policy of parental leave was much more powerful in facilitating the participants' career sustainability by fostering an egalitarian parental context and family-supportive behaviours of ABC's supervisors.

6.2.1. Parental Context and Flexible and Sustainable Careers

This study makes a theoretical contribution to flexible and sustainable careers in two ways: it confirms and extends Tomlinson and colleagues' (2018) model of determinants of flexible and sustainable careers over the life course by adding parental context; and, it contests the positive portrayal of balance in the concept of sustainable careers by exposing its paradoxical co-existence with work intensification (section 6.2.2.).

First, I will present the contextual factors which influence flexible and sustainable careers identified by the extant literature and then I will explain how this study confirms and extends these.

Moen and Sweet (2004) critiqued the static approaches of studying outcomes of FWAs on work-family "balance" as they simplify a complex phenomenon which shifts across

the life course and is context-dependent. To address this, they identify a need for changing the discourse from work-family to flexible careers over the life course, thus implicitly referring to sustainable careers which “endure over time” within contexts of society and organizations. Van der Heijden and De Vos (2015) in the Handbook of Sustainable Careers, similarly to Moen and Sweet (2004), argue for an approach which highlights the interplay of multiple actors affecting careers and their sustainability over time. Several studies included in the Handbook examine the newer concept of sustainable careers from different angles. One study is of particular relevance to this research regarding the interconnection of flexibility and career. De Hauw and Greenhaus (2015, p.228) through their model propose that work-family balance, defined as “employees keeping the total sum of their work and family demands manageable”, is a driver of employees’ career decisions. These decisions can facilitate or hinder the sustainability of their careers. For example, low work-family “balance” can lead employees to make career decisions which compromise their careers, by leaving their organizations or switching to more junior roles or status (organizational level). In contrast, a high work-family “balance” can result in career decisions for further career development, for example accepting an overseas role. One limitation of their model is that it examines the influence of “balance” on sustainable careers in isolation from context, which was identified by the authors as a future research opportunity.

Arguing for the inclusion of context in the study of flexible and sustainable careers, Tomlinson *et al.* (2015) called for papers within a special issue of *Human Relations* to conceptualise the role of governments, organizations and individuals in enabling or undermining the flexibility and sustainability of careers at different points across the life course. Tomlinson *et al.* (2018) subsequently proposed a model identifying the conditions of the institutional environment and organizational dynamics which can support employees to construct flexible and sustainable careers across the life course. Their model, depicted in Figure 1, shows that the institutional environment, for example welfare regimes, length of working week and parental leave regulations, impacts on the family-supportive behaviours of organizations embedded in it and the flexible working policies they offer. Both institutional and organizational contexts determine employees’ ability to access the flexibility they need in order to develop flexible and sustainable careers as they transition through life stages.

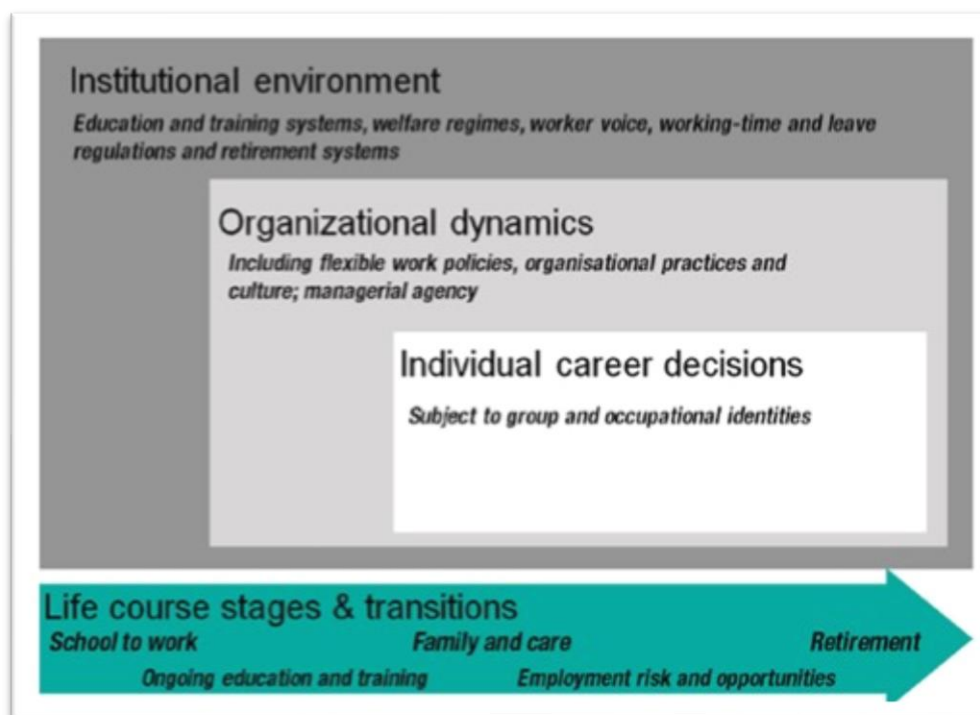


Figure 1: Determinants of a flexible career (Tomlinson *et al.*, 2018)

I will now discuss how the research reported in this thesis confirms and extends the conceptual models proposed by De Hauw and Greenhaus (2015) and Tomlinson *et al.* (2018). Within this sample, the findings confirm the De Hauw and Greenhaus (2015) study in how a sense of work-family “balance”, or the absence of, affects employees’ career decisions which in turn influences the sustainability of their careers. For example, participants who were unable to manage their work and family demands in a satisfactory way according to their values, made compromised career decisions by declining roles with more responsibilities or resigning. Those who felt that they had “balance”, maintained and/or advanced their careers. Furthermore, my findings extend their model by addressing its limitation of not including contextual factors impacting on employees’ sense of “balance”. I provide evidence that Sweden’s welfare regime with its policies on parental leave and subsidised day-care played the most significant role in retaining the women in their careers after childbirth by catalysing a family-supportive organizational culture influencing their agency for sustaining their careers. In doing so, I also reinforce Tomlinson *et al.*’s (2018) model, in that the institutional environment constitutes a determinant of flexible and sustainable careers across the life course (Figure 1).

Furthermore, I argue that my study extends Tomlinson and colleagues' (2018) model as I explain below. Within this sample, the institutional environment was indeed the bedrock which engendered an organizational context encouraging the use of flexibility and independence to schedule control. In parallel, the institutional environment fostered an egalitarian approach in the parental and home responsibilities. All women with children in Sweden and their husbands engaged in shared parental leave, which nurtured a continued mutual involvement with care and home roles to support each other's careers through life and career transitions. All husbands engaged with staying home with the children in coordination with the women's work schedules, albeit to a different extent. Therefore, the husbands' engagement with shared leave and continued involvement with care and home roles, enabled the women to return and focus on their careers after childbirth and also to take on career advancement opportunities which required longer hours, travel and in some cases relocation abroad. I argue that what facilitated the women's flexible and sustainable careers, was the synergy between the family-supportive values of this organization and its supervisors and the husbands' egalitarian attitudes in flexing each other's career to look after care and home roles. Therefore, I contend that the parental context, which in this sample includes the pivotal roles of husbands, needs to be incorporated within this model nested within the institutional context and interconnected with the organizational context as shown in Figure 2.

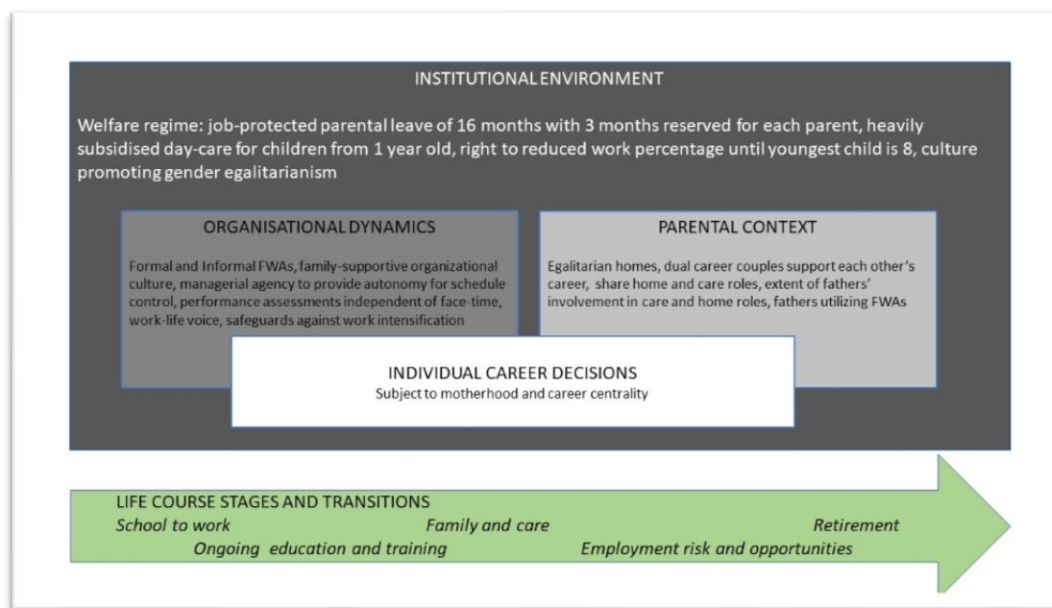


Figure 2: An extended model of determinants of flexible and sustainable careers

The above model is based on the national context in which this study took place but can be adapted to the specifics of other national contexts and organizations.

6.2.2. Work Intensification: A Threat to Flexible and Sustainable Careers

I now turn to the second theoretical contribution of this study to sustainable careers which centres on the issue of work intensification perceived as “balance”. I first explain the positive portrayal of “balance” in the career sustainability literature and then show that it is antithetical to this study’s findings.

Pfeffer (2010) contends that just as organizations are responsible for protecting and using physical resources without depleting them, they also have a responsibility towards human sustainability (also referred to as social sustainability), i.e. protecting the mental and physical health of their employees. Building on the concept of sustainability, Newman (2011) and Kossek, Valcour and Lirio (2014) posit that career sustainability entails protecting and fostering human and career development with a focus on balance and renewal. Other studies examining the necessary conditions for women and men to achieve sustainable careers over the life course, include “balance” or work-family fit as a prerequisite (De Hauw and Greenhaus, 2015; Valcour, 2015; Vinkenburg, Van Engen and Peters, 2015). For example, De Hauw and Greenhaus (2015) define sustainable career as “a career in which employees remain healthy, productive, happy and employable throughout its course and that fits into their broader life” (p.224). Their definition is based on Greenhaus and Kossek (2014) and Kossek *et al.* (2014) who advocate that to achieve career sustainability over the life course, employees need to factor their work-family demands into their career and home decisions so that they have sufficient time and energy (resources) to meet their needs according to their values. Tomlinson *et al.* (2018, p.7) define a flexible career as “one that meets the individual’s needs and preferences for flexibility and sustainability as life circumstances change and is influenced by the institutional environment, organizational factors, as well as individual career decisions”.

I argue that this study’s findings on the inherent contradiction in the way the women talked about their sense of “balance” while alluding to experiencing work intensification, clash with the multiple definitions of career sustainability presented above which revolve around employee resources being protected and used without being depleted (Pfeffer, 2010) with a focus on renewal and balance (Newman, 2011; Kossek, Valcour and Lirio,

2014). If we assume that employee resources include time and energy to attend to multiple demands from career and family, then I argue that the women's resources in terms of time were depleted and in terms of energy were not protected. Therefore, I contend that work intensification poses a serious threat to career sustainability.

Despite being recognised by scholars as an unintended consequence of FWAs, work intensification has only been explored by a few studies. Kelliher and Anderson (2010) studied the process through which work intensification arises using social exchange theory. Cañibano (2019, p.455) talked about the interplay of the organizational offering of FWAs as “inducements” or rewards and employees reciprocating with extended hours and effort as “contributions” to the organization. The findings of this research confirm the aforementioned studies in that work intensification arises as a result of reciprocity, i.e. the women give back to the organization in exchange for having flexibility and autonomy to manage their work and home demands.

I argue that this research also extends the concept of work-intensification by revealing the paradox between how the women perceived and experienced this phenomenon. By utilizing FWAs, the women expressed that they were satisfied and even grateful for having schedule control, describing it as having “balance” while they also explained that they worked additional hours which was evident in all their accounts and in particular in the senior women managers' journeys. Nevertheless, the women emphasized that they felt they had “balance” or “freedom with responsibility”, obscuring their heightened effort at work and home. I contend that this finding explains why “balance” is an increasingly contested term in the work-family literature, claiming that it is elusive and unattainable. Studies have attributed this construct's shortcomings to the fact that employee preferences on allocating resources to work and home differ and shift across the life course, therefore there is no single objective state of balance which employees can achieve and that the construct places too much emphasis on individuals to achieve it – ignoring contextual constraints (Lewis, Gambles and Rapoport, 2007). The paradox of work intensification and “balance” is far from the positive portrayal of “balance” in the literature which obscures the fact that organizations, by failing to safeguard against work intensification, continue to disadvantage women who in return for “balance” exert heightened effort, which depletes their resources of time and energy and can lead to

burnout. This consequence of using FWAs is problematic for employee well-being due to increased stress from working long hours at work and home and threatens career sustainability which is the very purpose they are offered for. I argue that the women's career journeys, and especially those who continued to advance, entailed working intensively at work and home which could have compromised their health and well-being and is contrary to the meaning of sustainability, i.e. using resources without depleting them. Therefore, studies on sustainable and flexible careers need to explicitly recognise that responsibility needs to be shifted to organizations to "lean in" and safeguard against work intensification. I contend that in Tomlinson and colleagues' (2018) model, one important condition for organizations, along with offering FWAs, should be the safeguarding against work intensification to foster and protect employee well-being in order that careers can be sustainable.

A finding which further strengthens my argument on including the interplay of parental context and organizational contexts in Tomlinson and colleagues' (2018) flexible and sustainable careers' model, is that the egalitarian partnership of the participants with their husbands fostered by national policies for work and care, partially mitigated the stress arising from work intensification and helped the women's career sustainability, despite the depletion of their time resources.

The next sub-section contains the study's empirical contribution.

6.2.3. Engaging with FWAs and Career Consequences

This research, to the best of my knowledge, constitutes the first empirical study of examining whether and how women managers at every level of an organization engaged with FWAs. Exploring access to FWAs across all managerial levels allows an examination of "work-life inequality" (Kossek and Lautsch, 2018, p.8). Secondly, it advances understanding of how women managers engage with FWAs during different career and family stages (early career, motherhood and career and older children and career).

I first turn to work-life inequality i.e. the inequality of access to FWAs across different employee groups or levels or different consequences depending on employee levels when FWAs are accessed. Extant literature posits that organizations enable access to FWAs as

an inducement to motivate valued employees (Rousseau, Tomprou and Simosi, 2016), according to employee status, i.e. organizational level (Kossek, Thompson and Lautsch, 2015), or work ethic prior to requests for utilization (Bourdeau, Ollier-Malaterre and Houfort, 2019) or proven performance (Kossek *et al.*, 2016). This means that senior managers would have more access to flexibility by virtue of their rank, strategic roles and demonstrated performance which also protects them from career stigma typically associated with reduced face-time. I contend that lower level employees could be in greater need of FWAs as they are often the ones facing tensions in their work-family interface by simultaneously developing their career and starting a family. If FWAs are made available on an inequitable basis by being primarily offered to senior levels, this could lead to negative individual and organizational outcomes. Employee perceptions of injustice could in turn hinder employee commitment, motivation, retention and organizational performance. Contrary to the aforementioned literature on senior managers or valued employees having preferential access to FWAs, this research demonstrates that within ABC, access to FWAs was not dependent on organizational level or performance or prior work ethic or talent. All participants engaged with FWAs while those who had children younger than 14 years continued to do so. I argue that this organization embraced the Swedish norms which support life outside work and therefore provided an equitable access to FWAs across organizational levels to new and existing women managers. As previously discussed, national context had a significant influence on the family-supportive attitudes of this organization which, by extension, impacted on the capacity of the participants to engage with FWAs irrespective of organizational level.

Secondly, I contend that this study by exploring the use of FWAs across all organizational levels, advances understanding of how women managers engage with FWAs during different career and family stages. This study has shown that the participants engaged with FWAs for an extended period of time which began at childbirth and continued until the youngest child was 14+, contrary to assumptions that managing career and children is an intense 10-year period. I argue that a tough period of care-giving and managing a career can easily extend to 20 years without including elder care responsibilities. A related finding was that ages of children and other factors such as parental context (i.e. the extent of sharing home roles with husbands/partners or being a single mother) and/or elder care responsibilities, influenced which type of FWAs was utilized which changed according

to family and career circumstances over time. For example, remote working was utilized when young children were ill and stayed home from school and adjusting office hours was a strategy which was used throughout until the children were 14+. Women with older children, above 14, rarely utilized FWAs and spent longer hours at the office. This confirms extant literature on FWAs which questions the efficacy of one-size-fits-all FWAs (Darcy et al., 2012). I argue that ages of children and the extent of caring duties were important considerations for the participants in engaging with FWAs. Therefore, this study extends current understanding on mothers' motivations for utilizing particular types of FWAs as well as duration of utilization. Furthermore, this has implications for practice regarding the need for a more tailored and dynamic approach to the design of FWAs in order to better address employees' flexibility needs as those change with career and family stage.

Thirdly, this research distinguishes between formal and informal FWAs and therefore adds to the scarcity of literature examining informal FWAs and their career consequences. Informal FWAs have not been studied to the same extent as formal FWAs (de Menezes and Kelliher, 2011) despite evidence that the former are widely used and have different outcomes on employee attitudes and performance (De Menezes and Kelliher, 2017) and career (Gatrell, 2007; Tomlinson and Durbin, 2010). I argue that extending the literature on informal FWAs and career outcomes increases understanding of benefits and consequences of different FWAs. This study confirms the wider use of informal FWAs, namely remote working and adjusting office hours, by demonstrating that these were utilized by all the women. In contrast, reducing work percentage, the only formal type of FWA, was utilized by very few participants and only those with a greater extent of caring duties and less support in their home domain. In terms of career consequences this study finds evidence that formal and informal FWAs had diverse career consequences. The women's accounts indicated that reduced work percentage or part-time was associated with career stalling for the duration of its utilization. This was also demonstrated by the fact that none of the women who reached senior levels had worked part-time at any point during their careers. Furthermore, the women who did so, were among the oldest within their organizational levels. Notably, reduced work percentage amounted to a small reduction in contractual hours (10-15%), yet it still seemed to be career taxing. This finding confirms the previous literature which posits that employees who reduce their

work-percentage are more likely to experience career stalling effects (Tomlinson and Durbin, 2010) and career stigma (Stone and Hernandez, 2013). However, I argue that the career stalling effects of part-time work is an unexpected finding within this national context as it is a legal entitlement in a country which supports parents to reconcile their work and family roles. Perhaps this surprising outcome can be attributed to the sector in which ABC and the women's previous employers operate (SET) where there is a lack of role models working part-time. This explanation is consistent with previous studies on part-time work by Herman and Lewis (2012) and Gascoigne and Kelliher (2018). Another possible explanation could be that reducing work-percentage deviates from ideal worker norms, pervasive in this sector, where presenteeism is the mode of working (Faulkner, 2013). Conversely, the two informal FWAs, i.e. remote working and adjusting office hours, had no apparent taxing career consequences evidenced by the fact that all the women who rose to senior ranks had utilized both remote working and adjusting office hours.

Fourthly, in terms of career maintenance, findings show that all three types of FWAs seem to have helped the women sustain their careers after childbirth and were perceived as essential in managing career and family. When such arrangements were unavailable or frowned upon by the participants' previous employers, the women resigned or moved to more junior roles. Therefore, this study finds evidence that both the formal and informal FWAs explored, helped sustain the women in their careers albeit resulting in different career consequences as discussed in the above paragraph.

Most importantly, the findings of this study have shown that while utilization of formal and informal FWAs was helpful in enabling the women to stay their careers after motherhood, the role of national policies for work and care was much more powerful in facilitating the participants' career sustainability. Shared parental leave set the scene for ABC and its supervisors' family-supportive behaviour and influenced an egalitarian sharing of care and home roles between the women and their husbands. Perhaps the existence of progressive national policies to facilitate gender equality in work and care results in less emphasis for organizational policies for flexibility, thus the range of FWAs offered by ABC and their role was not as extensive as expected. This supports previous

literature which posits that national context matters in the development of flexible working policies by organizations (Kossek, Lewis and Hammer, 2010).

Finally, findings illuminated that FWAs did not suffice in facilitating women's further advancement within the managerial pipeline, despite their widely-championed purpose of doing so. This study provides evidence that notwithstanding the women's drive to work hard and perform, additional contextual supports were at play for those who reached senior levels: sponsorship by their supervisor in terms of mentoring, career planning, development and further promotions; and, an egalitarian partnership at home with husbands and wives flexing their careers and sharing home and care roles beginning with parental leave. The women did "lean in" to use Sandberg's (2013) popular expression; however, career advancement came about due to a synergy of "leaning in" by the Swedish culture and structures, the organizational and parental contexts.

6.3. Implications for Practice and Policy

This study has shown that research on FWAs and their outcomes which focuses on the individual level of analysis is inadequate. For FWAs to achieve their intended purpose, availability within organizations does not guarantee utilization. If utilized, FWAs may lead to career penalties depending on type used and supervisor attributions of employees' work ethic and commitment. Furthermore, even if employees are protected from career stigma when utilizing FWAs, their stress from managing family and work demands may not be alleviated due to work intensification. This study has shown that the strain from attending to demands from multiple roles increases when fathers do not participate in the care and home roles. Therefore, for FWAs to effectively meet employees' flexibility needs as those change during the different life stages, there needs to be a synergy between society, organization and family.

In terms of society's role, the study's findings on Sweden's parental leave and its reserved months for mothers and fathers, suggest that incentives directed towards men engaging with parental leave resulted in an increase in fathers' uptake of this benefit, especially among professionals. Therefore, public level policies directed towards working mothers **and** fathers, have the potential to accelerate culture change towards the un-gendering of the division of labour at work and in families. Fathers and by extension male supervisors through engaging with such public policies are exposed to the primacy of care which

could help shift gendered norms regarding care and reduce biases in promotion decisions which ultimately penalize mothers.

Organizations offer FWAs but unless they change the structures of work, they will continue to disadvantage women and other minority groups who, through reciprocity, work extended hours to pay back the organization for providing them with autonomy in scheduling when and where they work. FWAs may change the working hours and the place of work but they do not alter the workload. Therefore, women who pursue a career and have a family end up working long hours which increases stress and threatens their well-being. Organizations and supervisors need to take measures to ensure that workloads and deadlines are realistic. In parallel, they need to encourage men to utilize FWAs so that these policies are no longer perceived as “favours” by women and other minority groups in the organization and become more mainstream. If FWAs are considered a right applicable to all, they are less likely to trigger work-intensification as a “pay-back” strategy for those who utilize them.

Regarding women’s career advancement, other than the significant support from home, this study showed that the role of the supervisor in sponsoring the women was key for those who advanced to senior levels. I do not suggest that women need support because they don’t “lean in”, as argued by Sandberg (2013), rather that the scarcity of women in senior roles can have adverse effects on their self-efficacy regarding the sustainability of combining senior roles and family. Therefore, supervisors and organizations could play an instrumental role in enhancing the women’s self-efficacy by taking measures such as implementing mentoring and development programmes to encourage women to take on more responsibilities while safeguarding against unrealistic workloads. Furthermore, top management of organizations should act as role models showing that senior positions and family are not an either/or proposition.

As Padavic, Ely and Reid (2019, p.43) argue, “solutions require a thorough reconsideration of gender at work and home...while this challenge may seem daunting, invoking Ridgway and Correll’s (2000) metaphor of ocean waves moving a sandbar makes realizing a broader vision more possible: one set of families embracing egalitarianism -one wave- has little effect; one company’s action to humanize work

demands -another wave- similarly has little effect. But as the waves continue -as other families and companies follow- the old gender system will be eroded to irrelevance”.

6.4. Limitations

This research was a case within one organization in Sweden and therefore results may not be generalizable to other organizations. Further, this organization operates in the SET sector which is particularly masculine compared to other sectors and therefore findings may differ across sectors. However, as this organization has embraced the values of the Swedish culture, it contributes to the literature by providing evidence regarding how, even under the best societal (Sweden and its policies for work and care) and organizational circumstances (family-supportive), FWAs, do not necessarily “fix” the leaky pipeline unless other contextual factors are in place.

Secondly, the retrospective nature of many of the women’s constructions of their career experiences with FWAs, may have resulted in a representation which was not entirely accurate. This study did not include the perspectives of the women who left ABC and therefore may have captured mostly positive experiences. However, as described by the majority of women who left previous organizations to join ABC, this organization does provide an example of recognising employees’ family roles and enabling them to schedule control as needed.

Another limitation is that this study focused on women managers, the large majority of whom were professionals of high educational attainment and lived in dual career households with partners of similar attainments. This may have captured a more positive picture of gender role ideologies regarding career and family than may exist between couples of different educational backgrounds and in low-skill positions.

As with all qualitative studies, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to a large range of populations. However, listening to and capturing the participants’ career experiences and how these were affected by utilizing FWAs, adds important insights to the literature regarding the actual versus the intended role of FWAs in women’s careers.

Finally, I examined the outcomes of utilizing FWAs on the women’s career experiences only from their own perspectives, but outcomes could be better understood if the perspectives of the women’s husbands and supervisors were also captured. This could be

an avenue for future research. Notwithstanding the described limitations, I argue that this study has significant implications for the work-family, FWAs and women's career fields.

6.5. Future Research

This study was conducted in a very specific national context which is conducive to utilization of FWAs and, based on the participants' accounts, played a central role in facilitating women's return to work after childbirth and their career sustainability through shaping egalitarian parenting including home roles and family-friendly attitudes of supervisors. Therefore, more studies are needed to explore and compare the role of other national contexts in facilitating or hindering the adoption and utilization of FWAs and the consequences on career sustainability and advancement. Moreover, such studies could examine how a national context instils expectations of gender roles and how such expectations influence gender equality at work and home.

The women in this study talked about men in ABC using FWAs to manage work and family. Several participants described their husbands' utilization of FWAs. Fathers are not often included in work-family research and studies of FWAs (Gatrell and Cooper, 2016) despite evidence that fathers' expectations to use FWAs in order to look after their children are on the rise (Hobson and Fahlén, 2009b). Therefore, future case studies could look into fathers' experiences with FWAs and career consequences. A cross-cultural comparison could also add insights into the extent of fathers' agency to utilize FWAs and increase their involvement with caregiving roles.

Future studies could also examine how the dyad of working parents and how their work and family ideologies affect each other's work-family and career outcomes. Cross-national comparisons could also provide new insights comparing feminine vs. masculine welfare regimes (Hofstede, 1980).

In a similar vein, supervisors' engagement with parental leave in Nordic countries would be an interesting avenue for research to increase understanding of its effect on supervisor attributions of employees' utilization of FWAs. Cross-national research could provide valuable lessons in comparing the relationship between public policies and organizational culture and practices affecting supervisor attributions.

Using the proposed model in this study which is based on Tomlinson *et al.* (2018), future research could explore additional determinants of crafting flexible and sustainable careers over time. This would increase understanding on how organizations and societies can further support flexible and sustainable careers for women and men during the different family stages. Cross-national comparisons could further provide understanding on what type of public policies can effectively shift gendered norms of work and care, and contribute to women's career sustainability.

Longitudinal studies which examine the type of FWAs utilized over time on employees' career experiences within the context of society, organization and family, could provide nuanced insights into the outcomes of utilization in terms of family and career.

This study captured the role of FWAs in the career experiences of women managers who sustained their careers within this organization. Future case studies could also include the experiences of women managers who left their organization, in order to gather more insights on the role of utilizing FWAs.

Finally, future studies can delve deeper into the concept of work intensification, across organizations, sectors and cultures to explore the circumstances under which it arises and how it can be prevented.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A Interview Protocol

A.1 Introduction

- Introduce aims of the study, talk about confidentiality and ethics and obtain permissions for audio recording and note taking.

A.2 Flexible working and work-life balance

- Please describe your current role within your organization and your working pattern.
- Tell me about your experiences with flexible working.
 - Can you tell me about your flexible working patterns at different stages of your career?

(Type of flexible working, for how long, authorization process, formal or informal arrangement, timing i.e. career stage)

- What would you say the benefits are for your work? What about outside work, e.g. your family? (*Probs: how did you feel about that? How did it impact your work? Your family?*)
- What would you say the key challenges are for your work? What about outside work e.g. your family? (*Probs: how did you feel about that challenges or barriers? How did it impact your work? Your family? How did you overcome it (them)?*)
- How do you see the relationship between flexible working and your “work-life balance”? (*Probs: how satisfied are you with the level of balance you have/had at that stage in managing your work and non-work responsibilities?*)
 - Was there any difference in this relationship at different stages of your career? (*Probs: what would you have done if you did not have this flexibility at that stage? At a different stage?*)

A.3 Flexible working and career progress

- How do you see the relationship between flexible working and your career?

- What would you say the benefits are (personally, professionally, for your organization)?
- What would you say helped you advance? (Organizational policies, programmes, interventions, organizational culture, supervisor, team members, colleagues, Support outside the workplace e.g. family, friends, household help etc.) (Probs: tell me more about this support. How did it manifest itself?)
- What would you say the challenges were? What helped you overcome them and continued to progress in your career? (Organizational policies, programmes, interventions, organizational culture, supervisor, team members, colleagues, Support outside the workplace e.g. family, friends, household help etc.) (Probs: how did you sustain yourself? How did you keep motivated?)
- Reflecting on what you have achieved, what would you say were the key elements of your success?

A.4 Demographics:

- Age, education, work level, marital status, dependants (children, ageing relatives)

Appendix B ABC Brief

B.1 Lack of gender balance in top management positions

Professional women enter the labour market and rise to junior and middle management positions yet, their representation declines as the positions become more senior. Several barriers contribute to this exit of female managerial talent such as the glass ceiling, lack of role models and mentors, social capital, different leadership styles and work-family balance issues and it is the latter that is the focus of the proposed research. Although work-family balance is clearly relevant for both women and men, it is often women who shift their working patterns, such as opting to utilize flexible working, in order to cope with competing demands from work and non-work roles. There has been much discussion about how the use of flexible working relates to career experiences.

B.2 Data

For this research I would like to invite women from all management levels within ABC to share their career experiences and perceptions of what types of support can facilitate and sustain their career progress, particularly in relation to flexible working to address family and other non-work roles. Outcomes of the research will include increased understanding and recommendations of how ABC can further develop the opportunities for women in the managerial pipeline to achieve work-family balance while sustaining their career progress to senior management.

B.3 Method

I will conduct a study consisting of 40 semi-structured interviews of women managers within ABC. The conversations will be recorded with the permission of the participants and transcribed.

B.4 Confidentiality

All interviews will remain confidential and transcripts will not be shared with anyone except my supervisors at Cranfield. Names and other details will be changed in any written reports so that participants remain anonymous. Likewise, this and any other organizations would not be named.

B.5 The findings

The findings of the study will be used in a variety of ways:

- As the data collection for my PhD thesis
- Publications in academic journal articles
- To provide a report to ABC. This will be a summary of any suggestions or comments that arise in the interviews which could potentially inform the organization as to how its culture can enable the pipeline of female managers to continue to advance their career while working flexibly.

Again, any quotations used in written documents will maintain confidentiality and participants' anonymity.

Research contact: Andrie Michaelides, BSc., MBA,

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Before commencing my doctoral studies, I worked in the Human Resources field for many years as HR Director for PepsiCo in the Middle East and North Africa and then for the International School of Amsterdam. Having had personal experience in managing a career while working in different countries with my spouse and raising two children, I am extremely interested in researching flexible working issues and the way these can impact women's career progress to top positions.

Research Supervisors:

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Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering taking part in this research.

Appendix C Interview Invitation Letter

Dear All,

You have been selected as potential interview participants for the purposes of my PhD research on talented professional women within ABC to share your career experiences and perceptions of what types of support can facilitate and sustain your career progress, particularly in relation to flexible working to address family and other non-work roles.

I attach a brief research outline which explains the objectives of the study and the content of the interviews.

If you are happy to participate, please let me know a suitable date and time for you during the next 4-6 weeks if possible. I expect the interview (which would most likely be conducted on SKYPE) to last between 45 and 60 minutes. Our conversation will be entirely confidential, and the names of all participants will be changed in the thesis to ensure anonymity.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes,

Andrie Michaelides

Appendix D Dissemination of research

Peer reviewed conference papers

- Michaelides, A. (2017) 'Senior women managers: career success and sustainability through work-home flexibility', Community, Work and Family Conference, Milan.
- Michaelides A., Anderson, D. and Doherty, N. (2018) 'The work-home interface and the role of flexible working arrangements in the career success of senior women managers', British Academy of Management Conference, Bristol.

Doctoral colloquia

- Cranfield School of Management, 06/2016
- Community, Work and Family Conference, 06/2017
- Cranfield School of Management, 02/2018
- British Academy of Management Conference, 09/2018