

Delegation as the key enabler for senior female leadership transitions:

an exploratory study

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I. Abstract

My objective was to research the key leadership transitions in which female leaders have to engage to close the gender gap at senior executive levels. Informed by my own coaching experience, I focused on the capacity to delegate as the enabler of other leadership transitions. I researched the key blocking factors for delegation and how they may differ for female leaders compared to male leaders. I surmised that the capacity for delegation to release the critical resource of time may indeed allow investment in other leadership transitions, such as developing a vision, developing a general management perspective, building relationships vertically and horizontally and building a network. I developed a framework for investigation that I proposed to test through a survey with a group of 50 senior executive coaches as an 'expert group', with a collective experience of over 6500 female coachees. I complemented this survey with eight in-depth interviews with senior female leaders, all leaders of managers.

I found moderate support for the hypothesis that female leaders have more difficulty in delegating than male leaders. More importantly, however, the blocking factors for female leaders are significantly different. For them, perfectionism, a high sense of responsibility and feeling overly protective of their teams constitute some of the major factors that block delegation. My study confirms that effective delegation releases 'transition time' for female leaders to engage in key leadership transitions, key among which are developing a general management perspective and horizontal relationships with peers. I also looked into how behavioural changes during those transitions help female leaders develop their leadership identity and to what extent a conflict between their gender and leader identity might impact their leadership role.

Key words: delegation, leadership transition(s), responsibility, time allocation, leader identity, gender and leader conflict.

II. Introduction and research objective

Today a large number of women form part of the labour force as successful managers and leaders.

A much smaller number of them, however, make the leadership transition from senior manager to an executive position and even fewer reach the executive committee of large organisations. In 2011 women held 21% of the seats on executive committees in Sweden, 15% in Norway, 14% in the United States, 12% in Australia, 11% in the United Kingdom, 9% in China, 8% in France, 3% in Germany, 3% in India and 1% in Japan (Barsch, Devillard & Wang, 2012).

There are a large number of possible reasons why women fail to reach these senior executive levels, such as their organizations' subtle biases in not proposing women for senior positions, not giving them the stretch assignments needed to qualify for them or not giving them sponsors who rally for them. Other reasons why women do not attain senior positions might also include their personal choice not to pursue promotion in order to maintain their carefully constructed work/family balance, or their reluctance to become more 'political' in order to get there.

While I am aware of these various elements, my aim in this thesis is to look at the leadership challenges that might accelerate female leaders' transitions to executive positions. Research has shown that to make this step, which often happens through a promotion or a series of promotions, men and women have to go through a leadership transition, i.e. a behavioural step change where they become comfortable and confident with their identity as a leader (Ibarra *et al.*, 2010). Research has also identified a number of critical steps women (and men) have to master to make this senior transition successfully, such as developing their strategic vision, a broad internal horizontal and external network, becoming more a general manager in their thinking, etc. (Ibarra *et al.*, 2010; Watkins, 2012)

One key leadership transition that is often assumed to have happened before an individual reaches these senior transitions, however, is the capability and propensity to delegate, which is often developed in earlier managerial positions (Charan et al, 2001).

My hypothesis, grounded in my coaching practice, is that women have a bigger and different challenge to delegate than men. I further hypothesise that delegation is a qualifier and a key enabler for those other leadership transitions to happen. A further question is then how the gender dynamic interferes with mastering this challenge of delegation.

I also hypothesize that if a female leader masters this challenge better, this will affect the key resource of time, which will in turn allow her to invest in a number of senior leadership transitions e.g. developing and communicating a strategic vision, developing a general management perspective, developing horizontal relationships with peers, developing upward relationships and developing a network outside one's organisation. In a parallel process with these leadership transitions and experimenting with new behaviours, she will be developing her identity as a leader (Ibarra et al., 2010).

I propose to explore these hypotheses in four steps through a series of questions:

- Is delegation seen as a bigger challenge for women than men?
- Are the factors blocking delegation different for women than for men?
- How does effective delegation impact on senior leadership transitions?
- How do these leadership transitions help female leaders develop their 'leadership identity' and to what extent does gender impact on this?

I explore the literature on delegation, leadership transitions, leader identity and gender as it relates to women's leadership development.

For my empirical research, I undertook two projects:

1. A survey on the theme of delegation and leadership transition with a group of 86 international executive coaches at IGLC, to which I received 51 (69%) valid and complete responses. They represent a kind of 'expert group'. Those coaches have on average 10

years' coaching experience and a coaching practice with on average 13 female and 41 male leaders as coachees per year.

2. In-depth semi-structured telephone interviews with eight senior female leaders on the topic of delegation and leadership transitions. All had completed the Global Executive Leadership Inventory (GELI) 360-degree feedback questionnaire in a senior management development programme and thus I could measure their score on 'empowerment' (as a proxy for delegation) and exchange on their experience with delegation and leadership transitions, along a spectrum of 'very good' and 'less good' delegators to understand the underlying rationale.

III. Literature review

I will first explore briefly the concept of delegation and elaborate on a number of potential blocking factors to delegation. Moving on from delegation – which in my hypothesis would facilitate other senior leadership transitions – I will examine the literature on leadership transitions and their link to the development of a leadership identity. In the gender literature I will concentrate on a number of perspectives differentiating male and female leaders in their leadership behaviours and identities and look into potential conflict between gender and leader identity.

Delegation literature and potential blocking factors

For my survey I used the following definition of delegation:

'The assignment of authority and responsibility to another person (normally from a manager to a subordinate) to carry out specific activities. Delegation empowers a subordinate to make decisions, i.e. it is a shift of decision-making authority from one organisational level to a lower one. The opposite of effective delegation is micro-management, where a manager provides too much input, direction, and review of delegated work' (Delegation, n. d.).

According to a study by Yukl and Fu, 'delegation may improve the speed and quality of decisions, reduce overload for the manager, enrich the subordinate's job, increase the subordinate's intrinsic motivation, and provide opportunities for subordinate development of leadership skills' (Yukl & Fu, 1999). Particularly relevant for my thesis, where I look at delegation in the context of being a leader of managers, was the fact that the hypothesis that more delegation and consultation were used with subordinates who are managers themselves was validated and that the most important reasons for delegating was to develop subordinates, motivate their commitment and empower them to do their jobs better (Yukl & Fu, 1999).

I found no studies which specifically examined what blocks delegation. I therefore looked at broader literature on leadership challenges and potential derailers that might help define certain blocking factors.

In the clinical approach to leadership dynamics (Kets de Vries & Engellau, 2010) micromanagement and the corresponding need for control are seen as major derailers and impediments to delegation. Conflict avoidance might also constitute a blocking factor to delegation as the need to please everybody and be an eternal consensus builder might inhibit effective delegation. The impostor syndrome is another potential blocking factor; people suffering from this syndrome always doubt whether they measure up to others' expectations and thus develop very perfectionist behaviours and struggle with an underlying fear of failure (Kets de Vries, 2005). Looking at the theme of perfectionism, the feeling of 'not being good enough' brings us to the literature of the 'good-enough mother' concept developed by Winnicott (1953).

In her work on learning to lead, *Becoming the Boss* (2007) Hill addresses a number of myths around a manager's delegation to and empowerment of a team, such as the myth of formal authority, the myth of being in control and the myth of having to show off one's technical expertise, which helped me to define additional potential blocking factors towards delegation, such as the need for control and not letting go of one's expertise.

Leadership transition literature and leadership identity

In the field of **leadership transition**, the concept of the **leadership pipeline** (Charan et al., 2001) describes the various leadership skills a manager needs to develop along a model of career-crossroads (see Appendix 1). The six ‘passages’ cover managing self, managing people, managing managers, managing a function, managing a business, managing general managers (or a group of businesses) and finally managing the enterprise. For my thesis the crossroads from managing managers to managing a function and a business is what I am interested in. Often, however, the first passage from managing self to managing people is skipped, when managers haven’t made the shift from doing work themselves by getting work done by others, the first basic definition of delegation. From managing people to managing managers then supposes that those managers ‘divest themselves of individual tasks, select their team members who can manage others, assign managerial and leadership work to them and must begin to think beyond their functional responsibility towards strategic issues’ (Charan et al., 2001).

Moving to functional management, then, team play with other functional managers – peers – and competition for resources are two major additional transitional skills, while at the same time managers need to become more proficient strategists, blending their functional strategy into the overall business strategy. This translates into **different time allocations** including ‘reducing time spent on purely functional responsibilities, making it essential that functional managers **delegate responsibility** for overseeing many functional tasks to direct reports’ (Charan et al., 2001). Preparing for the next passage, from functional manager to business manager, the transition of integrating skills and **developing a general managers’ perspective** becomes key.

Another set of leadership transitions, looking specifically at the transition from a functional responsibility to a business/enterprise responsibility, is also elaborated by Watkins in his ‘seven seismic shifts of perspective and responsibility’ (Watkins, 2012). The seven shifts cover the move from specialist to generalist, analyst to integrator, problem solver to agenda setter, warrior to

diplomat and support cast member to lead role. The shift from specialist to generalist is quite relevant because it confirms the work by Charan and addresses, for the purpose of my thesis, a key transition challenge when a leader has to 'transition' from a functional comfort zone towards a business or executive role.

Ibarra also summarises a number of common hurdles associated with moving into more senior leadership roles, such as adopting a more business-wide perspective, managing change processes and key stakeholders to execute strategy successfully, learning to communicate with and through informal networks and adapting one's leadership styles to better delegate and develop others (Ibarra et al., 2010).

Finally, going back to the various other senior leadership transitions women should be more able to engage in once effective delegation is mastered, I checked the literature for specific barriers for women linked to any of the five senior leadership transitions I use in my survey (i.e. developing and communicating a strategic vision, developing horizontal relationships with peers, developing upwards relationships, developing a network outside the organisation and developing a general management perspective). Specifically linked to the leadership transition on developing a vision, an analysis of 360-degree feedback reports from the INSEAD Global Leadership Centre database pointed to the relatively low scores of women on key elements of visioning (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2009), where women do not seem to value vision as much as men as a key leadership dimension. They struggle with the transition from letting go of the mid-level roles, where details and getting results were key measures of success, to more senior leadership roles that call for more strategic reflection and daring to extrapolate inspiring future scenarios from limited data.

Those role transitions often go hand-in-hand with an identity change and Ibarra's work on an **identity-based model of leader development** brings relevant perspectives (Ibarra *et al.*, 2010):

'The identity-based model posits that leader development unfolds as an identity transition in which people disengage from central, behaviourally anchored identities while exploring new

possible selves and, eventually, integrate a new, alternative identity. Old and new identities exist in the interim’.

Ibarra’s model highlights the dynamics of ‘a liminal – betwixt and between – transition period in which people linger between old and new identities before grounding a deeper change based on their experience and practice’ (Ibarra *et al.*, 2010) and she identifies three stages: separation, transition and incorporation.

A key condition for managers to go through those stages is the critical dimension of ‘**transitional time and space**’ – which is rooted in Winnicott’s view of the developmental psychology of transitional periods – allowing for experimentation with new behaviours (Winnicott, 1989).

On the same theme of **transition and identity**, Bridges also defines transition as a psychological process and elaborates on the three phases people traverse during the transition time: (1) letting go of the old ways and old identity; (2) going through an in-between stage where the old has gone but the new is not fully operational; and (3) coming out of transition and making a new beginning, developing the new identity (Bridges, 2009).

Gender and leader identity literature

Turning to the **gender literature** on leadership, a comprehensive overview by Carli and Eagly (2011) lists a number of potential explanations for the gender gap in senior executive positions, covering evolutionary psychology and male dominance, potential different leadership traits of men and women, gender differences in human capital and domestic responsibilities, education, preferences for advancement and career commitment, gender stereotypes and discrimination against female leaders, different leadership styles of men and women and, finally, organisational barriers to women’s leadership. Two specific pieces of research are relevant to my work. The first, based originally on the work of psychologist David Bakan (1966) on the two basic human drives of agency and communion, applies this to commonly held role stereotypes: ‘**agentic**’ men versus ‘**communal**’ women. This is relevant as people expect ‘men to be “agentic” – assertive, dominant,

competent and authoritative – and women to be “communal” – warm, supportive, kind and helpful’ where the challenge for women is then ‘to balance the demand for agency required of the leader role and the demand for communion required of the female role’ (Carli & Eagly, 2011). Looking specifically at the transition of women from lower levels in the organisation to top leader positions, Rosette and Tost (2010) then hypothesised that top women leaders can be evaluated as simultaneously agentic and communal and that leaders’ communal traits may increasingly be viewed as advantageous to them and their followers and so confirmed the so-called female leadership advantage. Looking at ways for women to become more agentic and taking more control, Ruderman and Ohlott (2002) note that ‘letting go’, that is, recognising that you can’t do everything yourself and delegating work to others, constitutes a key dimension as well as the ability to extend beyond one’s comfort zone and thus the ability to take risks.

A second piece of research, in the context of traditional gender stereotypes, introduced the ‘**double bind**’ concept, Catalyst’s (2007) explanation for the trade-off women face between likeability and competence, which constitutes an attitudinal barrier: this double bind helps account for why women continue to be rated lower than men on most of the qualities associated with leadership. Indeed, women’s effective performance may not be enough to break the pattern of being seen as either likeable or competent, but never both, if it is attributed to factors other than ability (Ely & Rhode, 2010). To make matters worse, many women may also internalise these stereotypes, which creates a psychological (self-imposed) glass ceiling; a lesser sense of entitlement might discourage them from being more assertive and self-promoting and from taking risks that are critical for developing key leadership skills (Ely & Rhode, 2010).

Further research links this double bind to the strategic choices female leaders may make during an identity transition to leadership roles, where women may be more likely to choose ‘prevention’ strategies –avoiding failure – rather than ‘promotion’ strategies – actively driving success (Ely & Rhode, 2010, p.397):

Prevention strategies derive from an internalized self of what one ought to do and focus on responsibilities, safety and security while **promotion strategies** derive from what one would ideally like to do and focus on aspirations, advancement and accomplishments ... and the catch 22 women experience in the workplace – too feminine or not feminine enough – may encourage a prevention-oriented approach to leadership identity’ .

Similarly, looking at the strategies used by men and women navigating a professional transition into client advisory roles in professional service firms, Ibarra and Petriglieri’s (2007) study showed that men and women developed different ‘image’ strategies in response to identity threats in role transition: women used more **protective** self-representation, avoiding disapproval and ‘lying low’, while the majority of the men used **acquisitive** strategies, soliciting approval by using active, aggressive attempts to signal their credibility.

This brings us to the question of potential **conflict between the gender role and the leader role** that women in leadership transitions might experience. Building on the work of Chan and Drasgow (2001) on the affective (pleasure of leading) and social-normative (duty to lead) components of motivation to lead, Karelaia and Guillem (2012) looked at the link between **women leaders’ identity conflict and their motivation to lead**. Their results showed that when women experience a high conflict between their roles of woman and leader, they construe leading **as a duty or responsibility**, which enhances their sense of duty to assume leadership roles. In addition, the same identity conflict between their role as a woman and a leader undermines the attractiveness or pleasure of leading. Karelaia and Guillem also found the holding a positive gender identity reduces the identity conflict between women’s gender and leader identity. This finding partly echoes what Rudermann and Ohlott (2002) also found in their study where some women describe an **‘overdeveloped sense of responsibility’**, partly resulting from the feeling that women must work twice as hard as men to achieve the same result, partly from the expectation that women will take care of others and will take responsibility for others’ actions as well as their own. Rudermann and Ohlott argue that acting in a more agentic way means women sharing more responsibility and

information with their team, being less rigid and controlling and even learning to have more fun (2002: 104).

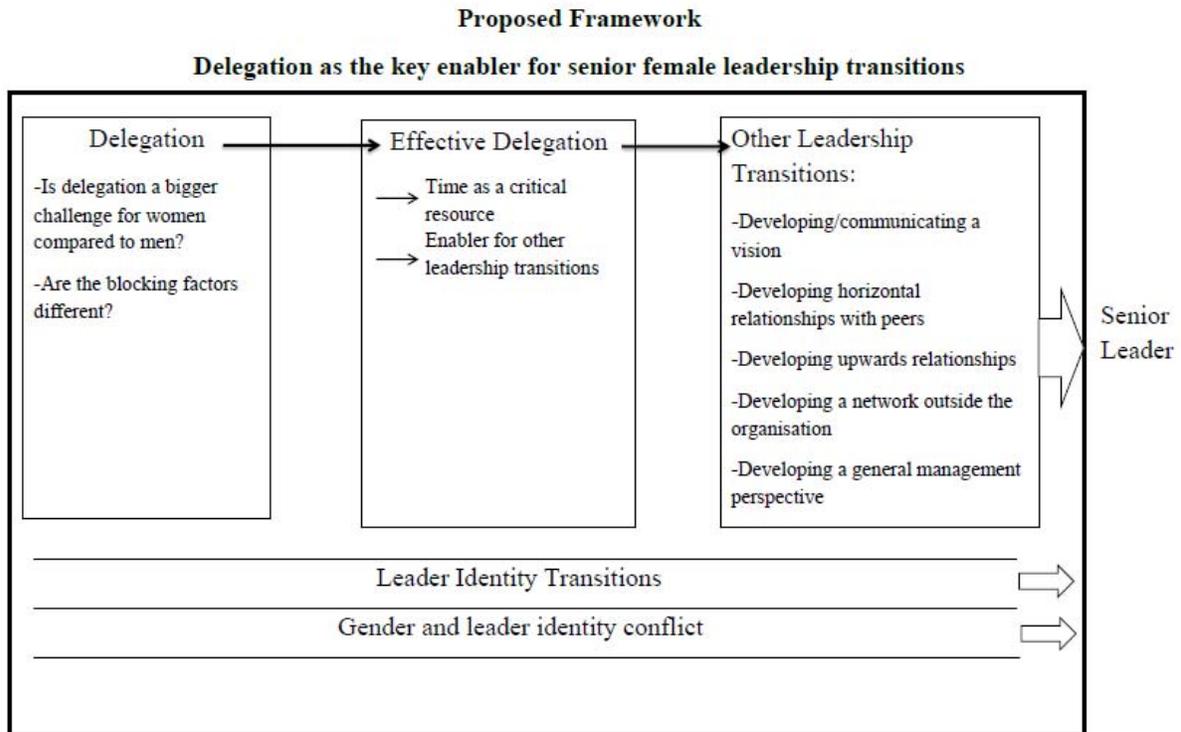
This notion of female leaders' **high sense of responsibility** was very interesting for my thesis as it resonated strongly with barriers to leadership transitions discussed with female leaders in my coaching practice. For this reason, I included this parameter as one of the blocking factors in the ability to delegate.

Another blocking factor to delegation that seemed to come back regularly in my coaching practice with female leaders was the often unconscious need to be protective of the team. I did not find extensive research on this dimension in the leadership literature, although the broader literature area around attachment theories (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991) was helpful in understanding the field of relationships with others i.e. team members in this case. Another link could be made with the **Jungian archetypes as sources for female leadership** (Hernandez, 2009). The four female archetypes Jung identified (Faerie, Wise One, Lover and Queen) can provide insights in female patterns of leadership. According to Hernandez, The Queen is the most complex and the most mature of the archetypes and refers to the Great Goddess – the great mother who has an inborn sense of duty.

Finally, looking at the different roles female leaders in organizations can play, the organizational role analysis framework (Borwick, 2006), which separates the organizational role from the person in a systemic analysis can bring some interesting analysis where the locus of behavioural change can be concentrated on the organizational role and not the personality.

Informed by both this literature review and my own experience-based coaching practice I formulated a framework for investigation to guide my survey and interviews, covering a number of blocking factors to delegation on the one hand and on the other, listing the key leadership transitions female leaders have to make to achieve the desired outcomes in terms of more senior

positions. The bridge between those processes is then facilitated and enabled by the critical resource of time.



IV. Methodology and data gathering process

Since I found no existing research directly analysing the phenomenon under study, I opted for a qualitative methodology where I concentrate on a thematic analysis using a survey and interviews in order to contribute to theory building.

Based on the literature (see section III) and on the insights developed in my own 12 year coaching practice with over 25 senior female and over 50 senior male managers per year, I started by developing a preliminary theory for investigation, consisting of a preliminary framework for investigation (see above) and a number of hypothesis framed as questions, as follows:

- Is delegation seen as a bigger challenge for women than men?
- Are the factors blocking delegation different for women than for men?

- How does effective delegation impact on senior leadership transitions?
- How do these leadership transitions help female leaders develop their 'leadership identity' and to what extent does gender impact on this?

In terms of data gathering I chose to approach two different groups of research participants: (1) the executive coaches who work with both male and female coachees and (2) a set of female leaders who describe their individual experience with delegation and its link with other leadership transitions.

As a first step I used a survey to test my assumptions on the group of coaches as intermediaries who, by virtue of having coached a very large number of senior leaders over a number of years, could give insights based on their cumulative experience and as such represented an expert group. In the analysis I use both their survey responses and the observations they made in their open comments.

To deepen further the insights of this survey of coaches I then set up a series of in-depth interviews with a structured sample of eight female coachees (end users) to investigate how they experience the practice of delegation, potential blocking factors for delegation, the potential impact of gender on delegation capability and the link between delegation and other senior leadership transitions. I also expected the interviews to elicit some reflections around the theme of leadership identity and the potential conflict between gender and leader identity.

The survey population and process

The total group of certified executive coaches in IGLC (Insead Global leadership Centre) was chosen as my survey population. They number 86 in total, the large majority having graduated from the Executive Masters in Coaching and Consulting For Change (EMCCC) programme, a year-long programme created at INSEAD in 2000 and directed by Professors Manfred Kets de Vries, Roger Lehman and Eric Van de Loo. These coaches share the same coaching language and the same

clinical approach. Before being officially accredited as part of the IGLC coaching pool, all coaches have gone through a rigorous admissions process and through a shadow coaching process of a minimum of three coaching experiences together with a senior IGLC coach in the IGLC small group coaching process. Since I am also one of the IGLC coaches and have been part of the same community for the last 10 years it was easy to gain access to this community and, more importantly, their willingness to participate. The survey, conducted between 4 October and 13 November 2012, was sent by email and consisted of five structured questions (see Appendix 3) and took about 15 minutes to fill out.

Out of the total pool of 86 coaches, I received 51 fully completed responses, of which 31 (61%) were from female coaches and 20 (39%) from male coaches. Of the 51 coaches, 32 were part of IGLC's European coaching group, 10 from the Asian group, three from the Middle East group, three from Latin America, two from North America, and one from Russia. The average number of years of executive coaching among the 51 was 10 years and the coaches coached on average 54 coachees per year (13 female and 41 male leaders). This brings the combined experience of the coaches – on which my survey data is based – to a total of 27,500 coachees, 21,000 male and 6500 female. Those coachees come from both one-to-one coaching and small group coaching (see Appendix 2 for biographical data on the coaches).

The survey content

For the content of the **survey** (see Appendix 3 for the survey overview and responses from all coaches) I created five major questions: the first four related to delegation (from surveying the perceived level of difficulty/challenge of delegation by men versus women to evaluating the importance of 10 potential blocking factors for delegation for women versus men) and the fifth related to the link between delegation and other senior leadership transitions.

Questions 3 and 4 consist of a list of 10 potential blocking factors to delegation, which I defined in function of my coaching practice over the years and the earlier literature review. The blocking

factors were also partly grounded in my coaching practice of coaching senior female leaders in four dedicated senior women's leadership programmes (for a large European bank, a large European engineering company, a global European FMCG company and the International Women's Forum Leadership Foundation Program).

Originally I listed only seven potential blocking factors and I increased these to 10 after I had sent the initial survey as a small pilot test to four experienced coaches from my coaching community, my thesis advisor and an academic who is an expert in leadership identity and leadership transitions and has a broad knowledge of female leadership development programmes and research.

The 10 blocking factors to delegation that I finally used in my survey are: perfectionism, need for control, fear of failure, a too-high sense of personal responsibility, low trust in the team, feeling overly protective of the team, risk avoidance, feeling 'I can do it faster' and difficulty in letting go of one's expertise.

The limit of this approach is that the choice and definition of 10 blocking factors is already predetermined in the survey and as such is more rigid and has a potential bias deriving from my own perceptions and feedback from the pilot test. I tried to compensate by giving the opportunity for the respondents to list other blocking factors that I might have overlooked in the comments section. The list proved satisfactory as only two of the 51 coaches suggested additional blocking factors (lack of self-confidence for female leaders, and being competitive for male leaders), and several volunteered comments that the list was quite complete.

The semi-structured interviews

In addition to the survey and to test certain survey outcomes with a selection of senior female leaders, I set up a series of eight semi-structured telephone interviews of 60–90 minutes which I audio-recorded (with the participants' permission), giving assurance of confidentiality about the names of the interviewees. Access was easy, as I had coached all eight female leaders previously and all had been participants in a variety of executive development programmes – a combination of

mixed male and female programmes and some women-only programmes. To have a homogeneous group in terms of leadership development challenges I chose female leaders who were all ‘leaders of managers’ (Charan level 2) and senior (all reporting to a leader who was a member of the executive committee of a large organisation, one national, seven multinational). They led groups ranging from 32 to 400 employees and had teams of direct reports ranging from 3 to 12. Their ages were between 39 and 50; all were university-educated; six out of the 8 were the oldest child at home; six out of 8 were in a long-term relationship; and seven had 2–3 children. Two interviewees were North America, two were European, one was from the Middle East, one from Russia, one from Africa, and one was British/Australian. Their business roles were all senior functional support roles (e.g. VP marketing of a major division, regional head of sourcing, VP global information management, global CSR director, director of operations, VP marketing and strategy officer, chief information officer and VP collaborations).

In terms of their practice of delegation, I could work with a numeric score based on a 360-degree feedback questionnaire (Global Executive Leadership Inventory, or GELI)¹ developed by Professor Manfred Kets de Vries at the IGLC. I used one of the 12 leadership dimensions called ‘Empowering’ as a proxy for delegation: four of the eight questions linked specifically to delegation – involving employees in decision-making, encouraging my people to make their own decisions, tolerating mistakes by employees who take the initiatives and letting the person in charge take full responsibility for the task delegated (see Appendix 6 for the elements of empowering). On this empowering dimension, the scores of the eight female coachees ranged from scores in the 75th percentile (‘high’ score) to the 30th percentile (‘to improve’) as seen by their direct reports (see Appendix 7 for an overview of scores and biographical data of interviewees).

¹ The total database of the GELI instrument users (participants and observers) comprises over 100,000 executives, gathered 2004–11.

I used a semi-structured interview format with five open-ended questions (see Appendix 8 for interview protocol), which I sent the interviewees by email two weeks before the interview. All eight potential interviewees I approached accepted promptly. At the end of each interview I asked each interviewee for her time allocations (out of 100%) in the course of a working week between spending time with her team, her boss(es), her peers, on networking and time working alone, as I became aware that this data point also constituted a good indication of time spent investing in other leadership transitions beyond working with one's team.

A limit of these interviews is that the interviewer was not completely neutral as I had actually coached these female leaders on a number of leadership dimensions, some of them (the low scorers) specifically on delegation and so I was more 'informed' about the responses. Another limit could be that I did not take into account the cultural dimensions and national differences between interviewees, as this parameter might also have influenced their view/assumptions about effective delegation – existing research suggests that culture influences leaders' inclination to delegate and followers' expectations (Chevrier & Viegas-Pires, 2012).

V. Data analysis

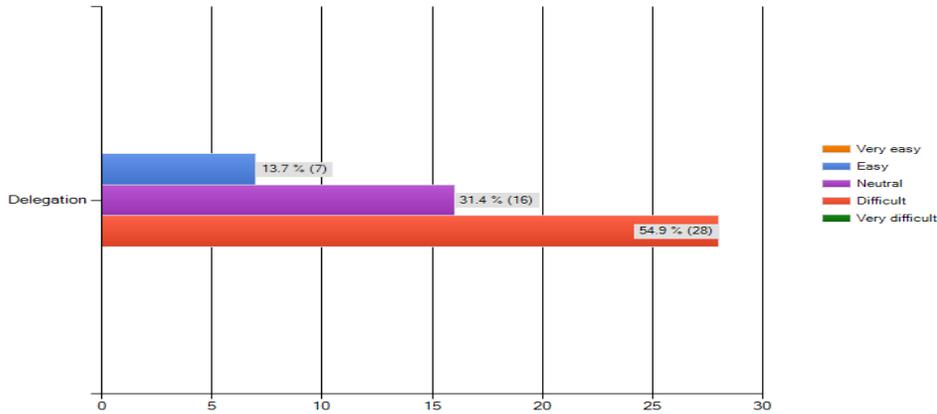
What do the data tell us? I will address this for each of my four main hypotheses, using the survey results and, where appropriate, complementing these with quotes from the eight qualitative semi-structured interviews. Given the insightfulness of the comments of these interviewees we have opted for extensive quoting. Note that the numbering of each anonymous interviewee reflects how they rank according their capacity to delegate based on their 360 score, from 1 (high delegation score) to 8 (lower delegation score).

1. On the hypothesis that delegation is a bigger challenge for women than for men

'I feel that women struggle more than men to feel entitled to delegate and share the load.' —
Female coach

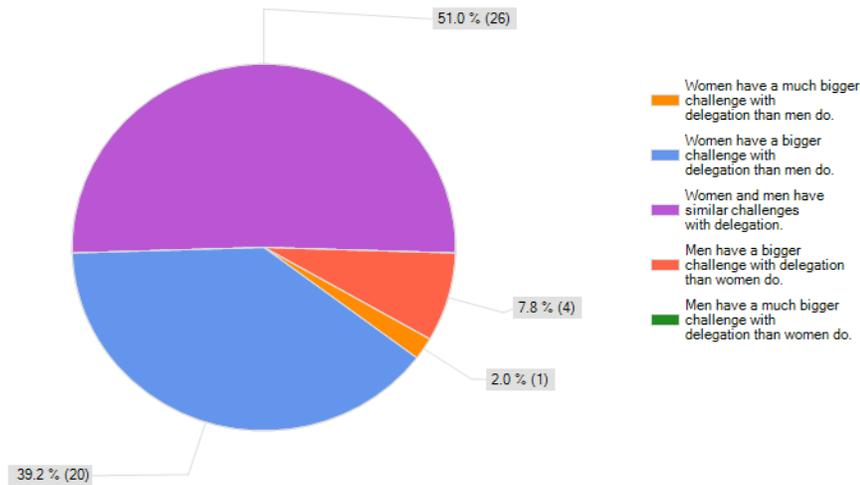
Data from the survey :

Table 1. Based on your experience, how easy or difficult is delegation for senior female leaders? N = 51



More than half the coaches (54.9%) find that delegation is a difficult challenge for senior women leaders. In this, the male and female coaches (see Appendices 4 and 5 for the survey responses of female and male coaches) have identical views: 55% of the male coaches and 54.8% of the female coaches think delegation is a difficult challenge for senior women.

Table 2. Comparing the female and male senior leaders that you have coached, which statement reflects your view best? N = 51



In the comparison between female and male leaders the hypothesis is still supported but less strongly: 41% of my coaches report that, in their experience, delegation is harder for women while

less than 8% report men as having a bigger challenge. For 51% of the respondents, however, the challenges are equal. Interestingly, comparing the answers of female and male coaches, 48.2 % of the female coaches think women have a bigger challenge with delegation against 30% of the male coaches.

Some coaches link the delegation challenge to the length of time someone has been in the job rather than to differences between men and women, as one female coach notes:

'The challenge of delegation is the same for men and women. It is a very high challenge when one is fresh in the job and then the challenge decreases as one gains maturity within the position and self-confidence increases.'

Others argue that the challenge is bigger for women because women have a lesser sense of entitlement, as a female coach reflects:

'I feel that women struggle more than men to feel entitled to delegate and share the load.'

Still others assume that the delegation challenge for women is linked to a pressure for higher performance than men as one male coach observes:

'Since women often have the (justified) feeling that they have to perform better than men in order to get the same appreciation, it is my assumption that women will find it more difficult than men to delegate, primarily out of fear to lose control.'

In summary, my first hypothesis is partly corroborated but not overwhelmingly so, indicating that a more subtle analysis is necessary. How the challenge differs for men and women stands out more clearly in an analysis of the specific blocking factors.

2. On the hypothesis that male and female leaders experience different blocking factors to delegation

'Before, in junior positions, perfectionism has helped me; now being perfectionist is a blocking factor.' — Senior female leader

'A too-high sense of responsibility and wanting to protect junior members of the team from 'making mistakes' have been in my experience key factors in preventing female leaders from delegating.' — Male coach

In my survey I presented respondents with 10 potential blocking factors of delegation based on both the literature on leadership development challenges and my own coaching experience. In the ratings, major differences indeed surfaced:

Table 3. Please rate the following ten potential blocking factors to delegation for senior female leaders (1 being the lowest score, and 5 being the highest). N = 51

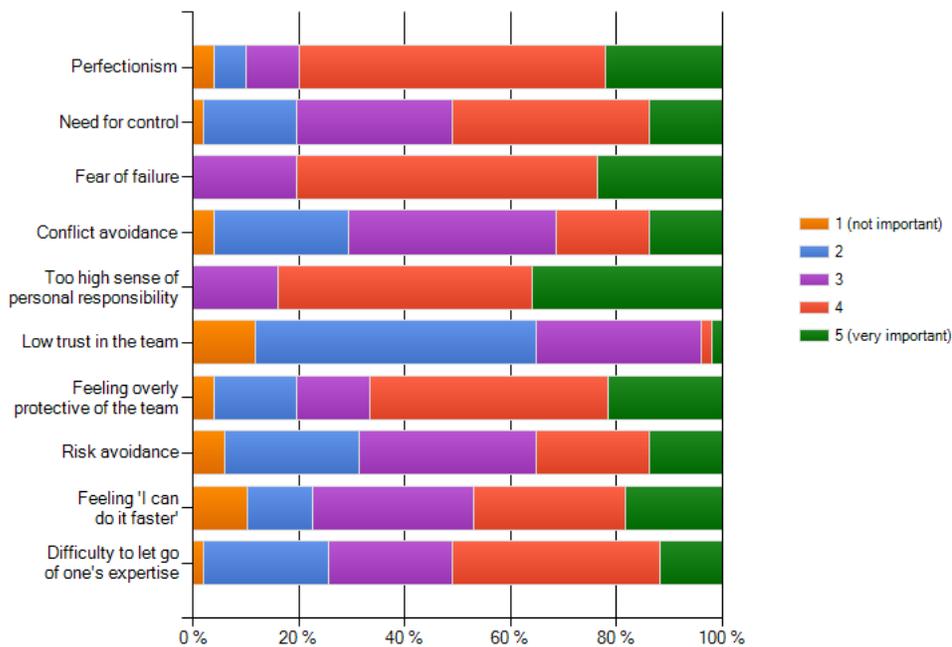
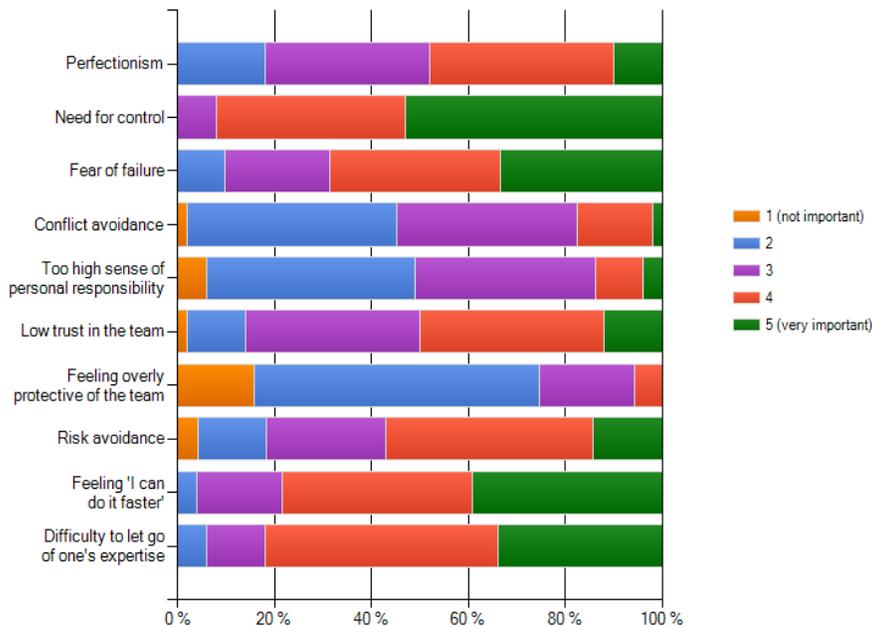


Table 4. Please rate the following ten potential blocking factors to delegation for senior male leaders (1 being the lowest score, and 5 being the highest). N = 51



As these figures show, the blocking factors for female and male leaders are in order of importance (% of responses combining 'very important' and 'important' blocking factors):

Blocking factors to delegation

For female leaders	%	For male leaders	%
Too-high sense of personal responsibility	84	Need for control	92
Perfectionism	80	Difficulty letting go of one's expertise	82
Fear of failure	80	Feeling 'I can do it faster'	78
Feeling overly protective of the team	67	Fear of Failure	69
Need for control	51	Risk avoidance	57
Difficulty letting go of one's expertise	51	Low trust in the team	50
Feeling 'I can do it faster'	47	Perfectionism	48
Risk avoidance	35	Conflict avoidance	18
Conflict avoidance	31	Too-high sense of personal responsibility	14
Low trust in the team	4	Feeling overly protective of team	6

Comparing the two data sets, a first striking point is that the top blocking factors for women and men are very different. **For men the need for control is the top blocking factor and for women it is the too-high sense of personal responsibility.** A second interesting finding is that the first and fourth blocking factors for women (sense of personal responsibility and feeling protective of the team) only come in at numbers 9 and 10 among the male blocking factors, which is almost a reverse picture. A third important difference lies in the fact that the second blocking factor for women (perfectionism) comes only at in seventh place for men. Conversely, the second blocking factor for men (difficulty letting go of one’s expertise) only comes at sixth place for women in the survey of the coaches.

Still looking at the top four blocking factors, the only **convergence is around the factor of fear of failure (3 for women, 4 for men)**, which links back to the notion of the impostor syndrome, which does confirm the impostor syndrome as a major leadership blockage for both men and women.

Did female coaches rate the top four blocking factors differently from the male coaches and vice versa? In the question on blocking factors for female leaders, female coaches (Appendix 4) scored the top blocking factor of a too-high sense of responsibility considerably higher than the male coaches (Appendix 5) and scored the fourth blocking factor (feeling overly protective of the team) slightly higher.

Top four female blocking factors

Blocking factors	All coaches	Male	Female
Too-high sense of personal responsibility	84%	70%	93%
Perfectionism	80%	80%	80%
Fear of failure	80%	80%	80%
Feeling overly protective of the team	67%	60%	71%

Looking at the four top blocking factors for male leaders, female coaches score the need for control as the number one blocking factor for men, substantially higher than the male coaches, and also

score the fear of failure factor higher. Male coaches then score ‘letting go of expertise’ and ‘feeling I can do it faster’ factors much higher than the female coaches.

Top four male blocking factors

Blocking factors	All coaches	Male	Female
Need for control	92%	80%	100%
Difficulty letting go of one’s expertise	82%	95%	80%
Feeling ‘I can do it faster’	78%	90%	80%
Fear of failure	69%	65%	71%

In the interviews – where I avoided to mention specific blocking factors myself – three of the four top blocking factors for women leaders from the survey (high sense of personal responsibility, perfectionism, feeling protective of one’s team) came naturally to the foreground for the majority of the interviewees, as illustrated in their quotes below. In addition, comparing in particular the answers from the stronger and weaker delegators, the very high **sense of personal responsibility stood also out as the major blocking factor for the weaker delegators.**

The interviews with the female leaders and the qualitative comments from the coaches also allowed me to go deeper into the key blocking factors that stand out for female leaders:

i) Blocking factor: a too-high sense of personal responsibility

During the interviews several women spontaneously brought up the high sense of personal responsibility as a **strong driver for their behaviour.** When probing some linked this to a strong sense of commitment, others to their parenting role, or both as reflected in the following illustrative comments (emphasis mine).

*‘I have a heightened sense of **personal responsibility.** I am somebody who highly values commitment and loyalty. **If you have made a commitment, you must deliver on it;** if you cannot deliver, then it is best not to make the commitment. I don’t know if it is gender-related, but for me it is a personality thing.’ —Interviewee 8*

*‘I see that all my female colleagues feel **personally responsible** and all of them want to deliver. I think this comes **from instinct or because they have children** or because they do all the work at home. If you have to cook, you cook, and if you don’t cook your family will be hungry so therefore you must cook. I didn’t analyze why but I see that women are more*

responsible and delivery-oriented and men are more relationship-oriented and more at ease with the idea that some things don't work out. It is somewhat of a pride or honor issue, it is as if they didn't feel responsible for something like that.' —Interviewee 7

*'For me, **the project I am leading is like my baby**. If anybody says anything about it, I feel they are talking about me. I get really defensive, I get very protective, I take it very personally. Whereas, if it was a man in my shoes, he would be able to see himself as separate from the project. People have made jokes about that, they say to me that I am the mother of the project, and that is the way I feel, too. I feel I cannot de-personalize it.'* — Interviewee 7

*'I think that women tend to be much more emotional and more responsible than men. **They care about the family, the kids and they tend to extend that [role] to the business.**'* — Interviewee 6

The interviewees also were aware that their high sense of responsibility led to a too-high identification with their business, as illustrated by the following quote:

'It comes down to the fact that I need to be more personally detached, I shouldn't associate business with myself. I need to be passionate about my business but I shouldn't personalize it. I need to develop also my soft skills and my influencing skills and to network more with my peers and boss.' —Interviewee 6

ii) Blocking factor: perfectionism

Perfectionism, often defined as micromanaging and translated into a very strong focus on details, was frequently listed by the interviewees as a major differentiating point and a trigger point for change in women's quest for more delegation:

'A trigger point was that I got a chance to grow into letting go a little bit more and getting comfortable with what level of information I needed to have and I've gotten better at asking my direct reports what they need from me in order to be successful versus what I think I need... and that helps you to let go because very few direct reports have interest in having their direct managers involved in details. It's much less about my agenda now than about theirs, what they need.' —Interviewee 2

Two interviewees linked this letting go of perfectionism as a clear indicator to others of their leadership transition and moving to leading through others:

'Before in junior positions perfectionism has helped me; now, being perfectionist is a blocking factor.' —Interviewee 6

'Maybe it is the urge to be perfect, to do the job in the best way you can. It's not just about 'I wanted to do the job the best way I can' instead of letting others do the job the best way they can and that's the way I can get better. I think it's going from me doing the best job to my team is doing the best job.' —Interviewee 3

One interviewee linked perfectionism, not being good enough, the need for control and the early relationship with authority (the father figure)

'For me the biggest trigger points were letting go of the need for control and being less perfectionist. The point is I always go for an A-plus in my life. So in order to be able to delegate, at one point in my career I had to convince myself that if someone else did 80% of what I would do myself, that is good enough. Otherwise it is difficult to manage and you cannot give the responsibility to someone else because they cannot do it like you. They don't have your experience, they don't have your role, and there is a reason why you are their manager and they are working for you. So at one point I just decided that 80% was enough. ... I think it's related to upbringing. One day I came home with my report card and I had five 10s and two 9s, and then my father would say, why the two 9s? He said the same to my sister, but with my younger brother he was just happy that he made it to the next grade... A lot of women have to deal with this father issue. Don't work for your father, work for yourself. And in delegation, you need to be happy with a 9.'—Interviewee 5

Another female leader saw the letting go of details as a real trigger point in her leadership transition:

'I think that women in general have greater attention to detail and greater capacity for remembering things than men, which allowed me to get into this competency trap since I was a self-contained one-woman show basically. Whereas some of my male colleagues who work along the same lines, one in particular, it was really interesting, I used to always describe him as 'unencumbered by details'. He just didn't have the capacity for details, he always just left that to other people which allowed him to focus on bigger topics. And I observed that and I thought, well, I'm not going to change my identity. And then I also realised that other people have perceptions of leaders. When they do have a team where they are actively delegating and they have people in responsible positions underneath them that's seen as a badge of success, a badge of being able to do the delegation. And I noticed all these things at once. I realised that people were perceiving me differently when they saw that there was a team of people underneath me taking care of big topic areas. I also realised that I needed to preserve more time for myself so that I could address the larger issues. It's something I still have to work at, setting aside time for the non-urgent but important topics.'—Interviewee 1

Finally, one interviewee linked perfectionism to a different way of delegating between men and women:

'Unfortunately, I hate to say this, but in my life I have seen that women aren't as effective at delegating as men. I hope that changes with younger women coming up through the ranks but my own experience has been that often the type of women who end up being promoted have been honestly working extraordinarily hard, juggling many balls and not letting any of them fall. Lots of reporting, lots of checking in, lots of checklists and I have certainly done a lot of that earlier in my life. Men don't do it that way. They don't make lists, they are not as organised. I see that all the time at the executive ranks; men have a different model, it's more verbal. Women tend to do deeper and more thorough verification of work, but it's not necessarily as effective as what men would do. Women have a more linear, more systematic model for managing people than men do. Men generally have a more directive, verbal approach in terms of follow-up on tasks. For example, 60 to 70 per cent of project managers in IT in financial services are women. It's about the sweating the details, keeping all the balls in the air, follow-up, it seems like a very strong gender bias.'—Interviewee 2

A final quote from a (female) coach also echoes this difference:

'I don't think I have ever met a male leader who I would think of as a perfectionist the way I have with female leaders.'

iii) Blocking factor: feeling overly protective of the team

Being protective of one's team doesn't help develop team members. Good delegators allow their team members to make mistakes. Often leaders go to great lengths to protect their team, not daring to delegate more to them because in the leaders' mind they already carry a heavy load, as two quotes from coaches testify:

'A too-high sense of responsibility and wanting to protect more junior members of the team from 'making mistakes' have been in my experience key factors in preventing female leaders from delegating.'—Male coach

'I think women often feel that the team is already under a lot of pressure and they do not want to add to it so they end up doing the task themselves.'—Female coach

One of the coaches saw the protection of the team in a different light, not as a blocking factor to delegation but as process of too-high identification with and attachment to one's team – close to a mother's role –leading to a deficit in terms of horizontal relationships with peers:

'For me, women are almost more easily delegating than men: they are able to develop more trust in their teams and are highly risk taking... The real challenge is that they are all like mothers protecting their family to the outside world, at the borders of their unit. So they are perceived as family owners, highly defensive of their teams and thus struggling with cross-functional collaboration on a peer level.'—Female coach

One interviewee added an additional perspective on the impact on team members if a female leader is overly protective:

'If you are not delegating effectively, that means your managers are spending more time trying to keep you happy and reporting upwards than leading and managing their own teams. It has a trickle-down effect.'—Interviewee 2

iv) Other blocking factors

Looking at the other blocking factors, feeling I can do it faster, risk avoidance, conflict avoidance and low trust in the team were not considered critical blocking factors for female leaders by either female and male coaches; but feeling I can do it faster, risk avoidance and low trust in the team were considered the third, fifth and sixth most important blocking factors for male leaders.

One interesting blocking factor for women, which was only listed in sixth place by the coaches (but was the number two blocking factor for men), namely **letting go of one's expertise**, came very much to the forefront in the interviews. This would suggest that letting go of one's expertise is a major blocking factor to delegation for both women and men. One explanation why letting go of expertise was mentioned as being so difficult could be that all eight interviewees were in senior support roles, such as operations, IT, marketing, etc., rather than in line functions where letting go of expertise is a *sine qua non* condition for leadership development.

Three interviewees comment explicitly on the letting go of content:

'There was some point where it was hard to let go. In my mid-30s I was afraid to let go of the deep knowledge that I had that let me get to that point. I had to be brave enough to hold on to the thought that I seemed to be proving myself as an integrator and leader and that further developing those skills would be just as useful to bring me forward in my career. And because I've always worked in technical fields the technical knowledge is valued. Within my company, many of the CEOs of the business units come from a technical background. And because I was interacting with them more and more I realised what level of technical knowledge was needed for those types of roles, which was much less than I thought. So in my current job, I on purpose from the start removed myself from an operational role from day one so no one expected me to take that on. I just made sure that the others had that responsibility and I was there for consulting but I wasn't going to take that on.'—Interviewee 1

Another interviewee phrases it as a tension between a content and an executive role:

'One of my challenges at the moment to delegation is that I am both a content expert and an executive leader. And executive leadership is sometimes about taking on areas in which you have limited background experience. Many people take on new functional positions as they get more senior and they are not necessarily content experts. I think that is what will have to happen for me, but at the moment my challenge is that I'm performing both roles and the two are in conflict when it comes to delegation because I get caught in discussions about content. Less content would allow me to delegate more because if you don't know the content you have to delegate.'—Interviewee 8

In conclusion, the responses of the coaches confirmed the finding of the survey that the top blocking factors for female leaders are indeed different from those for male leaders. For women, a too-high sense of responsibility, perfectionism and feeling overly protective of the team stood out as handicaps to effective delegation. The eight female leaders I interviewed also confirmed two of those three factors: the sense of high responsibility and drive for perfection. Their stories link the responsibility factor to the parenting/mother role, which becomes extended to their professional role, and link the notion of perfectionism to the quest for being the best and still not being ‘good enough’. One blocking factor for women which did not come out strongly in the coaches’ ranking, but was frequently referred to in the interviews, was the letting go of expertise, which was ranked as the number two blocking factor for male leaders. The interviewees expressed this in their narratives in terms of trying to let go of ‘content’ and investing in ‘context’, or letting go of the ‘operational role’ and focusing on the ‘executive role’ in their delegation challenge.

3. On the hypothesis that delegation is the key enabler for other leadership transitions

*‘For me delegation is a key enabler on a basic level for these leadership transitions because the leader has **more time** to do these things. Apart from the time, one needs also to “get out of the weeds” in order to see things differently (i.e. a strategic vision, a general management perspective).’ —Female coach*

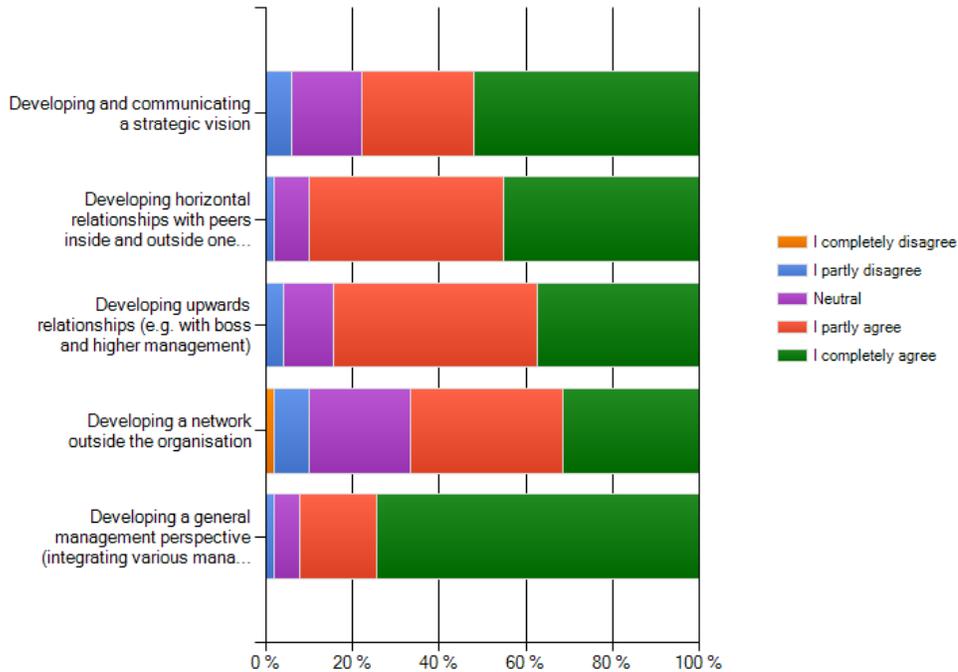
*‘The time gained by delegating enabled many things... I was able to have **deeper conversations** with my peers and horizontal relationships and also upwards in the organisation... and then in turn I benefited from those conversations because they were also of a more strategic and visionary orientation.’ —Female leader (Interviewee 1)*

I built a logical follow-up hypothesis for my survey, asking the coaches to respond to what extent they agreed that effective delegation constituted a key enabler and qualifier for a number of other key leadership transitions to occur.

I had compiled a list of **five key senior leadership transitions skills** from the literature review on senior leadership transitions (Ibarra *et al.*, 2010; Watkins, 2012). Some were specifically linked to research on key leadership transitions for women, such as the need to develop a strategic vision (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2009); others addressed leadership transitions for both men and women. In my

survey I asked the coaches to respond to the question from the point of view of women’s transitions and I did the same in my interviews.

Table 5. To what extent do you agree that delegation is a key enabler for the following leadership transitions to occur? N = 51



From the survey, the coaches score the impact of delegation on the following key transitions (combining the answers ‘I completely agree’ and ‘I partly agree’) in the following order of importance). I also added the relative scores from male versus female coaches.

Key leadership Transitions

Key leadership transitions	All coaches (n:51)	Male (n:31)	Female (n:20)
Developing a general management perspective	92%	85%	97%
Developing horizontal relationships (peers)	90%	90%	90%
Developing upwards relationships (boss)	84%	75%	90%
Developing & communicating a strategic vision	78%	95%	73%
Developing a network outside the organisation	67%	55%	74%

Overall, from the coaches' perspective **delegation has the strongest impact on the development of a general management perspective and on the development of horizontal relationships with one's peers**, followed by the relationship with the boss, the development of a strategic vision and the development of an outside network.

By giving a ranking on which leadership transitions would be more impacted by delegation, the coaches also signal indirectly which leadership transition skills they think are most important to reach higher leadership levels. A closer look at the differences between the responses from male and female coaches gave interesting insights. Male coaches put a much greater impact on developing a strategic vision (95%) compared to the female coaches (73%), signalling that they think the 'vision thing' is the most important dimension to invest in, once effective delegation has taken place. Female coaches, on the other hand, signal that effective delegation would have the most impact on the development of a general management perspective and also see a bigger impact on the development of an outside network, two leadership transitions that they feel are key. Both female and male coaches agree, however (equal scores), that the development of peer relationships is the second most important impact of effective delegation.

Turning to the interviewees' answers, on key leadership transitions they engaged in as a result of better delegation, they focused primarily on the importance of investing in **horizontal peer relationships** (which ranked in second place for the coaches) and the **value of outside networking** (ranked lowest by the coaches).

*'I think delegation is critical because if you only focus on the work with your team, you are not focused on things like **building relationships with your peers**, and if you don't, you have no shot at a C-suite role, because those are the people who get you there.'* —Interviewee 2

*'One of the things that I have underestimated is **the power of networking**; it is a very important muscle to develop. Up until now, I knew people but I didn't know how to convert those relationships to be meaningful beyond just knowing them. And now I see that I can use you for something, and you can use me for something, or I can bounce something off you or you can facilitate something, I just never really thought about it. I am more purposeful about it now and keep prioritising it, because I think that's where my next level of growth is going to come from. The ability to have a strong network that I can call on to get outcomes for the organisation, and to be a key influencer, not just a key doer.'* —Interviewee 4

Similarly to the female coaches' responses they focused less on the impact on developing a vision. And contrary to the coaches, the interviewees did not emphasize the link with developing a general management perspective (ranked number 1 by the coaches).

Time as the key resource and the strategic importance of different time allocation

One key assumption that underlies the hypothesis linking delegation and senior leadership is clearly related to the value of **time as a key resource**, which is freed up through delegation and allows the female leader to invest this scarce resource in a number of the leadership transitions listed above.

The coaches also clearly explain this link in their comments on the survey:

*'I believe all of the above [leadership transitions] apply due to the fact that insufficient delegation has a tendency to hold leaders back from spending **time** on activities that they should be engaging in, in order to create value... As leaders of managers they need to let go of the operational tasks that they were previously occupied with.'* —Female coach

*'Delegation equals more **time**, which is the rarest resource in executives' lives; lack of delegation does not hinder developing and communicating a vision but it hinders execution of the vision as they are bogged down by details that others should take care of.'* —Female coach

In the in-depth interviews, all interviewees also explicitly mention the overall link between delegation and the scarce resource '**time**' as the way to enable other leadership transitions. Some refer to it simply as '**time**', others as '**mind space**' and '**bandwidth**'; still others refer to '**time to negotiate more**' and '**time to engage in deeper conversations**'.

*'Delegation is giving me **time** to do what I am hired for... to work on the things that are really going to make a difference... the big chunks that you need to shift... transformation and strategy on a high corporate level for instance...'* —Interviewee 5

*'Each time I came back from (maternity) leave I have really seen the value of being able to delegate and it has enabled me to step up. And every time I gained some extra resource that has released capacity, it released **mind space** for me and allowed me to become more strategic... It is the key to my progression.'* —Interviewee 8

*'Delegation gives me more **bandwidth**... I can do more things because I am not juggling as many things... It also enriches how I interact with people... I get to test what human interactions work better than others and I 'test' them 'at home' with my team and reflect on them as I interact outside of my team... I learned to **negotiate** a lot with my team and then I use that skill with suppliers, peers, supervisors, etc.'* —Interviewee 4

*'It is hard to stay away from day-to-day problems and decisions and to take it to another level and see the strategic perspective and have time to really **negotiate** well with third*

parties... Delegation is the only answer... Time to be pro-active instead of being reactive on a lot of subjects.’—Interviewee 3

*‘The time gained by delegating enabled many things... I was able to have **deeper conversations** with my peers and horizontal relationships and also upwards in the organisation... and then in turn I benefited from those conversations because they were also of a major strategic and visionary orientation.’ —Interviewee 1*

Time allocation as a proxy for leadership transition development

Another way to have a better understanding of women leaders’ transitioning capability is to look into the working time priorities they set for their relationships downwards, upwards, horizontally, outwards and inwards, which can come together as a star-like framework.

To gauge this, I added a specific question during the interview with each female leader, asking her to estimate what percentage of her total weekly working time (100%) she spent with her direct reports, peers, boss, network and allocated for herself and found the following averages (see also Appendix 9):

Average time commitment

Time commitment	Average Percentage of all eight interviewees
Time with direct reports (downwards)	44%
Time with peers (horizontal)	19%
Time with boss (upwards)	11%
Time with network outside (outwards)	12%
Time with self (inwards)	14%

It is also interesting to note that if I look at the empowering/delegation score (see Appendix 9) of the high delegators (numbers 1–5) and the lower delegators (numbers 6–8), the low delegators spent on average 55% of their time with their direct reports compared to an average of 38% of the high delegators, which confirms my idea that time spent with one’s direct reports is a good proxy for effective delegation; time spent with other actors (peers, boss, network) is an important leadership transition investment; and finally that time spent by oneself for reflection and planning could also be a signal of higher leadership maturity.

One interviewee, who had been at an executive program where time allocation had been discussed as a lever for change, expressed this experience as real trigger point for change:

'This question in the coaching day – how do I spend my time at work – was probably the single most important realisation for me: I used to spend 70% of my time with my direct reports and since then I have been consciously trying to reduce that and trying to step back from detail... And I have consciously tried to increase the amount of external contact, networking and participating in industry forums, peer networks and the odd conference.' — Interviewee 8

In conclusion, the hypothesis that delegation constitutes a key enabler for the other key leadership transitions to occur seems overwhelmingly confirmed by both the coaches and the interviewees. From the coaches' perspective, effective delegation allows for stronger development of a general management perspective and for the development of horizontal relationships with one's peers, followed by the relationship with the boss, the development of a strategic vision and the development of an outside network.

The coaches also signalled indirectly which leadership transition skills they think are most important to reach higher leadership levels. A closer look at the differences between the responses from male and female coaches yielded interesting insights in this respect. Male coaches put a much greater impact on developing a strategic vision (95%) compared to the female coaches (73%), signalling that they think the 'vision thing' is the most important dimension to invest in, once effective delegation has taken place. Female coaches, on the other hand, signal that effective delegation would have the most impact on the development of a general management perspective and also see a bigger impact on the development of an outside network, two leadership transitions that they feel are key. Both female and male coaches agree, however (equal scores), that the development of peer relationships is the second most important impact of effective delegation. My interviews with the female leaders confirmed the link between effective delegation and the key importance of building relationships with peers and the outside network. For both the coaches and the interviewees the critical resource of time as the major consequence of effective delegation and

the key enabler for the other leadership transitions to happen constituted absolute evidence; some labelled this effectively as ‘transition time’ towards new behaviours and eventually new professional roles. The interviewees had a series of interesting synonyms for this ‘transition’ time, labelling it as ‘more bandwidth’, ‘deeper conversations’, ‘time to influence and negotiate’ ‘releasing mind space’, etc.

Finally in my interviews with the eight female leaders, I focused more closely on the different time allocations those leaders might have between time spent upwards (with boss), downwards (with direct reports), horizontally (with peers), outwards (network) and inwards (with self) and I used these averages as an indicator of leadership transition ‘readiness’. Interestingly, I saw that those interviewees with low delegation scores had much higher time allocations (55% of their total time) with their direct reports than the interviewees who had high delegation scores (38 % of their total time).

4. Leadership transitions and identity, gender and leader identity conflict

The survey did not address issues of leader identity and potential conflicts between gender and leader identity. In the interviews, however, a number of female leaders reflected on how, in parallel with their leadership transition, they started to develop a ‘leader identity’ over time, as one female leader testifies:

‘Over time if I think back 20 years ago, even then I realised that I could do a lot more through people than myself and that’s what drew me to leadership roles. But it was a transition: from working with just small groups of people or informal relationships all the way up to now being head of large sub-components of the organisation. So I think I’m more comfortable with that identity now.’ —Interviewee 1

During the leadership transition of learning to delegate, a female leader explained the ‘**competence**’ **trap** she had fallen into. She defined competence as a combination of technical and managerial expertise and explains how this trap was a trigger for a behavioural change:

'I had another tipping point later in my career when I realised that I was getting by-passed for other job opportunities because I was perceived as so competent in my current role that they couldn't imagine anybody else doing that role... So I realised from observing how other career paths worked in my company that I'd better find a 'successor' candidate and train him or her and make that person visible so that people would see that others other than myself could do that sort of work. So the next hire that I had open, I actively sought somebody that I thought could be my successor. And so I hired this gentleman who was about ten or 15 years younger than me, who has a good emotional intelligence, good with people, able to handle a lot of things at once, and with a strong technical background. And then I started giving him insights and letting him know the issues I was confronting and started to delegate different tasks to him and eventually delegated a huge block of responsibility to him over a period of about two years. I made sure that as much as possible he wasn't just in my shadow. I would make sure people knew his name, sometimes have him attend important meetings without me being there so that there wouldn't be the tendency that people would just come to me for the answers. In a way, I put him de facto as my deputy... It worked – after three years he ended up getting my former position when I took this new position.'—Interviewee 1

Another interviewee shared how a development programme became a trigger point to change the way she saw herself in her leadership role:

'The course I followed was another tipping point for me because it created a transition space, it allowed me to stand back and see things differently. The phrase 'what got you here won't get you there' forced me to think about what needed to be different and I am much more conscious now. I'm not sure if I'm better at delegating but I'm much more conscious about the need to do it and able to stop myself sometimes. Often when I start to write an email or I start to think about an action I stop and think: No, I'm not going to send this email, I'm going to let that person deal with it on their own. Or I send the email saying that's fine, you can deal with that on your own. I changed my image of how I should act in my role.'—Interviewee 8.

One other interviewee talked about adjusting her behaviours to develop the leadership transition skill of networking and reflected on her more introvert personality trait:

'I have taken personality indicator tests many times, and in these tests I consistently score introverted. I don't need a lot of people around me, and it is important for me to spend time with myself to decompress. But this doesn't work very well in a corporate environment, which meant that I had to make some kind of a shift because my personality trait does not always fit into corporate settings, especially not with the career choice that I have made, because I'm in a very client-facing role, a supplier-facing role, constantly making presentations. So over time I have found ways to mould my personality a little bit. It's like a "super personality" that I put on for my career to progress, but I also create space at home and at work to revert back to my preferred disposition in order to recharge and replenish myself.

'Networking for example implies a certain amount of reaching out and reaching over the fence, walking over to say hello and introduce yourself, which is not a natural

disposition for me, it takes effort. I didn't change my personality, but I had to put in effort to make these things happen because I see the quantum benefit. —Interviewee 4

Asked specifically to what extent gender might interfere with their role as a leader, a number of female leaders expressed different views. One linked becoming a mother with becoming a better delegator:

'I don't think gender interferes with my identity as a leader, because I see it more as a part of my character than gender. But the two may well be unconsciously connected. Some of the things which strengthen my identity as a woman, like for example becoming a mother, have actually helped me become a better delegator. I have less time, so I have to be more ruthless with my time and with the amount that I give to other people. I am juggling so many balls that I have to be even more efficient and I think I am less tolerant therefore of other people. I just don't have as much to give as I used to. In that sense strengthening my identity as a woman has actually increased my tendency to delegate.' —Interviewee 8

Another interviewee concurred on the same theme:

'I do think there is a link between the caretaking, nurturing roles that women play in life, and how that plays out at the office. It seems that people-related, special projects, special leadership off-sites, that kind of work will often fall to women here. For me, I do bring my parenting role with me to work. I think a lot of it is positive... and I think part of that is the roles I play in the real world. I think that is often a benefit for women as long as they don't get sucked into spending a lot of extra time on things that aren't critical to succeeding and moving up through the hierarchy of these companies. If people would be promoted for doing some of the softer stuff and some of those extra projects that would be terrific, but if not, then they should aim those same wonderful communication and relationship skills at the work that is rewarded. So I am careful about that when I get asked to do a lot of extra special stuff. I am trying to be pretty ruthless about only doing the things that I think really matter to the CEO and the CAO.' —Interviewee 2

Another female leader linked the gender role to being more accommodating:

'Compared to women, men say no more easily. Women try to accommodate more, I push my limits more and I think it is bad to say no.' —Interviewee 6)

Yet another leader linked the leadership transition capability to men being more 'contextual' compared to women's focus on 'content':

'So I delegate and then I jump in also, and then the person to whom I delegated doesn't have a sense of ownership because I'm also in the soup with them. And I've had to think through that quite a bit, why am I doing that? And for me it was a number of things. As my career

*was progressing I took on jobs with more authority in the organisation, I was still operating at an operational level and not on a strategic level. I felt that my credibility came from the amount of content knowledge that I had, the amount of data and information. But as you move up the ladder it's not a matter of content, you have to have **context richness**. So the more you go up, you have to delegate because you are being expected to be in a context conversation, not in a content conversation, and you are expected to delegate the content level. ...So for me the fear came from two things, one is that I feel my credibility comes from content, and a fear of failure, particularly if it has to be presented to the C-suite. And I don't see my male counterparts doing that, they are so happy to stick to context awareness... My observation is that, the more my career progresses up the chain, my male counterparts don't seem to struggle with not knowing the content. Men also find it much easier to answer to a difficult technical question "I'll get back to you on that". And I feel that even if he says that he doesn't know, he still seems very credible, ...but for some reason I feel that if I said that, I seem less credible. I just look like I just don't know what's going on.' —Interviewee 4*

Linked to the gender role, I asked two interviewees if they had experienced the **'double bind'** situation female leaders often find themselves in where they have to make a trade-off between competence and likeability. I got two very different answers:

'Indeed, a woman is either very nice and incompetent or a bitch and very competent, there is nothing in between. Men can be everything in between: many shades of grey... men are not judged in such a black-and-white way.' —Interviewee 3

'So far I've avoided being put in one category or the other. In general I haven't had much of a problem being perceived as competent and at the same time, from the feedback I get, people generally like me as well. I attribute that to the adaptability of the way I use my authority. I look at everything in life as a puzzle, as how to get to the solution, and it doesn't matter to me what happens in the steps along the way. So I don't feel the need to have everyone know that I am in charge of everything in the universe and every step in the process. I'm willing to step back and use other ways to get people to do things. For example, spending time to find out what people are good at and in a sideways way almost flattering them into going down a certain path and then coming back later to get the results because I know that certain people just won't take an order or an official request.' —Interviewee 1

In conclusion, the interviews gave me a deeper understanding of how female leaders became conscious of the need to change some of their behaviours, linked to a transition they needed to make, and in the process changed their leader-identity, the perception they had of themselves as a leader. Some linked to an awareness that they were stuck in a 'competency' trap, others changed behaviours to compensate for a deeper personality trait that wasn't always adapted to her leadership transition challenge. Zooming in on the gender versus the leadership role, different views again emerged: one made a clear link between her 'mother' role, which forced her to delegate more to

allow her to keep her multiple roles in balance; another noted that women were more accommodating and struggled more with setting boundaries and saying no. Finally I briefly touched in my interviews on the 'double bind' some women face, that is, having to make a trade-off between competence and likeability and I received two opposing views on this, where one leader very much experienced this either/or situation, while another one had found ways to avoid being caught in this trade-off.

VI. Discussion and insights

Following the data analysis of my survey and the narratives of the interviews, what did I learn from the survey? What insights did the interviews add? I propose to follow my original hypotheses:

1. On the challenge of delegation for male and female leaders and the different blocking factors

Overall, half the executive coaches thought that men and women have similar challenges with delegation, while 40% of the coaches found that female leaders have a bigger challenge and 8% that men have a bigger challenge. My first hypothesis was thus corroborated but not very strongly. Looking at different blocking factors to delegation and comparing their male and female coachees, however, the coaches listed clear differences.

The top four blocking factors for female leaders were 'perfectionism', 'too-high sense of personal responsibility' 'fear of failure' and 'feeling overly protective of the team' while the top four blocking factors for male leaders were 'need for control', 'difficulty letting go of one's expertise', feeling 'I can do it faster' and 'fear of failure'. The fact that fear of failure came up as one of the key blocking factors for men and women alike did not surprise me, as it confirmed the concept of the impostor syndrome (Kets de Vries, 2005), which I encounter with both men and women in my coaching practice on a frequent basis.

The interviews confirmed to a high degree two out of the three blocking factors for female leaders where the interviewees spontaneously cited perfectionism and a too-high sense of responsibility as key obstacles to effective delegation.

What was surprising was that in the responses from the group of coaches, two of the top three blocking factors for female leaders (too-high sense of responsibility and feeling protective of the team) came in as only the ninth and tenth blocking factors for male leaders, painting an almost reverse picture to that of the female leaders. Initially, this seemed partly to confirm some of the stereotypes I found in the literature review (Carli & Eagly, 2011), where the behaviour of women leaders was seen as being ‘communal’ – caring and helpful to others – whereas the male stereotype was seen as being ‘agentic’ – competent and authoritative. This was also partly confirmed by the blocking factors of need for control, not letting go of expertise and feeling I can do this faster among the male leaders. Are both male and female leaders then so stereotypical, even in their blocking factors to effective delegation? The interviews, however, highlighted that letting go of expertise also constituted a major blocking factor for women leaders to delegate in the experience of those female leaders and they expressed in their stories how they could be stuck in the ‘content and expert’ role, as well.

More interestingly, the themes of too-high responsibility and being protective of one’s team as two important blocking factors for female leaders seem to confirm two items from the literature I explored earlier: first, female leaders tended to choose ‘prevention’ strategies over ‘promotion’ strategies, focusing on responsibility and what one ought to do rather than on aspirations, advancement and accomplishments (Ely & Rhode, 2010). Second, if women experience a conflict between their gender and their leadership role, those two blocking factors again seem to confirm the literature on the motivation to lead; that is, that female leaders experience their leadership role more in a normative context (as a duty and responsibility) rather than in an affective context (the pleasure of leading) (Karelaia & Guillen, 2012). In their narratives, a number of female leaders link this notion of responsibility and protection to the parenting and mother role, which then brings us to

another question: to what extent are these blocking factors directly inspired by the role models female leaders have or have had, either in their own upbringing or in their professional roles? It also brings up the question to what extent there might be a 'role confusion' between the parenting/mother role and the professional leadership role where some female leaders might have a hard time separating both. The organizational role analysis framework where one analyses the triangle person-role-organization (Borwick,2006) seems very pertinent in this context as a female leader could focus her behavioural change on the role one plays in the organization and not on the person (or her personality) in a systemic way.

I also realised while working through the data and narratives that there was a high degree of interdependence between the four blocking factors for female leaders. I assume that if one is perfectionist, one tends to feel very responsible as well and this may lead to some female leaders overprotecting (or 'overparenting') their team. The underlying reason could be that the fear of failure (or its corollary, fear of success) drives those behavioural factors. Those factors are difficult to separate from each other; every female leader has to define her own puzzle in deciphering the relative importance each of these factors could have in her challenge to delegate better and explore how her specific constellation can be changed.

The second and third blocking factors for women (too-high responsibility and feeling protective of one's team) were the last two blocking factors among the 10 factors listed for men. Does that mean that male leaders do not struggle with this sense of responsibility? My hypothesis would be that a number of male leaders men often manage better to separate their leadership roles from their personal roles and as such have less 'attachment' to their teams and the organisation than female leaders do.

2. On delegation as a key enabler for other senior leadership transitions and on ‘time’ as a key resource in this process

The hypothesis that delegation constitutes a key enabler for the other key leadership transitions to occur was strongly confirmed by both the coaches and the interviewees, as I logically expected. From the coaches’ perspective, effective delegation allows a stronger development of a general management perspective, the development of relationships with one’s peers and one’s boss, the development of a strategic vision and the development of an outside network.

This question in my survey also indirectly signalled which leadership transitions the coaches think are most important to reach higher leadership levels. When I took a closer look at the data, I found interesting differences between the responses from male and female coaches. Male coaches put a much greater emphasis on developing a strategic vision (95%) compared to the female coaches (73%), signalling that male coaches think the development of a vision is the most important dimension to invest in once effective delegation has taken place, thus confirming the ‘vision thing’ research by Ibarra and Obodaru (2009). Female coaches, on the other hand, signal that effective delegation would have the most impact on the development of a general management perspective and an outside network, two leadership transitions that they feel are key to develop further for female leaders. Both female and male coaches agree, however (equal scores), that the development of peer relationships is the second most important consequence of effective delegation. The interviews then confirmed the link between effective delegation and the key importance of building relationships with peers and the outside network.

For both the coaches and the interviewees the critical resource of time was confirmed as the major consequence of effective delegation and the key enabler for the other leadership transitions. Some coaches and interviewees labelled this ‘transition time’ towards new behaviours and eventually new professional roles. The interviewees had a series of interesting synonyms for this ‘transition’ time,

referring to it as ‘more bandwidth’, ‘deeper conversations’, ‘time to influence and negotiate’, ‘releasing mind space’, etc.

In my interviews with the eight female leaders, I had added a last-minute question on the different time allocations they have in a normal working week between time spent upwards (with boss), downwards (with direct reports), horizontally (with peers), outwards (network) and inwards (with self). Interestingly, I saw that those interviewees with low delegation scores had much higher time allocations (an average of 55% of their total time) with their direct reports than the interviewees who had high delegation scores (an average of 38% of their total time) and thus more time available to invest in those other relationships and in reflection time for themselves. While I realise that eight interviewees is a very small sample, I stumbled on a potentially interesting practical framework using the average of these time allocations as a potential practical indicator of an executive’s leadership transition ‘readiness’.

3. On leader identity and potential gender conflict as a woman and as a leader

My survey did not include specific questions related to this dimension. But I did venture to link the key blocking factors to delegation for female leaders to gender conflict research (Karellaia & Guillen, 2012). From the coaches’ and female leaders’ perspectives alike, female leaders who struggle with delegation seem to experience the motivation to lead as a duty and responsibility rather than a pleasure.

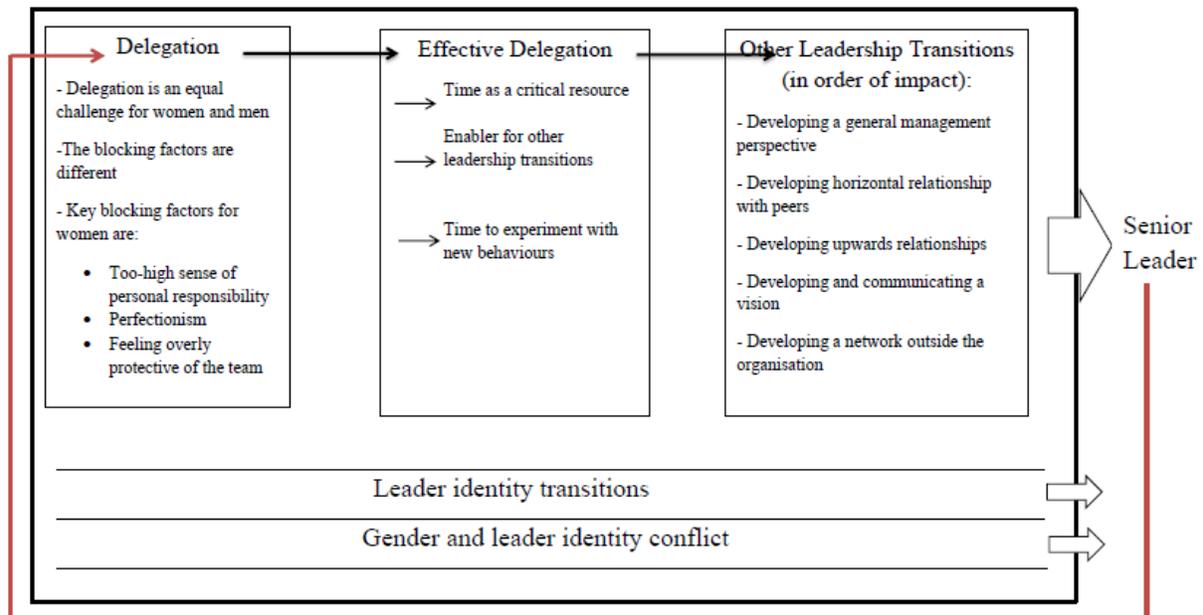
The interviews, however, gave me more opportunity to find aspects of leader identity transition in the narratives of the female leaders. Here they mentioned their conscious changes in behaviours to start identifying themselves in new roles and their awareness of the need to adapt certain behaviours. Questions on possible selves were not part of the interview protocol, although indirectly a number of female leaders mentioned the critical notion of ‘transition’ time to move into new behaviours and roles; this would link back to the literature on identity and transition (Ibarra et al., 2010; Bridges, 2009; Winnicott, 1989).

In conclusion, an interesting link between the hypothesis on different blocking factors to delegation and the hypothesis on delegation as an enabler for other leadership transitions seems to be that coaches' and interviewees' answers to the first hypothesis confirm the fact that female leaders choose 'prevention strategies' over 'promotion' strategies (Ely & Rhode, 2010). However, if they manage to delegate effectively, this opens for them the way to engage in 'promotion strategies', that is, invest in other key leadership transitions. Time to invest in those other leadership transitions is the factor that makes the bridge between these strategies. Similarly, one could describe this process as a healthy move from 'protective' to 'acquisitive' strategies (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 1977). An interesting question here is to what extent some female leaders may see delegating effectively as 'irresponsible' behaviour and might thus protect themselves from an identity threat and unconsciously choose not to engage in the 'acquisitive' and 'promotion' strategies.

Coming back to my tentative framework, I have demonstrated that if a female leader masters the delegation challenge, overcoming some of the key blocking factors perceived by the expert group of coaches and experienced by a number of female leaders I interviewed, the logical consequence is that the key resource of time grows proportionally. This 'time' can then be invested in the key transitional leadership actions that will create the conditions for female leaders to move upwards to take on senior executive positions and slowly but surely close the gender gap. My revised framework below integrates my key findings and also shows the iterative loop of those transitions: Whenever a female leader reaches those senior executive and C-suite positions, the challenge to delegate will still remain, though at higher and higher levels, and each time those (or other) blocking factors at higher levels might have to be overcome.

Revised Framework (with loop)

Delegation as the key enabler for senior female leadership transitions



VIII. Limitations and future research

I am aware of a number of limitations of my research, both in the choice of my two research settings and in the design of my survey.

I chose to target the group of IGLC executive coaches to test my hypothesis because their cumulative experience of coaching male and female leaders constituted a largely untapped source of insights and they represented my 'expert group'. I am well aware that they are 'intermediary and secondary actors' in the process of delegation and leadership transition I studied, with their own biases. In addition, I tried to explore whether male coaches responded differently from female coaches and vice versa, but their biases are obviously there.

I tried to compensate for these limitations of the inputs from the coaches as secondary actors by adding semi-structured, in-depth interviews with eight senior female leaders, the 'actual actors' (or end users) to see if their narratives corroborated or confirmed the views of my group of experts. The small sample size of eight female leaders is certainly a limit to my study and I would recommend

enlarging this population for further research. I did not take into account the different cultural background of these eight leaders, which, as some research has shown, might have influenced their assumptions and perspective on delegation. In addition, since I had coached all eight women in a leadership development programme a certain bias during the interview or when selecting the narrative quotes might have been present. Other factors – such as the fact that six out of the eight interviewees were the oldest child in their family – might also have influenced the fact that they frequently cited ‘high responsibility’ as a blocking factor; equally, the fact that all were in senior supporting roles in technical areas and not in line positions might have influenced their focus on their challenge of surpassing their need for technical expertise, etc.

In the design of my survey with the coaches, particularly when listing the 10 blocking factors to delegation, I am very aware that by giving a predetermined list I ‘biased’ some choices and eliminated possibilities of other factors being listed, for example, self-confidence as a potential blocking factor for delegation.

In terms of further work, I would certainly recommend that a larger study be undertaken with senior female leaders. With a larger group it might also be interesting to see if there is a difference in the blocking factors to delegation between female leaders with children and those without children to gauge if the high sense of responsibility and being overly protective of the team would be confirmed or disconfirmed. Also, the rather simple ‘star-like’ framework I used to analyse leaders’ time allocation – managing upwards (boss), downwards (direct reports), horizontally (peers), outwards (network) and inwards (self) – as an basic indicator for leadership transition ‘readiness’ might be a promising area to test further with both male and female leaders in their process of leadership transition. It might also be very useful to see if those time allocation percentages shift depending whether an individual is in the first or the fourth year of a job, as I would logically expect these percentages to evolve as people move from managing to leading.

One area that is often linked to successful transition into senior executive positions is the important leadership challenge of being at ease with power. Some of the top male blocking factors (need for control, not letting go of expertise) could be explored in this context; in my study the blocking factors for men were more linked to power, while the blocking factors for women were more linked to duty and responsibility. Kanter (1977) has already posited that differences between men and women are actually differences around power. Looking at the domain of women and authority, and using power as a positive lever for transition management, could be a major factor for closing the gender gap and in my view constitutes a promising area for further research. Linked to power is the leadership skill of negotiation, which was mentioned a few times in the narratives and constitutes another challenge for female leaders as it is a critical skill to develop in leadership transitions. I also know from my coaching and leadership work with female leaders that the practice of receiving and debriefing 360-degree feedback, particularly in a small group setting, is a true accelerator of awareness and action around behavioural changes needed for leadership transitions. An in-depth research piece on theory and design for women's leadership programmes (Ely, Ibarra & Kolb, 2011) revisits leadership topics (such as negotiation and leading change) and development tools (such as 360-degree feedback and networking) in order to discuss the leadership challenges women face when transitioning into senior leadership.

Finally, I hope that this study can help executive coaches working with female leaders to explore further the blocking factors to delegation identified here and women's readiness to engage in other leadership transitions.

X. Conclusion

I started this thesis with the objective of addressing the gender gap in senior executive leadership positions. Within this broad remit, I could have analysed this issue from a number of different angles, such as corporate diversity policies, cultural and organisational barriers and women's own choices that might explain this gap. I chose to concentrate on the specific leadership challenges that

female leaders have to master to get to those higher levels. I was intrigued that in my coaching practice the challenge of delegation was a recurrent theme in the leadership action plan even for quite senior female, and to a lesser extent male, leaders. Specifically looking at a number of leadership transitions women need to make, I formulated a hypothesis that the capability to delegate constitutes the key enabler for other leadership transitions, such as developing a vision, developing strong peer relationships, developing a general management perspective, learning to manage upwards and establishing an outside network.

I was very much encouraged by the high response rate of the IGLC executive coaches whose cumulative coaching experience validated them as a true expert group. In addition, the narratives of the eight female leaders I interviewed were very rich and the conversations transparent and open.

In summary, I found that the blocking factors for delegation for female leaders and male leaders were very different and for female leaders crystallised around the themes of perfectionism, a too-high sense of responsibility and being overly protective of one's team. The fear of failure was a blocking factor for both men and women.

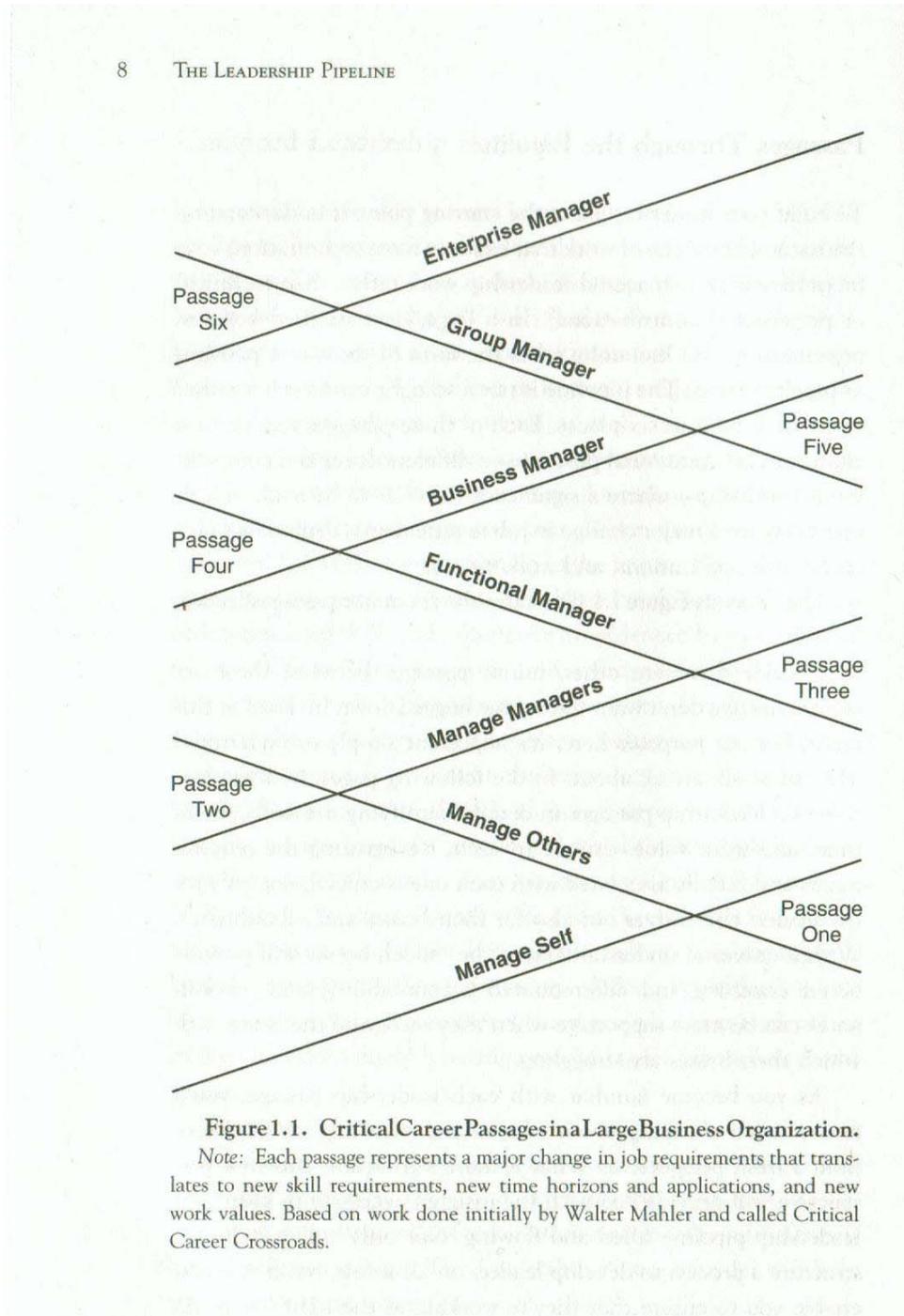
I also found that delegation is indeed a key enabler as it frees the critical resource of time to allow female leaders to invest in other leadership transitions. The need to develop a general management perspective and to invest in relationships with peers were the two top leadership transitions to work on for female leaders and I developed a small practical framework of time allocation that could be used to gauge a leader's transition readiness.

From my personal perspective, this study complemented my CCC journey very well. After having coached for over ten years, this study allowed me to 'reflect' rather than 'do' for a number of months. The writing process brought back from the past – when I was in a leadership role for many years – my own blocking factors to delegation and leadership transitions: I would have benefitted enormously from tackling these issues at the time with a coach. The loop is closed.

Finally, I hope that this study will help improve the coaching practice for female leaders, and help coaches to guide their coachees to pinpoint more clearly the underlying reasons for their quest for senior positions, identify some of the obstacles and find their true and unique leader identity.

I want to close with a heartfelt thank you to Philippe, Sophie and Frederik and to my sisters Genevieve and Ingrid for their relentless support and Rozan for the technical help. A very special thank you to Herminia Ibarra for introducing me to the fascinating area of women and leadership through our joint work in a large number of female leadership programmes where I still learn every day.

Appendix 1: The Leadership Pipeline



Source: Charan, R., Drotter, S., & Noel, J. (2001). *The Leadership Pipeline: How to Build the Leadership-Powered Company*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass (2nd edition, 2011).

Appendix 2: List of Biographical Data of IGLC coaches who responded to the Online Survey between 4 October and 14 November 2012

	Nationality	Female	Male	Number of yrs of executive coaching	Average nr of senior female leaders coached per year	Average nr of senior male leaders coached per year
1	Swiss & Canadian		X	10	10	20
2	French	X		5	35	65
3	German	X		5	50	70
4	Swiss		X	10	3	35
5	German	X		20	20	50
6	German		X	6	10	50
7	Brazilian	X		14	8	10
8	Belgian	X		8	50	130
9	American / Dutch	X		17	35	100
10	German	X		12	10	25
11	Dutch		X	8	15	50
12	British	X		15	9	15
13	Lebanese / Canadian	X		5	10	20
14	French	X		10	15	45
15	Dutch		X	40	15	50
16	Indian	X		8	10	30
17	British	X		8	5	15
18	French	X		15	6	25
19	German		X	6	20	20
20	German	X		6	8	16
21	Dutch	X		8	12	16
22	British		X	12	15	85
23	German		X	9	1	25
24	American	X		10	5	5
25	Canadian		X	5	8	70
26	American	X		10	3	10
27	Belgian		X	25	4	20
28	French		X	7	15	40
29	Dutch		X	10	10	40
30	Belgian	X		9	15	50
31	Dutch	X		16	10	40
32	Russian		X	10	2	8
33	Swedish	X		5	18	75
34	Dutch		X	5	10	30
35	American	X		4	25	55
36	Brazilian		X	5	3	9
37	British	X		12	7	48
38	German	X		10	3	12
39	Australian	X		10	10	30
40	Australian		X	11	15	50
41	German		X	7	12	70
42	Polish	X		7	10	30
43	Swiss	X		16	12	43
44	Argentinean	X		10	15	25
45	Swedish	X		3.5	15	100
46	Dutch	X		7	15	52
47	British	X		7	17	60
48	American		X	10	30	60
49	Dutch		X	25	3	20
50	Swedish	X		16	5	40
51	French		X	6	12	58
	Total	31	20			
	Average			10	13	41

Appendix 3: Overview of the survey and responses (all coaches)

2. Based on your experience, how easy or difficult is delegation for senior female leaders?

	Very easy	Easy	Neutral	Difficult	Very difficult	Rating Average	Response Count
Delegation	0.0% (0)	13.7% (7)	31.4% (16)	54.9% (28)	0.0% (0)	3.41	51
answered question							51
skipped question							0

3. Comparing the female and male senior leaders that you have coached, which statement reflects your view best?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Women have a much bigger challenge with delegation than men do.	2.0%	1
Women have a bigger challenge with delegation than men do.	39.2%	20
Women and men have similar challenges with delegation.	51.0%	26
Men have a bigger challenge with delegation than women do.	7.8%	4
Men have a much bigger challenge with delegation than women do.	0.0%	0
answered question		51
skipped question		0

4. Please rate the following ten potential blocking factors to delegation for senior female leaders (1 being the lowest score, and 5 being the highest).

	1 (not important)	2	3	4	5 (very important)	Response Count
Perfectionism	4.0% (2)	6.0% (3)	10.0% (5)	58.0% (29)	22.0% (11)	50
Need for control	2.0% (1)	17.6% (9)	29.4% (15)	37.3% (19)	13.7% (7)	51
Fear of failure	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	19.6% (10)	56.9% (29)	23.5% (12)	51
Conflict avoidance	3.9% (2)	25.5% (13)	39.2% (20)	17.6% (9)	13.7% (7)	51
Too high sense of personal responsibility	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	16.0% (8)	48.0% (24)	36.0% (18)	50
Low trust in the team	11.8% (6)	52.9% (27)	31.4% (16)	2.0% (1)	2.0% (1)	51
Feeling overly protective of the team	3.9% (2)	15.7% (8)	13.7% (7)	45.1% (23)	21.6% (11)	51
Risk avoidance	5.9% (3)	25.5% (13)	33.3% (17)	21.6% (11)	13.7% (7)	51
Feeling 'I can do it faster'	10.2% (5)	12.2% (6)	30.6% (15)	28.6% (14)	18.4% (9)	49
Difficulty to let go of one's expertise	2.0% (1)	23.5% (12)	23.5% (12)	39.2% (20)	11.8% (6)	51
Comments/other factors						16
answered question						51
skipped question						0

5. Please rate the following ten potential blocking factors to delegation for senior male leaders (1 being the lowest score, and 5 being the highest).

	1 (not important)	2	3	4	5 (very important)	Response Count
Perfectionism	0.0% (0)	18.0% (9)	34.0% (17)	38.0% (19)	10.0% (5)	50
Need for control	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	7.8% (4)	39.2% (20)	52.9% (27)	51
Fear of failure	0.0% (0)	9.8% (5)	21.6% (11)	35.3% (18)	33.3% (17)	51
Conflict avoidance	2.0% (1)	43.1% (22)	37.3% (19)	15.7% (8)	2.0% (1)	51
Too high sense of personal responsibility	5.9% (3)	43.1% (22)	37.3% (19)	9.8% (5)	3.9% (2)	51
Low trust in the team	2.0% (1)	12.0% (6)	36.0% (18)	38.0% (19)	12.0% (6)	50
Feeling overly protective of the team	15.7% (8)	58.8% (30)	19.6% (10)	5.9% (3)	0.0% (0)	51
Risk avoidance	4.1% (2)	14.3% (7)	24.5% (12)	42.9% (21)	14.3% (7)	49
Feeling 'I can do it faster'	0.0% (0)	3.9% (2)	17.6% (9)	39.2% (20)	39.2% (20)	51
Difficulty to let go of one's expertise	0.0% (0)	6.0% (3)	12.0% (6)	48.0% (24)	34.0% (17)	50
Comments/other factors						5
answered question						51
skipped question						0

6. To what extent do you agree that delegation is a key enabler for the following leadership transitions to occur?

	I completely disagree	I partly disagree	Neutral	I partly agree	I completely agree	Response Count
Developing and communicating a strategic vision	0.0% (0)	6.0% (3)	16.0% (8)	26.0% (13)	52.0% (26)	50
Developing horizontal relationships with peers inside and outside one's department	0.0% (0)	2.0% (1)	7.8% (4)	45.1% (23)	45.1% (23)	51
Developing upwards relationships (e.g. with boss and higher management)	0.0% (0)	3.9% (2)	11.8% (6)	47.1% (24)	37.3% (19)	51
Developing a network outside the organisation	2.0% (1)	7.8% (4)	23.5% (12)	35.3% (18)	31.4% (16)	51
Developing a general management perspective (integrating various management functions)	0.0% (0)	2.0% (1)	5.9% (3)	17.6% (9)	74.5% (38)	51
Comments/observations						15
answered question						51
skipped question						0

Appendix 4: Overview of the survey and responses (female coaches)

2. Based on your experience, how easy or difficult is delegation for senior female leaders?							
	Very easy	Easy	Neutral	Difficult	Very difficult	Rating Average	Response Count
Delegation	0.0% (0)	16.1% (5)	29.0% (9)	54.8% (17)	0.0% (0)	3.39	31
answered question							31
skipped question							0

3. Comparing the female and male senior leaders that you have coached, which statement reflects your view best?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Women have a much bigger challenge with delegation than men do.		3.2%	1
Women have a bigger challenge with delegation than men do.		45.2%	14
Women and men have similar challenges with delegation.		41.9%	13
Men have a bigger challenge with delegation than women do.		9.7%	3
Men have a much bigger challenge with delegation than women do.		0.0%	0
answered question			31
skipped question			0

4. Please rate the following ten potential blocking factors to delegation for senior female leaders (1 being the lowest score, and 5 being the highest).						
	1 (not important)	2	3	4	5 (very important)	Response Count
Perfectionism	3.3% (1)	6.7% (2)	10.0% (3)	53.3% (16)	26.7% (8)	30
Need for control	3.2% (1)	19.4% (6)	25.8% (8)	35.5% (11)	16.1% (5)	31
Fear of failure	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	19.4% (6)	51.6% (16)	29.0% (9)	31
Conflict avoidance	3.2% (1)	29.0% (9)	32.3% (10)	16.1% (5)	19.4% (6)	31
Too high sense of personal responsibility	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	6.7% (2)	53.3% (16)	40.0% (12)	30
Low trust in the team	12.9% (4)	61.3% (19)	22.6% (7)	3.2% (1)	0.0% (0)	31
Feeling overly protective of the team	3.2% (1)	16.1% (5)	9.7% (3)	48.4% (15)	22.6% (7)	31
Risk avoidance	6.5% (2)	22.6% (7)	35.5% (11)	19.4% (6)	16.1% (5)	31
Feeling 'I can do it faster'	10.3% (3)	10.3% (3)	27.6% (8)	34.5% (10)	17.2% (5)	29
Difficulty to let go of one's expertise	3.2% (1)	16.1% (5)	25.8% (8)	38.7% (12)	16.1% (5)	31
Comments/other factors						11
answered question						31
skipped question						0

5. Please rate the following ten potential blocking factors to delegation for senior male leaders (1 being the lowest score, and 5 being the highest).

	1 (not important)	2	3	4	5 (very important)	Response Count
Perfectionism	0.0% (0)	19.4% (6)	35.5% (11)	32.3% (10)	12.9% (4)	31
Need for control	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	45.2% (14)	54.8% (17)	31
Fear of failure	0.0% (0)	9.7% (3)	19.4% (6)	32.3% (10)	38.7% (12)	31
Conflict avoidance	3.2% (1)	45.2% (14)	29.0% (9)	19.4% (6)	3.2% (1)	31
Too high sense of personal responsibility	6.5% (2)	48.4% (15)	32.3% (10)	9.7% (3)	3.2% (1)	31
Low trust in the team	3.2% (1)	16.1% (5)	38.7% (12)	29.0% (9)	12.9% (4)	31
Feeling overly protective of the team	19.4% (6)	54.8% (17)	19.4% (6)	6.5% (2)	0.0% (0)	31
Risk avoidance	3.3% (1)	16.7% (5)	23.3% (7)	40.0% (12)	16.7% (5)	30
Feeling 'I can do it faster'	0.0% (0)	6.5% (2)	22.6% (7)	32.3% (10)	38.7% (12)	31
Difficulty to let go of one's expertise	0.0% (0)	6.7% (2)	13.3% (4)	53.3% (16)	26.7% (8)	30
Comments/other factors						4
answered question						31
skipped question						0

6. To what extent do you agree that delegation is a key enabler for the following leadership transitions to occur?

	I completely disagree	I partly disagree	Neutral	I partly agree	I completely agree	Response Count
Developing and communicating a strategic vision	0.0% (0)	3.3% (1)	23.3% (7)	23.3% (7)	50.0% (15)	30
Developing horizontal relationships with peers inside and outside one's department	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	9.7% (3)	51.6% (16)	38.7% (12)	31
Developing upwards relationships (e.g. with boss and higher management)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	9.7% (3)	54.8% (17)	35.5% (11)	31
Developing a network outside the organisation	0.0% (0)	9.7% (3)	16.1% (5)	45.2% (14)	29.0% (9)	31
Developing a general management perspective (integrating various management functions)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	3.2% (1)	16.1% (5)	80.6% (25)	31
Comments/observations						8
answered question						31
skipped question						0

Appendix 5: Overview of the survey and responses (male coaches)

2. Based on your experience, how easy or difficult is delegation for senior female leaders?

	Very easy	Easy	Neutral	Difficult	Very difficult	Rating Average	Response Count
Delegation	0.0% (0)	10.0% (2)	35.0% (7)	55.0% (11)	0.0% (0)	3.45	20
answered question							20
skipped question							0

3. Comparing the female and male senior leaders that you have coached, which statement reflects your view best?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Women have a much bigger challenge with delegation than men do.	0.0%	0
Women have a bigger challenge with delegation than men do.	30.0%	6
Women and men have similar challenges with delegation.	65.0%	13
Men have a bigger challenge with delegation than women do.	5.0%	1
Men have a much bigger challenge with delegation than women do.	0.0%	0
answered question		20
skipped question		0

4. Please rate the following ten potential blocking factors to delegation for senior female leaders (1 being the lowest score, and 5 being the highest).

	1 (not important)	2	3	4	5 (very important)	Response Count
Perfectionism	5.0% (1)	5.0% (1)	10.0% (2)	65.0% (13)	15.0% (3)	20
Need for control	0.0% (0)	15.0% (3)	35.0% (7)	40.0% (8)	10.0% (2)	20
Fear of failure	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	20.0% (4)	65.0% (13)	15.0% (3)	20
Conflict avoidance	5.0% (1)	20.0% (4)	50.0% (10)	20.0% (4)	5.0% (1)	20
Too high sense of personal responsibility	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	30.0% (6)	40.0% (8)	30.0% (6)	20
Low trust in the team	10.0% (2)	40.0% (8)	45.0% (9)	0.0% (0)	5.0% (1)	20
Feeling overly protective of the team	5.0% (1)	15.0% (3)	20.0% (4)	40.0% (8)	20.0% (4)	20
Risk avoidance	5.0% (1)	30.0% (6)	30.0% (6)	25.0% (5)	10.0% (2)	20
Feeling 'I can do it faster'	10.0% (2)	15.0% (3)	35.0% (7)	20.0% (4)	20.0% (4)	20
Difficulty to let go of one's expertise	0.0% (0)	35.0% (7)	20.0% (4)	40.0% (8)	5.0% (1)	20
Comments/other factors						5
answered question						20
skipped question						0

5. Please rate the following ten potential blocking factors to delegation for senior male leaders (1 being the lowest score, and 5 being the highest).

	1 (not important)	2	3	4	5 (very important)	Response Count
Perfectionism	0.0% (0)	15.8% (3)	31.6% (6)	47.4% (9)	5.3% (1)	19
Need for control	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	20.0% (4)	30.0% (6)	50.0% (10)	20
Fear of failure	0.0% (0)	10.0% (2)	25.0% (5)	40.0% (8)	25.0% (5)	20
Conflict avoidance	0.0% (0)	40.0% (8)	50.0% (10)	10.0% (2)	0.0% (0)	20
Too high sense of personal responsibility	5.0% (1)	35.0% (7)	45.0% (9)	10.0% (2)	5.0% (1)	20
Low trust in the team	0.0% (0)	5.3% (1)	31.6% (6)	52.6% (10)	10.5% (2)	19
Feeling overly protective of the team	10.0% (2)	65.0% (13)	20.0% (4)	5.0% (1)	0.0% (0)	20
Risk avoidance	5.3% (1)	10.5% (2)	26.3% (5)	47.4% (9)	10.5% (2)	19
Feeling 'I can do it faster'	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	10.0% (2)	50.0% (10)	40.0% (8)	20
Difficulty to let go of one's expertise	0.0% (0)	5.0% (1)	10.0% (2)	40.0% (8)	45.0% (9)	20
Comments/other factors						1
answered question						20
skipped question						0

6. To what extent do you agree that delegation is a key enabler for the following leadership transitions to occur?

	I completely disagree	I partly disagree	Neutral	I partly agree	I completely agree	Response Count
Developing and communicating a strategic vision	0.0% (0)	10.0% (2)	5.0% (1)	30.0% (6)	55.0% (11)	20
Developing horizontal relationships with peers inside and outside one's department	0.0% (0)	5.0% (1)	5.0% (1)	35.0% (7)	55.0% (11)	20
Developing upwards relationships (e.g. with boss and higher management)	0.0% (0)	10.0% (2)	15.0% (3)	35.0% (7)	40.0% (8)	20
Developing a network outside the organisation	5.0% (1)	5.0% (1)	35.0% (7)	20.0% (4)	35.0% (7)	20
Developing a general management perspective (integrating various management functions)	0.0% (0)	5.0% (1)	10.0% (2)	20.0% (4)	65.0% (13)	20
Comments/observations						7
answered question						20
skipped question						0

Appendix 6: List of items on the empowering dimension

Global Executive Leadership Inventory
 Programme Name
 Empowering

Participant Name
 Programme Duration

Question	Self	Observer	Observer Responses							
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9. I make sure that all employees have a clear idea of where the organization is going	5	4.38	4	5	4	6	2	3	5	6
10. I try to involve my employees in decision-making	5	5.00	4	5	4	6	4	5	5	7
11. I encourage my people to make their own decisions	5	5.25	4	6	4	5	5	5	6	7
12. I do everything in my power to create commitment to the organization	5	4.75	4	5	4	5	3	5	6	6
13. I tolerate mistakes made by employees who are taking the initiative	5	5.50	5	5	5	6	6	7	4	6
14. I encourage people to share information within the organization	6	5.25	4	6	5	6	6	4	5	6
15. I try to minimize secrecy within our organization	6	5.13	4	6	5	6	4	6	5	5
16. Once I have delegated a task, I let the person in charge take full responsibility	5	5.00	5	5	3	6	4	7	5	5
TOTALS	42	40.25	34	43	34	46	34	42	41	48

Scores

Relationship	Self	Observer	Superior	Co-worker	Direct Report	Others
Score	42	40.25	46.00	38.25	44.50	**
Discrepancy	-	-1.75	4	-3.75	2.5	**

Possible Scores: 8 to 56

** - In order to protect your observers' anonymity, some scores will not be shown separately.

Source: GELI 360° instrument, INSEAD Global Leadership Centre, INSEAD

Appendix 7: Overview of data of the eight interviewees

Interviewee	Age	Function (industry)	GELI score Empowering
1	47	VP collaboration (healthcare equipment)	75 th percentile
2	50	Chief Information Officer (banking)	70 th percentile
3	39	Director of Operations (insurance)	68 th percentile
4	40	Head of Sourcing (banking)	60 th percentile
5	46	Chief Marketing & Strategy officer (media)	55 th percentile
6	40	VP Marketing (FMCG)	45 th percentile
7	47	VP Global Information Management Services (IT)	40 th percentile
8	44	Global Director CSR (audit)	30 th percentile

Appendix 8: Interview protocol (email sent to all eight interviewees)

Dear

I hope you are well and that your summer break was good and relaxing.

I enjoyed very much meeting you and working with you in the [x] program and I hope that the insights gained are still useful as you go forward professionally and privately.

I am writing to you with a request: I am writing an executive Masters thesis at INSEAD on the topic of ‘Delegation as a key enabler for female leadership transitions’ and would like to conduct a number of interviews with female senior leaders on this topic. I would be very grateful if you would be available for a telephone interview, which would last about one hour to one hour and a half. For the purpose of the interview, I have chosen to use the following definition of delegation: ‘The assignment of authority and responsibility to another person (normally from a manager to a subordinate) to carry out specific activities. Delegation empowers a subordinate to make decisions, i.e. it is a shift of decision-making authority from one organisational level to a lower one. The opposite of effective delegation is micro-management, where a manager provides too much input, direction, and review of delegated work.’

Next to an update on your current job, I would propose to structure the interview around five questions:

1. Tell me about the role of delegation in your current role/function.
2. What would you consider to be potential blocking factors in your ability to delegate?
3. Could you share a ‘tipping point’ or particular insight that has helped you to delegate more effectively?
4. To what extent has being a woman influenced your experience with delegating?
5. To what extent has delegation enabled you to make a number of other key leadership transitions happen (e.g. developing a strategic vision, developing horizontal relationships with peers, developing an outside network, developing a general management perspective)?

I would like to plan the interview for one of the following dates:

For practical purposes I will record the phone interview and assure you that quotes used in my thesis will be anonymously attributed.

With my thanks.

Appendix 9: Average time allocation (in %) in one week’s working time in different sets of relationships and self

Interviewee	Direct reports	Peers	Boss	Network	Self	Empowering score
1	50	20	5	15	10	75 th percentile
2	20	20	20	20	20	70 th percentile
3	40	20	10	10	20	68 th percentile
4	40	10	10	20	20	60 th percentile
5	40	25	25	-	10	55 th percentile
6	60	25	5	5	5	45 th percentile
7	60	25	5	5	5	40 th percentile
8	45	10	10	25	25	30 th percentile

1–5: high delegators

6–8: lower delegators

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