

**CHARLES UNIVERSITY IN PRAGUE**

Faculty of Humanities



**Women in Managerial Positions and their  
Negotiation of Hegemonic Work Cultures  
in Prague**

*Bachelor Thesis*

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**Declaration**

1. I hereby declare that this thesis has been formulated exclusively by referencing the cited literature and resources.
2. I confirm that my thesis has not been employed to obtain any additional academic title or recognition.
3. I give my complete consent to the utilization of my work for educational and scientific pursuit.

In Prague on 8. 06. 2023

Karolína Schönová

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## Abstract

This study presents insights from interviews with 10 women in managerial positions in Prague, focusing on their experiences with the hegemonic work culture and its impact on gender inequalities and biases, creating challenges for women in various aspects of their professional lives. The topic presented in this study is important due to the persistence of gender inequalities and biases in the workplace, despite ongoing efforts to promote gender equality. The prevalence of a hegemonic work culture, shaped by deep-rooted societal biases and traditional gender roles, creates challenges for women in various aspects of their professional lives. Through these interviews, key themes and insights emerge, highlighting the varying cultural norms and expectations surrounding gender in the workplace. The impact of cultural norms and practices on women's advancement within the workplace becomes evident, with individual biases affecting opportunities for women even in organizations that promote equality. Maternity leave poses challenges for women's career progression and salary growth, emphasizing the need for better support and flexible work arrangements. Gendered expectations and norms significantly influence decision-making, leadership styles, and career advancement opportunities. Women express challenges in being heard and valued in decision-making processes, as well as the pressure to conform to traditional leadership styles. Masculine influence and biases within the organizational culture are acknowledged, highlighting the need to challenge and overcome these influences. The wage gap is recognized as perpetuating gender inequalities, leading to frustration and disappointment among women. Leadership is seen as playing a vital role in promoting gender equality and fostering a supportive and inclusive work environment. Strategies such as promoting open communication, providing support during maternity leave, implementing transparent salary policies, and fostering inclusive leadership are recommended to address these issues. The study concludes that despite progress, challenges and biases persist, and ongoing efforts are needed to create a more equitable and inclusive work culture.

## Keywords

women managers, women in leadership, female leaders, gender inequality, gender diversity, hegemonic work culture, gender and management, gender and organization,

## INTRODUCTION

“This is a man’s world.” These lyrics from the iconic song by James Brown resonate with experiences of women in various professional settings, highlighting the challenges they often encounter.

Despite ongoing attempts to promote gender equality, research has revealed the persistent existence of gender inequalities in the workplace, where prevailing masculine norms continue to influence various aspects such as full-time work and long working hours. Women often find themselves navigating a hegemonic work culture where deep-rooted societal biases and traditional gender roles continue to shape workplace dynamics (Renzetti & Curran, 1989). This is a topical issue in the Czech Republic where according to the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE, 2023), the country ranks 23<sup>rd</sup> among 28 European Union countries on the Gender Equality Index, with a score of 57.2 out of 100 points—11.4 points below the EU average. In the work domain, the Czech Republic ranks 24<sup>th</sup> scoring 67.1 points, with the fifth lowest ranking among the countries being evaluated. Additionally, when we examine the composition of boards in the largest quoted companies, specifically the supervisory board or board of directors, the gender balance is measured based on the representation of women and men. According to the EIGE data from September 2022, the Czech Republic exhibits a distribution of 21.3% women to 78.7% men in these positions. Presented statistics underscore the pressing need to address and overcome gender inequalities, including disparities in employment rates and the quality of work.

These concerning gender disparities serve as a compelling motivation for my interest in exploring the experiences of women in managerial positions and their encounters with the prevailing hegemonic work culture in the Czech Republic. This bachelor thesis examines the experiences of women managers working in project leadership, exploring their practices and strategies as well as the challenges they encounter.

The reason for focusing on women in leadership and their experience with work culture in Czech Republic stems from both my personal and professional engagement with a significant number of women in higher-level positions during my part time employment as office manager that started in August 2022. Through interactions and participation in team building and coworking activities, where I shared the work environment while collaborating on projects with women managers, I have gained valuable insights into their day-to-day experiences. These interactions have exposed some of the challenges they face, the milestones they achieve, and the obstacles they navigate in their day-to-day work lives. As

a woman coming from Slovakia, where I had observed cultural differences in work culture compared to my limited experience in Prague, this has sparked my interest to learn more about the perspectives of other women regarding the work culture present in the Czech Republic.

The research thereby seeks to contribute to the existing knowledge on gender dynamics and inequalities in the workplace, offering insights into the ways in which women managers maintain their positions and progress within challenging professional contexts.

While previous research has demonstrated the benefits of gender-inclusive leadership and the value of diverse perspectives in organizational performance (Krizikova & Pavlica, 2004), the experiences of women managers in Prague has remained underexplored. By focusing on this specific context, the research will utilize qualitative method, specifically interviews to gather rich and in-depth data. The sample will consist of 10 women managers from the project management field in Prague, allowing for diverse perspectives and experiences to be captured. By carefully analyzing the collected data, a more nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by women managers within a society that exhibits concerning gender disparities will be developed. This study also aligns with the broader goal of fostering gender equality and creating work environments that embrace diversity and inclusion.

The research is informed by key sociological concepts, such as culture, gender dynamics, socialization, historical and political origins, work culture, management diversity, biases, discrimination, double standards, stereotyping, challenges related to work-life balance, microaggressions, as well as the significance of networking. Additionally, insights from Renzetti and Curran's book *"Women, Men, and Society"* (2004) and Kate Huppatz's book *"Gender, Work and Social Theory: The Critical Consequences of the Cultural Turn"* (2018) are incorporated.

The research has three primary areas of interest. Firstly, it aims to explore women's dreams and expectations in the workplace, as well as the factors that sustain them. Understanding what drives women and keeps them motivated is crucial for comprehending their experiences and aspirations. Secondly, the study seeks to examine the role of specific stereotypes that women managers encounter throughout their professional careers. These stereotypes often stem from societal norms and expectations surrounding gender roles, which can significantly impact women's advancement and opportunities in the workplace. For instance, the prevalent belief that a woman's career is secondary to her childcare responsibilities is a stereotype that will be addressed. The research will delve into how

women tackle, respond to, and resist such stereotypes. Thirdly, the research will investigate the support systems available to women managers, including support from their partners and institutions. These support structures play a vital role in achieving success in the workplace and experiencing overall well-being. By examining these questions within the unique cultural and organizational context of Czech Republic, Prague, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the experiences, barriers, and potential enablers for women in managerial positions. Ultimately, the findings of this research endeavor seek to inform strategies that promote gender equality, dismantle stereotypes, and enhance the well-being of women professionals in the workplace.

To investigate these inquiries, the study employs qualitative methods, specifically conducting ten semi-structured interviews with women managers who are based in Prague and work in project management roles. By analyzing interviews and existing literature, this thesis aims to make a meaningful contribution to the existing body of knowledge regarding women's experiences in managerial positions. It also seeks to offer practical insights that can benefit organizations and policymakers. Through shedding light on the barriers encountered by women managers and exploring the strategies they employ to overcome these obstacles; the research aims to encourage collective efforts in eliminating barriers that restrict women from fully realizing their potential in the workplace.

The thesis is structured as follows: Chapter I provides a comprehensive exploration of key concepts that underpin the study. It examines crucial elements such as culture, socialization, patriarchy, communistic culture, and the influence of masculinity on contemporary organizations and management diversity. Additionally, the chapter delves into biases, discrimination, double standards, stereotyping, challenges related to work-life balance, microaggressions, as well as the significance of networking. By thoroughly examining these concepts, the groundwork is laid for a deep understanding of the factors that shape women's experiences in managerial positions. Chapter II focuses on the methodology employed in the research, specifically utilizing semi-structured and in-depth interviews. The chapter provides a detailed description of the interview process, including the selection of participants, the development of interview questions, and the overall approach to conducting the interviews. Furthermore, the chapter outlines the method of analysis employed to interpret and derive insights from the qualitative data gathered through the interviews. Chapter III highlights the key empirical findings obtained from the research, shedding light on various important aspects. These findings encompass crucial topics such as the wage gap and equal pay, organizational efforts and future outlook, leadership and



inclusion, challenges and biases faced by women managers, gendered expectations and norms, as well as cultural norms and expectations.

Furthermore, the conclusion of the thesis provides a comprehensive summary of the key findings. It also acknowledges the limitations of the study and identifies potential areas for further research, thereby emphasizing the potential for continued exploration and understanding in the field.

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# Chapter I. THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

## 1.1. Introduction

In this chapter, set within the context of the Czech Republic, we will delve into a range of key concepts that will guide our exploration and understanding of the topic. These concepts form the foundation for our investigation and provide valuable insights into the protentional dynamics of the workplace and its culture. The concepts we will explore include culture, gender, gendered institutions and socialization, communistic culture, prevailing myths and bias in Czech society, masculine influence in modern organizations, work culture, work segregation, tokenism, childcare, management diversity, discrimination, double standards, stereotyping, challenges related to work-life balance, microaggressions, as well as the significance of networking.

By examining these concepts, we aim to gain a comprehensive understanding of the complex factors that influence women's experiences and opportunities in the workplace.

## 1.2. The concept of culture and its significance for organizations

The concepts of culture and society are commonly employed in sociology. Culture comprises the values individuals embrace, the norms they adhere to, and the material goods they produce. Values are abstract ideals, while norms are specific principles or rules that guide people's behavior. Norms serve as "commands" and "prohibitions" within social life (Giddens, 2017).

How does understanding culture and society contribute to comprehending work culture and gender dynamics? The recognition of culture as a metaphor for organizational culture provides comprehension of the complexities of workplace dynamics. This acknowledgment helps to illustrate how societal norms and biases can have a significant impact not only on the career progression but also on the actions of individuals within the workplace.

There are various perspectives on culture. From a topical standpoint, culture encompasses social organization, religion, and economy. From a historical definition, culture refers to the social heritage or traditions that are passed down to future generations (Jandt, 2020). Huppertz notes that *“More recently, culture has been recognized as a broad metaphor for organization, with scholars developing metaphors to grasp the intricacies of*

*organizational culture*.<sup>1</sup>" In the context of gendered organizations, feminists have adopted the notion of organizational culture to examine how organizations are influenced by symbolism and ideology. Metaphors have played a crucial role in unveiling the gender dynamics within organizations, shedding light on invisible limitations and advantages that workers experience as they navigate organizational structures (Leonard, 2002; Bendl et al., 2010). These metaphors serve as tools to expand our understanding of the social world and offer alternative perspectives that are important for this thesis.

Therefore, by exploring the concepts of culture and society and incorporating metaphors to analyze organizational culture, we can gain deeper insights into the gendered dynamics and invisible forces that shape workplace experiences and outcomes.

One of the metaphors that marked a significant turning point in the literature on gendering organizations is the emergence of the term "the glass ceiling". It originated from an article titled "The glass ceiling: Why women can't seem to break the invisible barrier" published by journalists Carol Hymanowitz and Timothy D. Schellhardt in *The Wall Street Journal* in 1986. This metaphor captured the attention of scholars and practitioners alike, leading to its further exploration in the edited volume *Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Can women make it to the top in America's largest corporations?* (Morrison et al., 1994).

Interestingly, both women and men in gender-atypical positions face discrimination, albeit with distinct forms and consequences. Sociologist Christine Williams (1992, 1995) supports these claims through her research. She highlights that women often encounter discrimination during hiring and promotion processes, and they frequently confront the metaphorical "glass ceiling" that limits their upward mobility within organizations. This barrier obstructs their career progression, hindering their ability to reach top-level positions. Conversely, Williams notes that men, rather than women, receive preferential treatment in hiring practices. They can bypass the barriers of the glass ceiling and ascend to higher positions more easily, symbolized by the concept of the "glass elevator." Williams developed this concept through empirical research, conducting in-depth interviews with men and women employed in four feminized work domains in the United States. Her research revealed a significant finding; while some men may face exclusion from feminized positions, the tracking of employee progress often leads to their promotion to more prestigious and higher-paying roles. In contrast, women tend to encounter a 'glass ceiling' that hinders their

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<sup>1</sup> Huppertz, Kate. 2023. "*Gender, Work and Social Theory*." London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023, Chapter 4.

upward mobility within organizational hierarchies. These metaphors shed light on the differential treatment and barriers faced by women and men in the workplace. They illustrate how societal norms and biases influence the advancement opportunities available to individuals based on their gender. By examining the metaphors of the glass ceiling and glass elevator alongside the broader context of organizational culture, we can better understand the complex interplay of gender, power, and discrimination within workplace settings.

### 1.3. The connection between gender, gendered institutions, socialization and workplace culture

Gender is highly significant when discussing workplace culture as it extends beyond individual communication and is deeply rooted in the broader societal context. Gender encompasses shared meanings, characteristics, symbols, and values that permeate various domains like politics, education, religion, and employment (Connell, 2002). Gender roles, which are collections of behavioral expectations associated with specific social groups, influence task allocation, responsibilities, and socialization processes that guide individuals from childhood to adulthood, perpetuating existing gender patterns (Možný, 2006). Traditional gender role expectations have evolved over time, recognizing the diversity and fluidity of gender identities and roles in contemporary society.

Acker's gendered institutions framework holds considerable significance as it provides valuable insights into workplace cultures that surpass specific regions or contexts. Representing a paradigm shift, Acker's work "Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A theory of gendered organizations" (1990) expanded our understanding of organizational structures by incorporating the influence of masculinity and its alignment with management norms (Acker, 1992). Her analysis reveals the prevalent gender dynamics underlying work relationships and activities, shedding light on how workplace culture and beliefs perpetuate a gendered framework that aligns with traditional notions of the ideal male worker, perpetuating gender dichotomies, devaluing women with caregiving responsibilities, and associating women with nature (Acker, 1992). Furthermore, Acker emphasizes the role of organizational culture, which both shapes and is shaped by embodied gendered dispositions and imagery. This interconnectedness extends to broader social life, where organizations align with the logic of the domestic division of labor and influence family relationships (Acker, 1992).

The influence of gendered institutions and expectations on workplace culture becomes apparent through the perpetuation of gendered norms, biases, and inequalities

within organizational structures and practices. These gendered dynamics impact hiring processes, promotion opportunities, and the overall experiences of individuals within the workplace.

By incorporating Acker's framework, we gain a deeper understanding of the gender dynamics within organizations, including the influence of masculinity, cultural processes, power distributions, and gendered expectations. It highlights how work culture perpetuates and reinforces gender inequalities (Kate Huppatz, 2018). Acknowledging the influence of gendered institutions and expectations on workplace culture enables us to critically examine the systems and structures that contribute to gender disparities and work towards fostering more inclusive and equitable environments.

The relevance of acknowledging the gender pay gap lies in the persistent and systemic inequality experienced by women in the workforce. Despite the increasing participation of women in the labor market since the Second World War, there is a consistent disparity in wages between men and women across various sectors, job types, and levels of qualification (Eurostat Statistic, 2021). This gap, commonly referred to as the gender pay gap, highlights the ongoing issue of gender inequality and the need for further progress towards achieving gender parity in the workplace.

The gender pay gap is a multifaceted problem with wide-ranging implications. It reflects not only the unequal distribution of economic resources but also the undervaluation of women's work and the perpetuation of gender-based stereotypes and biases within employment systems. The gender pay gap can hinder women's economic independence, limit their financial security, and impede their overall career advancement opportunities (Renzetti & Curran, 1989).

Furthermore, the gendered division of household responsibilities and the prevalence of patriarchal sex-gender systems underscore the influence of societal norms on workplace culture. According to Renzetti and Curran, "*Women often shoulder the primary responsibility for household management, reflecting the unequal distribution of caregiving tasks and the devaluation of activities associated with femininity in relation to those associated with masculinity.*"<sup>2</sup> These dynamics perpetuate gender disparities and highlight the interconnectedness of workplace culture with broader societal expectations and structures. As a result, it becomes challenging for women who seek workplace success while

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Renzetti, Claire M., and Daniel J. Curran. *Women, Men, and Society : the Sociology of Gender*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1989, p.98.

simultaneously managing household activities. The disproportionate burden placed on women can hinder their career advancement and create additional barriers to achieving their professional goals.

Interestingly, research by Huppertz (2023) suggests that the gender gap in housework decreases for couples transitioning out of cohabitation and marriage relationships. This effect is most profound for separating married couples, while for separating unmarried but cohabitating couples, housework was found to have been shared more equally from the outset of the relationship. It is worth noting that even after separation, women's participation in housework gradually declines for up to two years, but single women still tend to do slightly more housework than men (Huppertz, 2023). These findings highlight the complex interplay between gendered expectations in both domestic and work spheres and further emphasize the impact of societal norms on workplace culture and division of labor. With that being said, it is imperative to recognize that achieving true gender equality necessitates not only addressing the gender pay gap but also promoting the equitable distribution of household responsibilities.

To understand how a society assimilates symbols and shared interpretations, particularly in relation to accepting and embodying dominant gender roles within workplace culture, sociological theories will be employed. These theories, such as primary and secondary socialization, cognitive development approach, social learning theory, and identification theory that help shed light on the process of gender socialization (Carter, 2014).

Socialization refers to the intricate and long-term process by which individuals interact and communicate within a group or society, learning appropriate behaviors and norms. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), socialization can be categorized into primary and secondary socialization.

Primary socialization occurs during childhood and establishes an individual as a member of society, involving the acquisition of language, social rules, norms, and values. Secondary socialization, on the other hand, focuses on acquiring role-specific knowledge as individuals participate in various social roles within society. By considering the influence of socialization, both primary and secondary, on women's experiences in the workplace, we can gain a deeper understanding of the societal and cultural factors that shape the women's professional journeys. It allows for an exploration of the ways in which gender roles are internalized, the impact of societal norms on women's career choices and opportunities, and the challenges they may face in breaking free from traditional gendered expectations. Gender

is one of the earliest categories through which individuals comprehend characteristics during primary socialization, as they distinguish between two gender groups that possess different roles, expectations, and societal values.

Prominent theories that elucidate the creation of gender relationships within society include the cognitive development approach to gender, pioneered by Lawrence Kohlberg and Jean Piaget (Bem, 1993, s.112) posits that children's understanding of gender evolves in distinct stages as they acquire knowledge of the gendered world around them. This approach posits that children's understanding of gender evolves in distinct stages as they acquire knowledge of the gendered world around them. Challenging these deeply ingrained norms and promoting more inclusive and equitable values from childhood is crucial for breaking free from the constraints of traditional gender roles and fostering a more equal society.

Social learning theory, formulated by psychologist Albert Bandura (1986), proposes that people learn from one another through observation, imitation, and modeling, integrating principles from behaviorist and cognitive learning approaches.

Collaborating on Bandura's theory of social learning, psychologist Sandra Bern extended the cognitive learning perspective by introducing the concept of a gender lens, which examines how society perceives an individual's gender. Bern identified three distinct gender lenses: gender polarization, androcentrism, and biological essentialism (Bern, 1993). Within this framework, gender polarization superimposes male-female differences on various aspects of human experience, encompassing attire, social roles, and expressions of emotion and desire. Androcentrism, the first lens, establishes males and male experiences as the standard or norm, while considering females and female experiences as deviations from this norm. Lastly, biological essentialism rationalizes and legitimizes the other two lenses by attributing them to the inherent biological natures of women and men.

These gender lenses proposed by Bern align with Bandura's theory of social learning, which asserts that individuals learn through observation, imitation, and modeling, integrating principles from behaviorist and cognitive learning approaches. Bandura's theory emphasizes the role of social interactions in shaping one's behavior and understanding of the world. By collaborating with Bandura's framework, Bern's gender lenses shed light on how societal observations, imitations, and modeling processes contribute to the formation and interpretation of gender within a given social context (Renzetti & Curran, 1989). This connection between Bern's gender lenses and Bandura's social learning theory enriches our comprehension of how gendered norms are learned and perpetuated into the workplace culture.

Psychoanalytic theories of socialization, also known as identification theory, primarily focus on an individual's psychosexual development, specifically the gradual transformation of sexually motivated behavior and experiences. Sigmund Freud's concept of identification underpins these theories, suggesting that children acquire gender patterns and roles through identifying with a same-sex parent. *“Freud's approach also reflects an androcentric perspective that considers male superiority as the norm, overshadowing the female.”*<sup>3</sup>

These theories offer valuable insights into the process of gender socialization (Carter, 2014). They help us understand how individuals acquire and internalize beliefs and attitudes towards gender roles, which in turn can shape workplace culture. Socialization involves the internalization of societal expectations and norms, including those related to gender, and these beliefs and attitudes often manifest in the workplace, influencing its culture. By examining the interplay between culture, gender, and socialization, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how individuals are influenced by their cultural contexts, societal expectations, and gender roles. These insights will contribute to a deeper understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by women in the workplace and will inform strategies for promoting gender equality and fostering inclusive work environments.

#### 1.4. Work-life balance

According to Nancy Lockwood (2003), the concept of work-life balance is multifaceted and dynamic, *“exhibiting characteristics akin to a chameleon.”*<sup>4</sup> Its meaning varies among different groups, contingent on the context and the perspectives of the individuals engaged in the discussion. The following are working definitions of terms commonly used in relation to work-life balance, with some definitions overlapping and others evolving:

- Work-family: A term more prevalent in the past, it now tends to be superseded by broader titles incorporating the phrase work-life, which convey a more encompassing connotation or pertain to specific areas of support such as quality of life, flexible work options, and life balance.

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<sup>3</sup> Renzetti, Claire M., and Daniel J. *“Curran. Women, Men, and Society : the Sociology of Gender”*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1989, p.48.

<sup>4</sup> Lockwood, Nancy "Work/Life balance: Challenges and solutions". *The Journal for Quality and Participation* 27, 2004, p.3, <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/work-life-balance-challenges-solutions/docview/219089777/se-2> (accessed May 22, 2023).



- Work-family conflict: The tension experienced between work and family responsibilities, as individuals navigate the competing demands of their professional and personal lives.
- Work-life balance from the employee viewpoint: The dilemma faced by individuals as they strive to effectively manage their work obligations while attending to their personal and family responsibilities.
- Work-life balance from the employer viewpoint: The challenge of cultivating a supportive organizational culture that enables employees to focus on their jobs while accommodating their personal and family needs.
- Family-friendly benefits: Benefits provided by employers that allow employees the flexibility to address their personal and family commitments without compromising their work responsibilities.
- Work-life programs: Initiatives established by employers, often entailing financial or time-related support, to offer employees options for balancing their work and personal responsibilities.
- Work-life initiatives: Policies and procedures implemented by organizations with the aim of enabling employees to fulfill their job requirements while also affording flexibility to address personal and family concerns.
- Work-family culture: The extent to which an organization's culture recognizes and respects the family responsibilities and obligations of its employees, fostering an environment in which management and employees collaborate to meet both personal and work needs.

According to Lockwood, it is crucial for human resource professionals to gain a deeper understanding of the interplay between work and family relationships, considering the increasing diversity of family structures within the modern workforce. This understanding is necessary to comprehend the consequences of these dynamics in the workplace.

The insights offered by Lockwood are crucial for my study on women managers and their experiences within work culture. Lockwood's findings shed light on the heightened complexities faced by women managers in managing work and family responsibilities, as evidenced in the previous paragraph where the unequal distribution of caregiving tasks was highlighted (Renzetti & Curran, 1989). By recognizing the significance of work-family culture, as emphasized by Lockwood, organizations can create an environment that

acknowledges and integrates employees' family responsibilities, enabling a more collaborative approach to balancing personal and work needs. Incorporating Lockwood's insights provides a deeper understanding of the impact of these dynamics on women in managerial positions, accentuating the challenges they face in balancing their professional roles and family commitments.

### 1.5. Communistic culture

Revisiting the historical context of Czechia in the aftermath of communism's collapse, as outlined by Krizikova and Pavlica (2004), provides valuable insights into the study of women managers in the country. The intertwining of gender equality with the concept of working-class emancipation during the communist era highlights the complex dynamics that shaped societal perceptions of gender roles and equality.

It is essential to acknowledge that the notion of gender equality was intertwined with the thesis of working-class emancipation, wherein the elimination of exploitation and class oppression was believed to eradicate the underlying factors contributing to women's unequal position in society. Consequently, in a society constructed and governed by communist ideology, Western or capitalist-driven interest in gender issues found no place or validation.

In the face of the daily living conditions experienced by the citizens of the former Czechoslovakia (Czechoslovak Socialist Republic), the communist ideology gradually lost credibility and became increasingly seen as nonsensical, even by party officials themselves. Unfortunately, for ordinary people, the rhetoric of social equality and justice propagated by Bolshevik propaganda was understood as a mockery. The undeniable reality was that the majority of both men and women were struggling with similar difficulties. *“Consequently, the desired changes at the end of the 1980s were primarily focused on addressing economic dysfunction and an overbearing government, rather than everyday customs and interpersonal relationships.”<sup>5</sup>*

Hence, it is important not to dwell excessively on the fact that, while the Czech population generally accepted various measures associated with economic transformation as necessary and desirable, the discussion on gender equality was often perceived from the outset as an artificially manufactured problem and a political invention. From an international perspective, it could even be said, with some exaggeration, that many Czechs

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<sup>5</sup> Křížková, Alena, Pavlica, Karel. *“Management genderových vztahů. Postavení žen a mužů v organizaci.”* Praha: Management Press. 2004. p.11. ISBN 80-7261-117-8.

still view efforts to address gender issues as unwanted as the rise of new forms of crime, the spread of drugs, pornography, and other negative influences "*imported from the West*"<sup>6</sup>.

Understanding this context is crucial for comprehending the challenges faced by women managers in Czechia, as the legacy of the communist ideology and its focus on economic transformation influenced attitudes towards gender issues.

However, the reluctance and distrust towards addressing gender-related issues are not solely rooted in the communist past. Resistance to tackling these matters stems from numerous biases that persist in various forms across a majority of developed European and non-European countries.

In the following discussion, we will examine some of these prejudices, biases, and myths as it is important to recognize and challenge them to promote gender equality and inclusivity in the workplace in Czech Republic.

## 1.6. Biases in Shaping Gender Culture and Inequality in the Czech Republic

According to Krizikova and Pavlica, one of the prevalent biases that shape the culture and work culture in the Czech Republic, stemming from the prevailing mentality in this region, is "*the belief that a social structure where men hold decisive economic and political power while women are primarily engaged in "supplementary" roles, such as creating a social background and raising children, is natural and in accordance with the order of nature.*"<sup>7</sup>" This bias perpetuates the automatic attribution of certain characteristics to men based on their perceived "natural" qualities as fighters and hunters, including traits such as being active, dominant, strong, rational, and decisive. Conversely, women are assigned traits associated with motherhood and nurturing care, including being passive, subordinate, emotional, and empathic. Regrettably, many individuals do not perceive these views as erroneous or problematic in any manner (Krizikova & Pavlica, 2004). This bias not only reinforces gender inequalities but also restricts opportunities for women to fully participate and excel in various professional domains.

These viewpoints do not dispute the idea that individuals may possess different biological predispositions for developing specific abilities. However, they tend to overlook the influence of social relationships on an individual's development and potential. By

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<sup>6</sup> Křížková, Alena, Pavlica, Karel. "*Management genderových vztahů. Postavení žen a mužů v organizaci.*" Praha: Management Press. 2004. p.12. ISBN 80-7261-117-8.

<sup>7</sup> Křížková, Alena, Pavlica, Karel. "*Management genderových vztahů. Postavení žen a mužů v organizaci.*" Praha: Management Press. 2004. p.12. ISBN 80-7261-117-8.

neglecting the impact of social context, they fail to provide satisfactory or convincing answers to questions that challenge their "anti-gender" stance.

For instance, psychological surveys consistently indicate that women, compared to men, often exhibit lower self-esteem and a tendency towards self-deprecation (Krizikova & Pavlica, 2004: 14). While this could be explained by innate factors, it is also essential to consider the influence of the social environment in which women have lived and how it contributes to shaping their experiences. Moreover, women and their mental abilities frequently become targets of underestimation and ridicule.

In theory, the conditions for men and women in the workplace should be equal. However, long-term statistics demonstrate that, despite equal qualifications, functional classifications, and comparable levels of efficiency, women tend to receive significantly lower wages than their male counterparts in the same organizations. *“Additionally, women are noticeably underrepresented in top management positions in the Czech Republic.<sup>8</sup>”* Can this underrepresentation be simply attributed to lower abilities or a lack of ambition, as it is commonly believed?

This question and issues highlight the problematic nature of the relatively widespread cultural bias that women are primarily responsible for their (potentially) unequal position due to their own incompetence and passivity (Krizikova & Pavlica, 2004: 15). This connection highlights the broader context in which gender inequalities exist. It is imperative to recognize that gender disparities extend beyond individual attitudes or actions and are deeply embedded in institutional structures and societal norms. Various factors, including systemic biases, gender stereotypes, restricted opportunities for professional growth, and workplace cultures that reinforce inequality, collectively contribute to the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions and the persistence of the gender wage gap.

### 1.7. Masculine influence in modern organizations

In contemporary times, both men and women engage in year-round employment for monetary compensation. However, significant disparities persist in the ways women and men experience the workforce. Notably, a crucial distinction lies in the traditionally assigned types of work for women and men. Within the entertainment industry, women are often

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<sup>8</sup> Křížková, Alena, Pavlica, Karel. *“Management genderových vztahů. Postavení žen a mužů v organizaci.”* Praha: Management Press. 2004. p.21. ISBN 80-7261-117-8.

categorized into specific roles based on societal perceptions of femininity or masculinity (Krizikova & Pavlica, 2004). This segregation has noteworthy implications, particularly within the workforce, which warrants our focused attention.

As organizations perpetuate gendered environments, it is common to witness various disruptions in interpersonal relationships and social behavior. These disruptions extend beyond the relations between men and women and occur within these groups of workers. To comprehend their nature and origins, it is crucial to analyze how gender inequalities manifest within the company's culture and in the construction of gender identities.

Within male-dominated organizations, the inclination towards masculine values and behaviors penetrates the corporate culture, manifesting in various symbolic means that reinforce gender disparities (Huppertz, 2023). This is reflected in both implicit and explicit expressions that deliberately exclude women from equal participation in company events. Furthermore, such organizational cultures can give rise to microaggressions, which are communicative acts that demean and discriminate against individuals from marginalized groups. These microaggressions can take different forms, including microinvalidations that dismiss or undermine the feelings and experiences of individuals, such as consistently interrupting or appropriating their ideas. Additionally, microinsults involve recurring comments that are insensitive or disrespectful, often based on an individual's social status. In more extreme cases, micro assaults occur, characterized by explicit attacks and discriminatory statements (Blithe & Elliott, 2020). The presence of microaggressions in the workplace is a pressing issue that must be addressed, as it can have a significant impact on job performance and worker productivity.

Furthermore, these organizations contribute to gender discrimination through the use of language that exclusively associates management positions with masculinity, effectively overlooking and undervaluing the contributions and capabilities of women. *“Derogatory terms such as "hen," "female," and "hysterical" (in Czech origin: “slepice, ženská, hysterka“), find their way into colloquial vocabulary.”*<sup>9</sup> Informal conversations often revolve around male-centric topics and interests, such as football, hockey, cars, technology, war, and the objectification of women. Additionally, folklore tends to perpetuate jokes about women's abilities, while organizational mythology and historiography focus on the celebration of male heroes (Krizikova & Pavlica, 2004).

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<sup>9</sup> Křížková, Alena, Pavlica, Karel. *“Management genderových vztahů. Postavení žen a mužů v organizaci.”* Praha: Management Press. 2004. p.35. ISBN 80-7261-117-8.

Overall, these observations highlight the detrimental impact of gender bias in organizational cultures, as it not only perpetuates gender inequalities but also creates an environment that systematically marginalizes and undermines the contributions of women at all levels. The aforementioned realities effectively force women within organizations to either accept a secondary position and status or conform to the male behavioral model. However, even the latter option is not without its social risks, as many men criticize women who emulate male behavior as being "too aggressive" or "ridiculous" (Krizikova & Pavlica, 2004: 35).

As previously mentioned, research indicates that women with aspirations for managerial positions not only have to adopt certain masculine traits and approaches, but they are also socially compelled to strive for these positions more intensely than men. Additionally, Adrian Furnham and Paul Stringfield (2001) suggest that this dynamic can, in some instances, have adverse effects on men working within the company. The findings from Furnham and Stringfield's research have direct relevance to the study of women managers and work culture, as they highlight a specific aspect of gender dynamics in managerial evaluations. The observed tendency of certain female managers to rate male subordinates more poorly, despite no significant differences in performance or work behavior between genders, raises important questions about potential biases and stereotypes at play.

Through their research, Furnham and Stringfield discovered that certain female managers exhibited a notable inclination to rate male subordinates more poorly than their female counterparts. Notably, there were no significant differences in the performance or work behavior between the assessed men and women. This observation led to the hypothesis that this lower evaluation could be a form of psychological "payback" against men. This discovery highlights that stereotypes and biases can play a role in how managers evaluate their subordinates, regardless of gender.

Gender inequalities can also extend beyond relationships between men and women and also manifest among women themselves. Markiewicz et al. (2001) demonstrated in their study that within gendered organizations, many female managers strongly identify with the traditional perception of women as inherently less capable and dependable in the workplace. In order to distance themselves from this perceived category, they often display excessive criticism and intolerance towards other women. The study conducted by Markiewicz et al. reveals the complexity of gender dynamics within organizations, underscoring how societal

perceptions and stereotypes influence individuals' self-perceptions. This, in turn, can lead to the manifestation of detrimental behaviors within the workplace.

The influence of masculinity in modern organizations is also evident in the way gender norms shape expectations around men's or women's bodies in the workplace. This relationship between body and gender in work culture extends to the concept of aesthetic labor, according to Huppatz (2023).

Societal expectations often reinforce the idea that men should possess certain physical attributes, such as being strong, tough, and resilient. This can create a work culture that places value on physicality and downplays discussions around mental health and emotional well-being. Men who do not conform to these traditional ideals of masculinity may face challenges and stigma within the organization Huppatz (2023). They may be subjected to stereotypes or judgments that question their masculinity or undermine their professional capabilities. The pressure to embody masculine norms can also hinder men's ability to seek support or address their mental health needs, as it may be seen as a sign of weakness or vulnerability.

Similarly, women may face specific challenges related to their bodies, such as appearance-based discrimination, objectification, or pressure to conform to certain beauty standards. These expectations can affect hiring, promotion, and overall career advancement opportunities and are closely linked to the observation that aesthetic labor is gendered. *"Aesthetic labor involves governing gendered and sexualized appearance, but it can also involve emotion – the production of a viewpoint or disposition."<sup>10</sup>* These forms of discrimination based on physical appearance reinforce gender inequalities and can also contribute to the marginalization of women in the workplace (Huppatz, 2023).

Additionally, the double standard that emerges in the workplace, particularly evident in the interpretation of pregnant women as potential risks (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011), further illustrates the challenges women face due to gender-based perceptions of their physicality. *"In several cases, for example, employers terminated service workers when they became pregnant."<sup>11</sup>*

In conclusion, workplaces influenced by masculine expectations can have a negative impact on both men and women. Societal pressure to conform to traditional ideals of

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<sup>10</sup> Huppatz, Kate. "Gender, Work and Social Theory." London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023, Chapter 7.

<sup>11</sup> Bobbitt-Zeher, Donna. "Gender & Society." Vol.25 No.6, The Ohio State University 2011, p.774

masculinity and appearance-based discrimination can create an environment that is detrimental to individuals' well-being and professional experiences.

### 1.8. Work segregation, tokenism, childcare

In the context of these observations, it is essential to address certain sociological concepts and terms that negatively impact women in the workplace, as these concepts and terms emerge from the gendered culture and socialization we discussed earlier.

Starting with a phenomenon known as work segregation, which refers to the division of job roles and occupations along gender lines, we can observe the persistence of gender inequalities in various aspects of work. Work segregation is a phenomenon where certain industries or occupations are predominantly dominated by either men or women (Krizikova & Pavlica, 2004). This segregation perpetuates gender-based disparities in terms of job opportunities, wages, and career progression. The concept of work segregation emerges from societal norms and expectations that assign specific roles and tasks to individuals based on their gender. These norms are deeply rooted in cultural, and socialization processes we discussed earlier. “*While all paid care work is feminized and comparatively poorly paid, the professionalized care jobs tend to require a university degree and are mostly done by white women<sup>12</sup>*”, which contribute to occupational segregation. Professionalized care occupations, such as teaching, social work, nursing, and allied health professions, tend to require a university degree and are predominantly filled by women.

Furthermore, the impact of work segregation extends beyond employment itself. It influences societal perceptions and expectations regarding gender roles and capabilities, reinforcing traditional gender norms and reinforcing the unequal distribution of power and resources between men and women. The segregation of work based on gender reinforces stereotypes, biases, and discriminatory practices that hinder women's advancement and limit their access to equal opportunities in the workforce.

To address these challenges, it is crucial to recognize the role of organizations in perpetuating or challenging work segregation. Organizations have the power to promote inclusivity, diversity, and gender equality by implementing policies and practices that foster equal representation and opportunities for all employees, irrespective of their gender. By embracing a more inclusive and diverse workforce, organizations can benefit from a wider

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<sup>12</sup> Huppatz, Kate. 2023. "Gender, Work and Social Theory." London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023, Chapter 7.



range of perspectives, skills, and talents, leading to enhanced creativity, innovation, and overall success (Reskin & Hartmann, 1968).

In the context of the labor market in Czech Republic, an example of work segregation can be observed in the field of Information Technology, commonly abbreviated as IT (Bettio & Verashchagina, 2009). IT-related occupations, such as software development and network administration, are typically male-dominated, while roles in administrative and customer service positions are often occupied by women.

This segregation is influenced by various factors, including societal perceptions of gender roles and stereotypes, educational and career choices, and workplace biases. The perception that IT is a male-dominated field can discourage women from pursuing careers in technology, leading to a lack of representation and opportunities for women in this sector.

The segregation present in the labor market has a significant impact on job opportunities for both genders. To understand the influence of gendered segregation on job opportunities, a compelling approach is to examine individuals who have obtained employment in fields that are not traditionally associated with their gender. This is especially pertinent as my primary focus revolves around examining women who occupy the position of project managers within the IT field.

Another term, tokenism, which refers to the practice of recruiting a small number of diverse candidates to create the illusion of diversity on a larger scale, has been extensively examined by Rosabeth Moss Kanter in her groundbreaking work on men and women in leadership roles (Kanter, 1977). Kanter delves into the concept of tokenism, shedding light on how these select individuals are often regarded as symbolic representations of their gender rather than being valued for their individuality (Kanter, 1977, p. 209). By studying these dynamics, my research aims to shed light on the challenges and experiences of individuals who break the gender stereotypes within their chosen professions, such as women who are project managers, as discussed earlier. It examines how tokenism, and the symbolic treatment of individuals impact their opportunities, advancement, and overall career experiences of the individuals.

According to Kanter, tokenism is primarily a numerical issue, suggesting that the work experiences of women in atypical positions would improve with a greater representation of women in those roles. However, Zimmer (1988, p. 72) and other researchers (Bulm and Smith, 1988; Franklina Sweeney, 1988; Williams, 1995) argue that men's negative attitudes towards women in the workplace are motivated more by perceiving women as a social minority rather than the small number of women present. In other words,

the social status of the token group, rather than its size, is the crucial factor influencing work experiences (Williams, 1992, p. 263).

Williams (1992, 1995) also highlights an important distinction in experiences of tokenism between men and women. In a female-dominated workplace, men tend to feel empowered, whereas women often experience feelings of humiliation and being controlled in male-dominated work environments. These contrasting experiences are also evident in the frequency of sexual harassment cases reported in the workplace (Renzetti & Curran, 1989), which only emphasizes the disparities in power dynamics and the impact on individuals' experiences.

Gender dynamics are deeply entrenched in the family structure, particularly in the context of childcare. It is within the family structure that men are typically assigned to the domain of work, while women are expected to prioritize their roles within the realm of family. This emphasis on distinct areas of fulfillment and advancement does not imply that women and feminine principles dominate the entire family structure. According to Krizikova and Pavlica (2004), the family provides a limited space where the expression of "feminine" values is accepted, albeit with certain conditions. *"This acceptance has its limits and one of them is the economic dependence of women and children on male providers<sup>13</sup>."*

The relationship between family life and the world of work will be further explored in this chapter.

In the family dynamic, power imbalances often favor men, placing women in weaker positions relative to their partners. Additionally, women frequently find themselves in part-time employment due to their responsibilities in childcare, which further restricts their opportunities for career growth. The laborious work performed by women within their homes is undervalued and often goes unrecognized as legitimate work. According to Krizikova and Pavlica, this undervaluation extends to female employees in the labor market, where their contributions are not adequately acknowledged through fair compensation, salary increases, and promotions. Furthermore, the absence from the workplace during maternity leave hinders working mothers' active participation in the workforce and hampers their ability to progress alongside their colleagues on the career ladder.

As previously mentioned, a significant barrier to employment for many women is the lack of accessible and affordable childcare options. Krizikova and Pavlica add, that

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<sup>13</sup> Krížková, Alena, Pavlica, Karel. *"Management genderových vztahů. Postavení žen a mužů v organizaci."* Praha: Management Press. 2004. p.31. ISBN 80-7261-117-8.

regardless of objective qualifications, there exists a pervasive presumption among employers and colleagues that women are incapable of physically or mentally handling certain job roles. This bias perpetuates discrimination against women in terms of hiring, career advancement, and other work opportunities. Moreover, this presumption hinders men from taking on an equal share of family and household responsibilities, as their partners or wives are expected to compensate for the lack of support in these areas (Krizikova & Pavlica, 2004).

The evidence examined in this chapter underscores the enduring stereotypes surrounding suitable jobs for men and women, which reinforce occupational segregation in the workplace and contribute to the gender pay gap. In Czech Republic, the notion that the public realm of work belongs to men while the private realm of home belongs to women continues to persist, often resulting in women facing inferior employment conditions compared to men.

### 1.9. Management diversity

Until the late 1960s, management focused primarily on technical disciplines and analytical techniques. However, criticism emerged in the 1970s due to a disconnect between education and practical skills, highlighting the significance of interpersonal skills and practical experience in successful management. This criticism led to the emergence of new management disciplines, such as diversity management, aimed at eliminating discrimination and promoting equality within organizations. *“Initially addressing ethnic and linguistic minorities, diversity management expanded to include women, disabled individuals, and other marginalized groups.”*<sup>14</sup> Considering the inclusion of women among traditionally discriminated groups, it becomes essential to consider the gender perspective when addressing diversity issues.

Gender relations management serves as both a crucial aspect of diversity management and a distinct discipline enriching personnel and strategic management. It focuses on creating equal opportunities for men and women within organizations. Achieving balanced gender relations involves fostering a gender-integrated organizational culture, analyzing social and cultural conditions, identifying barriers to equality, integrating the gender perspective into management education, and promoting joint learning experiences (Krizikova & Pavlica, 2004).

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<sup>14</sup> Krížková, Alena, Pavlica, Karel. *“Management genderových vztahů. Postavení žen a mužů v organizaci.”* Praha: Management Press. 2004. p.23. ISBN 80-7261-117-8.

By adopting a comprehensive approach to gender relations management, organizations can facilitate qualitative changes in gender identity and mutual relationships. This requires understanding the cultural context, assessing potential risks, and committing to fostering equality and inclusivity. Networking plays a vital role in professional advancement, enabling individuals to expand connections, access resources and opportunities, and enhance visibility and reputation (Grant & Pritchard, 2015). Building and nurturing a robust network provides access to support systems, mentorship, and career development prospects.

In the context of gender and work culture, networking takes on even greater significance. The study by Blithe and Elliott (2020) on gender inequality in the academy highlights the relevance of networking in the academic context. It examines the impact of microaggressions and work-life conflict on academic rank, shedding light on the systemic challenges faced by women in academia. The findings underscore the importance of networking as a means to overcome gender-based barriers and biases, as it can provide women with the connections, support, and mentorship needed to navigate and excel within the academic environment. Moreover, networking serves as a platform for challenging gender stereotypes and promoting gender equality in the workplace (Blithe & Elliott, 2020, 760). By actively engaging in networking initiatives, women can challenge traditional norms and expectations, assert their expertise, and foster collaborative relationships that promote their professional growth.

Networking is essential for career advancement, as emphasized in "Success Strategies for Women in STEM: A Portable Mentor" by Pritchard and Grant (2015). It entails cultivating positive relationships with influential individuals who share common interests or goals, enabling individuals to expand their professional connections, access valuable resources, and enhance their visibility in the workplace. Effective networking provides an opportunity to establish relationships with influential individuals who can support career progression and endorse capabilities. It is a means through which individuals, regardless of gender, can overcome barriers and biases, contributing to their success in leadership roles.

## Chapter II: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology for this study is guided by a qualitative approach, focusing on the experiences and perspectives of women managers within the context of work culture. Drawing upon a deductive approach and employing semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method, this research aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges, strategies, and perceptions of women managers in navigating their roles within organizations and shedding light on the impact of work segregation, tokenism, family dynamics, biases, discrimination, microaggressions as well as the significance of networking and societal perceptions on their employment opportunities and career advancement.

The research design for this study can be viewed as the framework that guides the collection of data and provides structure to the investigation. According to Bryman and Bell (2011), the choice of research design depends on the objectives and desired outcomes of the study. In this research, a qualitative approach is adopted to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and perspectives of women managers within the context of work culture.

While the theoretical foundation of the study draws on existing literature on gendered workplace dynamics, there is a gap in understanding how these theories specifically apply to the experiences of women managers in Prague.

The focus of this research is on capturing the views and perspectives of participants. By utilizing semi-structured interviews, the study aims to delve into the lived experiences of women managers and gain in-depth insights into their interactions with colleagues, superiors or subordinates. Through open-ended questioning and probing, the qualitative data collected will provide a rich and nuanced understanding of the gender dynamics and challenges faced by my focus group.

### 2.1. Research strategy

The research design chosen for this study aligns with the goal of obtaining a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under investigation (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

A descriptive research approach is particularly suitable for this qualitative study, as it allows for detailed descriptions and exploration of the participants' experiences and attitudes (Sandelowski, 2000).

The research strategy serves as the overall framework for the study, guiding the selection of participants, data collection methods, representation of the data, and data analysis (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

By utilizing a descriptive research design, this study seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on women's experiences in the workplace, particularly in relation to the challenges posed by the hegemonic work culture. The findings of this research will provide valuable insights for organizations and policymakers, facilitating the development of strategies to promote gender equality and create a more inclusive work environment.

## 2.2. Research method

To establish a coherent connection between theory and the phenomena explored in this study on women managers, a deductive approach has been employed. The deductive approach begins with an established theory or generalization, such as the glass ceiling theory, which posits that women face invisible barriers to career advancement (Hyde, 2000). This theory serves as a guiding framework for the research process, specifically in relation to the male dominance observed in the workplace and the cultural influences that perpetuate gender segregation (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

While deductive approaches are traditionally associated with quantitative research, they can also be effectively employed in qualitative research to explore beyond existing theories (Hyde, 2000; Azungah, 2018). In this study, the deductive approach allows for the examination of the glass ceiling theory and its implications for women managers, shedding light on the challenges they face in overcoming gender-based obstacles in career progression. Additionally, the influence of male dominance in the explored workplace and the cultural factors contributing to segregation are examined within the deductive framework.

It is important to note that the data collection process is vital within the deductive approach, as it shapes the entire research endeavor. By systematically gathering data on the experiences and perceptions of women managers in relation to the glass ceiling, male dominance, cultural influence, segregation and other elements, this study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge and provide valuable insights into the complex challenges faced by women in managerial roles (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

### 2.3. Semi-structured interviews

As mentioned earlier, this research adopts a qualitative approach with a descriptive aim, placing particular emphasis on female managers and their encounters and adaptation to the work environment in Prague. In order to gain meaningful insights into these phenomena, semi-structured interviews have been chosen as the primary data collection method (Stevens, 2006).

Descriptive studies, such as this one, often employ minimally structured interviews to allow participants to provide their unique perspectives and in-depth insights (Sandelowski, 2000). By utilizing interviews, the researchers can flexibly explore the specific issues at hand and gain valuable information directly from the participants (Milena, Dainora & Alin, 2008).

During the process of conducting the interviews, it is essential to maintain the integrity of each respondent's individual responses, free from the influence of other participants. Therefore, to ensure a conducive environment for open and candid discussions, each interview will be conducted on a one-on-one basis. This approach allows for a focused and personalized interaction between the researcher and the participant, fostering a sense of trust and enabling the participant to share their unique experiences and perspectives without the potential influence or bias of group dynamics (Stevens, 2006; Bryman and Bell, 2011).

The semi-structured nature of the interviews provides the researchers with the freedom to determine the sequence of questions and ensure that the interview questions align with the research objectives (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

All of the semi-structured interviews for this study have been conducted in person, providing several benefits to the research process. Conducting interviews face-to-face allows for richer and more nuanced data collection, as it enables the researcher to observe not only the verbal responses but also non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice. These additional dimensions of communication can provide valuable insights into the participants' emotions, attitudes, and levels of comfort when discussing sensitive topics related to their experiences as women managers.

Furthermore, in-person interviews foster a more personal and engaging interaction between the researcher and the participants. This can help establish rapport, trust, and a sense of mutual understanding, creating a safe space for the participants to openly share their thought. The direct and immediate nature of in-person interviews also allows for

clarifications and follow-up questions, ensuring a deeper exploration of key topics and a more comprehensive understanding of the participants' perspectives.

## 2.4. Conducting questions

Despite progress towards gender equality in the workplace, women still encounter unique challenges when it comes to challenging and navigating dominant cultural norms and practices (Krizikova & Pavlica, 2004). This study aims to contribute to our understanding of how women in managerial roles negotiate and navigate the hegemonic work culture in order to maintain their positions and progress further.

In this study, a qualitative research approach is employed to delve into the experiences of women managers. The use of semi-structured interviews allows for in-depth exploration and capturing of the unique challenges and strategies employed by women in navigating the work culture. By conducting one-on-one interviews with ten women managers from diverse backgrounds and varying levels of experience in the field, the research aims to gain valuable insights into their firsthand experiences.

The interviews will encompass a range of topics to delve into the experiences, challenges, and strategies. By exploring these areas, the study seeks to develop a holistic comprehension of the distinctive dynamics and obstacles encountered by women in managerial roles. Additionally, it aims to identify potential avenues for improvement and support within the workplace. The theoretical framework presented in the Chapter I. will serve as a guiding reference for analyzing the collected data and drawing meaningful conclusions. Here are the listed key topics, along with their respective goals, that will be explored in the interviews:

### 1. Cultural norms and expectations

- Gain insight into cultural norms and expectations within the work culture: Assess their influence on gender dynamics and women's experiences in managerial roles.
- Identify challenges and obstacles related to cultural expectations: Exploring women's experiences with cultural norms provides valuable insights into barriers and the impact on their professional journeys.

### 2. Gendered expectations and norms

- Explore the influence of gendered expectations and norms on professional experiences: Understanding how gendered expectations impact decision-making, leadership



styles, and career advancement opportunities allows us to grasp the gender dynamics at play and their effects on women in managerial roles.

- Assess the role of work-life balance and accessible childcare options: Examining the relationship between work-life balance, childcare support, and women's career progression helps us understand the challenges women face in balancing their professional and personal responsibilities.

### 3. Challenges and biases

- Identify the impact of masculine influence on the organizational culture: By exploring the influence of masculinity on the work culture, we can gain insights into the experiences of women and the challenges they encounter in male-dominated environments.
- Uncover barriers or biases, such as the glass ceiling or the wage gap: Investigating barriers and biases provides a deeper understanding of the obstacles that hinder women's career advancement and equal treatment, shedding light on the persistence of gender inequalities.

#### 1. Organizational efforts and future outlook

- Assess organizational initiatives to address gender inequalities: Understanding the steps taken by organizations to promote diversity, inclusion, and gender equality helps evaluate their commitment to creating an equitable work environment.
- Envision the future of gender dynamics within organizations or industries: By exploring future prospects, we can identify the desired changes and improvements needed to achieve gender equality and create more inclusive work environments.

#### 2. Wage gap and equal pay

- Examine perceptions of the wage gap's role in perpetuating gender inequalities: Exploring perspectives on the wage gap helps us understand its impact on women's economic empowerment and the importance of addressing this disparity.
- Identify strategies to address the wage gap and ensure equal pay: By exploring potential strategies, we can gather insights into effective approaches for organizations to bridge the wage gap and promote fair and equal compensation practices.

#### 3. Leadership and inclusion

- Understand the role of leadership in promoting gender equality: Exploring the views on leadership allows us to gain insights into the importance of inclusive leadership in fostering gender equality and creating a supportive work environment.
- Assess the significance of inclusion in promoting gender equality: Investigating the importance of inclusion helps us understand its impact on creating equal opportunities for women and breaking down barriers within organizations.

## 2.5. Sampling frame, sampling size

A probability sampling technique was employed in this study, ensuring that the sample was selected randomly with an equal chance for every individual to be included (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The age range of the participants in this research was set between 28 and 57 years old. Additionally, a purposeful sampling technique was utilized, whereby the researchers deliberately selected participants whom they believed would provide valuable insights for the study (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015).

This technique is particularly useful when seeking information-rich cases (Patton, 2015). As mentioned earlier, the interviewees were selected based on three criteria: gender (women), position (project manager), and location (Prague).

In this study, a total of 10 interviewees were selected for the interviews. The duration of each interview was set between 19 and 35 minutes, considering the range of topics to be covered and the willingness of participants to respond to the questions.

## 2.6. Interview time

Participant	Interview time
1.	32 min
2.	24 min
3.	35 min
4.	19 min
5.	28 min
6.	26 min
7.	33 min
8.	32 min

9.	28 min
10.	20 min

## 2.7. Execution of the interviews

The interviews were conducted between the 20th of November 2022 and the 17th of February 2023. Participants were invited to participate through online messages, providing them with information about the estimated duration of the interview and the assurance that their answers would be used solely for study purposes. The topic of the study was also shared with them in advance.

The interviews were conducted in person to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the participants' responses. This approach allowed for the capture of both verbal and non-verbal communication, providing valuable insights into the participants' experiences. It is important to note that the interviews were recorded with the participants' awareness and consent, enabling accurate transcription and thorough analysis of the interview data.

## 2.8. Language

It is essential to conduct interviews in a language that participants feel confident and comfortable in (Bryman and Bell, 2011). In this study, English was not the native language for five of the 10 participants. To ensure effective communication, three interviews were conducted in Czech, and two interviews were conducted in Slovak, allowing the participants to express themselves more comfortably in their native language.

The interviews conducted in Czech and Slovak were translated into English by the author of this paper. The translation process from one language to another can be intricate as it involves considerations of language, writing style, cultural nuances, and linguistic differences (Darwish, 2003). Participants may also have concerns about the accuracy and fairness of the translation, as they want their statements to be faithfully represented (Squires, 2009).

To address this, the author shared the translated versions of the interviews with the participants to ensure their agreement and approval. It is important to note that the respondents confirmed their agreement with the translations made.

## 2.9. Ethical considerations

As a researcher, it is essential to recognize and uphold ethical responsibilities, particularly when conducting interviews where the well-being of the interviewees is a priority (Eike, 2010). Ethical considerations revolve around the role of values within the research process and address potential concerns such as participant treatment, consent, anonymity, and any form of deception (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Liedka, 1992).

To ensure a comfortable and stress-free interview environment, it was emphasized to the participants that they had the option to leave the session or refrain from answering any questions if they felt uncomfortable (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Additionally, the importance of anonymity was clearly explained at the beginning of each interview, with the author of this thesis assuring the participants that they would be identified only by a designated number in the final study, such as participant 2, while their age would be stated.

Prior to the start of each interview, all participants agreed to these conditions.

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## Chapter III: ANALYSIS

### 3.1 Introduction

In Chapter III., we present a comprehensive analysis of the perspectives obtained from 10 interviews conducted with women managers in the project management field. By selecting relevant segments and directly citing the respondents' answers, we aim to offer a thorough understanding of their viewpoints. These chosen passages contribute to the exploration of the theoretical framework and align with the research questions. The participants in this study represent a diverse group of women managers, each bringing their unique experiences and insights to the discussion. Through their responses, we gain valuable insights into the challenges, triumphs, and perceptions of women managers in project management.

The analysis draws upon the concepts and terms discussed in Chapter I, providing a contextual foundation. We explore the multifaceted nature of work-life balance, as highlighted by Nancy Lockwood, which holds particular relevance to the experiences of women managers in project management. Balancing professional responsibilities with personal and family commitments can be especially demanding in this field. Additionally, insights from Krizikova and Pavlica's examination of communistic culture provide a historical backdrop for understanding the influences on gender dynamics within the project management field.

By examining biases, prejudices, and myths that perpetuate gender inequalities, we seek to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by women managers and the potential impact of these biases on their career advancement. Furthermore, we delve into the influence of masculine values and behaviors within project management organizations, as well as the significance of work segregation and tokenism within the field.

The analysis also highlights the importance of childcare and its impact on the careers of women managers in project management. Understanding the role of gender relations management and diversity management within project management organizations is crucial for creating inclusive work environments that support the advancement and success of women managers. By incorporating both supporting and contrasting perspectives, we strive to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the participants' viewpoints.

## 3.2. Interview findings, responses and analysis

### Theme 1: Cultural Norms and Expectations

1. How would you describe the prevailing cultural norms and expectations within the work culture in relation to gender in your organization?

Respondent n.3.: *“In my opinion, women are still afraid to be rejected or to be seen as “they think too much about themselves”. That is why the difference in salaries is sometimes shocking to me. This is not men’s fault; it is lack of confidence in women. We need to learn how to negotiate, make sure to ask for a salary range and know how to promote ourselves. Initially, it might be a difference in women vs men psychology, but in this case, women have to consider salary negotiation to be a skill that they need to improve.”*

Respondent n.1.: *“Depends on the situation, culture...My parents raised me to be independent, that I need to be self-sufficient, and I cannot rely on anyone. And I don’t expect from my partner to bring more money than me, today the roles are changing, in modern families, just like when partners go on a parental leave and the mothers are at work, and I prefer the 50:50 attitude to the whole thing.”*

Respondent n.2.: *“First of all, I would like to mention the video we were talking about before, where they discussed how women need to choose between career and family way earlier than men, to think about their future beforehand, there is a very little time if you realize in your 20s that you want to have kids, you need to start working and be financially stable in your 30s so that you still can have kids, well at least I was thinking that way. And now, that I am in that age where I can actually have kids, it is so stressful for me now. Sorry, I forgot what the question was.”*

Respondent n.1.: *“I think women tend to stop themselves, (when talking about the stereotypical role of a woman-mother-employee). I really like a quote by Sheryl Sandberg, she wrote a book called Lean in, and she says: Don’t leave before you leave, and that’s an advice she gives to future mothers and women who plan to have a family, to not stop yourself*

*in your personal life, projects and work just because you plan to be pregnant, what if it won't happen until 3/5 years later, you should never put yourself second because you waste your time. I don't think pregnancy is a sickness, so women should start new projects, not only in their career, but in general, even if you are starting a family or not."*

2. Have you witnessed instances where cultural norms and practices have impacted the opportunities for advancement of women within the workplace?

Respondent n.3.: *"We can all agree that in the past women were treated very differently, not only in Prague but overall. With time the situation got better, and I feel that most companies treat men and women equally. But there are still INDIVIDUALS (emphasis) who treat men and women differently. So, you might work in a good company, but you would report to a manager who turns out to be sexist. These special cases have to be escalated to HR, but I see that sometimes, people just do not want to get involved in a conflict, so they prefer to stay silent about it."*

Respondent n.2.: *"...there is an issue that not every company does want to work with the mother on maternity leave. Even if she wants, her manager might do not feel like she is reliable and committed to her tasks... So, they go part time, and this is stopping you, big time. Of course, there is companies that are not like that, but still, if a woman wants to be self-sufficient when talking about money, she still needs to "hustle". So, from the time you go for a maternity leave, you don't get no raise, I mean usually. Okay, with our company you get your pay "fixed" after you come back from the maternity leave, but that is not a common thing, right? There are companies that tell you: be grateful you are back. So, the mothers can come back to the salary they used to get 10 years ago, and with today's prices and inflation, it is very hard."*

3. Can you share any specific challenges or obstacles you have encountered as a woman in a managerial position within the work culture?

Respondent n.2.: *"Maternity is a big topic to me (as a manager), I realized not a lot of women are informed properly, don't know how to confront their managers about it, don't know about the things they can do in such a situation and so on... How long does their manager holds their job position for them. Should they put maternity leave in their CV? What if that*

*can bring out some prejudices, employed mother means an employee with an ongoing sick leave because of her kids... So that's what I would say about it."*

Respondent n.3.: *"When I just started my career as a manager, I lacked experience in communication with HR & upper management. I struggled with salary negotiations and personal confrontations at work. Some people would comment on my personal relationships or professional skills, and it made me upset. As a result, I could be overly emotional which led to conflicts at work.*

*I also felt that men in the same position as mine were getting higher salaries and tended to be promoted more often and I was afraid to speak up or stand up for myself. My lack of confidence and experience cost me money and emotional stress."*

The responses from the interviews shed light on the prevailing cultural norms of Czech Republic and expectations within the work culture in relation to gender. The findings align with the theoretical background, which emphasizes the impact of societal norms and expectations on women in the workplace.

Respondent n.3's acknowledgment of the difference in salaries and the need for women to improve their negotiation skills reflects the concept of gender bias and wage disparities discussed in the theoretical background. This suggests that the prevailing cultural norms and expectations may contribute to the perpetuation of unequal pay.

Respondent n.1's emphasis on independence and self-sufficiency challenges traditional gender roles and aligns with the theoretical understanding that cultural norms influence gendered expectations and behaviors in a domain of employment (Connell, 2002). The respondent's belief in equal partnerships also reflects the importance of addressing gendered norms within personal and professional relationships. The response indicate a notable shift towards adopting egalitarian attitudes and rejecting conventional gender norms and expectations in relationships. This implies a desire for a more balanced division of responsibilities and financial contributions within the partnership.

The stress and pressure expressed by respondent n.2 regarding career and family planning highlight the challenges faced by women due to societal expectations and limited timeframes. This aligns with the concept of work-life balance and the notion that women are often required to make choices and plan their careers around family responsibilities. Furthermore, the findings of Huppertz's research (2023) aligns with the notion that the



division of domestic labor is influenced by societal norms and expectations, as discussed in the theoretical framework.

The reference to Sheryl Sandberg's book "Lean In" by respondent n.1 supports the idea that women should not limit their professional ambitions based on future family plans. This aligns with the theoretical understanding of challenging stereotypes (Renzetti & Curran, 1989) and double standards, advocating for women's empowerment and career progression regardless of their plans for starting a family.

The instances mentioned by respondent n.3, where individuals within organizations exhibit sexist behavior, reflect the persistence of gender biases and discriminatory practices discussed in the theoretical background (Adrian Furnham & Paul Stringfield, 2001). This underscores the need for organizations to address and rectify such behaviors through proper channels and policies.

The challenges faced by mothers returning from maternity leave, as highlighted by respondent n.2, reflect the difficulties associated with work-life balance and the need for accessible and supportive childcare options. This aligns with the theoretical understanding of the impact of childcare on women's career progression (Krizikova & Pavlica, 2004) and the significance of organizations addressing these challenges to promote gender equality.

Respondent n.3's personal challenges in communication, salary negotiations, and experiencing comments on personal relationships and skills demonstrate the presence of microaggressions and the influence of gender biases within the work culture. These findings underscore the importance of addressing discriminatory practices and biases within organizations to create an inclusive and supportive environment (Blithe and Elliott, 2020).

## Theme 2: Gendered Expectations and Norms

1. How have gendered expectations and norms influenced various aspects of your professional experiences, such as decision-making, leadership styles, and career advancement opportunities?

Respondent n.1.: *"I still believe it is very unsafe for women to share their personal life at work, publicly saying yes, we just started trying for a baby...People in leadership might still have the bias and think okay, she is 30, she just got married, she will want to have a kids soon so she is not a great fit for this role/get raise as she will leave us in a couple of months. I personally felt it, quite recently during our team dinner, that was completely informal, questions like How long are you with your partner? And kids? ...But mentally, we should*

*rethink this whole thinking, sky is the limit in my opinion and as I have said before, pregnancy is not sickness. I just think it is still something that cannot be shared publicly without the consequences.”*

Respondent n.6.: *“I can definitely say that gendered expectations and norms have had a significant impact on my professional journey. In terms of decision-making, there have been instances where my ideas or suggestions were dismissed or not given the same weight as those of my male colleagues. It's frustrating because it feels like my voice is not always heard or valued as much.”*

Respondent n.9.: *“As for leadership styles, there's often this notion that a more assertive and dominant approach is the way to go. But guess what? I've embraced my own unique leadership style, which can be described as collaborative, inclusive, and empathetic. And for sure it has fostered a positive and supportive work environment. My team feels empowered and valued. Let me tell you about this recent project we had. We were up against some tough challenges and tight deadlines. Instead of going with the typical top-down, bossy approach, I gathered my team and created a space where we could all share our thoughts and ideas. I made sure everyone had a chance to contribute their insights, suggestions, and concerns.*

*And you know what? It worked like a charm! Our team not only met all the project goals, but we also delivered exceptional results. But here's the best part: we built such strong bonds and trust among team members that it created a culture of collaboration and support that goes beyond just that one project. This is what motivates me in my job.”*

2. How do you perceive the role of work-life balance and accessible childcare options in supporting women's career progression and promoting gender equality in the workplace?

Respondent n.4.: *“First of all, my company never put any pressure on me, like -when do you return to work? Will you return after 11 months, when you do it, and so on. They really let you decide on how many more months off you want to take after those 6 months. In any point, in which you want to return, you can start the discussion with them and like, find a common ground. I was very lucky. After one year I wanted to return as a part time, and because I had previous experience as data analyst, I was able to adapt to the new tools. It was great because I didn't have to come to the office, and I could just stay with the baby. I had flexible*

*hours, like I worked in the mornings and evenings 2 and 2 hours, so no day care. It was just me and my partner managing the time, when I was working, he was with the baby and so on. So, like really great from both point of views. This is an experience I truly wish for everyone to have, especially after such a big change that having a baby can be. What I would like to point out, is that you really need to communicate, you really can't speak to no one and then just appear and be like I'm returning, you cannot expect from them to do everything for you. You need to be more proactive, be patient, adaptable, talk to people. "*

*Respondent n.5.: "After I came back from the maternity leave, I was actually able to negotiate my role, okey, hey, I am coming back, I want more strategic position, learn about the bigger picture, not just focusing on some very small tasks as I did before, and I also said that I do not want to return to the same position that I have. I felt like I already learnt from the time before going for the maternity leave and honestly, no. I don't feel like something changed. Maybe when I got pregnant, like I was so happy but also felt like the discussions between professional work, the projects and so on, like they didn't happen so much anymore, right? So, I don't think that people did it on purpose, and I also wasn't asking as I did before, like getting as involved. So, definitely, it was on both sides. But also, I got a raise exactly right before I went on a maternity leave, which is something that is not happening with other companies, maybe it was like all the recognition of the work that I was doing before, or maybe I was just lucky, but I really do not feel like it was a big change."*

*Respondent n.1.: "I think a lot, I think women tend to stop themselves, I really like a quote by Sheryl Sandburg, she wrote a book called Lean in, and she says: Don't leave before you leave, and that's an advice she gives to future mothers and women who plan to have a family, to not stop yourself in your personal life, projects and work just because you plan to be pregnant, what if it won't happen until 3/5years later, you should never put yourself second because you waste your time. I don't think pregnancy is a sickness, so women should start new projects, not only in their career, but in general, even if you are starting a family or not."*

*Respondent n.3.: "I do not have kids myself, but I am in a long-term relationship. Once I get married, the passion for my work life won't change for me, but I do not know how it changes when you decide to have kids. I can assume that it is much more stressful as you need to take quite a big break and create a good work-life balance once you return. That is*

*why I find the support from the company you are working for crucial, especially for the women nowadays, who are working and have been working for their career. From what I know about the experience of my colleagues, they were greatly supported in terms of money, I know XY received a bonus right after she went for the maternity leave and after some time, she started working remotely from home. But I know this is not very common in Czechia. “*

3. How have you navigated the tension between conforming to cultural expectations and asserting your own managerial style or approach?

Respondent n.3.: *“Me personally, I never had any conflict in my life regarding the cultural expectations, thanks to my great upbringing I always considered myself as someone who can achieve anything. But I know, in Prague, especially for generation 40+ are men still considered to be the provider of the family, which has harmful impact on the women, if any of their male figure in their life has such an opinion. But as for younger people, this formula does not always work because we can see more stay-at-home dads and more women with higher income. Overall, I see a positive tendency of people going away from these stereotypes in here (Prague).”*

Respondent n.7.: *“I will give you a specific example that really highlights the tension I faced. In a crucial decision-making process, I suggested involving the entire team and gathering their ideas and feedback. I believed that this inclusive approach would not only lead to better decisions but also empower the team members and make them feel valued. However, some of my colleagues and even some higher-ups didn't fancy my idea. They considered it too "soft" or "unconventional" for a manager. I faced resistance, skepticism, and even dismissive comments. But I refused to back down. As time went on, my persistence started to pay off. The team members gradually became more engaged, and their ideas began to flow freely. We experienced remarkable results as we worked together, it wasn't an easy journey, and there were moments of frustration and self-doubt. However, by staying true to my beliefs was able to create a work environment where everyone's voice mattered and where innovative solutions could emerge.”*

Starting with work segregation, the interviews provide insights into the persistence of gender inequalities in various aspects of work. The theoretical background on work

segregation by Krizikova & Pavlica emphasizes the division of job roles and occupations along gender lines, which perpetuates disparities in job opportunities, wages, and career progression.

Respondent n.1's emphasis on the hesitation in sharing personal life details and their conviction that pregnancy should not hinder women's professional growth aligns with the understanding that gendered norms and expectations shape individuals' choices and opportunities. This aligns with the concept of work segregation, where societal norms assign specific roles and tasks based on gender (Krizikova & Pavlica, 2004). Respondent n.6's experiences of unequal treatment in decision-making processes also reflect the influence of work segregation, as gendered expectations can shape decision-making dynamics and reinforce the gender hierarchy within the workplace.

Moving on to tokenism, the interviews explore the challenges and experiences of individuals who break gender stereotypes within their chosen professions. The concept of tokenism, as discussed by Rosabeth Moss Kanter, involves the recruitment of a small number of diverse candidates to create the illusion of diversity. Respondent n.9's adoption of a collaborative leadership style challenges traditional gender expectations associated with assertive and dominant leadership styles. The experiences shared by both men and women in gender-atypical positions, as highlighted by Christine Williams, support the understanding that tokenism can lead to discrimination and different experiences based on the social status of the token group (Kanter, 1977; Williams, 1995).

Lastly, the impact of childcare on gender inequalities is evident in the interviews. The family structure plays a significant role in perpetuating gender dynamics, and the responsibilities of childcare often lead to restricted opportunities for women's career growth, as mentioned in the Chapter I. Respondent n.9's emphasis on the need for accessible and affordable childcare options aligns with the literature that recognizes the lack of such options as a significant barrier to employment for women. This suggests that the lack of adequate childcare infrastructure can hinder women's ability to fully participate in the workforce and pursue career growth. The undervaluation of the laborious work performed by women within their homes extends to the labor market, where their contributions are not adequately acknowledged and compensated (Krizikova & Pavlica, 2004).

In conclusion, the analysis of the interview responses, in light of the theoretical framework, provides a deeper understanding of the dynamics of work segregation, tokenism, and the impact of childcare on gender inequalities in the labor market. The literature on these topics, including the works of Krizikova and Pavlica, Rosabeth Moss Kanter and Christine

Williams, offers valuable insights into the experiences shared by the interviewees. These findings underscore the need to challenge gendered norms, promote inclusivity, and address the barriers that hinder equal opportunities and career advancement for all individuals.

### Theme 3: Challenges and Biases

1. Can you provide examples of how masculine influence has shaped the organizational culture and impacted the experiences of women in the workplace?

Respondent n.3.: *"I had experience of working in a team of six men and myself. I stayed in this position for a year, and it was, probably, the hardest year in my career. I was lacking technical skills and for that reason I was not considered an important team player even though I was fully managing all tasks and meeting expectations.*

*Looking back at those times, I wish my manager would have set boundaries and discipline in a team. However, I do not regret taking that position, I've learned a lot of lessons from this experience. "*

Respondent n.1: *"I never had a reason to complain about any sort of "toxic" masculine influence in work culture (thinking). Maybe once, with one of my colleagues, he called me "sweetheart", but I understood he has small kids, so I just told him to not do it again and he never did. My personal opinion on a working relationship between men and women, I see them all equal and treat them that way, therefore I do not experience any differences in treatment. At work, I always try to get what I want and be equal so."*

2. Have you encountered any barriers or biases, such as the glass ceiling or the wage gap, that have hindered your career advancement or equal treatment within the organization?

Respondent n.6: *"I've been through it, definitely. No matter how qualified and dedicated I was, especially in the beginning of my career, it seemed like my male colleagues always got the promotions and higher pay, leaving me wondering what the heck was going on. It was beyond disheartening and frustrating, but it didn't let it to stop me. I took matters into my own hands and went after opportunities to prove myself and showcase my skills. So, if you're facing similar barriers and biases, here's my advice: don't let them drag you down. Keep pushing, keep striving, and never hold back."*

3. Can you share any strategies or actions you have taken to challenge or navigate gendered expectations and biases in your managerial role?

Respondent n.3.: *“Absolutely. Every year my confidence grows together with my experience and career. The best example would be me asking questions. It is very simple really, but this is the crucial part. I learned how to say, “How can I get promoted?”, “What are you implying?”, “I think we should do it differently”, etc. Asking questions and expressing my opinion helps me to set boundaries and be myself.*

*I am also more aware of my role in the team. When I was younger, I often experienced imposter syndrome which is, unfortunately, very common for women. Now I know that my skill set is good, that I bring value and that comparing myself with everyone else is never a good idea.”*

Respondent n.1.: *“I seek strength in a hard time, and I always receive it through my partner. My partner is always pushing me, that I should ask for a raise because I work too hard and even stay overtime, he is my real fan and I appreciate it so much, and I hope a lot of partners can be such a support to their other halves.”*

The experiences shared by the respondents strongly resonate with the existing literature, highlighting the persistent challenges and biases that women face in the workplace. The mention of individual biases from colleagues or superiors aligns with the findings of Krizikova and Pavlica (2004), who emphasize that gender biases and discriminatory practices can hinder women's opportunities and career advancement. These biases can manifest in unequal treatment, differences in decision-making processes, and unequal distribution of resources and opportunities.

The prevailing myth in Czech culture, identified by Krizikova and Pavlica, perpetuates the belief in a social structure where men hold decisive economic and political power while women are primarily engaged in "supplementary" roles. This perpetuation of gender roles attributes certain traits to men and women based on perceived "natural" qualities, contributing to biases and discriminatory practices (Krizikova & Pavlica, 2004; Markiewicz et al., 2001).

Within this context, the experiences shared by the respondents further exemplify the challenges and biases that women face in the workplace. Respondent n.3's encounter with managers who treat men and women differently aligns with the persistent biases and

individual biases that can hinder women's opportunities, as discussed in the theoretical framework. This reflects the impact of patriarchal sex-gender systems, wherein gender disparities persist despite organizational efforts for equality (Krizikova & Pavlica, 2004; Markiewicz et al., 2001).

Moreover, Respondent n.2's discussion of the challenges faced by women returning from maternity leave echoes the barriers and biases highlighted in the literature. The doubts about commitment and reduced career progression experienced by women after taking time off for maternity align with the societal expectations and gender norms that can impede women's advancement in the workplace (Krizikova & Pavlica, 2004).

Additionally, Respondent n.3's reflection on personal struggles with communication and biases speaks to the influence of gendered expectations and biases on salary negotiations and career progression. This resonates with the discussions on the impact of gender norms and the underestimation of women's abilities within the cultural context (Krizikova & Pavlica, 2004; Markiewicz et al., 2001).

Furthermore, the mention of maternity leave and its impact on career progression as significant challenges for women reflects the broader societal expectations and gender norms that persist in many countries. The literature (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011) confirms that women often encounter doubts about their commitment and reduced career prospects upon returning from maternity leave.

#### Theme 4: Organizational Efforts and Future Outlook

1. How has the organization addressed gender inequalities and promoted diversity and inclusion within the work culture?

Respondent n.5.: *“The key for fairness and respect in a team is communication. Managers should always talk to their reports and make sure they understand their struggles, no matter what inequalities are in a way. “*

Respondent n.8.: *“What I really like is the initiatives that are specifically designed to support women in their professional development within my work. They provide mentorship programs, sponsorships, and networking opportunities to help women go through the challenges they might face in their careers. Also, all the after-work activities such as networking dinners or special courses are sponsored by the XY (name of the company). It's great to see my job taking concrete steps to empower women.”*



2. How do you envision the future of gender dynamics within your organization or industry? What changes or improvements would you like to see?

Respondent n.10.: *“I would love to see more women in leadership positions, I want to see women occupying the top roles, making important decisions, and serving as role models for the next generation of leaders.”*

Respondent n.9.: *“I believe that flexible work arrangements and hybrid mode for parents would be very helpful. Not having to visit the office every day and being able to work from home is an approach I see in many companies, especially after the covid, I think it really helps the parents with little kids that need their attention. We personally have the hybrid mode, and it saves me so much time. I can do yoga in the morning if I don't have any meeting, or I can work at night if I can't sleep and get my stuff done.”*

3. What steps can organizations take to challenge masculine influence, break through the glass ceiling, and ensure equal opportunities for all employees?

Respondent n.8.: *“When organizations create a work culture where everyone feels supported and included. One way they can do this is by setting up programs like mentorship programs or initiatives that are focusing on developing your skillset. These initiatives help people connect, learn from each other, and it makes you feel like you truly belong there. Another important thing is a work-life balance, but that can be hard to ensure that. I try to hold my 1-on-1's with every member of my team at least once every two weeks and discuss all of the matters they are having, sometimes the personal life as well. I think an open conversation is a must. One can feel supported and seen, and after all, we are not robots, but humans.”*

By specifically referencing the work of Krizikova and Pavlica (2004), we can see how the experiences shared by Respondent n.5 and Respondent n.8 resonate with the theoretical framework presented in the literature, highlighting the practical application of theoretical principles and emphasizing the significance of organizational initiatives and support systems in fostering gender equality and inclusivity in the workplace. In relation to Respondent n.5's appreciation of initiatives designed to support women in professional

development, including mentorship programs and networking opportunities, their perspective aligns with the literature on diversity management and gender relations. Krizikova and Pavlica (2004) emphasize the importance of fostering a gender-integrated organizational culture and implementing procedures for gradual change. They highlight the significance of education and learning processes, which can be seen in the mentorship programs and networking opportunities mentioned by Respondent n.5. These programs reflect the literature's emphasis on providing concrete support and creating equal opportunities for women within the organization.

Turning to Respondent n.8's praise for the support and after-work activities provided by their company, this aligns with the literature's focus on empowering women and addressing gender inequalities. The initiatives mentioned by Respondent n.8 exemplify the practical steps advocated by Krizikova and Pavlica (2004) in promoting diversity and inclusion. The literature emphasizes the importance of organizations taking proactive measures to support women and create opportunities for their career advancement. Respondent n.8's experience reflects this approach, highlighting the company's commitment to empowering women through tangible support systems beyond regular work hours.

In summary, both respondents generally acknowledge the importance of organizational efforts to address gender inequalities and promote diversity and inclusion. While specific examples vary, there is a shared sentiment that organizations should invest in initiatives and programs to support women's career growth.

#### Theme 5: Wage Gap and Equal Pay

1. How do you perceive the role of the wage gap between men and women in perpetuating gender inequalities in the workplace?

Respondent n.3.: *“I think it (wage gap) does exist. As I already mentioned, it could be related to different communication styles and expectations for men vs women, but I also believe that HR plays a big role in it. The culture of asking a candidate's salary expectation and not mentioning salary range for the position is extremely tricky and wrong. When it comes to the classic example when men make more money than women at the same position - I am afraid it also exists now. There are so many reasons for it: less years of experience in women's careers due to maternity leave, expectation that men are more knowledgeable, the fact that women generally ask for less money, the list goes on. But in the end, it is a company*

*who should be responsible for constant checks that allow for all employees to have the same benefits and fair compensation, whether it is a man or a woman.”*

Respondent n.6.: *“I’ve had moments where I discovered that I was earning less than my male counterparts in the same position. It just drives me crazy to think that even though I’m equally qualified and doing the exact same job, there’s still this unfair difference in pay. It’s like a punch in the gut, you know? I went to confront HR and demand equal pay. And you know what? It worked. I fought for what I deserved, and I got the raise I had been advocating for. It’s frustrating to think about how long they would have let it go on if I hadn’t stood up for myself. But that’s why it’s so important for women to empower themselves and speak up. We can’t rely on others to recognize our worth—we have to fight for it.”*

2. What strategies or actions do you believe organizations can implement to address the wage gap and ensure equal pay for equal work?

Respondent n.8.: *“You know, closing the wage gap is something that organizations really need to prioritize. I believe an important action is to establish a clear and transparent salary policies. Organizations should have guidelines in place that ensure equal pay for equal work. This means considering skills, experience, and performance rather than gender when determining compensation.”*

Respondent n.10.: *“I think it’s really important for organizations to be upfront and honest about job openings and chances for career growth. When they make these opportunities known to all employees, without any gender bias, it levels the playing field and gives everyone an equal shot at those higher-level positions, together with a better money. This kind of transparency helps to knock down any sneaky barriers that are adding to the already existing wage gap.”*

Respondent n.7.: *“In my opinion companies should put more effort into diversity and inclusion trainings to raise the awareness about any unconscious biases between the employees on all levels.”*

The responses from the interviews highlight the shared acknowledgment of the wage gap and its perpetuation of gender inequalities in the workplace. These perspectives align

with existing literature and theoretical frameworks, providing insight into the factors contributing to the wage gap and perpetuating gender inequalities in the workplace. The theory of gendered institutions, proposed by Acker (1990), highlights how gendered structures within organizations contribute to these inequalities, including the wage gap. The literature emphasizes that societal expectations, such as traditional gender roles and biases, contribute to differences in negotiation skills and perceptions of value in the workplace (Krizikova & Pavlica, 2004).

Respondent n.3 recognizes these factors by attributing the wage gap to differences in negotiation skills, maternity leave impact, and societal expectations. This perspective aligns with the theory of gendered institutions, which highlights the need for systemic changes within organizations to ensure fair compensation for all employees.

Moreover, the importance of individual negotiation and self-advocacy in addressing the wage gap is supported by social cognitive theory. According to Bandura (1986), individuals actively engage in self-regulatory processes, such as setting goals and taking action to achieve desired outcomes. Respondent n.6's expression of frustration at the wage gap and their personal experience of confronting HR and demanding equal pay reflects the agency and self-advocacy emphasized in social cognitive theory. This aligns with the notion that individuals can play an active role in challenging and addressing gender inequalities, including unequal pay.

Additionally, the suggestion made by Respondent n.8 for the establishment of clear and transparent salary policies aligns with the concept of organizational change and the role of management in addressing the wage gap. This aligns with the theoretical framework of organizational behavior, which emphasizes the influence of organizational policies and practices on employee outcomes. The literature suggests that organizations need to adopt fair and transparent salary policies that focus on skills, experience, and performance rather than gender to promote equal pay (Krizikova & Pavlica, 2004).

#### Theme 6: Leadership and Inclusion

1. In your opinion, what role does leadership play in promoting gender equality and fostering a supportive and inclusive work environment?

Respondent n.3.: *"Leadership plays a crucial role in advocating for its team members/employees when faced with difficult situations... I did not file a complaint myself, but there was a situation when my manager made another colleague apologize to me*

*regarding her -it was a woman, yes- (emphasis) insensitive joke about my home country. I personally did not feel offended by it, but it was nice that my manager stood up for me. I accepted the apology, and the conflict was resolved."*

Respondent n.5.: *"There has been some conflict within my team, and it was my job to narrow them down. Being inclusive and supportive is a norm for every successful leader. There are many conflict resolution strategies that you develop after some time in a leadership, but there are also mandatory trainings you go through, considering the company you work for cares about its employees. So, I would say, it is not only the leadership that plays the important role, but also the organization as such. The leader can literally lead as an example, demonstrate the inclusive behavior in a daily interaction, but so does the organization!"*

Respondent n.8.: *"You see, leaders have the power to make a real difference. When it comes to gender equality, they can't just talk the talk; they need to walk the walk. First, leaders should create a zero-tolerance policy for any form of gender-based discrimination or bias. That means no turning a blind eye or sweeping things under the rug. And when it comes to training, regular diversity and inclusion sessions are a must. By educating the team, we can break down the stereotypes and together create a more inclusive culture. (thinking) I can share an example that happened in the past. So, there was this incident where one of our team members made some really inappropriate comments about how a female colleague looked. It was totally unacceptable, and our leadership knew they had to act fast. They made sure to support the colleague and didn't stop only there but fired the person (person responsible for the comment). That sent a strong message to everyone."*

The responses from the interviewees can be analyzed within the framework of the theory of gendered organizations, which focuses on the impact of gender bias in organizational cultures and the role of leadership in promoting inclusivity and addressing conflicts. This theory, as discussed by Krizikova and Pavlica (2004), explains how organizations often cultivate a gendered environment where gender inequalities manifest in various ways. In line with this theory, the observations made in the paragraph regarding the use of derogatory language, exclusionary practices, and the marginalization of women's contributions within organizations can be understood.

The theory of gendered organizations underscores the need for leadership intervention and behaviors that foster inclusivity and respect. Leaders play a crucial role in challenging and changing the gendered dynamics within organizations, particularly when it comes to the experiences of women managers. The responses provided by the interviewees further highlight the significance of leadership intervention in addressing gender biases and promoting inclusivity.

By taking action against inappropriate comments and supporting affected colleagues, leaders exemplify inclusive behavior and set a positive example for others to follow. These actions not only address immediate conflicts but also contribute to the overall culture and climate of the organization. Aligning with this theoretical framework, the responses from the interviewees provide valuable insights. Respondent n.3 mentions a situation where their manager stood up for them in response to an insensitive comment from a colleague, highlighting the importance of leadership in addressing conflicts and promoting inclusivity. Respondent n.5 emphasizes the role of both leadership and the organization in promoting inclusivity and resolving conflicts, mentioning the importance of communication, conflict resolution strategies, and mandatory trainings in fostering an inclusive work environment. Respondent n.8 discusses a case where their leadership took decisive action by supporting an affected colleague and firing the person responsible for inappropriate comments, showcasing the role of leadership in setting a positive example.

These responses align with the theory of gendered organizations and the importance of leadership intervention in challenging gender biases and fostering inclusive workplace cultures (Krizikova & Pavlica, 2004). They demonstrate how leaders can actively contribute to promoting gender equality by addressing conflicts, supporting affected individuals, and promoting inclusivity in their organizations. Through their actions, leaders create an environment where gender biases and discrimination are challenged, and where employees feel valued and respected, regardless of their gender (Krizikova & Pavlica, 2004).

The respondents generally agree that leadership plays a crucial role in promoting gender equality and creating a supportive and inclusive work environment. The examples shared highlight the importance of leadership intervention, inclusive behavior, and organizational support in fostering a positive workplace culture.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the interviews with 10 women in managerial positions and their experience with navigating the hegemonic work culture in Prague, several key themes and insights emerge.

The prevailing cultural norms and expectations surrounding gender in the workplace vary among respondents. While some women feel that women's lack of confidence and negotiation skills contribute to the wage gap, others emphasize the importance of challenging traditional gender roles and expectations.

The impact of cultural norms and practices on the advancement of women within the workplace is also apparent. Some women describe instances where individual biases affect opportunities for women, even in organizations that generally promote equality. Maternity leave and its impact on career progression and salary growth are mentioned as challenges faced by women. The need for better support during and after maternity leave, as well as more flexible work arrangements, is highlighted as essential for promoting women's career progression. Furthermore, the division of household responsibilities and the impact of patriarchal sex-gender systems on work dynamics highlight the need to address gender inequalities holistically. The findings regarding the gender gap in housework and the experiences of separating married and cohabitating couples underscore the complexity of gendered expectations in both domestic and work spheres.

Gendered expectations and norms play a significant role in various aspects of professional experiences, such as decision-making, leadership styles, and career advancement opportunities. Women mention challenges in being heard and valued in decision-making processes, as well as the pressure to conform to traditional leadership styles. However, some women have successfully navigated these tensions by asserting their own unique leadership styles and approaches, resulting in positive outcomes for their teams.

Masculine influence and biases within the organizational culture are acknowledged by respondents. Instances of biased treatment, comments, and stereotypes are mentioned, highlighting the need for continued efforts to challenge and overcome these influences. The importance of effective communication, open conversations, and mentorship programs in addressing biases is emphasized, as these initiatives not only contribute to combating gender inequalities but also have a positive impact on individuals, serving as motivation for the women managers in their daily work.

The role of the wage gap in perpetuating gender inequalities in the workplace is acknowledged. Women express frustration and disappointment at the discrepancies in pay, despite equal qualifications and job responsibilities. Taking action, such as confronting HR and demanding equal pay, is seen as crucial for addressing the wage gap and advocating for fair compensation.

Leadership is seen as playing a vital role in promoting gender equality and fostering a supportive and inclusive work environment. Respondents emphasize the need for leaders to actively address gender-based discrimination, implement diversity and inclusion training, and support their team members. Examples of leadership intervention to address conflicts and promote inclusivity are mentioned as positive instances that women anticipate and appreciate.

Overall, the interviews highlight the complex landscape that women managers face in navigating the work culture in Prague. While progress has been made in promoting gender equality, challenges and biases persist. Strategies such as promoting open communication, providing support during maternity leave, implementing transparent salary policies, and fostering inclusive leadership are not only recommended to address these issues but also serve as motivational factors for women in their professional journeys. The experiences and insights shared by the women managers interviewed reflect the need for ongoing efforts to create a more equitable and inclusive work culture.

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## LIMITATIONS

While this study focuses on the experiences of women managers within the work culture from a gender perspective, it's important to acknowledge the influence of other factors such as race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. These intersecting identities shape the overall work culture and individuals' experiences within it.

However, due to the specific research focus on gender, this study does not directly explore the intersectionality of gender with race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. It is crucial to recognize that the findings may not fully capture the complex dynamics when gender intersects with these factors, and the experiences of women managers from diverse backgrounds may differ significantly.

Future research should explore the interplay between gender and these additional identity factors to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by women managers in diverse work cultures. Examining the intersectionality of gender, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation would provide valuable insights into how multiple dimensions of identity interact and shape individuals' experiences within the workplace.

Another limitation of this study is the sample size and composition. The study includes interviews with only 10 women managers, representing a small subset of the overall population. While efforts were made to ensure diversity within the sample in terms of age, and expertise, the findings may not fully capture the range of experiences and perspectives within the broader population of women managers.

The limited sample size restricts the generalizability of the study's findings. Each participant's unique background and context may have influenced their experiences, and these experiences may not be representative of all women managers. It is important to acknowledge that individual experiences within the work culture can vary significantly based on factors such as organizational context, industry, and individual circumstances.

Furthermore, the study's focus on a specific geographical location, such as Prague, further limits the generalizability of the findings. Work cultures and gender dynamics can vary across different regions, countries, and cultural contexts. Therefore, the findings may not be directly transferable to other settings or contexts.

To mitigate these limitations, future studies should consider larger and more diverse samples, encompassing a broader range of ages, expertise levels, business fields, and geographical locations. This would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the

experiences of women managers within different work cultures and provide a more nuanced perspective on gender dynamics and organizational practices.

Despite these limitations, the insights gained from this study contribute to the existing literature on women managers and their experiences within work cultures. They provide valuable understandings and areas for further exploration, serving as a basis for future research endeavors in this field.

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