

Favour of Women?

Promises and Disillusions of Boundaryless Career in the Finnish ICT Sector

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Abstract

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Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector is a newcomer in the Finnish economy. The pace of growth in the Finnish electronics industry was extraordinary over the 1990s. It led to an industrial restructuring in which knowledge replaced capital, raw materials and energy as the dominant factor in production (Ali-Yrkkö et al. 2000, 20). While Nokia's role in the Finnish economy is considerable, there are a large number of other actors in the ICT sector: hundreds of small and medium-sized fast growing companies networking and co-operating with Nokia. The strong ICT sector is largely the outcome of mutually enforcing, dynamic cluster relations, which were intensified during the 1990s (Ali-Yrkkö 2001, 82).

The ICT sector is a sector of young men; in over half of the Finnish ICT companies the majority of employees are men under 35. Only in one out of four Finnish companies the personnel is as young as this. (Kandolin and Huuhtanen 2002, see also Heilmann 2004) The boundaryless career model is thought to guarantee new possibilities also for women managers in the ICT sector.

There is a growing consensus that careers are changing from traditional, hierarchical, linear and organizationally bound models to more fluid arrangements (Arthur and Rousseau 1996). The boundaryless career concept captures territory from the old career thinking. Mobility between employers, networks, and changing hierarchical structures in organizations, as well as personal and family reasons are theorized to bring changes to career patterns in the future (Heilmann 2004).

Boundaryless careers can be defined by several factors. In boundaryless career the identity of a person is not derived from any one employer. Career can be seen as a series of steps and it can progress in multiple organizations. The idea that person 'owns' his/her career is typical to boundarylessness. Boundaryless career environment encourages person to learn and build strong self-awareness. Boundaryless career actor is not loyal to any one employer and he/she is willing to take risks. Fulfillment and enjoyment are the primary career choice drivers, earning money does not play a crucial role. Boundaryless career actor

perceives him-/herself as mobile and he/she is not overly concerned about succeeding with current employer. (Arthur and Rousseau 1996, Hall et al. 1996, Dowd and Kaplan 2005)

The discussion about careers has been very masculine. Career theories have mainly been developed by 'white males of European descent', leading to the fact that they have been most useful for understanding the behavior of Western white males. (Brown & Brooks, 1997, 7)

Cooper and Lewis (1999, 38 - 40) state that "the trend toward a short-term contract and freelance culture has led to what employers euphemistically refer to as the 'flexible workforce', although in family-friendly terms it is anything but flexible." They also claim that "women everywhere are historically more experienced at discontinuous career patterns, flowing in and out of the labor market, working part-time and on short-term contracts." Whatever the case, they believe that the masculine model of work and career making is giving way to a postmodern pluralism. The changes in the nature of work are thought to benefit above all women.

The latest discussion of women's career has made a total U-turn: there has been writings about women belonging to home and the dilemma of combining work and family has been seen as women's problem only. According to this, the rosy illusions of the boundarylessness and the ICT sector as the saviors of women's careers seem to fall flat. Or have they?

The data used in this study consists of the interviewees of ICT managers in Finland, mainly engaging in developing software. Their work was connected to projects where suitable applications were developed for customers' needs. Applications were designed in interaction with customer representatives and software developers. (Heilmann 2004)

The data used in this study show that the gender structure is often seen as transparent in organizations. The unequal gender structure is justified by biology and competences of the workers. However, the women that have been able to create an upward career in the ICT sector feel that they can never reach the top, however flexible and boundaryless the sector is thought to be.

Introduction

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector is a newcomer in the Finnish economy. The pace of growth in the Finnish electronics industry was extraordinary over the 1990s. It led to an industrial restructuring in which knowledge replaced capital, raw materials and energy as the dominant factor in production (Ali-Yrkkö et al. 2000, 20). While Nokia's role in the Finnish economy is considerable, there are a large number of other actors in the ICT sector: hundreds of small and medium-sized fast growing companies, many of them networking and co-operating with Nokia. The strong ICT sector is largely the outcome of mutually enforcing, dynamic cluster relations, which were intensified during the 1990s (Ali-Yrkkö 2001, 82).

The ICT sector is a sector of young men; in over half of the Finnish ICT companies the majority of employees are men under 35. Only in one out of four Finnish companies the personnel is as young as this. (Kandolin and Huuhtanen 2002, see also Heilmann 2004) However, the boundaryless career model is thought to guarantee new possibilities also for women managers in the ICT sector. In this paper we examine the expectations and outcomes of the new career era; do women really benefit from the new kind of career thinking in the Finnish ICT sector, and if they do, how does it show?

Research Method and Data

The data of this study is twofold: we use two different research materials, both conducted by interviewing in Finnish ICT companies. The first data consists of 15 interviewees of ICT managers in Finland, mainly engaging in developing software. The data was gathered in 2002. Managers' work was connected to projects where suitable applications were developed for customers' needs. Applications were designed in interaction with customer representatives and software developers. (Heilmann 2004) The second data consists of 5 interviews, representing the managerial level, gathered in 1999 - 2000 in a large

telecommunications company. The research material mainly focuses on personal development, career making and the question of how to combine work life with family life, but it also reflects the overall career making situation in the ICT sector. By using two different data we wish to draw attention to the possible changes and ways to conceptualize women actors in the ICT sector.

Changing Career

There is a growing consensus that careers are changing from traditional, hierarchical, linear and organizationally bound models to more fluid arrangements (Arthur and Rousseau 1996). The boundaryless career concept captures territory from the old career thinking. Mobility between employers, networks, and changing hierarchical structures in organizations, as well as personal and family reasons are theorized to bring changes to career patterns in the future (Heilmann 2004). Women should cope on with the changing career environment, and within the ICT sector this means an increasing role of the professional networks in career advancement. (Aaltio and Heilmann 2006)

Boundaryless careers can be defined by several factors. In boundaryless career the identity of a person is not derived from any one employer. Career can be seen as a series of steps and it can progress in multiple organizations. The idea that a person 'owns' his/her career is typical to boundarylessness. Boundaryless career environment encourages persons to learn and build strong self-awareness. Boundaryless career actor is not loyal to any one employer and he/she is willing to take risks. Fulfillment and enjoyment are the primary career choice drivers, earning money does not play a crucial role. Boundaryless career actor perceives him-/herself as mobile and he/she is not overly concerned about succeeding with current employer. (Arthur and Rousseau 1996, Hall et al. 1996, Dowd and Kaplan 2005)

The discussion about careers has been very masculine. Career theories have mainly been developed by 'white males of European descent', leading to the fact that they have been most useful for understanding the behavior of Western white males. (Brown and Brooks, 1997, 7) In fact, gender became an issue in the career context not until at the end of the 1970s, in the wake of Rosabeth Moss Kanter's classic book "Men and Women of the Corporation".

Cooper and Lewis (1999, 38 - 40) state that "the trend toward a short-term contract and freelance culture has led to what employers euphemistically refer to as the 'flexible workforce', although in family-friendly terms it is anything but flexible." They also claim that "women everywhere are historically more experienced at discontinuous career patterns, flowing in and out of the labour market, working part-time and on short-term contracts." Whatever the case, they believe that the masculine model of work and career making is giving way to postmodern pluralism. The changes in the nature of work are thought to benefit above all women.

Whatever the discourse about women benefiting from the boundaryless career is, there always seems to be one but. There remains the difference that makes women constitutionally unsuited to career, namely the potential motherhood. It seems that "only by renouncing their maternal part, or by sublimating it in other roles, can women obtain legitimation within organisations and compete in the career stakes. The spectre of motherhood still conditions women's chances to enter employment". (Poggio 2003, 13 - 14)

The latest discussion of women's career has indeed made a total U-turn: there has been writings about women belonging to home and the dilemma of combining work and family has been seen as women's problem only. According to this, the rosy illusions of the boundarylessness and the ICT sector as the saviors of women's careers seem to fall flat. Or do they?

Finnish ICT Sector

ICT sector can be characterized as a cluster. Clusters are used to describe networks of organizations, in which competitive advantage grows from dynamic interaction between actors. Cluster relations cross the boundaries of sectors, and spur innovation and upgrading through spillovers and knowledge transfer. A cluster can also be defined as a "network of networks", which has economic importance at the macro level (Ali-Yrkkö et al. 2000). The network dynamics causes positive effects on companies' competitiveness. The

information and communication cluster, based on competences and technical development, has been able to offer new job opportunities, even if the times for most rapid growth seems to be over.

In Finland the main areas of the ICT cluster are manufacturers of the communications equipment and service provision. These areas have increased their share in the information and communication cluster (Hernesniemi et al. 2001). Around the key industries there are industries that are considered to harbour special potential in enhancing the competitive advantage of the system through innovative applications on ICT, or through improving its functional preconditions (Paija 2001). The growth of the ICT cluster is not only connected to the growth of the markets in question, however. It is also connected to the general rise of the technical level in production and society (see Koski et al. 2001).

ICT sector is a newcomer in the Finnish economy. The pace of growth in the Finnish electronics industry was extraordinary over the 1990s. It led to an industrial restructuring in which knowledge replaced capital, raw materials and energy as the dominant factor in production (Ali-Yrkkö, 2001). Finnish ICT Company Nokia is a world leader in mobile communications. Nokia connects people to each other and to the information that matters to them with easy-to-use and innovative products like mobile phones, devices and solutions for imaging, games, media and businesses. The net sales of Nokia totalled EUR 29,3 billion (2004). Nokia provides equipment, solutions and services for network operators and corporations. The company has 15 manufacturing facilities in 9 countries and research and development in 12 countries. At the end of 2004, Nokia employed approximately 55,500 people. Nokia is a broadly held company with listings on four major exchanges. (<http://www.nokia.com>, 2005). While Nokia's role in the Finnish economy is considerable, there are a large number of other actors in the ICT sector: hundreds of small and medium-sized fast growing companies, many of them networking and co-operating with Nokia. The strong ICT sector is largely the outcome of mutually enforcing, dynamic cluster relations, which were intensified during the 1990s.

In the study of Heilmann (2004) the ICT managers are mainly engaged in developing software. The work is largely connected to projects where suitable applications are developed for customers' needs. Applications are usually designed in interaction with customer representatives and software developers (Heilmann 2004). The customers and the users of ICT in Finland are both women and men, but the majority of the workforce consists of men.

Because the ICT industry went through a very dynamic expansion during the 1990s, there was a big demand especially for young ICT professionals who had not only the necessary technical skills but who could also understand the needs of customers within the new economic environment (Ruohonen et al. 2002). Universities and research institutes have been successful in producing competent human resources and world-class research and development to support the development of the cluster. The supplier industries, most particularly the electronics industry, in turn, have become highly specialized over the last decade to meet the needs of the key activities of the sector. The venture capital market, as an example of associated services, has emerged as a new and important source of funding that has greatly enhanced preconditions for growth in the cluster (Paija 2001).

In the future the software sector will grow from a 'nerd business' into a professional business. Diverse skills relating to internationalization, especially experience in business management associated with international trade, language skills, negotiation skills and knowledge of different cultures and administrative bureaucracy will be in great demand. In terms of personal skills visionary capabilities, the ability to perceive matters in their entirety and to concentrate on essentials, communication skills, project and teamwork skills, adaptability, the ability to manage change, creativity and courage will be emphasized. Strategic expertise will focus especially on network-related capabilities and on understanding the changes brought by the new economy and value chains within the digital economy. Eclectic scientific knowledge, the ability to integrate and master international networks and teams consisting of persons with diverse skills, creativity and ability to visualise and innovate are needed (for future developments in the field, see Hernesniemi et al. 2001, <http://www.etla.fi>, 2002).

The need for wider and multifaceted competence in the software business is increasing. In addition to software-based technical and product competence, there are needs for business and marketing competence.

Knowledge of law, international competencies and an understanding of the meaning of production based on customer needs are all essential. There is also a need for comprehensive understanding of new challenges and opportunities created by the network and digital economy. Basic technical competence in the area of programming (e.g. skills of C++ and Java-programming languages) will remain important. In addition to these competencies the demand for general and personal competencies will increase. In addition to personal learning, the strategic learning of the organization and strategy management connected to it will increase (Rautkylä-Willey and Valtakari 2001).

Management and gender

Organizations in an economical sense are often described as 'black boxes', representing a classical input – output –model (Hatch 1997, 127). However, the world of the manager is complicated and confusing. Traditionally thinking manager plans, organizes, motivates, directs and controls. The manager adds foresight, order, purpose, integration of effort and effectiveness to the contributions of others (Strong 1965, 5). The manager works among diverse challenges. The multiple roles of a manager are described by Kivimäki-Kuitunen (2000, 78 - 91) as follows. First, assuring the commitment and motivation of personnel to agreed upon goals is one of the most important challenges for a supervisory manager and a premise for success. Additionally he/she recruits, familiarizes, agrees on goals, makes networks, acquires, discards and decodes information, communicates, follows, encourages, demands, takes care of the atmosphere of the organization and listens to problems. In addition to all this he/she is also a salesman/woman.

Barnard (1966) claims that executive work is not that *of* the organization, but the specialized work of *maintaining* the organization in operation. Mintzberg (1980) divides a manager's roles into 1) interpersonal roles, 2) informational roles and 3) decisional roles. In the interpersonal role a manager can be a *figurehead*. Because of his/her formal authority, the manager is a symbol, obliged to perform a number of duties. He/she can also be a *leader* who defines the atmosphere in which the organization works. Leadership involves interpersonal relationships between the leader and the led. The leader's role is clearly among the most significant of all roles, and has received far more attention than any other. The *liaison* role of the manager deals with the significant web of relationships that the manager maintains with numerous individuals and groups outside the organization that he/she heads. Informational roles are related to the receiving and transmitting of information. The manager as a *monitor* is about continually seeking, and being bombarded with, information that enables him/her to understand what is taking place in his/her organization and its environment. The manager's special access to information allows playing the important role of a *disseminator*, sending external information into his/her organization and internal information from one subordinate to another. While the disseminator role looks into the organization, in the *spokesman's* role the manager transmits information out to his organization's environment. The manager is often called upon to speak on behalf of his/her organization. The third category of managerial roles are the decisional roles. These roles involve the manager in the strategy-making process in his/her organization, in the process where significant organizational decisions are made. In the *entrepreneur's* role the manager acts as an initiator and designer of much of the controlled change in his/her organization. Whereas the entrepreneur's role focuses on voluntary action by the manager to bring about controlled organizational change, the *disturbance handler's* role deals with involuntary situations and change that is partially beyond the manager's control. The manager can also act as a *resource allocator*. Resource allocation is the heart of the organization's strategy-making system. The manager must oversee the system by which organizational resources are allocated. The manager's final role is that of a participant in *negotiation* activities. From time to time, the organization finds itself in major, non-routine negotiations with other organizations or individuals. It is frequently the manager who leads the contingent from his/her organization. It has been claimed that managers are essentially generalists in organizations of specialists. This is only partly true. Managers are generalists when considered in terms of the set of specialist functions performed by their organizations. But when compared with other kinds of work, managerial work is also specialized. Managers must perform ten roles outlined that involve their own kinds of specialized behaviour. (Mintzberg 1980, 58 – 94)

The management described above has very practical roots, concentrating on the actual tasks of managers. However, the rise of the postmodernism forces us to meet a more complicated and ambiguous managerial environment. The reality of organizations includes a variety of contradictions, uncertainties, ambivalences

and incompletenesses. For example, none of the above mentioned classifications for managers present gender in a crucial role in management. The basic difficulty of gender in management is that gender is women's thing only. When talking about men in the context of management, strategies and risk-taking, they are not gender questions, but neutral understandings of things in question. The acknowledgement of gender seems to disturb the fluency and interactive nature of everyday management. It is much easier to hush gender away. (Ropo et al. 2005) Aaltio-Marjosola and Sevón (1997, 269) state that "gender research is seen as a possible way to find alternatives to organizational change that answer the need for adaptation to new requirements caused by changing values and ideals in work life, new working styles and new types of organizations". An important postmodernist notion is the one of giving voice to silence, "seeking greater levels of participation by marginalized members of organizations" (such as women) (Hatch 1997, 46 - 48).

Women in the Finnish Labour Markets

Finland shares the idea of the Nordic welfare model with solid ideas of women's role in the work production and maintenance of the welfare state, including a comprehensive system of social welfare, exhaustive agreements on wages and working conditions and a large public administration. The Nordic gender regime assumes that both men and women participate to working life. (Aaltio and Kovalainen 2003, 185)

Finnish women most often work full-time. In 2002, women's employment rate was 66,2 %. The corresponding rate for men was 69,2 %. In public sector, 70 % of the employees are women, working mainly in social, health and educational services. In municipalities, even 77 % of work force is women. But then in industrial sector, only 30 % of wage earners are women, many of them working on textile and clothing industry. (Naiset ja miehet työmarkkinoilla 2003) The Finnish labour markets are drastically segregated by business sectors and professions, both horizontally and vertically. Most of the women serve, care and educate while most of the men manufacture and manage. (Kinnunen and Korvajärvi 1996, 11-12)

The minor number of female managers and women's poorer possibilities to progress in career are seen as a big problem both in research and in work life (see e.g. Korvajärvi 1996, 89). Recently, the role of women in the ICT sector has yielded wide interest (see e.g. Peterson 2005, Pietiläinen 2002), as the ICT sector is seen to represent the new era of working and provide more equal solutions for both genders.

Women in the ICT Sector

In the following we will examine the results of the two researches (Heilmann 2004 and Lepistö 2002) and reflect them in order to understand the development of women's roles in the ICT sector. We will discuss the work in ICT sector and its' impacts on women (Heilmann 2004), but also take a more general view on the framework suggested by the ICT sector (Lepistö 2002).

The ICT managers in the doctoral dissertation of Heilmann (2004) were mainly engaged in developing software. The work was connected to projects where suitable applications were developed for customers' needs. Applications were designed in interaction with customer representatives and software developers.

Within this sector, production can be defined as a purely masculine area. ICT sector professions require mathematical skills and girls usually choose something else than mathematics at school. There are ever fewer female students in technical universities. This is the main reason for the scarcity of females among the technical professions, but in the interviews of the male ICT managers, attitudes that favoured males and showed suspicions about the competences of women were also found. (Heilmann 2004)

Women in the ICT sector seemed to work mostly in supportive assignments like testing, documentation or as assistants (Heilmann 2004). There are signs that women in the ICT business have accepted the masculine world and made themselves "good guys". Even if the individuality of the workmates was emphasized, a clear separation between women and men of the workforce was often made in the interviews.

- *Women work in documentation. Only one of them works in production. I see no difficulties. They are very nice girls. (ICT manager, male)*

It seems that the gender matters do not have much importance in work situations. Anyhow women notice the existence of the glass ceiling in their career development. The career progression of women usually stops to middle management. However, the men managers did not consider the concept of glass ceiling in the interviews (Heilmann 2004).

Networks in the field seem to be gendered with the dominant role of men. This is clearly recognized by the female interviewees, even if these managers seem to have found their own ways to cope with the situation:

- *I feel comfortable working with men here. I have worked a lot with them. They have taken my job positively. I think there exists some kind of "glass ceiling" for women however. It doesn't bother me. I have a nice job. But there exist many men's affairs when men do things together. Other Department Managers are taken along more easily because they are male. I don't know if they think that it would be difficult if a woman goes along. Boys can't talk boy's business then. Actually I notice it only when I start thinking, it doesn't bother me every day. (ICT manager, female)*

- *In my first job the male colleagues helped me a lot. It was very nice. Both in personal relations and work occasions they have treated me very well. From customers' side and from everywhere else it is the same. I have been privileged to be in these work situations as a woman. Sometimes, in the situations where male outsiders are present and where I have not been before, males talk like there is not any female present. They do not pay any attention to female members of the group. But now when I am already older and gained competence they listen. (ICT manager, female)*

- *I don't think gender matters at all. Almost a half of my team members are female. When you look at the organization chart you see more males in upper levels of this organization. It would be nice to have there more females. (ICT manager, female)*

Also the male managers of the ICT sector are aware of the gendered nature of their work environment:

- *There could be more women working here. I don't know, maybe it comes from different hobbies. Boys and girls do different things. Boys have always been interested in machines, computers and so on. (ICT manager, male)*

- *Secretaries have always been female but I see that this workplace is equal for both sexes. (ICT manager, male)*

- *This gender structure works here. The secretary has always been female but there are five or six other women working in our organization as well. Mostly they work in documentation, only one works in production. There isn't any harm of them, they are nice girls. Of course, when you have to arrange some company events with sauna, so you must divide the personnel to males and females. But it happens everywhere, there is no trouble. But from a professional point of view I don't see any trouble. (ICT manager, male)*

In the interviews male managers raise female gender as a problem in terms of its minority, not so much professionally. However, female workforce is not recognized as a source for creativity among male ICT professionals. Diversity is emphasized as a value as such in the working environment. Also the customers in the ICT sector are both women and men.

Information professionals are rapidly increasing not only in numbers, but also in respect of modern companies' needs for development, which places new demands on compensation and career development policies. Both women's and men's work are valuable, partly because customers' needs are gender dependent. Customers' needs should be understood better and studied if there is also a gender gap to get filled.

- *This work environment is not so one-sidedly male because on the customer side there are also many women. Women are often even in the majority in meetings. (ICT manager, male)*

Companies are still facing a clearly exceptional labour market situation where there is a continuous shortage of competent information professionals. The attractive labour market and biased compensation structure risks the commitment of professionals and leads to high turnover rates. As a result of this, not only company attractiveness and the working climate need to be developed, but also exceptional recruitment methods need to be introduced. Due to the pace of technical advancement, the developmental needs of information professionals are of a scale of their own. With the aging workforce this challenges the human resource development and career planning of the company. Because of scarce human resources, hard workload and developmental need, work exhaustion prevails, which in turn calls for application of new and flexible working practices (Holm et al. 2002). The attempts to combine work and private life with family responsibilities should be taken as a serious challenge for ICT companies' human resource management. Not only women but also young men at the family building age can benefit from this kind of support.

The Finnish ICT sector is very network based and this is a special challenge for women who are a minority with not so many contacts in the field. Networks are often gendered by nature. This evidently edges out women of the professionals and might hinder their career advancement within the workplaces. The meaning of networks should be studied as well, from the angle how both sexes can take advantage of the networks and what this means to the development of the field in general. The meaning of software-work is increasing in the field, and the sector needs to acquire multi-skilled competence in the future. (Aaltio and Heilmann 2006)

ICT companies seem to be very masculine environments. Among men there exists some kind of suspicion of women's competences in the area of information and communication technology. Women's tasks are usually connected to lower-level or supportive assignments and their career progression may stop to the glass ceiling. Concurrently the existence of both sexes in the ICT companies is appreciated, but its importance for the well-being of the companies is not recognized.

- This is a masculine environment. There could be more girls here. It forces boys to shape up when a girl sits at the same table. I haven't met any good female software developers but I know they exist. It is possible for girls to develop software, though it is a technical area. (ICT manager, male)

It looks as if there is a double gaining of expertise for women of the ICT sector: first, in the school years the technical competence is acquired. The basic competence is based on mathematical skills and education first in the secondary school and after that in technical universities, i.e. the ICT sector becomes a masculine world from the beginning of education. After the gained formal education the competence is developed towards more specific know-how expertise inside the ICT companies and by lateral movement between the companies. The gendered nature of work traditions, company cultures and networks should be taken into better account and thus invite competent and highly motivated women and men to enter and to advance in the field. In the future technical skills are not enough for competence, and women can therefore enter at least the first expertise level more easily than before. (Aaltio and Heilmann 2006)

The general background expectations operating in the ICT sector relate, above all, to the flexibility of the sector. Next, we will give voice to managers of different sections of a large telecommunications company conceptualizing their working environment and its' response to the requirements of boundaryless careers.

The ways to talk about career making in the ICT sector among the interviewees is surprisingly similar. The talk clearly reflects the boundaryless career thinking.

- A career today, it goes up and down, it is a sort of a bumpy road. I do not believe in going upwards anymore. My values relate to respecting individuals, the freedom of work: you agree on certain objectives and after that, the means to reach them are relatively free... It is not a question of sitting in the office, but of doing the job. The place is not important. (Business development, male)

- This is not bound to the clock. (Business development, male)

- Nowadays there are several ways to communicate, it is up to your own activity and about finding the means. (Business development, male)

- The main thing is that you feel that you are doing something that is important to yourself. (Central management, male)

- I have concentrated on what I like, what is close to my heart and what brings satisfaction. (Quality management, male)

- You decide yourself, whatever it means. (Quality management, male)

- I work one afternoon per week from home. It is surely negotiable for other people as well. (Human resource development, female)

However positive and flexible the interviewees see the actual working, there is still a high price to pay in order to succeed in the hectic sector.

- My work follows me everywhere. That is the tricky factor, job pressing you too much. (Business development, male, talking about his paternity leave)

- My typical working day is more or less 9 or 9 ½ hours long. But at home, after I have put my kids into bed, I read e-mails etc. at least every other night, and work some 1 ½ hours again. I feel I have an unearthly chronic sleep deficit. Sometimes it feels like I just cannot take it physically, I am so tired. (Human resource management, female)

- You cannot count on me too much during the weeks. I have pretty long days plus the travels. I have awfully little time of my own. [I hope that after a couple of years] I can take back the time and [invest in] the other spheres of life that I have neglected. (Business development, male)

- People work madly here... I think people should not be driven into that kind of situation, you just have to have free time. You cannot take that too long, it eats away the motivation. [This way of working] I think it is characteristic to this company. (Human resource management, female)

- We have had hard times, as the crowd has changed speedily. Now we have a calm season going on, but according to my experience, it will not last long. There will be another change and then we go again. (Business development, male)

- If I have something more important, I work in a couple of nights during the week, after the kids have gone to sleep. I rather do that than stretch the actual working day. (Central management, male)

- [Occasionally] my child asks me why I always go to work. I feel guilty about that. (Central management, male)

- It is a fact that if you work hard and you have a busy work, it is away from something else. (Central management, male)

- Work is a threat to marriage. (Central management, male)

- Combining work and family is a significant challenge, you could easily work 24 hours per day. My work days are some 10, 12 hours long. Now we are introducing this 'quality time' concept in our family. (Quality management, male)

- I have to admit that my children have asked me why I have so much work to do. (Human resource development, female)

Despite the mad working culture, the interviewees feel that the company supports them in many ways.

- *Corporate culture must tolerate the existence of families. I think it is understood here and the company seems to take it quite seriously, people are not deliberately pushed to the edge. (Business development, male)*

- *It is almost a rule that every father in this company takes paternity leave. (Human resource management, female)*

- *I feel that the company invests in me. (Business development, male)*

- *Nobody questions if I have to break off a meeting and say that I have to leave to pick up my kids. It is totally acceptable. This company does not pressure or force. (Central management, male)*

- *This company is an exception in that sense that there are a great deal of fun and inspiring challenges. It carries you easily forward. (Central management, male)*

- *The atmosphere is vibrant, people work enthusiastically. (Human resource development, female)*

- *People can organize their work as they like. (Quality management, male)*

- *Already the company's basic values give understanding [to the organization]. (Human resource development, female)*

- *Everyone can plan the work to suit their needs and there are possibilities for teleworking etc. This has been very important to me. (Human resource development, female)*

Conclusions

The data used in this study show that the gender structure is often seen as transparent in organizations. The unequal gender structure is justified by biology and competences of the workers. However, those women that have been able to create an upward career in the ICT sector feel that they can never reach the top, however flexible and boundaryless the sector is thought to be. The talk of the 'boys' of the ICT sector reflects the traditional gender segregation and the stereotypes related to women: it is not questioned that secretaries are women, and women are referred to as 'girls'.

The comments of the interviewees draw a picture of a very masculine culture with long hours and hard working. Most of the promises of the boundaryless career thinking are lost in the managerial level; work is still the number one and other spheres of life are subordinated to it. When examining this with the gender lenses, we notice that this does not benefit women at all. However, it is noteworthy that we are talking about managerial level here: the pressures and expectations are tougher there than at the grass roots, and the realities of demanding work cannot be escaped. The work just becomes more hectic day by day. Still, if the example of the managerial level is the one encouraging mad working, it no doubt has its' reflections in the lower levels. And it is not women-friendly at all.

The 'worker-friendly' policies (flexible working hours, teleworking etc.) introduced by the ICT companies are often useful in the *practical* level; however, they do not e.g. diminish work load (how could they?), and thus benefit the workers in the *personal* level. Although career making in the ICT sector seems to be pretty much up to the person and in the light of our data, people who come to work in the sector, do not attempt to create a career as such, there are sacrifices that must be made. And often these sacrifices strike women harder than men.

The data presents the ICT sector as hectic and ever changing. The ICT sector is seen as instable and fluctuating; the wastage rate of personnel is high. This sets a basic dilemma for women: you should be young when entering the sector, work like crazy and in different assignments, and still have time to plan the family life. And when you have reached the glass ceiling you should be satisfied to your present position and give up for planning your career anymore.

There are *ostensible* possibilities for women to make progress in their careers in the ICT sector. Careers in the managerial level assume such great sacrifices that they do not arouse interest among women.

In the future we should examine the reasons why women's careers in the ICT sector often stop before reaching the managerial positions. Until now, nothing has changed; rather, the recent discussion about careers for example in the Finnish newspapers has even emphasized the *domestic* role of women. In the light of this discussion, women are seen as a work-force reserve only, giving way to men and their attempts to create career. There still seems to be no space for women's progression.

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