

## **Introduction**

The term 'glass ceiling', first used in a 1986 *Wall Street Journal* special report by Hymowitz and Schellhardt on the corporate women, outlined a world in which corporate tradition and prejudice blocked access to the top for woman (Jackson 2001). Since then the term 'glass ceiling' has been characterised as an invisible yet very real barrier that women experience when they vie for promotion to top jobs (Davidson and Cooper 1992). Other associated terms include that of 'concrete ceiling' in relation to ethnic minority women, and 'sticky floor' holding skilled and talented women back in lesser jobs.

Women account for approximately half the UK workforce and one third of managers (Clarke 2004), but they are still conspicuous by their absence in senior management. This situation is mirrored in travel and tourism, despite this sector having a majority of female employees.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of those involved, managers at senior and middle levels, as to the existence of a glass ceiling *per se* as well as possible reasons for any under-representation, together with suggested ameliorative strategies for action. This was done by means of an on-line questionnaire, the results of which are outlined and discussed.

## **Statistics on Women in Management**

In the UK, women made up only 10% of directors at FTSE 100 companies in 2006 with the number falling from 121 women in 2005 to 117 in 2006 (EOR 2007a). Furthermore, a recent report from PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP suggests that although figures for women directors have increased somewhat in 2007, the proportion of women reaching the first rung of the executive ladder (senior professional) has fallen by 40% in the past five years (EOR 2007b). Based on such figures the Equal Opportunities Commission have estimated that it will take at least 40 years for women to achieve parity in positions of power in the boardroom (EOR 2006).

In terms of pay levels, although each gender performs about 13.3 million jobs, and while girls continue to outperform boys in education, it is estimated that female employees with a degree earn 23% less than their male equivalents (EOR 2007c). Overall it is estimated that female full-timers earn 17% less than their male colleagues.

Whilst there is variation in the figures for women in management and gender pay in different countries, the general picture remains the same. In a review that includes European countries, the US and Australia, Davidson and Burke (2004:3) conclude that, whilst there has been appreciable progress in some areas (entering the workforce, occupying managerial and professional jobs), progress has been much more limited in others (senior

management jobs, top wage earners, clout positions, corporate directorships).

### **Travel and Tourism**

Travel and tourism constitutes a complex and fragmented sector. Employment in the tourism sector is notoriously difficult to define comprehensively (Department of Employment, quoted in Purcell 1997: 36). Thus for example, industries that are primarily dependent upon tourism, such as travel agencies and hospitality, also provide services for non-tourism industries. As Purcell (1997) points out, there is no single UK agency responsible for promoting tourism or monitoring tourism-related employment. Government employment statistics are thus not classified in a way conducive to the identification and aggregation of relevant occupations (Purcell 1997: 36).

None the less it is worth looking at the statistics that are available; using figures from 1995 Purcell demonstrates the extent to which the sector is gendered, with accommodation and catering being characterized by a numerically female-dominated workforce, nearly three-quarters of whom were employed part-time, but with the travel organizations and carriers sector being predominantly a male preserve. Recent data provided by the Office of National Statistics for December 2006 (ONS 2007) show women making up almost 60% of employees in travel agencies and tour operators and a similar percentage in hotels, restaurants and bars.

In terms of vertical segregation, the under-representation of women at senior levels in the UK in general is mirrored in Travel and Tourism. Despite the fact that this sector has a majority of female employees overall, they are still under-represented in senior management. Hemmati (1999) points to the prevalence of the 'gender pyramid' in the tourism sector, with lower levels and occupations with few career development opportunities being dominated by women, whilst key management positions are dominated by men. This research study investigates possible reasons for this, together with actions that could be taken. As Jordan (1997) points out, some estimates suggest that the travel and tourism industry is the world's largest employer, and yet employment in this sector is a relatively under-researched area and this is particularly true in relation to areas such as sex discrimination and equal opportunities. The current research seeks to ameliorate this situation to some degree.

### **Possible Explanations**

In the literature on the glass ceiling a variety of explanations have been offered and various possible determinants proposed (van Vianen and Fischer 2002). It has been posited that attitudinal, behavioural and structural barriers exist that hinder career advancement for many women (Wood and Lindorff 2001). As Kolb et al (2003:10) point out; there are many different theories about the role gender plays in organizational life and about the causes of gender inequity. Each theory has its own perspective on the problem and on possible solutions. In addition, the explanations and solutions are not neatly discrete, but overlapping.

One theoretical perspective, the gender-centred, postulates that intrinsic biological differences between men and women account for the preponderance of men in senior management, i.e. that men are more likely to have the required traits and behaviours for such posts.

In a parallel to the nature/nurture debate, a second perspective suggests that men and women have different beliefs, attitudes and values that affect behaviour, but that these are formed through environmental influences such as upbringing and societal expectations. Such an explanation encompasses women's *self* perception and confidence which may in turn influence promotion-seeking behaviour. It also includes male biases and negative perceptions of women. Whether biologically or societally determined, the purported outcome is neatly summarised by Morrison and Glinow (1990:201): women's traits, behaviours, attitudes and socialization are said to make them inappropriate or deficient as managers, or Schein's (1973) well known analysis 'think manager, think male'. Interestingly, recent interest in 'feminine' management skills and their increased relevance in an era of flatter organisational structures, team work and participative leadership styles might lead one to predict an increased demand for women managers based on such an approach.

A third perspective concentrates on structural or organisational constraints facing women. These can be viewed in straightforward practical terms at the level of the organisation, such as a lack of child-care arrangements, networks or role models as well as encompassing domestic constraints, or widened and combined with aspects of the second perspective outlined above. Such theorising has drawn attention to masculine organisational culture as a likely explanation for the persistence of the glass ceiling phenomenon. A broader perspective such as this also encompasses the view that organisations reflect the power and status differences in wider society.

Suggested approaches or possible solutions can be linked to the problem-definition and underpinning theoretical perspective (see Fletcher and Ely, 2003 for example). Thus if the glass ceiling is a result of socialised sex differences and women lack the skills and know-how to 'play the game', then the appropriate approach to change would involve developing women's skills through training, mentoring, etc. If women's skills are not recognised or valued and women are subject to negative stereotyping by male managers, then diversity training and initiatives designed to celebrate differences would be the suggested approach. Structural constraints, resulting in less access and fewer resources for women, suggest equal opportunity and flexible working policies to compensate for these. The limitations of such approaches include that, in the first example, they redefine the issue as a women's problem and leave male standards intact; in the second they reinforce stereotypes, and in the third that they have minimal impact on underlying organisational culture and that work-family issues remain a 'woman's problem'. For deep-seated organisational culture issues that are embedded within belief systems, knowledge systems and social practices, emergent localised approaches to change are suggested (see for example Meyerson and Fletcher

2003) but with the realisation of likely resistance to change and the difficulty of sustaining such initiatives.

### **The Study**

An on-line questionnaire was distributed to representatives in the sector via industry data-bases and targeted at managers in the industry. 182 useable responses were received.

The first section of the questionnaire covered demographic details. In the following sections questions on perceptions of the existence of a glass ceiling and possible reasons for relative under-representation were based on the literature on gender in this area, using a Likert scale for responses. Results were tabulated both by overall subtotals and percentages, and by gender. Results differentiated by gender were subject to Kendall's tau-c tests which respect the ordered nature of the Likert scale responses.

Of the 182 respondents, 122 were female (67% of total) and 60 male (33%), a likely indication of the relative importance of such a study to the respective genders. The majority (61%) were in senior management positions, with a further 23% in middle management. Thirty-nine per cent listed 'travel' as best describing the sector their organisation operated in, 26% tourism, with the rest coming from hospitality, leisure and other categories.

Eighty-seven per cent worked full-time, although there was evidence of flexible working arrangements with 28% of these having some element of working from home in normal working hours and 14% working flexi-time. The size of organisation worked for ranged from 1 to 30000 employees, with the largest number of respondents working for small to medium organisations of between 1 and 100 employees.

Details of the sample are given in Table 1. On average, male managers were older than females. In addition, a smaller proportion of female managers were married or living with a partner than male respondents.

**Table 1 Demographic characteristics of the sample by sex**

		Gender		
		Female	Male	Total
		Count (n=122)	Count (n=60)	Count (n=182)
Age Category	29 or less	17 (14%)	6 (10%)	23 (13%)
	30-49	80 (66%)	28 (47%)	108 (59%)
	50 or more	25 (20%)	26 (43%)	51 (28%)
Highest qualification	First degree is highest qualification	51 (42%)	16 (27%)	67 (37%)
	Higher degree	29 (24%)	19 (32%)	48 (26%)
Married or living with partner		81 (66%)	46 (77%)	127 (70%)
Have dependent children		42 (34%)	23 (38%)	65 (36%)

***Equal Opportunities, Diversity and the Glass Ceiling***

Sixty per cent of the organisations worked for had a formal policy on equal opportunities or managing diversity, with 40 % not having one (this lack of formal procedures in this area probably reflecting the size of organisation). Eighty-two per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement ‘The organisation I work for values diversity’; whilst 71% felt that the same was true of the sector. In terms of a glass ceiling, defined as ‘an invisible but very real barrier that women experience when they vie for promotion to top jobs’, few respondents (11%) perceived that a glass ceiling existed in their own organisations, although 30% felt it was evident in the sector.

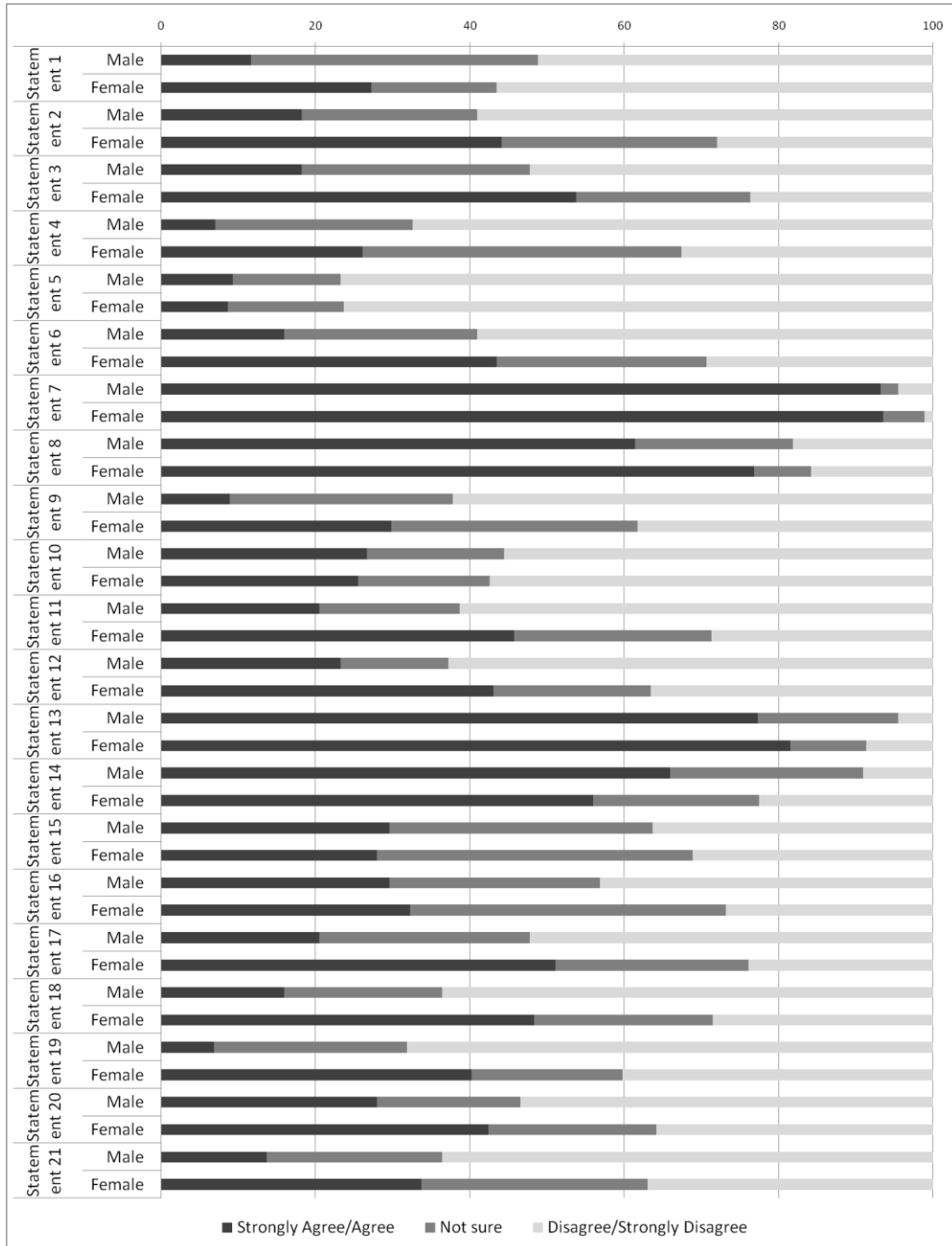
### ***Perceptions of Possible Reasons for Lack of Women in Senior Management***

Questions in this section were formulated as a result of a review of the literature providing theoretical explanations for senior management positions being male-dominated. Such explanations encompass overt discrimination, gender-related perceptions and self-perceptions, gender-related traits, the female role in child birth and childcare, characteristics of senior management jobs, through to organisational policies and practices such as provision of training, mentoring, flexible working and crèche facilities. Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with twenty one different statements on a five-point Likert scale (from strongly agree through to strongly disagree).

Reviewing the results in aggregate (i.e. male and female responses combined), 93% of those answering the question (the highest percentage obtained) either strongly agreed or agreed that both men and women have the required traits and abilities to be successful in senior management. Seventy-two per cent however strongly agreed/agreed that males are more likely to hold top positions in the sector. Fifty-nine per cent strongly agreed/agreed that female aspirations to reach top management positions are broadly the same as men, with 23% being not sure. Eighty per cent of those answering the question strongly agreed/agreed that women's career progress relative to men's in the sector was hampered by breaks in their career due to child birth and childcare.

The results are summarised in Table 2, which subdivides the responses by gender.

**Table 2 Perceptions of possible reasons for lack of women in senior management, by sex.**



The statements are listed below, together with the percentage of those strongly agreeing/agreeing with each statement (male and female combined) plus the Kendall's tau-c value. Where there is a significant difference between the responses by gender (significance <0.05) this is also indicated,

with significantly more women than men strongly agreeing/agreeing for the thirteen such statements indicated.

<b>Statement</b>	<b>%Strongly agree/agree (male-female combined)</b>	<b>Kendall's tau-c value</b>	<b>Significance (&lt;0.05)</b>
1. The characteristics of senior management posts discourage women from applying	22%	.056	
2. Women's career progress in the sector is hampered by the attitudes and behaviours of male managers	36%	.325	Yes
3. Women's career progress in the sector is hampered by the existence of male culture and 'old boys network'	42%	.382	Yes
4. Woman's career progress in the sector is hampered by organisational practices on selection and promotion	20%	.352	Yes
5. Men are more likely to hold top positions in the sector because, in general, men are more likely than women to have the particular traits and abilities required for such positions	9%	.035	
6. In today's world, women have particular traits and abilities that make them more suited to top management positions than men	35%	.350	Yes
7. In general, both men and women have the required traits and abilities to be successful in senior management positions	93%	-.053	
8. Males are more likely than females to hold top positions in the TTL&H sector	72%	.285	Yes
9. When it comes to promotion to top posts in the TTL&H sector, women are discriminated against	23%	.266	Yes
10. Woman are less ambitious to reach the top management positions in the sector	26%	-.055	
11. Women's career progress in TTL&H is hindered by the dominance of male executives within the sector	38%	.335	Yes
12. Women's career progress in TTL&H is hindered by a lack of self confidence in their own ability	37%	.228	Yes

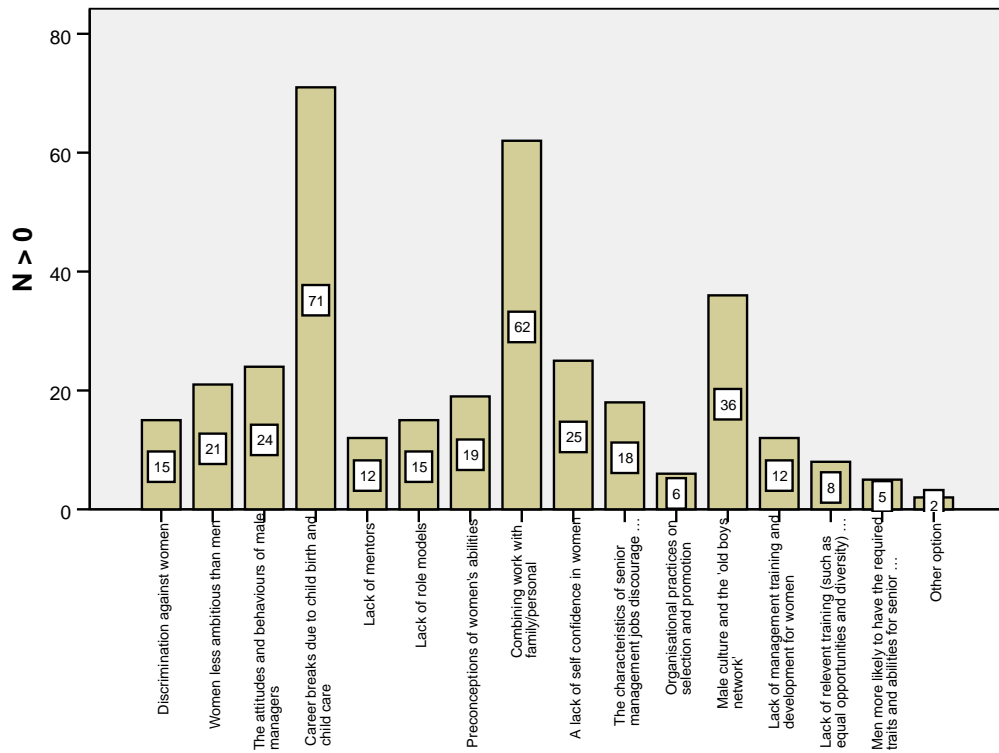


13. Women's career progress relative to men in TTL&H is hindered by breaks in their career due to child birth and child care	<b>80%</b>	.090	
14. Female aspirations to reach senior positions in the sector are broadly the same as those of their male colleagues	<b>59%</b>	-.092	
15. Ambitious women often choose to develop their careers in sectors which enjoy a greater profile than TTL&H	<b>29%</b>	.016	
16. The TTL&H sector is worse than others in allowing for personal commitments to be reconciled with work pressures	<b>31%</b>	.114	
17. Women's career progress in the sector is hindered by a lack of obvious mentors, male or female	<b>41%</b>	.345	Yes
18. Women's career progress in the sector is hindered by a lack of female role models	<b>38%</b>	.356	Yes
19. Women's career progress in the sector is hindered by preconceptions of women's abilities	<b>29%</b>	.356	Yes
20. More than in other industries, women's career progress in TTL&H is hindered by family/personal commitments	<b>38%</b>	.191	Yes
21. Women's career progress in the sector is hampered by a lack of relevant training and development opportunities	<b>27%</b>	.283	Yes

Respondents were then asked to rate the importance of statements giving reasons for the under-representation of women. Combining the numbers for 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> most important, career breaks due to child birth and child care came out as the top reason, with combining work with family responsibilities second, as shown in Table 3. This was true in aggregate, as the table shows, but also for total numbers of both females and males. However a higher proportion of males than females rated these two options. This situation was reversed for 'male culture and the old boy's network' and 'preconceptions of women's abilities' which were rated as important explanatory factors by a greater proportion of women.

**Table 3**

**1st, 2nd and 3rd Most Important Options**

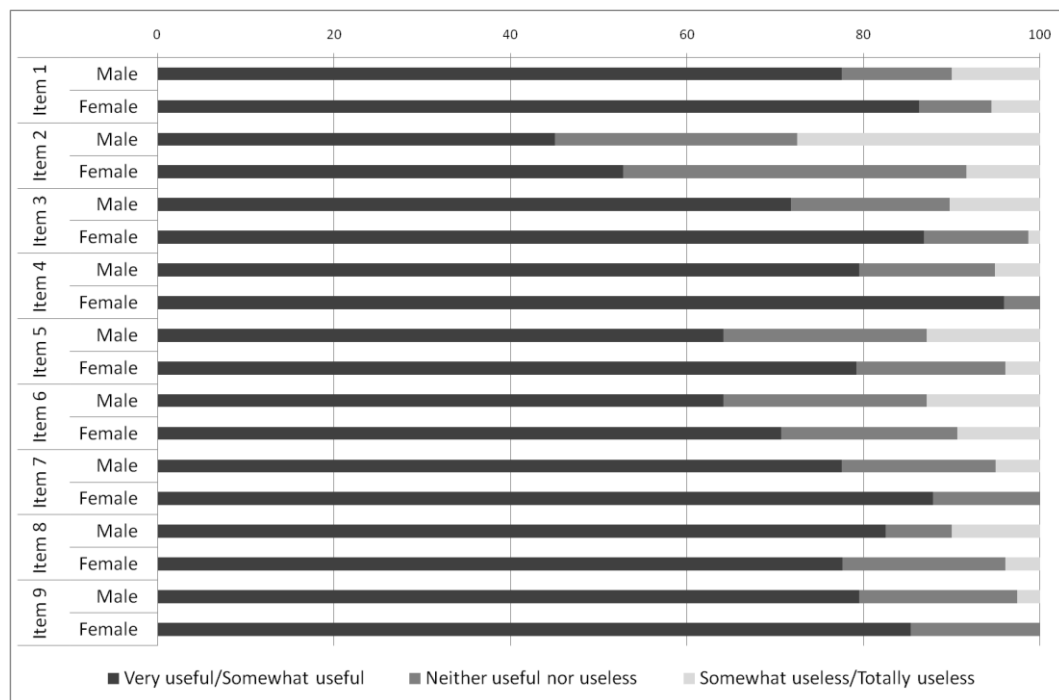


The results therefore showed the reasons for the under-representation of women in senior management positions in travel and tourism as perceived by the managers surveyed. Although there was agreement as to the top two reasons, which related to child care and family responsibilities, there were significant gender differences in a number of other explanations.

### Suggested Strategies

This section asked respondents to rate the usefulness of different possible strategies for increasing the proportion of women in senior management positions in the sector. Here there were fewer gender differences, although a greater percentage of women than men rated the suggestions as useful, apart from item 8 ‘diversity/equal opportunities training for managers in general’ as shown in Table 4.

**Table 4 Ratings of suggested solutions by sex.**



Item 1	Flexible Working
Item 2	Having ‘diversity champions’
Item 3	T&D for women, in technical and management skills
Item 4	Achieving equal pay in the sector
Item 5	Providing mentoring and coaching for female managers
Item 6	Application and monitoring of equal opportunity policies
Item 7	Childcare and crèche facilities
Item 8	Diversity/Equal Opportunities training for managers
Item 9	Opportunities for peer networking

### Discussion

One of the important features of this study was that it obtained the views of senior and middle managers, both female and male, as to their perceptions of reasons for the lack of women in senior management positions in a sector, travel and tourism, which has both a majority of female employees and is relatively under-researched. On the surface the results are clear: although a

relatively small proportion felt a glass ceiling *per se* as defined in the study existed, there was strong agreement that males are more likely to hold top positions in the sector. There was also strong agreement that both men and women have the required traits and abilities to be successful in senior management, a finding which does not lend support to the more gender-centric theoretical explanations that postulate that intrinsic biological differences between men and women account for the lack of women in senior management. Career breaks due to child birth and child care on the one hand, and combining work with family/personal responsibilities on the other, were perceived as the main explanations. Such structural factors are matched by some of the solutions listed as most useful, i.e. childcare and crèche facilities and provision for flexible working. This fits with one of the four frames of reference outlined by Fletcher and Ely, 2003; if the problem is due to work-family stress, then solutions are couched in these terms.

Fletcher and Ely however also point to the limitations of such solutions, ie that they are likely to have minimal impact on organisational culture and more deep seated attitudes. Such cultural and attitudinal explanations emerge when the data is examined more closely. Evidence of this is demonstrated by the substantial number (42% of respondents) agreeing/strongly agreeing that women's career progress in the sector is hampered by the existence of a male culture and 'old boys network', and that women's career progress is hampered by the attitudes and behaviours of male managers (36%). Significantly more women than men felt this to be the case.

Forty-one per cent agreed or strongly agreed that women's progress in the sector is hampered by lack of mentors, with a similar percentage for the statement regarding lack of obvious female role models, with again a higher proportion of women giving this as an explanation. In addition, women were also more in agreement that women's career progress is hindered by a lack of self confidence in their own ability, but also that in today's world, women have particular traits and abilities that make them more suited to top management positions. Such results showing sex differences in manager's perceptions partially support the findings of Wood and Lindorff (2001:153) and social role theory, i.e. that women and men fill certain gender and social roles and that their beliefs and behaviour will be influenced by the stereotypes that are attached to these roles.

As a footnote to the above, there was wide agreement that achieving equal pay in the sector is an important objective. It is planned to research this more fully in the next stage of the study by means of in-depth one-to-one interviews and focus groups.

When the results were analysed by sex, other aspects emerged. Of the twenty-one possible explanatory factors, a higher percentage of women than men strongly agreed/agreed with all but three. It was a similar picture for eight out of nine ratings of the usefulness of possible strategies. One could

conclude that, not surprisingly perhaps, women feel more strongly than men about the issues raised in the questionnaire.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The context for the study was an under-researched sector, travel and tourism, that is both complex and fragmented. The preponderance of small-to-medium sized firms is also a likely explanation for the relative lack of formal policies on equal opportunities or diversity. The results point to career breaks due to child birth and care, plus the difficulties of combining work with family and other responsibilities as being perceived by those in management roles as the most important determinants for the under-representation of women in senior management. The fact that child care and family responsibilities still fall primarily on women is salutary yet inescapable

At one level therefore, suggested solutions would be couched in practical and structural terms – greater provision of flexible working, career breaks and the provision of crèche facilities. Liff and Ward (2001:20) put forward the possibility that women may be rejecting not managerial work *per se* but rather the particular way in which it is currently organised. Similarly Liff and Wajcman (1996) quote a NEDO report that starts by saying that a visitor from Mars could be forgiven for thinking that management jobs have been specifically designed for men married to full-time wives and mothers who shoulder the burden of family life. Whilst solutions providing for greater flexibility and the requirements of child care are important, they are in themselves however unlikely to be sufficient if underlying aspects are left untouched. Analysing the results of this survey by sex also pointed to the need for mentors and female role models as well as highlighting perceptions, amongst women managers in particular, of more deep-seated aspects of organisational life such as a male culture and prejudicial attitudes. Whilst these remain, the number of women in the boardroom is unlikely to achieve much more than token status.

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