

Women and Ambition in the Irish Civil Service

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NATIONAL WOMEN'S STRATEGY

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All errors and opinions are those of the authors.

Executive Summary

Upon receipt of a grant from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, the Research Unit of the Centre for Gender and Women's Studies, Trinity College Dublin undertook a study of women and ambition in the workplace of the Irish Civil Service. The objective of the study was to analyse the barriers and facilitators to the career ambitions of women. We were interested in finding out if women were as ambitious as men or if structural barriers had caused them to downsize their ambition. The findings of some researchers in the US had found that professional women were leaving the workplace in significant numbers, that the workplace had indeed failed these women. Our aim was to ascertain if the same was true for women in the Irish Civil Service.

We began our study with a pilot project which focused on the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. The pilot employed the methodology which we would subsequently use in our main study. It was undertaken between September and November, 2007. The purpose of the pilot was to test the research strategy and methodology as well as to highlight any theoretical and/or practical problems which may have implications for the main study.

Following completion of the pilot, the methodology for the study was finalised and fieldwork began in December, 2007. The study encompassed a two strand methodology using both quantitative and qualitative tools of research. Via an online survey, we evaluated the opinions and assessments of both men and women employed in the management grades (Higher Executive Officer and above) across 15 Civil Service Departments. Simultaneously, we conducted in depth interviews with a sub-sample of both male and female employees from two selected Departments within the Civil Service. The qualitative component of the study also incorporated comparative data yielded from a small scale study conducted among junior, middle and senior male and female managers employed in a leading financial institution in Ireland.

The fieldwork for the Civil Service study was completed by February, 2008. A total of 2,237 valid responses were collected from the online survey, yielding a total valid response rate of 40%. In January 2008, we conducted a total of 26 interviews with employees in the selected management grades from two Civil Service Departments chosen in consultation with the sponsoring body. Supplementary fieldwork among management in a leading financial institution was completed by July, 2008. Interviews were conducted with 10 employees from junior, middle and senior management.

The literature review for this project revealed few surprises. Women were working in increased numbers in Ireland and in the EU but the higher the management level, the fewer women that were evident. What was of particular interest, however, was the fact that companies with women at senior decision-making levels outperformed those with lower numbers or no women. This makes the economic case for the increased inclusion of women at the highest level of management. The literature review also identified three main subject areas relevant to this project: 1) the nature and definition of women's ambition; 2) structural inequalities; and 3) socialisation. All three areas have implications for women's ambition in the workplace.

One of the most startling of our findings concerned the demographic profile of Civil Service employees. According to our analysis of the weighted survey respondents, male and female employees are distributed unevenly across the management grades. Senior male managers outnumber their female colleagues by 56% while in junior management women outnumber men by 2%. When we look at marital status and number of children, the results are even starker. The likelihood of female employees being married diminishes as they rise up the management grades. Among the senior management male employees, 86% are married. This is compared with 56% of female senior managers. When we examined parental status, we found that of the male employees, 66% had children compared with 35% of the women. If we put this in terms of management grade, particularly senior management, we find that there are very significant discrepancies between percentages of senior male managers who are married and who have children compared to their female counterparts. In total 86% of male senior managers are married and 86% have children. In comparison 56% of female senior managers are married and 53% have children. It would appear from this analysis that women may be prepared to make sacrifices in their personal life in order to reach senior management grades. It seems that these sacrifices are not made nearly as frequently by their male colleagues.

Analysis of findings from both the survey and the interviews revealed that men and women appear to have a similar understanding of ambition. While noting that ambition can be a negative quality when it lapsed into backstabbing or ruthlessness, it was generally perceived as propelling an individual forward to seek promotion and to demonstrate mastery of her/his area. An important finding of this study was the need for recognition of an individual's career ambitions and achievements to define, foster and sustain career ambition.

On the question of believing one's self to be ambitious, there is little difference between men and women. Just over 60% of both male and female employees described themselves as ambitious. What is significant is that as women rise through the management levels, they are more likely to think that other people will consider them to be ambitious. This corresponds with the fact that there are so few women in senior positions and hence they have a high visibility. Perhaps the most significant finding from this section of the study was the fact that ambition is perceived very differently when displayed by women than by men. For men, it is perceived as positive and natural. For women, ambition was interpreted by some in a very negative and a very harsh manner.

Another important finding of this study was the ebb and flow of ambition across the life cycle. For both men and women, it would appear that ambition can fade and return throughout an individual's life as different phases and different events cause people to respond differently to ambition. This point raises questions as to how best to facilitate a fading workplace ambition while also cultivating a welcoming environment for career ambition when it re-emerges.

In terms of ambition and motivations for working in the Civil Service, our interviewees commented favourably on the facilities for promotion, for developing skill sets, and for training. However, there were mixed views as to whether working in the Civil Service cultivated a healthy ambition to progress or whether it could create complacency among some employees who found themselves in career comfort zones. Moreover, there were concerns expressed as to men and women becoming stuck in career cul-de-sacs which would make it difficult for them to be promoted.

There are, of course, tools and strategies that both men and women use to advance their careers. According to our survey data, men are more likely than women to have a definite career plan. When correlating ambition with career planning, it would appear that those with a plan are marginally more likely to consider themselves to be ambitious. In terms of progression, both the qualitative and the quantitative data indicate that most women and men tend to aspire to the immediate grade above them without looking much further ahead.

Promotion was seen as incremental. It should also be noted that a number of female and male respondents were of the view that men were much more likely to go for promotion if they had only some of the requirements while women believed that they must meet almost all of the requirements. Some attributed this to confidence and some, indeed, to overconfidence. Moreover, it would appear that while both men and women are defining ambition in similar terms, there are significant differences in that women are aspiring to a lower grade than their male counterparts both at the beginning of their careers as well as in their current situation.

One tool which was seen by our respondents, as well as noted in the literature, as having a major impact on career progression and fulfilling ambition is a formal mentoring system. Our respondents felt that this was an important tool. They felt that mentors provided them with a broader perspective on their careers and encouraged and helped them to achieve their goals.

The issue of child bearing, child rearing and work-life balance is of great importance and has been studied in many different contexts. Our findings were in the context of the effect of maternity, paternity and parental leave on career ambition. We found that paternity leave (3 days) had very little impact on a man's career but maternity leave or maternity coupled with unpaid leave, which is obviously longer, was seen to have a negative effect on career progression.

From the data, we conclude that within the remit of the study on women and ambition in the Civil Service, gender does make a difference. In the various categories we have analysed, from the perception of an ambitious woman to the experience of ambition and to the likelihood of being married and having children, being a woman means having a different experience from that of being man. Of course, there is overlap but that commonality is overshadowed by the different experiences men and women have in negotiating their careers and fulfilling their ambition.

The research for this project should contribute to our increased understanding of the role of gender in three ways: 1) it clearly demonstrates that gender equality, despite the improvements, has not yet happened and very easily may stall if it is not paid sufficient attention; 2) we need to conceptualise a new mental map of ambition which incorporates multiple models, not just a linear progression; and 3) we need to accept the idea of an ambitious woman as normal. It would appear from our analysis that ambitious women are cast in a negative light and are suspect. We need to change our mind set to see ambitious women as natural and as normal as ambitious men.

Recommendations:

At a basic level, our key recommendation is that statistics on men and women in the Civil Service be kept by all Departments and analysed on a regular basis. Currently, some Departments include detailed gender breakdowns of staff at different grades, for example, in their annual reports or statements of strategy. However, other Departments include very little information of this kind. In particular it would be beneficial to include in the statistics a record of the number of people putting themselves forward for promotion, paying particular attention to the gender breakdown. In order to measure progress it is vital that all such statistics be gathered on a regular basis and uniformly published by all Departments.

1. Key issues arising from this study which require further study/exploration:

a. Mentoring

We recommend the implementation of a formal mentoring programme for women and that mentors be both men and women. We also suggest that there be a structured programme to train mentors themselves to make them more effective.

b. Career Planning

Through the PMDS system, we recommend that women are urged to make a career plan and to analyse periodically how well they are succeeding.

c. Leadership Courses

We recommend that the Civil Service establish leadership courses for women or facilitate the participation of women in ongoing leadership courses to both encourage them into senior management levels and to provide the necessary information to achieve those levels.

d. Paternity Leave

To undertake research to ascertain best practice in the provision of paternity leave on a 'use it or lose it' basis. This research would endeavour to find out what men want, what managers think would work best, and how it would effect career progression.

e. On-Ramps

To undertake research on the feasibility of providing "on-ramps" for those who are on extended leave. "On-ramps" is a term coined by Sylvia Hewlett to refer to mechanism used to engage those returning from extended leave, facilitating re-entry into their careers. A significant finding of this study highlights the fluid nature of ambition or the ebb and flow characteristic of ambition for some women and men. In addition, we recommend undertaking research on the ways in which this ebb and flow pattern can be accommodated so as to provide an opportunity for those who have been somewhat disengaged to re-engage.

f. Career Breaks

That additional research be undertaken to ascertain more fully the effects of taking career breaks on career progression.

g. Clerical and Junior Grades in the Civil Service

That research be undertaken specifically on the clerical and junior grades of the Civil Service on the question of women and ambition to ascertain if they need to be

encouraged to aspire to higher positions. We have had some feedback/expressions of interest that this study would be welcomed.

h. Male Middle Managers

That additional research be undertaken to draw out the nuances of the issues arising in relation to ambition among male middle managers.

i. Research in the Private Sector

The findings of this study pertain by and large to the Civil Service workplace culture. The small private sector sample who provided comparative data for this study demonstrated that cultural contexts are crucial for understanding the operation of ambition with career development. Extensive and more nuanced research on the area of women's ambition is required in the Irish private sector. There is a need to draw out the comparisons with the Civil Service in order to investigate the varying policies and workplace cultures of the private sector

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

This study of Women and Ambition in the Irish Civil Service was undertaken by the Centre for Gender and Women's Studies (CGWS), Trinity College Dublin and sponsored by the Irish Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. The objective was to evaluate the barriers and facilitators to the career ambitions of women in the context of employment in the Irish Civil Service.

The study encompassed a two strand methodology using both quantitative and qualitative tools of research. The opinions and assessments of both men and women employed in the management grades, Higher Executive Officer (HEO) and above, across fifteen Civil Service Departments were evaluated via an online survey. Simultaneously, in depth interviews with a sub-sample of both male and female employees from two selected Departments were conducted. The aim of this qualitative strand of the research was to obtain a deeper more nuanced understanding of the complexity of women's ambition. In order to benefit from a comparative element in the analysis of the qualitative data, interviews were conducted among employees from similar management levels working within the private sector. The institution chosen for this research is one of the largest employers within the financial and banking sector in Ireland.

The criteria for determining which grades or management levels would provide the focus for this study was undertaken in consultation with the sponsoring body (DJELR). This study focuses on employees in HEO, AO, AP, PO, AS and SG¹ grades for the purposes of reducing the captured sample and concentrating the research outputs. In order to arrive at a parallel sample within the financial institution consultation was undertaken with the HR team and the appropriate management grades were identified. Therefore, the findings of this study derive from data obtained from those employees within what is considered early management and management roles.

This report represents the findings of the study which was conducted between September 2007 and July 2008. A pilot was undertaken initially in order to test the research strategy and methodology and to address any theoretical and/or practical problems which may have implications for the main study. The pilot was conducted within the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform between September and November 2007. Following completion of the pilot, the methodology for the study was finalised and fieldwork began in December 2007. A total of 2,237 valid responses were collected from the online survey, yielding a overall valid response rate of 40%. A total of 26 interviews were conducted with employees in the selected management grades from two Civil Service Departments chosen in consultation with the sponsoring body. This was followed by interviews with 10 employees from a private sector institution.

This report outlines the aims and objectives of the study and relates them to the current literature in the field. We follow this with a discussion of the pilot study and the research methodology we employed in this study. Finally, we discuss the main findings from the project via thematic analysis.

1.2 Research Aims and Objectives

Our aim was to study the complex nature of women's ambition. As scholars in the field of gender studies, we are particularly interested in two key questions: Do women's career ambitions follow the traditional linear, hierarchical male model, dubbed 'the corpocratic male model' by Jane O'Leary (1997)? Or, do they follow the more non-linear, web-based pattern described by Sylvia Ann Hewlett et al. (2005)? Second, we wanted to explore the effects of structural inequality, asking if barriers such as the glass ceiling and the gender wage gap cause women to 'downsize their ambition'. Other research questions flow from these two major ones: What role does socialisation play in shaping women's ambition? Is ambition a gendered term, i.e., is it unfeminine to be ambitious? Is age a factor?

¹ These are Higher Executive Officer, Administrative Officer, Assistant Principal Officer, Principal Officer, Assistant Secretary and Secretary General.

How crucial is workplace culture? How important is reaching the top of their chosen profession to women? Is money a marker of success? Answers to these questions will provide a deeper, more nuanced understanding of women's relationship to the workplace.

Our research explores these theoretical issues in the concrete context of the Irish Civil Service. Significantly, research of this nature has not been undertaken within an Irish context. This research project is the first significant study of its kind in Ireland and groundbreaking within the EU.

Chapter 2: Literature Summary

2.1 Introduction

Women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace.... Beijing Declaration, para. 13

This section of the report draws upon the existing literature both nationally and internationally on the subject of women and ambition in order to examine current theories and evidence on the issue. It also will explore the ways in which the research findings connect with and/or challenge previous studies.

The academic literature that exists concerning Irish women and the workplace predominantly focuses on how many women participate in the workforce and on structural inequalities such as the glass ceiling and the gender wage gap. This is, for example, measured on an annual basis in the *Women and Men in Ireland* reports produced by the Central Statistics Office. This data is useful to examine in order to provide a context to the study of women and ambition.

In 2006 the CSO reported that 59% of women in Ireland (aged 15-64 years) were in paid employment, compared with 77.3% of men. Ireland has only a slightly higher rate of female participation in the workforce than is average in the EU27 (57%). However, Ireland still lags significantly behind countries such as Sweden and Denmark who have female workforce participation rates of 70% and 73% respectively. Female labour force participation in Ireland also lags behind that of the UK by almost 8%. This means that in Ireland, women are significantly less likely than men to be in the workforce, and thus there are fewer women competing to achieve the top posts.

During the years that have come to be known as the 'Celtic Tiger' period, Irish women's participation in the workforce grew more rapidly than the average female employment growth rate in the EU, rising by almost 15% to 58% in Ireland as compared to 56.3% in the EU (CSO, 2006). This was dubbed by some analysts as 'The Celtic Tigress'.

Several reports have been produced recently which highlight the fact that women's numerical participation in the workforce is crucial to sustained economic growth. The National Women's Strategy (2007: 25-26) highlighted women's contribution over the last number of years: 'A review of economic growth in Ireland over the past decade or so will show that much of that growth has been achieved through the significant increase in women's labour market participation'. Lunn et al. (2007: 7) regard it as an important national strategic policy to increase the number of women in the Irish workforce. Thus women's participation in the workforce is essential to sustaining growth. The major growth of women in the workforce over the last decade can largely be attributed to increased participation in the service sector or in lower status jobs. However, as will be discussed below, there is evidence to suggest that having women at higher level positions has major benefits for companies. This is significant as it suggests that fostering the ambitions of women who wish to attain high level positions has benefits for not just for those women but for the wider organisation also.

The literature outlines specific financial benefits for companies that have women at high levels. The McKinsey report (2007: 13-14) found that companies with women at senior decision-making levels outperformed those with lower numbers or no women.² The report found that companies with three or more women in top management functions outperform their sector in terms of return on equity (11.4% vs. an average 10.3%), operating result (EBIT 11.1% vs. 5.8%)³, and stock price growth

² The companies were selected from all European listed companies with a stock market capitalisation of over €150 million, on the basis of the following criteria: the number and proportion of women on the executive committee, their function (a CEO or CFO having greater weight in corporate decisions than a Communications Manager) and, to a lesser extent, the presence of more than two women on the board, or statistics on gender diversity in the annual report.

³ EBIT is Earnings Before Interest and Taxes

(64% vs. 47% over the period 2005-2007). Furthermore, the McKinsey (2007: 12) report has found that companies with women at board level are often more successful across a range of established performance criteria: leadership, direction, accountability, coordination and control, innovation, external orientation, capability, motivation, work environment and values. However, this depends on whether a 'certain critical mass is attained: namely, at least three women on management committees for an average membership of 10 people. Below this threshold no significant difference in company performance is observed' (McKinsey, 2007:12).⁴

This is important in light of current reports such as the recent ESRI (2005) publication. This report forecast that based on current trends, women will account for the highest proportion of new entrants to the labour force in the next five years. Lunn, Doyle and Hughes (2007) estimates that women's share of the labour force will increase from 41.8% to 44% by 2012, while men's share of the labour force will decrease from 58% to 55% during the same period. While Lunn et al. state that 'women are increasing their share of employment faster in professional, associate professional and managerial occupations, as well as in sales' there is no *guarantee* that women will rise to the top ranks of power in these fields. That volume does not necessarily lead to equity of power can be evidenced in the fields of employment where women predominate, for example, the health and education sectors. According to the CSO's (2007) *Women and Men in Ireland* report the health and education sectors employed over 30% of all women who were in the labour market in 2006. In the Health Service, women accounted for 92% of nurses and 79% of employees in the Irish Health Service as a whole. According to the CSO figures, the majority of medical/dental consultants were men. In 2005/2006, 85% of primary school teachers were women, but women only account for 51% of school managers.

At a European level women are similarly represented in low numbers at the higher management grades. There are certain exceptions such as Norway who take the lead overall in terms of participation rates of women at board level. The European Professional Women's Network (EPWN) (2006) found that 67.8% of companies had female representation (meaning at least one woman) on corporate boards in Europe.⁵ The number of companies with more than one woman was significantly lower at just 30.5%. The EPWN, however, warn that 'The representation of women on boards in Europe is stagnating, with the exception of the Scandinavian countries' which have 'moved well beyond tokenism and serve as best practice'. This is a clear warning that we should not be complacent in expecting progress to happen naturally. The McKinsey (2007: 6) report stated that even 'the increase in the number of female university graduates will not itself be sufficient to close the gap' at management level.

In the public sector there have been some notable improvements over recent years with all Departments having reached the targets for women at AP grade (33%). However, much more has yet to be done in order to achieve full gender parity at senior levels. The European Commission (2008: 7) has found that 'women within the central [public] administrations of EU member states...currently fill nearly 33% of positions in the top two levels of the hierarchy compared to around 17% in 1999'. However, it must be noted that the best performing countries are the newer Member States, not existing member states such as Ireland. Men held over 85% of senior positions in the public administration of Ireland in 2007, this is similar to Belgium and Cyprus (European Commission, 2008: 44). Our data reveals that in 2008 the figure remains similar with 78% of the senior roles in the fifteen Departments surveyed being occupied by men (See Chapter 4 for a demographic profile of the respondents).

Female Civil Servants, like female Cabinet Ministers, are also more likely to be found in Departments that have an emphasis on social affairs/welfare:

As with their political counterparts, women Civil Servants are more likely to have positions of responsibility in ministries with socio-cultural functions (social affairs, health, children, family, youth, older people,

⁴ See http://www.europeanpwn.net/files/mckinsey_2007_gender_matters.pdf . The findings of this study are based on 58,240 respondents to a survey of mainly large corporations in Europe, America and Asia, across a spectrum of industries, from energy to distribution and financial institutions.

⁵ See http://www.europeanpwn.net/files/boardwomen_present_large120606.pdf for further details of the survey.

education, science, culture, labour, sports, etc.) than other functions, though the difference is less pronounced. In such ministries, women fill 41% of the positions in the top two levels of the hierarchy compared to the average of 33% across ministries of all types – a difference of around 8 percentage points compared to 12 for their ministerial leaders. They are least well represented in ministries undertaking basic functions (foreign and internal affairs, defence, justice etc.) where they fill 29% of key positions (European Commission, 2008: 46).

Our data suggests that women at senior management levels in the Irish Civil Service (i.e. PO and up) also conform to these trends. The highest percentages of female senior managers (36%) can be found in the Department of Health and Children and the Department of Social and Family Affairs. Women at senior management level are least represented in the Department of Agriculture – just 11% of the total senior managers in this Department are women. Numbers, however, are not enough to explain the nature of women's ambitions. We need to understand the complexities of Irish women's career ambitions and how they relate to the workplace as will be outlined in the next section.

2.2 *Informing the Current Project*

A review of literature in the area identified three main subject areas relevant to this project: 1) the nature and definition of women's ambition; 2) structural inequalities; and 3) socialisation. These will each be discussed in turn.

2.2.1 **Female Ambition**

In discussing ambition we are restricting our definition to contemporary women's ambition as it is manifest in the workplace and utilise the term to mean the 'ardent ... desire to rise to high position, or to attain rank, influence, distinction or other preferment'.⁶ Ambition can thus be defined as the desire to publicly succeed. According to Anna Fels (2004: 52), a contemporary psychologist who has written extensively in the field, ambition is composed of two main parts: mastery and recognition. This means developing certain expertise that are acknowledged and validated by others. Fels (2004: 52) claims, mastery is essential to ambition because without it aspirations remain unfulfilled. Similarly, Fels (2004: 53) argues that research has demonstrated the fact that recognition 'is one of the motivational engines that drives the development of almost any type of skill'. This suggests that in order to sustain ambition, one must feel rewarded or well regarded in some way.

Sylvia Ann Hewlett (2005) and Anna Fels (2005) both argue that women often achieve mastery but very frequently fail to receive recognition. This lack of recognition stalls women's ambition and may result in what Hewlett calls 'a downsizing of women's ambition'. Fels (2005: 133) concurs:

Recognition in all its forms – admiration from peers, mentoring, institutional rewards, societal approval – creates our ambitions and modulates our efforts to fulfil them.

Another dimension to the literature on the definition of ambition is the difference between men and women in their understanding of the meaning of the term. Fels (2005: 5) found that the women she interviewed used wholly negative terms to describe ambition, including egotism, self-aggrandizement, or the manipulative use of others for one's own ends. In contrast, men articulated ambition as a necessary and desirable aspect of their lives. Our study has shown slightly different results: In the survey men and women in the Irish Civil Service define ambition in similar ways, although some of our interviewees suggested that men and women's ambitious behaviour was perceived in different, and often wholly contrasting, ways (see Chapter 5 for further discussion).

The difference between male and female ambition in the workplace is analysed by O'Leary (1997) who offered a very interesting critique of the male corporatic model and its emphasis on competition and hierarchal progression. She explored the concept of "career ambitious" in the context

⁶ Definition from Oxford English Dictionary online at www.oed.com

of a traditional corporatic male model compared to a female career development model. O'Leary noted that the traditional male model of career development fosters rivalry and instability within an organisation and places greater value on job mobility than on job substance. Her study correlates with the studies of both the more recent Kirchmeyer (2002) and the earlier study by Turner (1964) in that O'Leary argues that men tend to use objective measures of career success, for example, salary, rank or promotion whereas women look to both their professional and their personal arenas when evaluating their success. The importance of money, status and job security are issues explored in the current study, and will be discussed in Chapter 5.

2.2.2 Structural Inequality

There are factors within the workplace which appear to make it difficult for women to succeed. These include: Inflexible career ladders; lack of role models/mentors for women; the concentration of women at lower levels, referred to as the 'sticky floor' (ILO, 2005); and male-dominated work environments with traditional male work patterns that do not accommodate women's non-linear careers. All of these factors contribute to sustaining the gender pay gap and the glass ceiling.

The glass ceiling is a reality in women's lives, recognised by the EU as preventing women from reaching top positions. A 2001 International Labour Organisation (ILO) study on the glass ceiling, found that women's advancement in organisations was often limited because they were streamed early in their careers into so-called 'soft' management streams such as human resources and administration. The Irish Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform (2007) noted that the situation was often compounded by women being cut-off from both formal and informal networks that are necessary for advancement within organisations. The McKinsey (2007: 7) report found that:

while social policies can be more or less favourable to women's employment, corporate models – historically designed by men – form the pillars on which the glass ceiling is supported.

This suggests that policies designed to facilitate women to maintain their positions in the workplace do not necessarily facilitate their career advancement.

The gender wage gap may also thwart women's ambitions and therefore correlate with the lack of women in top level positions. It is a complex issue often related to factors like part-time work and domestic responsibilities. These are particularly important in an Irish context. The gender pay gap in Ireland was 9% in 2005 according to the CSO (2006), below the EU average of 15%.⁷ The OECD (2008: 33) has recently highlighted that women with children in Ireland have much lower employment participation rates than the EU average. Furthermore, women in Ireland and across the EU are more likely to work part-time and have more breaks which can negatively impact upon their professional career development. The study by Hewlett et al. (2005) revealed that 93% of women who had taken career breaks intended to get back to work, but only 74% have managed to do so, and only 40% had found full-time work.

The impact of career breaks and atypical working patterns will be discussed in subsequent chapters. However, it is pertinent to acknowledge that our research found that the reasons why career breaks were taken was very significant in determining how the return to work was experienced and in evaluating whether a career break was a negative or positive experience. The reasons for taking career breaks were also seen to be highly gendered, with far greater numbers of women than men engaging in caring activities while on breaks. This also correlates with the data produced by Hewlett et al. (2005) which found that those American men and women in their study who left the workforce did so for divergent reasons; 44% of women left for family reasons, while only 12% of men did. As in our study, men were more likely to have left to change careers or to pursue education and training.

⁷ The CSO (2007: 59) publish provisional Eurostat data which specify that the gender pay gap is calculated as an average gross hourly earnings of female paid employees as a percentage of average gross hourly earnings of male paid employees. The calculation is based on all paid employees aged 16-64 who work 15 or more hours per week. The EU 27 value is a weighted average of national values estimated without including countries for which data is missing.

Occupational segregation is also a factor in women's low pay, relative to men. Eurostat (2008a: 55) have commented on this divergent gender characterisation of the labour market: 'More than men, women in employment in the EU tend to be concentrated in a few sectors of activity. This concentration, moreover, seems to be increasing rather than falling over time'. The gendered occupational segregation is starkly highlighted by the Eurostat (2008a: 55) data from 2005: In the EU-25 in 2005, some 61 % of women in employment worked in just six sectors of activity, defined at the NACE 2-digit level (of which there are 62 in total). All of these involved the supply of services. They consist of health care and social work (in which 17% of all women in work were employed), retailing (12.5%), education (11.5%), public administration (7%), business activities (7%) and hotels and restaurants (5%). These six sectors, however, accounted for only 31 % of men in employment.

In 2007 21.4% of women in Ireland were employed in clerical and secretarial occupations, compared with just 5.4% of men (CSO, 2007: 15). In the EU27 in 2005, female teachers were in the majority at primary and secondary level (69%), while at tertiary level there were fewer female teachers (38%) than male (Eurostat, 2008b). In Ireland, only 30% of managers in 2005 were female (Eurostat, 2008b).

Another issue raised in the literature concerns the hidden obstacles that often prevent women from achieving their career ambitions. Schein (2007) argues that the way that work and the workplace are structured, and the barriers which these structures pose for women need to be examined. Management positions are effectively gendered male, having been structured around traditional gender divisions of labour, with the husband in work, while the wife manages the home and childcare. Sylvia Ann Hewlett (Hewlett et al. 2005) led a large-scale study in the US which investigated why women leave careers and what firms could do to keep them. Their study found that a majority of professional women have non-linear careers. This echoes what O'Leary (1997) has reported in her findings.

Traditionally, career patterns have been seen as a linear progression. However, in order to examine and understand women's career ambitions, we must re-examine this model. Being required to follow the traditional male career model caused the women in Hewlett et al.'s study to 'downsize their ambitions'. Their study found that highly qualified women were much less likely than their male peers to describe themselves as ambitious, while only 15% of women singled out a 'powerful position' as an important career goal. The difficulty women have in breaking into a male dominated culture may explain both the downsizing of their ambitions and their greater propensity to opt out. Alternatively, workplace cultures that do not facilitate women, or particularly women with families, may have an impact on whether or not women choose to become mothers (Redmond, Valiulis and Drew, 2006).

It is evident that many women who wish to achieve top positions are opting to do so by conforming to the 'male' model of working life:

in a male-centric model, women who are today carving out prime positions for themselves follow the same path as men, and make the same choices imposed by the dominant model – particularly that of putting career before family (McKinsey, 2007: 16).

Similarly, Singh et al. (2001: 81) argue that for women managers 'there is often tension between their identity as women and their professional identity in a male-dominated environment where suitability for promotion is assessed on a set of male managerial characteristics'.

Our findings support this argument. Both the qualitative and quantitative data demonstrates that the majority of women in the most senior grades of the Irish Civil Service are either unmarried or do not have children, or indeed both. This is the crux of the difficulties women face at higher levels. As Fels (2005: 60) has argued: 'Women who pursue careers must cope with jobs structured to accommodate the life cycles of men with wives who don't have full-time careers'.

Our research has sought to query what effect these structural inequalities have on Irish women's ambition and if indeed they lead to a downsizing of women's ambition within the context of the Irish Civil Service. This will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

2.2.3 Socialisation

Much has been written on the different socialisation of men and women. Fels (2004) found in her study that ambition is not a trait which is seen as positive for a woman to have. Women, therefore,

are reluctant to describe themselves as ambitious, particularly as they get older. Fels found that women were reluctant even to admit to being ambitious because to do so is to act inappropriately for their sex. This view has been echoed by O'Leary (1997), Kirchmeyer (2002) and Turner (1964).

The literature also suggests that women are less likely than men to rate their own performance in the highest terms. A study of MBA students (Eagly, 2003, in McKinsey 2007) found that 70% of female respondents rated their own performance as equivalent to that of their co-workers, while 70% of men rated themselves higher than their co-workers. As the McKinsey (2007: 9) report comments on this finding:

If women are thus less naturally inclined than men to recognise – and appreciate – their own performance, it is probably more difficult for them to assert their talents and gain recognition in the company, and hence to capture every opportunity for promotion.

This raises an interesting point in relation to workplace cultures. The Civil Service as a whole promotes a culture of participation by employees in all available promotional competitions. This expectation is explicitly referred to in the *Equality Initiatives* (2006: 9) report: 'Staff should avail of opportunities for promotion for which they are eligible'. The question is: Do women need extra encouragement or recognition of their talents in order to go for promotion?

This problem of recognition also extends to dilemmas related to the expression of ambition and leadership within organisations. Women managers operating within organisations that are dominated by male modes of organisation and management are, according to Catalyst (2007) faced with three possible predicaments:

- Extreme Perceptions of their behaviour – Too Soft, Too Tough, and Never Just Right: when women act in ways that are consistent with gender stereotypes, they are viewed as less competent leaders (too soft). When women act in ways that are inconsistent with such stereotypes, they're considered as unfeminine (too tough).
- The High Competence Threshold – Female Leaders Face Higher Standards and Lower Rewards than Male Leaders: women as leaders are subjected to higher competency standards. On top of doing their job, women have to prove that they can lead, over and over again and have to manage stereotypical expectations constantly (e.g., too tough/too soft)
- Competent but Disliked – Women as Leaders are Perceived as Competent or Likeable, but Rarely Both: when women behave in ways that are traditionally valued for leaders (e.g., assertively), they tend to be seen as competent, but also not as effective interpersonally as women who adopt a more stereotypically feminine style.

Furthermore, Catalyst (2007: 10) has argued that ambition is perceived as an essential component of leadership, thus the dilemmas presented above may have a direct relationship with understandings and expressions of ambition in the workplace. The extent to which women's ambitions are hampered by stereotypical or negative perceptions of senior women managers is an issue connected to the gendered nature of ambition and its enactment by men and women, both of which are further explored in Chapter 5 of this report.

Other research by Babcock et al. (2007) has found that women who negotiate pay increases are likely to be viewed as 'less nice' by their employers than men who do the same. Moreover, Susan Ambrose's (2005) study found that women unconsciously 'scale down' their career expectations. This correlates positively with Kirchmeyer's (2002) finding that women often perceive themselves as successful, even though they have lower income and rates of promotion than men over the employment life span. Kirchmeyer's study compares quite interestingly with Ralph Turner's (1964) study nearly 40 years earlier which looked at school leavers in the United States and correlated women's career ambition with motivations. Turner concluded that women tend to leave the extrinsic reward of the material level of living in its traditional place, i.e. with the male bread winner. As a result, education and careers for women tend to be the vehicles for intrinsic rewards, such as personal intellectual and social development. Turner posited that women who value intrinsic rewards highly tend to seek careers whilst those that valued monetary status and extrinsic rewards tended not to have careers.

In her more recent study Kirchmeyer also found that monetary reward did not seem to register as highly for women as it did for men when it came to perceived success in their careers. Are women therefore conditioned to look for things other than income when measuring their success in the workplace? Perhaps both women and men are socialised to view the male occupation as being the primary source of income within a family and therefore income becomes a vital way of measuring success for men. However, our study found that women at all management levels were motivated to work in the Civil Service by the desire for financial independence to a higher extent than men. This was not dependent on their marital status.

Socialisation also brings with it the double day. Women's dual responsibilities of home and work-life appear to constrain how much time they can devote to working outside of the home. This can negatively impact on their career ambitions and on their earning potential. Lyon and Woodward (2004: 206) have argued that the different time demands men and women face is a major factor in the persistence of gender inequalities:

The gendered asymmetry that allows men to mobilize female altruism while women have at best been able to get men to split housework and care, or pay for someone else to do it, emerges as significant in explaining the persistent inequalities in who holds decision-making positions.

Survey respondents and interview participants both mentioned the work life balance demands that face employees, these demands tended to fall more particularly on women. The consequent effect on career progression and ambition fulfilment is discussed in Chapter 5.

The effect of having to be primarily responsible for domestic and childcare duties means that women face an unfair burden which may be said to hinder their progress in the paid workforce. Linda Hirshman (2006) argues that the inherent belief that child-rearing and household chores are women's 'natural domain' is central to the failure of women to advance to the top levels in the workplace. Hirshman posited that a glass ceiling does inhibit women's career advancement however this ceiling is located in the home. This would seem to have some resonance with evidence from European studies of time use. According to Eurostat figures:

on average European women continue to devote twice as much time as men to domestic tasks: 4 hours and 29 minutes a day, compared with 2 hours and 18 minutes for the men (in McKinsey, 2007: 9).

This is not just a European phenomenon. In the United States, Sylvia Ann Hewlett (2002) argues that the problem with women succeeding in the workplace by cloning the 'male competitive model' is that male partners have not yet begun to share women's traditional responsibilities in the home. Hewlett says that high-achieving women do a vast amount more childcare and household chores than their high-achieving male counterparts. This finding was echoed in the ESRI time use study conducted in Ireland for the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in 2005. McGinnity et al. (2005: 8) found that almost 75% of women but only 30% of men reported cooking on a weekday. Only 19% of men reported cleaning on a week day, as opposed to 71% of women. Furthermore, 31% of women reported actively playing or reading with their children (as distinct from supervising or monitoring them) compared to just 15% of men.

Lodge and Malone (2006) undertook an investigation of the continued under-representation of women in senior positions within education on behalf of the Department of Education and Science in Ireland. Their findings echo those of Hewlett (2002) and Hirshman (2006). Lodge and Malone reported that among their sample only women mentioned making cut-backs in their work to facilitate their families. Similar claims were made in relation to reasons for avoiding promotion. The researchers concluded that this pattern is mirrored in other employment sectors where women still find that the caring responsibilities which continue to fall on their shoulders impact on their career progression.

2.3 Conclusion

Women's career ambitions are facilitated or hindered by a number of factors. The literature shows that there are structural inequalities in the labour market, such as the concentration of women at

lower ranking positions and the gender pay gap, which may frustrate women's ambitions. The McKinsey report (2007: 6) argued that:

In essence, unless we address the root causes of the problem, the notorious "glass ceiling" will stay firmly in place, and women's participation in corporate leadership over the next 30 years will remain low.

Examining the processes that create gender inequality in the workplace and producing strategies to combat this is the best way to address the problem of the 'glass ceiling' referred to by McKinsey. At the moment, women appear to be struggling against the odds to achieve top positions. By examining the 'glass ceiling' and finding ways to combat it, the results may also make it easier for women to achieve the highest positions.

Eagly and Carli (2007:64) use the metaphor of the labyrinth to convey the ways in which women may have to negotiate the workplace to achieve their goals:

For women who aspire to top leadership, routes exist but are full of twists and turns, both unexpected and expected. Because all labyrinths have a viable route to the centre, it is understood that goals are attainable. The metaphor acknowledges obstacles but is not ultimately discouraging.

The data arising from this research report adds to our knowledge of the factors involved in the shaping, nurturing and understanding of women's ambition and provides some answers as to how women can best negotiate their way through their own labyrinths.

Chapter 3: The Pilot

One of the primary purposes of a pilot study is to test the proposed research tools on a smaller platform and to make recommendations for the main study. It was agreed that the pilot study would be conducted within the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (DJELR). The study was undertaken between October and November 2007. The research method was composed of two elements:

1. An online survey of employees in HEO grade and above and
2. Eight in depth semi-structured interviews with male and female employees from the target group (HEO/AO and above).

3.1 The Pilot Survey

The survey elicited a 56% overall response rate. Incomplete or invalid questionnaires were removed from the analysis which brought the valid response rate down to 41%. The survey targeted all those employed in the grades at HEO/AO and above. For the purposes of maintaining confidentiality and for analysis the grades were grouped into three management levels. Junior management included all those employed in the Higher Executive Officer and Administrative Officer grades. Middle management consisted of those in the Assistant Principal grade. Senior management was made up of employees from Principal Officer, Assistant Secretary, Director, Deputy Secretary and Secretary General grades.

As outlined in Table 3.1 below, the senior management response rate was highest at 60%, while the middle management and junior management response rates were 44% and 33% respectively.

Table 3.1: Valid response rate by management level (N=549)

Management Level	Total staff at this level in the DJELR	Total Respondents	Valid	Respondents as % of total staff
Senior management	81	49		60%
Middle management	185	81		44%
Junior management	283	93		33%
Total	549	223		41%

Table 3.2 overleaf shows the distribution of the valid responses by gender and according to management grade. From the table we can see that 41% of the total number of women employed in the DJELR (N=257) responded to the survey, this is compared with 40% of their male counterparts.

Table 3.1 above illustrates a relatively low response rate among junior management employees (33% in total). Further investigation concluded that limited internet access among this cohort may have contributed to the low response rate here. This was considered to be a limitation of using an online survey. Furthermore, Table 3.2 shows a very high response rate among female senior managers (72%) compared with male senior managers (49%). Similarly the female middle management employees responded at a higher rate than their male colleagues at that grade. As a result of the higher percentage of women responding at these grades as well as the overall under-representation of junior management among the respondents, weights were designed to counteract any bias that may ensue.

Table 3.2: Valid response rate by gender and management grade (N=549)

Management Level	Total women at this level in the DJELR	Total men at this level in the DJELR	Valid Female Respondents as % of total at grade	Valid Male Respondents as % of total at grade
Senior management	18	63	72% (13)	49% (31)
Middle management	78	107	50% (39)	40% (43)
Junior management	161	122	34% (54)	35% (43)
Total	257	292	41% (106)	40% (117)

The pilot study was an opportunity to identify possible flaws in the survey as well as to test the appropriate weighting methods which would be applied to the main study (See Chapter 4 for a description of the post-stratification weights employed in this study). A feedback question was included in the pilot survey which allowed the research team to consider suggestions and comments regarding the design of the survey. Where possible, appropriate corrections were made and the comments were considered when designing the questionnaire for the main study.

3.2 The Pilot Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted among both male and female employees of the DJELR. The purpose of qualitative interviewing in this study is to obtain an in-depth and nuanced understanding of the issues that affect career ambition and to ascertain how this intersects with gender. The topics discussed in the interviews arose from the questions contained in the survey. However, the intention behind the conversations was to allow greater room for further explanation than can be afforded in a survey.

In order to ensure that each of the grades or management levels were represented in the qualitative study, while also maintaining confidentiality, the grades were pooled into three management levels. Both men and women were interviewed for this component of the study. However, as the focus of the project was on women's ambition the sample was weighted to include more female participants. Five women and three men were interviewed. The table below illustrates the distribution of the sample across the management grades.

Table 3.3: Distribution of qualitative sample by gender and management level

	Men	Women	Total
Senior Management	1	1	2
Middle Management	1	2	3
Junior Management	1	2	3
Total	3	5	8

This weighting of more women to men in a ratio of 3:2 represents the method for the qualitative component of the main study. The analytical method employed in the pilot study was also replicated in the main study. Data analysis was guided by grounded theory methodology in which data collection and analysis occurred in close temporal proximity (Glaser and Strauss, 1976, Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Furthermore, a voice-centred relational analytic method, described by Anne Byrne (2000) was employed to reveal key themes arising from the conversations.

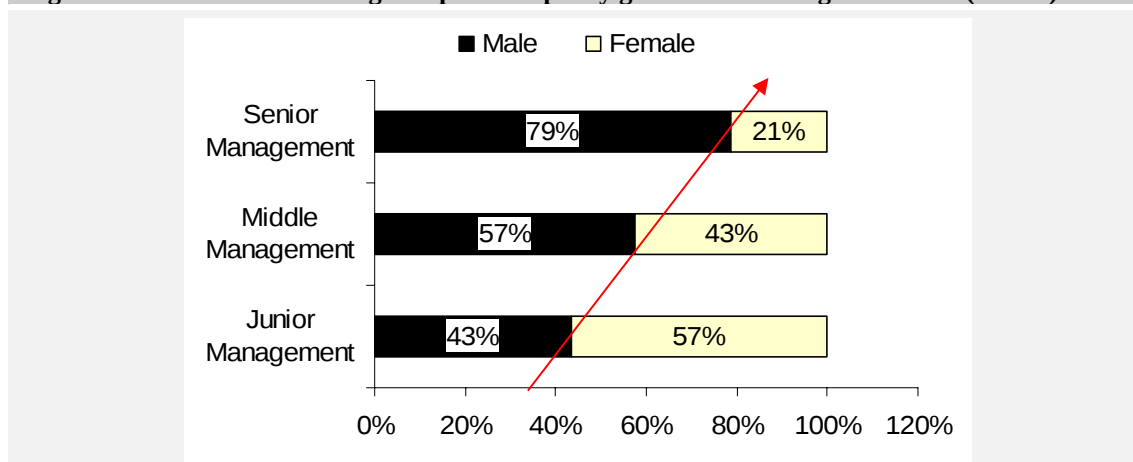
3.3 Summary of Pilot Survey Findings

3.3.1 Descriptive Data

The next section of the report will present some of the key findings that emerged from the pilot data. It is important to note that the data in this section has been subjected to post-stratification weighting (see Chapter 4 for further explanation). The application of the weights allows the sample survey findings to be interpreted as representative of all the employees in the HEO grades and above within the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. The weights were applied on the basis of gender and management grade and were derived from comparison with statistical data describing all employees in the Department.

Gender and Management Level

Figure 3.1: Distribution of weighted pilot sample by gender and management level (N=223)



Weighted Data

Figure 3.1 above indicates the uneven distribution of men and women in the DJELR according to management level. Men vastly outnumber women in the senior management grades with 58% more men than women in senior management. The opposite is true for junior management where women outnumber their male colleagues by 14%.

Age

According to the sample survey, the majority of employees (HEO/AO and above), in the DJELR, falls into the 35-44 and 45-54 year age groups. Each of these categories accounts for 39% of employees respectively. The average length of service among employees was over 21 years.

Table 3.4: Cross Tabulation of Gender with Age (N=222)

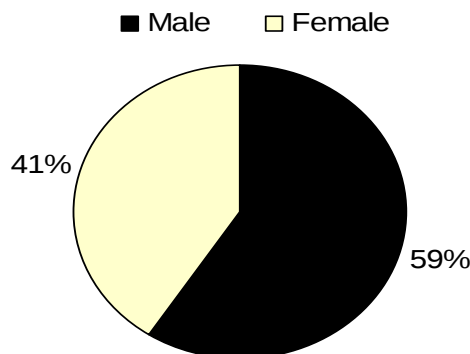
	Under 25	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65 and over
Male	1%	11%	31%	49%	7%	1%
Female	0%	19%	48%	27%	6%	0%
Total	0%	15%	39%	39%	6%	0%

Weighted Data

Children

Analysis of the weighted pilot data revealed that 59% of employees in the DJELR had children. Figure 3.2 below shows the distribution of this group according to gender.

Figure 3.2: Distribution of employees with children by gender (N=132)

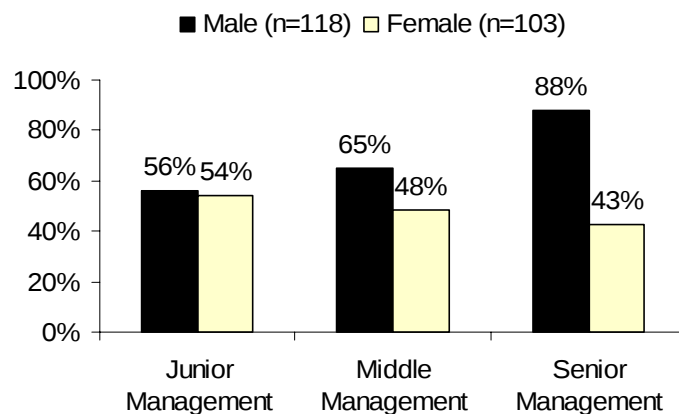


Weighted Data

As illustrated in Figure 3.2 above, of those employees with children, 59% were men and 41% were women. We can conclude that women are less likely than their male colleagues in the DJELR to have children.

Figure 3.3 overleaf indicates the stark differences between men and women in relation to children and management grade. Among male senior managers (n=25) 88% had children, this compares with women senior managers (n=7) of whom only 43% had children. Men are much more likely to have children as they rise up the management grades. However, this is not the case for their female counterparts. Women in junior management grades in the DJELR were more likely to have children (54%) compared with those in senior management (43%).

Figure 3.3: Distribution of male and female employees with children according to their management level (N=221)



Weighted Data

Marital status

There is quite a difference in the marital status of the men and women sampled. Over 70% of the male respondents were married, while among the female respondents, 51% were married. Women in the sample were almost twice as likely to be single than their male counterparts. Single women represented 33% of the sample compared with single men who represented 18% of the sample.

Table 3.5: Distribution according to gender and marital status

	Single	Married	Cohabiting	Divorced	Separated	Widowed
Male	18%	71%	6%	2%	4%	0%
Female	33%	51%	8%	1%	6%	2%
Total	25%	61%	7%	1%	5%	1%

Weighted Data

3.3.2 Assessments of Ambition

Overall, the majority of employees in the DJELR, almost 68%, considered themselves to be ambitious. Men (74%) were more likely than women (61%) to consider themselves to be ambitious, as outlined in Table 3.6 below.

Table 3.6: Distribution of sample by those who considered themselves to be ambitious with gender.

	Yes	No
Male	74%	26%
Female	61%	39%

Weighted Data

Slightly less people (59%) overall believed that others considered them to be ambitious. However, there was greater similarity between women's self-assessed ambition level and how they think others view them, compared to the male respondents. Table 3.7 illustrates the percentage distribution of men and women in relation to other people's assessment of their ambition. In comparing Table 3.6 and Table 3.7 we can see that while almost 74% of men considered themselves to be ambitious, only 58% thought that other people considered them to be ambitious.

Table 3.7: Assessment of public perception of their ambition by gender

	Yes	No
Male	58%	42%
Female	60%	40%
Total	59%	41%

Weighted Data

Very few (less than 1%) of respondents think that ambition is 'unfeminine', with little difference between men and women's response. However over one third of respondents claimed that other people thought ambition was 'unfeminine'. Men and women were largely in agreement on this point, as outlined in Table 3.8 below.

Table 3.8: Assessment of public perception of ambition as unfeminine by gender

	Yes	No
Male	34%	66%
Female	33%	67%
Total	33%	67%

Weighted Data

3.3.3 Career Aspirations

This section looks at the aspirations of employees in the DJELR in terms of the Civil Service career ladder. Analysis will focus on how aspirations may have altered or adapted over career lifespan as well as on how gender may or may not have affected the creation and the realisation of such aspirations.

Table 3.9 below shows that Principal Officer/Principal Officer 1 was the grade which most people (23%) aspired to reach on first joining the Civil Service. This was closely followed by Assistant Principal/Assistant Principal 1 (22%) and Higher Executive Officer/ Administrative Officer (17%). Just

over 15% of respondents harboured an ambition to reach the top echelons of Senior Management, (i.e. Assistant Secretary or Secretary General).

Table 3.9: Distribution by gender of employees according to their aspiration upon entry to the Civil Service (N=223)

	EO	HEO/AO	AP/AP1	PO/PO1	AS	SG	Other
Male	6%	15%	25%	26%	12%	8%	8%
Female	15%	18%	29%	19%	8%	3%	17%
Total	10%	17%	22%	23%	10%	5%	13%

Weighted Data

While there are similarities between what grades are most popular amongst both men and women, there are also some quite important differences, particularly in relation to the highest ranking choice in the aspirations of men and women. Upon entry into the Civil Service the majority of men (26%) in the DJELR aspired to reach Principal Officer/Principal Officer 1 level. Among women in the DJELR, the majority (29%) aspired to reach Assistant Principal/Assistant Principal 1 grade upon entry into the Civil Service. While 45% of male respondents had ambitions to reach Senior Management grades (that is Principal Officer and above), only 30% of women aspired to reach an equivalent level. However, 34% of women aspired to reach Junior Management positions (that is HEO/AO and below) whereas only 21% of men aspired to reach an equivalent level. It is important to note here however, that the level to which this represents shorter or longer term goals for the respondents cannot be judged. The survey asked respondents to reflect upon their ambitions upon entry into the Civil Service, it does not ask for qualification as to whether they were projecting these aspirations for their entire career or for the immediate 5 or 10 year period. However, it would appear from this data that among the current cohort of DJELR employees, women generally aspired to reach a lower grade than their male counterparts upon entry into the Civil Service.

Table 3.10: Distribution by gender of employees according to their current aspirations (N=224)

	Assistant Principal/AP1	Principal Officer/PO1	Assistant Secretary	Secretary General
Male	29%	47%	20%	4%
Female	54%	30%	14%	2%
Total	41%	39%	17%	3%

Weighted Data

In order to gauge how ambition changes over time respondents were asked to select what grade they now aspire to reach within the Civil Service. In comparing Table 3.9 and Table 3.10 above, we can see that over time career ambition in relation to grade aspiration altered among the respondents. In total, 41% of respondents said that they now aspire to reach Assistant Principal/Assistant Principal 1 level. Almost 39% of respondents said they would now aspire to reach Principal Officer/Principal Officer 1 level, and over 20% of overall respondents now aspire to reach the top echelons of Senior Management.

With regard to gender differences, while 47% of men aspire to Principal Officer/Principal Officer 1 level, only 30% of women aspire to reach this level, and while 24% of men now wish to reach the top echelons of power within the Civil Service, (i.e. Assistant Secretary/Secretary General) only 16% of women share this aspiration.

3.4 Summary of Pilot Interview Findings

Qualitative interviews were conducted with three men and five women from the DJELR representing each of the three management levels identified in the methodology. Analysis was carried out on the transcribed data using a voice-centred relational analytical method (Byrne, 2000). According to this analysis method, multiple readings were undertaken focusing on the voice of the interview participant and allowing for thematic divisions of the data to emerge. A voice-centred analysis of the

transcripts yielded a deeper understanding of the key issues surrounding the topic of ambition and success in the Civil Service as it relates to gender relations.

For the purposes of protecting the confidentiality of the interview participants who took part in this study, the qualitative findings will be presented through identification of the key themes. Examination of the qualitative data allowed for the emergence of seven key themes which were common to all the interviews. These themes are significant in that they act as framing devices for evaluating the interviews as well as for structuring a reviewed interview guide for the main study (see Appendix B for copy of interview guide).

The themes are as follows:

- Civil Service and workplace culture
- Education and socio-economic background
- Motivation and priorities
- Mobility
- Social networks and collegiality
- Mentoring and role modelling
- Defining ambition

3.4.1 Civil Service and Workplace Culture

A common thread running through the pilot interviews was recognition of the changing culture of the Civil Service. The average length of employment in the Civil Service among the pilot participants was 26 years. As a result they were able to reflect on how the modern Civil Service has evolved particularly in relation to women's employment. Many of the participants recalled a very conservative and male dominated Civil Service culture in the early years of their employment; women were employed predominantly in the clerical grades and very few progressed into management grades at all. Issues such as the marriage bar as well as an effective embargo on recruitment in 1988-1989 were discussed in terms of how they impacted on the numbers of women in the upper grades as well as the cultural climate of the Civil Service itself. There was recognition that over the last decade the Civil Service had been transformed in response to the changing economic and social climate in the country as a whole. Many of the participants in the pilot phase agreed that this changing culture had an impact on the nature of ambition and competition within the Service. The rate of promotion had increased in recent years fostering a more competitive climate and steeper career trajectories. This was viewed very positively by the pilot participants.

There was also an acknowledgment that there was a greater mix than ever before of women and men at all the grades. One of the primary features of all of the pilot conversations was discussion of the various Civil Service work life balance policies and how they have particularly facilitated the employment of women with children. However, emerging from pilot data under this theme was an appreciation of the difficulties inherent in harmonising policies which facilitate breaks in service with the necessary productivity and time demands of careers in the upper grades. There was a general feeling that these policies were aimed at and utilised predominantly by women and particularly by those in the lower grades. The pilot participants noted that while there was a positive attitude towards these policies within the cultural environment, they were also interpreted as possible road blocks in a career trajectory into the upper ranks of the Civil Service.

3.4.2 Education and socio-economic background

Education was a strong theme across the pilot interviews, in particular the value placed on continuing education within the Civil Service culture was emphasised. The majority of the pilot participants joined the Civil Service upon completion of the Leaving Certificate. Reflection on the motivations for joining the Civil Service at this time were put in the context of the economic depression in the 1980's and the value that was placed upon a secure and pensionable Civil Service job by their families. The pilot participants were emphatic regarding the value of education and all of the participants had availed of the policies which enable Civil Servants to continue education while working. Social class relations emerged as a theme among a number of the pilot participants. For this

group their employment in the Civil Service had enabled upward social mobility via education as well as financial security. This socio-demographic feature of mobility is by no means unique to these participants and is a reflection of the economic and social changes experienced on a national level.

3.4.3 Priorities

In the context of discussing ambition the concept of personal priorities and motivations for work frequently arose. The desire to advance within a Civil Service career was placed alongside family priorities among pilot interviewees. This was particularly relevant in the discussions around family friendly workplace policies that are fostered and promoted within the Civil Service. In particular, many of the pilot participants remarked that breaks in service which were taken in order to combine caring responsibilities and work might be perceived as demonstrating a lack of commitment to the job. This emerged from both the male and the female participants and was mentioned particularly in relation to the upper management positions. According to many of the pilot participants the difficulties in reconciling parenting with a high pressured job, particularly for women, is not an issue of workplace perception but is the hard reality of constraints of time. Parenthood enforces a renegotiation of priorities and this often leads to career sacrifices. In the experience of the participants, these sacrifices remained primarily those of women rather than men.

3.4.4 Mobility and variety within the Civil Service

The opportunity afforded by Civil Service employment to rise up a structured career trajectory as well as to move around various roles gaining varied experiences and skills was widely celebrated among the pilot participants. The structured nature of the Civil Service facilitated a linear review of the participants careers to date as well as projections into the future. This was also placed within the context of a new, more competitive culture within the service where promotion through the ranks was encouraged. Furthermore, the variety of experiences and roles that the pilot participants experienced throughout their careers was discussed in the conversations. Overall there was a great sense of dynamism within the Service and this is viewed very positively by the participants.

3.4.5 Social networks and collegiality

The significance of social networks as facilitators to ambition and advancement within the Civil Service was emphasised throughout the conversations with pilot interviewees. Many of the participants acknowledged that if one had a desire to advance through the ranks of the Civil Service having an extensive contact list as well as experience around the different Departments was crucial. This was viewed in a positive light by some of the interviewees who spoke about it in the context of building network ties and gaining important skill sets along the way. For some participants however, there was resentment at this culture of “pressing the flesh” which they believed was inherent in the Service. This was mentioned particularly in the context of internal competitions for promotion where they felt there was unfair bias against those who were less well connected. Furthermore, this culture was also described as being discriminatory towards parents and particularly women with children who found the socialising aspect of their job difficult to manage.

3.4.6 Mentoring and role modelling

The theme of role modelling and mentoring was a significant thread throughout the interviews. Many of the pilot participants spoke about a particular mentor from their early careers who advised them and encouraged them in promotions. The style of mentoring that was described by the participants as being fostered within the Civil Service culture was informal. Furthermore role models were also important for the pilot participants particularly in relation to informing their own management styles. Significantly, none of the mentors or role models described by the pilot participants were women. This can largely be explained by the fact that very few women rose up the ranks of the Civil Service to be in a position to mentor until relatively recently.

3.4.7 Defining ambition

In discussing the nature of ambition the pilot participants distinguished between a public and private ambition as well as between negative and positive ambition. The participants spoke about their own personal goals for their careers and their own strategies for achieving these goals. However, the participants believed that within a workplace context it is important to manage the perception of one's ambition. This is relevant for the discussion of positive and negative forms of ambition. Those that did

not manage the perception of themselves well were described by the participants as using back stabbing and ruthless strategies to advance their careers. In describing their own ambition the participants were adamant about distinguishing their ambition from negative ambition. They emphasised their desire to advance without hurting anybody or treading on any toes.

Of further significance is the frequent reference to the perceived differences between the Civil Service and the private sector in terms of the nature of ambition which is fostered within each of the two working cultures. The interviewees frequently mentioned that their perception of private sector ambition was more negative than in the Civil Service. They felt that overt negative ambition was a feature of the private sector and they believed the Civil Service ambition was tamer by comparison.

A common thread in the interviews was recognition that ambitious women can be perceived differently to their male counterparts. Women were portrayed by the participants often as lacking in confidence in particular in relation to putting themselves forward for promotion. By contrast their male counterparts were more likely to overestimate their abilities. The pilot participants posited that there was often discomfort around women who were overtly ambitious. It would appear that gender socialisation may operate to create a space for overt male ambition, however, when women attempt to move into this space they can often be met with resistance.

3.5 Implications for the Main Study

The primary focus of the pilot study was to identify implications for the main project which arose during the experience of the pilot research. In particular the function of the pilot study was to test the research design and methodology in relation to both the survey component and the interview element of this project. Furthermore, the issues highlighted in the pilot interviews informed the background knowledge of the researchers in terms of Civil Service workplace culture.

3.5.1 Key learnings from the pilot survey:

One of the major benefits of the pilot research was the opportunity to test the tools elected to facilitate the collection and analysis of the survey responses. In particular the online repository facility was tested as was the transfer of collected responses to the data analysis software (SPSS). Furthermore the design and structure of the survey itself was reviewed with a particular focus on any structural issues that arose from the survey layout that hindered analysis.

In addition to testing the design and structure of the layout, the pilot also afforded the research team the opportunity to apply and test the post-stratification weights. The importance of this weighting procedure is outlined in Chapter 4 below. The application of the post-stratification weighting formula outlined for the pilot study was extended to the analysis of the main study. In particular weighting accounted for gender and management level differentials between the Civil Service Departments included in the captured sample for the main study.

3.5.2 Key learnings from the pilot interviews

The pilot study allowed the research team to test the equipment used in the interview process as well as make appropriate amendments to the interview guide. Post-interview discussion among the research team allowed for the identification of key topics or issues that arose during the pilot interviews which require deeper probing in the main study. Modifications were made to the interview guide which reflected the desire to elicit participant responses to the topics identified in light of the pilot interviews (see Appendix A for copy of Interview guide used for the main study).

Chapter 4: Methodology

The fieldwork for the main study was conducted between December 2007 and February 2008. Supplementary private sector data was collected by July 2008. A two strand methodology was employed using both qualitative and quantitative components. The research aimed to investigate the nature of ambition among Civil Service employees focusing on those in management grades (HEO/AO and above). The focus of the study was women's ambition, however men were included in the research sample in order to provide a basis for comparison. The main research tools employed were:

- An online survey administered to all employees in the HEO grade and above within 15 Civil Service Departments. A total of 5,552 employees were targeted in the captured sample yielding a total valid response rate of 40.3%.
- Qualitative interviews were conducted with 26 employees from two Departments. The sample was weighted in favour of women to include a total of 19 women and 7 men. A sample of 10 employees from a large private sector financial institution in Dublin was also interviewed. This sample consisted of 4 men and 6 women from across similar management levels.

4.1 The Survey

4.1.1 Response Rates

The survey was administered using online survey software which acts as a design and analysis tool as well as a repository for the questionnaire. The survey sample was accessed through a web link administered through the HR personnel within each of the Departments via email. This method was considered by the research team in consultation with the sponsoring body to be the best means of achieving maximum response rates and of accessing the broad spectrum of employees at the selected management grades.

The survey was disseminated for a period of 8 weeks from November to January 2008. As in the pilot study, the grades were grouped into three management levels.⁸ Completed questionnaires were collected via the online repository and were filtered for valid responses. The survey elicited a 50.5% total response rate (N=2,806). Invalid or incomplete responses were filtered from the total response yielding a valid response rate of 40.3% (N=2,237). Table 4.1 below indicates the percentage response rates by gender and management level.

Table 4.1: Percentage response rates by management level and gender							
Department	Senior Management		Middle Management		Junior Management		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Average	34.0%	55.4%	40.7%	64.8%	40.9%	52.5%	45.0%
Total	34.2%	53.5%	37.5%	63.4%	29.2%	46.2%	40.3%

Source: CGWS, 2008

Table 4.1 shows that across the management grades the response rates were higher for female employees compared to men. The average total response rate was 45%. Across the Departments the individual response rates ranged from 24% to 83% with 13 of the 15 Departments yielding a total response rate of over 30%.

4.1.2 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The following section presents a profile of the total respondents (N=2,237) who will form the basis for analysis. This profile describes the total respondent sample and is unweighted (see section

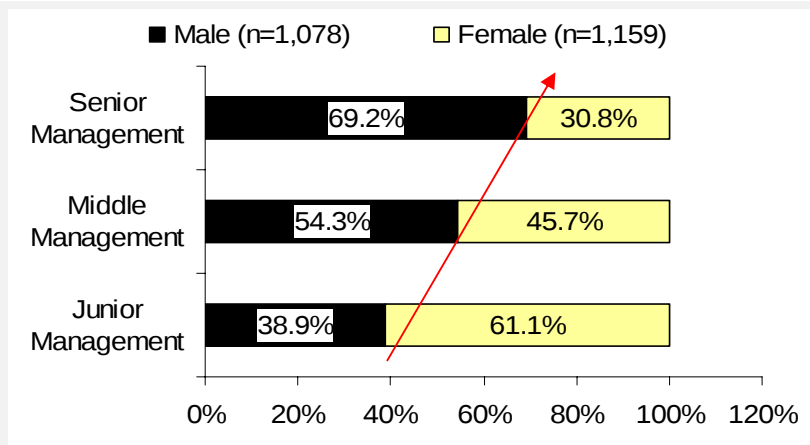
⁸ Junior management included all those employed in the Higher Executive Officer and Administrative Officer grades. Middle management consisted of those in the Assistant Principal grade. And senior management was made up of employees from Principal Officer, Assistant Secretary, Director, Deputy Secretary and Secretary General grades.

4.1.3 for further explanation). Therefore, this data is representative of the survey respondents only and not of the Civil Service in general.

Gender and Management Level

Figure 4.1 below illustrates the distribution of respondents by management grades and by gender. Among those senior managers who completed the questionnaire, 30.8% were women compared to 61.1% female junior managers.

Figure 4.1: Gender breakdown of management grades (N=2,237)



Source: CGWS, 2008

Figure 4.1 above demonstrates the uneven distribution of respondents across the management grades according to gender. Senior male managers outnumber their female colleagues by 38.4% while the reverse is true in junior management where women outnumber men by 22.2%.

Marital and Family Status

Table 4.2 below illustrates the distribution of respondents by marital status. From the table we can see that the majority of respondents are married. However of the male respondents, 75.4% are married, compared with 54.5% of female respondents. Furthermore, female respondents are more likely to be single than the male respondents.

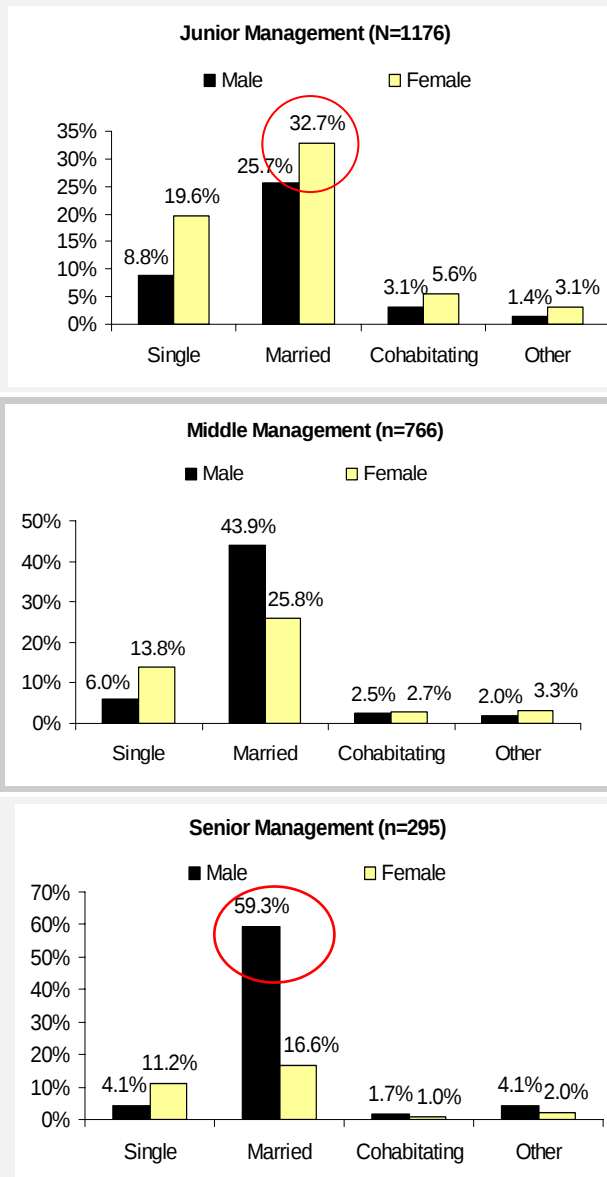
Table 4.2: Gender and marital status (N=2,237)

	Male (n=1,078)	Female (n=1,159)
Single	14.9%	31.9%
Married	75.4%	54.5%
Cohabiting	5.7%	7.8%
Other	4.0%	5.8%

Source: CGWS, 2008

Figure 4.2 below illustrates the distribution of respondents in the management grades according to gender and marital status. Each figure represents a percentage of the total number of employees at each management level.

Figure 4.2: Comparison of management grades by gender and marital status (N=2,237)*



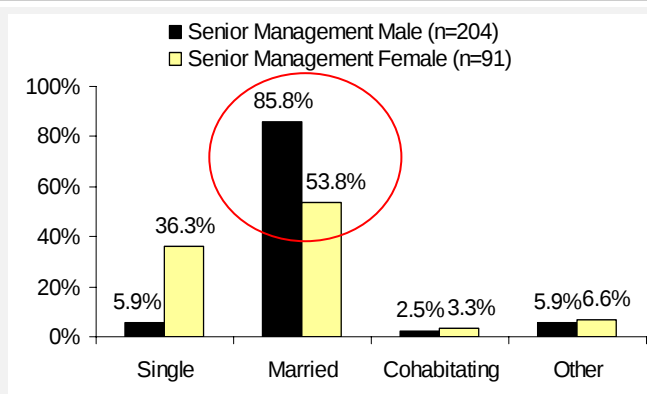
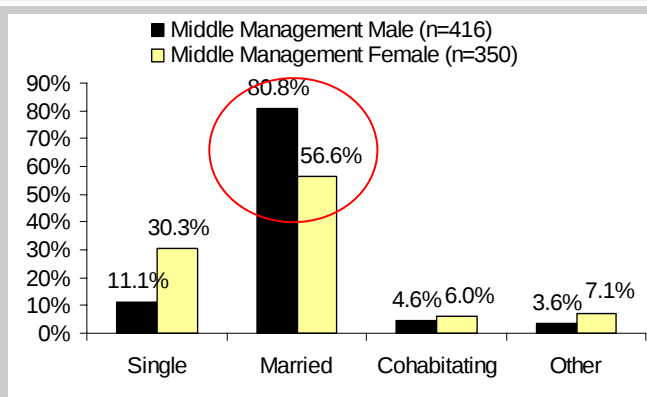
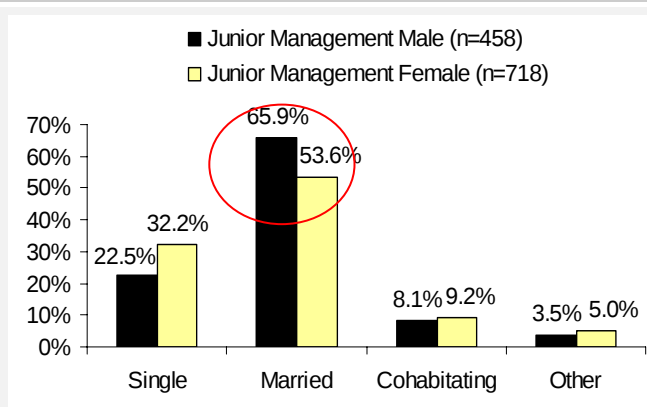
Source: CGWS, 2008

*This chart compares the management grades, therefore, each management category represents 100% of the male and female employees at that level.

The figure shows the dominant cohorts within each management grade. The largest cohort among senior managers (n=295) consists of married men who represent 59.3% of the respondents at these grades. By contrast among junior managers who responded to the survey (n=1176), the dominant cohort is married women who represent 32.7% of junior managers who answered this survey.

Figure 4.3 below compares the marital status of male and female respondents according to what management grade they belong to. In this figure the percentages are derived from the total number male employees and the total number of female employees at each management grade.

Figure 4.3: Percentage of male and female respondents within each management grade, who are married (N=2,237)*



Source: CGWS, 2008

*This chart compares women and men within each management grade, therefore women and men each add up to 100% within each management level.

Figure 4.3 illustrates that the likelihood of female respondents being married remains relatively static as they rise up the management grades. Among their male counterparts, however, there is an increased likelihood that they will be married as they rise up the grades. Among the senior management male respondents, 85.8% are married as compared with 53.8% of the female senior managers. Figure 4.2 illustrates that among the survey respondents the senior management level is overwhelmingly dominated by married men who represent 59.3% of the total number of employees at this level. By contrast, married women make up only 16.6% of all senior managers.

Table 4.3 below shows the percentage distribution of respondents with children according to gender. The male respondents were much more likely to have children compared to their female

colleagues. Of the men who answered the survey, 70.7% had children compared with 53.6% of the women.

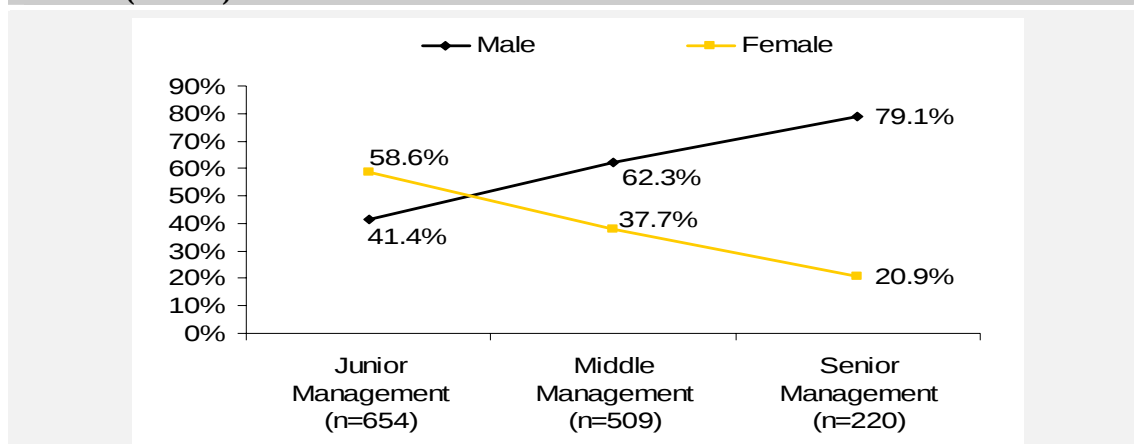
Table 4.3: Percentage of respondents with and without children according to gender (N=2,237)

	Yes (n=1,383)	No (n=854)
Male	70.7%	29.3%
Female	53.6%	46.4%

Source: CGWS, 2008

Figure 4.4 below illustrates the percentage of male and female respondents within each of the management categories who have children. From the chart we can see the likelihood of women having children dramatically decreases as they rise up the management categories. Again, the opposite is true for men. Among senior manager respondents who have children (n=220), 79.1% are men compared with 20.9% who are women. By contrast, among junior managers who responded to the survey and who have children (n=654), 58.6% are women compared with 41.4% who are men.

Figure 4.4: Percentage of male and female respondents within specific management levels with children (N=1386)



Source: CGWS, 2008

It would appear from the information above that the female respondents are much less likely than male respondents to be married and have children as they rise up the management grades. There are very significant discrepancies between percentages of male senior managers who are married and who have children compared to their female counterparts. As will be seen in Chapter 5, this is also true of the representative weighted sample of the Civil Service as a whole.

Age and Length of Service

Table 4.4: Distribution of survey population by gender and age (N=2,237)

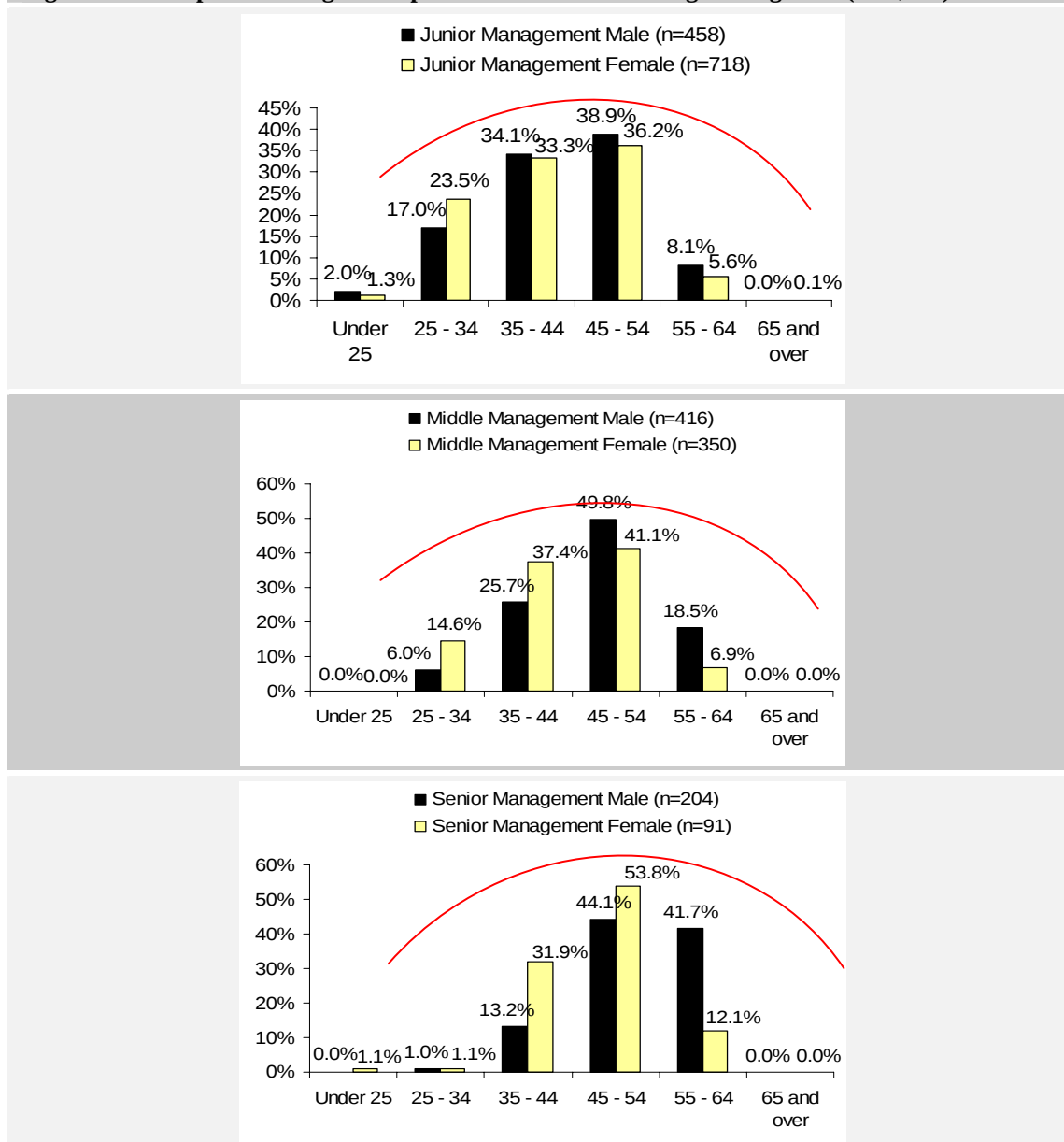
	Male (n = 1,078)	Female (n=1,159)
Under 25	0.8%	0.9%
25-34	9.7%	19.1%
35-44	26.9%	34.4%
45-54	44.1%	39.1%
55-64	18.5%	6.5%
65 and over	0%	0.1%

Source: CGWS, 2008

Table 4.4 above illustrates the age distribution of the survey population by gender. The respondents are spread across the age brackets in a bell curve distribution, with concentration in the middle age categories (35-44 and 45-54). Of some significance is that the female respondents are more likely to be younger than their male counterparts. The majority of the female respondents are between 35 and 44 years of age whereas the majority of the male respondents are between 45 and 54 years.

Figure 4.5 above illustrates the distribution of respondents by age and by management level. There are a higher number of junior managers under 34 years and more senior managers over 55. A significant finding lies in the gender distribution of respondents. Women senior managers are more likely to be younger than their male counterparts. The majority of the female senior managers are in the 45 to 54 and the 35 to 44 age brackets. By comparison, the majority of the male senior managers are in the 45-54 and the 55 to 64 age brackets. Similarly among the middle managers, women are again more likely to be younger than their male colleagues. A higher percentage of the women middle management respondents are in the first three age brackets (25 to 44 years) than the male respondents.

Figure 4.5: Comparison of age of respondents across the management grades (N=2,237)



Source: CGWS, 2008

A possible explanation for this slight age discrepancy is the marriage bar which operated in the Civil Service until 1973. This mandated that women leave employment upon marriage and would have impacted on the number of women in the management grades as well as the age distribution of employees. Furthermore, our analysis of the survey data revealed that men in the senior management who obtained their current grade through seniority are equal to their female colleagues by an 8:1 ratio.

This is further explored in section 5.4.2 below and reveals a possible explanation for the age discrepancies among men and women in senior management.

Table 4.5: Distribution of respondents according to gender and length of service (N=2,237)

	Male (n=1078)	Female (1,159)
Less than 5 years	4.9%	8.5%
Between 5 and 10 years	12.5%	19.1%
Between 11 and 20 years	14.8%	18.5%
Between 21 and 30 years	36.5%	37.2%
Between 31 and 40 years	28.2%	16.0%
More than 40 years	3.0%	0.9%

Source: CGWS, 2008

The distribution of respondents according to gender and length of service as described in Table 4.5 above shows similar normal bell curve distributions among men and women. The majority of respondents have completed between 21 and 30 years service. The female respondents, however, are much more likely to have been recruited in the last three decades compared to their male colleagues. A total of 31.2% of the male respondents were recruited into the Civil Service over 30 years ago compared with 16.9% of the female respondents.

Table 4.6: Distribution of respondents by gender and educational attainment (N=2,231)

	Male (n=1077)	Female (n=1154)
Primary level	0.1%	0.3%
Secondary level	28.2%	26.8%
Third level (Diploma)	16.3%	17.2%
Third level (Degree)	27.1%	26.2%
Post-graduate (Diploma)	6.3%	9.7%
Post-graduate (Masters)	20.1%	18.0%
Post-graduate (Doctorate)	1.9%	1.8%

Source: CGWS, 2008

Table 4.6 above provides the percentage distribution of male and female respondents according to their highest educational attainment. The table indicates that the educational profile of the male and female survey population is very similar. Women are marginally more likely than their male colleagues to have attained third level and postgraduate diplomas rather than degrees or masters. However there is little significant difference between the male and female respondents on this measure.

4.1.3 Post-Stratification Weighting

As outlined in Table 4.1 in section 4.1.1, the total and average response rates for the female respondents were significantly higher than for their male counterparts across the three management categories. Women represent 41% (n = 2,275) of the total population of employees in the selected management grades.⁹ However, the total response rate for female respondents is 50.9% (n=1,159) compared to a 32.9% response from their male counterparts (n=1078). The number of female survey respondents is far greater than their actual representation in the selected grades across the Departments.

Table 4.7 below illustrates the response rates distributed by management level comparing the distribution in the base population (N = 5,552) and the survey population (n=2,237). While the distributions are somewhat similar we can see from Table 4.7 that middle management are over represented in the survey population compared to the base population. Both senior management and

⁹ The total base population for the employees in HEO grade and above within the 15 Civil Service Departments was supplied to the research team via the research sponsors using IPA figures for 2008 in conjunction with the records of the Departments themselves. This total figure was given as 5,552 (women = 2,275 and men = 3,277)

junior management are under-represented, with the under-sampling of the junior management having greater significance.

Table 4.7: Percentage distribution of total employees and responses by management level

	Total Employees	% distribution of total employees (N=5,552)	Total Responses	% distribution of total responses
Junior management	3,124	56.3%	1,176	52.8%
Middle management	1,661	29.9%	766	34.2%
Senior management	7,67	13.8%	295	13.1%
	5,552		2,237	

Source: CGWS, 2008 and DJELR, 2008

In order to compensate for the over-sampling of women as well as respondents from the middle management grades, post-stratification weighting has been employed. The purpose of allocating these weights to is to allow for a representative sample. Having a representative sample of the population by gender and management level is important in order to avoid bias in the analysis of the survey results. This ensures that the survey responses from each subsample (by gender and management level) will be given a representative weighting according to how they are distributed in the base population, i.e. the total population of employees within the selected management grades across the 15 Departments. (See Appendix D for further clarification of the post-stratification weights employed in the survey data analysis).

4.2 The Interviews

4.2.1 The Interview Format

The interviews were structured to further explore the key topics and issues arising from the survey while also having the flexibility to encompass issues raised by the interviewees. The interview guide combined structure with flexibility in order to obtain optimum results (See Appendix A for copy of the interview guide used in the Civil Service interviews as well as the interviews conducted within the financial institution).

Each interview lasted for approximately one hour. All interviews were digitally recorded. Following best practice in the field of qualitative research, the structure of the interview guides was sufficiently flexible to permit topics to be covered in the order most suited to the interviewee. It also allowed for answers to be fully probed in order to obtain more in-depth insights and opinions. The interview was interactive in nature - researchers aimed to be responsive to relevant issues raised by the interviewee outside of the interview guide. Feminist interviewing strives to be more reflexive and interactive, aiming to take a non-hierarchical approach which avoids objectifying the participant. The research team adopted such an approach, maintaining a sensitive and adaptive method throughout the course of the interviews. Interviews were conducted primarily by two members of the team: one to direct the questions to the interviewee, and one to take notes. The role of both people present was fully explained to the participant.

Guidelines of the Sociological Association of Ireland were adopted in conducting the interviews and guiding the ethical procedures.¹⁰ Following these best practice directives, the research team ensured:

¹⁰ See the SAI website for further information as to the best practice guidelines when conducting research by interview.

<http://www.sociology.ie/index.php?service=ethi13&pagid=ric1b00003&useid=sok1213696686s2>

- Provision of information to the participants on the research project before the interview in order to prepare themselves (See Appendix B for participants interview guide for both the Civil Service and the financial institution);
- the confidentiality of the participants (see Appendix C for copy of consent forms);
- the interviewees were assured as to the voluntary nature of their participation and their right to withdraw from the study or decline to answer any question or topic that may arise;
- to ensure confidentiality data derived from the interviews is presented in this report using pseudonyms for the participants. In presentation of the data from the Civil Service sample, a pseudonym as well as management level and gender is supplied. Due to the limited sample size in the private sector and the likelihood of identification, it was decided to supply only the gender and a pseudonym for the private sector participant.

4.2.2 The Sample

Participants for the Civil Service component of the qualitative study were drawn from across the three management grades (HEO/AO and above) and from two Civil Service Departments. Both men and women were interviewed for this component of the study. However, as has been noted, the focus of the project was on women's ambition therefore, the sample was weighted to include more female participants. A total of 26 volunteers were interviewed, this consisted of 19 women and 7 men. In the private sector component of the study a smaller sample was interviewed. The purpose of this component was to draw comparisons when analysing the Civil Service data, therefore the sample consisted of only ten employees. Both men and women from the financial institution were interviewed and they were distributed across relevant management levels. The private sector sample consisted of 4 men and 6 women.

The Civil Service Qualitative Sample

Table 4.8 below illustrates the distribution of the qualitative sample by gender and management level.

Table 4.8: Distribution of qualitative sample from the Civil Service Departments by gender and management level

	Junior Management	Middle Management	Senior Management
Male	2	1	4
Female	7	7	5
Total	9	8	9

Source: CGWS 2008

The average age of the participants was 42 years and their length of service ranged from 5 years to 40 years with an average of 17 years. Three of the participants worked atypical work patterns while the remaining 23 were full-time employees. A total of 13 participants had children, this included 6 out of the 7 male participants and 7 of the 19 female interviewees. Table 4.9 below illustrates the marital status of the participants by their gender.

Table 4.9: Distribution of the Civil Service qualitative sample by marital status

	Co-habiting	Married	Separated	Single
Male	1	5	0	1
Female	4	7	2	6
Total	5	12	2	7

Source: CGWS, 2008

The Private Sector Qualitative Sample

The smaller sample of interview participants from the financial institution was structured to replicate the sampling frame used in the Civil Service study. Therefore, three parallel management levels were determined in consultation with the HR Department of the institution. Table 4.10 below illustrates the distribution of the qualitative sample according to gender and management level.

Table 4.10: Distribution of qualitative sample from the financial institution by gender and management level

	Junior Management	Middle Management	Senior Management
Male	2	1	1
Female	1	3	2
Total			

Source: CGWS 2008

The average age of the participants was 42.8 and their length of service ranged from a minimum of 3 years to a maximum of 40 years, the average length of service was 19 years. A total of six participants were married, this consisted of four of the women and two of the men, a third man was co-habiting. Two of the female participants were single as well as one of the men. Half of the 10 interview participants had children - three of the six women interviewed and two of the four men interviewed. On average the participants had 1.3 children. Among the women with children each had two children, the men had four and three children each. All of the participants worked full-time.

According to the voice-centred analytical method employed by the study, multiple readings of the transcripts were undertaken. These readings allow for thematic divisions to emerge from the texts which are centred on the voices of the participants themselves.

Chapter 5 will present the findings from the study according to the key thematic divisions that emerged from the analysis stage.

Chapter 5: Thematic Analysis

This chapter of the report presents the findings from thematic analysis of both the quantitative and the qualitative data. Specific thematic divisions were identified from the transcribed interviews and the texts were coded according to these themes. The findings are presented according to four thematic pillars which emerged from the analysis of both the interviews and the survey:

- Understanding ambition
- Strategies and planning for career advancement
- Ambition and motivations for working in the Civil Service
- Ambition, career breaks, children and atypical work patterns

All of the quantitative data presented in this chapter has been subjected to post-stratification weighting as outlined in Chapter 4. These weights have been employed in order to allow the data derived from the survey responses to be as representational as possible of the 15 Departments surveyed. Table 5.1 below presents the distribution of the weighted survey population by gender, management grade and Department. The application of weights to this data means that the percentage distribution, as represented in the table below, replicates the *actual* distribution of employees in the individual Departments.

Table 5.1: Weighted survey population by gender, management level and Department*

	Junior Management			Middle Management			Senior Management		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Agriculture & Food	33%	29%	63%	18%	9%	27%	9%	2%	10%
Arts, Sports & Tourism	32%	16%	47%	32%	16%	47%	0%	5%	5%
Communications, Marine/Nat. Resources	22%	19%	41%	30%	10%	40%	13%	6%	19%
Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs	23%	39%	62%	15%	12%	27%	12%	0%	12%
Defence	25%	33%	58%	18%	10%	28%	10%	5%	15%
Education & Science	23%	35%	57%	17%	13%	30%	9%	4%	13%
Enterprise, Trade and Employment	18%	30%	48%	22%	11%	32%	15%	4%	19%
Environment, Heritage and Local Gov.	18%	27%	45%	27%	12%	39%	13%	3%	16%
Finance	21%	19%	40%	23%	17%	40%	16%	4%	20%
Foreign Affairs	14%	20%	33%	26%	13%	39%	24%	5%	29%
Health & Children	18%	25%	43%	19%	21%	40%	12%	6%	18%
Revenue	34%	29%	63%	21%	7%	28%	8%	2%	10%
Social & Family Affairs	40%	33%	73%	15%	6%	21%	4%	3%	7%
Taoiseach	13%	26%	40%	11%	24%	34%	18%	8%	26%
Transport	22%	26%	48%	20%	10%	30%	18%	4%	22%
Total	27%	27%	54%	21%	11%	31%	12%	3%	15%
Average	24%	27%	51%	21%	13%	33%	12%	4%	16%

Weighted Data *These figures are a static snapshot derived from the IPA Yearbook 2008. This is compiled from demographic statistics pertaining to mid 2007.

The findings that are outlined in the following sections will be presented in relation to gender and to management grade and can be interpreted as being representative of the Civil Service Departments surveyed. Furthermore, all references to individuals who participated in the interviews for

the qualitative analysis are made using pseudonyms in order to safe-guard confidentiality. Gender and management level are supplied when referencing the participants from the Civil Service sample set. However, due to the small sample size and the danger of identification, only gender is supplied when referencing the private sector participants.

5.1 Understanding Ambition

5.1.1 Defining Ambition

Definitions

Analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative data illustrates little difference in the understanding of ambition between the male and female Civil Service employees. Both chose the same words to define ambition, albeit in a different order of priority. Table 5.2 below illustrates the top five words chosen by survey respondents according to gender.

Table 5.2: Top five words which describe ambition, for men and women

	Men	Women
1	Motivated	Motivated
2	Competitive	Determined
3	Determined	Goal-oriented
4	Driven	Competitive
5	Goal Oriented	Driven

Weighted Data

The qualitative analysis of the 26 Civil Service interviews corresponds with the findings from the survey in that there would appear to be a similar understanding of ambition among men and women. Motivation, drive and a goal-orientation were features of the interviewee's descriptions of ambition.

It's seeking out the standard that you want and working to achieve that
(Ann, senior manager, Civil Service)

Ambition I would say is a mixture of trying to attain greater status in the workplace and trying to do yourself justice in terms of your own abilities.
(Richard, junior manager, Civil Service)

I think it's the drive to succeed, to be an expert in what you do and to constantly look for new challenges once you've become an expert in something to say 'right now I need to challenge myself a little further'
(Joanne, middle manager, Civil Service)

Among the private sector sample similar definitions of ambition were offered. Again words such as desire, progression, drive, hunger and belief were used.

I suppose a hunger, a desire, an enthusiasm to do more, to become more, it's around, I suppose, realising the capability that one has (Orlagh, female private sector employee)

You must believe in yourself, you must have the belief that you can do something, if you don't believe, you're not going to do it, so there is a basic issue there. The second one is desire, people will demonstrate the desire, the hunger to do something, to get on, to take advantage of things [...] And the last one then is the hard work, are you prepared to work for it? (Seamus, male private sector employee)

Both the Civil Service employees and the private sector participants emphasised realising one's potential or abilities through hard work in their descriptions of ambition. Across both of the samples and among both men and women there was an association made between progression or advancement and ambition.

Negative and Positive Ambition

It would appear that there is little difference in the way men and women are defining ambition. However, the qualitative data provided more nuanced information as to the attitudes of the participants to ambition and in particular to the distinction between negative and positive forms of ambition. Significantly, there was a degree of conflict in the participant's reaction to the term ambition as many participants described their own distrust of the concept. The interviewees acknowledged that ambition can be seen in a positive light. However, very often their initial reaction to the word was to invoke images of aggression, extreme single-mindedness as well as ruthless competition. Maeve, a junior manager in the Civil Service explained why she often feels uncomfortable around ambitious people. In her account below she illustrates the perception of ambition as a possible threat to her self.

I understand the parameters around my ambition, I understand the tradeoffs I'm willing to make, we're back to that negative connotation again, but in some ways I don't understand the parameters or the deal that somebody else is making with themselves in order to get ahead, what are they willing to do, who are they willing to talk about or talk to or what task are they willing to take on [...] if my ambition level isn't as high as theirs are they going to decide that I'm expendable on the altar of their ambition? It's just something, do you know...I'm not even sure I'm explaining it but I'd just be a little bit careful, that's all. (Maeve, junior manager, Civil Service)

The sense that very ambitious people are a threat to the individual was echoed across the 26 interviews in the Civil Service. Very often an image was portrayed of the ambitious person as a single-minded lone figure that focuses solely on their goals to the detriment of their colleagues.

You just feel that they have no regard for you and that they would step on your head to get where they want to go (Alice, junior manager, Civil Service)

If you distilled it, it's people who don't give a toss about others and will ride over their backs and go through them [...] and Thatcher is the epitome of it. (Brian, middle manager, Civil Service)

He's an ambitious person, single minded, absolutely ruthless (Jane, middle manager, Civil Service)

As the quotes above illustrate, negative ambition was viewed as threatening and individualistic. It is interesting that Margaret Thatcher is used by Brian as an example of the 'epitome' of ruthless ambition, an indicator of the negative connotations and stereotypes that exist particularly about aggressively ambitious women.

Within the private sector sample a similar association of an extreme negative ambition with individualism and ruthless determination was drawn.

Probably what comes to mind to me is kind of an ugly word because normally when the word is [...] you always get the impression that it means somebody's that's ruthless and very self-centred and only looking out for their own good but ultimately everyone needs a bit of ambition to drive them to do anything, to get up in the morning, so it doesn't have to be an ugly word at all but I think if I just hear the word it can...you can interpret the extreme (Michael, male private sector employee).

I think it goes back to this blinded ambition, we've all seen that where somebody achieve for themselves at all cost and that certainly wouldn't be my view of ambition (Orlagh, female private sector employee).

Of some significance however, was that in their initial response to the term, the private sector participants were less likely to define ambition in negative terms. Although both sets of participants recognised that ambition can be both a negative as well as a positive attribute. In general, the Civil Service group were slightly more emphatic when describing ambition as negative. It is important to highlight that the Civil Service participants, while acknowledging negative ambition exists, were eager to point out that it was not a prevalent feature of the Civil Service. Many felt that this negative ambition was more likely to exist within the private sector. However, across all of the interviewees from both sets, ambition was generally seen as a positive thing.

it has to be tempered but I mean it's a great thing to have, as I say without determination/ambition I guess there's not much left to progress, to help someone progress within an organisation (Michael, male private sector employee)

The danger of a ruthless and aggressive form of ambition was referenced not only as a threat to the individual but also was viewed by Conor, a senior manager in the Civil Service, as a threat to the organisation as a whole:

It can be a very destructive thing in an organisation, it can genuinely be [...] if you can't harness ambition as energy and you allow ambition just be a straight, you know, untrammelled competition where people are trying to get one up on the other, you know, it can be very damaging [...] if you harness ambition you get people to work hard, to deliver, you know, towards a corporate goal or a corporate end, if you let ambition on its own take over then it can be very destructive to that. (Conor, senior manager, Civil Service)

A key insight of the extract from Conor above is the recognition that ambition is not in itself a negative thing and that, in the correct environment, it can be hugely positive for the individual and the organisation. However, very often highly ambitious people were portrayed as difficult to work with. In particular there was a feeling that ambition should always be linked with ability and where ambition is not founded on ability, there is a problem. However, as Richard, a junior manager in the Civil Service aptly describes, even where ambition is founded on ability, there can be problems if it becomes a single-minded obsession:

It can be a distraction if somebody's ambition kind of, well certainly if it outstrips their ability it's terrible. If it is consistent with their ability but it is the sole focus that is kind of, there's a bit of arrogance there and it is off-putting but at the same time people can see that the person is well able and capable and should progress. Eh, you just wish they wouldn't dwell on it so much. (Richard, junior manager, Civil Service)

The association of ambition with ability, as highlighted in the extract above, was a significant feature of both sets of interviews. In their reflections on the concept of ambition all the interviewees recognised a positive aspect of ambition. In particular, positive ambition was strongly associated with performance and display of abilities within work.

Ambition is a want, you want to go somewhere but for whatever reason you do...people want it for different reasons and if you get up to that level they don't just want it for money, now they'll say they're delighted with the few bob but it's not, they want it because they feel they deserve it, you have to feel you deserve it and that you're capable of doing it, (Jane, middle manager, Civil Service)

I would think about that as less about career ambition and more about ambition to be good at your job, I don't know why the two seem different to me (Maeve, junior manager, Civil Service)

I can think of some very good examples in the business of people who are definitely, they're the future leaders of the organisation, they demonstrate sound and solid behaviours, [...] but you know that they're good and they're capable so it's okay (Orlagh, female private sector employee)

Both sets of participants emphasised that where there is ambition without ability, it can be dangerous and can lead to the negative form of ambition described above.

I think there's such a thing as ambition beyond someone's capability [...] you do hear sometimes ambition being used with negative connotations and I think it would be more associated with people, you know, who will say and do anything but actually don't necessarily have the capability to back up what they're saying or doing. (Barbara, female private sector employee)

Conscientiousness within a particular job was linked to career advancement as well as a perceived commitment to the workplace:

They're enthusiastic about their work, they're conscientious, they're willing to think about what they're doing, they make it clear that although they're at a particular level that they're interested in moving on, you know, and in making the most of whatever opportunities that they get, you know? (Frank, senior manager, Civil Service)

Recognition was a critical element of the positive ambition described by the participants. Tied in with the desire to work hard and the ability to do a job well was the acknowledgment that recognition was crucial to fostering and sustaining ambition:

It's recognition by your peers of your ability and a fulfilment of your ability by yourself. (Richard, junior manager, Civil Service)

This concept of mastery and recognition as expressed by both sets of participants corresponds with the work of Anna Fels (2004; 2005) as outlined in Chapter 2. The need for recognition to define, foster and sustain career ambition was a significant finding of this study:

I suppose seeking promotion, seeking betterment, seeking more power, more responsibility, wanting to be somewhere in a job that gives you tremendous satisfaction that you're using your abilities to the full, that you're getting paid for it and that you're recognised for it, so I suppose it's that want or desire to reach the pinnacle of your career or your life ambitions or whatever, something around that (Niamh, senior manager, Civil Service)

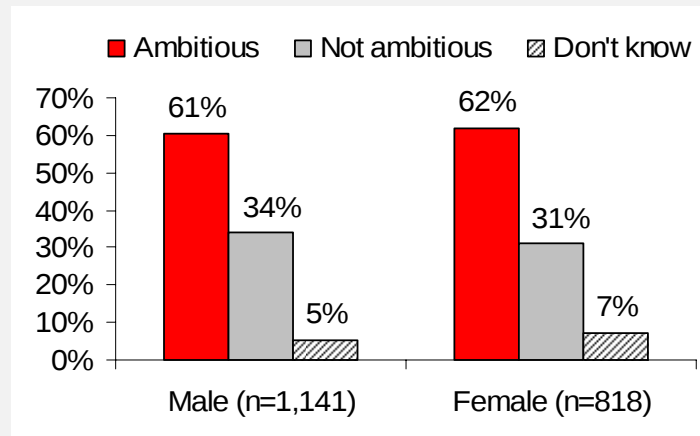
Yeah, without question if that's not there and I'm able to say this from having times in my career where it's not been there then you fade away, you have no interest because...if recognition is there then it doesn't matter what's on your 'To Do' list or what you're working on, the kind of value of it isn't there and I mean you don't, if you're not going to get recognised or something it doesn't matter how you do it, obviously you do it for yourself, you always have your own standards but at the end of the day sure what's the point in that, you know? (Michael, male private sector employee)

5.1.2 Personal Ambition

Assessment of own ambition

The descriptions of negative and positive ambition as outlined in section 5.1.1 above are significant when relating ambition on a general level to the interview participants and the survey respondent's perception of their own ambition. Figure 5.1 below indicates that there is little difference in the percentages of male and female respondents who consider themselves to be ambitious. Just over 60% of both male and female Civil Service employees described themselves as ambitious.

Figure 5.1: Employees assessment of their own ambition (N=1,959)



Weighted Data.

Analysis of the survey data as well as the interviews in section 5.1.1 above illustrated how men and women would appear to be defining ambition using the same terms and from the data above it would appear male and female Civil Servants are equally as likely to describe themselves as ambitious. This was supplemented by the qualitative data. The extracts below from Linda, a junior manager in the Civil Service and Conor, a senior manager in the Civil Service illustrate the language used by the participants in describing themselves as ambitious:

I'm not happy to stay at the grade I am at so in that way I would aspire, you know. (Linda, junior manager, Civil Service)

I don't think you succeed and get up the slippery pole to [senior management] without having some kind of underlying ambition (Conor, senior manager, Civil Service)

Figure 5.1 also shows that men are marginally more likely to say they are not ambitious compared to women with 34% of the male respondents answering no to this question compared with 31% of the women. It should be noted however, that men were significantly less likely to answer either of these questions in the survey and this is increasingly more significant among senior managers.

The reluctance of the Civil Service respondents to claim the term 'ambitious' in describing themselves is perhaps surprising when we consider that the employees targeted by this survey are in the upper grades of Civil Service. This reluctance may be explained by some of the qualitative findings in section 5.1.1 which described a negative form of ambition. The interview data provided insight into how a negative perception of ambition associated with ruthless competition and single-mindedness might influence personal ambition:

For myself I'd prefer to do well at what I'm doing and as I say hopefully gain a promotion further down the line but I wouldn't like to become one of those people who are, you know, unapproachable and thinking about themselves all the time and their own career path, couldn't see myself like that. (Carla, Junior manager, Civil Service)

Among many of the Civil Service participants there was a juxtaposition made between career ambition and a desire to do a good job:

Ambition, if you define ambition as I take pride in my work, I endeavour to do the best that I can then yes I am ambitious in that regard but I would hate to be thought of as I want that top job no matter what else and walk over everyone else to get it...to me that's a very negative view of ambition. (Nora, middle manager, Civil Service)

My view of ambition, my ambition is, in work, is to do my work right, to do a good job, that's my ambition (Debra, senior manager, Civil Service)

Nora, Debra and Carla express their own ambition in terms which emphasise their conscientiousness and their work ethic rather than their desire to progress their career in relation to the grade structure. However, what is implicit in these extracts is the belief that this desire to do their work well coupled with their ability will result in career progression, although this advancement is not their outward goal.

A feature among some of the interviews was the difficulty many of the participants had with reconciling their conscientious desire to do a good job with a desire to be promoted:

I like to do things right, okay, I don't mind being busy, I don't want to be bored and I want to be good at what I do...so my ambition is to be good at what I do as opposed to having ambition to move on (Emma, Junior manager, Civil Service)

I think people always look at ambition as going upwards but to me it can be change, you know, it's doing your job, doing things right, learning more things, if you create something, if you invent something, it's not necessarily a hierarchical thing but I think sometimes again it's seen as a hierarchical issue, it's constantly going up a ladder and maybe we've got into this sort of view of ambition as if you're a CO you're ambition should be to be an EO and I say 'well maybe it isn't (Debra, senior manager, Civil Service)

I think I would be ambitious in terms of the work I do, I mean, I am interested in the work and I would be quite driven in terms of making sure that things are done and done properly and done but I'm not sure how ambitious I would be in terms of my own career, (John, middle manager, Civil Service)

This reluctance to connect ability with a desire for advancement was commented upon by Richard, a junior manager in the Civil Service. Richard expresses this in terms which portray his frustration with those that lack a desire to move on in their career and who achieve satisfaction with the status quo:

And then there is [sic] other people who are incredibly capable and you just wish they had some ambition or looked at what they contribute. They are quite happy with their role or they are in love with their role and they never want anything to change but you are looking at them and saying: 'You have so much more to offer. I know you love what you are doing but you could make such a big contribution at a much higher level and you're robbing the Civil Service and the State of that contribution...And you are also robbing the people coming behind you of the access to the job you are in.' (Richard, Junior manager, Civil Service)

A nuanced understanding of the construction of ambition offered by the interview participants was very significant. In particular, there was a divide between those who could and those who could not draw a connection between ability in their work with a desire to be promoted.

I'm more ambitious than I'd admit to being or that I know I am or that I think I am, do you know what I mean? Because I want to be good at my job and I want to do well at my job and I would like to be promoted. (Emer, Junior manager, Civil Service)

In comparing the findings from the private sector interviews, in general, there was less of a difficulty among this sample in reconciling ambition with career progression and with conscientiousness within their job.

there is a progression even if it was in a small agency, you know you start off as account executive, if it was in marketing and then you move up to account manager and maybe you'll make account director if you're good enough so that's really the fulfilment of ambition (Michael, male private sector employee)

In the extract above, Michael makes an automatic connection between ambition and progression. There does not appear to be the same conflict around conscientiousness in a job and career advancement that is a feature of the Civil Service interviews. Where this issue did arise in the private sector sample was among the female interviewees. They emphasized their desire to maintain high standards in their job performance even if they had consciously capped their advancement due to considerations of work life balance. This will be further explored in section 5.3. However, the extract from Barbara below illustrates the conflict she is experiencing between work life balance and career progression. This conflict is framed by her desire to do a good job and to obtain fulfilment from her work.

an awful lot of what I just value are, you know, your skill set being recognised, individual recognition for your contribution, but it doesn't necessarily translate into you want to be an executive [...] I think my ambition at this point is to get fulfilment because I think as time has gone by and I have progressed up the things that gave me fulfilment I don't do them [...] I think my ambition is to just get a bit more fulfilment out of what I'm doing and to get the work-life balance back on track again. (Barbara, female private sector employee)

The extract below from Seamus illustrates that according to him ability is of lesser importance than attitude when it comes to advancing within his institution.

attitude before skills, we recruited for attitude, I've seen lots of people with ability and so what? The same applies in sport, you get people with the ability though, they're useless though if the chips are down, they're no good, you get people with lesser ability and they really give it and generally they come through. (Seamus, male private sector employee)

Seamus acknowledges a key point with regard to career advancement and ability within the private sector. He highlights that ability alone is not what drives an individual's career. According to Seamus there is an extra element, what he terms "attitude", which pushes people to the top. This perspective is extremely interesting in light of the findings from the Civil Service interviews. In particular, there is an implicit belief among Civil Servants that display of ability through hard work will lead to promotion. For many of the Civil Service participants the emphasis was placed upon ability, capability and recognition of conscientiousness in work. These attributes were considered more important than career progression as the outward signs of ambition. However, Seamus's recognition of "attitude" is key to an understanding of ambition and competition within the private sector. What is of particular interest is his placement of "attitude" as more important than skill or ability when considering criteria for recruitment. This is a finding of the private sector interviews worthy of further probing and explanation. In particular, how extensive is this belief among private sector employees and employers? Also, how is this "attitude" manifested within the work environment? Who is included and who is excluded by this belief? Can a gender sensitive framework for investigation and analysis

provide further insights into this finding? A more extensive investigation of ambition within the private sector is required to answer these questions.

Recognition and public assessment of ambition

As noted recognition emerged from the interview data as a key element in the fostering and nurturing of ambition. This notion of mastery and recognition correlates with the writing of Anna Fels (2004; 2005) as explored in the review of relevant literature in Chapter 2. Fels argued that recognition is one of the key motivational factors pushing the development of skills and motivation within the workplace. According to Fels, in order to sustain and feed ambition it is necessary for an individual to feel well-regarded and that their efforts are rewarded. This acknowledgement of the role of recognition in driving ambition is reflected in the interview extracts below from Kate, a senior Civil Servant and Lisa, a junior manager in the Civil Service:

I'd say I am ambitious, yes, in the sense of wanting to be recognised that I'm capable, that I'm competent, that I do a good job and that's important for me. (Kate, senior manager, Civil Service)

But it is nice to know that somebody respects that fact that you are able to do something and you are good. (Lisa, Junior manager, Civil Service)

The Civil Service is a culture without the bonus incentive schemes offered in many private sector industries. Therefore, primary tools for positive feedback to employees and for recognition of effort and hard work are annual performance reviews, mentoring and particularly, promotion. This will be further explained in section 5.2 which examines workplace culture in the Civil Service. The qualitative data would suggest that very often promotion and advancement through the grades is linked with perception of the employee as a hard worker and as ambitious:

I do work hard and I do try and improve my performance each time I come around for a performance review, I do try and gain more competencies, take on more responsibility so I have no doubt that anybody that I work with...that they look at me, I think, and say 'she doesn't want to be here forever', you know, 'she wants to get ahead' and I would think that probably, without me intending to I would think that probably does communicate itself alright. (Maeve, junior manager, Civil Service)

I define myself as a career Civil Servant and one of the things that marks your progression and marks you, what do you call it, your status with your peers, I don't know if that's the right word, is if you do advance up the career ladder because it is recognised by your peers that you are, you know, sufficiently good at the job that you get bumped up. (Jack, senior manager, Civil Service)

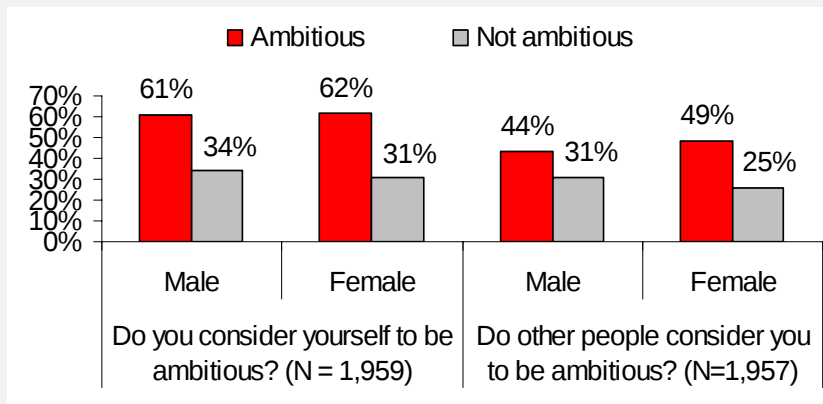
The emphasis among the Civil Service interviewees on promotion as the primary means of receiving recognition for hard work contrasts somewhat with the private sector participants. Bonus and award schemes are prevalent in the particular financial institution from which the participants were drawn. For these participants, there was the added dimension to recognition, that of a financial incentive.

Obviously you'd like the money in the account kind of thing but I do take a lot from someone just saying well done or 'you did better than I thought you'd do' but I suppose, like, a bonus is obviously nice (Catriona, female private sector employee)

This point ties in with the observation made above in relation to the implicit assumption among Civil Servants that promotion is the reward for hard work. The observation from Seamus, a private sector participant, that among the private sector in any case, ability does not necessarily drive career advancement is perhaps linked to the financial reward for hard work that is not a feature of the public

sector. This financial reward, it could be argued, deflects attention from other forms of recognition such as promotion. Again, this point merits further more complex research within the private sector.

Figure 5.2: Assessment of personal ambition by gender

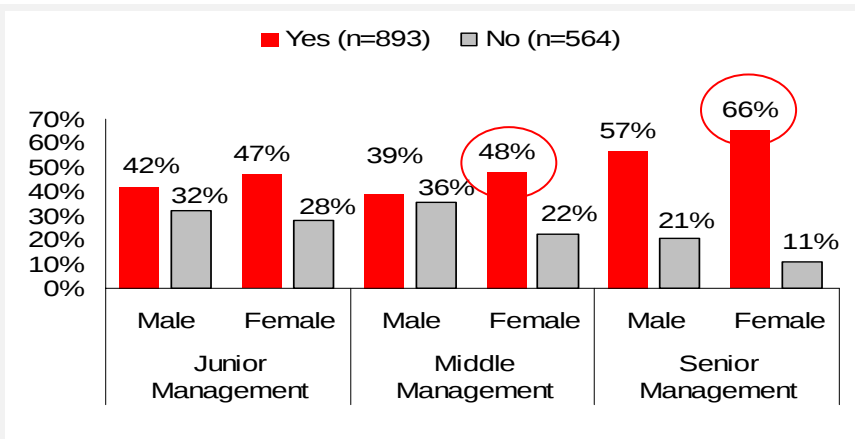


Weighted Data.

Figure 5.2 above compares the percentage of men and women working in the Civil Service who believe themselves to be ambitious with their perception of public opinion of their ambition. Female Civil Service employees are marginally more likely to say that others believe them to be ambitious (49%) compared with their male counterparts (44%). The figure shows of those who consider themselves ambitious, 17% of male and 13% of female employees believed that other people did not perceive this ambition.

Figure 5.3 below shows that as women rise up through the management levels in the Civil Service they are more likely to think that other people *will* consider them to be ambitious. At each management level women are significantly more likely than their male counterparts to agree that other people see them as ambitious. There is a significant jump between middle management and senior management in relation to the female employee's perception of public assessment of their ambition as high.

Figure 5.3: Do other people consider you to be ambitious? Responses by gender and management level (N=1,957)



Weighted Data

Significantly male middle managers were less likely than men in the other management levels as well as women across the grades to say that other people saw them as ambitious. This finding will be further explored in section 5.1.3 in relation to gender socialisation. A possible explanation for the higher likelihood that women will assess the public perception of their ambition as high could be the higher visibility of ambitious women. This will also be further explored in section 5.1.3 below.

Ambition, Age and the Life Cycle

Age is also a significant factor in how Civil Service employees assess their ambition and how they perceive other people view them in terms of their ambition. Table 5.3 below shows the distribution of the weighted survey population according to the different age categories. This data is weighted to replicate the base data for the entire population of the 15 Civil Service Departments (see section 4.1.3 for further explanation).

Table 5.3: Distribution of weighted survey population by gender and age (N=2,235)

	Men (n=1,319)	Women (n=916)
Under 25	1%	1%
25-34	9%	19%
35-44	27%	35%
45-54	45%	38%
55-64	18%	6%
65 and over	0%	0%

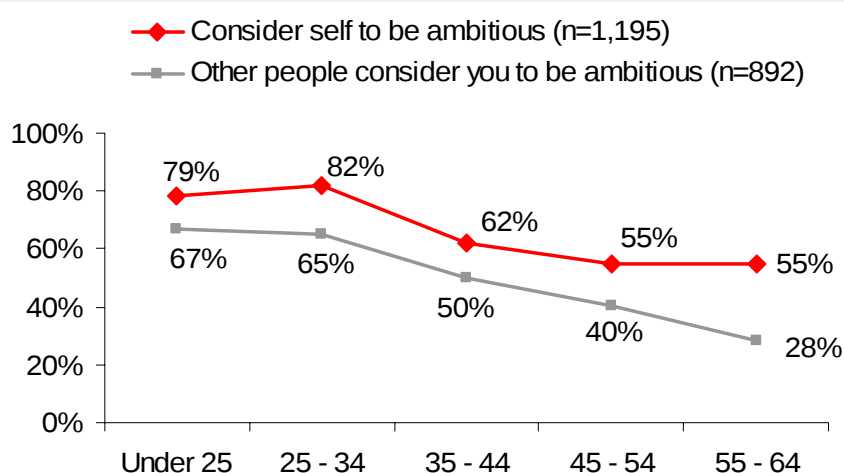
Weighted Data

Emerging from the Civil Service interview data was recognition of advancing age as having a negative impact on public perceptions of ambition. The quote below from Ciara illustrates this point:

there's a sense if you go over, particularly 55, you're definitely a 'has been' and probably even over 50, you know, that you're not going to have the energy and the enthusiasm and all the rest that people look for at interviews and I think there's a sense as well that people would look at somebody at my age and think 'hmm, 29 years [service] and she's only got this far, what's wrong with her?' (Ciara, middle Manager, Civil Service)

The negative effect of advancing age was also a finding of the quantitative analysis. Figure 5.4 below illustrates a decline in the perception of public as well as personal assessment of ambition with age.

Figure 5.4: The percentage within each age group who said they considered themselves ambitious or that others saw them as ambitious



Weighted Data

From this data we can conclude that ambition can decline with advancing age. However, the discrepancy between personal assessment of ambition and the perception of public assessment is most significant in the 55-64 year age bracket (27%). The qualitative data provides a more nuanced view of this topic. The quote below from Frank supports the quantitative finding of a declining ambition towards the end of one's career:

when you're younger, you're probably more ambitious in the early stages, well I mean coming in as a young Executive Officer you don't think much about these things but once you're in a few years you do sort of become quite ambitious, I think that does tend to wane a bit as you get older, you know, or maybe it's more of a sense of realism, that you just sort of know...you find your level and you accept that's the level that you finish at and you're not going to go any further, that would be my feeling anyway, you know? (Frank, senior Manager, Civil Service)

However, the interviews highlighted an interesting aspect to this topic which was not realized within the analysis of the quantitative data. From interviews with the female participants particularly, it would appear that ambition ebbs and flows throughout the life stages of the individual. The quote below from Ciara illustrates this finding:

when I started originally but I wouldn't have had a strong desire to do so if you know what I mean, but then as time went on and particularly once I had a child at that stage kind of any ambition I had probably left me in that I didn't want the job to prevent me from, you know, having any time with my son. So, and, like, he is now 13 ½ and I can see, like, the need for me is diminishing...so over the last year I sort of felt a little bit of an extent that my ambition is possibly returning somewhat in that, you know, I'm not 100 per cent whereas five years ago I would have been positive that I didn't want to go any further now possibly I would maybe think about maybe wanting to go for the next grade but if I want to do that I'll have to do it soon because of my age, you know. (Ciara, middle manager, Civil Service)

It would appear that ambition can fade and return throughout an individual's life as different phases within life stages occur and as different events such as childrearing present new assessments of priorities. This point raises questions on how best to facilitate a fading ambition at certain stages during the life cycle while also cultivating a welcoming environment for career ambition when it re-emerges. The area of ebbing and flowing ambition requires further investigation particularly in terms of what policy measures could be enacted which would facilitate both women and men to leave their career ambition for a particular stage in their life cycle while also fostering and cultivating the return of ambition among employees at different phases of their careers. This is discussed further in Chapter 6.

5.1.3 Gendered Perceptions of Ambition

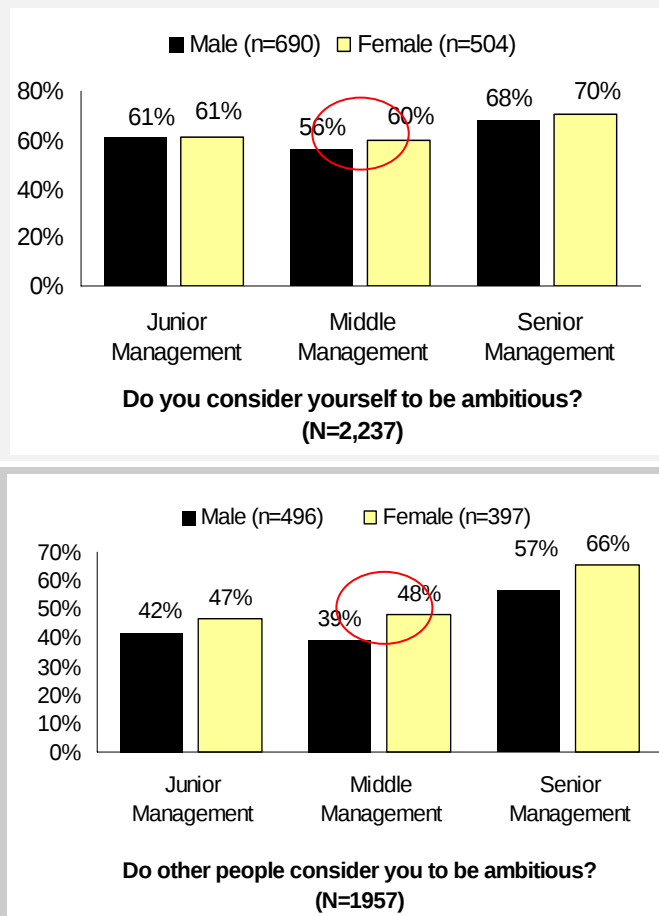
The previous sections highlighted some very significant findings in relation to how respondents and participants are defining ambition in general as well as their own personal ambition. In this section we will broaden out these findings by placing them within a gender ideological framework. In doing so, we hope to unravel some of the differences between male and female concepts of, and claims to, ambition. In particular, this section of the chapter will look at the gendered perceptions of ambition and examine the nature of ambition as it is experienced and perceived by men and women:

Because of the way I've seen women being ridiculed for being ambitious I suppose no, I wouldn't want to be described as ambitious. (Ciara, middle manager, Civil Service)

Assessment of ambition and the visibility of women

Figure 5.5 below provides a comparison between those male and female Civil Service employees who said that they were ambitious and those who believed that other people saw them as ambitious.

Figure 5.5: Comparison of those who consider themselves to be ambitious with those who believe that other people consider them to be ambitious



Weighted Data

Figure 5.5 above indicates that junior management male and female Civil Servants are equally as likely to describe themselves as ambitious. There is an increase of 10% in the frequency with which female respondents describe themselves as ambitious as they rise between middle management and senior management. However, there is a decline in the percentage of men who call themselves ambitious as they rise between junior and middle management. Significantly, women's perception of their own ambition is higher than their male colleagues at each of the management levels.

In the previous section we pointed out that as they rise through the management grades female employees in the Civil Service are increasingly likely to feel that they are publically viewed as ambitious. Furthermore, the table above shows that women at each management grade are more likely than men to say they are ambitious and to say that others view them as ambitious. This finding points to the high visibility of ambitious women, a point that was further explored in the interviews. In particular, the extract below from Conor a senior Civil Servant highlights the importance of context in understanding how ambition is perceived in women:

I think women probably have to try harder and therefore that ambition is more obvious and that may be a very unfair comment but I think it's possibly true...I look around at my female colleagues who have done well and they are visibly ambitious and it's an obvious ambition if you like probably built on a need and it's a generational thing, you know, the kind of glass ceilings and so on, the need to push through the glass ceilings whereas the likes of myself can be much more comfortable in that and not make it so obvious (Conor, senior manager, Civil Service)

The quote from Conor points to the barriers that women have to overcome in order to reach the high echelons of power. According to Conor, the difficulties women face in reaching the upper ranks has the effect of making their ambition more visible than their male colleagues. The extract below from Carla provides an interesting illumination on Conor's perceptions. Carla argues that the higher visibility of women in the senior grades comes from their relative scarcity and as a result, she argues they are unjustly received negatively:

There is definitely still a huge amount of gender inequality in the Civil Service, there's no doubt about it, that an ambitious man is seen, or a man who, you know, might make various steps through to very high grades in the Civil Service, be it Assistant Secretary, Secretary General, heads of Departments, are seen as ambitious whereas women at similar grades, one, they're in the minority and two you should hear the things people say – "she's a bitch", "she's hard to deal with" – but you don't hear that about men at the same level, you just don't. (Carla, junior manager, Civil Service)

Perhaps, indeed women's ambition *per se* is not necessarily more "obvious" as Conor argues but rather senior ranking women themselves are more obvious due to the fact there are less of them:

I think sometimes it's the idea of, if you're a woman and you have designs on the high echelons of whatever career you're in that you've got to be, there's an expression I'm thinking of that is not really very politically correct [laughs] and the second word is "breaker"! (Joanne, middle manager, Civil Service)

The high visibility of ambitious women in the senior management levels was also a feature of the interviews among the participants from the financial institution. This higher visibility was connected to how women display ambitious behaviour and monitor their perception among their colleagues.

I think they're more conscious of how it'll [*ambition*] come across etcetera and it's back to this much smaller population so they're going to be spotlighted much more readily. (Orlagh, female private sector employee)

Gender socialisation and gendered ambition

In the previous section concerning the survey data we pointed out that male middle managers in the Civil Service were the least likely among male employees to see themselves as ambitious or to believe that others viewed them as ambitious. The lack of perceived or expressed ambition among the male middle management is also worth considering in light of the literature on the gendered nature of ambition and on gender socialisation. This literature argues that men are more likely than women to be socialised to achieve and to aim high and to be valued by society in terms of these attributes. In light of this theory perhaps men, and particularly men in the middle grades, may feel vulnerable to the criticism of the public gaze in relation to their ambition and their achievements. The extract below from Brian, a middle manager in the Civil Service, certainly speaks to this interpretation when he acknowledges the repercussions for men when they are not perceived as being ambitious:

I think ambitious men, if you're not ambitious as a man you're regarded negatively...Because I no longer hang around late in the evenings and stuff like that I'm sure I'm not helping my case (Brian, middle manager, Civil Service)

Many of the interviews described a gendered stereotype of ambition in society which rewards men for displays of ambition while ambitious women evoke a hostile reaction from their peers:

Ambitious women, I think, tend to be mocked and sneered at and ambitious men tend to be, you know, fair play to them. (Ciara, middle manager, Civil Service)

I would say an ambitious woman is regarded as a right bitch and an ambitious man is regarded as an ambitious man (John, middle manager, Civil Service)

Furthermore, there would appear from the qualitative data to be an expectation that men should be ambitious, ambition is described in terms which punish women who attempt to claim ambition for themselves while allocating normative ambition to the realm of men:

There is a more negative view of ambitious women I think. Men, it's okay for a man to be ambitious, it's expected, but ambitious women leads more to that hard nosed attitude, that dreadful perception of women in power really, that they are just impossible to work with. (Nora, middle manager, Civil Service)

I was just thinking about it, you know, it's alright for men to be ambitious but they don't seem to like women being ambitious, I'm questioning it myself, it's part of the baggage we all inherit (Brian, middle manager, Civil Service)

The interview material gathered from the private sector echoes the findings above. Similarly, ambition was seen to be a characteristic associated with men and deemed unusual among women. This is particularly true when considering overt ambitious behaviour.

I suppose I think that behaviour might be a little more acceptable from men...but then again often very successful women have that kind of streak that they would be quite strong and forceful at times, I think it might come across better from a guy being that slightly forceful ambition, I think it might sit better and might not be noticed whereas if a woman did it maybe it would be (Catriona, female private sector employee)

I guess a lot of the characteristics I would link in with overt ambition are those, you know, the aggressive side of things [...] it's at that level of ambition you'd notice that more from a woman because it probably sticks out a bit more than in a man. (Michael, male private sector employee)

If an ambitious woman is...it depends on whether it's good ambition or bad ambition and I would say a lot of men have a lot of the bad ambition qualities, they can be quite ruthless and if you have a ruthless woman in some ways she's seen as worse than a ruthless man so it depends on the way a woman is showing her ambition but if she's showing it as ruthless it can come across as actually nearly worse than a man. (Sinead, female private sector employee)

The comments above from Catriona, Michael and Sinead point to the higher visibility of overtly ambitious women in the context of the private sector. As a result of this visibility, they argue that overtly ambitious behaviour may not be well received when it comes from a woman. By contrast it would appear that men do not have the same repercussions to face.

The Civil Service data presented above also provided some significant insight into the association of ambition with masculinity. This finding suggested that perhaps men may feel pressurised or vulnerable in terms of public and personal assessments of their ambition. An interview with Paula a highly successful private sector participant provided some key insight into this finding when she discusses her own career achievements:

I'm delighted but...I think the difference between me and men of my generation is that if it never happened I wouldn't feel a failure and there were certainly those in the bank who I could see their only ambition in life was to get to executive status and if they didn't get there they were really distressed by that and that's what I'm saying, there's a great deal of freedom in not having expectations! (Paula, female private sector employee)

The qualitative data presented above support the literature which theorises on gender socialisation and the construction of ambition as a masculine characteristic 'valorised' in men and 'demonised' in women. If ambition is more associated culturally and socially with men, then it would translate that when a woman displays ambition she is noticed, she stands out from the crowd. Both the quantitative and the qualitative findings outlined above certainly indicate that women who achieve within their working lives feel the public gaze and perceive a judgement of their ambition as high. Those few women who do manage to rise into the senior management grades are perhaps more likely to feel that they and their careers are noticeable among their predominantly male peers.

Interestingly, the survey analysis revealed that men who are high achieving in terms of their Civil Service career are less likely than women to believe that they are perceived as ambitious by the public. Gender socialisation and the gendering of ambition can again be used to explain this finding. If high ambition is constructed as a masculine trait and is seen as 'natural' among men, then perhaps men feel the public gaze is more critical of them. This critical gaze may set the bar higher for men than for women in terms of being judged publically as ambitious.

Ambition and femininity

Analysis of both the survey and the interview data revealed significant findings in relation to perception of ambition and femininity. Again, this relates to the literature on gender socialization. Many women are negotiating structural and cultural barriers to achieve their career ambitions. The methods by which women negotiate these barriers can lead to difficulties in combining stereotypical perceptions of ambition with femininity. As Ann, a senior manager in the Civil Service, points out below, the barriers women have to negotiate as they rise to the top may have the effect of altering how they are perceived and how they may be required to behave:

I think they are perceived as being harsh but then I think a lot of the women who have made it are quite demanding personalities because it takes a lot out of them to make it and the characteristics that have brought them through the system are probably characteristics that people consider to be very strong characteristics. (Ann, senior manager, Civil Service)

The following extract from Alice, a junior manager in the Civil Service, illustrates the double standard whereby ambition as displayed by men and women is perceived differently both culturally and socially:

Ambition is probably something seen to be admired in men but in women it's seen as pushy, or I think it would be seen as unfeminine to be honest (Alice, junior manager, Civil Service)

The qualitative data from the Civil Service interviews suggest that ambition and femininity can be culturally constructed in opposition to each other. The following extract from Ruth a middle manager in the Civil Service demonstrates how femininity and women are defined culturally almost in opposition to ambition. Of particular note are the comparative adjectives used by Ruth in her description of ambitious women for example: "harder", "tougher", "less soft":

I think ambitious women would be considered to be harder, tougher, less soft, that sort of thing whereas for a man I think it's kind of more admired, probably more encouraged, yes I kind of sort of figure that in men it's expected whereas in women less so (Ruth, middle manager, Civil Service)

This finding in relation to the cultural and social positioning of ambition and femininity in opposition to each other is supported by the data obtained in the interviews with private sector employees.

it's almost expected of the guys whereas for a girl it is seen as a distinguishing feature and it depends again on how they behave...I suppose, you know, I suppose it'd be easier for a very ambitious guy to be one of the guys, I think it's less easy for an ambitious woman to be one of the girls (Barbara, female private sector employee)

The extract above from Barbara illustrates that, in her experience, an ambitious women may find it a lot more difficult to 'fit in with' her female colleagues. Ambitious behaviour, in Barbara's opinion, tends to mark women out from one another.

The private sector interviews also provided insight into the barriers that ambitious women have to overcome in relation to negotiating the stereotypical cultural and public perceptions of women and ambition. The extract below from Miriam suggests a prejudice towards women which stereotypically does not perceive women as high achieving in terms of their own goals.

I think it's harder for women. They are...more perceived in the support roles rather than the out in front role. (Miriam, female private sector employee)

In her interview, Paula acknowledged that women who are ambitious are required to be very careful when considering how to display their ambition for fear of negative repercussions. She describes a tenuous relationship between private feelings of ambition and a desire to achieve, with management of public perception.

I think it's [Ambition] something that women have had to be careful not showing too nakedly at my stage, I think they've had to be a bit more subtle because it has tended to put people's backs up so in terms of how I'd react to it I think it's a perfectly legitimate thing to feel but I think it's something you need to be careful of how people will react to it. (Paula, female private sector employee)

It would appear from the qualitative data yielded from both interview sets that cultural constructions which juxtapose femininity with ambition have the effect of altering how the similar ambitious behaviour of men and women is perceived by the public:

I think the behaviour is pretty much similar but it's considered to be an undesirable trait in females and a perfectly natural trait in males. (Ciara, middle manager, Civil Service)

The quantitative data has indicated that women in the senior management within the Civil Service are more likely to be older, have no children and be unmarried than their female colleagues in the lower grades (see section 5.4 for further information). It would appear from the interview data with Civil Servants that this demographic status of senior management women also has implications for how they are perceived and treated by their colleagues:

The stereotypical ambitious women can certainly be seen negatively, you know, again I'm speaking in a general sense, but not negatively that it's bad that somebody wants to get X, Y, Z job but it's like "oh she has nothing else in her life". (Carla, junior manager, Civil Service)

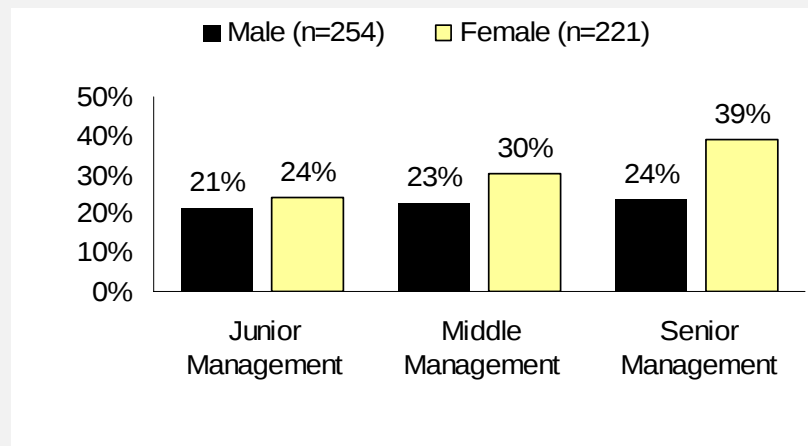
Men, and women will say it as well, they have this negative attitude towards ambitious women, if there's a woman looking for a job they'll say "ah she's just a this" use a derogatory word and they'll have this "ah sure she couldn't get a man, that's why she's going up for the job", you know? There's a lot of that going on and it's laughed at by women as well so it's not just men that will do that (Jane, middle manager, Civil Service)

The extracts above from the interviews with Carla, a junior manager and Jane a middle manager, express a harsh and negative perspective along the spectrum of opinions in relation to high achieving women. These perspectives are very disturbing in their depiction of how women can be judged and

ridiculed by their peers. Importantly, the qualitative data outlined above illustrate how traditional social 'markers' of femininity such as marital status and motherhood can be used to evaluate the behaviour, status and role of women in the workplace.

Figure 5.6 below reveals significant findings illustrating how the perception of public attitudes to ambition and femininity change as women progress up the management levels.

Figure 5.6: Do other people consider ambitious as unfeminine? By gender and management level (N=1,958)



Weighted data

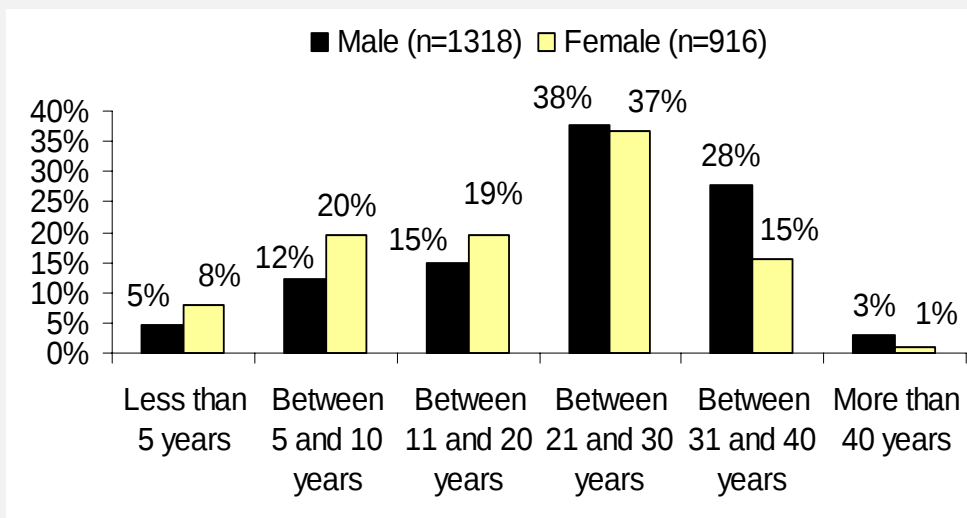
From this data, it would appear that as female Civil Servants progress their career they are more likely to meet a negative reaction from others in relation to their femininity. Note, however, that the male perception of other's attitudes in relation to femininity and ambition remains relatively steady throughout the management levels. There is little difference between men at the different management grades in the level of awareness of the challenges women appear to be facing in relation to combining their career ambition or progression with public conceptions of femininity.

The level of men's awareness of these challenges remains static despite the fact that senior managers are more likely to be older, to have more than 20 years service and, as a result, have more experience. Men represent 78% of senior management, therefore, they must be fully engaged in all facets of the process of implementing attitudinal change and educational directives. If men are not given the knowledge and the training to recognise the challenges women are facing in the senior grades this presents an obstacle in terms of trying to institute change.

5.2 Ambition and Motivations for Working in the Civil Service

The survey of Civil Servants elicited a broadly representative sample in terms of length of service as can be seen in Figure 5.7 below which demonstrates the weighted Civil Service sample. The interviews also elicited two diverse samples in terms of length of service. Civil Service respondents ranged from 4.5 years to 40 years completed service, the average being 17.8 years. Within the private sector respondents, length of service similarly ranged from 3 to 40 years with an average of 19 years. The research is therefore based on quantitative responses and qualitative insights from participants along the entire spectrum of service length.

Figure 5.7 Respondents' length of service, by gender (N= 2,234)



Weighted Data

As seen in the literature (see Chapter 2) workplace culture can have a significant impact on how policies relating to women and the workplace are translated into practice. Different Departments in the Civil Service are perceived as having very different workplace cultures, due not only to the type of work, but also their organisational structure. Many employees had experiences of working in a number of Departments and were able to reflect on the different cultures that existed across the Civil Service. The study also highlighted the fact that the Civil Service is a diverse organisation. As Ciara, a middle management interviewee stated:

people make the mistake of thinking the Civil Service is homogenous and it's very much not... (Ciara, middle manager, Civil Service)

Similarly, the private sector institution chosen for this project is one of the largest companies of its kind in Ireland. It is diverse in terms of the financial products and services it provides and therefore has many divisions or sections within it. As a result, both sets of participants could offer reflections on the impact of workplace culture on the cultivation of a 'healthy' ambition,

Analysis in this section of the report will focus on the effect of workplace culture in the Civil Service using the private sector as a comparison. These comparisons were drawn by the interview participants themselves as they were asked to reflect on their perceptions of either the private or the public sector as a place of work. Furthermore, the interviews included questions pertaining directly to the workplace culture of the participant.

5.2.1 The Civil Service and Cultivating a 'Healthy' Ambition

The facilities available for training, promotion and mobilisation of staff were highlighted by many Civil Service interviewees as positive factors in developing personal ambition. Many interviewees mentioned being given the opportunity to go on training courses, develop their skills through project and policy work, and expand their competencies through job rotation. This atmosphere of development, fuelled by PMDS and informal mentoring, was thought by some to create a positive attitude towards facilitating people's personal ambition(s):

I think the Civil Service gives huge supports in self-development so that should feed in for people. I don't know if it is a case of making people ambitious but if people are ambitious there is no end to the opportunities that they will be given and a huge variety of work (Ann, senior manager, Civil Service)

The competitive system of promotions was thought by some to have fostered an expectation that you would put yourself forward for competitions whenever the opportunity arose:

There is this expectation that once these things come up you will go for them whether you want to or not, nearly, it's just kind of natural that you would go for it (Alice, junior manager, Civil Service)

people always feel there will be regular competitions whether its an internal competition or, now this is going back to the whole thing of progression being promotion, but that's important for people who want to move on, they can see that there is going to be a competition later this year for HEO or AP ... or you can move out from the Department (Clare, junior manager, Civil Service)

However, the rigidity of the system of promotions in the Civil Service was referred to by some interviewees as somewhat frustrating their ambitions because they could only progress when it was authorised to do so:

It doesn't allow...yes it doesn't necessarily allow that kind of progression that you can go out and get for yourself, you can't make a career for yourself, you have to wait for them to...you have to wait on the system to squeeze you through you know (Emer, junior manager, Civil Service)

I don't think there is any need for that in the Civil Service, or there is no point because the system effectively contains ambition because you can't cajole your way into an elevated position. The system is so convoluted and slow paced that you just have to stick with it and pursue it relentlessly at a very low intensity level! (Laughter) Whereas in the private sector there is more freedom to promote or reward or develop projects with people (Richard, junior manager, Civil Service)

Some interviewees made the distinction between facilitating ambitions already extant and fostering an atmosphere whereby ambition can be instilled and nurtured (see section 5.2.3 on promotions for more on this). These interviewees felt that, while the Civil Service provided excellent opportunities for those who desired to climb the ranks or experience certain types of high level work, it could also be a place that created career 'cul-de-sacs' and allowed people to remain in positions where they were unmotivated (see section 5.3.4 for more on this perception). A selection of the comments are as follows:

Do I think the Civil Service promotes a healthy attitude to ambition? No, not really, I think it actually brings people into the middle, it applies an average...generally applies an average to people, people who don't work very hard can still be ambitious to get ahead...to get promoted, let's make the distinction, rather than be ambitious to do a good job (Maeve, junior manager, Civil Service)

If you are interested in getting ahead there are a lot of promotion competitions. [...]In other ways its sort of a fur lined mousetrap. It's quite comfortable, you can come in and you can be paid, I mean the starting pay is pretty comparable to what is out side but I mean the working conditions are significantly better in many instances so that eh, even if you can get another five grand somewhere else you mightn't get four weeks leave, you mightn't get paid study leave, you mightn't get a range of other [benefits]... (Jack, senior manager, Civil Service)

These comments demonstrate the fact that there are some areas/jobs that are necessary but repetitive and static. Such jobs will not aid a person to gain a diverse range of competencies that they need to move forward, and hence can be 'traps' that sap a person's ambition.

Others felt that you had to be lucky to be able to fulfil your ambitions fully, particularly if you were in the Civil Service at the time of the embargos on promotion:

it can be difficult to realise it [your ambition], very often people who progress it's luck, it's being in the right place at the right time... (Brian, middle manager, Civil Service)

A less negative view of this was also articulated, arguing that the Civil Service allowed people to develop themselves as far as they personally could:

I think typically people are encouraged to go as far as they wish to and that they're able to do... (Ruth, middle manager, Civil Service)

The comments therefore recognised that there are different types and levels of ambition and it seems, overall, that the Civil Service is good at fostering all forms of ambition. However, it is also true that for those whose ambition is to reach a higher grade or an important area of work, career planning is an essential exercise in order to avoid the traps of career cul-de-sacs, this will be further addressed in section 5.4.

5.2.2 Differences between the Private and Public Sector Cultures

Workplace culture has been shown in the literature to have a significant impact on how employees feel about their organisation. This impacts on ambition because a connection to the working atmosphere may encourage employees to go for promotion and fulfil their career ambitions within the organisation. Conversely, disaffection from the workplace culture may produce antipathy in workers or may prompt them to leave in order to fulfil their ambitions elsewhere.

A majority of the Civil Service interviewees had no experience of working outside the public sector, and thus based their comments on their perceptions or knowledge of friends or family's working experiences. Some, however, had spent time working in the private sector and could reflect from personal experience on the differences they encountered between the two. Previous experience in the private sector had led some to revise their misconceptions about the Civil Service working environment. One of the interviewees, Kathy, began working in the Civil Service after spending most of her working life in private industry and found as a result a total change in her attitude towards the workplace culture in the Civil Service:

...it changed my view of this age old perception of the Civil Service as being a nine to five where you come in and mark your time and that is completely wrong. There may well be some individuals but my experience of...any of the Departments that I have linked in with in cross Departmental teams is that there is actually a huge amount of output, constructive proper output. That is, works as hard as any other sector or organisation and has a better balance in doing it. (Kathy, middle manager, Civil Service)

Of those who perceived little difference between the two workplace cultures, some highlighted specific similarities. For one of the Civil Service interviewees, the workplace cultures of the private and public sectors were similar because she felt women performed the essential day-to-day work in both:

I think in the public and private sector that it's actually the women who are the hard core reliable drones that produce the work, or that the thing needs done or it'll all fall apart. (Ciara, middle manager, Civil Service)

Another interviewee felt that for women with children, the workplace culture of both the public and private sectors presented difficulties:

Now, I don't have great experience but just from listening to people in the private sector I don't think there's huge differences, women will have the same difficulties if they have children. (Jane, middle manager, Civil Service)

None of those interviewed for the private sector component of this project had any significant experience of the public sector or the Civil Service itself. However, when asked to comment upon their perceptions of the workplace culture of the Civil Service many of the participants initially spoke about the stereotypes of the Civil Service. They evoked images associated with seniority promotions and rigid shorter working hours.

I think the impression I've been given is that the Civil Service was quite, you know, it was a one step process every time whereas I suppose talent can be more fast-tracked within the bank depending on the person that you're working with so it's a more fluid process if appropriate, whereas the Civil Service system just looked very structured and almost looked like your years service was bringing you up to entitlement as opposed to your abilities (Barbara, female private sector employee)

Well I would perceive the workplace culture...the public sector as being much more structured in terms of hours and stuff like that, that people are much more...they know their rights and 'I'm going to work 9-5 and I will clock out at 5 o'clock' whereas in a place like here where you're not, there's no overtime, you're on a salary plus bonus there's much more...I would see that in the private sector you work much longer hours than in the public sector and you've much more entitlements in the public sector, rightly or wrongly (Sinead, female private sector employee)

Both Sinead and Barbara highlight what they perceive to be the major differences between the public or Civil Service culture and the culture of their own private sector financial institution. In particular they note the promotion system and the long hour culture as points of variance. Barbara noted that in the private sector individuals can be "fast-tracked" according to their abilities and their display of competence. This she felt, was not a feature of the Civil Service. Sinead commented on the long hours worked in the private sector, and the bonus system which is implemented as a reward scheme for private sector employees.

What is most significant about the findings of this element of the study is the recognition among, particularly the female private sector interviewees, that the Civil Service compared favourably against their own institution when it came to the promotion of women.

in some ways it's not necessarily as nurturing as you have open competitions and lists and things and it happens more by the process than necessarily by looking at the individuals and finding fits for them but I think it's been better at promoting people over the years, particularly women, I think women have got along better in general. (Paula, female private sector employee)

I would think it's more family friendly, the public sector than the private sector. (Sinead, female private sector employee)

These findings are particularly interesting when viewed in light of the data that was presented in the previous section in relation to personal ambition. In this section we saw that Seamus, from the private sector, observed from his recruiting experience in the institution that ability took secondary place to attitude. Furthermore, the analysis in this section suggested that the bonus scheme that is used as a means of recognition in the private sector may possibly have a drawback of deflecting attention away from promotion. These findings require further in-depth research in the private sector which would provide a more nuanced and complete understanding. However, it can be posited here that

perhaps the more structured environment of the Civil Service as well as the lack of a financial reward scheme, may contribute to the advancement of women. This may be particularly true of those women, and indeed men, who are motivated and driven by job contentiousness and the satisfaction that comes from successful completion of a task. The extract below from Tim, a private sector employee hints at this possibility,

...he [his partner] would say I'm somebody that has drive but not necessarily ambition, you know I'm driven to do a job well and he said that I would have been promoted, my work would have been recognised far more quickly in the Civil Service and I would have been promoted, he thinks, to about one up, if not two up in the equivalent grade that I'm in now. (Tim, male private sector employee)

In discussing the private sector workplace culture many of the Civil Service participants also commented on the financial reward system in the private sector as well as the rigid promotion structure of the Civil Service. Interestingly, many of this interview group agreed with the private sector participants. They argued that the benefits available to employees in the private sector to reward hard work and the less rigid procedures for promotion directly fuels ambition in the private sector:

I would imagine in the private sector that people are more ambitious...there's no bonus payments [here] whereas in the private sector there's much more scope for that, you can push yourself and go as high as you want in some ways whereas in the Civil Service it's more regimented, like, you have to be at this level for a certain number of years before you can go to the next level, you know? (Alice, junior manager, Civil Service)

the private sector has the opportunity of satisfying ambition through money so that you can be technically doing the same job but if you're invaluable to an organisation the amount of money you earn associated with that can move dramatically and I mean I know of corporate structures where there are specialists who earn more than the CEO simply because they want to hold that person, here the only way we can do it is through promotion so it's stop/start, it is unhealthy obsessive, it is hugely time consuming... (Conor, senior manager, Civil Service)

The financial aspect of working in a private sector company was seen by others as fuelling some of the more negative types of ambition which were explored in section 5.1. This negative 'private sector' ambition was often characterised as being ruthless and selfish in achieving the company's financial aims:

I'd say it's very different because you're working for, you know, a company, I'd say it's an awful lot more competitive and cut-throat ... (Emma, junior manager, Civil Service)

Interestingly, as will be detailed in the next section, many in the Civil Service said they were not motivated strictly by money, with many mentioning the idea of public service as a motivational factor.

Some interviewees felt that in recent years the Civil Service had benefitted greatly from getting people in from the private sector who may have different experiences and ideas of how to do things. One female interviewee felt that this was necessary in some areas that had become 'set in their ways':

I think the Civil Service really needs more ambitious people ...I mean, ambitious in different ways, I mean people who come in and want to change the ways things are done because the Civil Service is very stuck in its ways in a lot of sense... so it does need people to come in and shake it up, come in with different ideas who have different levels of education, who have worked other places, I think people who've worked in private

industry are very good for the service... (Carla, junior manager, Civil Service)

Thus the culture of the Civil Service was felt to have changed for the better in recent years due to the influx of new staff with new ideas. The opening up of the higher Civil Service grades to outside candidates may also ensure that a dynamic and energetic atmosphere will continue or that new ways of working are experimented with.

5.2.3 Male Dominated Cultures

...certainly for the first four or five years I was in the Department ... I hated it, it was everything I'd assumed being a Civil Servant would be, it was dark, it was dour, kind of almost quill pen and ledgers, now, I exaggerate when I say that but you had the HEO, the heads...it was almost like the heads at the top of the room supervising, like Bob Cratchett, all the minions below, it was pretty Dickensian...the Civil Service has changed fundamentally since then (Conor, senior manager, Civil Service)

Interviewees offered a number of interesting insights on the issue of male dominated cultures or 'old boys' networks' within the Civil Service. The views of the Civil Service interviewees ranged from simple acknowledgement that close cliques existed because of progression through the ranks to expressions of distaste and rejection of senior management ambitions because of this.

The presence of male dominated workplace cultures is a factor that is often thought to prohibit women's advancement in organisations because they are at a comparative disadvantage in having informal networks with senior colleagues who may encourage them or help them to advance. This is illustrated in the following quote from Ann:

...There probably is still an element of that [old boys' network], an element of socialising. You know the usual thing where women aren't participating, like women don't go to the pub and all that em, yeah women don't have the informal networks that men have ... (Ann, senior manager, Civil Service)

The extract at the beginning of this section from Conor, a senior Civil Service manager, also acknowledges the presence of certain male dominated cultures. This indicates that such an environment can prohibit men as well as women. The presence of a male dominated culture was also referred to by a female interviewee as a factor that would prohibit her in the future from wanting to take up flexible working options if she became a mother:

the other thing is just because of where I work within [Department] I feel that it will be more difficult in there because of the culture, because it's very male dominated and because it's a long hours culture I think it's more difficult to juggle that, you know, as a woman, I think it will be harder than in other Departments to be honest. I've seen it, I've seen people work share at PO level, you know, in other Departments and it's perfectly fine and there are no questions asked whereas in [Department] it's sort of like 'I don't know, you know, it's not really advisable kind of thing' and, you know, I don't know how much of that is real and how much of it is a product of the culture where everybody has to be seen to be 'God, I'm so stressed and this is so important and the world is going to fall apart if we don't do our work' kind of thing (Joanne, middle manager, Civil Service)

The presence of a male dominated culture within a Department or section can be a very stressful situation for employees not included in the 'group'. Such an experience led one of our interviewees, Linda, to contemplate leaving the Civil Service altogether:

there's one whole unit in my section that is male driven and they just are not interested, I was on that team for a while, I just could not get my head around what they were doing, I couldn't find anybody who would explain

to me what they were doing, you know and I felt like walking out. (Linda, junior manager, Civil Service)

Linda's experience led her to seek work in a different section of the Department where she had a positive experience of the working environment. Whilst this is understandable as a way to cope with the stress of being in such an atmosphere, it also means that such male dominated cultures often tend to be left unchallenged. As a result these cultures change and evolve very slowly if ever.

Others referred to long hours cultures that have developed in certain sections specifically as a result of male dominated cultures:

there's a long hours culture and it's predominantly men and it's predominantly men who can do it because their wives are at home minding their kids and it's seen as kind of an achievement if you're walking around the corridors at 7.30 at night with a file in your hand, you know, 'Isn't he great? (Emma, junior manager, Civil Service)

Emma's comments indicate that the different effects marital status has on senior managers' ability to work later than normal is perceived by those at lower grades, with male managers being facilitated to work long hours because they are married, but female managers not able to do the same. Conor also referred to the long hours in certain sections as being a product of male dominated cultures:

I am extraordinarily conscious, this is the [refers to section], it has a long tradition of being fairly macho because there's lots of hours (Conor, senior manager, Civil Service)

Some of the participants observed that in many cases the clubs or groups within Departments that were dominated by men were almost inevitable. This is due to the fact that many of these men had worked closely together for a long number of years. As Ruth said:

the thing about [Department] is that everybody's been working there for about 30 years or so and as I said there's all the newbies and then there's the old guard and they are there for whatever length of time and they know each other and they've all passed each other up and down the ranks all the way so it's kind of inevitable that you're going to have that kind of relationship I think but as is said I've never seen any negative side to it, you might feel you're not part of the club but, I mean, so what, like! (Ruth, middle manager, Civil Service)

Emer recognised this phenomenon of men grouping together in the workplace, although she also attributed this to simply having come 'up the ranks' together:

There's a group, there's a couple of groups of POs...it's not really a network but it's this group of people who came in around the same time as Clerical Officers when they were 16, 17, 18 and they're still there and they've sort of moved up the ranks over the years... (Emer, junior manager, Civil Service)

Debra, a senior manager, however, felt that she would be deterred from seeking promotion to Assistant Secretary because of the particular culture or way of working that had been developed over the years by men at that level. It was this, rather than the long hours mentioned by some, that would make her reluctant to go forward for promotion:

Oh no, the hours wouldn't bother me too much although again I suppose I've had jobs pretty well most of my career which involve long working [hours] ...I'm not too sure that I like a lot of the way the Civil Service is going at the top levels, I'm not really too sure I want to be in these management... MAC – Management Advisory Committee environments, I've a number of colleagues that are in it and they tell me what goes on and I just, it's just...this is not an environment, there's a lack of collegiality

and it's, again, I think it's more macho thing and you're just going 'Do I really need this?' (Debra, senior manager, Civil Service)

The fact that the ethos at the top grades did not reflect Debra's values or ways of working is significant, as it was this and not her own lack of confidence or personal work life balance issues that she highlighted as important for her. This finding, while particular in this case to one participant, is interesting because it counters assertions often made that women lack confidence to obtain top positions. Rather, women may feel unwelcome in certain Departmental environments, particularly at the higher levels. Sally, also a senior manager commented that the particular cultures that develop in certain Departments may make it hard for people to come in from the outside. She thought, however, that this may have a stronger effect than any gender issues:

I think [Department] is a bit of a male bastion... a very specific type of eh, culture and tradition. ... by and large yes, I think I would be at a cultural disadvantage more than a gender disadvantage and I would expect that in a number of Departments. I don't necessarily think I would be at a gender disadvantage but I would certainly be at a cultural disadvantage. (Sally, senior manager, Civil Service)

Sally made her comments good-humouredly within the interview and did not particularly think the 'disadvantage' would be on the basis of gender. However, it may also be the case that the particular Department's culture has been created by a legacy of male dominance. This leaves the question: do such Departments 'transmit' a message to women that they are unwelcome or would find it particularly tough at the top?

Among the private sector interviewees there was acknowledgement that the upper echelons of power within their institution was heavily dominated by men. It was felt by some of the participants that this male dominance could lead to the impression of an unwelcoming environment for women. In the extract below from Orlagh she recalls experiences she had in the past where she was the only woman in a meeting of very senior management in her organisation.

A; I would have sat around most of the [*upper senior management executive*] table discussions, certainly in my former role, on a very regular basis and apart from our newly appointed head of HR, you were the only female at the table and it was interesting because the comments would range from if the language is inappropriate 'oh, sorry for embarrassing you' etcetera. You know the way, it's...

Q: So attention would be drawn to the fact that you were the only woman there?

A: It can and would be...now less so as times went on, you know (Orlagh, female private sector employee)

The experiences of Orlagh pertain particularly to earlier in her career. However, she feels that as more women are rising up through the grades, albeit very slowly, these experiences are less common as the norm male dominated senior management is changing.

before you just had this very kind of hierarchical male dominated group of individuals, all of them, without I think exception, stay at home wives, it's just very different. (Orlagh, female private sector employee)

There was recognition among the private sector interviewees that the dominance of men among the very senior management made it more isolating for women who wished to advance their careers in this direction. In the extract below, Barbara recognises that it is often easier for men to integrate themselves with the senior management:

it wasn't so much a boys' club but there is an element that it is easier to integrate if you are...yeah, if you're a guy it's obviously easier because there's much more of them there and the things that they tend to gravitate towards are the golf club. (Barbara, female private sector employee)

Similarly, Colm agrees with this observation when he argues in the extract below that it can often be easier for men to get along with the “male game” of getting on in their career:

in terms of I think that the culture of...I won't try to make the words politically correct I'll say there's a bit of an old boy club or sort of negative bit of ambition is, you know, it's not what you know but sort of whose party you've reached and, you know, doing the right...and I'd say that's largely a male game so the fellas have, some of the fellas have an advantage in that it gives them an advantage over most women, now I don't see it as an absolute, like, you have to be a fella to get on and to have done those kinds of things but I do feel that is a factor, yeah. (Colm, male private sector employee)

What is significant in Colm's observations with regard to the workplace culture of this particular financial services organisation is that he recognises that the male dominated cultures can often be isolating for men as well as women:

some males find it easier to progress because they've the right people looking out for them and the right people looking out for them tend to be middle aged fellas who went to the same school as they did who, you know, is it...like, if you were to ask me is the bank institutionally discriminating? It's not like that but it's just that you're drawn to what you know? ...I'd say that there's advantages to wearing the old school tie and playing rugby for whoever it might be. (Colm, male private sector employee)

In the extract above from Colm's interview there is acknowledgement of the dominance of men in the senior grades and in particular men of a similar social background in terms of social class, nationality etc. Many of the participants recognised that this dominance can lead to isolating behaviours and it can make it more difficult for employees who do not fit the pattern or the recognisable type to forge a career in the senior management.

5.2.4 Motivational Factors

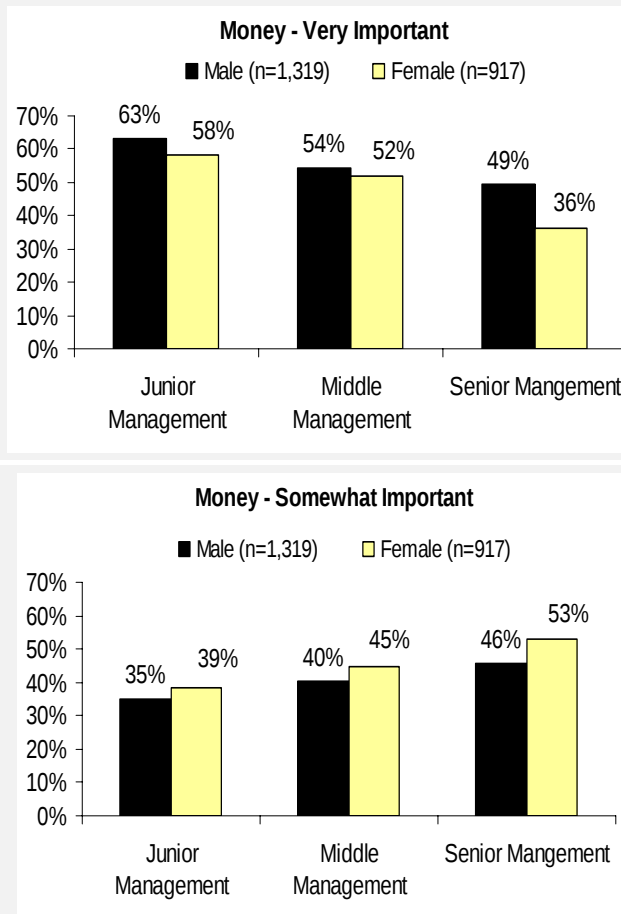
The survey sought to establish the particular motivating factors for working in the Civil Service in order to establish whether men and women are motivated by different variables and what impact this potentially has on their ambition. Respondents were given the following six categories to choose from and to assess them as to whether they were 'very important', 'somewhat important' or 'not important at all':

- Money for household expenses
- Career satisfaction
- Personal financial independence
- Power
- Status
- Job security

For each of these variables the answers in each case that received the highest responses will be given in charts in order to emphasize what men and women employed in the management grades of the Civil Service felt to be the most influential factors in their motivations for working in the Civil Service.

In relation to money for household expenses, as might be expected, the majority of junior and middle managers said this was very important. As can be seen in Figure 5.8, higher levels of male (49%) than female (36%) senior Civil Service managers rated this as 'very important'. This is perhaps explained by their greater propensity to be married with children. The inverse relationship between higher grade level and lower importance attached to money can perhaps be explained by the higher income earned at senior management levels, which adequately covers household financial needs.

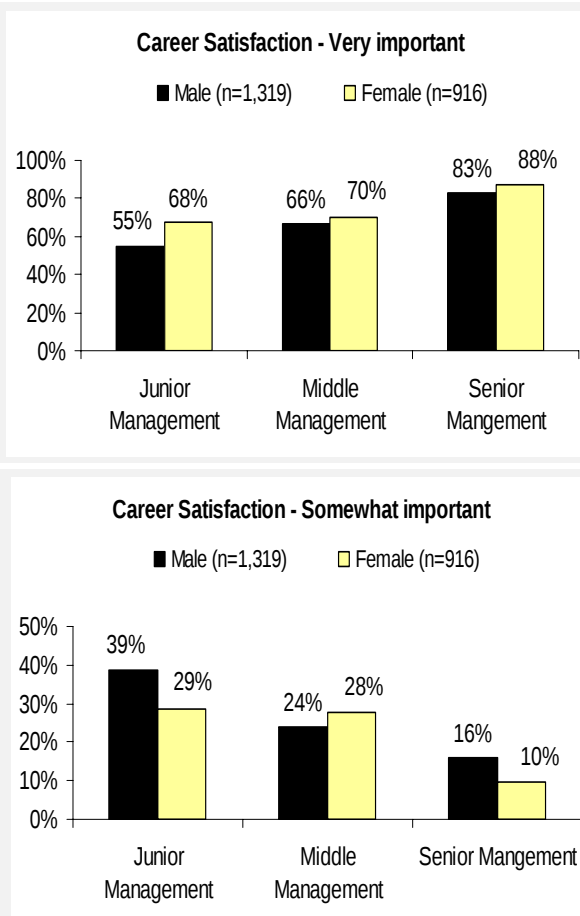
Figure 5.8: Respondents that said that money for household expenses was 'very important' and 'somewhat important' by gender and management level (N=2,236)*



Weighted Data

Career satisfaction was also rated highly by male and female respondents at all management levels, although with higher proportion of women in each management band claiming this was very important to them. As also might be expected, career satisfaction as a motivational factor is shown to increase with seniority as seen in Figure 5.9. As many of the Civil Service interviewees stated, at senior management level money becomes less important as a motivational factor as it is necessary to enjoy and be challenged by the work when it requires such intense working hours.

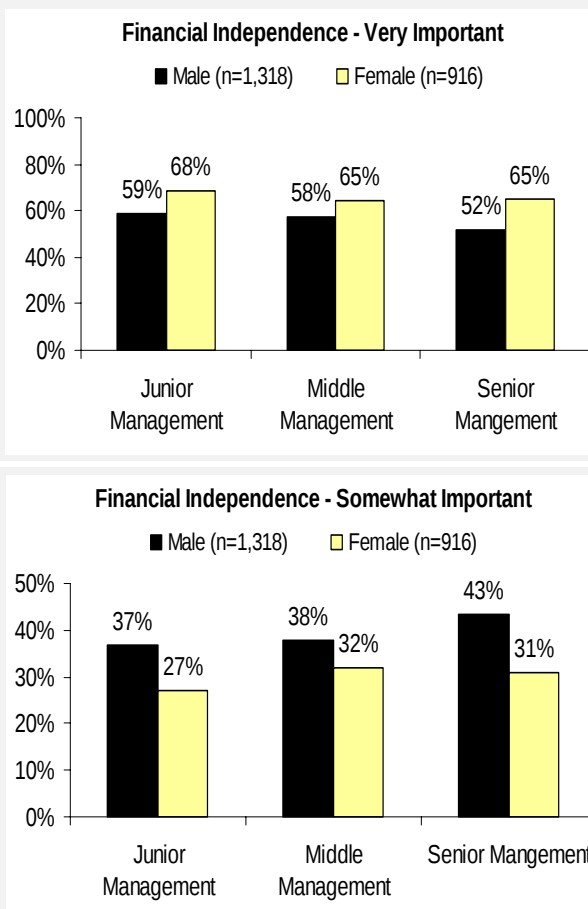
Figure 5.9: Respondents that said that career satisfaction was 'very important' and 'somewhat important' by gender and management level (N=2,235)*



Weighted Data

Interesting differences emerged in responses to the importance of personal financial independence for men and women at all management levels in the Civil Service. Women were more likely than men to rate personal financial importance as 'very important', as can be seen in Figure 5.10 below. A clear majority of approximately two-thirds of the women at each management grade rated this factor as 'very important'. This suggests that having the financial capacity to support oneself independently is seen as of more importance for the Civil Servant women than men, regardless of grade. It is also significant that high numbers of junior women managers (65%) stated this was 'very important', as they are more likely than senior female managers to be in a relationship (either married or cohabiting).

Figure 5.10: Respondents that said that financial independence was 'very important' and 'somewhat important' by gender and management level (N=2,234)

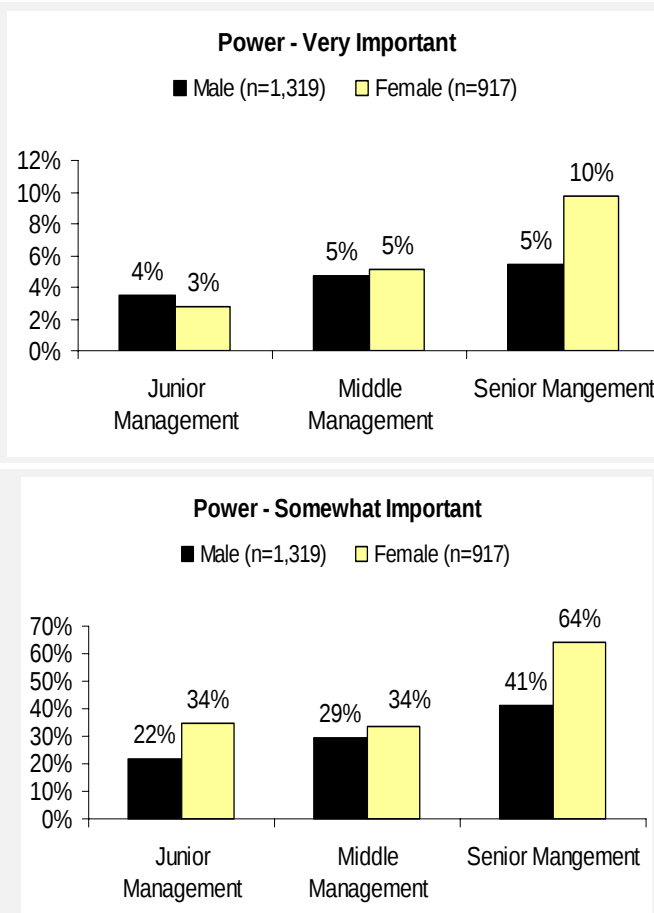


Weighted Data

The majority of respondents at all management grade levels in the Civil Service said that power was not an important factor for their motivation to work in the Civil Service. The highest response rates for this question were for the 'somewhat important' category, as demonstrated in Figure 5.11 below.

As can be seen from the table, women at each management level in the Civil Service are more likely than their male colleagues to think that having power is 'somewhat' or 'very' important. The number of those who thought that power was a 'very important' motivating factor was quite small at each management level, but it is interesting to note that women at senior management level (10%) were more likely to give this response than males (5%) at the same level. While these response rates do not suggest that women are motivated absolutely by power, the data shows that they believe it has greater importance for them than men do.

Figure 5.11: Respondents that said that power was ‘very important’ and ‘somewhat important’ distributed by gender and management level (N=2,236)



Weighted Data

The survey question had an optional text box category and elicited 192 textual responses from across the selected grades in the Civil Service. These responses give some further clues as to the role of power as a career motivator among Civil Servants:

‘If "Power" equals "Influence" i.e. the ability to influence policy etc. I would rate it as Very Important’ (Female survey respondent)

Re. power, I mean the ability to impact on policy and serve the public, not in the megalomaniacal sense (Male survey respondent)

As for power, I think responsibility would be a better category as power suggests a narcissistic characteristic rather than an intelligent and reliable one (Female survey respondent)

Power can be defined in a number of ways, My definition of power is to do with being in a position where one can and is allowed to try and make a difference (Female survey respondent)

Power as a motivator strikes me as a negative thing. I feel Power is ego related as opposed to competence related (Female survey respondent)

'Power' is not a motivator but it may be necessary to allow me to achieve what I could otherwise not achieve. I'm grading it as 'unimportant' as a motivator (Male survey respondent)

Some of the interview participants also made reference to power. In the extract below, Ann, a senior manager in the Civil Service, observed that women were often not as comfortable or adept at knowing how power operated:

I think men are actually more tuned into the idea that you make an impression and seize the power for yourself ... So it is to do with reading power and reading structures, that's in everything. I think women are bad at reading power (Ann, senior manager, Civil Service)

Another interview participant also recognized that power was necessary to achieve certain ambitions:

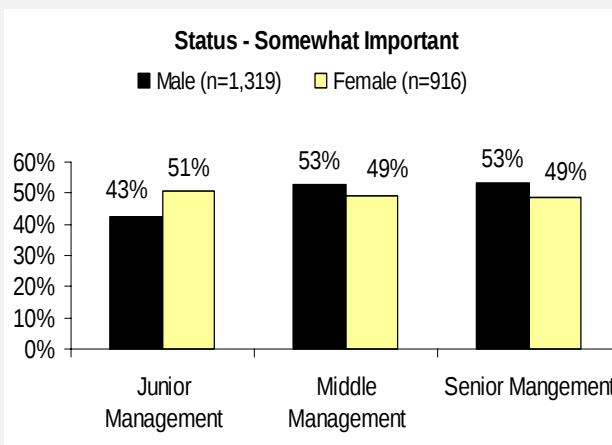
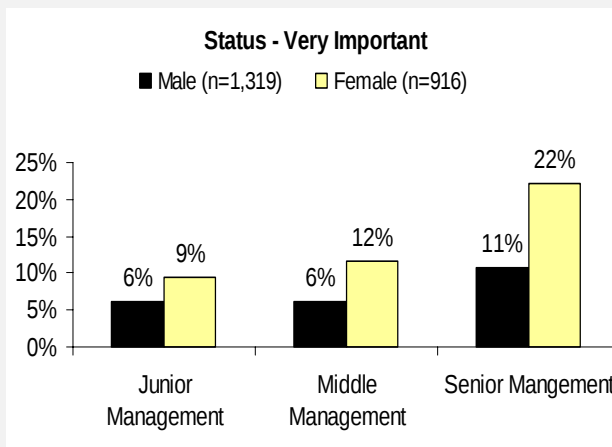
maybe that's why I'm ambitious as well, I always felt that I could do the job that my boss was doing maybe better than they were doing it [laughs], if you talk about ambition that would have been one of the things, I would always have said 'look, I could do it', you know, and if I had the power, you know, which each promotion gives you, if I had the power I could do [it]... (Niamh, senior manager, Civil Service)

Power in this sense, as the ability to do a job well, is something that seems to correlate with the textual answers from the survey. Power was also referred to indirectly in terms of satisfaction at being able to have influence:

I like, kind of sort of, doing things, maybe not quite changing anything but certainly that I can kind of sort of maybe tweak policies and I have some influence there... (Ruth, middle manager, Civil Service)

In relation to the assessment of status as a motivator for working in the Civil Service the analysis revealed similar responses for status as for power. The data showed gender differences at each management level. Again, low numbers of respondents thought that it was a 'very important' motivational factor, with the response rates more divided between 'somewhat important' and 'not important at all' than for other categories. Figure 5.12 below details the responses for male and female Civil Servants who thought status was 'very important' or 'somewhat important' as a motivating factor. As can be seen, women at all levels of management were more likely than their male colleagues to say that status was an important motivator for them. Women in senior management (22%) gave this the highest rating out of all those who gave this answer, and are thus more likely than men at that level to attach importance to status as a motivational factor.

Figure 5.12: Respondents that said that status was ‘very important’ and ‘somewhat important’ distributed by gender and management level (N=2,235)



Weighted Data

As can be seen from Figure 5.12, men and women at all grades answered in broadly similar terms as to whether status was ‘somewhat important’ as a motivational factor, with higher rates of male managers at middle (53%) and senior (53%) management than women at these levels giving this answer. Female junior managers (51%), however, were more likely than their male peers (43%) to state that status was somewhat important. The lack of an overwhelming majority for all responses shows that status is something men and women felt conflicted about answering. As one respondent to the survey stated in a textual answer:

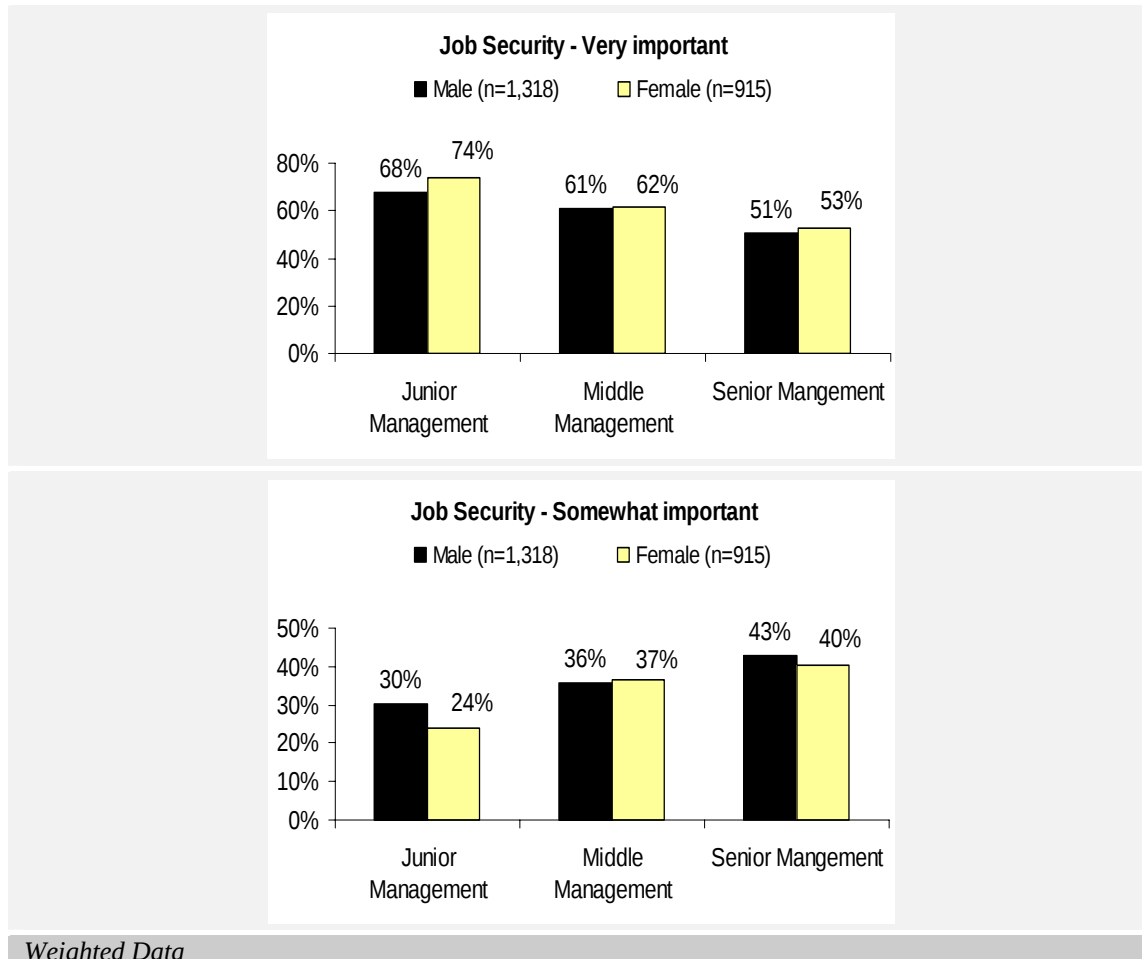
‘Difficult to separate power and status as in Civil Service, the level of power is equated with the grade’ (Female survey respondent)

This suggests that these two issues may require further investigation in order to conclusively assert whether or not there are significant gender differences in exploring motivational factors. The Civil Service interviewees mentioned status as something which made them enjoy their jobs. When asked questions related to their motivations for being in the Civil Service and what they enjoyed about their job, many mentioned the respect they received from colleagues and junior workers, which is intimately connected with status:

I like the responsibility I think and the respect I get off the people below me, does that sound really...that sounds terrible doesn't it?! (Alice, junior manager, Civil Service)

Figure 5.13 below details the answers to the final category under job motivations, job security. As may be expected, the majority of men and women at all management grades in the Civil Service answered that this was 'very important' as a motivating factor. As can be seen from Figure 5.13, a slightly higher proportion of women than men in each grade rated job security as a very important motivational factor. There was relative gender parity occurring at middle management level.

Figure 5.13: Respondents that said that job security was 'very important' and 'somewhat important' distributed by gender and management level (N=2,233)



Weighted Data

The interviewees concurred, as might be expected, with this opinion. Alice, for example, commented on the positive advice she would give to a younger person thinking about entering the Civil Service:

if they wanted a good permanent job and good prospects and good training I'd say 'yes, definitely join'. (Alice, junior manager, Civil Service)

5.3 Ambition, Children, Career Breaks & Atypical Working Patterns

This section outlines the results of questions on the impact(s) of having children, taking career breaks or working atypical hours from both the qualitative and quantitative data. First it is instructive to examine the marital status of the weighted survey sample, which is representative of the 15 Civil Service Departments as a whole (rather than just particular to the survey population as outlined in section 4.1.2).

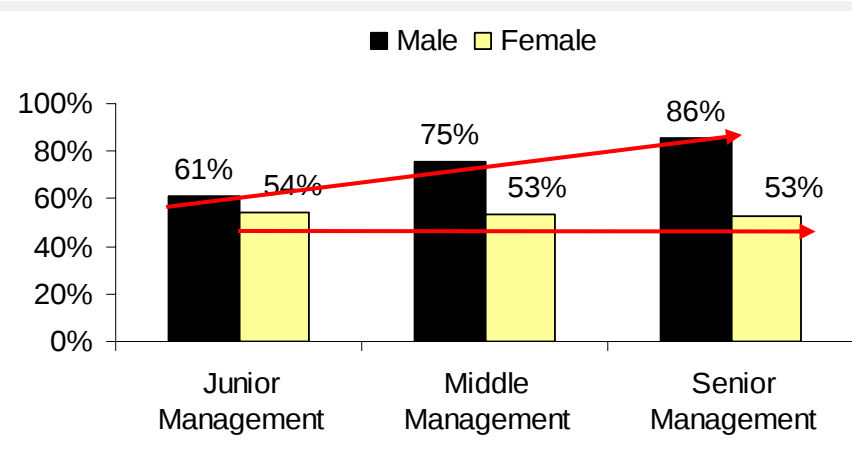
As can be seen from the above data, men are overwhelmingly more likely than women to be married at all management levels within the Civil Service. Approximately a third of women in all management levels are single. However, men are less likely to be single the higher the management

grade, only 6% of male senior managers are single. Broadly similar low proportions of men and women are cohabiting, although this is the fastest growing family type in Ireland (CSO, 2007) and employees in this category may therefore increase in coming years. The fact that there are lower proportions of married women in management suggests that marital status may impact on whether or not women attain higher grades. This is also connected to being a parent.

5.3.1 Children

A total of 1,428 of the weighted survey sample or 64% had children. Of these 35% were women and 66% were men.

Figure 5.14: Gender and children by management grade (N=1,428)

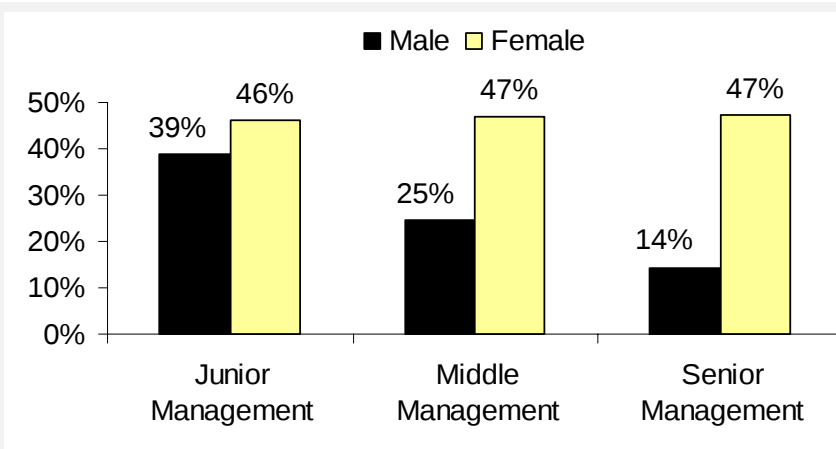


Weighted Data

As can be seen from Figure 5.14, men are also relatively more likely than women to have children at all management grades in the Civil Service. Women with children constituted approximately 50% of all women at each grade. This potentially means that men would have more familial responsibilities than women. The research showed, however, that children and family status have a greater impact on women's career advancement than men's, as will be seen in the following sections.

The total number of employees who did *not* have children in the weighted survey sample was 808 (36%). At all management levels, this represented lower proportions of men than women. Figure 5.15 below shows the breakdown of Civil Service managers with no children by gender, illustrating the fact that in the Civil Service senior men are far more likely to have dependents than women.

Figure 5.15: Respondents who have no children, broken down by gender and management level (N=808)



Weighted Data

Almost half of women at all management levels do not have children. In the Irish Civil Service, therefore, women at all ranks of management level are without children to a *proportionately* higher extent than their male colleagues. One female respondent on the survey thought that not being a parent had been beneficial to her career in terms of progression:

Sadly, I think not having children has given me more time and energy to devote to my career. Women with young children in management positions in the Civil Service in my experience often (not always) have to deal with anything from subtle prejudice to outright obstructiveness [sic] towards career progression. (Female survey respondent)

This quote points to the perception that children are often seen as a hindrance in terms of career progression, particularly for women. However, one of the Civil Service interviewees, Ann, referred to the fact that she thought she was setting a good example to her daughter by being employed:

I always took the view that it was very damaging to my daughter if I didn't have a job. (Ann, senior manager, Civil Service)

The majority of survey respondents who were parents (64% of the weighted sample) had two children (n=471). Table 5.4 gives a detailed breakdown of the data, representing the number of men and women at each management level in the Civil Service who have the given number of children.

Table 5.4: Number of children by gender and management level								
Number of Children		1	2	3	4	5	6	>6
Junior Management	M	51	174	95	35	9	1	0
	F	84	147	76	17	4	0	1
Middle Management	M	47	139	111	40	10	2	1
	F	31	52	32	4	3	2	1
Senior Management	M	26	87	72	28	5	1	2
	F	5	11	20	2	0	0	0
Weighted Data								

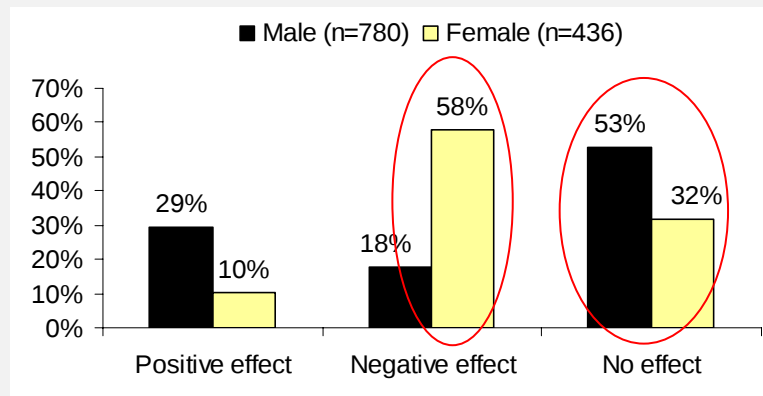
As can be seen from Table 5.4, the largest cohort in the survey were men at junior management with two children (n=174) representing 29% of men at that level. The largest cohort among the female survey respondents were also women with two children (n=147) which represented 24% of the female junior managers.¹¹ Senior male Civil Servants are likely to have more children than women at the same level. There are also no female senior managers with more than 4 children among the survey respondents, although there are a small number (n=8) of male managers with over this number of children. Both the survey respondents and the Civil Service interviewees commented on the fact that many senior female managers did not have children. For example, a survey respondent wrote:

Very few of the senior women anywhere in the Civil Service have children. The few exceptions prove the rule. (Female survey respondent)

Survey respondents were asked what effect they thought having children had on their career progression. Perceptions of the effect of having children on career progression appear to differ vastly according to gender, and this may also be related to the length of leave taken by men and women. Figure 5.16 shows the results based on answers for positive, negative or no effect (missing values and 'don't know' are excluded from the analysis):

¹¹ This is in line with national trends with the 2006 Census reporting an average of 2.0 children per woman in the state. See Table 43, Census 2006 report, *Volume 3: Household Composition, Family Units and Fertility*, available from

Figure 5.16: Effect of children on career progression by gender (n=1216)*



Weighted Data *Note: Those who said they didn't know were minimal (n=87) and have been excluded from the analysis.

As can be clearly seen in Figure 5.16, the majority of female Civil Servants (58%) said that having children had a negative effect on their career progression, while the majority of their male counterparts (53%) reported no effect on career progression. Male Civil Servants were also almost three times as likely to report a positive effect. It is necessary to highlight the fact that this question related specifically to career progression and not other factors such as career satisfaction, quality of life or happiness with life overall. It does, however, indicate the fact that having children impacts more negatively on women's promotion to higher grades in the Civil Service.

Some of the interviewees' comments on children correlated with the quantitative data from the survey in that many saw children as having a stronger impact on women's career choices than men's. The tension between motherhood and career ambitions were clearly articulated by Ann, who had herself chosen to work flexibly in order to facilitate spending more time with her children:

I think the crunch point is the children thing. I think you know, even I would have reservations about women who push their career at the cost of their family. ... I would be ambitious but I would be very ambitious for my children so if I thought me getting a promotion would damage my children I would actually go and support the children first. (Ann, senior manager, Civil Service)

Similarly, Ciara reflected on the struggle of juggling both family and career ambitions, ultimately seeing them as incompatible:

I don't think it's possible to be completely ambitious in your work and to achieve what your ambition would want you to achieve in your work and at the same time to have children and to not at the end of it feel somehow or another to have sold out on my kids, not to have something to beat yourself up with at the end of the day, you know? ... I think that means having to accept that you're probably not going to go as far as you might have done had you been free to focus on that totally. (Ciara, middle manager, Civil Service)

Ciara stated explicitly that had she not had children she would have been aiming for the role of Secretary General, but becoming a parent made her realise her limitations in terms of what she was capable of achieving at work. Kathy had a more tempered view, and felt that her ambitions to achieve promotion to senior management would have to be fitted in to her family commitments and her work life balance needs:

... if I had no children and if I wasn't married I'd immerse myself completely in that and go fast track but I can't do that fast track now even though if I went to my husband and said I am going to do this he would be completely supportive but it's not fair ... (Kathy, middle manager, Civil Service)

For those female Civil Service interviewees that did not have children already, the pull between being a mother and being a worker was something they clearly saw as part of their future if they decided to become a parent:

I accept that if I want to go ahead both in having kids and, you know, in furthering my career, that I'll have to make some fairly ugly decisions at times and I'll have to do things that really don't make me happy... (Joanne, middle manager, Civil Service)

Joanne was most concerned that she would have to make hard decisions at times about what was best for her children versus what was best for her work commitments and did not foresee an easy resolution. This is a challenge for women in the workplace that needs to be further considered in terms of policy development and workplace environment. Being a parent should not penalise women or be experienced as more stressful or difficult in the workplace than for men. Equally, fulfilling ambitions should not lead to a choice between career and family time for men, as articulated by Conor:

... when you're a bit driven I think you do miss out on things, on family and I would freely admit that, I can't say I've neglected my children but I've probably spent less time with them than I perhaps would have preferred... (Conor, senior manager, Civil Service)

There were some questions within the interview that related to advice to younger colleagues, as mentioned above. While some thought that neither the colleagues' gender nor family status would have any impact on what advice they would give them, some drew distinctions about the impact of children. It was significant that many respondents referred to the fact that having children or not was a more important factor to consider in terms of planning a career than gender. Whilst many thought gender was not an issue that would in any way hinder a person, having children, and their subsequent effect on time and work commitment, was thought significant by some:

I think it might be different if they had children as opposed to if they were male or female. (Linda, junior manager, Civil Service)

I think the only way the advice might be different for a woman would be that there's no doubt that...okay, like, I think...half the staff I have are women and depending on whether they're single or...not single or married but if they have children or they don't have children, that's the big issue and how to manage children and...but, like, certainly I would try, I mean, you're not saying 'don't go for that because you have children' but you're kind of sort of saying 'look you have children, factor in all the issues and then we'll see where you're going to go'... (John, middle manager, Civil Service)

Some survey respondents gave a mixed response, seeing both positive and negative outcomes of being a working parent:

Both negative and positive i.e. negative in terms of balancing children's needs with work needs and positive in motivation to progress my career to financially support my family and set a good example. (Female respondent)

This is a response that resonates with much of the data from both the Civil Service interviews as well as the conversations conducted with the private sector participants. Managing the demands of work

with the role of parenting was a similar feature of many of the private sector interviews. In particular, it would appear that it is impacting very significantly on the choices that women are being forced to make in an attempt to balance the two conflicting demands. The interview with Sinead revealed her distress in attempting to deal with this conflict. She felt that she was now at a crossroads: She had been up until that point, on a very successful career path in the financial services organisation. Now she felt her career was in jeopardy due to the demands of motherhood:

I'm at the stage for the first time ever I don't know where I'm going to go next, I'm in a job that's probably a two-three year job really, I should probably be looking to move out of it sometime next year, yeah early next year, and for the first time ever I actually don't know what I'm going to move to or how I'm going to move because I now have two...and they're small kids and so I'm actually at the stage where I don't know where I'm going next or whether I should leave the [organisation] and try to do something myself because for the first time ever I'm thinking maybe I should try and look for a more flexible job or something so for the first time...so I really don't know where I'm going! (Sinead, female private sector employee)

The interview with Sinead provided some key insights into the mindset of many women faced with similar choices. She was clearly distressed and unsettled by the prospect that her career, which she had worked hard for and which she had planned and made expectations around was now in crisis due to the conflicting demands on her time as a result of being a mother.

it's as they [her children] get older actually they need you more than when they're younger so...yeah I am still trying to resist it because I don't want to give up and say 'that's it, I'm parking my career here', that's the challenge. (Sinead, female private sector employee)

There was a sense among the interviews in this sample that men were less likely to face the same dilemmas or crises when attempting to balance fatherhood with a successful career. In her interview Orlagh describes her male colleagues as very often having the freedom to be "utterly focused" on their careers. This is compared to women who very often are "sidetracked" from their careers into making choices which may compromise their career path.

I think there is the sense of maybe men will be more what I would describe as kind of utterly focused in terms of where they want to get to, women maybe become sidetracked or they may make judgements, they may make choices actually. (Orlagh, female private sector employee)

It would appear that is very difficult for women to combine a successful career in the private sector with children and with a partner who is also managing a high end career. Both Seamus and Paula, in the extracts below, point out that in order to balance a successful career in terms of promotions with children it is extremely beneficial to have a partner who is willing to take a back seat with their career. This relieves some of the pressure with regard to balancing work and home life:

if you've got yourself a partner who'll say 'okay, I'll put my career, my career will be secondary to yours'...it's really the exception that both careers are going to go on because you're going to have this issue of pressure on people (Seamus, male private sector employee)

because I have a career and my husband is at home fulltime with the kids so, you know, we've made choices that have supported that for a number of reasons and that's worked for us (Paula, female private sector employee)

The statistics which emerged from survey findings point to the very low numbers of married women with children in the top grades or management levels. This indicates that it is women who are more likely to put their careers behind that of their partners in order to devote the necessary time to

children. Sinead describes her own experience in comparison to other mothers of her children's classmates:

People just get to...like, I see it in my son's school, there's 31 in his class, there are three working mothers, it's people just get to the point and they say 'I just can't do it' and you'll have one or two who'll keep going and who'll strive to go to the next level but...I just, I don't know how it's ever going to...I thought it would change and I don't know how it's ever going to change because it just gets too difficult with two people working full time if you're both in careers to try and manage it and somebody ends up giving up or going part time (Sinead, female private sector employee)

It would appear from both the Civil Service survey data as well as the qualitative data described above that mothers in both the Civil Service and the financial services organisation are currently experiencing more negative impacts as a result of having children than are fathers. The next section on parent-related leave goes some way to explain why this might be.

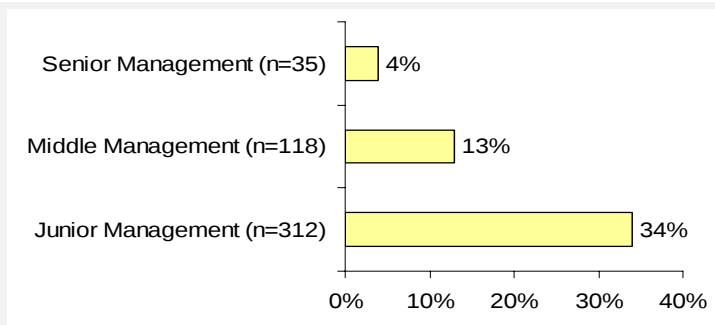
5.3.2 Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave

This section details the data relating both to the frequency with which maternity, paternity and parental leave has been taken and the attitudes towards such leave. We also examined is the perceived effect such leave has on an individual's career progression.

Paid and Unpaid Maternity Leave

Figure 5.17 details the female survey respondent's reported take up of maternity leave. The total number of women who reported having taken maternity leave is 465 or 51% of the weighted sample of women.

Figure 5.17: Uptake of paid maternity leave by management grade (N=465)*



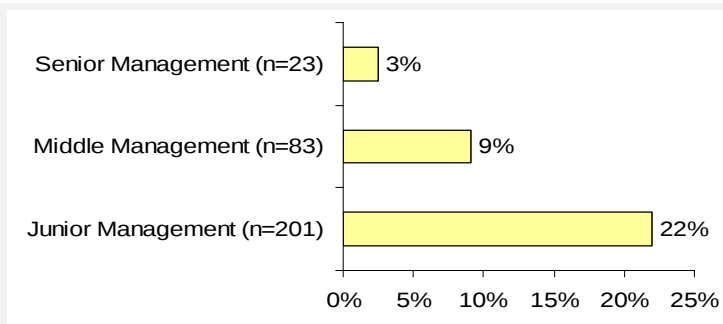
Weighted Data

*Note: The chart illustrates figures for the % of women who have taken maternity leave at each management level as a % of the total cohort of women.

As may be expected, women in the junior management grades report greater levels of uptake of paid maternity leave, and part explained by their younger age profile as well as the fact that fewer women at senior management level have children. Only 4% of the sample of women Civil Servants who had taken maternity leave were at senior management level. Maternity leave, therefore, is negatively correlated with senior management status, and this suggests that maternity leave or the presence of children could have a detrimental effect on a woman's career progression into the senior management grades.

In general, unpaid maternity leave is availed of generally by fewer Irish mothers and this is also true of women in the Irish Civil Service. As may also be expected, again women at lower management level in the Civil Service were more likely than their senior female colleagues to report having taken unpaid maternity leave. This may also be part explained their age profile, as extended unpaid maternity leave may not have been available to senior female managers, or indeed to middle managers.

Figure 5.18: Take up of unpaid maternity leave (N=307)*



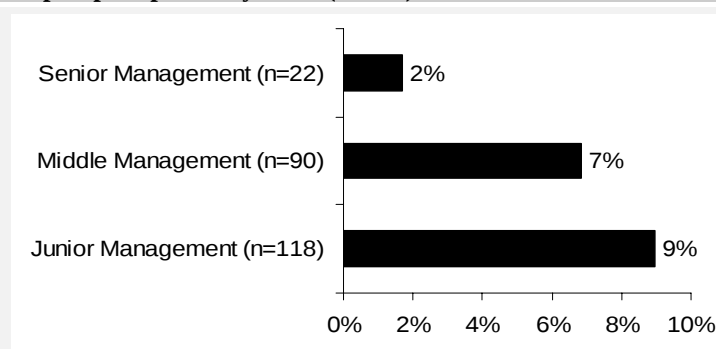
Weighted Data

*Note: The chart illustrates figures for the % of women who have taken maternity leave at each management level as a % of the total cohort of women.

Paternity Leave

Paid paternity leave is offered on a non-statutory, ad hoc basis in Ireland. The Irish Civil Service is one of the only employers that guarantee the right to paid time off for fathers, and the entitlement currently stands at three days paid leave. A total of 230 (18%) male respondents took paternity leave.

Figure 5.19: Take up of paid paternity leave (n=230)*



Weighted Data

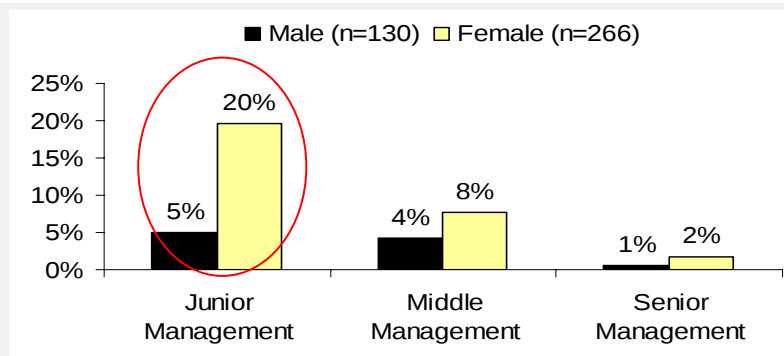
*Note: The chart illustrates figures for the % of men who have taken paid paternity leave at each management level as a % of the total cohort of men

Paternity leave is more likely to have been taken by male managers at both middle and junior levels than senior managers, and this again is due to the age profile of managers at each level due to the relatively new introduction of this leave.

Parental Leave

Parental leave is available for both men and women in the Civil Service but is currently unpaid and therefore a less attractive option for many parents. Quite a few of the survey respondents left qualitative comments in the survey stating that they would not be able to afford to take parental leave. A total of 396 respondents said they had taken parental leave representing 18% of the total cohort. Of these, 266 were women, representing 29% of the weighted female sample and 130 were men representing just 10% of the weighted male sample. This is despite the fact that more men in the sample were parents. It seems that women in the Civil Service are more likely to avail of all forms of parent related leave than men. The data in Figure 5.20 below demonstrates the percentage of men and women at each level who took parental leave out of the total survey cohort. Figure 5.20 shows that parental leave was taken up in the highest proportions by women at junior management (20% of all women). It is likely that such leave is either combined with maternity leave or taken subsequent to coming back from maternity leave.

Figure 5.20: Take up of (unpaid) parental leave, by management level and gender (N=396)*



Weighted Data *Note: The N represents the total number of men and women who answered yes to the question. 'Not applicable' answers have been excluded. The data represents the % of men and women as an expression of the total weighted cohort of each gender.

The disparity between men and women at all management levels in the Civil Service in rates of uptake shows that, in addition to the more significant lengths of time women may be absent from the workplace due to maternity leave, their working time is also interrupted to a larger extent than men's by parental leave. This may have an impact on their career progression in terms of gaining competencies and diversified work experiences.

Age and Parent-related Leave

Comparing the age at which male and female survey respondents took maternity, paternity and parental leave respectively, it can be seen that maternity leave was taken by women in the highest proportions between the ages of 35 and 54 years. Paternity leave was taken by men predominantly between the ages of 35 and 44 years.

Table 5.5: Percentage of employees availing of family leave by age

Age range	Maternity (n=465)	Paternity (n=231)	Parental (n=397)
25-34 years	10%	6%	7%
35-44 years	27%	18%	26%
45-54 years	25%	9%	20%
55-64 years	7%	0%	3%

Weighted Data

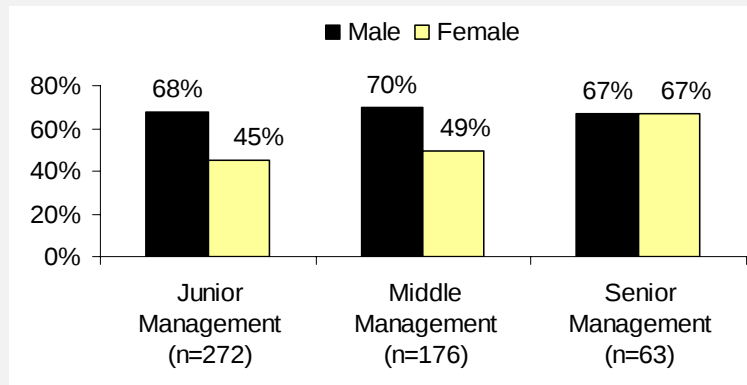
Parental leave is taken by employees at rates similar to maternity leave, which is significant because it is unpaid and must be negotiated. This indicates that parents are eager to avail of such leave despite the negative financial impact this may entail.

The Impact of Taking Parent-related Leave

These data suggest also that having children has a more sustained impact in terms of time away from the labour market for women than for men in the Civil Service. This is not just in terms of the length of leave (which is considerably longer for women than for men) but in terms of the number of years of an individual's life that child-related leave has an effect upon career.

The survey sought to investigate what effect respondents perceived their taking of maternity, paternity and parental leave had on their career in the Civil Service. While the majority of men felt that their taking of such leave had no effect, women were more evenly divided as to whether they thought it had no effect or a negative effect. This is illustrated in Figure 5.21 and Figure 5.22 below. Marginal numbers of respondents (n=35 or 7%) stated that they felt taking leave had a positive effect.

Figure 5.21: No effect reported as a result of taking Maternity/Paternity/Parental Leave, by management level and gender (N=511)*

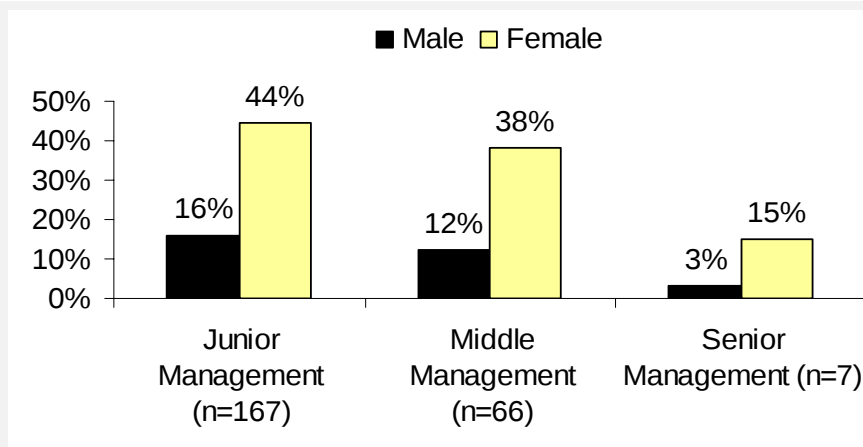


Weighted Data

*Note: The answers for 'don't know' (n=98) and 'positive effect' (n=35) are not represented. Figures represent the % of men and women at that management level who answered the question. The data refers to reflections on the effect of both paid and unpaid maternity leave.

As can be seen from the chart above, approximately two-thirds of men in all management categories in the Civil Service claimed that taking leave had no effect at all on their career progression. Women at senior management were also more likely than those at the lower levels to feel that the leave had no effect, although they were also less likely to take the leave in the first place.

Figure 5.22: Negative effect reported of taking Maternity/ Paternity/Parental Leave, by management level and gender (N=240)



Weighted Data

*Note: The answers for 'don't know' (n=98) and 'positive effect' (n=35) are not represented. Figures represent the % of men and women at that management level who answered the question

Of the women at junior management, 44% reported a negative effect on their career progression as a result of taking leave. At middle management the figure was also high at 38% compared to their male peers at 12%. The most obvious explanation for the discrepancies between men and women's answers relating to a perceived negative effect is, as mentioned above, the difference in the length of the leave. Taking three days out of working time for paternity leave is vastly different to taking six months to a year.

The question also allowed respondents to record further insights in a text box, and this drew 184 comments in total. The qualitative comments in the survey regarding the effects of taking parent-related leave referred frequently to perceptions of other employees' attitudes towards their commitment and to the disruption taking such leave could cause. Some, however, felt that taking such leave,

particularly parental leave, had a positive effect because they would not have been able to stay in their jobs if this had not been available to them:

This enabled me to continue working as I had to mind my daughter exclusively for a period of six months. If the special leave had not been available I probably would have had to resign. (Female survey respondent)

In terms of my career so far I think it has had a neutral effect. However it has helped enormously to balance work and family life where there are exceptional circumstances at home which would otherwise prove very difficult to manage. (Male survey respondent)

Another respondent said that parental leave made him more focused on his goals:

having a day off with the kids gave me the motivation to do better in work and get promoted so my wife could give up work. (Male survey respondent)

Examples of some of the comments relating to a negative perception of the effect of taking such leave are given here:

From views I have heard expressed by colleagues and more senior managers, there is a definite view that staff availing of any family friendly initiatives are an inconvenience and little thought given on how to make it work. (Female survey respondent)

For a man it's seen as a non interest in a career path and advancement in your career suffers. (Male survey respondent)

I think that once you demonstrate in your job that you have family commitments which may have to take precedence over being available for your job 100 per cent, one is inclined to be regarded as somebody that an organisation would be less inclined to promote. (Female survey respondent)

One female respondent experienced a particularly negative attitude from her direct manager about the inconvenience her taking maternity leave would cause:

Perception about ability does not change, perception about availability/reliability does - in one conversation with my then manager pre-mat[ernity] leave, I was told (in anguished tones) "well, if you were on a career break, we would have a CHOICE about whether to take you back or not" with clear dissatisfaction on part of manager about the perceived constraints of mat[ernity] leave entitlements. (Female survey respondent)

The issue of 'inconvenience' in relation to taking maternity leave was also expressed within the interviews with the Civil Servants. Some referred to the fact that the work often fell on colleagues. Ciara, a middle manager, observed that while this may be inconvenient or cause a slight resentment, it was something that should simply be accepted:

it can happen with maternity leave that you can end up having to take on somebody else's job for, you know, six months or a year or whatever on top of your own in which case you can be somewhat resentful of it but not significantly so because people need to reproduce and in particular people who work need to reproduce rather than just the people who don't work so I think most people just recognise that it's just a fact of life. (Ciara, middle manager)

For men, the issue of the length of paternity leave was referred to as being a reason why the leave had no effect upon career progression:

The amount of paternity leave available is so small as to make it unnoticeable (Male survey respondent)

Another male respondent contrasted this with the experience of taking maternity leave:

Paternity leave is for a very limited duration - it effectively just merges in with one's annual leave. It has no real effect on your job - an extra week or so is not enough to disrupt how the work is done. Maternity leave, on the other hand, simply because of how long it lasts, can very seriously disrupt the workings of an office, particularly because replacements are not made available. I imagine that in the private sector, where recruitment is far more at the discretion of the end user of staff (to use an ugly phrase), if I were taking on people, even with the best will in the world, I would have to be conscious that if all the best people at an interview were all women of a certain age, and if I were to (doing the right thing) staff up my office or shop with them, then I would be facing "maternity leave gap" at some stage. None of this really applies to the Civil Service, though - you get who you get and you have no choice, which in some ways is a good thing - it lessens the temptation to discriminate. (Male survey respondent)

The private sector interviews revealed comparable findings in relation to maternity or parental leave. In particular there was a similar acknowledgement that long maternity leaves have a detrimental effect on the working environment. When talking about performance reviews and assessments that he was undertaking, Seamus revealed how long absences from the workplace due to maternity, can have a direct detrimental effect on a woman's review:

we have a bell curve, that's another thing you're going to get in these organisations, X percentage, so say it's 1-4 and 4 is brilliant and 1 is poor so there's only X percentage gets 4s, 3s, 2s, 1s you know... 'I deserve it, I deserve X or Y' and I say 'but you were out for half the year, you weren't there, how can you deserve...I know you're brilliant but you were only on the pitch until half time and game was won or lost in the second half' (Seamus, male private sector employee)

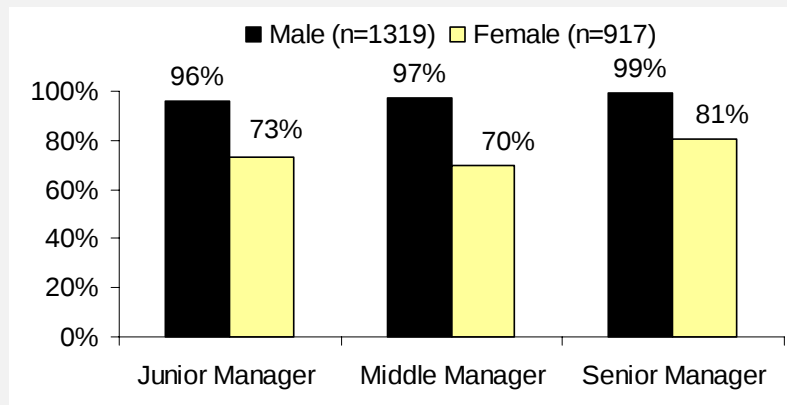
It seems that taking parent-related leave can be experienced negatively in terms of the workplace environment in the Civil Service and in the world of the private sector. On a practical level, this may be due to the fact that staff are not uniformly replaced in every section/Department when they are on leave. This leaves the burden of work to fall on their colleagues. Employees taking leave may also lose out on gaining valuable experience and core competencies that would help them to progress their career. This leaves the question: to what extent does this have an impact, either short or long term, on employees' drive to fulfil their career ambitions?

5.3.3 Working Patterns

The take-up of atypical working patterns

The majority of all survey respondents at all the selected management levels in the Civil Service worked full-time as detailed in Figure 5.23 below, although more men engaged in full-time working patterns than women.

Figure 5.23: Employees working full-time, by gender and management level (N=2,236)



Weighted Data

Figure 5.23 shows that male Civil Servants at all management levels work full-time to a greater extent than their female colleagues. Women at senior management, however, are more likely to work full-time than those at the lower management levels.

Table 5.6 below gives a breakdown of the atypical working patterns of men and women at each management level. As can be seen from the data below, women at each selected level in the Civil Service are more likely to be working atypical hours, ranging from 27% of women at junior management levels, to 30% at middle and 19% at senior management.

Table 5.6: Atypical work patterns, by gender and management level (N=2236)

Type of Work	Junior Management		Middle Management		Senior Management	
	Male (n=595)	Female (n=611)	Male (n=466)	Female (n=234)	Male (n=258)	Female (n=72)
Part-time	0.5%	1.5%	0.2%	3.4%	0.0%	1.4%
Work-share	2.4%	14.7%	1.7%	15.8%	0.4%	9.7%
Job-share	0.2%	2.8%	0.2%	0.4%	0.0%	2.8%
Job-share (without partner)	0.5%	4.3%	0.0%	6.0%	0.0%	2.8%
Other	0.3%	3.4%	0.4%	4.3%	0.4%	2.8%

Weighted Data

As is highlighted in Table 5.6, the highest proportion of Civil Service workers in the management levels engaging in atypical work patterns at every management level were women work sharers. Out of all the flexible working options, work sharing was engaged in by the highest proportions of men, although the numbers are minimal. Our research found within the senior Civil Service management category, no employees above PO grade were working atypically. Of those PO's engaged in atypical work patterns, 88% were women and just 12% were men.

The effects of atypical working patterns

This section examines the effect working atypically may have on career progression and the attainment of career ambitions. Atypical working patterns and ambition was an issue raised by many in the Civil Service interviews. Family responsibilities are reported by some as a reason for working atypical hours. However, there is also evidence to suggest that even leaving work at a relatively normal hour (as opposed to working late) is frowned upon by some colleagues:

... since the children have come along now I'm out the door at 5 or 5.30 every day because I have to be...no-one has ever said anything about it but yet there's a school of thought in [Department] that you can't go out at 5 o'clock...if the Secretary General catches you! (Brian, Middle manager, Civil Service)

This, however, may be dependent upon the ethos of a particular section. A woman working in the same Department as Brian had an alternate view on the issue:

So if I can start to look at over a five, ten-year period when all of the children have moved into education that I can start to move things forward as well. It's nice for me to be able to finish work at four o'clock and spend time with them on homework or other activities knowing that in the work side that's okay ... There is no expectation that as you progress your career you have to stay longer hours (Kathy, middle manager, Civil Service)

For Kathy, work life balance options in the Civil Service allow her to facilitate family life and her future ambitions, although it is evident that her plans to progress are somewhat 'on hold' until her children become older. There was also the sense that some thought there may be negative consequences in terms of the quality of work you were given if you engaged in flexible working. Nora, a middle management Civil Service interviewee, was heartened to see a senior woman in her Department taking term-time as she had been given a high profile task to do at the same time:

This woman had been working on a very critical piece of policy so was obviously very highly regarded in the Department, you know, she wouldn't have been given that piece of work or she wouldn't be in that position unless, and yet she was taking term time and I thought, that's where I want to be. That's where I want to be in five or ten years time. I want to be that person who gets good work, who, you know, is challenged in terms of the work I do but also that I am facilitated to take leave when I need it and you know in that sense. (Nora, middle manager, Civil Service)

Nora's sense of inspiration at seeing this is indicative of the fact that this experience was perceived by her to be unusual. A female respondent to the survey felt that some senior women she worked with were unsympathetic to women with children because they were not mothers themselves:

I actually job share now on a split week basis and I feel that managers don't particularly like to have job-sharers in their sections. Obviously it can depend on the manager and sometimes it is actually senior women managers who are less tolerant of job sharers than senior male managers. I believe the reason for this is that most of the senior female managers are women who are either not married or who do not have children themselves and therefore do not understand the family pressures that younger married women are under e.g. I job share due to lack of childcare facilities in my area. (Female survey respondent)

This comment is perhaps particular to the Department or section, but given the fact that fewer senior women in the Civil Service have family responsibilities in comparison to their lower ranking female colleagues, or indeed their male peers, it may be an issue that others perceive also.

In the survey, some male respondents thought that it was not viewed as acceptable for men to take such leave:

I do not believe that senior managers think it is acceptable for male APs to take term time (Male survey respondent)

Taking term time would have indicated to management a lack of commitment to my job (Male survey respondent)

Another male survey respondent indicated that he thought men engaging in work-sharing were particularly negatively viewed:

This is necessarily subjective but, based on comments made to me in relation to others, I would be surprised if a man who opts to work-share for family reasons would not be seen as, somehow, less committed to the job. In some cases, this might well be true. In my case, it was not but it may have been perceived that way, at least by some senior people. (Male survey respondent)

The interviews from the financial services organisation provided further insights into the effects of leave or atypical work patterns on career progression within the context of the private sector. For many of the women they felt that flexible working arrangements were a signal to employers that ones career progression was ending:

That's the thing if you take the flexibility you're effectively saying hands up 'I have other priorities now' and they will put you in one box now, 'she's got kids, she's got other priorities' so...(Sinead, female private sector employee)

When discussing the impacts of working atypical work hours, for example job sharing, Orlagh acknowledged that flexible working arrangements can hurt an individual's career:

It impacts, no doubt about it, it impacts on the choice, it impacts on the quality of the job absolutely, no question. (Orlagh, female private sector employee)

In explaining why flexible working arrangements tend to have an adverse effect on an individual in terms of advancing their career, Seamus pointed out that the demands of a high level career are extremely difficult to manage when working reduced hours:

flexible working and all of that is all very fine but if one member, and I'm just being honest now and I do think it needs to be built into...if it doesn't work it doesn't work, you know, if someone's not available when they're required by their client etcetera well then it doesn't work, then you have to say 'well in this particular type of job unfortunately there's a difficulty here' and in a number of types of jobs within the bank that's where the problems start to arise and that's why going up the ranks becomes a problem because it's demanding in terms of time etcetera. (Seamus, male private sector employee)

It would appear that the difficulty of balancing flexible working arrangements with a high profile job is particularly punishing to women as they negotiate the demands of home with the workplace. In assessing her own situation with regard to work and family demands, Sinead discusses why she is reluctant to take up flexible working arrangements. She also acknowledges her lack of role models in terms of other women who have successfully dealt with a similar situation:

I mean there are one or two people who have taken...who have reduced their hours in terms of they're not working five days a week and that but that's brought challenges for them and they're effectively doing a five day week in three days so there isn't somebody that I could look up at and say 'yes, this is the job' or 'they've got themselves in the right position' (Sinead, female private sector employee)

It is important to point out here that the viability of flexibility in relation to managing a successful career in this private sector organization did not only pertain to those women with children. In the extract below, Barbara describes her own dilemma in relation to her career and her desire to regain some work life balance:

I'm finding it less fulfilling so I think my ambition is to just get a bit more fulfilment out of what I'm doing and to get the work-life balance back on

track again and to a certain extent I almost do see that you can't...you can't do all this, I don't feel I can do all within this organisation so obviously it does make you contemplate whether or not it's time to make a move or whatever just to get the balance back in your life because I think there's one thing as well in the organisation almost assumes that you're ambitious and it's throwing things at you all the time and it's just kind of like 'guys, I don't want to keep proving myself', you know, I just want to relax things down a bit. (Barbara, female private sector employee)

It would appear that the option of taking flexible working arrangements is very difficult when combining this with a high profile job either in the Civil Service or in the private sector. We have seen that atypical work patterns are virtually non-existent in the very senior positions among the survey respondent population. Similarly, in both the private and the Civil Service sectors the interview material suggested that the lack of compatibility between high profile jobs and atypical work patterns can have a detrimental influence on women's career planning.

The survey and the interview data among Civil Servants suggests that the experience of taking leave and its subsequent impact on career progression appears to be heavily dependent on: what type of leave is taken; how long the leave is for and what particular section an employee is in. It is thus a topic that requires further investigation in order to conclude concretely about its effects. However, given the numerous comments on negative effects, particularly for men, it seems that parent-related leave has the potential to be a barrier to career ambitions.

5.3.4 Career Breaks

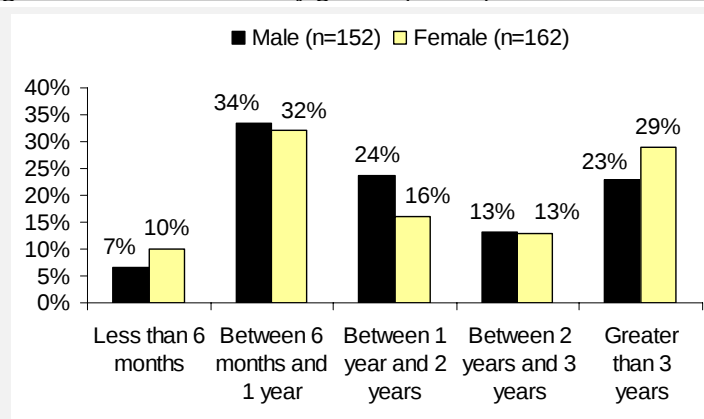
The questionnaire sought to examine the impact of taking career breaks on an employee's career. The reasons for the career break appear to have a very significant affect on whether or not its impact was perceived as positive or negative.

The take-up of career breaks

A total of 323 survey respondents reported having already taken a career break, representing 14% of the weighted sample. Of this total there was a fairly even balance between women (164 or 51%) and men (159 or 59%).¹² The majority of both men (n=142 or 89%) and women (n=139 or 85%) had taken just one career break, with 9 men (6%) and 19 women (12%) having taken two career breaks.

The length of the first career break is shown in Figure 5.24, illustrating that male and female Civil Servants are both likely to take between just 6 months and 1 year off.

Figure 5.24: Length of first career break by gender (N=314)



Weighted Data

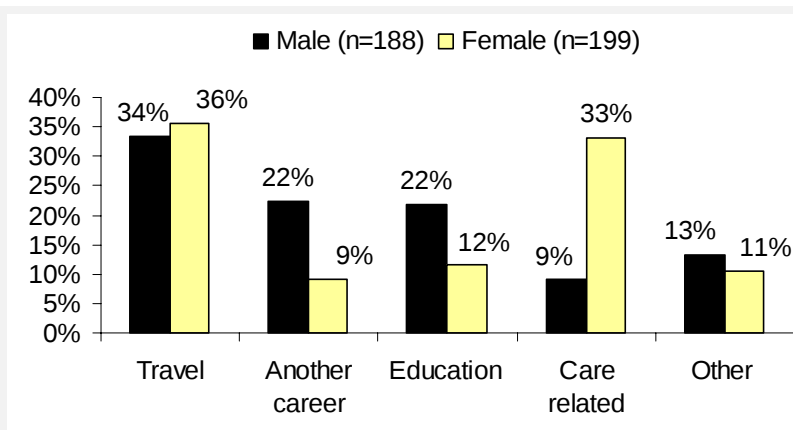
Women (29%) are slightly more likely than men (23%) to take over 3 years off work for a career break.

¹² Only 5 people (4 men and 1 woman) reported applying for a career break but being turned down.

The effect of career breaks

The survey also examined the main reasons why employees took career breaks. Many respondents gave more than one reason as to why they availed of a career break, suggesting that these are used to fulfil multiple goals of both a personal and professional nature.¹³ This means that the effect of career breaks is an area in need of further investigation in order to determine more precisely whether or not the reason for the break has a significant impact on future career development. Figure 5.25 gives the gender breakdown and reasons for taking a career break among survey respondents. The greatest proportion of both men (34%) and women (36%) availed of a career break to travel. The data highlights that of those Civil Servants taking career breaks for care related reasons, women outnumber men by a ratio of 3.6:1. Men outnumber women by 2.4:1 among those that took a career break for the purpose of trying a different career, and by 1.8:1 in undertaking further education during a career break.

Figure 5.25: Reason for taking a career break, by gender (n=387)*



Weighted Data

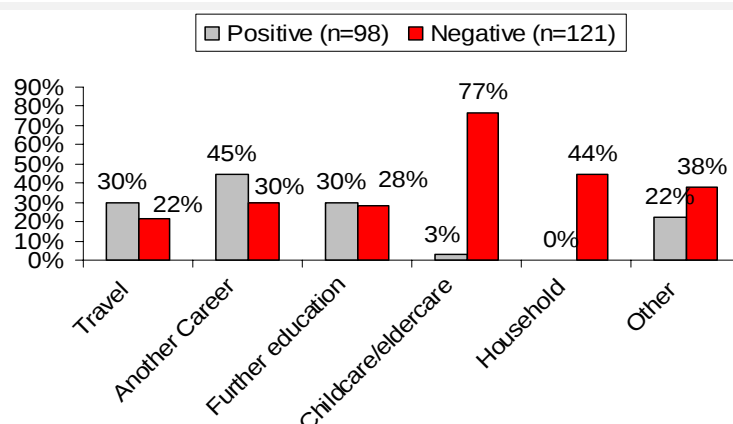
*Note: The 'Care related' category combines answers for childcare, eldercare and household responsibilities. Values are given as a % of gender.

Figure 5.25 thus indicates that career breaks are more likely to be taken by women to fulfil familial/care duties, whilst men are more likely to take career breaks to further their career or for personal fulfilment through travel.

Looking at the total cohort, it can be seen that career breaks taken in order to experience another career, to travel or to engage in further education have positive ratings or show little effect on career progression. Those taken for caring or household reasons are reported as having negative effects on career progression. Figure 5.27 below details the reported positive and negative effects associated with each reason for taking a career break.

¹³ The below data represents information on the total number of career breaks taken (a total of 387), not the total number of people who have taken them.

Figure 5.26: Reported Positive and Negative Effects on Career Progression of Taking a Career Break by Reason for Taking Leave (N=388)*

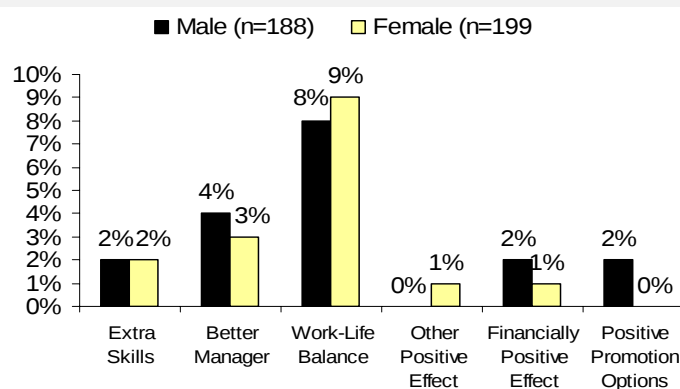


Weighted Data *Note: Respondents could choose more than one effect so totals do not equal 100%. Values for 'no effect' or 'don't know' are not shown.

Men are more likely to have taken a career break for those reasons which were attributed higher positive ratings (i.e. education another career) and women for the reasons that have higher negative ratings (i.e. caring and domestic responsibilities). It is clear that female survey respondents are experiencing more negative than positive reactions to their taking of career breaks than men. This would appear to be because of the reason they are taking them.

Examining the kinds of effects of career breaks on career progression also throws up some stark gender differences. Figure 5.27 below gives a breakdown by gender of the perceived positive effect of taking a career break, and Figure 5.28 gives the same breakdown for negative effects in relation to career progression.

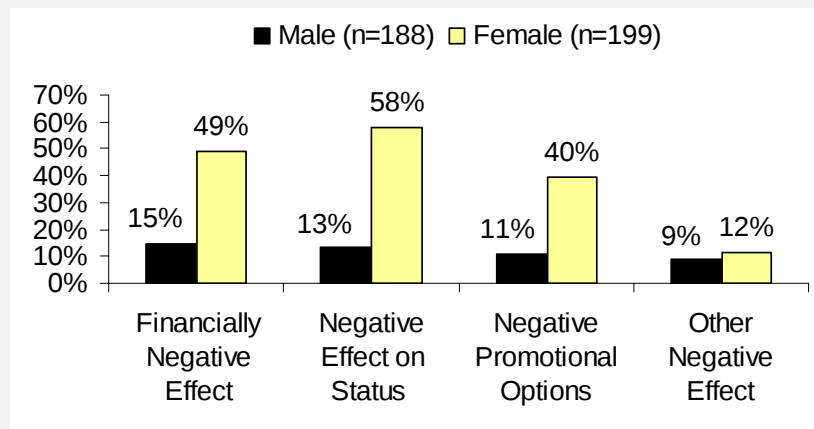
Figure 5.27: Reported Positive Effects of Taking a Career Break by gender (N=387)*



Weighted Data

*Note: Respondents could choose more than one effect so totals do not equal 100%

Figure 5.28: Reported Negative Effects of Taking a Career Break by gender (N=387)*



Weighted Data

*Note: Respondents could choose more than one effect so totals do not equal 100%

As can be seen in Figures 5.28 and 5.29, there were low percentages of the respondent group overall who reported positive effects. The highest ratings were given to work-life balance by both men (8%) and women (9%), although these are very low percentages. Nineteen respondents gave qualitative answers to the question and reported positive effects such as increased ambition, the chance to complete higher education and, as mentioned, better work life balance. A selection of these comments are given here:

Gave me better confidence, more ambition and a broader outlook. (Female survey respondent)

Helped me to recognise my own abilities and increased my ambition (Female survey respondent)

I joined the Civil Service from school and the belief was that people in the private sector worked harder. Experience showed me that this was not true, there were very good, average and bad in both sectors. Size often dictated how things were addressed. The bigger the company the more driftwood they carried. (Female survey respondent)

However, when it comes to negative effects, the gender differences become far more apparent. While negative effects in terms of financial consequences may be expected for both men and women, given that this is unpaid leave, that women report this effect to a higher degree is related to the fact that they were not doing alternate paid work as many of the men were. Figure 5.28 also demonstrates that women perceive that they have experienced negative effects in terms of status and promotion opportunities. This is perhaps also related to the fact that the majority were engaged in caring work while on a career break, and thus did not gain extra skills, education or alternative methods of working while on leave compared to their male peers. This was also referred to by respondents who left qualitative comments. A female respondent specifically thought that the career break she took impacted more negatively on her career progression than maternity leave:

Definitely the career break I took after the mat[ernity] leave had a negative effect on my career in terms of my promotional opportunities but over time I think this will lessen. (Female survey respondent)

Another female respondent referred to the personal effect taking a career break had on her in the workplace:

I took a career break for 2.5 years after the birth of my 2nd child. I lost my confidence at work which I took a long time to regain. (Female survey respondent)

This comment again raises the issue of confidence, which will be referred to in Section 5.4.2 as a crucial issue in terms of going forward for promotion. This suggests the need for training or mentoring for employees who have taken such extended leave in order to fully prepare them for returning to work and also to maintain their confidence in their own abilities.

The negative effects associated with taking a career break for caring work rather than travel or education was a finding that was also replicated in the Civil Service interview data, although views were quite mixed. In general people on career breaks are generally replaced and do not come back to the same section. This means that many thought there was little impact in terms of negative perceptions because when they returned from a career break they were like a new employee in their section. Some, however, thought that caring related career breaks halted the progression of people's careers but travelling, however, did not:

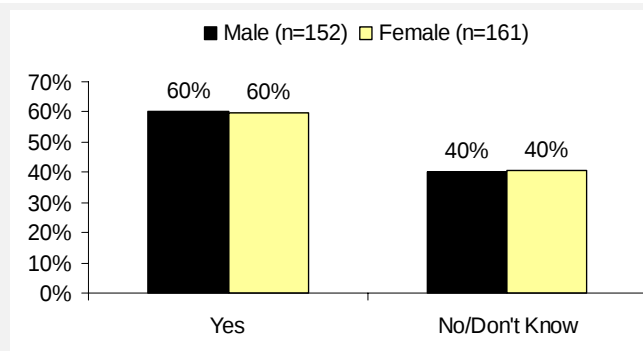
One of the girls that I worked with ... took a five year career break and I'd say it did impact because ... she's great with people and I'd say she would have been a bit more up the ladder now if she hadn't, now, I think that's to do with a time thing, even a man takes out time it'll affect him because he's away from the workforce, he's not going to have the opportunities to display these things at interviews then because he's been out for five years so maybe that's both men and women but more women tend to take career breaks than men but I do think, if you're very young and you might take it for a year to go off travelling and people have this notion, 'oh he went off washing windows in Australia but that was great, you know' and yes, maybe that doesn't affect you... (Jane, middle manager, Civil Service)

Debra argued that those taking a career break, particularly for care related reasons, should be careful that they continue to develop and/or utilise relevant skills during their absence. This, she observed, is important in terms of collecting skills which can be used to progress their careers upon re-entry into the workforce:

... if you take a career break for five years depending on what you're doing and that if you're coming to a merit...competency based interview you're limiting what you can talk about ...if situations where people are taking breaks to look after somebody else and that, unless they're proactive in keeping their skill sets up I would say it's most unlikely they're going to be on an equal footing so again it can be in your own hands, you just can't sit back on a career break and do nothing and expect that you're going to be as good in an interview as somebody who hasn't done that, you would have to do two things when you're on a career break, do whatever you want on your career break but equally if you want to come back and progress your skill sets, I mean it doesn't have to be work related it could be 'I oversaw a building project in my local school or...', it doesn't matter what it is, you just can't sit back. (Debra, senior manager, Civil Service)

When the Civil Service survey cohort were asked the question 'Did taking a career break change your career/life aspirations in any way?' there was no significant gender difference as can be seen in Figure 5.29 below.

Figure 5.29: Effect of career break on career/life aspirations by gender (N=313)



Weighted Data

This indicates that there is a consensus among those Civil Servants that availed of career breaks that these breaks have had an effect on their career/life aspirations in some way. This may be related to the earlier result which indicated that the majority of mothers among the survey cohort felt that this responsibility has had a negative impact on their career progression because so many of them took a career break to care for their children.

The question allowed for survey respondents to give additional textual answers which indicated the ways in which they felt that taking a career break changed their career/life aspirations. Many respondents said that the career break allowed them greater perspective on their life and career and the majority reported either positive personal or workplace effects as a result of taking it. A selection of these comments are given here:

Became more realistic as to what I hoped to achieve. Realised variety of work is important as well as career structure (Male survey respondent)

Became more ambitious (Male survey respondent)

Definitely made me appreciate the importance of quality of life (Male survey respondent)

Despite the fact that it may have hindered my promotion prospects I feel that it was of great benefit to take the career break, both in terms of improving my educational qualifications and in expanding my perspective (Female survey respondent)

I appreciate being back in the work force more than I did before the break (Female survey respondent)

Some survey respondents reported a negative effect on their career/life aspirations as a result of taking a career break, ranging from feeling less ambitious to frustration at the job they were assigned on return:

In my opinion there was a negative reaction from senior management which delayed my promotion to PO for many years (Male survey respondent)

It made me less ambitious (Female survey respondent)

On coming back I was diverted into an office that was almost entirely technical and had no policy section and I feel it stultified me and my career (Female survey respondent)

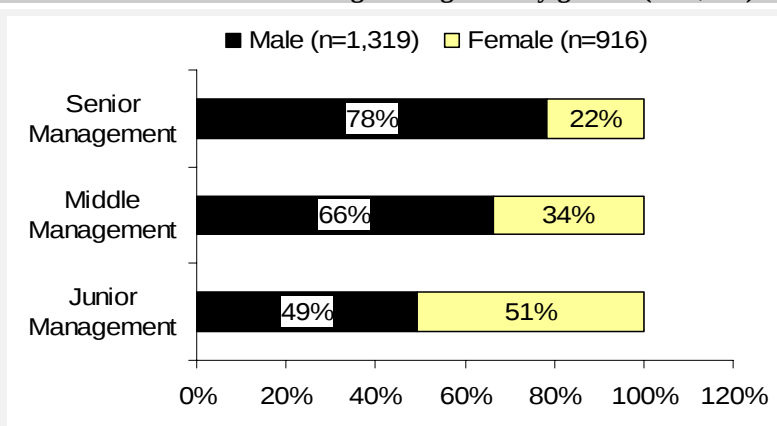
Resulted in personal satisfaction but very negative on my finances and career in the Civil Service (Male survey respondent)

Positive and negative consequences on career/life aspirations were mentioned by both male and female Civil Service managers in the survey, suggesting again that the reason for taking a career break, rather than gender, has a stronger effect on whether taking a career break will be perceived positively or negatively.

5.4 Strategies and Planning for Career Advancement

In this section of the chapter, analysis is given of the role career planning plays in the work life of Civil Service employees. In particular, what are the strategies recognised as important to securing a successful career? Figure 5.30 below provides a weighted analysis of the gender breakdown of management grades. This analysis is weighted to be representative of the actual conditions within the 15 Civil Service Departments surveyed and shows that just one in five senior managers in the Civil Service are female. From the chart below we can see that women equal 22% of the total number of senior managers, this provides us with a ratio of 3.6 (men) to 1(woman). The figure illustrates the hierarchical nature of the distribution of male and female respondents. This section of the chapter will attempt to provide some insight into possible causes of this imbalance as it relates to career plans and strategies.

Figure 5.30: Gender breakdown of the management grades by gender (N=2,235)



Weighted Data.

5.4.1 Career Plans

Who is planning and why?

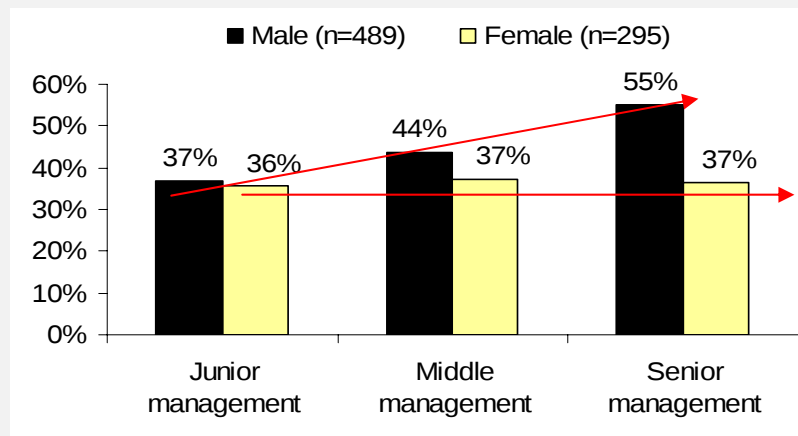
Career planning emerged from both the qualitative and quantitative data as crucial to achieving a successful career. When asked what advice she would offer to a junior colleague in relation to their career, Joanne, a middle manager in the Civil Service, highlighted the importance of planning and agency:

don't stay in a job that you're comfortable with, that you have to go...you have to find out what is important within the Department, you have to find out what management, what people...like, what the big thinkers think is

the next big thing and go and chase it, you know, and make people aware that you're interested that you want to learn and that you want to develop yourself, I think that's all about putting yourself out there and sometimes putting yourself in a situation where you're not 100 per cent comfortable. (Joanne, middle manager, Civil Service)

Both the survey data and the qualitative data from the Civil Service indicate that men are more likely to have a definite career plan compared to their female colleagues. In total, 43% of male Civil Servants in the selected management levels have a career plan compared with 36% of their female counterparts.

Figure 5.31: Male and female employees in each of the management grades who have a definite career plan (N=1,961)



Weighted Data

Figure 5.31 above illustrates the percentage of male and female employees in each of the management categories of the Civil Service with a definite career plan. This chart demonstrates that career planning is progressively more common among male respondents as they rise up the management levels. For women however, planning remains a steady feature of their careers. Women in the Civil Service are not significantly more likely to plan their careers when they are at senior management compared to when they are at junior management, and even then, a majority (over 60%) are not planning at all.

The following two extracts from Ciara, a middle manager and Conor, a senior manager give us some insight into the different possible mindsets of women and men in relation to career planning and family:

No, my only plan I suppose was I wanted to earn enough money to support myself and if I ever had children to support them, that would have been as far as it went, I was never, I never, and I did probably presume I would work all my life alright, (Ciara, middle manager Civil Service)

but from there you start thinking about a career, at that stage...I had two kids, married a few years, I was in for the, you know, you start to think about a career (Conor, senior manager, Civil Service)

Significantly the extracts above indicate that in some cases family affect women and men's careers differently. In many examples cited by the participants, this effect of family was largely negative in terms of women's career progression. In particular the first extract above from Ciara could be seen as perhaps historical as she is reflecting on her initial planning when she began her career. This may again be related to gender stereotyping and/or socialisation which would construct men as the family breadwinner. However, it is important to highlight the employment of agency by some of the participants in negotiating family as a barrier to their career. These interviewees gave some key

insights into how they negotiate the combination of children with successful careers by careful planning:

I have an ambition that I would like to progress maybe through the Principal Officer grade and onto the assistant secretary grade em, its hard to see how that is definitely, you can picture the steps in your mind however in terms of timeframes I see that I would like to be at PO level within to 3-5 years...Em, if I had no children and if I wasn't married I'd immerse myself completely in that and go fast track but I can't do that fast track now even though if I went to my husband and said I am going to do this he would be completely supportive but its not fair and I've got an opportunity for this work life balance to really be pleasant so there is no need to go head long into it. But over a three to five year timeframe with the support of the Department I can do that in a logical or a structured fashion, knowing that in three to five years if I present myself for PO for competitions either internal or external and I move to the interview phase that I would have given myself every opportunity to be successful at that. So I have that sort of idea. (Kathy, middle manager, Civil Service)

Oh, yes, I can certainly say that I have sought particular jobs or, you know, accepted particular jobs over the last couple of years in an effort to build up my competencies and to build up my experience level...So, yes, I suppose, when you put it like that perhaps I do have a career plan in that I'm chipping away at the competencies, chipping away at the things I know I need to be able to do in order to progress. (Maeve, junior manager, Civil Service)

The extracts above are significant in that they demonstrate the necessity for career planning and the level of agency that is involved in carving out a career path and ensuring access to the experience and competencies necessary to progress. In particular, the extract from Kathy in relation to negotiating the demands of family with career ambitions is pertinent. Kathy's extract highlights the necessity of careful planning for women who wish to combine children with a successful career.

The interviews with employees of the financial services organisation revealed similar findings in relation to the recognised importance of planning to a successful career. Virtually all of the participants in this small sample stressed the importance of not planning too rigidly and making sure that they are well positioned in terms of availing of opportunities as they arise. In the extract below Colm explains how he uses a mixture of planning along with availing of opportunities in strategising for his career:

I do plan in advance and I do think about the consequences and I do think about how to position things but as a mixture of planning and kind of going with the flow, sometimes opportunities come up and you just take them. (Colm, male private sector employee)

In the extract below, Seamus describes a strategy of 'so positioning yourself'. This involves developing skill sets that position an individual in relation to the career opportunities that arise:

I've always felt though in terms of career you can't be, you know, there's plan and there's so positioning yourself [...] you should always be developing your competencies and then you so position yourself. [...] So, a plan sometimes can narrow you, I think you should so position yourself and that's within the range of competencies and so on. (Seamus, male private sector employee)

An example of this 'so positioning' was outlined by Colm as he described his current aspiration to achieve a top level senior management position, and his plans to get there:

I've a definite plan that I want to get into [top level senior management], those are the guys that are really the leadership people, that's the senior management and the grade below that is not really so attractive so that was my career plan, now there's lots of [senior management] positions there most of which I'm completely unqualified to do and some of which, some of which I could become qualified to do but I'm trying to kind of do things that would put me in a good position to be considered there. (Colm, male private sector employee)

The qualitative analysis of this private sector sample further developed the nuanced understanding of women's relationship to career planning. As was explored above, the historical social forces which created expectations of career advancement among men may have operated to limit the career planning of women. In the extract below, Paula recalls her relationship to planning at the beginning of her career:

Well I tended to pick things I thought would be interesting, would be stimulating as opposed to 'this will get me to there' because I had no great expectation that I'd ever get to there so...(Paula, female private sector employee)

However, as increasingly more women are contending for the upper ranks of senior management these historical forces will wane. Expectations of having a successful career are vital ingredients in a career plan. In the interview with Paula she described her current career plans and reflected on how she had managed to achieve her current position in the organisation. This extract describes how she combined career planning with a degree of the 'so positioning' outlined above:

I think I've always wanted to stretch myself so I've always made career moves which were designed to primarily stretch myself and make myself more useful so that if opportunities did come up I'd be in a position to challenge...inasmuch as that's a plan I did try to arrange skills and that and I've tended to take the view that if you have a very defined plan that you tend to miss opportunities so I'm always taking the view that I'll try and seek opportunities...(Paula, female private sector employee)

Ambition and career planning

When correlating ambition with career planning it would appear that those with a plan are marginally more likely to consider themselves to be ambitious. Of the total number of Civil Servants in the selected management grades who consider themselves to be ambitious (N=1,196) 54% also have a definite career plan. This would appear to be supported by the qualitative data from Civil Servants:

In five years time I certainly see myself at PO level with you know, biting on the heels of the Assistant Sec level and probably you know, then forming in my mind what is my timeframe to get to this, you know, where in the competency profile do I need to strengthen myself, where is okay at the moment...I will still be doing it in a measured fashion and saying again, it will be a three to five year. So I will certainly be at PO level and planning my attack over the next three-year period at the assistant sec post somewhere. (Kathy, middle manager, Civil Service)

The extract above from Kathy's interview highlights the correlation between ambition and planning. A significant feature of the plans that the interview participants described included ensuring access to particular experiences and gaining required competencies necessary for successful promotion. This is reflective of the 'so positioning' strategy outlined in the previous section which was a feature of the career planning among the private sector participants. Among the Civil Service interview participants the division or the area you worked in was an important aspect of securing a successful career. Of particular note was that agency was very important in negotiating and determining the type of work allocated to you as well as the division in which you were placed. Jane, a middle manager, acknowledges in the extract below the importance of recognising where you are in relation to other people and what type of work you are performing:

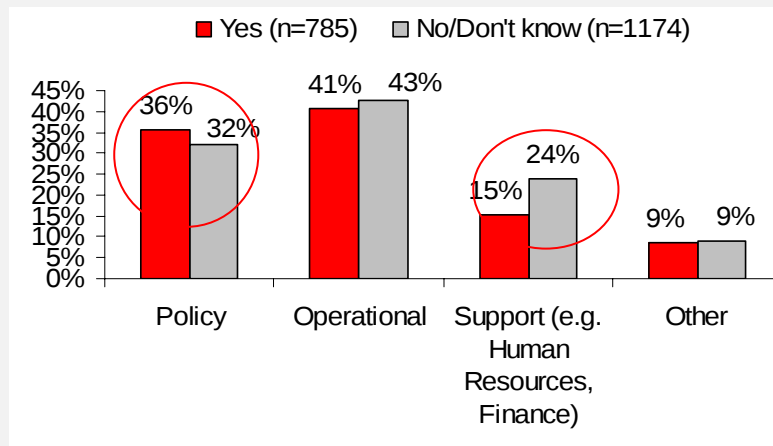
you kind of know who's in the important areas and who's doing the jobs that are recognised, you know...certain areas are definitely recognised more...(Jane, middle manager, Civil Service)

Again this strategy was also employed by the interview participants from the private sector. In the extract below, Sinead emphasises the importance of mobility within the organisation and of exposure to as many types of work and different colleagues as possible:

if you want to progress in [the organisation] you need to move around, you need to move into different areas otherwise you've a very narrow focus, you need to get exposure to as much people as possible so move either your job or your role in terms of what you're doing should change every three years (Sinead, female private sector employee)

It would appear that career planning is crucial in obtaining strategic goals and in placing oneself in the strategic areas within a Department/section. Figure 5.32 below shows that, among Civil Servants in the selected management levels, those with a career plan are more likely to work in the policy areas than those without a plan. By contrast those working in the support areas are more likely to not have a career plan.

Figure 5.32: Distribution of those with and without a career plan according to what functional area they work in (N=1,959)



Weighted Data

5.4.2 Career Aspirations and the Civil Service

Step by step navigation

Analysis of the survey data revealed that across the management grades, the majority of Civil Service employees currently aspire to reach the next management level above their current status. Of the junior management respondents, 56% aspire to reach assistant principal grades. Similarly, 46% of the middle managers aspire to reach the principal officer grades. Among senior management however, 43% of the sample population wanted to remain with the principal officer grades while 36% hoped to reach assistant secretary or deputy secretary grade. This would correspond with the qualitative data which suggested that most Civil Service management employees navigate their careers in a step-by-step process:

I would be more the type that would, I'm a kind of a plodder, I like to get there, get familiar with the job and only when I feel comfortable that I know the job that I know myself that I'm able to move on would I then aspire...I'm not one of these people that just assumes I'm going up there...I like to feel that I can do the job and that I'm eligible to go forward for promotion... (Jane, middle manager, Civil Service)

It would appear from both the quantitative data as well as the interviews that Civil Service employees are more likely to aspire to the immediate grade above them without looking much further up the career

ladder. When they are promoted to a specific grade they would then look to the next grade in creating new aspirations:

as you progress a bit you look at the people doing the job above you and you think 'God that's not really too hard, I could do that' whereas when you start off as an EO you're kind of going 'oh my God', like an AP and a PO seems a million miles away but the closer you get to it the easier, it's just kind of natural to go for it (Alice, junior manager, Civil Service)

I couldn't say I'm sitting here and saying someday I want to be Secretary General of the Department, when I think of that it frightens me, would I be able to do it? It's all these self doubts. But Principal Officer, yes, because I've spent time as an AP as I see it and I look around me and I see POs that I worked with when they were APs and they were brutal when they were APs! Some interview board somewhere thought it was a good idea to make them Principal Officers and, like, that can kind of tick you off, you look at them and you think if they can get paid over 90 grand a year surely I can do a better job. (Emma, junior manager, Civil Service)

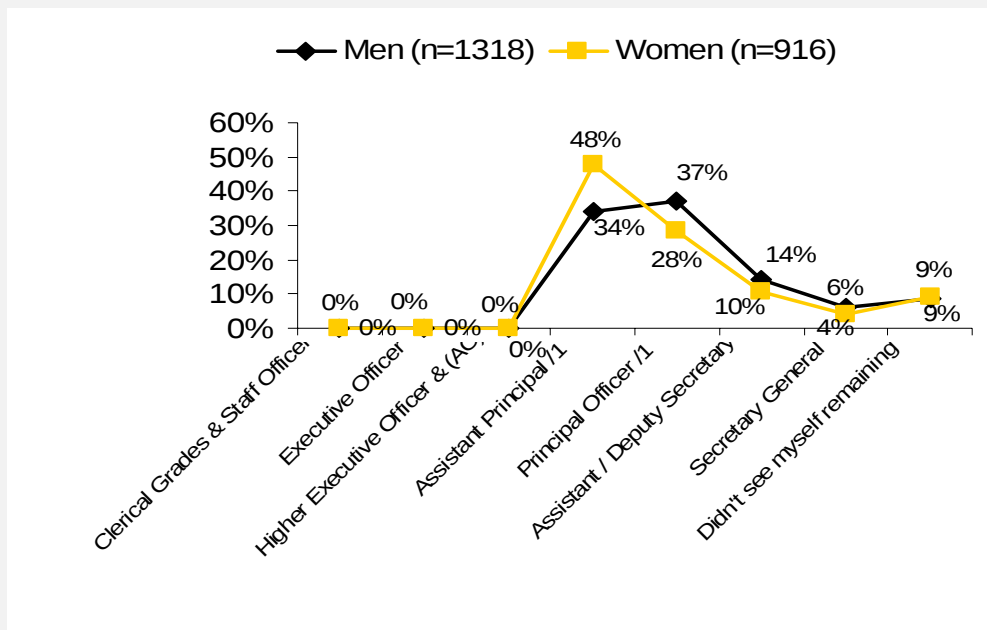
I think it's always been the case that you work your way into a job, you say 'yes, I can do this job' and then you say 'well, can I do more?' and I think that's the route of ambition, if you can convince yourself that 'yes, I think I can do more than this, I think I can make this step', well then that's the definition of ambition and you then you go 'how do I fulfil that ambition?' by identifying the job that you want to go for (Conor, senior manager Civil Service)

Well I think when you start working in a particular grade, you know, I would never be, you know, confident enough to say 'oh I want to be that higher grade and I'm going to get there by such and such a time', and it's just through the time you spend in a particular grade the more exposure you have to people you realise that, you know, well I could do what he's doing or I could do what she's doing and then you move on, so, you know, (Emma, junior Manager, Civil Service)

Men and women's changing aspirations`

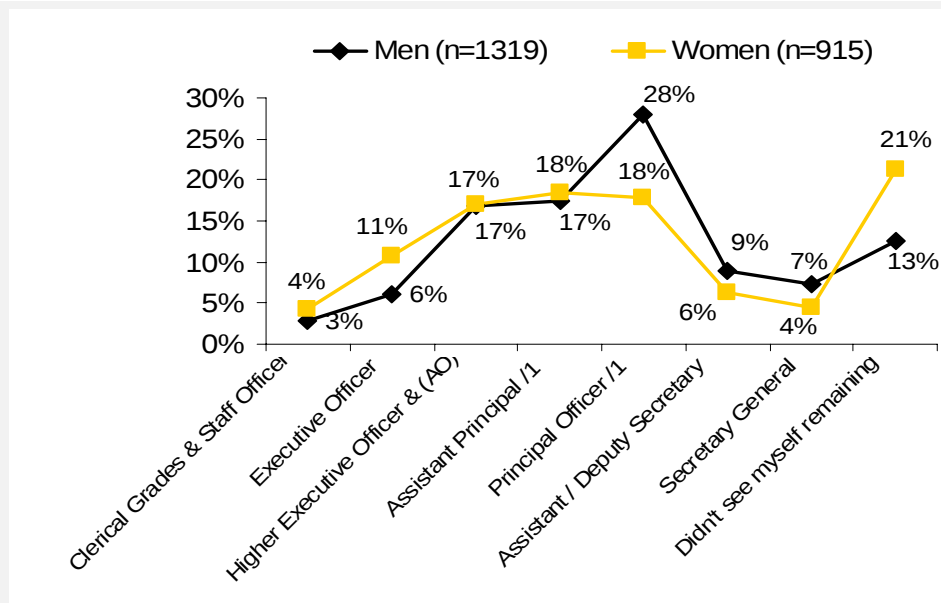
Figures 5.34 and 5.35 below illustrate the comparison of current aspirations with aspirations upon entry into the Civil Service for male and for female respondents.

Figure 5.33: Comparison of male and female current aspirations



Weighted Data

Figure 5.34: Comparison of male and female aspirations upon entry

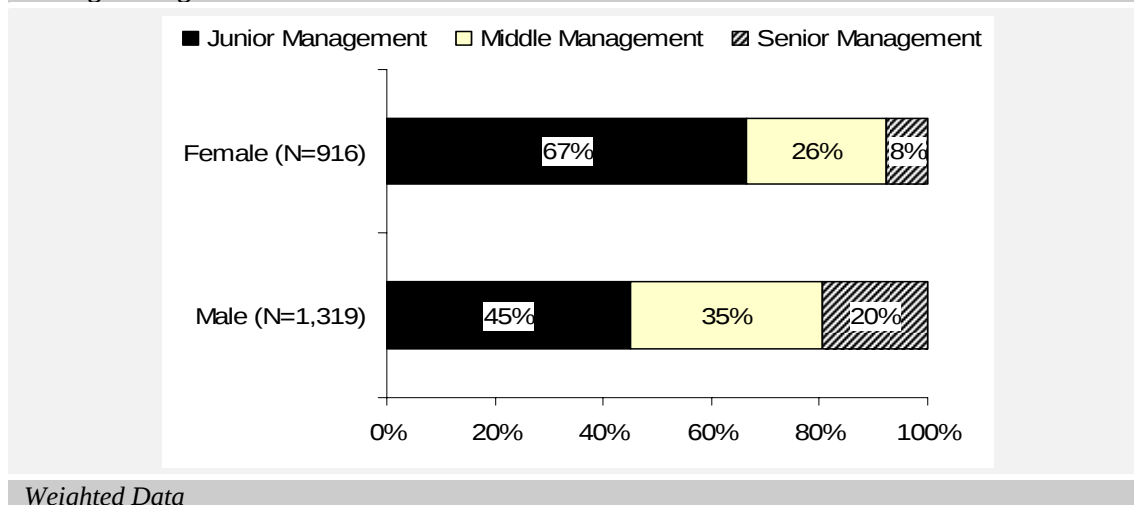


Weighted Data

The aspirations upon entry of both the male and the female Civil Service management employees peak at the Assistant Principal and the Principal Officer grades. Significantly however, men are much more likely to aspire to the upper management grades upon entry than their female counterparts. This corresponds with the theory posited in the previous section which suggests that social forces may have operated to limit the career expectations of many women when they began their career. This may be particularly true of older women reflecting back on entry level career aspirations formed at least ten or twenty years earlier.

Aspirations are greatly influenced by the context in which they are formed. A minority of women have advanced to senior management roles in recent years and this has been facilitated by social changes regarding the role of women in society. The importance of role models in the career advancement of women has been outlined in Chapter Two and is also a finding of this research as discussed in section 5.4.4 below. The data above represents employees who have advanced their careers beyond EO grade. This has influenced the current aspirations of female Civil Servants which is higher than their aspirations upon entry. Significantly, 14% of female employees in the surveyed grades currently aspire to reach AS and SG grades, this is compared with 20% of their male counterparts. However, the relatively low percentage of women to have breached the upper echelons of senior management to date cannot be emphasised enough. Figure 5.35 below illustrates the distribution of male and female employees in the selected grades according to management level.

Figure 5.35: Distribution of male and female employees (HEO/AO and above) according to their management grade



The statistical data is very stark. Of those women who are in HEO/AO and above (N =916), only 8% are in the senior management (PO and above). This compares with 20% of male employees in the selected grades (HEO/AO and above) who are in senior management. This indicates that those women who currently aspire to the very senior management levels are likely to encounter greater difficulties in achieving this aspiration than their male colleagues.

It is important to highlight that the variance in the current aspirations of male and female employees in the grades surveyed. The data represented in figures 5.34 and 5.35 indicate that current aspirations are weighted towards the upper management grades for the male Civil Servants compared to their female counterparts who are more likely to aspire to middle management. Although both men and women among the Civil Service management population are aspiring in a similar pattern i.e. they are both peaking in the middle and senior management, men are doing so in much greater percentages. A total of 19% of women aspired to principal officer grades when they began their careers in the Civil Service. This compares with 28% of their male colleagues. A total of 32% of women aspired to the entry and junior grades (Clerical, Staff Officer, EO and HEO). This compared to 26% of their male colleagues. In terms of current aspirations, 66% of men currently aspire to reach a grade within senior management. This compares with 52% of their female colleagues.

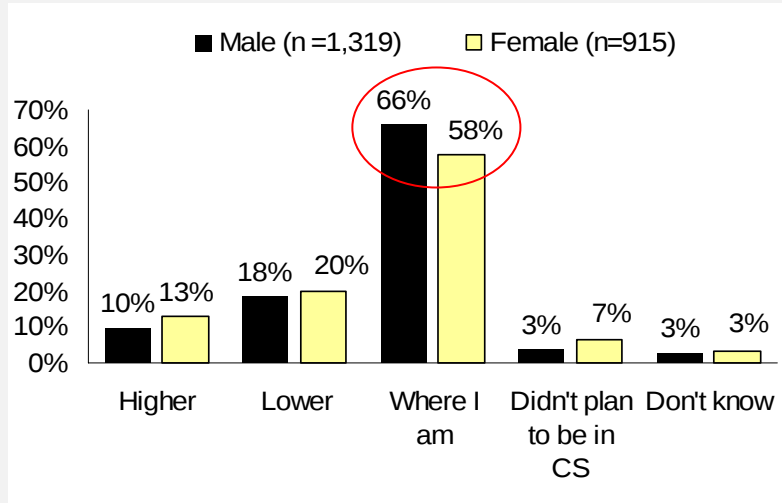
It would appear that while both women and men are defining ambition in similar terms there are significant differences in both the entry level as well as current aspirations. Women in the Civil Service management grades are aspiring to a lower grade than their male counterparts both at the beginning of their careers as well as currently. This finding raises questions concerning the contexts in which men and women are forming their aspirations and the influence of role models in the creation of career expectations.

Career expectations in context

Figure 5.36 below indicates that women working in the management grades in the Civil Service are 8% less likely their male counterparts to be currently in the position that they thought they

would be five years ago. This corresponds with Figure 5.31 which indicates that this cohort of women are less likely to plan their careers the corresponding cohort of men. As a result, these women are more likely than their male counterparts to be in a position which is higher, lower or contradictory to their expectations.

Figure 5.36: Assessment of current position in relation to where they thought they would be five years ago (N=2,234)



Weighted Data

The qualitative data provided some interesting insights into the generational and cohort effects on aspirations and on career expectations which were mentioned in the preceding sections. The extract from Jane, a middle manager, highlights the importance of historical context in understanding how the aspirations and expectations of women are formed:

When I joined in 1978 I knew that it was an opportunity, there was opportunity for promotion, however, I didn't expect, in that time it was probably more accepted that women would eventually get married and not that we were obliged to leave but that I probably would leave at some stage, so I went in with reasonable expectations that perhaps...I might just go up maybe one or two rungs of the ladder...it went slightly different for a variety of reasons and I didn't anticipate that I'd get to AP level, no I certainly didn't. (Jane, middle manager, Civil Service)

Jane's extract illustrates how cultural and social expectations for women in employment, which prevailed at the beginning of her career, greatly affected her aspirations as well as her career strategies. Similarly, Richard a junior manager below described the social and economic climate which created a context for his early career, informing his expectations:

And obviously I was, whatever, 22 going on 23 so I was a lot greener then and I thought things happened a lot faster but at the same time we were coming out of a period where things were not moving fast in Ireland so expectations were tempered by that as well. So it's very hard to know now how I felt then but I would say probably roughly in line but maybe a bit of a lag. I'd like to be further ahead at this point. (Richard, junior manager, Civil Service)

These insights in relation to cohort and historical effects on aspirations were supported by the data emerging from the interviews with the private sector employees:

I would say [the organisation] at the time I joined it wouldn't have been and I was horrified to discover [...] I went to a conference and discovered that there weren't any other women in [the organisation] any more superior than me and I was amazed because that wasn't terribly senior as you can

imagine, I think I would have assumed that I wouldn't get on very well in [the organisation] because there wasn't much of a culture of women getting on for a long time, I think that's changed quite dramatically probably in the last seven years. (Paula, female private sector employee)

The interviews analysis emerging from both samples in the qualitative component of this project provided a nuanced insight into the affects of context and cohort in understanding career expectations and aspirations of Civil Servants and indeed perhaps employed outside the public sector and the Service.

5.4.3 Promotions

Promotion Structure

In the Irish Civil Service there are usually four methods by which an individual may currently achieve promotion:

- internal promotion competitions,
- confined inter-Departmental competitions,
- open competitions and
- appointments made through the Top Level Appointments Committee (TLAC) for senior positions, some of which are now filled by open competition.

The Civil Service has largely moved away from its previous 'senior suitable' system of promotion whereby length of service contributed to promotion. All methods are merit based usually and require candidates to compete in competency assessment through interviewing. This approach is part of the equality of opportunity initiatives incorporated into the human resources strategy of the Civil Service. Senior promotions, to the Assistant Secretary and Secretary General grades require promotion through the TLAC system whereby candidates must be assessed by a committee of senior Civil Servants and approval sought from the appropriate minister.

The formal promotions system therefore, is the only method of advancing through the Civil Service structures. The qualitative data indicates, however, that women are less likely than men to put themselves forward for promotion. The extract below from Sally's interview represents this point and reflects the opinions of other interviewees:

From the number of interview boards that I have sat on, em my own, you know, my own finding for what its worth is that a nervous man will compete and do a bad interview perhaps em, a nervous woman sometimes will not be prepared to compete at all and my tendency, in what I have looked at here, is that the women are less likely to compete in the first place and I don't know why that should be because I have seen both men and women very, very nervous but I have seen the men, whether it's a cultural thing you know, em, more reluctant not to be seen to not have their hat in the ring. I've always seen, you know, a tendency that they will be prepared to have a go even if they are very nervous. (Sally, senior manager, Civil Service)

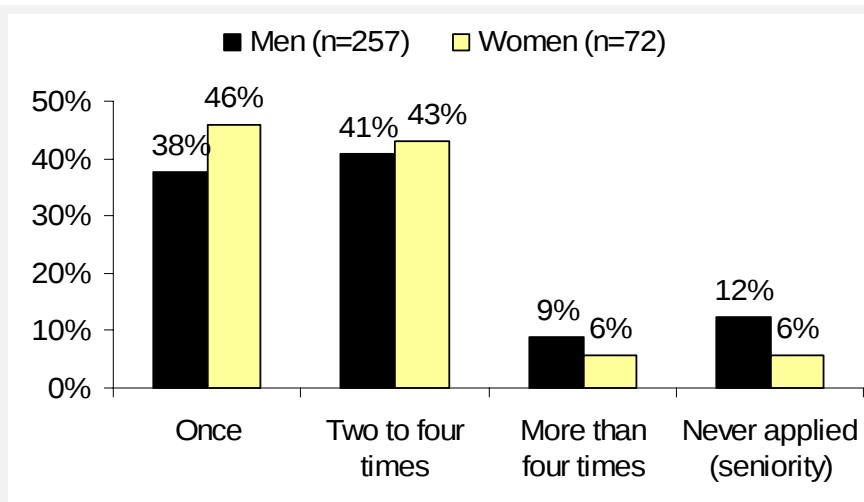
This qualitative finding was echoed among the interviews with participants from the private sector. In the extract below, Barbara describes the different processes by which she feels men and women are more likely to approach a new job or a promotion:

I don't know if that's something that's typically female but it's almost that thing of wanting to be very very comfortable at the level that you're at, I mean very very comfortable rather than actually constantly saying 'I can do that' and you know you really do want to prove to yourself not that I can do it, I have done it and I think there's almost that something...whereas I think the guys are, you know, it doesn't seem to daunt them as much in terms of the idea of going into something that they

have no experience of, they seem to just 'ah sure, you'll be grand'.
 (Barbara, female private sector employee)

The survey data revealed significant findings in relation to promotions and the Civil Service. The survey asked respondents how many times they applied for their current position where once was understood to mean they were promoted on their first attempt. Across the three management categories on average, 47% of female Civil Servants achieved promotion to their current grade the first time they applied, as compared with an average of 38% of their male counterparts. As was explained previously in the report, senior management in the 15 Departments surveyed is made up of 78% men compared with 22% women. In terms of ratio distribution of men and women, for every one woman in senior management there are 3.6 men. For the purposes of this report and in light of the massive discrepancies between the numbers of women and men in the senior management grades, analysis of the survey data in relation to promotions will focus on senior managers.

Figure 5.37: Percentage distribution of male and female senior managers according to how many times they applied for promotion to their current grade (N=329)



Weighted Data

Figure 5.37 above indicates that the majority of both male and female senior managers gained promotion to their current grade on their first attempt or after applying two to four times. In terms of the ratio distribution of the total number of senior managers, of those who gained promotion to their current grade the first time they applied, men outnumber women in a ratio of 2.9:1. In other words, for every one woman in senior management who gained promotion to her current grade on her first attempt there are 2.9 men. Remembering that among the total number of senior managers, women are outnumbered by men in a ratio of 1 woman to 3.6 men, we can see that a significant proportion of the female senior managers are successful at promotion the first time they apply. Figure 5.37 above shows that of the total number of female senior managers (N=72), nearly half (46%) gained promotion to their current grade the first time they applied. This is compared with 38% of all men in senior management (N=257).

The greater success of women at gaining promotion at their first attempt correlates with the literature which suggests that quite often women feel that they must be completely prepared before considering competing for promotion. The qualitative data obtained from our interviewees corroborated this contention, this is reflected in the extract below from Joanne:

they're more driven to kind of wing it and to say 'I can do that', you know, whereas women are more likely to go 'God, I don't know, I'll give it a try but I'm not really sure', you know, we have, I think we're less self assured about things and you could probably get a man and a woman of the same abilities and if something, say a promotion, came up...if there are 10 criteria and a man has four he goes 'yes, I can do that job' and a woman

will go 'oh no, I'd need at least six or seven', you know, and she wouldn't even put herself forward. (Joanne, middle manager, Civil Service)

The interview findings relating to promotions support the quantitative data which reveals that among senior managers in the Civil Service, a greater percentage of women than men achieved promotion on their first attempt.

The data regarding successive attempts at promotion revealed important findings. The significance of this analysis lies in the ratio of men to women who applied for promotion more than four times or who gained promotion to their current grade via seniority. It would appear that men who applied for their current grade more than four times outnumber their female counterparts on a 5.8:1 ratio. Figure 5.37 above illustrates that of the total number of men in senior management, 9% applied for promotion to their current position more than four times, this compares with 6% of their female colleagues. Furthermore, in terms of those who gained their current status through seniority, men are equal to women on an 8:1 ratio whereby 12% of senior management men were promoted on the basis of seniority compared with 6% of women.

This statistical evidence points to a possible hesitancy among women from this cohort of senior Civil Servants to put themselves forward for promotion multiple times. These survey data correlates with the qualitative data obtained in the interviews with both private sector participants as well as Civil Servants. This data suggests that women are more reluctant than men to put themselves forward for promotion unless they are assured of being extremely prepared for the position and for the interview. This may connect with the finding that women are more likely than men to obtain promotion on their first attempt or following two to four attempts. The interview data provided a more nuanced understanding of this issue:

I think maybe as a generality, there's obviously great exceptions, women, we underplay our skills, we underplay what we do, men in generality overplay. And of course what you want is more confidence from women and a little bit more realism on some of the guys...they're just confident and they don't look to see if they have the back up as far as I can see and that, they put their names down for the job and you think 'you couldn't do that job in a fit, you can't do the job you're in!', not a problem! They just keep on going. (Debra, senior manager, Civil Service)

The extract from Debra's interview above reveals an interesting insight into the complex issue of confidence. She argues that in some cases men tend to be overly confident when assessing whether they will put themselves forward for promotion. Women, on the other hand, according to Debra are more likely to downgrade or underplay their skills and potential. This point was iterated by a number of the female interviewees consulted in the qualitative phase of this research:

Is it a lack of self-confidence or is it a lack of self-doubt on the part of our male colleagues? (Emer, junior manager Civil Service)

Based on the analysis of the survey data related to promotions, one could argue that the number of times men and women are going for promotion is having a strong effect on the overall ratio and percentage distribution of men to women in the senior management grades of the Civil Service. Both seniority and those numbers applying for promotion more than four times are among the factors that are weighting the overall distribution of senior management in favour of men (i.e. 3.6:1).

The issue of seniority has already been effectively addressed by Civil Service promotion policy. The current numbers of men and women who have gained promotion via seniority will decline as the policy of promotion on seniority is phased out. However, the fact that women are significantly less likely than men to apply for promotion after the fourth time they have been refused needs further analysis as to the reasons why women are not continuing to apply for promotion as well as the policy measures that can be implemented to address this imbalance.

Confidence and Meritocracy

As we saw in the previous section, in understanding the reluctance of women to put themselves forward for promotion the interviewees frequently described a lack of confidence among women in self-assessment for promotion. In particular, many of the female interviewees acknowledged

the overt confidence of their male colleagues in contrast to women. The extract below from Debra reflects an opinion reiterated by many of the participants:

One thing I do admire in men I must say, I think they have the most amazing confidence in themselves, a lot of it is very misplaced but it is quite amazing, I do actually admire them for that and I don't know whether it's a woman thing, I think we tend, I'd certainly say "could I do the job?" "Am I doing a good job now?" "Am I providing the service for my boss that he deserves?" "Am I pulling my weight?" "Am I helping out my team?" I'm not too sure if the men go through this trauma on it and I think that means we sort of say "Oh I couldn't do that job, I wouldn't be good enough to go for the next step" and then you find these people going, you think "good lord, how could they have filled in the form?" (Debra, senior manager Civil Service)

The issues raised above in relation to confidence and to promotions was also a feature of the private sector interviews. In the extract below, Orlagh is analysing the causes for what she believes to be a massive discrepancy between the number of women in the lower grades compared to the senior grades in her organisation. For example, she identifies the structural issues related to childrearing. However, she is reluctant to believe that the answer lies solely here. She points to the self belief and the confidence that men would appear to have in relation to their careers which she feels is not as strong in women:

you could certainly see a sense of men, I suppose, genuinely being more confident in their ability and their self belief and it goes back to...something happens – we have 70 per cent of our organisational population female in the below manager category, that becomes 30 per cent by the time you get to organisational level four, so there's something that happens in between...so what I'm saying to you is it's factual but it's also backed up by...and I know we have women at different stages, there's childrearing, there's judgement calls, all of that, maybe needing to work more flexibly but that doesn't quite explain it (Orlagh, female private sector employee)

A feature of some of the Civil Service interviews with women was an acknowledgment and an admiration of the extreme confidence that they find in many of their male colleagues. Significantly however, they point out that to a certain extent this confidence can be overblown in relation to actual ability. They highlight that confidence is crucial in relation to promoting oneself in an interview context, yet at the same time there is a danger that the confidence could be unfounded. Women, according to the interviewees, are more likely to think themselves out of going forward by over emphasising the difficulty of the job or the task and perhaps underestimating their ability.

well I have the theory, now I know it's only generalisation but women tend to beat themselves up, I think, in terms of performance and tend to be dissatisfied with anything less than perfection whereas a lot of men would think that they're brilliant when we can see or anyone can see that they're not! And it always fascinates me that there is that difference in perspective and I know some really really brilliant women, you know, who would be so lacking in confidence and, you know, so I notice that there's quite a large group of people who will constantly bolster each other up whereas men don't need to do that because they would be amazed to discover that a man was sitting there wondering was he good enough...(Ciara, middle manager, Civil Service)

Echoed throughout the interview accounts was the idea that women were more likely than men to assess themselves negatively in relation to criteria for promotion. This harsh assessment of themselves was described in both positive and negative terms. For example Emma, a junior manager in the Civil Service, described women as learning to 'walk the walk' before they apply for a promotion or for a particular job. As a result women were generally very competent in the jobs that they were doing:

This is just what I think, I think men who are ambitious learn to talk the talk, and women who are ambitious, maybe it's down to my self-doubt or lack of confidence or whatever, they actually make sure they can walk the walk, that they can actually do the job, men are satisfied to go for a higher post if they can talk about how great they would be or their ability to do that (Emma, junior manager, Civil Service)

This positive finding related by Emma above corresponds with the survey data outlined in the previous section on promotions, which suggests that women are more likely to get a promotion on their first attempt. This would suggest that women tend to be better prepared than men for an interview for promotion. However, the negative side to this, according to some of the interviewees, was that women were less likely to put themselves forward as frequently as men did. The extract below from Joanne, a middle manager, illustrate the means by which women can very often talk themselves out of going for a promotion:

Men are more likely or, I don't know, they're more driven to kind of wing it and to say "I can do that", you know? Whereas women are more likely to go "God, I don't know, I'll give it a try but I'm not really sure" you know? We have, I think we're less self assured about things and you could probably get a man and woman of the same abilities and if something, say a promotion came up, I mean one of the illustrations I read came up was if there are 10 criteria and a man has four he goes "yes, I can do that job" and a woman will go "oh no, I'd need at least six or seven" you know? And she wouldn't even put herself forward. (Joanne, middle manager, Civil Service)

Linked to the concept of men and women's different expressions of confidence as described in the interviews is the idea of a meritocracy. Based on their own experiences and those of their female colleagues some of the female interviewees believed that women were more likely to place their career aspirations in the hands of a merit based reward structure. In the opinion of many female interviewees, women were more likely to believe that by doing a good job and working hard their efforts would be recognised. This recognition would be obtained without the need to promote themselves or to make colleagues or employers aware of their achievements. The extract below from Alice is representative of many of the female interviewees:

They're [women] much quieter about it, I mean they might have their ambitions internally but they're not kind of putting themselves out there and trying to climb the ladder as much, they're probably more like myself just doing the work, getting on with it and hoping that someone notices rather than throwing themselves out there and putting their name forward. (Alice, junior manager Civil Service)

Workplace Barriers for women

Alongside the discourse of confidence and meritocracy which were drawn upon to explain the variances by which women and men are promoted were the structural barriers to women's advancement. These barriers include a lack of role models or other women in the senior management grades. The effect of role-modelling on career progression will be further explored in section 5.4.4 below. However, the extract below from the interview with Sally, a senior manager, illustrates how a lack of women in the upper grades has the effect of exposing women who are seeking to enter this management level. This again is tied into the issue of confidence; according to Sally, a lack of women in the senior grades increases the visibility of women at this level and therefore renders them and their confidence more vulnerable and exposed.

Perhaps it has to do with self confidence and perhaps it has something to do with the fact that women thin out the further you go so em, you do tend to feel that bit more exposed the further you attempt to compete. (Sally, senior manager, Civil Service)

Another barrier to women's promotion that emerged from the interview data was the additional demands that are generally placed on women's time and their lives compared to men. In particular, care giving duties and domestic responsibilities emerged as a key factor when women are assessing whether they will put themselves forward for promotion:

I don't think in my case it was a lack of confidence, I just didn't want to ratchet up the demands when I felt that I couldn't deal with them, domestically. (Ann, senior manager Civil Service)

The extract below from Nora in middle management highlights an important issue in relation to the topic of work life balance. According to Nora women are more likely to weigh up the balance between work and life when considering their career. Significantly, it would appear that this is happening throughout their career or certainly from early on. According to Nora, from her experience men are more likely to go automatically for a promotion without consideration of work life balance needs:

I think men are just more, just go for it, there is no other issues to consider, it's just black and white. Women think about a lot of other kind of peripheral issues. Well, they are not peripheral in the sense that they are not important, they are very important. I think they take the wide balance, the work life balance into account when they are thinking of jobs and em, you know, where there next step and move will be. (Nora, middle manager Civil Service)

This extract is interesting when compared to the data which emerged from Conor's interview:

I'm at that point in life where you want to make choices and the choices are do you want to push on to the next stage [...] or do you want to go for quality of life because when you're a bit driven I think you do miss out on things, on family and I would freely admit that, I can't say I've neglected my children but I've probably spent less time with them than I perhaps would have preferred. (Conor, senior manager Civil Service)

The balance between work, family and life would appear to affect both male and female employees. However, the significant issue raised by these interviews is the placement of this concern along the life and career course. Conor is a high ranking employee in the senior management grades of the Civil Service, his assessment of work life balance issues is undertaken through hindsight. Ultimately the issue of family life as it affects career choices is occurring to him after a very successful career and when he is at a high point assessing whether he will push himself further. Perhaps for women this assessment is occurring much earlier in their careers due to societal gendered expectations with regards to caring work in the family.

The interviews with participants from the financial services organisation provided similar insights into the issue of work life balance as it is effecting women's assessments of their careers. In both the extracts below the women are considering whether it is necessary for them to halt their career progression in order to pursue a better balance between their work and their life outside of work. Both women are considering this option for different reasons: Barbara is seeking more satisfaction in her life and more personal and workplace fulfilment; Sinead is hoping to better manage the conflicting demands between her career and motherhood. The significant point being made here however, is that these women do not feel their current employer would encourage or facilitate a halt in their progression, particularly as they are both quite advanced in their careers already. Both women are considering their options in order to achieve better work life balance:

I think my ambition is to just get a bit more fulfilment out of what I'm doing and to get the work-life balance back on track again and to a certain extent I almost do see that you can't...you can't do all this, I don't feel I can do all within this organisation [...] because I think there's one thing as well in the organisation almost assumes that you're ambitious and it's throwing things at you all the time and it's just kind of like 'guys, I don't want to keep proving myself', you know, I just want to relax things down a bit. (Barbara, female private sector employee)

I'm at the stage for the first time ever I don't know where I'm going to go next, I'm in a job that's probably a two-three year job really, I should probably be looking to move out of it sometime next year, yeah early next year, and for the first time ever I actually don't know what I'm going to move to or how I'm going to move because I now have two...and they're small kids and so I'm actually at the stage where I don't know where I'm going next [...] because for the first time ever I'm thinking maybe I should try and look for a more flexible job or something so for the first time...so I really don't know where I'm going! (Sinead, female private sector employee)

As we have seen in the interviews with the Civil Service employees, the issue of work life balance was not confined to the female participants. This was also a topic raised by some of the male interviewees from the private sector as well, Colm and Tim reflect on this below:

I have absolutely no doubt now that if I applied to get onto that team I would be promoted reasonably quickly, in fact I know I would have been but that team involves a huge amount of travel [...] I just don't, I'm not going to do it. (Tim, male private sector employee)

...work's an important part of my life but it's by no means the most important and family will always come first [...] I do do things like, if you were talking about gender stereotyping would be more typically associated with the female roles, so sometimes I take the kids to school or stuff like that or sometimes I can't come to work terribly early or that and I don't find any bad stuff either in the context of how it enables me to do my current job or as me being talked about as a potential person going forward [...] I think [the organisation] is quite positive in supporting work/life balance [...] generally if your only issue is if you need to have a life/balance I think this [organisation] is quite good at doing that sort of stuff but I'd be very interested if your research says the same things from women who are in the same position I'm in. (Colm, male private sector employee)

What is significant about the two extracts above is that neither of these men spoke about the issue with the same anguish as the women. Colm in particular, did not feel that his desire for work life balance was in conflict with his career aspirations at all.

This issue of work/life balance requires further examination and research in relation to the extent to which women and men in each management level are availing of the initiatives. In particular are these initiatives being interpreted as applicable only to women and/or in relation to family? How might this effect women's assessment of their careers compared to men? Furthermore, are these initiatives having the unintended side effect of strengthening societal gendered attitudes which place women in the home above and before the workplace?

5.4.4 Agency and the navigation of careers

As outlined above, the operation of agency in the form of strategising and career planning are key elements in navigating a successful career and fulfilling career expectations. The employment of agency also emerged in relation to networking and identifying key members from a circle of colleagues who will offer support and assist in the formation of career plans and aspirations. In particular mentors emerged as crucial to fostering ambition and to navigating the career terrain in the Civil Service. The role of both mentors and role-models as well as networks from within the Civil Service were particularly evident in relation to steering careers away from ghettos as well as forming career plans and strategising for promotion.

Career Cul-de-Sacs

One of the remits of this study was to identify the potential traps or dangers for employees as they navigate their careers, and particularly female employees. As already mentioned, there are structural barriers in existence which hinder women's careers such as the glass ceiling and societal gendered expectations in relation to caring work. Career cul-de-sacs were also featured in the accounts of the interviewees as they described the potential traps for both men and women as they negotiate their careers. These traps were often linked to complacency or a lack of awareness of the type of work being done and one's position in relation to the function or operation of the Department as a whole. In the extracts below Linda and Lisa, both junior managers in the Civil Service, describe these traps as comfort zones. They posit that the danger of the comfort zones is that they can lead to apathy in relation to claiming agency and steering one's own career:

I don't know if you are aware in the Civil Service a lot of people get into their comfort zone and they stay there and they don't want to change areas or go up the grades you know? (Linda, junior manager, Civil Service)

I think that's very important, to keep an eye on where your work is going because in the Civil Service you can sit back on your laurels. [...] and I don't think it's great to walk out of your job and think I did nothing today. (Lisa, junior manager Civil Service)

The extracts above highlight the danger of comfort zones to career ambition. This is particularly pertinent as a correlate of career planning. The interview with Brian, a middle manager, shed some light on repercussions of finding oneself in a trap or ghetto. The extract from his interview below illustrates the level of frustration he feels at an inability to find his way out of his current situation. This has led, in his case, to a thwarting of his ambition:

I feel I'm doing a job that nobody else wants and is sort of much despised and it's not the hot topic, I mean there are more technical sides in the place that I'd like to get into over time but I don't think that's going to happen (Brian, middle manager Civil Service)

The operation of agency in form of planning and strategising would appear to be necessary to avoid these ghettos and to negotiate oneself out of these traps. In describing key landmarks in his career Frank, a senior manager, spoke about a turning point for him as he found his way out of a particular ghetto and managed to go on and secure a successful career from there:

I kind of became an expert in the [*support*] area, I got all my promotions there and you could argue that that was a rut and that I probably, looking back on it now I should have asked for a change out of that area much sooner myself, you know, for one reason or another it didn't happen, you can tend to become an expert in a particular area and it can mean that you're left there and you're not moved on to something else, so I think the big landmark for me was changing into something totally different out of that, unfamiliar but being given the opportunity to show what I was made of so that was huge for me to be honest with you now. (Frank, senior manager Civil Service)

The Civil Service participants identified numerous strategies for preventing or moving away from traps along a career path in the Civil Service. In particular, mobility was highlighted as crucial to fulfilling career ambitions. In the extract below Brian, a middle manager who found himself in a career ghetto at the time of interviewing, was asked to give advice to a hypothetical junior colleague on how to secure a successful career. His key piece of advice was to remain as mobile as possible:

what I'd say to people is to be highly mobile, serving several Departments, serving different areas, you can get stuck doing the one thing, you get pigeon holed and that has happened to me, and it's my own fault, (Brian, middle manager Civil Service)

This advice was echoed throughout the interviews and mobility was identified as crucial to fulfilling career ambitions and to negotiating a competency based promotional structure. Mobility was also a key strategy identified by the participants from the private sector who saw it as key to achieving a successful career. Alongside mobility both sets of interview participants identified key operations of agency in relation to navigating Civil Service careers, these included: networking; identifying role models and utilising mentors.

Networking

The identification and building of networks were recognised by the interview participants as crucial to creating career opportunities, building a profile and gaining access to key information. In particular heightening your profile among colleagues, peers and superiors was acknowledged as being important for increasing recognition. The extract below from Jack, a senior manager in the Civil Service, emphasises the importance of networking. Jack's interview supports the theory that the social aspect of the job is often very important for building networks and sustaining rapport with colleagues:

... its even, its things like saying that it is a good idea to be involved in the union and go to union conferences or whatever because yes, there is a huge social element and so on but there is also, you know, you are also there dealing with people. Okay, you are socialising, you are having a pint with people that, you know, you are going to be dealing with over the course of your career so it never does any harm to have a rapport with them. (Jack, senior manager Civil Service)

The establishment of networks was linked to high career ambition by Kathy, a middle manager. In the extract below, Kathy talks about creating a profile for herself through building networks and a dynamic working style:

I have worked with all grades. Because of the type of work that I am doing I have had exposure to all grades and I have made links, networked for want of a better word, I have networked with all the grades up to assistant principal and I would be known up to secretary general so I have created all of those links, I have created a profile for myself. Partly because of my professional qualification and partly because that is what I like to do, I like to network with people. (Kathy, middle manager, Civil Service)

The private sector participants also supported this finding in relation to the importance of networking and building a profile to a successful career. The extracts below from Barbara and from Catriona elaborate on the importance of networks. In particular, Catriona identifies her participation in the graduate training programme in her organisation as key to developing her network of contacts:

an awful lot comes back to your personal reputation and that and your connections (Barbara, female private sector employee)

it's more the people that you get to work with early on and you can learn so much very fast and again with so many employees in the one company knowing the right people is great for even just being able to ask them stuff or knowing who to go to for what. The introductions you get coming in through the Graduate Programme were excellent so I'd say it probably is a little bit easier just because of the people that you get to know very early (Catriona, female private sector employee)

The importance of networks was also established by both sets of interview participants in relation to preparing for interview and promotion. Debra, a senior manager below describes the value of creating a pool of people with the expertise to assist her in applying for a promotion:

There would probably be a list of a good ten people that if I applied or that and then they'll pull out all the stops to help me to go, which is nice, you know, (Debra, senior manager, Civil Service)

Similarly both Colm and Orlagh, private sector participants, illustrate in the extracts below how they utilise their network as a means of furthering their promotion opportunities:

I've increasingly, increasingly become aware that, you know, just because you work for a particular person doesn't mean that it's that particular person who's going to influence or effect the outcome of your career ambition, there are other significant influences...of people who have significant power in those situations and you have to try to find a way of getting to influence them some of which is quite easy to do and some of which is quite hard. (Colm, male private sector employee)

I suppose I have a number of people through the role I've held, I would have very close networks, contacts with a lot of the very senior folk so there's certainly people I can bounce something off of if I need to, or get advice, or use as an independent sounding board, yes. (Orlagh, female private sector employee)

The control and dissemination of information among employees is crucial for negotiating a career in most organisations, including the Civil Service. Networks were described as key to gaining access to this information. In her interview Clare, a junior manager in the Civil Service, described the value of gaining access to this information through networks and of also putting oneself in a strategic position whereby you will not only gain access to vital information but also may be called upon to offer information:

The other thing I would say is get to know people on a personal level. People that you might have to deal with outside your section, outside your work, keep a network of people so that you can get information and you know, build up contacts. Be approachable so that people can actually say, 'oh this is the person that I need to know' or 'this is the person that I could ring to find out about this'. I think it's important to be open. (Clare, junior manager, Civil Service)

Furthermore, networks were identified as key to gaining a perspective of the Department and the Civil Service as a whole. In doing so it is possible to understand the particular value of one's work to the functioning of the Department and thereby circumvent potential ghettos or traps along the career path. The importance of networks in gaining a sense of the particular and the general in a Civil Service Department was emphasised in the extract below by Richard, a junior manager:

Talk to people and network within the Department because if you are broadening your knowledge of the Department you are getting a better sense of the structures or what it is about and I think you can put that across to an audience in that most of your audience is likely to be engaged in a different part of the Department or a different Department so if you are speaking their language about what you do or relating it into that context you can better get your message across. You know, I don't think it is pandering to the board or anything. (Richard, junior manager, Civil Service)

Mentoring

The operation of mentoring on an informal basis would appear from the qualitative data to be a widespread practice in the Civil Service and is crucial to navigating a career. In particular mentors were valued for the encouragement and the support that they provide:

I hadn't studied hugely because I was on maternity leave and I just didn't have time and I went back to the HEO and I said 'look, I think I'll have to pull out of this competition' because, I said, 'I don't know enough to do a good interview' and he really encouraged me and only for him I would have pulled out at the time because he advised me what to study, he said

'look, you can't study everything, you'd be studying for two years' but he advised me, he gave me a few tips, he said these are the kind of areas that will most likely come up and he did strongly encourage me, he helped me, you know, very much (Jane, middle manager, Civil Service)

the section most people have been promoted at and its all down to him, he can see people's [potential], when they are able for it, gives them work and pushes them and its nice to feel that someone is pushing you and mentoring you in the direction you should be going. (Lisa, junior manager, Civil Service)

In both the extracts above, Jane, a middle manager, and Lisa, a junior manager, identified a mentor by the support and encouragement provided in relation to going for promotion. The positive reinforcement obtained through a mentor would appear to be critical in fostering aspirations. This ties into both the research findings described in section 5.1.2 above as well as the literature which links recognition with ambition.

I don't believe that you need to see women getting there to encourage you to get there, what you do need is reinforcement that, maybe this is a weakness on my behalf but it could be that I need reinforcement to say, because I'm kind of negative about my own ability and in my personal life my partner would say that, '[Jane] unless you get one hundred per cent you'll think you're brutal', you know, but unless I get positive reinforcement, and it doesn't matter who it comes from, (Jane, middle manager, Civil Service)

The positive reinforcement that is described by Jane, a middle manager in the Civil Service, above would appear to be a crucial benefit of mentoring. This was an important aspect of mentoring that was also identified by the private sector participants:

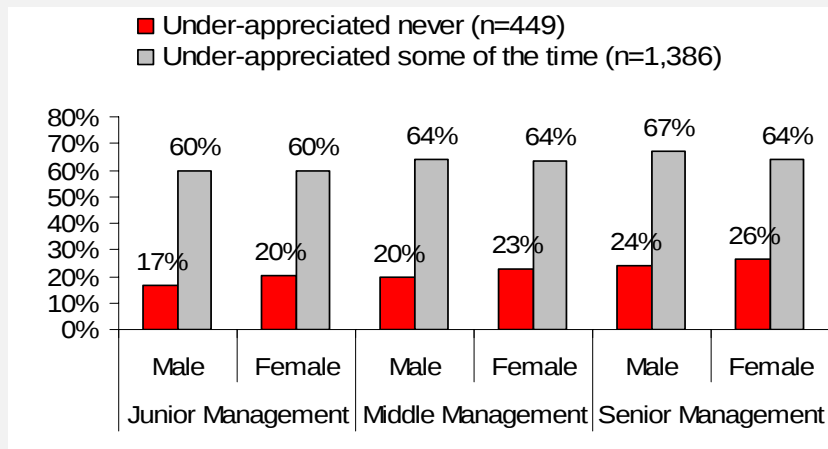
it's not about knowing that you're doing a good job, it's what skill set and what attributes you bring to the job that are recognised as being important or recognised as adding value, sometimes it's more just that you'd be happy with a conversation where somebody is saying 'these are the skill sets where you're adding value and this is what you need to develop more' whereas it's not asking somebody to sort out your career for you because that's up to yourself (Barbara, female private sector employee)

A significant feature of the interviews with the participants from the private sector in relation to mentoring was the recognition that one's career development was up to the individual. Mentoring was important in terms of recognition for a job well done and also in identifying skill deficits and areas for development. However it was not the role of the organisation to nurture an individual but rather to develop skills. According to Paula, this has had a positive effect on the advancement of women in the organisation:

I think it [the organization] tries to manage talent, it's really only got into this in quite recent times in terms of talent management, I think historically it would have been much more your people whom you nurture and you bring them up along the ways and I think that's one of the ways for example women have got locked out in the past, I think it's much more inclusive now and it's trying to select talent from an early stage and recognise it and create opportunities for people to move around and get the range of skills they're going to need to move on. (Paula, female private sector employee)

The quantitative survey data as illustrated in Figure 5.38 below revealed that quite a large number of employees, both male and female, feel under-appreciated in their jobs some of the time. On average 63% of employees across the management grades feel under-appreciated in their jobs some of the time.

Figure 5.38: The distribution of those that feel under-appreciated never and some of the time by gender and management grade (N=1,835)



Weighted Data.

The relatively high level of the sample population who feel under-appreciate some of the time (63% average) could be an issue related to informal or formal mentoring. Mentors were typically described by the Civil Service participants as those in senior positions who demonstrated an interest in the interviewee's career. They did this by encouraging them to go for promotion and also in giving them valuable work which enabled competency gathering:

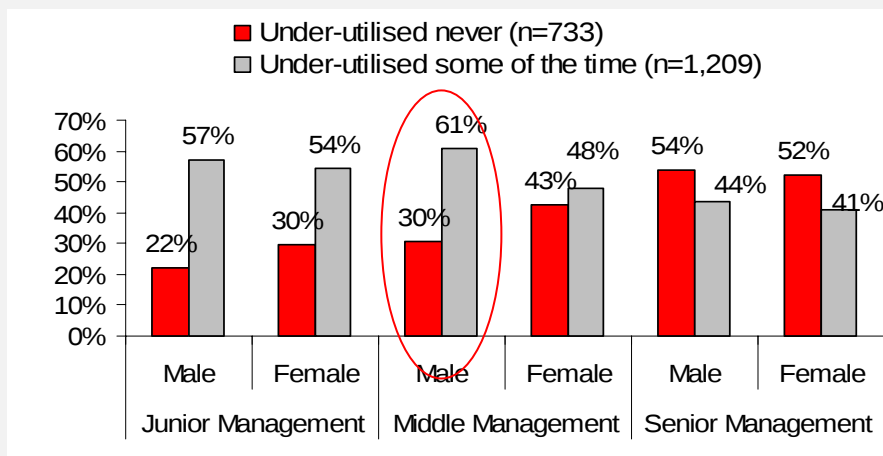
If you have reasonable line managers who will allow you, you know, give you that opportunity to do the work at the higher grade so that when you actually go for competition then you've a benefit, you can actually give examples, concrete examples of what you've done. (Emma, junior manager, Civil Service)

I got the feeling in retrospect that somewhere along the line somebody identified 'here's a guy who has a capacity, let's give him the things to do'...and saw a willingness in me to do that and I got blocks of work that were entirely my own, you know, completely separate but I was more than willing to take it, I was probably a lot older than the graduate recruit that would have normally comes in so he had the foresight to use me as somebody that in other circumstances would have been operating at a higher level. (Conor, senior manager, Civil Service)

In particular, the benefit of having a mentor who was in a position to offer crucial blocks of work, as emphasised by the extracts above, is critical in negotiating a competency based promotional structure as in the Civil Service.

The survey data revealed some findings in relation to the under-utilisation of Civil Service employees. Figure 5.39 below illustrates that as an employee rises up the management grades they are increasingly *less* likely to feel under-utilised. This would correspond with the increased responsibilities of senior managers. The significance of these figures, however, lies with the middle management men. The percentage of male middle managers that feel under-utilised some of the time rises from the junior level. This finding connects to the concept of career ghettos and section 5.1 which found that middle management men were less likely to believe others perceived their ambition.

Figure 5.39: The distribution of those that feel under-utilised never and some of the time by gender and management grade (N=1,942)



Weighted Data.

The extract below from Conor a senior manager emphasises that very often a mentor operates beyond the scope of an individual's career looking at the Department as a whole:

And I suppose when it comes to it, there were people along the way who helped me and pushed me in certain directions that weren't always obvious to me but probably developing my set of skills or abilities for the future and I would be, you know in retrospect, hugely grateful. (Conor, senior manager, Civil Service)

One of the key means of fostering an individual's career is to utilise them and develop their skill sets. The interview with Conor, a senior manager in the Civil Service, was particularly perceptive in terms of understanding the value of a mentor to the promotion of individuals through the ranks and of fostering ambition. In particular he mentions that often he was pushed in different directions and there was a general feeling that he was identified and groomed by mentors himself as he went along his career towards senior management:

The mentor thing is hugely important, somebody who is able to take a wider view than you are in a position to take [...] you operate in the junior grades in a fairly narrow silo, narrow responsibility, further up there's someone who's able to take a view of the whole lot and they're in a better position to see the, awful word, the synergies, the connections, the possibilities and link them to what they see in you as an individual and even though it may well be to my disadvantage to let an exceptionally talented person go to do something else if it's the right thing for them and there's a value down the road then that's, I'd be encouraging of that, as I say I benefited from it and I think it's the right way to develop people (Conor, senior manager, Civil Service)

In the extract above, Conor described mentors in terms of their role in viewing an individual as he or she fits into the Department as a whole. In particular mentors are described as taking a macro view of individual's careers, particularly those in the junior grades.

Role Modelling

The importance of role modelling for women was explored in the interviews. When talking about female colleagues or peers who had climbed the ranks of the Civil Service to reach the very senior grades of upper management, many of the female Civil Service participants agreed that they found this to be inspirational. Crucially, many of the participants pointed out that while it was

inspirational to see women reach the upper grades it was very important to feel that they deserved their position:

I felt she deserved, she was really really good and she deserved it but apart from that the fact that she was a woman, we just wanted somebody else there and it was, you know, first time in the Department's history that it had happened. (Clare, junior manager, Civil Service)

It can be a bit disheartening though if you look at the higher levels and you see the small proportion of women but, yes, it is important because it's important to see women who not only I respect but I know other people respect, that they have the respect of men as well. Because I have worked with guys who, when a woman is in a position of power, they will refer to her as being a tough lady and, you know, they'd say she's sharp rather than intelligent and that kind of thing so, yes, I think it's important that women are in higher grades but that's not to say they should, you know, they need to get there on merit. (Emma, junior manager, Civil Service)

In the extracts above both Clare and Emma, junior managers in the Civil Service, observed that in order to derive inspiration or satisfaction from seeing a woman reach to top positions it is important that they feel she deserves her position. This connects to the findings in section 5.1.3 above which observed that very often women placed their faith in a meritocracy and valued hard work and performance in a particular job. Furthermore, Emma's comment regarding respect is significant particularly in relation to women gaining the respect of male colleagues and peers. In particular she refers to women being judged as sharp rather than intelligent and described as 'tough ladies'. Emma's extract alludes to the difficulties women in the very senior grades can face in terms of the attitudes of their peers and colleagues. A role model for Emma, therefore, would be a high achieving woman who achieves her ambition through hard work earning respect from all of her colleagues, male and female. Implicit in her comment is a rejection of tokenism or positive discrimination that would see women appointed just because they were women, a view shared by many of the participants.

As acknowledged at the beginning of section 5.4, women represent only 22% of the senior management across the 15 Civil Service Departments surveyed. Among senior managers, 53% of women have children compared with 86% of men. Among the female senior managers with children 87% are in the Principal Officer grade. Among those women reaching the very senior grades (above the PO position), the vast majority are unmarried and have no children. This would appear to have an effect on how they are perceived as role models by women in the lower grades:

I haven't yet come across a women as a role model who I feel eh, has been really inspirational to me because the women I have worked with have been women without commitments outside work and they have been completely sucked into their work and that to me isn't, it's not a role model. (Nora, middle manager, Civil Service)

A lot of women at the top obviously wouldn't be typical in a way because sooner or later the husband resigns...to support the career. It's very hard for the middle of the road woman who wants to have it all. (Ann, senior manager, Civil Service)

In the comments above, both Ann and Nora remark on the marital and family status of the majority of potential role models among high ranking female senior Civil Servants. This aspect of role modelling was also a feature of the private sector interviews as can be seen in the extract below from Sinead:

there is no representative woman who's...and then at the next level, if you look at the [top senior management level] there's probably about eight or nine women and I don't think any of them...one of them has two children

and her husband is at home, one of them doesn't work five days a week...so there aren't...(Sinead, female private sector employee)

It would appear that women are keenly aware of the difficulties of combining marriage and children with a high achieving career and this is made more evident by the prevalence of women without children among the senior grades.

Many of the women in the lower and middle grades and particularly those with family are eager to look to women who reflect themselves. This addresses the concept of the role model as mirror and points to the importance of facilitating and encouraging more skilled women, with or without children, into the highest ranks of the Civil Service. It is important for both men and women to see their reflection in the senior grades in order to confirm their ambitions and encourage them to aim high. This is particularly important for women who may be intimidated by what they perceive to be the sacrifices they may be called to make as women in order to achieve their ambitions.

The promotion of women into the senior grades of the Civil Service is a welcome and applauded characteristic of recent decades. This reflects the enormous ability and potential of women in the labour force. However, it is important to focus on the characteristics of those reaching the top grades. In particular, exploration is required into what are the specific barriers to some women which are not encountered by others. Do these barriers act as a filter particularly for those with domestic or caring roles? The significance of role models and mentors is well documented in management and equality literature. The findings of this study support the literature which argues that when choosing a role model, employees look to somebody like themselves. This is a significant feature of role modelling and requires further exploration in relation to leadership courses and the promotion of all women through the senior grades.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Key Findings

The findings of this study, both within the survey and the interviews, revealed that gender does make a difference in analysing women and ambition. The research has shown that while men in the Civil Service are more likely to be married and have children, family and marital obligations have a greater, and more negative, impact on women's than on men's career progression. Given the attention over the last two decades to equality policies, to flexible working patterns and to merit-based competitive promotions, it is startling that women have not attained positions in the highest grades in greater numbers. Why is this the case? Are we asking women to pay too high a price in terms of their personal lives to achieve senior status?

The research found that men and women in the Irish Civil Service are using the same terms to define ambition. These terms stress expertise and hard work. However, there appears to be different perceptions of ambitious men and women. The study found that ambitious women can be viewed by some more negatively than ambitious men. Clearly, there is some influence here of gender socialisation whereby women performing non-standard feminine roles are marked as somehow abnormal. As seen in Section 5.1.3, while ambitious men and women may act quite *similarly*, their behaviours and attitudes are perceived *differently* due to the influence of normative and stereotypical gender ideologies.

Putting aside these stereotypes will help us move beyond the mother vs. worker dichotomy that hems women into an either/or model limiting their potential and restricting their development. This is important for all women in order to allow them to reach their full potential and to 'own' their own sense of ambition without feeling the need to justify or downsize it. This is particularly important, however, for those women currently at lower grades who wish to proceed to the higher grades and are in need of positive, successful role models to inspire them.

The disparity in the numbers of men and women at senior levels in the Civil Service as demonstrated by our research highlights the necessity of encouraging more women into the upper echelons of senior management. We also are very conscious that because of the low number of women at the upper echelons of the Civil Service, they are highly visible. This may give the false impression that there are more women than there actually are because everyone can think of at least one or two examples. However, the misperception that there are many women, rather than just a few, at the higher grades may lead to a distorted impression of the success rate of women overall, thereby denying problems of gender inequality at senior levels.

As a result of the research we are left with a number of questions:

- How do we best utilise the growing number of talented, dedicated women?
- How do we retain these women?
- How do we facilitate their advancement and encourage their career progression?
- How do we create and sustain an environment which benefits both male and female employees of the Civil Service in terms of achieving career ambitions?

Our hope is that this research contributes in some way to answering this question.

6.1.2 Recommendations:

Record Keeping

In order to facilitate any further research or monitoring of gender parity and equality in the Civil Service there is a fundamental need to collect and analyse basic statistics on men and women in the Civil Service. These statistics should be compiled by all Departments and analysed frequently for example on a quarterly basis. Currently, some Departments include detailed gender breakdowns of staff at different grades, for example, in their annual reports or statements of strategy. However, other Departments include very little information of this kind. In order to measure progress it is vital that such statistics be gathered on a regular basis and uniformly published by all Departments.

Mentoring

Mentoring is an important issue which arises in a variety of studies on women and leadership as well as women and decision making (Chinchilla and Léon, 2005; Chinchilla et al., 2006; European Commission, 2008; Scally, Judge and Stephenson, 2007). We recommend that a specific programme be set up within the Civil Service to mentor women. Furthermore, we suggest that mentors be both men and women. Not only is it a question of encouragement but also a question of understanding the power structure and the ways in which power flows through the Civil Service. To do so it is necessary for a mentor to be in a position to avail of a broader view of a person's career. A competent mentor should be positioned to note if, for example a person's career is in a cul-de-sac, if a person needs to develop other competencies as well as strategies for career progression. One of our interviewees explained the way she used this method in conducting PMDS reviews with her staff:

I'd tell them to first of all find out what's required at the higher grade, what kind of skills they need to build up to actually work in that grade, you probably have heard of the PMDS system we have in the Civil Service? So I have done it before that I've asked Clerical Officers and Executive Officers to get the last competition notice or application form for the grade that they would be due to be promoted into and then start building up a record of the tasks that they carry out, a record of what they did and how well they did it so when they go for promotion they have the information and the competencies built up and they have a written record of them performing the competencies or carrying out the competencies but...and I think the other bit of advice would be to for every competition possible.
(Emma, junior manager)

While mentoring is currently achieved to some extent through PMDS, we would also suggest that there be some structured programme to train mentors themselves to make them more effective. This was a finding strongly supported by the interviews within the private sector organisation. This organisation had implemented a formal mentoring programme which operated on a voluntary level. It was mentioned by some participants that, while the programme was beneficial, its success was largely dependent on the knowledge and training of the mentor. In particular, whether the individual was equipped with the right skills to mentor effectively:

I think sometimes it's actually recognising, it's recognising individual capabilities and recognising what people are bringing, the skill set, the actual skill that you are valuing whereas I think sometimes we do very blanket recognitions and we don't actually take the time to understand what it is about that person that's actually adding the value and what it is about their skill set that's adding the value (Barbara, female private sector employee)

Career Planning

A further recommendation is that, through the PMDS system, women in particular are urged to make a career plan and to analyse how well they are succeeding periodically. The evidence of this study suggests that planning is vital for achieving career ambitions. Furthermore, section 5.4.1 of the report suggested that women are not as likely to plan their careers compared with their male colleagues. Career plans also need to be made in order to realistically plan for and facilitate having a family in the future. Our data suggests that, for some female employees in particular, the desire to have a family and to fulfil their ultimate career ambitions is seen as problematic. Planning may take away some of the fear that combining senior management responsibilities with a family is impossible, as articulated by one of our interviewees:

I'm planning to get married and I hope to have kids and so, you know, I've seen in practice that it is possible to manage as a PO with kids but I think the next level up you're talking about very senior management, Assistant Secretary and I'm not sure how workable that would be, you know, but that's...you're talking, I would be looking that that's at least 10 years away

because there's a huge gap in responsibility between those two, you know, between PO and Assistant Sec. (Joanne, middle manager)

Leadership Courses

Given the scarcity of female leaders within the Civil Service, it is necessary to explore the option of specific leadership training for women in order to better prepare them for the higher grades. The issues raised in this report concerning the frequency with which women are putting themselves forward for promotion could be addressed via leadership training. Such courses may give women the confidence to go forward. We saw in section 5.4.3 that many of the female interviewees mentioned questioning their own abilities, even though they knew they had managed to rise to the challenges of previous positions:

you're caught in this whole thing, you know, and slightly worried, you know, 'can I do the job' and people say 'but you've done every job you've been given, why on earth would you think that this job would be any different?' and you know they're right but again I say 'yes but do I need the hassle?', It's a quality of life sort of issue, I have sufficient money and that and there's no use of 'okay it's a bit extra but is it really worth it?' and so I don't know, you have this sort of pull kind of inwardly knowing I can do the job and then this sort of voice in your head that's slightly undermining your own confidence but it's coming from you, (Debra, Upper manager)

The Civil Service could either establish its own tailored leadership courses for women or facilitate the participation of women in ongoing leadership courses to both encourage them into senior management levels and to provide the necessary information and skills to achieve those levels.

Paternity Leave

New research is needed to ascertain best practice in the provision of paternity leave on a 'use it or lose it' basis. The aim would be to explore the issue on a number of levels: The type of paternity leave men currently want; the type of leave managers think would work best; and how the take up of such leave would potentially effect career progression. Exploration of the provision of paternity leave is essential as, without equality in the home, it is almost impossible to achieve it in the workplace. The difficulties women currently experience because of having children was clearly articulated in our research by both the survey respondents and the interviewees. It was felt by many that having children had little or no effect on men while being a mother could have a negative effect on a woman's career:

Being a wife & mother of 2 children would have negatively affected my career whereas the family situation would have little or no effect on the career of my husband (Female survey respondent)

Facilitating men's involvement with their own families is crucial if there is to be a more equitable distribution of these responsibilities and less of a burden on women, which affects their ability to compete in the workplace and to achieve their ambitions.

Establishing On-Ramps which Reflect the Ebb and Flow Pattern of Ambition

A significant finding of this study relates to the fluid nature of ambition. This is characterised by the ebb and flow of ambition for some women and men. As a result we recommend that research be undertaken on the feasibility of providing 'on-ramps' for all workers who have been out of the workforce for a period of time. This would include: women with children who are on maternity leave or extended maternity leave; parents who have availed of blocks of parental leave; or those employees who have taken career breaks. 'On-ramps' is a term used by Sylvia Hewlett and is discussed in Chapter Two of this report. This term is used to describe the special mentoring and training packages that have been developed for women at the Harvard Business School to facilitate their re-entry to the workplace after they have taken maternity leave or especially when they have taken extended time out through a career break. The ebb and flow pattern of ambition due to family commitments was clearly articulated by one of the female interviewees:

you start out very ambitious to get ahead and then it sort of detours a little if you have children and when you come back after children you start to resume that drive towards promotion or whatever... (Ciara, middle manager)

The work of Hewlett corresponds with the findings of this study in indicating that there can be a significant loss of confidence as well as work related skills as a result of care related leave. 'On-ramps' could also be used by those employees who feel they need to re-start their careers or get out of 'career cul-de-sacs'. The findings of this study, outlined in section 5.4.4, suggest that some employees may feel that the work they have been engaged in may not assist them in achieving the higher grades because it is repetitive or focuses on a limited range of skill sets. Age and life cycles were also factors mentioned in the potential waning of workplace ambitions:

Yes, well when you're younger, you're probably more ambitious in the early stages, well I mean coming in as a young Executive Officer you don't think much about these things but once you're in a few years you do sort of become quite ambitious, I think that does tend to wane a bit as you get older, you know, or maybe it's more of a sense of realism, that you just sort of know...you find your level and you accept that's the level that you finish at and you're not going to go any further, that would be my feeling anyway, you know? (Frank, senior manager)

Thus 'on-ramp' programmes may facilitate a range of employees who find themselves at points in their career where they need extra guidance or extra skills to get to the next level. It is important to recognise that ambition can come and go in an individual's career for a variety of reasons including family or caring responsibilities or life stage phases. Therefore, providing on-ramps would provide for the re-emergence of ambition in a person's career by encouraging and facilitating a renewed drive or focus. The proposed research project would entail focus groups and individual interviews with employees currently on leave and who have come back from leave in order to identify what their needs are and how best to fulfil their ambitions now that they have re-entered the workforce. Such 'on-ramp' schemes are being hosted by some private companies. These schemes have been shown to significantly ease the transition back into the workforce.

Career Breaks

Related to 'on-ramp' programmes is the need to undertake specific research on career breaks. We recommend that additional research be undertaken to ascertain more completely the effects of taking career breaks and the subsequent career progression of employees who do so. Given our finding that care-related breaks are often experienced as having multiple negative consequences, attention must be paid to the reason why the individual took a career break. Individual interviews and focus groups with those who have already taken a career break could be undertaken in order to examine their experiences. Furthermore, a longitudinal study measuring the career progression of those who took breaks, paying particular attention to why they took breaks and for how long, could be undertaken in order to assess whether there are any long-term impacts. It would also be beneficial if a system was put in place whereby those who have just come back from a career break were 'paired' with someone who had taken one in the past in order to pass on advice and informal mentoring.

Clerical and Junior Grades in the Civil Service

A further recommendation is that research be undertaken specifically on the clerical and junior grades of the Civil Service on the question of women and ambition to ascertain if they need to be encouraged to aspire upwards. A significant finding of the research is that men plan their careers to a greater extent than women. The correlation between career planning and successful career advancement means that women may need to be encouraged to create and consistently monitor or revise their career plans from an early stage.

Men at Middle Management Level

An unexpected finding of our study was that men at middle management level reported feeling unrecognised in terms of their ambition to a higher extent than all other groups in the survey. They also reported lower levels of personal ambition than all other groups. The reasons for these findings need to

be explored in order to understand why this is so. Men at middle management may feel more comfortable with their own sense of ambition and may not need outside recognition to the same extent as other groups. Being ambitious for a man, as was suggested in the interviews, may also be seen as more 'natural' and hence men may not conceptualise themselves explicitly as ambitious, while at the same time having a career plan. However, the literature suggests that public recognition of ambition is important in keeping personal ambition alive. Men at this level also hold key positions as line managers in encouraging and facilitating the ambitions of their junior colleagues. Thus it is important to explore their own feelings towards ambition and recognition in the workplace so that they can be best placed to nurture the aspirations of others.

Research in the Private Sector

The small scale private sector sample who provided comparative data for this study demonstrated that workplace culture or ethos has a crucial impact on the nature of ambition and particularly women's ambition. Extensive and more nuanced research is required to be undertaken on a much larger scale focusing on the Irish private sector. There is a need to draw out the comparisons with the Civil Service in order to investigate the varying policies and workplace cultures of the private sector. In particular attention is needed to the contexts under which women are planning their careers and forging personal career expectations and ambition.

6.2 Concluding Remarks

Conceptualise a new mental map of ambition

We need to conceptualise a new mental map of ambition which incorporates multiple models drawn from both male and female conceptions of ambition. The dominant model is the male model of linear trajectory of ambition whereby status and success are attained by rising through the grades without any familial hindrances. This is not necessarily true for most women and some men. People experience ambition differently and at different times of their lives. If there are multiple models, we can expand our conception of the ways and times at which people can be ambitious. This, of course, correlates with the 'on- ramps' mentioned above which facilitate the ebb and flow of ambition.

Make ambitious women the norm, not the exception.

From our research it is clear that, while not always experiencing discrimination, it is true that ambitious women are not the norm. Ambitious men are the norm and many men are held up to this ideal also. Ambitious women are sometimes singled out in a negative way. In order to progress the equality agenda and to facilitate the fulfilment of women and men's ambitions, it is necessary that we move beyond this paradigm and create a space for ambitious women in all their wonderful diversity.

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Civil Service

Interview Guide: January 2008

Introduction:

This conversation is part of a research project commissioned by the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform, on the nature of ambition within the Civil Service, looking particularly at what constrains and what facilitates women's career ambitions.

We will be interviewing both men and women because we wish to understand men's views on their career ambitions also. This will provide us with the information needed to investigate and understand the differences and similarities between women and men when it comes to career ambition.

The conversation with you will last between forty-five minutes to an hour and will follow a series of questions covering themes about your career ambitions and how they may have grown or altered at various stages of your employment. We are also interested in your views of the particular challenges and opportunities that you have faced throughout your employment history.

This interview follows on from a web-based survey which you will already be familiar with. We feel that a conversation with you will add greatly to the quality and the depth of our research. Your opinions and view points will help us to understand the nuances and the subtleties of the nature of ambition within the Civil Service.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can decline to answer any question if you wish. You are free to withdraw from the study at any stage. This conversation will be completely confidential and anonymous and all information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence. No information will be included in the final report that could reveal the identity of the study participant.

Section 1: Career Plans

- 1.1 Do you think your career has gone the way that you expected when you started in this job? In what ways has it not and in what ways has it?
- 1.2 What position or grade did you aspire to achieve in your career when you entered the Civil Service? How has that changed now?
- 1.3 Are you at the position now that you thought you would be 5 years ago?
- 1.4 Have your career expectations changed much over the years? For example have your goals, aspirations or your priorities altered from when you first joined the Civil Service?
- 1.5 Can you think of any landmark events or phases in your life that affected your aspirations or expectations for your career?
- 1.6 Do you have a definite career plan? If yes, do you feel you have enough support from your colleagues and superiors to achieve this plan? If no, did you ever have a career plan previously?
- 1.7 Are you encouraged by your boss to go for promotion? How many times have you gone for promotion to get to your current position?

Section 2: Mentoring and Role-Modelling

- 2.1 Is there somebody in your work environment who you feel represents where you would like to be in the future in terms of career progression?
- 2.2 If yes, is this person male or female? Would it make a difference to you whether you have a role model of your gender?
- 2.3 Is there a particular person that you feel you could ask for advice from in terms of career progression?
- 2.4 Is there a particular person in your work environment that you feel is very encouraging of your career?

- 2.5 What in your opinion is the difference between a role model and a mentor? Do you have both in your career? What contribution have they made, if any, to your career?
- 2.6 If a younger colleague who is at an entry grade came to you looking for advice on how to progress their careers what would you tell them?
- 2.7 Would the advice be different for a male or female colleague?
- 2.8 Would the advice be different for a colleague who had or was planning to have children?
- 2.9 Are there particular dangers or potential pitfalls that you would warn them against?
- 2.10 Do you consider yourself to be a role model and/or a mentor to anybody in your working environment? In what way?

Section 3: Ambition – Other People

- 3.1 Can you think of an ambitious person from either your work or your personal life? Describe that person to me? In what way are they ambitious?
- 3.2 Can you define ambition?
- 3.3 Do you think that ambitious men are perceived the same way as ambitious women by their colleagues?
- 3.4 Do you think that ambitious men are perceived the same way as ambitious women by their subordinates/superiors?
- 3.5 Do ambitious men and women behave the same way? If they behave in the same way, might they be perceived differently? If they behave differently, why do you think that might be?
- 3.6 Thinking again of this ambitious person in your life, do you think their ambition could be described in the same way if they were male/female? Are men and women ambitious in different ways?

Section 4: Ambition - Self

- 4.1 When you were a child did you ever think that you were less or more encouraged to be ambitious than your male/female siblings or peers?
- 4.2 With hindsight and from your position now looking back on your childhood do you remember any instances where you now feel that boys or girls were treated differently in terms of ambition and achievement?
- 4.3 What did you want to be as a child? Were you encouraged? In what ways were you encouraged/not encouraged? From whom did you get this encouragement/discouragement?
- 4.4 Would you consider your parents to be ambitious for themselves or for you?
- 4.5 Do you think that your close male/female friends would consider you to be ambitious?
- 4.6 Do you think your colleagues would consider you to be ambitious?
- 4.7 Do you consider yourself to be ambitious?
- 4.8 Do you ever feel uncomfortable around ambitious people? If yes, in what way?
- 4.9 Can ambition ever be a negative attribute? Can you describe a negative ambition? Can you describe a positive ambition?

Section 5: The Civil Service

- 5.1 Have you always worked in the Civil Service or did you ever spend time in the public or private sector?
- 5.2 What do you perceive to be the differences, if any, between the workplace culture of the private sector and the public sector? *(Even if have never worked outside the CS, base judgement on perception.)*

- 5.3 What are the things that motivate you to work in the Civil Service over and above the Private Sector?
- 5.4 Do you feel that the Civil Service cultivates a healthy ambition?
- 5.5 Do you think the workplace culture of the Civil Service has evolved or changed during your career life span there? In what ways has it changed or stayed the same? Has this had a positive or negative effect on your career plans and experiences?
- 5.6 What do you enjoy most about your job? Is there any part of your job that you wish to change? What to you least enjoy?
- 5.7 Have you gone on any training courses in recent years? Have you developed new skills in the Civil Service and are your skills fully utilised in your job?

Section 6: Career Breaks

- 5.8 Have you ever taken a career break or extended leave from your job? If so for how long and for what purpose?

If yes above 5.8

- 6.1 How did you feel when you approached your colleagues to inform them about your leave? Were you encouraged to take the leave?
- 6.2 Do you feel that this leave or break impacted negatively on your relationships with your colleagues, to your work place and to your career progression?
- 6.3 Did your career plan or aspirations change between before and after this break? In what way?
- 6.4 Would you ever consider taking another career break in the future?
- 6.5 If you left your current job and took extended leave or a career break do you think you would return to the Civil Service afterwards?

If no above 5.8

- 6.6 Has anybody from your immediate working environment, team or group taken a career break or extended leave?
- 6.7 How do you feel this career break impacted on the working atmosphere or the relationships between the group?
- 6.8 Do you ever plan to take a career break? If so, what would you do? If no, why not?
- 6.9 In general do you think, from your own experience or looking at the experiences of colleagues that took career breaks, does extended leave impact negatively on career progression?
- 6.10 If you left your current job and took extended leave or a career break do you think you would return to the Civil Service afterwards?

Section 7: Conclusion

- 7.1 Are you happy overall with your career so far?
- 7.2 Where do you see yourself in 5 years time?
- 7.3 What is success to you? How do you define success?
- 7.4 Do you consider yourself to be successful?
- 7.5 Is there anything else you wish to add here that we haven't covered yet?
- 7.6 Were there any issues that were raised in the questionnaire that you wish to expand on here? Do you have any comments on the questionnaire or any part of this project?

Financial Sector

Interview Guide: July 2008

Introduction:

This conversation is part of a research project commissioned by the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform, on the nature of ambition, looking particularly at what constrains and what facilitates women's career ambitions.

We have already undertaken research across the Civil Service Departments, including interviews with male and female employees. The purpose of the interviews we are conducting with employees in your institution is to provide some comparative data concerning ambition within your specific workplace culture.

We will be interviewing both men and women because we wish to understand men's views on their career ambitions as well as women's. This will provide us with the information needed to investigate and understand the differences and similarities between women and men when it comes to career ambition.

The conversation with you will last between forty-five minutes to an hour and will follow a series of questions covering themes about your career ambitions and how they may have grown or altered at various stages of your employment. We are also interested in your views of the particular challenges and opportunities that you have faced throughout your employment history.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can decline to answer any question if you wish. You are free to withdraw from the study at any stage. This conversation will be completely confidential and anonymous and all information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence. No information will be included in the final report that could reveal the identity of the study participant.

Section 1: Career Plans

- 1.1. Do you think your career has gone the way that you expected when you started in this job? In what ways has it not and in what ways has it?
- 1.2. Have your career expectations changed much over the years? For example have your goals or aspirations altered from when you first joined this institution?
- 1.3. Do you have a definite career plan?
- 1.4. If yes, do you feel you have enough support from your colleagues and superiors to achieve this plan?
- 1.5. Is there somebody in your work environment who you feel represents where you would like to be in the future in terms of career progression? Why have you chosen this person?
- 1.6. Are you encouraged by your boss to go for promotion? How many times have you gone for promotion to get to your current position?
- 1.7. If a younger colleague who is at an entry grade came to you looking for advice on how to progress their careers what would you tell them?
- 1.8. Is there a particular person that you feel you could ask for advice from in terms of career progression?

Section 2: Ambition

- 2.1 What words come to mind when you think about the term 'ambition'?
- 2.2 Can you think of an ambitious person? Describe that person to me? In what way are they ambitious?
- 2.3 Is there such thing as bad ambition and good ambition? If yes, what is the difference?
- 2.4 Do you think ambitious men and women act the same?

- 2.5 Do you think they are perceived the same?
- 2.6 Do you think other people would consider you to be ambitious?
- 2.7 Do you think the people who know you best would consider you to be ambitious?
- 2.8 Do you consider yourself to be ambitious?
- 2.9 Do you ever feel uncomfortable around ambitious people? If yes, in what way?

Section 3: Workplace Culture

- 3.1 Do you think that recognition is important as a motivator for career ambitions? (e.g. among your junior colleagues/peers)
- 3.2 Do you feel your work is adequately recognised?
- 3.3 Do you usually get rewarded when you work hard? In what ways are you rewarded?
- 3.4 Do you think this institution is a place that fosters employee's career ambitions? If yes, in what way?
- 3.5 Does that vary according to the particular division that one may work in?
- 3.6 Thinking about ambition, how does this institution compare with other private sector institutions/companies in your experience/perception?
- 3.7 Thinking about ambition, how does this institution compare with your perception of the workplace culture of the public sector and more specifically the Civil Service?

Section 4: Conclusion

- 4.1 Are you happy overall with your career so far?
- 4.2 Where do you see yourself in 5 years time?
- 4.3 Do you consider yourself to be successful? How are you measuring that? What is success to you?
- 4.4 Is there anything else you wish to add here that we haven't covered yet?

Appendix B: Participant's Interview Guides

Civil Service

Participant Interview Guide: January 2008

Introduction:

This conversation is part of a research project commissioned by the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform, on the nature of ambition within the Civil Service, looking particularly at what constrains and what facilitates women's career ambitions.

We will be interviewing both men and women because we wish to understand men's views on their career ambitions also. This will provide us with the information needed to investigate and understand the differences and similarities between women and men when it comes to career ambition.

The conversation with you will last between forty-five minutes to an hour and will generally be divided into four themes addressing your career plans, your ambition, your priorities and your overall assessment of your career to date. We are also interested in your views of the particular challenges and opportunities that you have faced throughout your employment history.

This interview follows on from a web-based survey which you will already be familiar with. We feel that a conversation with you will add greatly to the quality and the depth of our research. Your opinions and view points will help us to understand the nuances and the subtleties of the nature of ambition within the Civil Service.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can decline to answer any question if you wish. You are free to withdraw from the study at any stage. This conversation will be completely confidential and anonymous and all information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence. No information will be included in the final report that could reveal the identity of the study participant.

Career Plans:

In this theme we will discuss your career expectations and goals. Do you think that these have changed over the years from entry into the Civil Service to now? We will also discuss whether you have ever had a definite career plan and how has this evolved over the years. We would be interested to hear about any role models you have encountered in your work environment and how have they encouraged your career progression.

Ambition:

During the conversation we are hoping to gain a greater understanding of how workplace ambition is defined by individuals in the Civil Service. We will discuss your childhood ambitions and the nature of encouragement you received as a child in relation to your goals. Do you consider yourself to be ambitious now? We will also ask you about ambitious people around you now and how you relate to them and their ambition. Furthermore, do you feel that men and women behave differently in presenting their ambition?

Priorities:

Under this theme we are interested in discovering what motivates you to work in the Civil Service. We will also discuss what you may or may not perceive to be the potential ramifications of career breaks or extended leave on career progression.

Conclusion:

Finally we will be interested in your assessment of your career to date and whether you are happy with what you have achieved so far. Furthermore, where do you see yourself in five or ten years time?

Financial Institution

Participant Interview Guide: July 2008

Introduction:

This conversation is part of a research project commissioned by the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform, on the nature of ambition within both the Civil Service and the private sector. We are looking particularly at what constrains and what facilitates women's career ambitions.

We will be interviewing both men and women because we wish to understand men's views on their career ambitions also. This will provide us with the information needed to investigate and understand the differences and similarities between women and men when it comes to career ambition.

The conversation with you will last approximately 30 minutes and will generally be divided into four themes addressing your career plans, your ambition, your workplace culture, and your overall assessment of your career to date. We are also interested in your views of the particular challenges and opportunities that you have faced throughout your employment history. Your opinions and view points will help us to understand the nuances and the subtleties of the nature of ambition within the private sector.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can decline to answer any question if you wish. You are free to withdraw from the study at any stage.

This conversation will be completely confidential and anonymous and all information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence. No information will be included in the final report that could reveal the identity of the study participant.

Career Plans:

In this theme we will discuss your career expectations and goals. Do you think that these have changed over the years? We will also discuss whether you have ever had a definite career plan and how has this evolved over the years. We would be interested to hear about any role models you have encountered in your work environment and how have they encouraged your career progression.

Ambition:

During the conversation we are hoping to gain a greater understanding of how workplace ambition is defined. Do you consider yourself to be ambitious now? We will also ask you about ambitious people around you now and how you relate to them and their ambition. Furthermore, do you feel that men and women behave differently in presenting their ambition?

Workplace Culture:

Under this theme we are interested in discovering what motivates you to work in the private sector. What do you perceive to be the differences between the private sector and the public sector as a place of work and in relation to fostering ambition?

Conclusion:

Finally we will be interested in your assessment of your career to date and whether you are happy with what you have achieved so far. Furthermore, where do you see yourself in five or ten years time?

Appendix C: The Consent Forms



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Dublin 2

Gender and Women's Studies
School of Histories and Humanities
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Fax: +353 1 896 3997
Web: http://www.tcd.ie/Womens_Studies/

Women and Ambition in the Civil Service

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for the Women and Ambition research project. We appreciate you taking the time to talk to us. The interview with you will last between forty-five minutes and an hour and will follow a series of questions covering themes about your career ambitions and how they may have grown or altered at various stages of your employment.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can decline to answer any question if you wish. You are free to withdraw from the study at any stage.

The researchers would like to use a digital recorder to record the interview. The data collected in the interview will be transcribed by the research team from the Centre for Gender and Women's Studies, Trinity College, Dublin. Only they will have access to the data for the purpose of analysis. It will be stored in locked files at the Centre for Gender and Women's Studies. No information will be included in the final report that could reveal the identity of the study participant. All data will be destroyed 12 months after the research is completed.

I have read the above and agree to take part in the study.

Thank you.

Research Participant

Principal Investigator

Date: _____





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Web: http://www.tcd.ie/Womens_Studies/

Women and Ambition in the Financial Institution

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for the Women and Ambition research project. We appreciate you taking the time to talk to us. The interview with you will last approximately forty-five minutes and will follow a series of questions covering themes about your career ambitions and how they may have grown or altered at various stages of your employment.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can decline to answer any question if you wish. You are free to withdraw from the study at any stage.

The researchers would like to use a digital recorder to record the interview. The data collected in the interview will be transcribed by the research team from the Centre for Gender and Women's Studies, Trinity College, Dublin. Only they will have access to the data for the purpose of analysis. It will be stored in locked files at the Centre for Gender and Women's Studies. No information will be included in the final report that could reveal the identity of the study participant. All data will be destroyed 12 months after the research is completed.

I have read the above and agree to take part in the study.

Thank you.

Research Participant

Principal Investigator

Date: _____



Appendix D: Post-stratification Weighting

Post-stratification weights were calculated with the principal intention of reducing any possible bias in the survey sample. Employment data from across the 16 Civil Service Departments show that senior management represent 13.8% of the total population of employees in HEO/AO and above grade. Middle management make up 29.9% and junior management account for 56.3% of the population. Table A1 below compares the percentage distribution of employees across the management levels with the distribution of the survey respondents. From this we can see that middle management was over represented in the survey responses. Both junior management and senior management were under-represented in the survey responses with significant under representation of those in the junior grades.

Table A1: Comparison of percentage distribution of base population and survey responses by management level

Management Level	Total Employees within the 16 Departments	% distribution at each management level	Valid response rate by management level	% Distribution of valid responses
Senior Management	767	13.8%	295	13.1%
Middle Management	1,661	29.9%	766	34.2%
Junior Management	3,124	56.3%	1,176	52.5%
Total	5,552		2,237	

Source: CGWS, 2008

Weights are constructed to force the weighted marginals to mirror a set of target marginals for the relevant population (Henry, 1990). The target marginals were set in this study by gender, Department, and grade. For example senior manager male responses in one Department were a bit under-represented in the sample compared to the employment data. The post-stratification weights for response increased this group's representation accordingly. This works under the assumption, of course, that our current sample is representative of the total population.¹⁴

Furthermore there was significant over-sampling of female respondents to the survey with a far greater number of women responding to the survey than their actual representation in the selected grades across the Department. Women represent 41% (n=2,275) of the total population of employees in the selected management grades. However, the total response rate for female respondents is 50.9% (n=1,159). Table A2 below compares the percentage distribution of respondents by gender and management level between the base population and the total survey respondents.

Table A2: Comparison of percentage distribution of base population and survey responses by gender and management level

	Senior Management		Middle Management		Junior Management	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Base population (5,552)	3.1%	10.8%	9.9%	20.0%	28.0%	28.3%
Survey population (2,237)	4.1%	9.1%	15.6%	18.6%	32.1%	20.5%

Source: CGWS, 2008

Having a representative sample of the population is of paramount importance when conducting a survey. Due to the fact that both senior management and middle management staff were effectively 'oversampled' while junior management were 'under sampled'. Post-stratification weighting

¹⁴ The total base population for the employees in HEO grade and above within the 16 Civil Service Departments was supplied to the research team via the research sponsors using IPA figures for 2008 in conjunction with the records of the Departments themselves. This total figure was given as 5,552 (women = 2,275 and men = 3,277)

has been employed not as a panacea for non-response but rather to adjust for the expected random discrepancies between sample and target population characteristics (Henry, 1990).

The following formula was used to arrive at the weight for each subsample where Y = the total number of female or male employees at each management level within each Department based on the total employment figures for the 16 Civil Service Departments (N=5,552). X = the total number of female or male survey respondents at each management within each Department level based on the total response rate (N=2,237).

$$\text{Post-stratification weight} = (X/2,237) / (Y/5,552)$$

Tables A3 show the average weight across all the 16 Departments by gender and by management level

Table A3: Average weight across all the Civil Service Departments surveyed, by gender and by management level.			
	Senior Management	Middle Management	Junior Management
Male	1.549	0.713	0.859
Female	0.842	1.197	1.201
<i>Source: CGWS, 2008</i>			

Appendix E: Copy of Survey

Women and Ambition in the Civil Service DRAFT FULL SURVEY

1. Introduction and Disclaimer

CONFIDENTIAL

Women and Ambition within the Civil Service

Centre for Gender and Women's Studies

Trinity College

November 2007

This questionnaire is part of a research project commissioned by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform on the nature of ambition within the civil service, looking particularly at what constrains and what facilitates women's career ambitions.

We are sending this questionnaire to men as well as to women because we wish also to understand men's views on their career and ambition. This will provide us with the data needed to investigate and understand the differences and similarities between women and men in terms of career ambition.

Along with research and results from interviews, the results from this questionnaire will be available in a final report. We are very interested in hearing your views, and we would be grateful if you would take a few minutes to complete the questionnaire.

This questionnaire is COMPLETELY CONFIDENTIAL and anonymous and all information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence. The questionnaire will come directly back to the research team at the Centre for Gender and Women's Studies and any data presented will be in a format that does not and cannot identify individual personnel. The research team are not able to identify respondents in any way and will maintain complete confidentiality.

Women and Ambition in the Civil Service DRAFT FULL SURVEY

2. Demographic Questions

* 1. What age group do you belong to?

- ☐ Under 25
- ☐ 25 - 34
- ☐ 35 - 44
- ☐ 45 - 54
- ☐ 55 - 64
- ☐ 65 and over

* 2. What's your nationality?

- ☐ Irish
- ☐ Other (please specify)

* 3. Gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

* 4. What is your marital status?

- ☐ Single
- ☐ Married
- ☐ Cohabiting
- ☐ Divorced
- ☐ Separated
- ☐ Widowed

5. What is your highest level of educational attainment?

- ☐ Primary level
- ☐ Secondary level
- ☐ Third level Diploma
- ☐ Third level Degree
- ☐ Post-graduate Diploma
- ☐ Post-graduate Degree (Masters)
- ☐ Post-graduate Degree (Doctorate)

* 6. Do you hold a Professional Qualification (e.g. Accountancy etc)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, please state what the qualification is

* 7. Do you have children?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

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3. Questions regarding children

* 1. How many children do you have?

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☐ 5

☐ 6

☐ More than 6 - please state how many

* 2. How old are your children? (please group your child/children by the relevant overall age group - i.e. if you have three children aged 2, 6 and 8, you would choose the "All children are 10 years of age or under" option)

☐ All children are 5 years of age or under

☐ All children are 10 years of age or under

☐ All children are 15 years of age or under

☐ All children are 20 years of age or under

☐ All children are OVER 20 years of age

☐ None of the above - please specify

Please specify

* 3. Have you ever taken paid Maternity leave?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not applicable

* 4. If you have taken paid Maternity leave, how many times have you taken it?

☐ Not applicable

☐ Once

☐ Twice

☐ Three times

☐ Four times

☐ Five times

☐ More than five times, please state how many

* 5. Have you ever taken extended /unpaid Maternity leave

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not applicable

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* 6. If you have taken extended/unpaid Maternity leave, how many times have you taken it?

- ☐ Not applicable
- ☐ Once
- ☐ Twice
- ☐ Three times
- ☐ Four times
- ☐ Five times
- ☐ More than five times, please state how many

* 7. Have you ever taken paid Paternity leave?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not applicable

* 8. If you have taken paid Paternity leave, how many times have you taken it?

- ☐ Not applicable
- ☐ Once
- ☐ Twice
- ☐ Three times
- ☐ Four times
- ☐ Five times
- ☐ More than five times, please state how many

* 9. Have you ever taken unpaid Parental leave? (including Term-Time)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Would you like to expand on your answer?

* 10. If you have taken unpaid Parental leave (including Term-Time), how many times have you taken it?

- ☐ Not applicable
- ☐ Once
- ☐ Twice
- ☐ Three times
- ☐ Four times
- ☐ Five times
- ☐ Take Parental leave in an on-going manner (e.g. reduced working hours)
- ☐ More than five times, please state how many

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* 11. What effect do you think taking Maternity/Paternity/Parental leave has had on your career progression?

- ☐ Not applicable
- ☐ Positive effect
- ☐ Negative effect
- ☐ No effect
- ☐ Don't know

Would you like to expand on your answer?

* 12. If you think taking Maternity/Paternity/Parental leave has had a negative effect on your career progression, in what way has it been negative? (please tick all that apply)

- ☐ Financially
- ☐ Reduced your status within the organisation or among your peers
- ☐ Hindered your promotional opportunities
- ☐ Not applicable
- ☐ Other (please specify)

* 13. If you think that taking Maternity/Paternity/Parental leave has had a positive effect on your career progression, in what way has it been positive? (please tick all that apply)

- ☐ Financially
- ☐ Helped your promotional opportunities
- ☐ Gave you extra skills
- ☐ Helped you be a better manager
- ☐ Improved your work/life balance
- ☐ Not applicable
- ☐ Other (please specify)

4. Questions regarding your career in the Civil Service

* 1. What Department do you work in?

- ☐ Agriculture and Food
- ☐ Arts, Sport and Tourism
- ☐ Communications, Energy and Natural Resources
- ☐ Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
- ☐ Defence
- ☐ Education and Science
- ☐ Enterprise, Trade and Employment
- ☐ Environment, Heritage and Local Government
- ☐ Finance
- ☐ Foreign Affairs
- ☐ Health and Children
- ☐ Justice, Equality and Law Reform
- ☐ Office of the Revenue Commissioners
- ☐ Social and Family Affairs
- ☐ Taoiseach
- ☐ Transport

* 2. What is your grade? (If you are not on a traditional Civil Service grade structure, please approximate what grade most closely resembles your level of responsibility)

- ☐ Higher Executive Officer
- ☐ Administrative Officer
- ☐ Assistant Principal
- ☐ Principal Officer
- ☐ Director
- ☐ Assistant Secretary/Deputy Secretary
- ☐ Secretary General

* 3. How long have you worked in the Civil Service? (Please round up to the nearest year as appropriate)

- ☐ Less than 5 years
- ☐ Between 5 and 10 years
- ☐ Between 11 and 20 years
- ☐ Between 21 and 30 years
- ☐ Between 31 and 40 years
- ☐ More than 40 years

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* 4. Do you work:

- ☐ Full Time
- ☐ Part-time
- ☐ Work-share
- ☐ Job-share
- ☐ Job-share (without job sharing partner)
- ☐ Other (please specify)

5. What is your role within the department?

* 6. What is the primary functional area within the department that you work in?

- ☐ Policy
- ☐ Operational
- ☐ Support (e.g. Human Resources, Finance)
- ☐ Other (please specify)

* 7. Please indicate what your current salary level is

- ☐ Less than €30,000
- ☐ €30,001 - €40,000
- ☐ €40,001 - €50,000
- ☐ €50,001 - €60,000
- ☐ €60,001 - €70,000
- ☐ €70,001 - €80,000
- ☐ €80,001 - €100,000
- ☐ €100,001 - €125,000
- ☐ More than €125,000

* 8. At any stage in your career to date have you been promoted on the basis of 'senior suitable'?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If Yes, how many times?

* 9. At any stage in your career to date have you been promoted on the basis of inter-departmental competition (excluding TLAC where relevant)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If Yes, how many times

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- * 10. At any stage in your career to date have you been promoted on the basis of an internal competition (i.e. a competition and/or interview confined to your then Department)

☐ Yes

☐ No

If Yes, how many times

- * 11. Apart from your original appointment to the Civil Service, at any stage in your career have you been promoted on the basis of an open competition (i.e. a competition advertised in the newspapers and open to the public)?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If Yes, how many times?

- * 12. How often did you apply for your last promotion (i.e. the promotion which brought you to your present grade) prior to being successful?

☐ Once - i.e. I was successful on my first attempt

☐ Twice

☐ Three times

☐ Four times

☐ More than four times

☐ Have never applied for promotion

Would you like to expand on your answer?

- * 13. Are you at a position within the Civil Service that you thought you would be five years ago?

☐ Higher

☐ Lower

☐ Where I thought I would be

☐ Didn't plan on being in the Civil Service 5 years ago

☐ Don't know

Would you like to expand on your answer?

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* 14. When you first joined the Civil Service, what was the top position within the Civil Service that you aspired to reach?

- ☐ Clerical Assistant
- ☐ Clerical Officer
- ☐ Staff Officer
- ☐ Executive Officer
- ☐ Higher Executive Officer
- ☐ Assistant Principal
- ☐ Assistant Principal 1
- ☐ Principal Officer
- ☐ Principal Officer 1
- ☐ Assistant Secretary/Deputy Secretary
- ☐ Secretary General
- ☐ Didn't see myself staying in the Civil Service

Would you like to expand on your answer?

* 15. What is the top position within the Civil Service that you now aspire to reach?

- ☐ Assistant Principal
- ☐ Assistant Principal 1
- ☐ Principal Officer
- ☐ Principal Officer 1
- ☐ Assistant Secretary/Deputy Secretary
- ☐ Secretary General
- ☐ I would like to leave the Civil Service

Would you like to expand on your answer?

* 16. In terms of what motivates you to work in the Civil Service, please rate the following in order of importance:

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not important at all
Money for household expenses	☐	☐	☐
Career satisfaction	☐	☐	☐
Personal financial independence	☐	☐	☐
Power	☐	☐	☐
Status	☐	☐	☐
Job security	☐	☐	☐

Would you like to expand on your answer?

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* 17. Do you feel that you've been given the opportunity to develop new skill-sets in the Civil Service?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

Would you like to expand on your answer?

* 18. Do you ever feel under-utilised or under-appreciated in your workplace?

	Never	Some of the time	Most of the time	All of the time
Under-utilised	☐	☐	☐	☐
Under-appreciated	☐	☐	☐	☐

Would you like to expand on your answer?

* 19. Have you ever taken a career break during your time working in the Civil Service? (EXCLUDING maternity leave, paternity leave and parental leave)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Applied for a career break but application was not successful

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5. Questions regarding career breaks

1. How many career breaks have you taken?

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6

More than 6 - please state how many

* 2. Why did you take a career break? (please tick all that apply)

- ☐ To travel
- ☐ To pursue another career
- ☐ To pursue further education
- ☐ Chilcare responsibilities
- ☐ Elderly care responsibilities
- ☐ Household responsibilities
- ☐ Other (please specify)

* 3. How long was your first career break for?

- ☐ Less than 6 months
- ☐ Between 6 months and 1 year
- ☐ Between 1 and 2 years
- ☐ Between 2 and 3 years
- ☐ Greater than 3 years - please state how long

4. If you have taken more than one career break, please indicate how long each of these subsequent career breaks were for?

* 5. What effect do you think taking a career break had on your career progression?

- ☐ Positive effect
- ☐ Negative effect
- ☐ No effect
- ☐ Don't know

Would you like to expand on your answer?

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* 6. If you think the career break(s) has had a negative effect on your career progression, in what way has it been negative? (please tick all that apply)

- ☐ Financially
- ☐ Reduced your status within the organisation or among your peers
- ☐ Hindered your promotional opportunities
- ☐ Not applicable
- ☐ Other (please specify)

* 7. If you think the career break(s) has had a positive effect on your career progression, in what way has it been positive? (please tick all that apply)

- ☐ Financially
- ☐ Helped your promotional opportunities
- ☐ Gave you extra skills
- ☐ Helped you be a better manager
- ☐ Improved your work/life balance
- ☐ Not applicable
- ☐ Other (please specify)

* 8. Did taking a career break change your career /life aspirations in any way?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

Would you like to expand on your answer?

6. Questions on your career and ambition

* 1. Do you have a definite career plan?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

Would you like to expand on your answer?

* 2. Do you consider yourself to be ambitious?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

Would you like to expand on your answer?

* 3. Do you think other people consider you to be ambitious?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

Would you like to expand on your answer?

* 4. Do you think it's 'unfeminine' to be ambitious?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

Would you like to expand on your answer?

* 5. Do you think other people think it is 'unfeminine' to be ambitious?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

Would you like to expand on your answer?

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* 6. How would you define ambition? (Please tick all words listed below which are closest to your definition)

- ☐ Enterprising
- ☐ Competitive
- ☐ Strategic
- ☐ Formidable
- ☐ Driven
- ☐ Determined
- ☐ Motivated
- ☐ Industrious
- ☐ Resourceful
- ☐ Pushy
- ☐ Ruthless
- ☐ Goal-oriented
- ☐ Other (please specify)

* 7. Overall, on a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being extremely satisfied), how satisfied are you with your career to date?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Career satisfaction	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

* 8. If you left your present position for some reason (e.g. took a leave of absence, career break etc), do you think you would like to return to:

- ☐ The same Organisation (i.e. the Civil Service)
- ☐ The same Department
- ☐ A different Organisation
- ☐ A different Department
- ☐ Don't know

Would you like to expand on your answer?

* 9. If you have children, what effect has the responsibility of having children had on your career progression?

- ☐ Positive effect
- ☐ Negative effect
- ☐ No effect
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Don't have any children

Would you like to expand on your answer?

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* 10. In terms of your professional work life, where do you see yourself in:

Five years time:

Ten years time:

* 11. Do you consider yourself to be successful?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Don't know

Would you like to expand on your answer?

* 12. How do you define success in life (please tick all that apply)

☐ Monetary wealth

☐ Financial security

☐ Balanced work and home life

☐ Inner happiness

☐ Good health

☐ Happy family life

☐ Freedom

☐ Security

☐ Other (please specify)

* 13. How important to you is money?

Not important

Somewhat important

Very important

Money is ☐ ☐ ☐

Would you like to expand on your answer?

* 14. How important to you is job security?

Not important

Somewhat important

Very important

Job security is ☐ ☐ ☐

Would you like to expand on your answer?

* 15. Were you encouraged to be ambitious as a child?

Very discouraged

Somewhat
discouraged

Neither encouraged
nor discouraged

Somewhat
encouraged

Very encouraged

I was ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Would you like to expand on your answer?

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* 16. When you were a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?