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Abstract

The aim is to investigate female and male managers' learning environments with particular focus on their opportunities for and barriers to learning and career development in the managerial work of a male-dominated industrial company. In the case study 42 managers, 15 women and 27 men in the company were interviewed. The findings demonstrate that the male managers were provided with significantly richer opportunities to participate in activities conducive to learning and career development than were female managers. The opportunities and barriers in terms of horizontal and vertical manager mobility, senior managers' support, strategic networks, career system, freedom of action and gender stereotypes operated simultaneously as opportunities and barriers to learning and career development for the female and male managers, respectively. The conclusion is that the expansive-restrictive continuum developed by Fuller and Unwin (2004) does not cover the extent to which gender operates as a condition for learning and career development, nor the extent to which the gender order influences the learning environment. Therefore we suggest that the expansive-restrictive model of learning environments would benefit from incorporating or, at least considering, gender dimensions in order to form a gender-sensitive model to analyse learning environments in workplaces.

Key words: restrictive and expansive learning environments, gender, managerial work

Introduction

The aim of this article is to investigate female and male managers' learning environments with particular focus on their opportunities for and barriers to learning and career development within a male-dominated industrial company. Specifically the article focuses on those conditions in the learning environment that female and male managers encounter within their everyday managerial work. As gender research shows repeatedly, the conditions framing

female and male managers' learning and career development differ significantly in organisations (Alvesson and Billing 1997). Women and men tend not to have equal opportunities for learning and career progression, that is, for being selected to leadership roles and reaching top-level management positions (Budworth and Mann, 2010; Davidson and Burke, 2004; Wood, 2008). To identify the conditions female and male managers encounter, we elaborate on the theoretical model of expansive-restrictive learning environments as developed by Fuller and Unwin (2004). The underlying assumption is that conditions that constitute expansive learning environments create richer opportunities for learning and career development than do restrictive learning environments. By using this model we identify to what extent the learning environment creates opportunities for and barriers to learning among female and male managers in a company. We argue, however, that the consideration of gender is not explicitly addressed in the Fuller and Unwin (2004; see also Evans *et al.,* 2006) model of learning environments. We are able to show that different and contrasting learning environments are created for female and male managers as a consequence of how gender operates within this company.

In the following, we first outline the theoretical framework applied in the article. Next, we provide a brief overview of the research context and methodology. We then substantiate our argument through empirical illustration and discussion of results from our case study. Finally, we offer conclusions based on our analysis and suggest avenues for future research.

Theoretical framework

In this article we use a framework based on the theoretical model of expansive-restrictive learning environments as developed by Fuller and Unwin (2004), which in turn is based on theoretical assumptions from situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and activity theory (Engeström, 2001). By identifying expansive or restrictive features of the environment and analysing them, Fuller and Unwin suggest that this might provide a useful tool for analysing the quality of the learning environment. The important aspect is that these learning environments are supposed to support different types of learning – adaptive and expansive learning. Both types of learning and their interrelationship are needed to better understand opportunities for and barriers to learning in work (Ellström, 2006; Engeström, 2001; Fuller and Unwin, 2004; Fuller *et al.,* 2007). This puts the focus on conditions in the learning environment that may be identified as expansive in terms of rich opportunities for learning, whereas restrictive ones create barriers to learning. The consideration of gender is relatively

underdeveloped in Fuller and Unwin's model so we incorporate a 'doing gender' perspective into the continuum of expansive-restrictive learning environments. Here gender conceptualises the social and cultural construction of the relationship between women and men, behaviour and tasks of women and men, as well as what is considered as 'female' and 'male' (Acker, 1990; Broadbridge and Hearn, 2008; Korvajärvi, 1998). Gender is continually produced and reproduced through actions and interactions over time in practices (Gherardi and Poggio, 2002; Martin, 2003) and is thus something that people do, hence learn, in everyday activities in which they participate and interact with others (Acker, 1990, 1999; West and Zimmerman, 1987).

The idea of gendered learning environments directs attention towards the ways in which different types of learning and gender are made parallel through participation and interaction in everyday activities in various social practices. The focus on participation is metaphorically used to define the process of learning in and between 'communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Learning in this sense is a process in which adaptive and expansive types of learning shape what we do and experience as well as who we become in the communities of practice to which we belong (Wenger, 1998). Learning as participation in communities of practice comes close to concepts of doing gender, and links learning and doing gender to learning environments.

According to Felstead *et al.* (2009, p. 27) learning environments are:

> … bounded networks of social relationships in which people interact with artefacts and devices that are intrinsic to the performance of their work tasks and roles. Such artefacts and devices contribute to the exercise of power and control over other people and things through time and space.

An environment for learning can be constituted as a community of practice which is based on a collective activity, mutual engagement, and creates trusting relationships through the sharing of a repertoire that recreates the community of practice (Wenger, 1998). According to Paechter (2003, 2006) it is possible from a gender perspective to configure femininities and masculinities as localised communities of practice. The focus is then on the learning of these local femininities and masculinities regarding gender issues such as power relations and hierarchies, inequalities, stereotypical expectations of femininity and masculinity. These also

impact on the learning environment while they are connected to wider gender configurations and structures (Acker, 1990; Paechter, 2006; Mathieu, 2009). Also Sawchuk (2003) recognises that there might be both formal and informal micro-political processes of domination between different groups, and this can create restrictive learning environments for sub-groups within the community of practice. According to Felstead *et al.* (2009) it is also likely that expansive and restrictive learning environments can be different for different groups within the same community of practice. This implies that participants in different sub-groups at a workplace can perceive and react differently to similar conditions. A learning environment may also comprise a constellation of interconnected communities of practice, each dealing with a joint activity in which the members share and create knowledge and artefacts (Wenger, 1998). The assumption is, as both Wenger (1998) and Engeström (2001) argue, that crossing boundaries between multiple and overlapping communities of practice inside and outside the workplace offers opportunities for learning (see also Fuller and Unwin, 2004).

A range of conditions constitutes different learning environments and the degree to which these are expansive or restrictive (Felstead *et al.*, 2009). Some of these arise from the workplace itself such as the history, culture and context. Expansive or restrictive structures include, for example, working conditions, the division of labour, leadership and strategies for competence development (Ellström, *et al.*, 2008; Evans and Kersh, 2004; Gustavsson, 2009). These structures may also be gendered as the work often creates divisions between women and men as well as between femininities and masculinities (Acker, 1990).

Moreover, there are conditions relating to participants' access to different forms of participation (Evans *et al.,* 2006). According to Billett (2001) access to participation in work activities, or the lack of it, have significant consequences for the quality of learning. Acquiring access depends on several interacting factors – everything from the way work is organised to more interpersonal relationships. It may also depend on physical and social resources available in various situations (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Salminen-Karlsson (2006) argue that there may exist considerable differences between women and men in gaining access to participation in activities and interactions. Internal contradictions between subgroups in communities of practice, for example women and men, might produce different patterns of participation that either include or exclude them from a wide range of activities (Sawchuk, 2003). As Billett (2004, p. 121) argues, it is necessary to consider the invitational

qualities in activities afforded by workplaces. He adds that there are different kinds of activities that participants are able to access due to the way power relations operate in providing opportunities for or barriers to learning. Participants may be invited to participate by others more experienced or actively take the initiative to participate in activities in order to develop ways of working (Akre and Ludvigsen, 1997). When men invite other men to participate in strategic networks, or in recruitment processes, the homo-social interactions tend to reproduce patterns of male dominance in organisations. Women belonging to a minority do not have access to these interactions to the same degree as men (Kanter, 1977; Lipman-Blumen, 1976). The majority position allows men to be mutually different but still form a masculine norm, while women risk confronting gender stereotypes – becoming *tokens*, which limits their repertoire of action (Kanter, 1977). Hence, gender stereotyping at workplaces may contribute to the (re)production of a gender order where women and men are horizontally and vertically separated (Acker, 1990; Fogelberg Eriksson, 2005; Kvande, 2002). As Martin (2003) points out there are certain positions which are more or less possible for women or men to access and enact. Different patterns of participation develop over time, and these patterns create either opportunities for or barriers to learning and career development for women and men. These patterns might also create unequal opportunities for participation in expansive learning environments (Felstead *et al.,* 2009).

Research context

The case study was carried out in a male-dominated industrial company in a small Swedish town. There were approximately 1800 employees (80 per cent men and 20 per cent women) and 128 managers (80 per cent men and 20 per cent women) at the site. The company specialises in products and services in material handling and logistics. The production is organised in three divisions, each specialising in one product and a unit for joint corporate functions. The production system implemented in the local company is inspired by Toyota hence it was lean. The trend towards lean production introduced new values or enhanced some existing values in the company, which created new demands on managers´ leadership. New leader capabilities were required such as visual control, standardised work, just-in-time, tact time and one-piece flow were developed.

Our respondents were drawn from three divisions within the company and were distributed as follows (see Table 1).

Table 1. Participating managers, distributed by managerial level and gender.

	Males	Females
Top level managers	7	1
Middle level managers	11	4
First level managers	9	10
Total	27	15

A manager in this study is defined as a person who has been given a formal position of leadership and the authority to lead subordinates. The youngest manager was 28 years old, the oldest 63 years old. The average age of the managers was 43 years. The majority of the managers (23 managers; 15 men, 8 women) had academic degrees, three managers had vocational training, 15 managers had high school degrees and one manager had elementary school training. The male managers had on average worked as managers for eight years and the women for seven years in the company.

Methodology

The case study is a qualitative one consisting of interviews which were semi-structured and lasted on average one and half hours. They took place during working hours in the spring of 2008. The authors of this paper and two other researchers from the research group conducted the interviews. The interview form contained questions regarding personal background, work of managers, management and leadership, learning and career paths, leadership and gender equality, as well as leadership and health. All the data from the interviews are not elaborated in this article, for example health issues. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim and the transcriptions were used as a foundation for the analysis.

The two authors analysed the data using the following steps. First, all interview transcripts were read for familiarisation and a broader understanding of the material, and an overview of the interview extracts was prepared. The analysis of the extracts resulted in an identification of two main themes emerging in the empirical material. The first theme focused on structural features which related to the expansive and restrictive nature of the learning environment and was coded into three different subcategories: entrance to and mobility between managerial positions; access to learning, competence development and planned careers; access to strategic resources and networks. The second theme focused on normalising and stereotyping

features surrounding female and male that restricted or facilitated learning and careers which was coded into two different subcategories; gender stereotyping and individualistic discourse.

Each subcategory in the main themes were analysed by gender to investigate female and male managers' patterns of participation regarding opportunities for and barriers to learning and career development within the company. The authors conducted a collaborative analysis using the expansive-restrictive continuum as developed by Fuller and Unwin (2004; see also Evans *et al.*, 2006; Felstead *et al.*, 2009; Fuller *et al.*, 2007). The patterns, which emerged in the analysis of each gender group separately, were homogenous regarding the group's perceptions of the learning environment and particularly the conditions for learning and career development. More differences emerged between female and male managers in comparing their patterns of participation and opportunities or barriers to learning. In the findings, female and male managers' perceptions are presented in quotes which were selected by gender as representative of our material. These demonstrate rich accounts of the managers' opportunities for and barriers to learning and career development in the company.

Sub-analyses were performed between different managerial levels and divisions in the company. In this process similarities rather than differences between the different divisions of the company appeared; also different patterns of participation occurred for female and male managers regardless of the division where they worked. There were also differences between women and men relating to managerial level; the higher the managerial level the more men there were in these positions in the company.

Findings

In the following section the focus is on female and male managers' opportunities for and barriers to learning and career development.

Entrance to and mobility between managerial positions

There were differences in the pattern of recruitment depending on whether managers were recruited internally or externally. Internal recruitment dominated at lower and middle managerial positions while managers for top-level positions were handpicked externally. When recruiting managers, internally as well as externally, senior managers had a crucial impact on the recruitment process. They were often invited by subordinate managers to actively participate in the selection of suitable candidates. In these situations the male senior

managers admitted that they headhunted candidates from their existing male-dominated networks within or outside the company.

> Yeah, look around, (laughing). I think that we are still a bit old-fashioned; we use an old-fashioned recruitment principle and managerial behaviour. And I think that the male leadership style is dominating, and it is easy if you are a manager to choose someone who is like yourself. So if you are a male manager with male attributes, it is easier to recruit one like that. I don't think that we are at the leading edge when it comes to this [i.e. recruiting women managers]. (Man, middle manager)

An implicit but expected duty was that all managers at middle and top-level positions should support upcoming managers on lower managerial levels to progress within the company. The senior managers emphasised that it was a part of their job to support young managers by sharing their competence and experiences of managerial work. Concurrently the managers expressed that they were not always good at noticing 'management potential' or at helping new managers. Senior male managers were however more likely to support other men to advance to (top) managerial positions. The attitudes and actions undertaken by senior managers thus created different conditions for women and men to reach managerial positions in the company.

Experiences reflected by some female and male managers were that their careers had been supported by vertical, or horizontal manager mobility, within or between divisions in the company. The female managers experienced that they had possibilities for horizontal movement but limited possibilities for vertical movement to higher positions. They reported, however, that managerial mobility was not impossible if they themselves acted to change positions. The male managers stated that their possibilities for horizontal as well as vertical movements were quite large and even greater as several of them already had changed their managerial positions one or more times. Gender differences were accordingly present with respect to managerial mobility.

Access to learning, competence development and planned careers
Both female and male managers believed that they had rich opportunities to participate in leader development programs or courses during working hours. New managers, especially,

were offered participation in internal or external programs or courses. Leader development was seen as necessary to prepare managers for entering a managerial role or as a tool for supporting more experienced managers in their work. Learning and competence development activities on the job were also generously distributed to support managers' needs for mastering changing tasks in the company. Both female and male managers expressed that the most valued source for learning the managerial job was to practise leadership in daily work situations, for instance participating in problem-solving activities and meetings with subordinates.

In spite of rich opportunities for learning, competence and career development the managers stated that there were conditions that could both support and hinder their progress. Managers expressed that it would be easier if careers were planned through 'career ladders' or leader trainee programs. As a minimum they proposed that there should be a one-year plan for competence and career development.

> I wish that there could be something explicit, explaining what we stand for and what we want from our managers, that there could be a forum where we could discuss that, rather than having all managers fumbling about in their own ways. (Woman, first-line manager)

Furthermore, they needed clear policies to meet new expectations and demands on the leadership due to changes related to the production system.

Access to strategic resources and networks
There were also other important conditions that supported learning and career development in the company, as several managers argued, that having mentors both within and outside the company would be a valuable resource for development of their leadership skills. Female managers also mentioned that it was valuable to get support from superiors regarding their career development:

> Well, to see them, that someone sees you, I think, to get the first push. Because everybody says "Me? No, you're crazy" they say. "I can't do it", but you have started a process. And I think that is the most important. (Woman, first-line manager)

It was also important for these female managers to get encouragement from peer managers, especially support from experienced female and male top- and middle-level managers who acted as role models. The male managers described however that they received support from other male managers. It was more likely that older men chose younger men as their successors and it was apparent in top-level managers' considerations that they actively supported rising male managers aspiring to middle- and top-level positions.

> Personally I have to admit that it is easier to understand men than to understand women, I think. It is more comfortable to communicate with people who think like you do yourself. (Man, top-level manager)

Also important are different networks in which managers dared to discuss problems and ideas. Several female managers mentioned female networks outside the company as a resource for exchanging experiences with other female managers from other organisations. The company had an internal network for female managers, and it seemed to be fruitful on a personal level as a social support for learning in the organisation. The female managers, however, would welcome other strategic networks like the ones men had to gain access to support for career development.

Informal strategic networks in the company gave male managers advantages in acquiring top-level managerial positions than female managers. According to female managers, their male equivalents were often invited by senior managers to participate in the informal managerial networks. Female managers stated that this created better opportunities for men to receive middle- and top-level positions. These differences between women and men in gaining access to the male strategic networks were not always visible to all those we interviewed. Both female and male managers, however, requested a more transparent and systematic arrangement for career development, for example career and mentor systems, to become visible as potential managers in the whole company.

Gender stereotyping
There were a number of gender stereotypical expectations which might constitute barriers to an even gender distribution in managerial positions. In the managers' perceptions there were paradoxes regarding gender because it was both important and unimportant. One manager

could state that women and men had the same view on leadership and simultaneously attributed gender stereotypical characteristics to women and men. These characteristics were interpreted by the managers as positive or negative in relation to learning and practising leadership. On the one hand, women were described as better leaders as they were perceived to have a highly developed relation-oriented leadership. On the other hand, several male managers expressed that women lacked leadership abilities such as the courage to take steps forward, or have enough self-confidence, or sufficient physical stamina, or formal competencies for management positions and so on. Conversely, men were characterised as fast decision-makers and more interested in production goals being reached.

> Women care more for their co-workers and the people of the organisation and are perhaps more willing to adjust some of the goals a little in order to have co-workers who do well. (Man, top-level manager)

> I don´t think that women really dare to show that they are good enough. (Man, middle manager)

These gender stereotypical notions seemed to be related to different expectations, consciously or unconsciously, directed towards women and men as managers. Women as well as men who had not fulfilled these expectations risked encountering barriers to learning and career development. These gender stereotypes also contribute to the preservation of the male dominance in managerial positions which is disadvantageous for female managers in the company.

It is up to you – an individualistic discourse
A widespread perception was that learning and career development was the individual manager's own responsibility and therefore career advancement is framed in individualistic terms. This discourse states it is more or less up to the individual to act to develop their own career. Thus the career was something that was affected by the individual managers' behaviour.

> Well, if I find some course I wish to attend, there is usually no problem, you have to take your own responsibility and try to find ways to do things, so I don't see that as a problem. (Woman, first-line manager)

Many of the managers stated that they were aware of the fact that it depended on their own willingness to utilise opportunities afforded to them in training as well as on-the-job learning. The managers described that it was up to each and every one if and how they used, or wanted to use, the opportunities to create their own personal development for advance in the company. They said primarily that it depended on their disposition for learning in terms of the ability to negotiate with superiors and actively demonstrate willingness to advance in the company. Thus the company's role was to provide a range of development activities and their task was to individually seek support needed for enhancing their leadership or work situation. This individualistic discourse suggests freedom of action for managers who have the desire and ability to advance. However, female and male managers expressed that the freedom of action more or less depended on whether they had necessary resources for changing the role and it was predominantly male managers who had these privileges. The female managers were at a disadvantage even if they wanted to advance.

To sum up, there were different opportunities for or barriers to learning and career development for female and male managers within the company in terms of horizontal and vertical manager mobility, senior managers' support, strategic networks, career system, freedom of action and gender stereotypes. These conditions operate, in terms of expansive and restrictive features of the learning environment, and their relation to female and male managers, are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of expansive and restrictive features of the learning environment in relation to female (F) and male (M) managers.

Expansive	Restrictive
Access to horizontal manager mobility (F + M)	Limited access to horizontal manager mobility (–)
Access to vertical manager mobility (M)	Limited access to vertical manager mobility (F)
Support from senior managers (M)	Limited support from senior managers (F)
Access to strategic networks (M)	Limited access to strategic networks (F)
Transparent career systems (–)	Non-transparent career systems (F + M)
High degree of individual freedom of action (F + M)	Low degree of individual freedom of action (F)
Positive gender stereotypes (M)	Negative gender stereotypes (F)

In the following section the conditions that created these differentially gendered opportunities in the company are discussed.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that there was no difference between female and male managers regarding their access to activities that supported horizontal manager mobility. Both female and male managers perceived that they had rich opportunities for learning in their managerial work. Rich opportunities for learning were interpreted as gaining access to those activities which were perceived as valuable for learning the managerial work (see Lave & Wenger, 1991). Both female and male managers gained access to a wide variety of learning activities focused on leader development programs, whereas others facilitated the attainment of competences needed on the job. Thus the learning dealt with mastering the job, including everything from taking part in daily routines to problem solving in which they interacted with co-worker and manager colleagues (see Ellström, 2006; Evans *et al.,* 2006). Once they had reached a managerial level both female and male managers had equal opportunities to participate in the learning activities in work.

It was nonetheless much more difficult for female managers to enter and advance to higher managerial positions in the company. Female managers experienced that they had limited opportunities for vertical movements from lower to higher positions whereas male managers had the converse experience. As the findings also demonstrate, several male managers had already changed their managerial positions once or several times. They were benefiting from their access to power structures (Oakley, 2000) and access to resources that supported vertical movement in terms of career advancement (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Female managers encountered invisible barriers to advancement in the company often referred to as 'the glass ceiling' (Morrison, White and Van Welson, 1987). Consequently, the trajectory of vertical movement from lower to higher managerial positions formed two patterns of participation, one for each gender. The managers' learning trajectories were thus gendered in terms of different outcomes and experiences as women and men move up to higher managerial positions within the company.

The findings demonstrate that the male senior managers had a major impact on identifying internal as well as external manager candidates in the recruitment process in the company. They often decided who was to be recruited and used their own male networks as a source for

this based on informality and personal preferences. This was not, however, formally recognised by all the managers we interviewed in the company. The actions undertaken by senior managers acted as door openers for the male managers who were identified as having managerial potential, but as bottlenecks for the female managers who were considered inadequate for higher grade positions. The process of recruitment was seemingly one of preservation of the male dominance that the top-level managers controlled. As several researchers argue (see Lipman-Blumen, 1976; Fogelberg Eriksson, 2005), the reproduction of male homo-social patterns of interaction simultaneously create opportunities for men and barriers for women. It this case it was evident that the male homo-sociality had consequences for the recruitment of managers as well as the positions that were possible for female and male managers to achieve in the company (Martin, 2003). The managers did not just belong to the community of managers in the company, but also to local femininities and masculinities that were being learnt within this community of managers (see Paechter, 2003, 2006). The learning of femininities and masculinities created formal and informal micro-political processes of domination, which produced different patterns of participation for women and men (Sawchuk, 2003). This may have created a more restrictive learning environment and indicates that gender produced differential opportunities for male managers and barriers to female managers' learning (Tanggaard, 2006).

Moreover, there existed a considerable difference between female and male managers in gaining access to strategic networks that were crucial for vertical movements from lower to higher managerial positions. The findings demonstrate that the male managers, but not the female managers, had access to those networks that were counted as strategically important for career development. Accordingly these informal and rather strong male networks created barriers for female managers who wanted to move up to management positions in the company. These male networks tended to exclude the female managers from participation in network activities conducive to learning and career development. In comparison with female managers the male managers were invited more often to participate in these strategic networks by senior managers thereby creating unequal opportunities as the male managers had better access to learning situations that supported advancement (Akre and Ludvigsen, 1997). The male managers' access to strategic networks might also have supported participation in more expansive learning environments to a greater extent than for female managers. Female managers had access to female networks which tended to support learning in work and fulfil social relationships rather than vertical advancement.

Nevertheless, female and male managers expressed that they preferred a more transparent career system, which could support recruitment as well as career advancement within the company. Consequently the non-transparent career system of the company was a barrier to learning for female as well as male managers. Access to formalised career development was important, as it was more likely to create equal opportunities for women and men to enter leadership roles and advance to higher managerial positions. Due to the non-transparent career system the responsibility for developing leadership was transferred to the individual level, a point which is confirmed in other research (Vittala, 2005). In this case the managers stated that it was up to them to learn what they needed for developing their individual careers. In addition they assumed that their willingness was an important requirement for the utilisation of learning potential that existed in their daily work (Evans *et al.,* 2006). This individualistic discourse creates a larger freedom of action for those managers who had the ability as well as the possibility to shape an individual leadership role. The managers not favoured were thus those who did not have the chance to utilise learning opportunities as they wanted. The freedom of action depended on gaining access to the resources needed to advance in the company and it was evident that more male than females had these resources for moving to higher managerial positions. This individualistic discourse reinforced the fact that managers should broaden their competence through investment in their personal career development. In addition the individualistic discourse on learning and careers seemed to neutralise gender differences and gender structures within the company and implies that weaknesses regarding gender inequalities are attributable to the individuals (Ahl, 2006; Korvajärvi, 2002). Managers' learning opportunities and careers were therefore linked to individual needs and not to organisational needs for supply of competence and an even gender distribution in managerial positions.

Furthermore some findings indicate that conscious or unconscious expectations were directed to women and men as managers, thus gender stereotypes operated as opportunities for male managers and barriers for female managers (see Acker, 1990). Men were always considered suitable for managerial positions, as they were perceived to be more goal-oriented and qualified for managerial work. Female managers were perceived to lack adequate personal characteristics, qualifications and skills for managerial work and, of course, such gender stereotypes contribute to the preservation of male dominance in management positions in organisations (Wahl, 1995). Research has shown that gender stereotypes may even function as

barriers for men who do not fulfil the expectations of gender (Connell, 1995). Nothing in this case however indicated that men encountered barriers to learning and career development to the same extent as female managers due to gender stereotypes.

Conclusion

The findings discussed in this article highlight differences in the learning and career development of female and male managers. The latter were provided with significantly richer opportunities to participate in activities conducive to learning and vertical career development than female managers. The different opportunities for learning and career development indicate that there may be two parallel learning environments (see Felstead *et al.*, 2009; Fuller and Unwin, 2004). The different conditions of the learning environments of managers acted simultaneously as opportunities for and barriers to participation in activities and interactions for learning and career development. The female and male managers experienced these conditions to different degrees as expansive or restrictive, and reacted differently to apparently similar conditions encountered in their everyday managerial activities. The learning opportunities in terms of vertical manager mobility, access to strategic networks, freedom of action and gender stereotypes were all to a greater extent resources in the male managers' individual career advancement. This shaped two patterns of participation, one for each gender. The female managers' pattern of participation shows that they had rich opportunities to move horizontally between departments within the same managerial level but limited opportunities to move upwards managerially. The male managers' pattern of participation shows that they had rich opportunities to move within the same managerial level as well as upwards to higher positions. These learning and career trajectories were thus gendered in terms of different outcomes and experiences for women and men within the company.

The two learning environments were shaped by how the gender order operated in the company. It predominantly constituted an expansive learning environment for male managers whereas it restricted the female managers' learning opportunities and their individual careers. The gender order that we are referring to here pertained to the patterns of male hierarchical dominance in managerial positions in the company. Gender itself could in that sense actually be interpreted as a barrier for female managers' learning as well as in their reaching and retaining management positions. Hence gender became a facilitator or a barrier that was experienced in parallel as expansive or restrictive among female and male managers. These

findings are, however, not surprising from a gender point of view. Collinson and Hearn (1994; see also Wahl, 1995; Wajcman, 1998) argue that the preservation of male dominance is connected to the strong male image that surrounds management, to the traditional male dominance on management positions, to the rhetoric surrounding leadership as well as to men's conceptions of women as managers. According to Tharenou, Latimer and Conroy (1994) structures of male-dominated managerial hierarchies decrease women's opportunities for career encouragement and development.

Based on the empirical findings of this study the conclusion is that the expansive-restrictive continuum framework, developed by Fuller and Unwin (2004), does not cover the extent to which gender operates as a condition for learning and career development, nor the extent to which the gender order influences the learning environment in which female and male managers engage. Currently in the expansive-restrictive model of learning environments gender aspects are not sufficiently considered. The model assumes gender neutrality, which means that the conditions of female and male managers are expected to be equal (see Mills and Tancred, 1992) but as we have shown different and contrasting learning environments are created for female and male managers as a consequence of how gender operates. A problem is, however, that gender differences are difficult to detect because these differences are often ascribed to the women themselves rather than to the environment in the organisation, in order to explain why women do not develop careers (Hearn and Piekkari, 2005). It is evident in this case that female and male managers' learning was part of doing gender in managerial work and could not be separated from these parallel learning environments, and especially not separated from the social-cultural context of this male-dominated company. To uncover the pervasiveness of gender in learning environments it is important to reveal gender-related barriers (or opportunities) and make them visible in everyday managerial work.

In conclusion, it is essential to consider incorporating gender dimensions in the expansive-restrictive continuum as a tool for theoretically and analytically investigating gendered learning environments and for understanding how gender operates among women and men at the same workplace. Therefore we suggest that the expansive-restrictive model of learning environments would benefit from incorporating gender dimensions in order to form a more sensitive model for analysing learning environments in workplaces.

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