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**It's all about relationships:
Women managing women and the impact
on their careers**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in Management

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Abstract

Women represent nearly half of New Zealand's workforce, making it likely that a woman will, at some stage during her working life, have a woman manager. She may also manage women employees. However, despite this likelihood, very little is known about the nature of women's hierarchical workplace relationships and even less about the impact these relationships have on women's careers. This research used narrative inquiry, relational cultural theory and the Kaleidoscope Career Model (KCM) to explore the relational experiences of 15 New Zealand women and the impact of these hierarchical relationships on career decisions. It was undertaken in two phases. Phase One used a combination of creative methods and semi-structured interviews to explore the participants' experiences. Phase Two brought the participants together in workshops to develop personal and organisational strategies aimed at strengthening workplace relationships.

Phase One found that most of the participants had experienced a negative relationship with a women manager and/or employee. Many of those participants subsequently left the organisation they worked for as a direct or indirect result of that relationship. Conversely, nearly half of the participants spoke of a positive relationship and while these were beneficial, they were not linked to a subsequent career decision. These findings suggest that negative relationships affect a woman's career decisions to a greater extent than positive relationships. The research also extends the KCM by adding the impact of women's hierarchical relationships to the career parameters of balance and challenge.

Phase Two delved further into these findings to determine that women have gender-based expectations of women managers, such as an expectation of a higher degree of

emotional understanding and support from a woman manager than would be expected from a man. In addition, while the participants look to women managers for some form of career support, most were not striving for senior management positions. They were instead motivated by a desire to make a difference and live a balanced life, with the demands of senior organisational roles seen as being in conflict with their relationships and family responsibilities. This raises a dilemma from a gender equity perspective, with research suggesting that a critical mass of women at the senior leadership level reduces the gender pay gap and increases the promotional opportunities of women at all organisational levels.

Phase Two identified a number of personal and organisational strategies to better support women's hierarchical relationships, as one way of enhancing women's careers. Taking a relational approach, an holistic gendered framework is proposed that situates relationships within the broader personal, organisational, societal and temporal context. Strategies are recommended to enhance personal and organisational relational awareness and acceptance, development of relational skills and support, as well as structural change to better align career paths to senior management with women's career aspirations and realities. In doing so, this thesis aims to progress the discussion on the ways in which organisations and women can better support each other to promote workplace gender equity.

Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated to all of those women from the past who have struggled, fought, and sacrificed so much for the rights that we take for granted today.

I feel extremely privileged to have had the opportunity to listen to and share the stories of the 15 women who participated in this research. This thesis may be my work, but it is based in their lived experiences. I have learned so much from them and feel very grateful for the generous contribution of their time and willingness to openly discuss their experiences with me.

I would also like to warmly thank my supervisors, Professor Sarah Leberman and Dr Margot Edwards who have inspired, challenged and supported me throughout my PhD journey. I have thoroughly enjoyed every aspect of the supervision process.

Finally, thank you to my wife, Caroline, for believing in me, supporting me, helping me to celebrate my successes, and most of all, reminding me to enjoy and treasure every moment of this amazing opportunity and journey.

Submission of a Thesis Based on Publications

This PhD was completed by articles for publication. It meets the requirements of Massey University that have been listed below.

Massey University allows the submission of theses based upon published research (or research accepted for publication), providing it conforms to the following:

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- The candidate is expected to have a working knowledge of all parts of the thesis, and to be able to answer questions about the thesis as a whole in the oral examination.
- The candidate is required to complete the form DRC 16 - 'Statement of Contribution to Doctoral Thesis Containing Publications' - for each article/paper included in the thesis.

Publications

As well as the articles contained in this thesis, I have co-authored the following refereed book chapters.

Hurst, J., & Leberman, S. (2015). New Zealand women in leadership: Opportunities and challenges. In S.R. Madsen, F.W. Ngunjiri, K.A. Longman & C. Cherrey (Eds.), *Women and leadership around the world* (pp. 207-226). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Inc.

Leberman, S., & Hurst, J. (in press). The connection between success, choice, and leadership for women. In S.R. Madsen (Ed.), *Handbook of research on gender and leadership*. Edward Elgar Publishers.

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