



Women Leaders in Hong Kong

Insight into their workplace experiences



Sponsored by



Shalini Mahtani
Community Business

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Foreword



BP is proud to sponsor this very important publication and to recognise the valuable contributions that many outstanding women have made to Hong Kong. Today women leaders make an ever-increasing and important contribution to the development of the world's economic, political and social life.

This publication is an important step towards enhancing our understanding of Women Leaders in Asia, particularly in Hong Kong.

At BP we are committed to diversity and inclusion (D&I). The world that we operate in is diverse and for us D&I is not merely about accepting differences but also about celebrating them. This celebration extends beyond our workplace and our marketplace and deep into all the communities in which we operate.

One core focus area for us in diversity is women in leadership. Women represent half the world's population and are increasingly our employees, consumers and investors. Yet disappointingly there are a significantly lower number of women than men in leadership positions. For any company, this represents missed opportunities. BP is dedicated to understanding the reasons why this is so and making necessary changes in our workplace so that we may provide an environment in which more women can equally excel.

This publication has been made possible through collaboration with Community Business, an NGO based in Hong Kong. I would like to personally congratulate the CEO/Founder of Community Business, Shalini Mahtani, and her team for this insightful and informative reference into the views of women leaders in Hong Kong.

I invite you to peruse this book and join me in celebrating the success of women in leadership in Hong Kong.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gary Dirks', written in a cursive style.

Dr. Gary W Dirks
Head of Region Asia, India Sub-Continent and Australasia

Author's Note



It has been a tremendous privilege for me to write this publication. The highlight has been learning about the lives of 22 women leaders in Hong Kong. Their personal stories have been inspiring to me, and in the process of meeting them and writing this I have learned much about their views on leadership, work and life. I value the opportunity to learn from these women and am extremely grateful to them for sharing their lives with us.

There are of course many more than 22 women leaders in Hong Kong. In fact, of all the top and senior management positions in Hong Kong, women in 2002 held 26% of them¹. Though apparently higher than in many countries², this rate is a far cry from women's share of overall employment of 45%³. In addition, certain industries have a smaller proportion of women compared to others. Women, for example, are less likely to be employed in industries that require scientific and technical knowledge.

Whilst this publication is a celebration of women leaders in Hong Kong, it is also a testament that much more needs to be done for women in the workplace. Leadership of course comes with many similar compromises regardless of gender. Yet as I believe you will see from our interviews with these women leaders, the compromises demanded of women and men who lead can be different. For companies that are serious about addressing gender diversity in the workplace, I hope this publication will take you one step closer to understanding the enormous challenges women in the workplace face.

This publication was written primarily for companies committed to addressing gender diversity in Hong Kong and as such, I have chosen to include those aspects of these women's lives that I think would be most useful to you. I have also tried to include those aspects that our future women leaders would find most interesting and valuable, and throughout the document you will see advice these women have to aspiring female leaders.

As the author, my greatest challenge in writing this publication has been to distil insights and common threads from 22 interviews into one document presented here. I have tried to give you an understanding about the women's lives, without divulging too much of what is personal to them. I have also tried to share with you underlying themes, whilst trying to preserve the diversity of views. After all, there is no such thing as a "woman-leader type", and there is a danger in stereotyping all women in leadership positions as being the same way as a few.

This publication explores both the professional and personal lives of the women leaders. To recognise the various forms personal relationships may take, we have used the term "life partner" and "partner" interchangeably when referring to women's long term relationships, whether married or not. When the women themselves have used the term "husband" we have kept this to reflect their voice. In many places, I have quoted an individual woman while keeping her identity anonymous, as I promised all of them. I have only included the women's names alongside quotes where they have given me express permission to do so.

As with any qualitative research, I have at times ultimately relied on my personal judgement to decide what to include. Although I believe I have remained neutral at all times, using the test questions of "What would companies find most useful?", the views presented here may have been influenced by my personal beliefs. Throughout the publication where I have an opinion I have aimed to declare it explicitly and at the outset I would like to make my beliefs known.

I believe that organisations in Hong Kong are doing shamefully little to address gender diversity in the workplace. I believe that unless employers understand the challenges that women face, there will never be full representation at the top of organisations. And for employers there is a large cost to this imbalance. Research has shown that companies with higher representation of women in senior management positions do better in terms of return on equity and total return to shareholders⁴. It is common sense to me that companies that have flexible work options in place are more likely to report lower staff turnover and greater staff loyalty, not to mention greater diversity in perspectives and more innovation. I believe that the best and the brightest of the younger generation of women increasingly are not going to tolerate the requirements of the current workplace, and those organisations that have family-friendly policies in place will be high in demand as employers of choice. Smart companies, of course, already understand this.

This publication is, to the best of my knowledge, the first of its kind in Hong Kong and was made possible through sponsorship from BP, to whom I am truly grateful. I would like to commend BP for taking a leadership role in enhancing understanding about gender diversity in Hong Kong. This publication is a small but significant step towards greater understanding of women in the workplace in Asia. I would also like to thank my team, who have worked with me to conduct research, attend interviews, transcribe interview notes and deal with all administration necessary with a publication of this nature. Thank you to Zoe Goldblum, Yolanda Ho, Janet Salaff, Ravina Shamdasani, Teresa Tam and Carmen Wong. I would also like to thank my editor Brian Schroeder. A sincere thanks most of all to the 22 women leaders we interviewed – without whom this publication would not have been possible.

I hope you find this publication informative and thought provoking.



Shalini Mahtani
Chief Executive Officer, Community Business

- 1 "Survey on the Extent and Level of Positions taken up by Women in the Private and Non-governmental Sectors in Hong Kong". November 2002. Women's Commission. <http://www.women.gov.hk/eng/research/research.html>. 3 January 2005.
- 2 *Ibid.* "According to ILO data, about a quarter (22%) of the top positions are taken up by the working women in Hong Kong in 1999, and the ratio lags behind women's share of the overall employment of 42% in that year. That said, the position of Hong Kong is found to be average and similar to that of the Singaporeans, Australians and the Scandinavians."
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 "The Bottom Line – Connecting Corporate Performance and Gender Diversity". Catalyst. http://www.catalystwomen.org/knowledge/titles/title.php?page=lead_finperf_04. 3 January 2005.

Executive Summary

We interviewed 22 women leaders for this publication. They are mainly aged between 41 and 55 years old, and come from a variety of backgrounds. As children most of them took on the role of eldest daughter in their families, and their mothers and extracurricular activities at school played large roles in their development.

Several factors influence these women's decisions about their career paths. For almost all the women leaders the greatest factors affecting their career paths have been the need to be intellectually challenged and the ability to make a difference in people's lives. For those with children, Hong Kong's access to affordable, reliable childcare is a major factor that contributes to their satisfaction working in Hong Kong. Most women interviewed have never had a career plan, and the majority of them have had male mentors.

Most of the women leaders believe that leadership is primarily about the ability to inspire and lead others. However, when asked whether they were themselves leaders, most women hesitated, being uncomfortable with the term "leader". Although most of the women said differences between leadership styles are not gender specific, a key difference identified between women's and men's leadership styles was women's stronger focus on people and interaction.

The women leaders generally believe Hong Kong is a good place for women to work. However a "glass ceiling" exists because of a fundamental belief in Hong Kong that women – even those in leadership – are the primary caregivers at home. Women of childbearing age thus have to work extra hard to prove their work commitment. A few women complained about the male-oriented workplace culture, which was nearly impossible to penetrate and posed a barrier to development. For those women perceived to be Asian ethnic minorities, there was "double discrimination" in being female and a minority.

Many women felt they had made compromises to be leaders. For most this was time-related and had to do with lack of time for people close to them, and for tending to their own personal health. A few mothers said that this lack of time meant that women did not tend to have time for anything other than work or family, and a resulting lack of time for networking limited their career growth. Most mothers also expressed feelings of guilt about giving up time with their children to progress in their careers. Although the women interviewed believe a business case exists for family-friendly workplace initiatives, only six of the women interviewed said their organisations have such initiatives.

Overall, women leaders generally believe that Hong Kong is a good place for women to work, and organisations should continue to build on their success factors. There is however much room for improvement, and moving forward, organisations should consider engaging with their employees, both women and men, to think through what factors highlighted here may be relevant to their workplace and address these. The ideal workplace is one that not only accepts differences but celebrates them.

Methodology

This section describes the methodology used to select, interview, and follow up with women leaders included in this publication.

Selection

Our aim was to have between 20 and 25 women leaders featured in this publication. We started with a master list of women leaders that included over 100 women across Hong Kong. This list was compiled by four researchers, and it included women who are leaders in their field, regardless of whether they have a high public profile. The names came from sources such as newspapers, websites, and through personal and professional contacts. We sent 52 invitations out and our sole criteria for selection was diversity in sector, industry, size of organisation, organisational culture (local or international), ethnicity and age.

From the invitations we sent out, we received 22 positive responses that led to interviews. There were a handful of women who would have participated but said that they could not spare the time to be interviewed.

Interviews and follow-up

There were 21 face-to-face interviews conducted, each approximately 90 minutes long. One interviewee, because of a hearing impairment, preferred for us to email her questions to which she responded by email. All the interviewees were asked the same questions and a full list of interview questions can be seen in the Appendix.

In 19 of the face-to-face interviews there were two interviewers. In two interviews there was only one. To maintain continuity I personally was one of the two interviewers for 19 of the 21 interviews.

All the face-to-face interviews were recorded to help us in transcribing interview notes. After each interview the interview was listened to and responses to individual questions were transcribed.

After we had written up all 21 face-to-face interviews and received the woman leader's response from the interview conducted through email, we grouped all the responses for each question. This gave me the starting point for this publication. This publication is based solely on information we received from these 22 women in the interviews. It should be noted that all but one woman gave us information pertaining to their personal lives.

After the publication was written and edited, I went back to each woman and asked for approval on attribution of quotes and reference to her name.

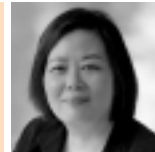
Women Leaders Interviewed



Title: Ms
Name: Adrielle Panares
Position: Director of Development, Migrant Worker Programme
Organisation: International Social Service Hong Kong Branch
Basis for invitation/selection: Adrielle is an advocate for minorities and migrant workers in Hong Kong, and the first and only Filipino national to receive a Grand Bauhinia Medal from the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government. Adrielle's efforts enabled many Vietnamese child-refugees to go to school in Hong Kong while awaiting emigration and repatriation.



Title: Mrs
Name: Alexa Lam
Position: Member of the Commission and Executive Director
Organisation: Securities and Futures Commission
Basis for invitation/selection: A former and successful solicitor, Alexa is currently one of five executive directors of the Securities and Futures Commission. She is the only female executive director.



Title: Ms
Name: Anna Wu
Position: Advisor to the Law School
Organisation: Shantou University
Basis for invitation/selection: Anna was instrumental as a lawyer-turned-legislator in bringing anti-discrimination laws to Hong Kong and as a chairperson of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) in making the body a stronger force for human rights. During her time at the EOC, Anna successfully took the government to court over a discriminatory school-place allocation system that favoured boys over girls.



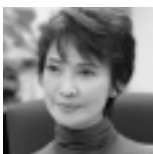
Title: The Hon
Name: Audrey Eu
Position: Legislative Council Member
Organisation: Legislative Council HKSAR
Basis for invitation/selection: Audrey is one of the most popular members of Hong Kong's legislature, the Legislative Council (Legco), and a successful barrister and former Bar Association head. She is an advocate for democracy in Hong Kong as part of the Article 45 Concern Group of prominent lawyers advocating universal suffrage.



Title: Ms
Name: Christine Fang
Position: Chief Executive
Organisation: The Hong Kong Council of Social Service
Basis for invitation/selection: Christine is a qualified social worker and has a long history in civil society in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Council of Social Service serves over 300 welfare charities in Hong Kong. Christine was also formerly secretary general for the Hong Kong Red Cross.



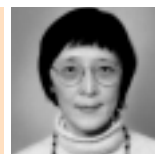
Title: Ms
Name: Christine Loh
Position: Chief Executive Officer
Organisation: Civic Exchange
Basis for invitation/selection: As a legislator, Christine successfully and in the face of heavy resistance championed the cause of equal rights for indigenous village women in the New Territories to own land. Christine spearheaded with Anna Wu the drive for anti-discrimination laws in Hong Kong. During her time in Legco she was Hong Kong's most popular politician, and she remains an influential thinker on public policy issues.



Title: Dr
Name: Siao Fong-fong, MBE
Position: Chairperson
Organisation: End Child Sexual Abuse Foundation
Basis for invitation/selection: Siao Fong-fong is a household name. She started her career at the age of six as a famous child actress in Hong Kong. Fong-fong is also a trained child psychologist.



Title: Ms
Name: Jan de Silva
Position: Chief Executive Officer
Organisation: Sun Life Financial (Hong Kong) Limited
Basis for invitation/selection: The insurance industry is male dominated and Jan has risen to the top of it. Jan is very involved with the American and Canadian Chambers of Commerce and with bringing the Women of Influence Awards to Hong Kong. She is originally from Canada.



Title: Dr
Name: Jean Woo
Position: Chair Professor of Medicine
Organisation: The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Basis for invitation/selection: A qualified medical doctor, Jean holds countless positions in academia and in hospitals in Hong Kong. She has spoken at nearly 300 international meetings, contributed to close to 500 publications and obtained dozens of prestigious research grants for her work. She has been a leader as a teacher, manager, and intellectual.



Title: Dr
Name: Karen Lam Siu-ling
Position: Chair Professor & Deputy Head in Medicine and Chief of Division of Endocrinology
Organisation: University of Hong Kong
Basis for invitation/selection: Academia in general but the field of medicine in particular does not see too many women at the top in Hong Kong. Karen is one of a few. She has done extensive medical research, represented Hong Kong at countless international conferences and holds leadership positions as a professor and doctor.



Title: Dr
Name: Lee Lai-shan
Position: Windsurfer
Organisation: Windsurfing Association of Hong Kong
Basis for invitation/selection: Lee Lai-shan is fondly known as "San-san" and as Hong Kong's "Golden Girl". As a windsurfer she became Hong Kong's first-ever Olympic gold medallist in 1996, and is to date the only one. She has been an inspiration to many an aspiring young athlete in a city not famed for its success in sport.

Leaders interviewed are shown alphabetically by first name.



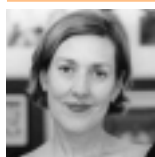
Title: Ms
Name: Lilian Fandriana
Position: Vice President, Finance, Asia Pacific
Organisation: BP Asia Limited
Basis for invitation/selection: That Lilian has made it to the top of an industry leader is a testament to her confidence and competence. She began as an engineer and has spent her entire career in the traditionally male-dominated oil and gas industry. She is one of but a few women and Asians at her level.



Title: Ms
Name: Margaret Leung
Position: Global Co-Head Commercial Banking
Organisation: The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Limited
Basis for invitation/selection: The banking industry tends to be male-dominated at senior levels, and Margaret is amongst the small handful of women closest to the top. Margaret is very involved in a number of non-profit organisations in a personal capacity.



Title: Dr
Name: Maria Lee Tseng Chiu-kwan
Position: Chairman
Organisation: GroupNet Holdings Ltd
Basis for invitation/selection: Founder and former owner of "Maria's Bakery", the first Hong Kong chain bakery-stores, Maria invented the "cake coupons" which are now very much a part of Hong Kong life. Maria's bakery suffered financial difficulties and closed down. She has since set up numerous other businesses.



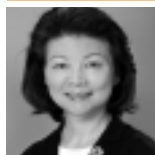
Title: Ms
Name: Michelle Garnaut
Position: Managing Director
Organisation: M Restaurant Group Inc
Basis for invitation/selection: Originally from Australia, Michelle started off waiting tables at 14 before embarking on a culinary career. She now owns two infamous restaurants, "M at the Fringe" in Hong Kong and "M on the Bund" in Shanghai. Michelle is also deeply involved in social and community work in Hong Kong.



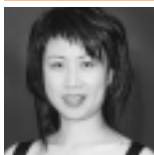
Title: Ms
Name: Nancy Ku
Position: Managing Director, Asia Pacific GE Equity
Organisation: GE Commercial Finance
Basis for invitation/selection: Nancy is at the top of a ladder few women have climbed. Private equity remains very much an old boys' network and Nancy has been actively working with women at GE to put female staff on the leadership track.



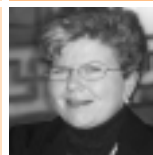
Title: Ms
Name: Shelley Lee, JP
Position: Permanent Secretary for Home Affairs
Organisation: HKSAR Government
Basis for invitation/selection: Shelley has been a career civil servant, having spent more than 33 years in government. She has risen to the rank of permanent secretary of a bureau with one of the most diverse portfolios, overseeing everything from arts and culture to building management as well as human rights and equal opportunities.



Title: The Hon Mrs
Name: Sophie Leung
Position: Councillor of Legislative Council HKSAR; Founder and Chairman of Young Entrepreneurs Development Council; Chairperson of Women's Commission.
Basis for invitation/selection: Sophie chairs the Women's Commission in Hong Kong and is involved with many civil society causes. She is also a director of a very successful garment manufacturing business. Sophie is a Legco member for the textiles and garment functional constituency, as well as founder and chairman of the Young Entrepreneurs Development Council.



Title: Mrs
Name: Sylvia Chung Chiu
Position: General Manager
Organisation: Hotel Miramar Hong Kong
Basis for invitation/selection: Sylvia is one of less than a handful of female hotel general managers in Hong Kong. She is also president of the Women Executives Club of the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce.



Title: Ms
Name: Tara Boyce-Hofmann
Position: Executive Director
Organisation: AFS Intercultural Exchanges Ltd
Basis for invitation/selection: Originally from the United States, for the last 18 years Tara has worked with AFS, an international non-profit organisation. She has travelled extensively with her job, and is committed to furthering the professionalism of the non-profit industry in Hong Kong.



Title: Dr
Name: Winnie Tang
Position: Chief Executive Officer
Organisation: ESRI China (Hong Kong) Limited
Basis for invitation/selection: Winnie won the Young Achiever of the Year Award at the Women of Influence awards ceremony in 2004 in recognition of her success as an entrepreneur, an advocate, and a mentor, as well as for her community involvement. Not only is Winnie a leader in the IT industry in Asia – a traditionally "male" industry – she also makes time to work with the Girl Guides and lecture at several universities in Hong Kong and the region.



Title: Ms
Name: Xu Xi
Position: Writer
Organisation: Mongrel International Inc
Basis for invitation/selection: Xi is a famous Hong Kong writer who writes extensively about women and family – both fiction and non-fiction. Xi teaches in the Masters of Fine Arts programme at Vermont College, Montpelier, USA. She is based in Hong Kong, the USA and New Zealand.

Personal Lives

Personal background

To begin to understand these women leaders' experiences it is helpful to have some background information about them. We give you their basic profile including their age, where they grew up and, how many of them were effectively the eldest daughter in their family. We then explore the role of men and women in their families, as well as their school and university lives.

Age

The average age of the women was 49 years old, and most women we interviewed ranged between 41 and 55 years old. The youngest woman leader was 34 years old and the oldest one was 75 years old. This table shows how many women are in each age bracket:

| Age at 31 December 2004 | 31-35 | 36-40 | 41-45 | 46-50 | 51-55 | 56-60 | 60+ |
|----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|
| Number of women | 1 | 1 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 1 |

Places of childhood

Most women we interviewed grew up in Hong Kong. One each grew up in the Philippines, Indonesia, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia and the USA. One woman spent a significant amount of time in Macau, and two women spent some of their time growing up in mainland China.

Financial situation of their families

Six out of the 22 women mentioned that there was financial hardship in their families when they were growing up. Many of the others shared that they grew up in families that enjoyed some financial comfort.

The eldest daughter

Family structure probably shaped the women's leadership qualities from a very young age. Thirteen out of the 22 women mentioned that they are either the eldest daughter in their families or an only child. In addition, one woman who was not actually the eldest daughter claimed that she was the child who took responsibility of household matters when her parents were not in town, effectively taking the role of the eldest daughter. For three of these women, their fathers died when they were very young. This forced them to support their family at a young age. One of these women started to work as a young child, and another quit secondary school to help her mother out. The third woman decided to adjust her educational plans so the money saved could help her younger siblings.



Advice to future women leaders

Audrey Eu

“Believe in yourself. [As a Taiwanese Monk said], The future is dreaming, the past is an irrelevant thought. Hold onto your love for the present, do your part and never look down upon yourself because there is no limit to the possibilities of man.”

Key family role-models

Significant role models for the women interviewed included mothers, aunts, and grandmothers. To a lesser extent fathers were also role models.

Mothers, aunts and grandmothers

As might be expected, almost all the women talked about their mothers during the course of the interview. For those that mentioned their mothers, it was almost always positively. Their mothers were depicted as strong and courageous women, whether they worked for an income or whether they were care-givers at home. Many of them said their mother was their source of unconditional love and as a role model – someone they wanted to emulate.

For most of the leaders who had working mothers, there seemed to be admiration for their mother. For one woman, her mother's choosing to go back to work while she and her siblings were still very young left a deep impression on her about women exercising their wants. Mothers who were solely caregivers were no less admired. Many of these mothers instilled values in their daughters that have had an impact on their lives. For one, her mother used to say that she thought girls were better than boys. For another, her mother's words have been a guiding force to serve those in need and inspired her to start her own business:

A person comes to the world...you should not go just like a blank piece, you have to leave some footprints, you have to do something.

Two women mentioned their grandmothers during the course of the interview. These grandmothers too were depicted as a source of inspiration. For one woman her grandmothers taught her about how men and women interrelate, which has shaped her views about gender equality:

Beautiful women were very much of what I saw when I was young...beautiful women but long suffering women... I observed that the older women [grandmothers] were there to serve the grandfathers at their every whim.

Several women also talked about their aunts, who were portrayed as strong and successful women. Some of these aunts also helped their families in times of need.



Advice to future women leaders

Michelle Garnaut

“Work out what your principles are and you have to stick by them, and you have to be fair...in business you have to share. If there is success, you have to share it, you have to be strong and you have to take responsibility. When the sh*t hits the fan you have to deal with it...”

Fathers

During the interviews most women talked about their mothers much more than their fathers. The women who did mention their fathers said they had taught them about hard work and work principles. As one leader put it, her father taught her an important lesson:

...You can change any situation around ...everything can be made a success if you put your mind to it...no job is too big or small.

Only one woman mentioned an uncle and none mentioned a grandfather.

Education

School experiences of the women leaders interviewed showed several commonalities. These included attending all-girl schools, being high-performing, competitive students, participating in extracurricular activities, and having at least some undergraduate education.

All-girl schools

The benefits of attending an all-girl school are often debated in educational circles today. Interestingly at least half of the women went to all-girl schools. Many of the interviewees believed that this contributed to their success, because they were not distracted by boys and were able to concentrate on their studies.

High-performing, competitive students

Many though not all women leaders interviewed outperformed academically. Amongst those that did outperform, several excelled at subjects such as maths and sciences, traditionally perceived to be "male" subjects. The competitive spirit was rife amongst several of these women. Jean Woo left Hong Kong at age 11 and did her secondary schooling in UK, and said Hong Kong students had a competitive advantage over other students:

We always had this sense that we had to do very well [at school]. I think everyone who comes from Hong Kong has that ingrained into your brain. You are naturally competitive in any situation. Because we learned Chinese, I think we developed a photographic memory pretty well, and that was a great advantage because I could memorise all the notes and during exams, I could reproduce huge chunks. They were completely amazed.

Parents also typically played a big part in fuelling competition, encouraging their children to outperform fellow siblings and classmates.



Advice to future women leaders

Sylvia Chung Chiu

“During your school time, take responsibility in school activities and participate in school committees, because when you join these kind of activities you will develop your leadership skills.”

Extracurricular activities and leadership roles

Extracurricular activities were mentioned by many women as being integral to their school lives, and were important in developing leadership qualities. For Lilian Fandriana, from the age of 11 her extracurricular activities consisted of managing non-performing loans in one of her father's businesses. School for her was easy compared to this. Other women talked about their leadership positions at school as head girls, school prefects and sports team captains.

Undergraduate degrees

Almost all of the women interviewed received a bachelor's degree. For two of our women leaders, they had planned to take just a year out after secondary school and did not go on to get their undergraduate degree. For many with Chinese parents, there was a strong preference that their children studied subjects that would give them a "real profession", and that was more often than not medicine. Many of our women did not know what to study at university and chose their default option, which in three cases was to read law.

Personal relationships

The basic facts below describe the women's personal relationships, based on what they shared in the interviews:

- Twenty women are currently in a long-term relationship, either heterosexual or homosexual. Two are single.
- Fourteen of our women leaders are currently married. One is widowed.
- Four of our women leaders have been divorced. Two are remarried, one has a long-term partner and one is currently single.

Almost all of them mentioned that their life partners also have demanding careers. However, many of their life partners either have more regular work hours or have more flexibility and may work from home.

Children

The basic facts below describe the women's roles in terms of children, based on what they shared in the interviews:

- Sixteen women have children. Most of these children are teenagers or older, and many of those in school are in boarding school. Two women, both in their 40s, have young children. The youngest child is less than 6 months old.
- Six women do not have children. One woman wants to have children but is waiting for the right time in her career. One woman has never wanted children, and another said that this lifetime is not meant to be about motherhood for her, and the last woman would give us no personal details. Two women, both in their 40s, wish they had had children.
- One woman mentioned that she is a grandmother.

Other care responsibilities

None of our women leaders said that they are the primary caregivers to their parents or life partner's parents. For many of them their siblings or life partner's siblings play that role. Most of the women with parents in Hong Kong make time to see their parents over the weekends, with one woman seeing her parents two to three times a week for dinner. For those women with parents outside of Hong Kong, living away from parents has become a greater emotional strain as their parents get older.

Jobs and Positions

This section explores what factors these women considered as they changed jobs or decided to stay in jobs. In addition, it explores other factors that may have assisted them in their careers such as a career plan, job mentors, personal contacts and networks, as well as personal traits.

Changing and staying in jobs

Many of the women leaders have worked in the same organisations for years. Examples include Shelley Lee from government, Margaret Leung from the private sector, Jean Woo from academia and Tara Boyce-Hofmann from civil society, who have all been with their current employers for 33, 26, 19 and 18 years respectively. Others have changed firms within the same industry while others have changed industry entirely.

What is interesting to note is that although these women leaders come from different industries, they have considered similar factors when deciding to stay in or change jobs. I explore these factors and discuss them in order of priority, with the factor mentioned most frequently first.

Interesting, challenging and satisfying jobs

Most important to almost all the women was that their jobs remained interesting, challenging and satisfying. Many of their views are summed up by Jan de Silva who said:

For me personally, the most dangerous place to be is in a maintaining job. I like getting in, trying something new – if there is a problem fixing it – and once the fix is done and there is nothing happening to change the scope or the learning aspect of the job – I really need something else.

Not unexpectedly, when these leaders failed to be satisfied by what they were doing, it was time to move on. For some this meant changing companies, for others industries. Sylvia Chung Chiu is one example of a person who chose to make a horizontal career move at one point because she felt it would be more satisfying:

If you work in a professional firm for a certain period, you have to decide if you want to go up vertical or you want to broaden your perspective. At a certain period you have to decide. Because of my character I decided to go to a commercial firm because there were lots more opportunities ... I wanted to be frontline at the end of the day – I wanted to be in business.



Advice to future women leaders

Anna Wu

“If you don’t like a job – don’t do it!”

The ability to make a difference for people

Several of our women said the ability to make an impact on people's lives was very important. All the women who mentioned this are today in positions where there can transform society through their work. Christine Loh moved from the private sector to the Legislative Council (Legco), Hong Kong's legislative body, because of the opportunity to affect the lives of Hong Kong people, something she felt no private sector job could offer:

I could do something that applied to seven million people, that no business project can do ... I thought, "Wow, you can actually change the law and this applies to everybody." There is no comparable experience in the private sector.

Similarly, Anna Wu, initially unsure about practicing law, stayed in it because she realised that she was "... dealing with real people who depended on me...this had a direct impact on my life". Many of the women who have a desire to make a positive impact on others are driven more by what contribution they can make to the community rather than self interest. Sophie Leung echoed this:

I always ask, "What can I bring to this offer?" This is different from asking what you can get out of it.

Alignment to personal values

For some women, their work is aligned with what they stand for as a person. Xu Xi, for example, said this about her writing:

It's the only thing I know is truly me.

For Christine Fang, serving the community through social welfare is in sync with her religious beliefs of service to all those in need:

I am a Catholic...going through [the means of] social work allows me to appreciate life more and human beings more.

Similarly for Audrey Eu, one of the reasons why she chose to run again for a seat in Legco in 2004 was because she supports democracy for Hong Kong, and wanted the democrats to be united in their efforts for democracy.



Advice to future women leaders

Margaret Leung

"They have to aim high and they have to be themselves. In whatever they do, they have to really believe that this is what they should be doing and that they are capable of doing it. There is no point in pretending that they are somebody else or to put up a show because this will not be sustainable. They should properly equip and develop themselves in order to deliver what is expected from them or what they expect from themselves."

Childcare

For women leaders who have children, childcare is a major factor affecting work choices. Two women from Hong Kong were working overseas before, but returned to work here primarily because of the availability of reliable and affordable childcare. Such help might consist of domestic help, grandparents, or both. Similarly, two expatriate women currently working who have young children said access to good domestic help makes Hong Kong an attractive place for working mothers.

Political uncertainty and 1997

Hong Kong's transition of sovereignty from Britain to China caused job movement for some women. For two women, this involved them giving up their jobs in Hong Kong and seeking postings with the same firm abroad, with the aim of obtaining residency or citizenship of another country.

Reaching the top

Achieving the top position in their organisations affected women's desire to stay in or move out of an existing position. Four women leaders had reached the top of their organisations and made a decision to leave to pursue other jobs. Three women working with multinational organisations had reached the top of their organisations and were given an offer to relocate to the head office abroad, which they all turned down. Two of the three had a husband's career to consider as well as children, and therefore decided to leave their employers and look for other local opportunities.

Financial rewards

Money was cited by four women as a factor for either staying in or changing jobs. For one professional woman, she judges herself by what she earns and has stayed in her job for many years as a result:

I enjoy what I do, I make good money. You look at the bankbook and you know what you achieved.

For one woman earning a high income was paramount, as she wanted to save so she could start her own business – something she did eventually do.

International exposure and travel

Two expatriate women requested international exposure with their organisations, and Lee Lai-shan, as a professional windsurfer, said that one of the aspects of her work she most enjoys is the opportunity to travel. However another woman turned down a job offer in a large multinational organisation because it required her to travel regularly, and although she does not have demanding child care responsibilities, she simply did not want the hassle and there were numerous other jobs on offer to her.

Furthermore, for a few women the opportunity to come to or return to Hong Kong was appealing because Hong Kong was still new territory in certain fields and therefore a place to "make your mark".



Advice to future women leaders

Jan de Silva

"Number one – to believe in themselves and number two – to be less focused on the career title and more focused on the experience...The final thing is – know yourself. If the work environment and corporate culture that you are in are not a good fit – find something that fits."

Recognition and encouragement

For a couple of women, receiving recognition and encouragement has been crucial to their career direction. For Maria Lee, who started off as a volunteer teaching women how to bake at the YWCA, encouragement from her students was the reason why she opened her first cake shops. Another woman from the private sector who has been an employee at the same firm for many years echoed the need for encouragement and praise:

If I did not get all the recognition or encouragement or good appraisals and comments from my seniors and peers, I doubt I would have stayed this long...

Culture of the company

Two women mentioned company culture as a motivating factor for shaping their career. For one woman the culture of her company has been one of the greatest motivators for staying on, despite countless and continuous job offers:

People say there is a company culture, it is difficult to describe what exactly it is. If you really ask me, it's a lot about team spirit and collective management. Nobody wants to outshine each other. You don't have to be aware of who is shooting behind your back every day...

Other sections in this publication mention company culture as an opportunity and barrier for some women's career progress (see pages 26 to 29). Female leaders' experience of corporate culture within organisations definitely affects their desire to stay or go.

Career plans

In addition to motivation for job movement, interviews explored career plans. No woman responded that she had a clear career plan for herself. This may be due to women leaders or leaders in general making opportunities happen, or at a minimum recognising and seizing opportunities that come their way.

A few women said they knew they had an overall work goal or a general direction, with one saying, "I planned to create an impact", and another saying, "I did not want to do something without meaning", but there was no clear step-by-step action plan on how to get there. One woman said she did have a plan, but only for the next step in her career, and two entrepreneurs had a financial plan for their businesses.

Most women claimed that opportunities had always fallen in their lap and the difficulty lay in the decision-making. As such, most of their job changes were not premeditated and many of them attributed their opportunities to luck. For most of our women, in any position they took on they were committed to



Advice to future women leaders

Lee Lai-shan

"As women we face quite a bit of difficulties and if you want to be successful in your field, the most important thing is to be patient, set your own goals. During the path to success you will face a lot of difficulties but try to remain positive and I'm sure you will be successful."

excelling in it. A few of them claimed they had “little ambition” and had never aspired to be a leader. This raises interesting questions about leadership, as some people might think that at these leaders’ levels, individuals must want to lead, but this is apparently not always the case.

Job mentors

Most of the leaders – 14 of 22 – had a mentor who helped them think through job and career issues. Most mentors were men and were former bosses. These men gave them an opportunity to take responsibility or inspired them to give others responsibility in their lives. As one woman said about her mentor:

He had confidence in me that I could carry the can. He left in me the firm belief that we need to give people the opportunity to try something on their own. Once he saw I could do the job he said, “Fine, you can do that.”

For Shelley Lee, her first job mentor was the then governor of Hong Kong, who inspired her with his leadership qualities and made her believe in the value of leadership:

With a strong leader, you can actually make things happen.

Four women mentioned that they had former female bosses that were their mentors. One woman, who had both a female and male mentor, said she approached him for purely professional advice and her for a personal and professional angle. This giving of personal advice was not uncommon amongst the job mentors mentioned, and Siao Fong-fong is one example of this:

In my acting career my English tutor was very helpful. He tried to make me think for myself... But above all, my English tutor taught me to learn about life. He brought me to meet all kinds of people that an actress in those days would never have had the chance to meet. Today he is still my “mentor”.

Many of our leaders also consider their husbands as job mentors, even though they may not have industry-specific knowledge. Other job mentors included a father, an uncle, a grandmother, or friends.

Of those eight women leaders who did not have mentors, two said they wish they had had one to impart guidance on career paths and the best way to achieve success. To sum up what one of these women said:

Had I had someone to coach me, a coach – they would have taught me how to channel my energy and be most efficient [in my career].



Advice to future women leaders

Lilian Fandriana

“You need a good assessment of yourself, what you’re good at, what you’re not...you need to have an inventory of your skills, then do what it takes to cover the holes...work smart, get a mentor, network and be yourself...I think it is tough if you don’t know yourself...it’s okay to have people open up doors for you...”

Contacts and personal networks

No interview question specifically asked about personal contacts and networks, but a few women mentioned that they had, through personal contacts, attained some of their work positions. For the most part, as mentioned earlier in relation to career plans, these were not jobs that these women planned to get but rather came across. These contacts included former colleagues and university professors, a family member, and a family friend. For one woman her personal contacts from previous jobs are today her customers, and she views them as a tremendous asset.

Personal traits

These women identified several positive personal traits that have been useful to them in their roles as leaders.

The most common personal trait mentioned was **perfectionism**. This was something we heard from almost all the women. The views of Lee Lai-shan were echoed by many others:

I want to do 100%...that's made me successful in sports.

For many of these women, being a perfectionist has meant that they strive to achieve much more than what is expected from them, and as Christine Fang said:

I am a perfectionist – in all positions I strive to do my best. Eventually you think, not just what I can do in this position but [what I can do] to advance the mission of the whole organisation.

Perhaps the next most commonly raised trait was that of **knowing one's strengths and weaknesses**. For many of these women, this is crucial to their success as they are able to recruit staff in areas where they lack particular skills and experiences.

According to our women, there were many other character traits that have assisted them. **Passion and energy** have given some of them the strength to continuously excel – as one woman put it she is “on fire” right now and when that fire runs out, it will be time to quit and move on to new challenges. Another woman leader, Christine Loh, mentions a “tremendous energy” that can be a source of **self confidence**:

I always believe I can do it. If I believe I can do it, I know I can do it and I will show you I can do it.

Not surprisingly almost all the women said they are **hardworking** and that the ability to **multitask**, whether on different projects or work and family life, has been a major contributing factor to their success. Being **courageous** has helped some of these women and as one woman said, even when the odds are clearly



Advice to future women leaders

Winnie Tang

“You need to be continuously learning, have vision, have persistence, and be hardworking.”

stacked against her, she is always prepared to voice her opinion and “go there first and take calculated risks”. Across the board women said they are **diplomatic, sensitive to others’ feelings, sincere and committed and they get along with all types of people**.

For others their **overseas work experience** has been invaluable. For all of them who mentioned it, this time away from their home country has given them a **broader perspective**. For Alexa Lam, she learned to speak out for herself:

In the USA for instance, you have to pull your weight and you have to speak up. ...if your boss did not give you a chance – you did it. The way to encourage young people and to bring them up so that they come of age – is to encourage them to speak up and you benefit too [as the boss]. ...This is also a function of [you as the boss] having confidence in yourself.

Interestingly, a few women mentioned that **managing people** was something they were good at because they come from **big families**. As one woman said:

I am an organisation person. I am from a big family. I have strong organisation ownership and sense of belonging. I can easily get attached to the organisation I work with and the people I work with.

Sometimes personality traits were **career-specific**. For example for Audrey Eu the “ability to break things down to its simplest, common-sense form to persuade people” is an important characteristic to succeed as a barrister and in politics. For Xu Xi, as a writer she reads extensively and is extremely curious about people’s lives, which is helpful to her:

I love to read and am genuinely curious about people. I am nosy.

Not surprisingly many of these same positive traits were also the negative traits of the women leaders. Being a perfectionist often meant that they were **too hard on themselves and on others** that work with them.

Many women mentioned that they are **too emotional** and one woman mentioned that she cries too much. A few mentioned that their **inability to say “no”** is a great failure on their part – often having far too much on their plate at any given time. Two women mentioned their **weak administrative skills** as a weakness they have.

While some people might assume that women leaders would be able to let their ability rather than looks speak for them, this was not true for all. One woman mentioned her **physical appearance** as a negative trait.



Advice to future women leaders

Maria Lee

“You have to watch people carefully and don’t trust them too much. Even though you think they are very trustworthy, you still have to beware. Secondly...you can direct other people to do [things] for you; you can instruct them how to do it for you. You don’t involve too much [of your own] time in it...but you have to watch and make sure what is going on.”

Leadership

This section explores how these women define leadership, whether or not they think they are leaders, and when they realised that they had leadership potential.

Defining leadership

Amongst the women there was general agreement on the main components of leadership, with the most important component being leading a team.

A leader must inspire, lead and develop a team

The ability of a leader to inspire, lead and develop her people was probably the single most important component in leadership according to most of our women. Nancy Ku summed this up perfectly:

If you don't have followers, you don't have a leader.

Margaret Leung echoed this when she said that the crux of being a good leader is to bring people together to work for a common goal:

A leader should be someone that can motivate people, can drive people towards doing something that is worthwhile and can achieve results. A leader should be a magnet that can draw other good people around him or her and should be able to mobilise them towards a common goal.

Inspiring the team for many was, as put by Sylvia Chung Chiu, "not about sitting back and watching your teams do all the work", but also about leading by action and providing moral and resource support. Because the team is the essence of whether the job gets done right, several of our women would not hesitate to change the team if need be, and many of them said it was up to them to take responsibility for the actions of the team.

Leading a winning team is about getting the best from members on the team and for the organisation. This involves continuously developing talent within the team and giving individuals an opportunity to shine. Christine Fang homed in on the fact that developing talent is actually beneficial to the organisation:

What makes you a leader is there is somebody for you to lead and somebody for you to work with. So, to be able to identify and build people that you work with so what they contribute can be maximised is what makes you a leader...



Advice to future women leaders

Christine Loh

"Take it easy – this does not mean dropping everything. This comes from knowing who you are and knowing your capacities."

In contrast, according to one of our academics, this team perspective is less important in academia where success is judged by how many publications an academic produces and is not typically team-based.

According to the women leaders interviewed, the following components of leadership were roughly equal in importance.

A leader must be motivated by something greater than self-interest

Having a clear sense of direction and purpose was identified by many women as one component of leadership. This view is summed up well by Adrielle Panares who said:

A leader must have a vision, a strong commitment, be able to share that commitment and vision with others, be goal-oriented and not be motivated by self growth, but by something bigger than the self.

A leader may not be what one expects

The women leaders noted that leaders can defy expectations of what a leader is. For a long time, apparently in many organisations women noted that a great manager or a leading expert would be given the leadership position. However, many of these women mentioned that a good leader does not necessarily have to be a good manager or an expert in the field. As Jan de Silva said:

Leaders are not always the experts. It is learning how to help people who are experts respect you and want to follow the goals and objectives you have for the business, and still continue to do their best and build respect for you even though you are not the expert. I think historically, a lot of managers were promoted because they were the best “doers in something” as opposed to being the best person to put the resources together to achieve quantum growth and results.

Audrey Eu noted that leadership can take different forms:

Leaders don't have to be very great people like Mandela.

According to her just being able to influence one or two people itself constitutes a leader, referring to the example of Frodo, a character in the book and film “Lord of the Rings”, who as an unassuming regular person does great things by rallying his fellow travellers to achieve their goal. Similarly Christine Loh made the point that leadership may be time-specific:

I believe leadership is for the time and for the occasion.



Advice to future women leaders

Jean Woo

“Don't focus on becoming a leader – just focus on the job at hand. Choose a job that you are really interested in and committed to doing, not just for the sake of earning an income, and things will happen. Develop EQ (emotional intelligence) which is always very helpful.”

Leadership in multinational vs. local companies

One woman said her experience with multinationals and local companies has showed her that they view leadership differently. As a result the qualities required to lead in these organisations differ:

Chinese and local firms are more autocratic – though I don't think they would admit that. Sometimes in Hong Kong you have to realise [as a leader] that because things move so fast you have to take the approach that you have to give orders all the time rather than convince people... International firms use the approach of apparently being more democratic.

Viewing themselves as leaders

The majority of women seemed uncomfortable being asked the question of whether they saw themselves as leaders. They were for the most part all very humble, and only a few women said outright that they thought they were leaders. Most of the women do not think they are leaders. The most common answers were “No” or “I am not sure”, or they gave a conditional “Yes” such as “Yes, but not as perfect as I expect”, “Yes, I hope so”, or “Yes, but I never intended to lead.”

Interestingly, many women seemed to take issue with the actual term “leader”. One of the women leaders said she did not like the term and referred to herself as a pioneer instead. Another woman similarly said, “I would not say that I am a leader, but I make things happen.”

Although many women were uneasy with applying the term “leader” to themselves, almost all in contrast could readily identify with the term when asked about their leadership skills. Exactly why these women were uncomfortable with the term “leader” is beyond the scope of this publication. However it may be related to a general aversion to power and control mentioned when women discussed perceived differences between male and female leadership (see page 25).

Realising they had leadership potential

Despite not readily viewing themselves as leaders, most of the women on being asked when they realised they had leadership potential were able to point to displaying leadership skills at a young age. Some held leadership positions in school, while others more informally led their friends. For some of these women, they only realised they had these leadership qualities many years later when childhood friends mentioned to them that they had in fact been leaders from a young age.

A few of our women leaders realised they had leadership potential in the workplace. For one of our women, she realised when at the age of 20 she was put in charge of a department where many of her colleagues



Advice to future women leaders

Christine Fang

“Have trust in yourself – trust your sensitivity and your intuition. Back it up with hard work and receptiveness to take on good advice.”

were her mother's age. Another woman from a male-dominated field realised her leadership potential when she was asked to sit on a management team that comprised only men. For a third woman, it was when she was repeatedly being asked to take up head positions to troubleshoot various departments within her organisation.

Differences between women and men

The women interviewed perceived several differences between leadership and management styles of women and men. From the outset, I want to state clearly that most women were uncomfortable with potentially stereotyping "women's" and "men's" behaviour. Furthermore, they felt that differences between people are individual-specific rather than gender-specific, as not all women and not all men are the same. Having said that, many women had observed that there are differences between women and men in the workplace. These women were not criticising women or men, but merely pointing out their perceived differences. These differences include a stronger relational focus, experiencing emotions in the workplace, conforming, multitasking, dealing with power and control, and managing human resources.

A stronger relational focus

A few of the women leaders believe that women are generally more **sensitive to people's feelings** than men, and this was summarised by one woman who said:

A large part is [about] personality but definitely being a woman there is a difference. You are much more approachable, less threatening, more articulate and expressive, more ready to talk about people's feelings and your own feelings – more sensitive.

As a result of women being more sensitive, apparently women are more **conciliatory** than men are when they engage with others. One woman used the example of a man and a woman in a meeting and said that under the same circumstances men and women communicate entirely differently. According to her, a woman would ask a question – "Don't you think this is a good idea?" – even when she believes something is a good idea. A man in contrast would tend to declare his view outright with "Absolutely, this is a good idea." Because of this dynamic several of the women leaders believe men may sometimes be perceived as "hard negotiators" and "tough" compared to women.

Because some of the women leaders believe they are typically more sensitive than men, they feel they are seen as more **warm**. Consequently, in the workplace men are more inclined to confide in female colleagues about personal matters than they would with male colleagues. As one woman put it:

Women can talk about more personal things that are very much part of the human experience that men can't. A lot of men will talk with us. They will share with us about their hopes and dreams, problems with their families that they would never dream of [sharing] with another man...I ask questions of my staff that I think other men would not ask.

Because of women's general sensitivity towards others' feelings, one leader mentioned that women try and please everybody, and this means that it may take longer to **make decisions**. Another woman believes that in fact women are generally better at decision-making because they tend to have less pride:

Comparatively men have ego and pride – I am not saying that we don't have this ego – but women's ego is smaller than men's and because we don't have that ego, when we deal with people to solve problems it makes it easier. When men solve problems, it's not like us, we will deal with it in a way where we will find a way to please everybody.

Emotions in the workplace

Perhaps in line with this relational focus noted above, several women pointed out that they are more emotional compared to their male counterparts. One woman used an example to illustrate a situation where a male and a female might react somewhat differently. In her experience, if a man is giving a presentation to his colleagues and a fellow colleague criticises the man's presentation in front of the others, the man would generally not take this personally. A man would tend to still be able to look at his colleague in the eye and go out for a drink afterwards. A woman however would more likely take this to heart and would be hurt by her colleague.

Conforming vs. not conforming

There was a feeling amongst some women interviewed that women are more likely to be able to be themselves in the workplace, whereas men have to "conform" more to a workplace culture. This conforming for a few women had to do with going out and "having a beer", and they said it was acceptable for women to say "No", whereas a man had little choice. As one woman said:

I am allowed to be different. Many of my male counterparts who were different left the organisation. It's harder for them to be different – because they look the same...I knew that I would be tolerated for being different...

Women may thus sometimes enjoy an advantage in the workplace. However, as revealed when discussing opportunities and barriers for women in the next section (see pages 26 to 29), corporate culture does not always enable the women interviewed to choose when to conform.

Multitasking

Several of our women leaders believed that women can do many things at once, whereas a male colleague is less likely to be able to do so. One woman had an interesting take on this, saying that it is "nature" rather than "nurture" that may have influenced this:

Men don't have the ability to juggle many things at the same time. Men are very uni-dimensional, uni-focused. If they have a task they will take all their energy to focus on that issue – they cannot juggle different balls at the same time. I think it is because biologically women have had to do that, combine family with work and when you look after a family, you have to juggle many balls... And if you apply this to work, it works very well...sometimes working with male colleagues, it drives you mad because they are just stuck on one thing.

Another woman leader said that as a result of this general tendency of men to do one thing at one time, men tend to focus only on achieving their goal, whereas women focus on achieving the goal and more because they can. According to her, women are more likely to overachieve because they can multitask. She asked:

How often do you see men extend the scope of their work and overachieve?

For many of the women interviewed, multitasking was definitely a positive trait.

Power and control

There seemed to be a view amongst a few of our interviewees that women tend to be more uncomfortable with power than men, who in these women leaders' experiences are typically much more at ease with it. One woman said this of men and power:

Men tend to want to flaunt their position. They make it very obvious that they are the leader in any situation whether in the way they behave or the things they say... Women don't do that. Women are mostly happy to do the job and the relationship with people who work under them is more equal and more empowering... I am completely useless in a great place when people introduce me as the great leader, I say "Where, who?" – it does not feel right. Some men slot into it like a glove, and they do very well, they put on a great big performance. I can do that but it has to be a performance for me. I have to consciously think about what to say. I think it is a part of nature.

As a result of this perceived power, men may give the impression that they are in control of a situation, and as one woman noted:

Men outwardly appear more in control of a situation but if you ask me, women tend to be more in control.

This dynamic of perceived and real control may connect to women leaders' reluctance to describe themselves as leaders, as discussed on page 22, perhaps due to less comfort with being seen as "the boss" at the top of a hierarchy, rather than alongside colleagues.

Human resources

Perhaps in line with women leaders' emphasis on relationships and connectedness, a few interviewees said that women tend to be much more concerned about human resources – whether it is coaching or developing staff, creating time to get to know family members of staff or building the right team composition.

Because of men's general tendency towards avoiding human resources, the outcome is sometimes that men may end up tolerating mediocre work standards rather than dealing with people to improve them. This apparently is something women are less likely to accept:

Very rarely do you find a male leader... taking the time to speak to their people [to] find out their strengths, their weaknesses and who is interested in human resources... Whereas for me, one of the key things is to get the right people in the right place and half the job is done... I differentiate between good performers and under-performers. An under-performer would hate working for me because they would have such a hard time... whereas a lot of male colleagues will just tolerate mediocrity. They just don't want to confront it. HR [Human Resources] for a lot of male colleagues is a chore that they would rather do without.

Industry-specific differences

Some differences between women and men in the workplace arise in particular industries. For example Lee Lai-shan mentioned that the physiological differences between men and women may affect women in sport, and Xu Xi said that writing styles may differ with women writers tending to be organically and emotionally driven, and male writers tending to work around an idea and building a structure around it.

Opportunities and Barriers

This section explores the opportunities and barriers facing female leaders. About half the women said that a man in their position would encounter the same difficulties that they have. Most of the remainder of women said that they thought that men would have encountered fewer difficulties than them.

Opportunities

Suitability to certain jobs

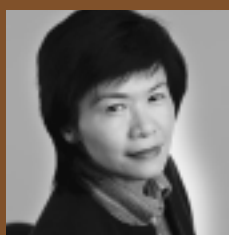
A few women claimed that being a woman is a great advantage. As mentioned earlier, according to most women leaders women tend to be much more sensitive than men to others' feelings. This can mean they are better suited to certain jobs, particularly those that require a large amount of dealing with people from different backgrounds and perspectives.

Several of our women, perhaps not coincidentally, were in troubleshooting positions and jobs that required a large amount of stakeholder dialogue. This may link to women mentioning a strong relational focus as part of leadership, and is further backed up by what a couple of women said about being given their present jobs – precisely because they are seen as less threatening to other men in leadership positions. Interestingly, one woman went so far as to say that had she been a man, she would not have been given her position as there is a general tendency that women will tiptoe around rather than “step on people's toes”.

Two women said that having children has made them better at their jobs, in very different ways. For one woman, she understands family and work pressures better and is therefore more understanding of her staff. The other woman said the experience of breastfeeding for months taught her to survive on little sleep, which has been a tremendous asset in her role.

Women in the non-profit sector may experience different issues around job-suitability. One woman said that women like her have it much easier than men in the non-profit sector. According to her, the non-profit sector is not seen as a serious career path in Hong Kong, and is therefore generally perceived to be more acceptable for women than men:

I think there is a perception in Hong Kong that if you work in anything but business you're not as gifted as other people may be. I think people see this [working in a non-profit organisation] as a very nice thing for wealthy wives to be in but they don't see it as a career. I think this a major barrier to overcome – that this is more than a hobby. I think if you were a guy in this position, you would be considered as having not succeeded in your professional career – so now you're in non-profit as a last option.



Advice to future women leaders

Alexa Lam

“They have to believe in themselves. They should not put themselves down because they are female... Just look at yourself as a person, not a woman – have confidence in yourself and believe in what you are doing – and most important of all is you have to work hard, because nothing comes to those who don't work hard. And if you sense there is discrimination, just ride over it. In Hong Kong the situation is a lot fairer and there are sufficient people who don't have a problem with women.”

Choice

There was a definite impression from those interviewed that many of these women may not need to work, at least not for financial reasons and at this point in their lives. As such these women may tend to have more choice of what jobs they take up than men who may have a real and perceived need to provide for their family.

Perhaps in line with this ability to choose, one woman said that she believed that the reason why there are not more women at the top is because women make the choice not to take the leadership role with all that it entails:

Women not always being at the top of organisations isn't always about [barriers to] women. It's about women sometimes saying, "We just don't want it."

While some women mentioned this aspect of choice, others did mention real barriers to success that came with being a woman.

Barriers

Several women mentioned that there are barriers in the workplace – sometimes known as the “**glass ceiling**”. Barriers mentioned are described below, in order of priority to the women leaders.

Juggling career and family

For many women with children, they seem to be constantly “juggling” work and family life. Being a leader does not seem to absolve a woman from her family responsibilities, even though she may work more than her life partner. As such many feel that men tend to struggle less with their **time allocation** than women, since they may traditionally not be expected to take on nor accept broader roles in the home. As one woman said:

Traditionally women are supposed to belong more to the home, to play a major role in the family. Modern women also go out [to work], contributing to society, to become leaders. They have to take up more roles. Women have to work extra hard, to be more efficient with their time usage.

Time allocation between work and family seems for many of these women to be governed by work, with family getting the balance of time. As such, many women seem to be overcome with guilt, knowing that they “should spend more time with their children”. Consequently some of them spend every spare moment that they are not working with their children. The result is that there is no time for **networking**, which has a



Advice to future women leaders

Adrielle Panares

“Know who you are, develop your potential as much as you can, affirm yourself. Do not make being a woman an excuse – it is not and it should not be. Hold on to your vision and live it. You have the capacity to be constant, consistent and determined. Don't let “no” stop you. Don't let current stereotypes keep you – build stairs or break walls because at the end of the day, you have to look at yourself in a mirror and not through somebody's eyes.”

tendency to mean less exposure to other people and less opportunities to progress in their careers. The importance of networking is commonly acknowledged for all in the workforce. However as one woman leader put it:

Successful women are good at networking – many women fail to see that.

Perceived commitment to work

Some of the women interviewed noted that they faced challenges in being perceived as completely committed to their work, and this affected their ability to get promoted. A key reason was that these women at childbearing age often have their commitment questioned, whether or not they have or plan to have children.

When there is a job vacancy or a promotion opportunity, it seems that it is more likely that a man rather than a woman will get the job. There tends to be an assumption that women will be the primary caregiver and will thus be less committed to work when they have children:

People would be very critical if [they] had to promote a female instead of a man because people still continue to believe men are more capable than females, that men can devote more in terms of time, devotion and energy.

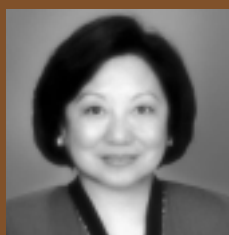
One woman actually stopped getting promoted when she became pregnant, and was told that if she had any more children, it would affect her career path within the organisation. Only when she confirmed that she was not going to have more children did her career pick up again, but she found she had to **work harder** than her male colleagues to prove herself:

At all times, I have to prove that I am no worse, but even better than a male colleague...in terms of commitment and results. If women want to achieve the same position as a man, women have to work harder.

Given this issue of perceived commitment, in several leaders' experience women therefore get seen as "**a risky proposition**", and supervisors need to be much more sure when they promote a woman than a man.

The person promoting you has to think hard – the supervisor will generally only promote a woman if she really is much better than a man. The supervisor does not want the responsibility of promoting the wrong person. If you promote the wrong man – the guilt is less. If you promote the wrong woman – the people will say "I told you so".

Because it appears at times to be so risky to promote a woman, in some cases women who are promoted are seen to have "befriended the male boss", something that many feel men would not generally experience.



Advice to future women leaders

Shelley Lee

"Take the job seriously but don't take yourself seriously. No matter what stresses or strains keep your sense of humour, and always be ready and willing to laugh at yourself, particularly when mistakes come along, because everybody makes mistakes. Be creative and make a difference in every job that you do... always remember that you can make a difference."

According to one woman, women may also be a more risky proposition than men, because women have a tendency to want to change things if they believe that things are not operating the way they should.

According to her:

Women often come into an organisation wanting to change things. If you were the establishment, this is not always good – they want the preservation of establishment. Women need to curb this desire a little bit.

Male-oriented socialisation

A few women raised the issue of unequal opportunities for building relationships. They pointed to a tradition of the “old boys’ club” making it extremely difficult for women to progress in their careers without equal opportunities for socialising with peers and superiors. Some of these groups have a tendency to be focused on activities that some women may not be comfortable with, such as regularly drinking alcohol.

Corporate rules

Choosing to conform or not conform was mentioned earlier as a benefit women sometimes had. However this is not always the case. Because men traditionally have developed corporate rules, one woman strongly felt that women need to learn to play by men’s rules. As such, she said that she coaches her female staff to be “more male-like” because this will assist them in the firm:

Women at times come in showing they are unsure. I am consciously trying to change that. We smile more. There is a lot of nodding and smiling. That is just not the business culture... [In this] man-driven business environment...until we have a majority at the top, we just have to play according to the rules. That’s what people expect.

Other women in the workplace

While a male-oriented corporate culture may do women no favours, women too can pose a barrier to other women’s success. A few women mentioned that women in their company have been a barrier to their professional progress. The women cited examples of how other women have purposely tried to keep them away from opportunities, and how jealousy may have been a factor. As one woman said, although she has had female bosses, it has been the male bosses that have encouraged her:

Reflecting back, all the opportunities that have been created for me have all been created by men.

“Double discrimination”– gender and race

To add to their glass ceiling, two women mentioned that their race or perceived race as an Asian ethnic minority has been a problem for employers. This has posed a problem in addition to merely gender issues for employers when considering recruiting or promoting them.



Advice to future women leaders

Siao Fong-fong

“Be yourself.”

Working Hours and Work-Life Balance

This section explores the number of hours that women work, the personal support they get that allows them to work as they do, and the personal sacrifices they have had to make to be a leader.

Working hours

Most women laughed when they were asked how many hours a week they worked, or responded as one leader did that it may be easier to count the hours she sleeps. The minimum number of hours worked a week was 50 and the maximum was 90. This maximum is probably understated as many women said they simply work all the time, even on holidays and after hours, thanks to **mobile phones, broadband internet access, and handheld wireless-communication devices such as Blackberries**.

One woman has now developed a “personal key performance indicator” (kpi) where she keeps a log of how many nights she spends away from home and how many holidays she has not taken due to work commitments. She has made it her assistant's goal to keep these two measures as low as possible, and she rewards her assistant for doing so. She has also made it a point to show this kpi to her male boss because she wants him to be aware of the personal sacrifices she has made.

In line with making more time with her family, one woman is planning to reduce her current 14-hour days, and she accepts that her performance will likely fall:

... I am trying to relax. I am trying to [achieve] balance, which is good for my people and for me. For example, if I work 14 hours I can achieve 90 marks – [for example, but] maybe if I work 12 hours I get 87 marks and people around me and myself will feel more relaxed. We will have more time for our families.

Personal support

There are four main sources of personal support that the interviewees mentioned. From most to least important these include their life partner, domestic help, parents, and children. A few women had a fifth source of support in the form of a spiritual or personal mentor. Sylvia Chung Chiu summarised her personal support, which was echoed by so many others, by saying:

We talked about difficulties women face – one of them is time. I am a very lucky person. I have the full support of all family members including husband, parents, children and maid. If people say I am successful it's because of them.



Advice to future women leaders

Nancy Ku

“Women have to know their priorities. I think at different stages of our lives there are different priorities. It's like in marketing, products have different product cycles and you have different strategies for each cycle. It's the same for our lives. There are always trade-offs. I don't think there is room to feel guilty. You have to be conscious of the decisions you're making and accept the consequences. If you know your priorities and accept the trade-offs, everybody will be more relaxed and accept your own lives.”

Life partner

This has been the greatest source of personal support for most of these women, and two women said that their life partners were the “trailing spouse” who moved to Hong Kong for the women’s careers.

For many of the women leaders with children, although their life partners (typically a husband) have demanding jobs as well, generally their husbands also have more flexibility. Therefore, as more than one woman put it, their children’s fathers are “the constant in the children’s lives”. Most married women commented that they are “very lucky to have good husbands”, and one woman believes that not many men would accept the long hours she puts in:

I have irregular hours...sometimes I have to come back [to work] in the middle of the night. Sometimes I go home for one and a half to two hours, from seven something to nine something in the evening and when my child goes to bed, I come back to work again. Not many husbands will like it if their wife goes back out in the evening...but he really supports me in that he gives me all this freedom.

Domestic help

Domestic help is a major source of support to many working women, especially those with children. In fact, almost every woman said that she had at least one domestic helper, and they had nothing but praise for their domestic help.

One expatriate working mother said that domestic help has allowed her to spend real quality time with her child, and in her home country she or her husband may have had to give up their job to look after the child:

I could not even visualise having this kind of career and this kind of community involvement if I lived in [my home country]. It would just not be possible. Even though the number of hours I spend with my child is not as great as it would be in [my home country], my belief is the quality of time is very good because it is absolutely focused on [my child] and I don’t have to worry about anything else to do with the household.



Advice to future women leaders

Xu Xi

“The personal is political. Look at the way you work with marriage, relationships, work and children. Why should we all be superwoman? You can change the way we understand family – look at the balance between household chores, work, raising kids and running relationships.”

Parents

A large number of women leaders who are mothers have ensured that they live next door to, or very near to their parents or in-laws. For many of these women, in addition to their domestic help, their parents or husband's parents play a big role in their children's upbringing. Many of these grandparents it seemed had extensive parental roles in their grandchildren's lives, and were acknowledged as a huge source of support for the women leaders. Women leaders regularly talked about their parents having dinner with the children every night because they worked late, keeping their children company so they would not be lonely, accompanying their children to activities, and caring for them when they are sick.

Children

A few women said that having the support of their children was very important. At least three women explained that gaining their children's support for their long working hours is often difficult and frustrating, as children do not always understand why their mothers work so much. One mother has had her child complain that "Other mums don't work", and this makes it even more difficult. Many of the mothers had strong feelings of guilt for wanting to work.

Children were also a source of support though. A couple of women mentioned that they receive tremendous support from them, with one saying that her children, now in their early twenties, are willing to plan their personal lives around her busy schedule.

Spiritual and personal mentors

Most women we spoke with did not have a personal mentor, and those that mentioned that they did may have had more than one. The most common mentor was a spiritual mentor, and this typically included the leader's inner self, God, nuns or religious priests. For those leaders who had one, the spiritual mentor seemed to be a source of light and wisdom. As one woman said about her spiritual mentor:

This was one person, who had this absolute faith in God that was combined at the same time with the most biting and critical intellect. And I have never met anyone like this before.

Other personal mentors gave emotional guidance to these women and included husbands, sisters, a psychologist, a grandmother, female bosses, and one good female friend.



Advice to future women leaders

Sophie Leung

"Get to know human nature much more, because it is only when you master human nature and understand it, and learn to think like others, that you can design things for them."

Personal sacrifices

Several of our women said they don't believe that they have made sacrifices to be where they are today, and one woman who thought she had said that she had "gained more than I ever had to sacrifice".

For the women who thought they had made sacrifices, there seemed to be an implied sense of belief that women make more sacrifices than men to succeed in the workplace. These sacrifices had to do with different priorities that men and women apparently have. One woman summed this up by saying:

I believe a man can give up his family more [easily] as compared to a mother, his wife. If I have only time for my work, my family and myself, I put work, family and myself last. I believe for a man, I am not a man, but I believe a man would put it work, self and family. So for me, I suffer, my personal interests suffer.

A common sacrifice was that of time with those close to them. By frequency from most to least mentioned, this included time with children, a life partner, parents, friends, and professional networks.

Time with their children

When asked what the single most memorable moment in these women's lives was, almost all the mothers said it was giving birth or another special moment with their children. A few even said that with hindsight they would have given up their leadership roles to have spent more time with their children, with one saying that she now has deep regrets:

I found that I did not have enough time for [my] first two kids because I worked, worked, worked, worked...That is one thing I regret very much.

Despite all the other sacrifices that some of these women have clearly made, time with their children was the only thing that some of our women, all mothers, said they would change given what they know now about their lives and careers.



Advice to future women leaders

Tara Boyce-Hofmann

"Find other women and talk to them...share your frustrations, share your successes."

Time with their partner

For most of our women in personal relationships, lack of time with their partner is often the by-product of their jobs. One woman, who is now divorced, implied that her hectic work schedule meant that her ex-husband found “other interests”. For another woman, the different time expectations of her and her partner are a source of friction:

In reality, there are areas and moments of time and friction, and they have to do with our mutual personal assumptions on time and expectations.

For one lesbian woman, because of societal pressures it is very difficult for her to be seen in public with her partner and therefore there is even greater pressure on her relationship.

For those women with children, this lack of time with their partner appears to be even more acute, because any time outside of work is generally spent together as a family unit. As a result time alone as a couple tends to suffer.

Time with ageing parents

Many women do not feel they spend enough time with their ageing parents. As one woman said:

This is something I worry about – nothing will wait for you – my parents are getting older. Sometimes I feel very selfish.

Time for friends and professional networks

Many women said they simply have no time for friends, and for one woman this is a major concern when she thinks ahead to retirement. Likewise responsibilities to other family members, and particularly children, mean little time remains for developing professional networks.

Health, hobbies, and sports

The stress, long hours, lack of sleep, and the inability to “switch off” from work have all contributed to health challenges for some of our women leaders. Many women say that their health has suffered as a result of work. For a few women, a health scare has motivated them to try and find time to regularly exercise. Several women however said that although in theory they have dedicated time to hobbies and sports, in practice these are often put on hold for work, and those with children find this even more so.



Advice to future women leaders

Karen Lam Siu-ling

“If you want to be a leader, go for it even if you have to try extra hard.”

Family-friendly Workplace Initiatives

Family-friendly initiatives are internal policies or programmes that organisations may have to assist women and men in the workplace with their work-life balance. This section explores what types of family-friendly initiatives exist in these women's workplaces, initiatives that become all the more important given the barriers dealt with in earlier sections. It also explores what women think about organisations that have family-friendly initiatives, and what these women are doing to assist other women in the workplace.

Existing initiatives

Most women said that their workplaces do not have family-friendly initiatives in place. In total only six women mentioned that their organisations have such work practices. Two of these are multinational companies, one is a small business, and three are non-profit organisations. The initiatives are described in the table below, and are available to both male and female staff members.

| Organisation | Family-friendly initiatives |
|---------------------------|---|
| Multinational 1 | Employees at all levels are able to work flexible hours and work from home or from wherever they wish, if their job nature allows it. The company provides the technology to enable staff to work flexibly. Paternity leave is given to all fathers-to-be. |
| Multinational 2 | This company has a nursery for their employees' young children. For junior staff there are opportunities for part-time work, shift work and staggered hours. |
| Small business 1 | There is an institutionalised five-day work week so that employees may have more time with their families. The woman leader in this company has also considered setting up a children's play area in the office, but this was turned down by staff members. |
| Non-profit organisation 1 | Employees may work flexible hours. There is also compensation time, varying work hours, and the most senior staff may work from home. |
| Non-profit organisation 2 | All staff can work from home, except for the office administrator. Staff can work when they wish. |
| Non-profit organisation 3 | Employees are allowed to bring their children to work over the summer holidays. The organisation is thinking about putting job shares in place. |

Perceived difficulties with initiatives

Some women leaders identify the lack of family-friendly workplaces as a barrier to success. At the same time, one leader from a global organisation said that family-friendly policies would not work for her operations in Hong Kong, because the operation size is too small and would put undue pressure on the rest of the team to take up their slack. On the other hand, it is perhaps interesting to note that in her company's head office abroad, these family-friendly practices are a part of the workplace.

Flexibility for leaders

Although in most of these women's organisations there is no policy to allow for flexible work practices, many of these women themselves have the flexibility to work from home, particularly late in the evening for conference calls.

Perceiving family-friendly work practices

Almost every woman leader we interviewed said that if the job nature allows it, then there should be flexible work practices for both women and men. Some jobs require face-to-face time and therefore the general view was flexibility is not an option for these roles. One woman believed that family-friendly initiatives may be more difficult for private companies, and therefore it must make financial sense for a company before they commit to this. There was only one woman who seemed somewhat negative towards these initiatives, her major concern being that employees that are not working flexibly should not have to take up excess work from those who are working flexibly.

The women leaders identified two reasons for family-friendly work initiatives: building business and offering equal opportunity.

Building business

There were three main views expressed about flexible work options being good for business. All these views were expressed by women in the private sector around the fact that women are **assets** to organisations. The women leaders felt that family-friendly companies can best retain female talent given many women's need to manage work and family responsibilities. In providing flexible work practices a company is acknowledging that employees often have multiple roles, which may include being a professional, a life partner, and a mother to name a few. Firstly, with flexible hours, employees actually work longer hours and the company gains from **higher productivity**:

The employer actually wins, not employees – when you start keeping track of hours the company actually wins.

There is a general belief that **work quality** is not compromised by flexible work practices, and one woman backed this up by saying:

There is no reason why I can't do my job well on a flexible basis on a flexible arrangement. It does not mean that I will do it with less quality, but do I need to be there from 9am to 6pm?

Secondly, an organisation saves in **recruitment and training costs**. As one leader puts it:

If a staff is delivering value – why would you want to lose them? There is a huge cost to retraining them. If they are not delivering value, you should fire them.

Thirdly, happy employees are **loyal employees**. Referring to her operations in the Mainland, Michelle Garnaut made this point:

I have a chef in Shanghai who is pregnant... I asked, "What do you want to do?" She said, "There's nothing in my contract." So I said, "I'll give you three months off, on full pay and you stay on contract." It's really important for me to be flexible. I mean, I've worked with her for five years. In the end she chose to take six months off on half pay. If you want people to stay, work with you, and have a good company with happy employees, the first base is people have to be happy, and if they are not happy, forget it.

Offering equal opportunity

There is a view that to not provide such family-friendly policies means a company effectively discriminates against women, perpetuating barriers the women leaders have themselves experienced:

If [an organisation] does not [offer flexibility] then women are instantly at a disadvantage. If you want to have equal opportunities you need to have these policies at least for a period of women's and men's lives.

With the continuous improvements in technology, flexibility is relatively easy thanks to mobile phones, broadband and Blackberries. With these an individual may have access to their workplace by phone and email from almost anywhere at any time.

For flexible work practices to succeed in the workplace, employers must be confident that their employees will work even though they work independently and out of the boss' sight. Perhaps the greatest barrier for companies in implementing such policies is trust in employees.

Assisting other women in the workplace

As mentioned earlier, most of the women leaders identified both barriers to success as well as an appreciation for needing a mentor. Somewhat surprisingly then, most women leaders do little to personally assist other women in the workplace in a formal capacity.

However, many of them provide professional coaching to their staff, and they do not distinguish between female or male staff. Two women mentioned that they sit on internal human resources or women's committees, thus influencing others to understand the differences between women and men in the workplace.

Moving Forward

Encouragingly, women leaders generally believe that Hong Kong is a good place for women to work, and organisations should continue to build on success factors in creating such a workplace. However, the women leaders interviewed identified key challenges that affect their ability to contribute more effectively and meaningfully to the workplace.

Values and strengths women have may be more effectively matched with their work. Perhaps in common with all committed professionals, the women interviewed relish challenges and describe themselves having a strong ability to work in groups. Many tended to value a focus on relationships more than some men might, and expressed reluctance at being seen as leaders within a hierarchical, top-down leadership framework.

Organisational culture may better encourage women's contributions. Women interviewed reported various barriers to progressing and contributing to the full extent of their ability. Some of these included being excluded from promotion opportunities due to their perceived role as primary care giver to children, and having less opportunity to network due to the existence of male-only social groups.

Work-life balance may be more effectively supported. This affects all staff, male or female, whether balancing family and work commitments, maintaining health or making time for friends and work-related networking. Many of the women leaders interviewed reported regret and guilt over choosing work over their children, and in hindsight some said they would have chosen their priorities differently.

A logical next step for organisations committed to gender diversity is to think through what factors outlined here – strengths and areas for improvement – might be relevant to their workplace by engaging in an open dialogue with their employees, both women and men. Dealing with the specific issues that may arise requires sensitivity and a strategic, tailor-made response appropriate to the needs and culture of the organisation.

Although these leaders have achieved much, some of the costs of success have been high – and unnecessarily so. The women leaders interviewed are some of the most talented in Hong Kong. If such capable women have to deal with these issues – even within Hong Kong's generally positive workplace for women – others too may have similar or even greater challenges. We hope this publication can stimulate research, move forward the discussion on women in leadership, and most importantly help women lead even more satisfying, fulfilling lives.

Appendix

This appendix lists the questions asked to each woman interviewed.

SECTION 1: FAMILY AND GROWING UP

- 1 How many women and men were there in your family, and what did your parents do?
- 2 Where did you go to school? Were you a good student?
- 3 Who or what influenced your career choices? Why were these factors so important to you?

SECTION 2: JOBS

- 4 What were the reasons you changed jobs? What was driving you to make these changes? (Go through specific changes mentioned in their curriculum vitae.)
- 5 Have you had a mentor who has helped guide you through your job life?
- 6 How would you define a leader? Would you say you are one?
- 7 How would you say your current organisation defines a leader?
- 8 When would you say that you realised you had leadership potential? How did you realise this?
- 9 How did you plan to be where you are today, in terms of leading an organisation?
- 10 Describe a recent project that you particularly enjoyed, and tell us why you enjoyed it.

SECTION 3: PARTICULAR TRAITS

- 11 What particular personality traits, skills, educational qualifications and local / overseas experiences do you think have been useful in this particular job? Why?
- 12 In the work you do, have you ever thought that your approach to managing an organisational problem differs from that of your male colleagues (or male counterparts in other organisations)? Can you give us an example?
- 13 What do you think would be the main differences between a male and female leader – could you name some differences?
- 14 Think of a man in your position (in same or similar organisation). Would you say that this man would face more, less, or the same difficulties in becoming a leader?
- 15 What particular barriers did you have to overcome as a woman in your position?
- 16 What are your negative traits?

SECTION 4: WORKING HOURS AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE

- 17 Do you have a partner? What does he or she do?
- 18 Where does your family live? Where does your partner's family live? Who takes care of them?
- 19 Do you have any kids? How old are they? Do they have special requirements?
- 20 How many hours a week do you work?
- 21 How many hours a week does your partner work?
- 22 What support do you get on the personal side that allows you to work these hours?
- 23 Can you tell us about a recent occasion when you had to work unforeseeably late – what personal and professional issues arose for you?
- 24 Do you regularly make time for yourself? If so, how often and what do you do?
- 25 Do you have a mentor to guide you through your personal life?
- 26 Would you say that you have had to make personal sacrifices to have this position?
- 27 What are some of the sacrifices / compromises that you have had to make, in a personal and professional capacity, in order to have the position you do?
- 28 Do you think Hong Kong is a difficult place for women to become leaders?

SECTION 5: ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT

29. In your workplace, are there flexible work initiatives or other support structures that have assisted you, or that you have put in place to assist other women?
30. Do you think that companies should assist women by having flexible work practices and family-friendly policies? If so, why?
31. Do you know of any good family-friendly models in your own organisation or in other organisations? Can you give us examples?

SECTION 6: ASSISTING OTHER WOMEN

32. As a woman leader, what do you do in a professional capacity to assist women in the workplace?
33. What do you do in your private capacity to assist women?
34. Do you mentor women either in the workplace or outside of the workplace?

SECTION 7: LOOKING BACK AND FORWARD

35. As you look back at your career to date, would you do anything differently in terms of:
 - a. Choosing your company / industry?
 - b. Prioritising your work and personal life?
36. Looking back, what so far has been the most memorable moment in your life? Why?
37. Who today do you regard as your role model and why?
38. Looking forward – do you plan to change the balance between your work and personal life?
39. Looking forward – where do you see yourself in 10 years?
40. What advice would you have for aspiring women leaders in HK?

SECTION 8: THE END

41. Is there anything you would like to add about your opportunities, challenges, or insights as a leader and as a female?
42. We may have to come back to you with some questions. Is it okay if we should email you or ring you?