

***The Career Development and Identity of  
Victorian Local Government Chief  
Executives: Is Gender a factor?***

**Andrea Diamond**

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degree of Doctor of Business Administration

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this research is to investigate the variations in experiences, career identity and career development of female and male CEOs in Victorian local government, in order to establish if gender in any way either facilitates or hinders career success.

The starting point for this study is not a hypothesis to be tested but rather an attempt to understand CEOs' own conceptions. The study is also interested in the influence of Councillors on CEO career development and identity and seeks to establish whether CEOs and Councillors have a common understanding of success for a CEO.

Phenomenography is the selected qualitative approach, as it provides a framework for describing experience and examining variations in experience. In-depth semi-structured interviews are conducted with 21 CEOs and Councillors and the interview transcripts form the basis of the research data.

The findings identify that Councillors have a significant impact on the career development and experience of being a CEO. While outcomes for CEOs are clearly influenced by Councillors, CEO identity does not appear to be as interwoven with Councillor perceptions. CEOs do however, suggest that performance is not the major determinant of CEO success, but rather identify capacity to engage Councillors as the most crucial issue in gaining a successful outcome.

The study also identifies a strong and recurrent theme of institutionalised sexism within the sector and as such finds that the experiences of females and males do differ in a number of ways. Female CEOs experience more scrutiny than their male colleagues and suggest that their actions reflect not only on them as individuals, but on all women.

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## Declaration

I, Andrea Diamond, declare that the DBA thesis entitled ‘The Career Development and Identity of Male and Female CEOs in Victorian Local Government’ is no more than 65,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated this thesis is my own work.



28 February 2007

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## **List of Abbreviations**

<b>BRRSALGV</b>	Board of Review of the Role Structure and Administration of Local Government in Victoria
<b>CEO</b>	Chief Executive Officer
<b>EEO</b>	Equal Employment Opportunity
<b>F</b>	Female
<b>M</b>	Male
<b>SSHRC</b>	Social Sciences Humanities Research Council
<b>VLGA</b>	Victorian Local Government Association/Area
<b>VLGB</b>	Victorian Local Government Board

# Chapter 1 - Introduction and Background

## 1.1 Introduction

Victorian local government organisations, like many others in Australia and overseas, exhibit low levels of female representation at senior management levels, despite high numbers of female employees overall. Sinclair (1998) states that the proportion of female senior executives in the Australian Public Sector is 16% compared with 4 to 5% in the private sector. Local government employs fewer staff than the other two tiers of Australian government, but is the most male-dominated across all management levels (Paddon 2005). Local government employs 125,000 staff, 40% of whom are women (ABS 1997). Victorian local government organisations in 2005 employ 36,797 staff of whom 23,044 (62.6%) are female, a higher percentage than any other State or Territory government (Victorian Grants Commission 2005). At State and Territory government level 61% of 828,000 employees are women, and at the Commonwealth level 46% of the 392,500 staff are women (ABS 1997). Despite the number of women employed in Victorian local government, employment rates of females at more senior levels within Victorian local government are still only marginally higher than other local governments but lower than other tiers of government (Paddon 2005). At the time of this research, of the 79 local government chief executive roles in Victoria, nine are held by women.

The low proportion of senior positions held by women became a research focus some 30 years ago (Adler 1999). Since then there have been numerous studies examining barriers to women's success at more senior levels and some studies examining women's success. The majority of these studies are based on the experiences of women in the private sector with few studies focusing on the public sector. Even fewer studies consider the experiences of chief executives (CEOs) within the public sector, and only one study particularly investigates women's representation in Australian local government (Paddon 2005).

The emphasis of such investigations has changed significantly over the past 30 years. Early studies focused on determining the reasons for the low levels of female representation at senior levels, which was often attributed to women's deficits and their

differences from their male counterparts (Jardim and Hennig 1990; Riger and Galligan 1980). In the late 1980s and 1990s the research emphasis shifted towards organisational structures and policies, and the ways in which these impacted on female representation at senior organisational levels (Olsson 2000a). This research predominantly examined how organisational structure and policies created barriers to women's advancement.

In more recent times the research into women's representation in organisations has emphasised the identification of women as potential leaders and attempts to give female leaders a voice and identity. Sinclair (1998) suggests that leadership is a social construct and is therefore determined by collective experience, expectations and beliefs, and that embedded in this construct is a sense of leadership being associated with masculinity. In this context, the more recent research focus is on understanding the self-representation and language of management, and exploring how this impacts on women's career achievements (Lamsa and Sintonen 2001).

This thesis makes no assumptions about generic management experiences and rests on the premise that individual experiential description, with equal female and male representation, allows for a better understanding of lived experience. It specifically considers the career development and identity of Victorian local government chief executives and compares the experiences of female and male CEOs. As previously indicated, there is little research that focuses on the public sector and in particular local government. Victorian local government has been chosen as the context for this study because female representation is higher than in other States, yet women are still under-represented at more senior levels. My interest in the topic stems from my own experience as a woman working at a senior level in local government.

This research aims at promoting women's visibility in leadership and challenges the notion of 'think manager-think male' as described in 'women in management' literature (Schein 1973; Sinclair 1998). 'Women in management' literature refers to the studies of women's involvement in organisational life (Lamsa and Sintonen 2001). This study specifically aims to establish whether differences in CEOs' conceptions and experiences are gender based. The study aims to give voice to local government CEOs and to examine variations in the self-representation of female and male CEOs as a means of understanding how career identity and success are determined. In recognising that leadership is a construct and that notions of leadership are necessarily developed

through interaction, the considerations of elected Councillors will also be examined as part of this study as they have sole responsibility for the recruitment and performance management of local government chief executives and are, in effect, their employers. The study will present a range of CEO perspectives and describe the variations among them.

This chapter will discuss the background to the study, present the rationale for the research including the research problem and questions, and outline the structure of the thesis.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Despite increased participation of women in the workforce, womens' representation at the most senior levels remains low across all sectors (Sinclair 1998; McConnell-Ginet 2000; Pringle 1999). Notably, women's representation at supervisory and middle management levels continues to rise, yet there has not been corresponding growth at the most senior executive or chief executive level (Pringle and Olsson 2002).

The study of women's participation in the workforce emerged in the early 1970s. Over three and a half decades of research little has changed for women pursuing senior executive roles, even though there is an increased representation at supervisory and middle management levels. Much of the research remains inconclusive and with contradictory findings (Rindfleish 2000; Sinclair 1998).

Female representation at senior levels is higher in the public sector than in the private sector and provides an opportunity for studying career development and identity. In Australia, public sector investigations have primarily focused on both Federal and State public service with minimal investigation at the local government level despite some strong similarities between the chief executive roles in public and private sectors (Rindfleish 2000).

Relatively little empirical research has compared the career development and identity of female and male chief executives, and few studies have considered the experiences of women who have achieved senior management status, and in particular the position of chief executive. In trying to understand why so few women reach senior positions, the

research has predominantly been tackled with a view to understanding and identifying the barriers to women's career progression. The more recent research approach represents an alternative way of understanding women's under-representation at senior levels by not only focusing on career barriers but by examining the career path and experiences of women who have attained senior positions.

### **1.3 Aims**

This study will investigate the variations in experiences, career identity and career development of female and male CEOs in Victorian local government. It will also consider the influence of elected Councillors on CEO career identity. Its general aim is to compare female and male CEO experiences and perspectives to establish if gender has played any part in career development and identity. Its specific aims are:

- to investigate the career development of female and male Victorian local government CEOs;
- to compare male and female CEO career development and identity;
- to identify whether gender is seen to influence career success or to act as a barrier to career development; and
- to examine variations in the ways in which CEOs and Councillors describe the requirements for a successful Victorian local government CEO.

### **1.4 The Research Question**

The central research question investigated in this thesis is:

*'How do the experiences and career paths of female and male Victorian Local Government CEOs differ?'*

The research focus is CEOs' self reflections on their career development and their identification of factors that assisted with their career advancement or acted as barriers to it. It also allows for a comparison of the experiences of female and male CEOs and seeks to establish what role, if any, gender has played in their career development.

The research is guided by the following supplementary questions:

- Do the career paths of male and female CEOs differ?
- Do CEOs acknowledge gender as a factor in career advancement?

- What defines the career identity of the CEO?
- What is the influence of Councillors on career development and identity?
- Do Councillors consider gender as a variable in CEO selection and performance management?

## **1.5 Rationale for this Study**

Whereas much has been written about the under-representation of women in senior management positions, less is known about women who have successfully made it to the most senior organisational role, that of chief executive. Although there is little empirical research on female senior executives, anecdotal accounts and the limited research conducted suggest that their experiences are probably different from those of their male counterparts (Lyness and Thompson 1997). This study is designed to examine the various experiences and conceptions of female and male Victorian local government chief executives and to study the impact of Councillors on the career development and identity of the chief executives.

## **1.6 Limitations of the Research**

The research focus is on gaining a deeper understanding of a particular sector; hence the generalisability of the findings to other sectors may be limited. However, the findings are expected to be relevant for other local government sectors, both nationally and internationally.

## **1.7 Research Method**

The research methodology takes a phenomenographic approach, with a particular emphasis on CEOs describing and explaining their own career development. The methodology selected, aims at accessing the specific manifestations of the CEO as a way by which knowledge and understanding of local government CEO career identity and development is determined. This approach emphasises the importance of the research participants' own accounts, understandings and interpretations of their experiences, with a particular focus on variations in the CEOs understanding of their experience. To enable this level of subjective account, a qualitative methodology was

selected for both stages of the research. Stage one was conducted through semi-structured in-depth phenomenographic individual interviews with CEOs and Councillors.

Stage two acts as a means of validating Stage one findings by providing research participants with a summary of the research findings and seeking their comments on the results. Information pertaining to CEOs was only provided to CEOs, and the findings relating to Councillors was only made available to Councillors.

The basis of this research is on giving voice to the research participants and as such validation of the research findings by those participants is regarded as the most ethical manner in validating the findings. It is on this basis that neither the CEOs nor the Councillors were asked to make comment on the other group's findings.

## **1.8 Statement of Significance**

This study will add to the understanding of CEOs' experiences by giving voice to both male and female CEOs. The study will specifically benefit local government. CEOs will be provided with information relating to their own and other CEOs' conceptions of their experiences. The relationship between CEOs and their employers, the elected Councillors, is crucial for effective corporate governance and this study allows for greater understanding of this relationship. To date, the career reflections of neither male nor female CEO have been explored in the Australian local government context. In gaining such an understanding, public sector management and leadership literature is further developed and a better understanding of the impact of gender on the career of senior executives is enabled.

## **1.9 Overview of the Study**

Following this introductory material, chapter two provides a review of the literature. This will be undertaken in three parts, the first of which will examine the research trends over three decades and explore how the research focus has changed over this time. Its emphasis is on examining the barriers to women's career advancement that have been identified. Part Two will examine the literature pertaining to women who have successfully reached senior executive positions and the factors that have been

significant in career advancement. Part three will briefly introduce the local government context, the role of the CEO and the reporting mechanisms.

Chapter three is devoted to the development of a theoretical and conceptual framework for examining career development and identity of female and male chief executives. Chapter four details the research methodologies and techniques. Chapter five will present the data analysis and research findings. Chapter six will provide the conclusions and implications.

## **1.10 Summary**

This chapter has presented the background to the study by outlining the research problem, the research questions and the purpose of the study. Victorian local government is determined as an appropriate context for conducting the research, as no prior research has specifically examined the career development and identity of CEOs in Victorian local government or the impact of gender on career development. Furthermore, there does not appear to be any research that considers the relationship between employer and employee in considering career development and identity. The research framework has been identified as taking a qualitative approach and specifically applies phenomenography as the specific research approach because of its capacity to examine variation from the perspective of the research participants themselves.

The grounds for this research are specifically its contribution to knowledge in a sector that has had minimal investigation, and its provision of a greater understanding of CEO conception. The following chapters will present the research, its findings and its implications. The next chapter will be dedicated to a review of the literature.

## Chapter 2 - Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature relating to career advancement that is relevant to the research topic and research questions associated with the study. The review identifies themes, concepts and findings, as well as facilitating the development of a conceptual framework that determines the research approach.

The ‘collective consciousness’ of women regarding the feminine mystique, which saw women’s identity restricted to the roles of wife and mother, was challenged by the early writings of Betty Friedan and Germaine Greer. Friedan’s approach to feminism was seen as individualistic and liberal and in this form was acceptable to many women (Beck 1990). Friedan (1982) identified the discrepancy between the reality of the lives of women and the image to which they were trying to conform. Greer (1970) challenged the notion that whilst women were seeking pay parity, equal work opportunities and maternity leave they were not in any way attempting to lose their femininity. Since then, there has been considerable impetus for considering the role of women outside of the family and much has been written, aimed at gaining equality between men and women.

Women make up about half of the workforce in most developed countries yet they comprise fewer than 5% of senior executive roles (Tharenou 1999). Ragins, Townsend and Mattis (1998) suggest that while women are flooding the managerial pipeline, their efforts to attain the more senior levels are being blocked. Rindfleish (2002) argues that women’s participation in the paid workforce has been one of the most remarkable social changes over the past 40 years, yet women are excluded from the most senior positions within organisations or on their boards.

The term ‘glass ceiling’ was first used in 1986 in a special report in the Wall Street Journal on the status of corporate women (Hymowitz and Schellhardt 1986). It was coined to describe the corporate traditions, practices and prejudices that blocked women in organisations. The term ‘glass ceiling’ is now used extensively in the literature and refers to the barriers that keep women and minorities from rising above a certain level in organisations (Davidson and Cooper 1992; Coe 1992; Adler 1993b; Cassell and Walsh

1994). Auster (1993) suggests that the glass ceiling is not one ceiling or even a wall in one spot but rather an amalgam of pervasive forms of gender bias that occur in both overt and covert ways. The ‘glass ceiling’ exists in all societies and is most evident at higher executive levels, particularly at the most senior level where female chief executives are very rare (Oakley 2000).

In 1992 a Federal Glass Ceiling Commission was established in the United States of America (U.S.A.), created out of the Civil Rights Act of 1991. The Commission’s mandate was to identify barriers that blocked the career development and opportunities of women and minority groups (Cooper Jackson 2001). The Commission’s study confirmed that a glass ceiling did exist and that women and minority groups were particularly disadvantaged when they attempted to reach senior positions (US Department of Labor 1995a). Gendered structures and practices operating within organisations resulted in very different career experiences and outcomes for women and men, with the most senior organisational positions being regarded as sites of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; 1995; Olsson 2000a; 2000b; Sinclair 1998).

Whilst women are increasing their numbers at junior (Parker and Fagenson 1994) and middle management positions (Talmud and Izraeli 1999) there continues to be a significant difference in the numbers of men and women who reach senior management positions in the U.S.A. (Adler 1999) and Australia (Sinclair 1998; Uren 1999). In most countries women plateau at lower to mid level management positions, and over the past 20 years the number of women executives in Australia has increased by only one to 2% and only hold 5% of all executive positions (Tharenou 1999).

## **2.2 Historical Review of the Literature**

Much of the literature has attempted to explain the reasons for women’s low representation at executive levels. Over a 30 year period the research framework has changed significantly, from an initial focus on the differences between female and male managers, in terms of style, traits and personality and even capacity to be leaders, to a consideration of organisational practices, structures and systems that create barriers to women’s career advancement. Oakley (2000) argues that explanations for the low representation of women at chief executive level must go beyond organisational policies and practices and should examine the impact of gender-based behavioural dynamics.

The more recent approaches over the past decade consider how perceptions of management influence the opportunities for women.

Theories focusing on women's deficiencies in management roles have been proposed and explored over the past 25 years (Riger and Galligan 1980; Morrison and Von Glinow 1990). This approach has been termed the gender-centred or person-centred approach and is based on theories of sex and gender differences (Riger and Galligan 1980). Other work has examined the influence of organisational structure and cultural factors on women's representation (Kanter 1977; Fawcett and Pringle 2000). These studies have emphasised the systemic barriers to women's career progression.

These research streams suggest therefore, that beliefs and attitudes held by the organisation, including women not being viewed as leaders, as well as contextual features, such as organisational structure, are the principal barriers that impact on women's career advancement (Cooper Jackson 2001). Underpinning this research, biological and sociological theories are used to explain women's under-representation. Renzetti and Curran (1995) examine theories which stress the biological differences between males and females and suggest that some behaviours and attitudinal differences are solely biologically determined. They assert that the sociological theories hold that women are socialised into particular roles, which have been socially constructed.

Irrespective of the research approach or orientation, none of these perspectives has unequivocally provided adequate answers to this phenomenon, nor have they led to increased representation by women in organisational life (Rindfleish 2000; Sinclair 1998).

The next section examines the development of the body of research investigating women's representation at senior levels within organisations, as well as considering the ways in which women have successfully attained senior appointments,

### ***2.2.1 Early research - examining gender***

The initial research focus has been termed the gender-centred approach (Jardim and Hennig 1990; Gilligan 1982). This approach focused on the role gender plays in

determining an individual's preferences, abilities and skills and how this leads to different outcomes for men and women in management positions.

Early research examining women's representation in senior management primarily focused on explaining why there are so few women in senior management (Powell 1999). Riger and Galligan (1980) argue that the causal explanations for the lack of women in senior positions focus either on the person or the situation.

Person-centred explanations suggest that the socialisation processes experienced by women encouraged the development of personality traits, behaviours and attitudes that are contrary to the demands of a management role.

This approach explains the marginalisation of women in senior management by comparing women and men in terms of behaviour, attitudes and traits (Hall-Taylor 1997). Proponents of this approach point to the differences and deficits of women in management as well as the behavioural differences between women and men as a means of explaining women's low representation (Jardim and Hennig 1990). Personality traits and behaviour differences are also presented as a rationale for low representation. Accordingly women are seen to lack the confidence and assertiveness required for a management role, to be reluctant to apply for senior roles and to have lower aspirations and inappropriate expectations, about their capacity to combine family and work successfully (Spero 1987). Davidson and Cooper (1992) assert that men are viewed as leaders in organisations, while women are seen to be the followers. They argue that women who work in male-dominated environments are less inclined to see themselves as leaders or seek leadership roles.

While some research argues that there are gender differences in leadership style, (Gilligan 1982; Helgesen 1995; Hennig and Jardim 1977) most findings indicate that there are no real differences (Bass 1990; Dobbins and Platz 1986; Donnell and Hall 1980; Tavriss 1992). Eagly and Johnson (1990) argue that whilst there are differences in the male and female leadership style, there is no differentiation of leadership effectiveness based on gender. Kolb (1999) and Shimanoff and Jenkins (1991) argue that there are far more similarities than differences between male and female leaders. In spite of the strong research base that finds few differences between male and female leaders, stereotypes continue to present women as less effective (Oakley 2000; Dobbins and Platz 1986; Powell 1993). Stereotypes premised on differences between male and

female leadership ability create a cultural prejudice that assumes men are better suited to leadership positions (Heilman, Block, Martell and Simon 1989).

Cooper Jackson (2001) argues that this perception is further reinforced by women having so few female role models. Davidson and Cooper (1992) assert that where the number of women in senior positions is so stymied it is difficult to develop a model of women as leaders. In addition, women often fail to career plan (Morrison 1992) and to build networks and effective mentoring relationships; they have been socialised to subordinate their careers in favour of home life and family (Fagenson and Jackson 1993).

Tharenou (1999) agrees that one of the major explanations for women's lack of career advancement relates to the perceived lack of skill and knowledge. This, Tharenou calls, investments in human capital in that the emphasis is on the person and their skill development. Investments in human capital lead to increased remuneration and role status but because women make fewer investments than men they gain fewer rewards. In this context women are seen to lack the expertise and skill set required for senior management roles. Ragins, Townsend and Mattis (1998) suggest that women may also need to moderate their own professional style to ensure male colleagues are comfortable. Organisations may still prefer a male-oriented management style where aggressive and direct behaviour is the norm (Cooper Jackson 2001).

Davidson and Cooper (1992) highlight the incongruity for women, suggesting that when women adopt this style they may be seen as pushy and aggressive but when men use these same behaviours they are regarded as demonstrating leadership qualities. Dominance, aggression, competitive behaviour and decisiveness are frequently cited as desirable leadership qualities (Klenke 1996). Masculinity is the measure of behaviour and it sets the standard against which women's performance is measured. Women report that when they adopt more feminine behaviours they are viewed as less effective, yet when they adopt the more masculine behaviours they are criticised for not being more feminine (Ragins et al. 1998).

Schein (1973; 1975; 2001) suggests that men still believe that men are more likely than women to possess skills and characteristics required for management roles, whereas women perceive that women and men are equally likely to possess requisite

characteristics. In support of previous research findings Butterfield and Grinel (1999), in surveying three decades of gender research, identify more similarities than differences between male and female managers. Sinclair (1998) on the other hand asserts that women's contribution at the senior executive level may not be registered as leadership because it looks different.

Cockburn (1991), Segal (1987) and Bacchi (1996) assert that masculine models of leadership do not allow for the different approaches that women may bring to the organisation. They argue that stereotyping of behaviour increases the marginalisation of women. Similarly Helgesen (1995) and Rosener (1995) suggest that there is an increased call for more feminine leadership styles, which make use of the personal characteristics associated with women.

Several studies have investigated the importance of early childhood experiences on subsequent leadership development (Mant 1997; Sinclair and Wilson 2000). These studies suggest that family of origin and early childhood experiences assist in developing an individual's sense of self, position in the world and capacity to communicate and negotiate. Mant (1997) asserts that leadership style and approach is linked to this early childhood experience, and that birth order, paternal influence and family circumstance are determinants of later career development.

This section has identified the early research as examining the differences between female and male leaders from a number of different perspectives and has also highlighted how this has impacted on women's behaviour as they have attempted to adjust and fit into the dominant corporate culture.

### ***2.2.2 A second approach – examining career development***

Whilst the initial research focus emphasised the individual and gender differences, by the late 1970s and through the next decade the research focus broadened to consider how organisations and structures impact on women's career development.

This research focus can be classified as the situation-centred approach and argues that the organisational work environment, rather than individual characteristics, is the cause of women's low representation. Kanter (1977) was one of the first researchers to

consider organisational structures and processes that may hinder career advancement for women. Kanter's structural theory suggests that the gender ratios at upper levels affect interactions between the dominant group (men) and the token group (women). The dominant group amplifies the differences between its members and the token group, resulting in negative outcomes for women including performance pressures, exclusion from interaction with male peers, and being viewed stereotypically as women rather than as managers. In turn, women may alter their management style to reduce their visibility or to lessen perceived differences and stereotyping by men. In male-dominated industries women are more likely to display a more stereotypical masculine style of leadership (Eagly and Johnson 1990; Ferrario and Davidson 1991). Kanter argues that women's positions in organisations can be understood in terms of organisational structures and the clustering of women in lower power roles rather than simply a function of individual gender difference. Kanter suggests that if there were a greater sharing of power within organisations, women would not have as much difficulty accessing management roles. Kanter's (1977) tokenism theory suggests that female executives will experience negative reactions to their position, which may include barriers to networks, which in turn will be detrimental to their career success.

There is also a suggestion that women may not necessarily help each other in breaking through the glass ceiling. The 'queen bee syndrome' is used to identify those women who have reached the top, usually in a male environment, and who then adopt a counter militancy approach that is based on their own professional and social success (Rindfleish 2000). Mavin (2006a; 2006b) suggests that competitive behaviour between women may extend beyond professional rivalry to include subconscious elements relating to a number of different factors such as age, weight and dress sense. Schein and Davidson (1993) argue that it is the established gender system, which assumes management to be male, that contributes to women's behaviour towards other women in senior management.

Wajcman (2000) asserts that women's behaviour in senior positions is conditional on their capacity to mould their behaviour to suit the dominant culture and therefore modify their behaviour to be like men. Being a minority group, women adapt their behaviour to present more like the dominant group and in this way minimise the visibility due to their gender difference. In so doing they do not challenge the status quo.

Kanter (1977) argues that the token group experiences pressures that are different to the dominant group, particularly around feelings of isolation, visibility and difficulty accessing usual networks. She suggests that there are three structural effects for women as the minority grouping in organisations. First, female leaders become visible in terms of divergence, resulting in them becoming invisible as individuals, and those women who are successful are regarded as the exception but simultaneously representative of women. Women may also feel the need to assimilate into the dominant male culture, which may lead to the development of specific expectations on women operating in this culture. Kanter (1977) suggests that when a woman enters management the contrast effect suggests that the male majority may seek to strengthen the male culture.

Kanter's tokenism theory and subsequent reviews (Yoder 1991; Zimmer 1988) posit that there are at least six negative outcomes for women that will act as career barriers. Firstly, women may feel that they do not fit in with the dominant male culture at senior levels or believe that they may need to change to fit in. Davidson and Cooper (1986) report that women experience far greater stress than their male counterparts because of factors associated with their token status, gender stereotyping and male colleagues appearing to be uncomfortable working with them. Davidson and Cooper (1986) and Harlan and Weiss (1982) also note that female managers report that they have to perform better than their male colleagues to prove themselves. Similarly Ragins et al. (1998) report that women believe that they have to exceed performance targets and need to over-perform to counter negativity based on gender. As women are promoted and achieve senior executive roles, their visibility and profile increases and there is a perception of a greater requirement for them to perform better than their male counterparts (Klenke 1996).

The second negative outcome identified by Kanter (1977) is reflected in work groups with skewed gender ratios. The dominant group (men) tend to strengthen cultural boundaries by exaggerating their camaraderie and in so doing, emphasising their differences from the token women. Kanter (1977) argues that this leads to exclusion of women from informal interaction and networks. Similarly, Davies-Netzley (1998) and Moore (1988) also found that senior women were excluded from informal networks with male colleagues. The 'old boys' network perpetuates gender biases against women (Swiss 1996).

A third consequence of women's token status is that they receive less opportunity for mentoring than their male colleagues. Dreher and Cox (1996) found that women with Masters of Business Administration degrees were less likely than their male counterparts to have male mentors. Ragins and Cotton (1991) found that women suggested it was more difficult for them to build mentoring relationships, and particular concerns relating to the nature of the relationship were raised in terms of potential for misinterpreting the purpose.

A fourth consequence relates to female executives' social isolation and their need to rely more heavily on formalised relationships than do male colleagues. Female managers rely on qualifications in pursuing promotion whereas males use informal networks for promotional purposes (Cannings and Montmarquette 1991; Powell and Butterfield 1994).

A fifth consequence is that women may be viewed stereotypically. Traditional gender stereotypes depict women as deficient in attributes deemed necessary for management success (Eagley and Carli 2003; Vecchio 2002). Morrison, Greene and Tischler (1985) suggest that staff may view female leaders more negatively than males. This is based on role incongruity, in that women are not expected to show leadership traits and therefore when they do, they are viewed more negatively than men exhibiting the same behaviours (Carli and Eagley 2001). Furthermore, roles may be segregated by gender (Bielby and Baron 1986) and there is a tendency to favour staffing decisions towards the dominant group (Kanter 1977). Jobs may also become gender-typed based on the gender of the previous job holder (Kiesler 1975). Where roles are seen as male-gendered type, women may not be considered for the position.

A sixth consequence is that women may have difficulty with geographical mobility. Adler (1984a; 1984b) noted that management may consider that women are unwilling to move or lack the fortitude to take up international assignments.

Wajcman (2000) argues that Kanter fails to recognise the power inequalities inherent in gender relations. Similarly, Calas and Smircich (1992), Connell (1987; 1995) and Collinson and Hearn (1996) challenge the notion of gender-neutral organisations and, instead argue that the gendered nature of the work environment is continually reinforced

through a variety of mechanisms including pay differentials between men and women, how organisational matters are communicated and communication across the organisation.

Wilson (2003) suggests that mainstream management theory has supported this notion of gender blindness in that it has not always recognised the relationship between management and gender. She argues that management theory has promoted gender blindness as it rarely considers the individuals who occupy the management role, treating management as an abstract set of functions, processes and operations and furthermore failing to recognise the influence of gender in organisations. Wahl (2001) argues that this gender blindness is evident not only in management literature but in the workplace as well. Wahl suggests that women in minority situations are likely to take on a gender-neutral adaptive strategy, that is, being more likely to attach greater importance to individual skills and competencies than to gender. The gender-neutral strategy is seen as a way for women to cope with their token position (Wahl 2001). In contrast, some women may also adopt a positive strategy where they amplify their gender through behaviour or dress and in this way believe being a woman may be an advantage (Wahl 1998).

The work environment includes group dynamics directed towards the token female members (Kanter 1977), attitudes towards female managers (O’Leary and Johnson 1991), and differential reward structures. Tharenou (1999), in support of Kanter, argues that women are prevented from advancing to the top by lack of support and exclusion from networks that men easily access.

Klenke (1996) suggests that in organisations that are male-dominated the ‘old boys’ network exists and it often excludes women. As women have difficulty accessing the male networks they may create their own (Cooper Jackson 2001). Access to networks is regarded as significant in achieving upward mobility as well as in accessing information and creating organisational nous (Ragins and Cotton 1996).

Riger and Galligan (1980) call for greater attention to the interaction between the person-centred approach and the situation-centred variables impacting on women’s representation. The next section highlights the work that examines the relationship between the person and the situation.

### ***2.2.3 A third approach - the gender-organisation-system***

Fagenson (1986) argues that there is a third means of explaining women's low representation in management - the gender-organisation-system approach. This approach brings together the person-centred and structural approaches and argues that situations influence individual behaviour, but that individuals differ from one another on the basis of gender. Davidson and Burke (1994) take a similar standpoint and suggest that there are a number of factors that maintain gender inequity in organisations, including formal and informal structures, and economic, social and individual practices and behaviours.

Tharenou (1999) holds a position that is similar to Fagenson (1986) and argues in support of this third explanation for women's lack of career progression. She suggests that specific but different factors move across both the individual and the organisation which may facilitate or hinder advancement to higher management levels. The differential impact of these factors results in women not advancing to senior positions (Tharenou 1997; 1999). This position holds that career advancement is dependent on progression through a number of stages, with the enabling factors favouring men over women.

### ***2.2.4 More recent research – career identity***

Although much has been written about the careers of women, there is some suggestion that research that does not differentiate between management levels may not be relevant to senior executive positions (Lyness and Thompson 2000). Hurley and Sonnenfeld (1998) argue that factors are different for selection at lower and mid level management positions, compared to senior levels. Similarly, Still (1994) argues that at entry to mid level management, the focus in the selection process is on substance, whereas at the senior level the emphasis is on style. Women at senior levels also face barriers that their male counterparts do not experience and this relates specifically to exclusion from particular networks (Davies-Netzley 1998).

Current research builds on the findings that senior executive leadership is dominated by corporate masculinity, which accommodates women as 'token' or 'other' (Sinclair

1994; Maier 1999; Halford and Leonard 2001). Senior executives have predominantly been men, so mainstream management literature presents the male manager as the norm. Management literature has primarily been written by men, for men and about men, despite the fact that women have had a presence in organisations since early industrialisation (Calas and Smircich 1996). In support Powell (1988) suggests that many theories of effective management have been based on observations of male managers. In this context, masculine behaviours and values are seen as the behavioural norm. This is argued to be another barrier to women's success at the more senior levels within organisational life.

Collinson and Hearn (2001) suggest that regardless of the increased representation by women, executive leadership is still regarded as a male domain. 'Patriarchy' is the term used to describe both the context and process through which men and male-dominated institutions promote male supremacy (Mavin, Bryans and Waring 2004). 'This can be through both control of access to hierarchical power and characteristics of knowledge claims' (Nicolson 1996, p.22). Patriarchy organises linguistic practices and information around a primary signifier that might be expressed as male authority, and within this category woman is subordinated to the category of man (Katila and Merilainen 1999). Smith and Still (1996) suggests that patriarchy is not a conspiracy between men, but rather a complementary social process between men and women. Patriarchy is therefore seen as the backdrop to determining organisational culture, and in this regard management continues to be seen as the territory of men.

Early literature provides the evidence of this. McGregor (1967) highlights the view of manager-as-male in suggesting that the model of a successful manager is to be aggressive, competitive, firm and just, not feminine or intuitive in a womanly sense, and in so doing implicitly characterises the managerial identity as male. The very acknowledgement of care and emotion is seen as a feminine characteristic and regarded as a detractor from the business of management. The model of manager has been a masculine one, with women being disregarded as management material (Ferrario 1991). This has led to the social construction of management as intrinsically linked to qualities attached to men.

Olsson and Walker (2003) argue that the absence of management being identified with women in any way has led to a victimisation of women in management research. They

furthermore posit that most mainstream leadership research has been positivist and quantitative, rather than ideologically focused or interpretative. ‘There is an urgent need for practising business researchers to scale the barricades of positivism’s epistemological roadblocks and thereby develop a more pluralistic approach, and hence a better informed understanding’ (Crane 1999, p.246). A number of researchers support this argument, proposing a new research focus on discourse and this is reflected in the more recent research approaches (Olsson 2000b; 2002; Sczesny 2003; Lamsa and Sintonen 2001).

Olsson (2000a; 2000b; 2002) suggests that a social constructionist approach provides a framework for addressing the invisibility of women in management literature and gives voice to women as senior executives. Schwandt (2000, p.198) asserts that the world ‘... is constituted in one way or another as people talk it, write it, and argue it’.

A social constructionist model of gender suggests how perceptions of men and women are automatically filtered through a gendered lens and reconstituted through a more general discourse on gender difference (Stubbe, Holmes, Vine and Marra 2000). Such a model problematises gender as a social construct constituted within language and transacted through the positioning of men and women within discursive practices (McConnell-Ginet 2000; Stubbe et al. 2000). A social constructionist approach recognises the role of language in creating and sustaining perceptions of gender. ‘Speaking and having your contributions recognised is part of constructing engagement, of positioning yourself and being positioned by others in ongoing discourse’ (McConnell-Ginet 2000, p.269). Gender is therefore relational, seen as a process and based on communication and discourse (Weatherall 2002). A social constructionist approach is concerned not only with gender and identity determined through language, but also with providing a basis for considering workplace interactions and change processes (Stubbe et al. 2000).

The literature argues that leadership and management are increasingly aligned with images associated with legendary heroes such as Ulysses, Zeus, Superman (Clark and Salaman 1998; Olsson 2002; Sinclair 1998). Profiling leaders in such a way promotes senior managers as heroic and transformational. The process plays upon subconscious imagery, beliefs and views reinforcing the concept of leadership as archetype. Archetype is defined as a powerful image or understanding, which exists in the

collective unconscious of groups of people. ‘An archetype of leadership is not a style, which is a reflection of an individual personality, but a social construction’ (Sinclair 1998, pp. 30-31). Leadership, when defined as archetype, emphasises the power of narrative to create images of leadership that are universal and may be exclusive of women (Olsson 2002). This imagery has transformed the concept of the distant, bureaucratic leader of the past to the far more charismatic and savvy leader of the present (du Gay, Salaman and Rees 1996).

Organisational mythology shapes the image of the executive, frames the definition of leadership and acts as the exemplar (Kaye 1995; 1996). Maier (1999, p.71) suggests that organisations develop a sense of a ‘corporate masculinity’. Sinclair (1998, p.50) terms this ‘heroic masculinity’, which defines who looks like a leader and who does not, and much of this imagery takes on a masculine form. Managers are expected to be hard-nosed, ruthless, adversarial, results-oriented and confident of their own power base (Maier 1997). Sinclair (1998) argues that leadership is not about style but rather is a social construction, and that women lack their own archetypal profile comparable to the heroic masculinity associated with male leaders. Fitzsimons (2002) warns that the growing concern is with men and the maleness of management, which in turn renders women invisible and fails to recognise women’s part in leadership.

Sinclair (1994) characterises the executive culture as a man’s world where women are not openly accepted into the workforce but rather are tolerated, and where the prevailing culture is one of ‘patriarchal elitism’ (p.8). The analysis of executive self-representation suggests that ‘men attempt to position their difference, status and power through discourses which involve the subjective processes of identification with some men and differentiation with other men, and from women’ (Collinson and Hearn 2001, p.151).

Networks can become gender-based, and are primarily male-based, with trust being based on homogeneity (Pringle 1999). Men’s power in organisations is maintained through identification with each other. Manifestations of dominant masculine behaviour at the senior executive level cause isolation for the women and this sort of executive culture is likened to doing ‘physical combat’ (Sinclair 1994, p.8). Marshall (1995b) asserts that in a similar United Kingdom study the senior executive culture was described as adversarial. The movement into senior executive positions is less formal and decisions are made on the basis of networks, politics and relationships (Fawcett and

Pringle 2000). Clearly defined competencies and merit-based performance criteria are associated more with the selection procedures for entry and middle management positions (Fawcett 1997). Networks therefore become more important at the senior level.

Men and women construct parallel paradigms of leadership as archetype and demonstrate both transactional and transformational skills (Olsson 2002). In describing leadership, men view this as a male domain, and do not spontaneously refer to women as leaders. Women were reported to recognise the role men had played in their careers as role models and mentors (Pringle and Olsson 2002). This representation, according to Olsson (2002), highlights the construction of leadership through a gendered lens. Social constructionism, with its focus on a gendered lens of perception names unrecognised and unexamined gendered attitudes within social and discursive practices, which maintain men's advantage over women in the workplace (McConnell-Ginet 2000). Stubbe, et al. (2000, p.237) posit '... that perceptions and understanding of men and women's behaviour are automatically filtered through a gendered lens'.

Olsson (2002) argues that just as language and discourse have reinforced masculine images of leadership, so should they create an image of the woman as leader. Stories, which position the persona, add to the framework in which leadership definitions are moulded (McConnell-Ginet 2000). Marshall (1995a) advocates breaking the silence on women as leaders, by finding methodologies that give women a voice and allow them to create their own meaning and ideology. The social construction model therefore suggests that unequal representations of gender lie at the crux of women's under-representation and that this representation and conception is embedded in language. It therefore follows that an examination of the low representation of women should focus on language. Language and discourse are a way of communicating and reinforcing discriminatory practices and thereby maintaining the unequal status between men and women (Holmer-Nadesan 1996; Katila and Merilainen 1999). The research focus is on developing a framework on how women leaders become symbolically represented in discourse and as such are considered as leaders. The social constructionist framework has been the foundation of much of the more recent research focusing on language, representations of women as leaders and the interaction between individual and organisation. This research signals that women's work as leaders, is not always

recognised as such and it is in this context that the research has carefully attempted to rectify this perception.

This section has reviewed the literature associated with the barriers to career progression for women. It has explored the initial research focus that sought to compare male and female leaders and then moved through to the subsequent research stage, which identified organisational factors that hinder career progress for women. The research then progressed to considering the interaction between the individual and the organisation, recognising that organisations are not gender-neutral. The most current research focus has also been examined; this involves a challenge to the construct of leadership as belonging to men and a pursuit of recognition of women as leaders in the same way in which men are afforded this position.

The next section will examine the literature pertaining to factors that promote career advancement for women and consider the factors that are most significant in this process.

### **2.3 Breaking the Glass Ceiling**

Ragins et al. (1998) suggest that the only way the glass ceiling can be shattered is by not only identifying both the overt and covert barriers to career progression but also understanding the strategies used by successful senior managers. Ragins et al. (1998) consider four significant strategies identified by successful female senior executives and chief executives for breaking the glass ceiling. These include exceeding performance expectations, developing a style that male managers are comfortable with, seeking out difficult and challenging projects, and having influential mentors. Mainiero (1994a) also identifies a number of key success factors for women who have broken the glass ceiling. These predominantly relate to individual performance, skill development and acquisition of political nous. Mainiero (1994b) describes this as a political maturation process, with a woman initially experiencing a stage in her work life where she is oblivious to corporate politics. In the second stage - 'building credibility' - the woman demonstrates to her manager her capacity to be an executive. The third stage - 'refining a style' - indicates the process of the female manager developing her individual style and finally 'shouldering responsibility', where she gains confidence and is regarded by others as befitting the role of executive (Mainiero 1994b, p.6). Wentling (2003)

similarly suggests that the most significant factors relating to career success for women include superior qualifications, hard work, mentors, people skills, job competence, and willingness to take risks.

### **2.3.1 Performance**

Exceeding performance expectations and repeatedly having to prove themselves is noted as the most significant means of breaking the glass ceiling according to Ragins et al. (1998). Careers can be fast-tracked by exceeding expectations and demonstrating innovation (Kanter 1977; Mainiero 1994a). Burke and McKeen (1994) suggest that when women participate in more formal education and training it is seen as an indicator of commitment to the organisation, performance and career development and therefore women with greater academic credentials are more likely to succeed. Ragins et al. (1998) assert that exceeding organisational expectations is the key factor for career promotion for women.

### **2.3.2 Style**

The second most significant success factor is forging a style with which male colleagues are comfortable (Ragins et al. 1998). Similarly Brewis and Linstead (2004) note that female managers labour to distract their male colleagues from their female bodies, in order to demonstrate that they are just as capable of masculine behaviours and approaches. The danger though of such an approach is that gender is regarded as something that can be controlled and discarded much like an item of clothing, which may not recognise the intrinsic nature of gender (Eveline 2005).

### **2.3.3 Stretch assignments**

Pursuing highly political, challenging and visible assignments is the third key factor according to Ragins et al. (1998). These assignments are seen as opportunities for achieving professional growth, and grooming, as well as gaining access to key decision makers (Tharenou, Latimer and Conroy 1994). Mattis (1995) and Jackson and Hirsch (1991) argue that because women are more often in support roles, such 'stretch' assignments that provide corporate developmental opportunities may not be as accessible as they are for men. Olsson and Walker (2004) suggest that women

executives engage in a process of both identification and differentiation with male managers, and that they identify with their supportive male mentors and differentiate themselves from less successful women and stereotypical female roles. Management literature increasingly proposes that contemporary management practices involve activities that increase teamwork, employee participation and flexibility, which has led to the feminisation of management (Fondas 1997; Lee 1994).

The feminisation of management refers to the application of a philosophy and practice that is associated with female behaviour and as such emphasises nurturing, caring, interpersonal sensitivity and awareness of and a preference for, open and co-operative relationships (Priola 2004). This is in contrast to the suggestion that there is a pervasiveness of masculine practices that dominate and determine organisational culture (Collinson and Hearn 1994; Alvesson 1998). Hearn (2001) argues that even though women may manage and lead in different ways from men, they do so without contesting the fundamental male organisational culture. Brooks (2001) asserts that female managers will only survive if they follow the example of their male counterparts.

#### **2.3.4 Networks**

Much of the research has focused on women's major difficulty being their exclusion from networks. Women are frequently excluded from 'old boys' networks that are usually comprised of influential organisational leaders (Linehan 2000; Fagenson 1986; Henning and Jardim 1977). Davidson and Cooper (1992) assert that certain male institutions have developed a male culture and traditions which are exclusive of women and protect against female intrusion. Burke and McKeen (1994) suggest that female managers are less integrated with important organisational networks that influence promotional decisions within the organisation.

Henning and Jardim (1977) and O'Leary and Ickovics (1992) hold that networking is essential for success in any senior career and that its important characteristics include informal interactions involving favours, deals, persuasion and connection to influential people. Parker and Fagenson (1994) argue that women need to access these male networks if they are to be successful. Ehrich (1994) argues that networking is crucial to career success, networks that men belong to tend to be more powerful and women have difficulty accessing male-dominated networks.

Ibarra (1992) identified differences in men's and women's access to informal networks. Men appear to have greater centrality and better relationships with the same sex in their network groups than do women. Men are also reportedly more able to access their mentor's networks and to gain access to key political groups. Women acknowledged that they usually operated between two networks - the first made up of women and providing social support, and the second the male-dominated networks that were seen to be crucial for promotion and advancement. Ibarra (1997) suggests that active involvement in these two groups frequently leads to tension for the women because of philosophical differences and that women need to maintain a delicate balance between their memberships of both groups.

Still and Guerin (1986) suggest that as women find it difficult to access male networks there is increasing impetus for them to form their own networks. The benefits of such networks include increased learning, confidence and social contacts. Ehrlich (1994) suggests that whilst women-only networks offer valuable psychosocial support, if women wish to pursue career advancement they must attempt to gain entry into mainstream networks, because the latter provide, in some instances, the only access to influential men.

### **2.3.5 *Mentoring***

A mentor relationship consists of a mentor and protégé who either informally or through formal organisational mechanisms establish a relationship to assist with the protégé's career development (Kram 1985; Noe 1988). Mentoring is seen as assisting both female and male career development but is regarded as especially important for women as they have more barriers to their advancement than do men (Noe 1988; Ragins 1989; 1999; Wallace 2001; Wanberg, Welsh and Hezlett 2003). Mentoring is defined as offering both career and psychosocial support (Noe 1988; Ragins 1999). Allen and Eby (2004) argue that female mentors are more likely to provide psychosocial support than male mentors, who are more likely to focus on career-related support.

A mentoring relationship is crucial to a woman's career advancement and is considered to be more helpful to women than to men (Noe, Greenberger and Wang 2002). Tharenou (1997; 1999), Ragins (1989; 1999) and Wallace (2001) share the view that the

significance of the mentoring relationship for a woman is particularly understandable in terms of the career blocks she is likely to encounter in pursuing advancement.

Tharenou (1997; 1999) argues that because women do not have as much access to informal networks, a formalised mentoring relationship is crucial to career development. Such sponsorship gives the women legitimacy, visibility, credibility and access to networks (Tharenou 1999; Burt 1998). Schor (1997) found that women executives reported that mentors were significant in their careers. Burt (1998) believes that whilst women need the mentoring relationship for advancement, such a relationship is not required by men. Mainiero (1994b) argues that it is the successful negotiation of a challenging assignment that gives the woman the visibility and legitimacy needed for advancement and that such opportunity may arise out of a mentoring relationship. Burt (1998) found that women with mentors advanced to higher levels more rapidly than women without mentors, and that in some cases the career achievements of women with mentors were higher than those of women without mentors. In contrast, Lyness and Thompson (2000) identified in a banking environment that mentor links had more negative impacts for women than for men. This is confirmed by Metz and Tharenou (2001) who also argue that in a banking environment mentor support is not in any way linked to career advancement, and that such support could be misinterpreted as the individual needing coaching and additional support.

Tharenou (2005) suggests that mentors are extremely important to senior women in the public sector suggesting that women executives with female mentors appear to have greater success. She also concludes that women do benefit from a mentoring relationship in pursuing career advancement and that such a relationship is more helpful to women than to men.

## **2.4 Successful Interventions**

Successful interventions fall into two major categories, those which aim to change organisational culture and those aimed at individuals within the system (McCarty-Kilian, Hukai and McCarty 2005).

The ongoing, coordinated commitment of senior management is a crucial element in creating change within the senior ranks (Mattis 2001). Senior management involvement

creates the visibility as well as the impetus for promoting diversity programs (McCarty et al. 2005). Senior management need to help others manage discomfort and challenge perceptions and stereotypes (Thomas 2001). Managers are also seen to reflect organisational culture and as such determine if the workplace is regarded as inclusive or exclusive of minority groups including those based on gender and race (Mattis 2001). Barrett and Beeson (2002) suggest that companies which offer diversity-training programs are likely to yield more open cultures that demonstrate inclusive cultures and practices.

Thomas (2001) argues that organisations have a responsibility not only to mount organisational level interventions but also to formalise the career development opportunities that assist in overcoming gender barriers. As such, he advocates that organisations offer staff assistance with entering into mentoring programs, as well as fostering networking opportunities and providing staff stretch assignments.

#### **2.4.1 Findings**

The literature review highlights a number of consistent factors which can assist women's career advancement. On an individual level these include use of networks, mentors and opportunities for stretch assignments. At an organisational level, culture, corporate policy and senior executive commitment are seen as key factors.

The next section specifically focuses on women working in the public sector. The section highlights women's representation at federal and State government levels as a backdrop to examining in more detail the local government environment.

### **2.5 Women Working in Australian Government**

Local government across Australia employs over 125,000 staff, with women making up 40% of the local government workforce (Paddon 2005). In comparison, women make up 61% of the State and Territory government workforce of 828,000 people and of the 392,500 Commonwealth government staff, 46% are women. Employment opportunities for women in local government have shown an increase over a 50-year period. In 1947, women made up 19% of the local government workforce, by 1985, 26% and in 2001, 40% (Dalton and Windsor 1987). Victorian local government female employment rates

of 58% are markedly higher than in all other States, with Northern Territory female representation of 43% the next highest (Paddon 2005). Employee numbers as well as female representation in Victorian local government have further increased between 2001 to 2005 (Victorian Grants Commission 2005).

**Table 2.1 - Comparisons of Australian Local Government Employment Rates for Men and Women**

Year	1996				2001			
	Female		Male		Female		Male	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Victoria	17431	57	13093	43	17050	58	12297	42
New South Wales	14609	34	28005	66	14587	35	26608	65
Queensland	8225	28	21292	72	9072	30	21010	70
South Australia	3031	38	5023	62	2941	38	4810	62
Western Australia	4471	39	6955	61	4623	39	7236	61
Tasmania	1352	33	2702	67	1036	31	2253	69
Northern Territory	811	43	1070	57	532	43	709	57
Total	49930	39	78145	61	49841	40	74923	60

Source: ABS 1997, based on the Paddon Report (2005)

### **2.5.1 Women in senior management**

Males dominate senior positions in local government, with only 5.1% of CEO positions across Australian local government filled by women and women occupying 10% of senior executive positions across the sector (Paddon 2005). Victoria, with 11.4% of CEO roles occupied by women, stands ahead of other states (Paddon 2005).

### **2.5.2 International and national research investigating female local government CEOs**

Female CEOs hold 14% of local government CEO positions in England and Wales, the figure having increased by 1% over a five-year period (Fox and Broussine 2001). Research investigating the experiences of local government CEOs has found that

women CEOs face barriers that their male counterparts have not experienced (Fox and Broussine 2001; Hunt 2001). In particular, female CEOs reported that they were subjected to questions at the selection interview that they do not believe were asked of their male counterparts, particularly questions of a personal nature and relating to family matters. These findings are confirmed by Morgan (2003) who suggests that women candidates in the UK may be assessed on criteria that may fall outside of the job description and within the ‘realm of personal prejudice’ (Morgan 2003, p.52)

In the Fox and Broussine study, women also commented on a sense of isolation and exposure to hostility from colleagues and Councillors, as well as believing that their activities were more harshly assessed than their male colleagues (Fox and Broussine 2001). Kram and McCollom (1995) contend that women constantly need to manage a visibility-vulnerability spiral in which women in management roles operate under intense scrutiny, which leads to more negative evaluation outcomes than males experience. Women’s career paths are seen to be different from those of their male colleagues, being punctuated by breaks for family reasons as well as more varied and less planned than males. Men’s careers are more likely to be planned and vertical (Fox and Broussine 2001).

Local government CEOs in Britain suggest that the most challenging and complex part of their role is working with the political dimension (Broussine 2000; Fox and Broussine 2001). Kloot and Martin (2001) identify that in Australia, senior local government managers rate accountability to Councillors as very significant. CEOs are increasingly concerned that they are becoming political appointees, with their fate tied to the fortunes of the politicians they serve (Fox and Leach 1999). Nalbandian (1999; 2003; 2004) asserts that even though elected officials and staff use the same words they attribute different meaning and as such the agendas of both groups can be misaligned. Nalbandian (2003) suggests that there is a notable skill gap between elected officials and staff. As a result of the gap in competence the CEO position has become more political in that the task is now to interpret and translate the requirements of the elected officials (Nalbandian 2003).

Research into the experiences of female local government CEOs has been undertaken in New South Wales, where four CEOs were asked about their experiences (Paddon 2005).

Whilst the sample size of this study is small, the findings are consistent with other research. In particular the following issues were raised:

- all had gained significant management experience outside of local government;
- moving nationally and interstate;
- qualifications sat outside traditional local government areas;
- support from male managers had been important; and
- all had managed demands of family and career (Paddon 2005).

Research that specifically relates to female local government CEOs is very limited and there does not appear to be any research that specifically considers this issue in relation to Victorian local government.

## **2.6 Victorian Local Government**

### **2.6.1 Introduction**

This section will provide a brief overview of the Victorian local government context, its current policy position and the reporting arrangements between Councils and their CEOs.

The past two decades have seen significant change in the public sector across all three tiers of government, namely Commonwealth, State and local government (Hughes 1998).

Australian government comprises three tiers of government, namely the national level, six States and two Territories at the intermediate level and more than 600 local government authorities. As local government is established by State Legislation, its modus operandi is determined at a State level, and State Government Acts prescribe the operation, management and reporting requirements of local government. Although each State is responsible for its own local government arrangements, similarities in requirements and operation are evident across all States (Marshall, Witherby and Dollery 1999). From the early 1990s some States began to introduce reforms across the local government sector. The main objective of the reforms has been to make local government become more responsive to community needs, take a more strategic approach and introduce greater accountabilities (Jones 2002).

### 2.6.2 Victorian local government

In Victoria the new *Local Government Act (1989)* replaced existing legislation dating back to 1958. Significant change was achieved through *the Local Government (Amendment) Act (1996)* and *the Local Government (Amendment) Act 1997*. The former Act emphasised increased local government accountability, requiring a statement of performance targets as well as a mechanism for reporting on achievement. The later Act served to clarify the roles and powers of the CEO in relation to staff management and employment of staff. This Act identifies the relationship between Council and its administration through the CEO (Worthington and Dollery 2002). The Victorian local government sector has undergone statutory changes which have brought about significant changes that have been termed ‘new public management’ (Hood 1991).

This reform, undertaken in the 1990s, saw the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering, Councils made responsible for their own organisational structure and a significant amalgamation of local authorities, resulting in a reduction from 210 to 78 Councils (Aulich 1999; Vince 1997). Senior executive appointments, including CEO appointments, were now based on fixed-term performance-based contracts which removed the ‘job-for-life’ positions of the previous local government regime (Pullin and Haidar 2003b). At the same time local government was expected to operate in a more commercial manner akin to the private sector (Van Gramberg and Teicher 2000). Kloot (1999) identifies the increased accountability and emphasis on performance management and measurement as a key factor in the reform process.

These reforms also led to the CEO clearly being identified as the administrative leader, with the organisational activity being led by the CEO and senior management replacing the previous regime where the town clerk and senior engineer were equally responsible for their own functional areas (Board of Review of the Role Structure and Administration of Local Government in Victoria (BRRSALGV) 1979). These changes also saw the strengthening of the role of the CEO, who was now clearly identified as having responsibility for the management of the Council organisation (Marton 2003). This effectively separated the political processes from the management structure. In 1997 elected Councillors also replaced commissioners in the newly formed Councils. The elected Councillors were expected to perform as a company board and were

charged with the tasks of determining Council's vision and strategic plan and of delegating decision making to management. In turn, Councillors clearly played no further part in organisational and operational decision making (VLGB 1995).

The legislative reforms have placed significantly greater responsibility on each Council's management team to lead the organisation through a change process and in particular to respond to external change. CEOs are expected to be visionary, strong leaders, capable of implementing new direction and to move the organisation from administrative compliance to managerial proactivity (Jones 2002). It is the CEO who is expected to manage the political-managerial interface.

Local government, like State and federal governments operates under the Westminster System of Government (Gerritsen and Whyard 1998; Tucker 1997). Public servants are expected to operate under the neutrality ethic, whereby public servants are to remain non-partisan in their dealings with elected officials (Hecl 1975; Williams 1985).

Ryan (2000) suggests that much of the change to local government through the mid 1990s required local government to shift from a more bureaucratic style to an organisational focus that was less process-focused and more outcome-oriented. Principles of managerialism, competitiveness, strategy development and leadership underpinned this reform process (Van Gramberg and Teicher 2000). Maddock and Morgan (1998) caution that the development of an emphasis on managerialist approaches threatens interagency partnerships and simultaneously creates more masculine cultures in the public service, which promote competitiveness and individualism. This shift in operational emphasis has seen the introduction of policy and operational activities that are similar to those of the private sector.

## **2.7 Limitations of the Literature Review**

A review of the literature indicates that the study of women's low representation in senior management has been tackled from two perspectives. The first focus has been on gaining an understanding of the barriers to career development. This problem has been examined from two broad perspectives, which can be classified as an examination of the person and an examination of the organisation. Despite extensive research there still remain incongruity and discrepancies in the research findings.

The second focus has been on examining factors that advance women's careers. There appears to be greater consensus on what these factors are and how they can be used to advance careers. The research can be described as descriptively experiential, in that it has examined the experiences of women in pursuing their careers.

The literature review also identifies the limited research that has been undertaken within the public sector.

There is no evidence of the research moving beyond the approaches identified through this literature review in examining CEO conception or understanding of either career blocks or the factors relating to career advancement.

## **2.8 Summary**

The review of the literature has examined both inhibitors and facilitators of career advancement. It has reviewed the range of approaches to examining career development and identity and provided an historical account of the research approaches to date, as well as describing some of the problems associated with the research. Whilst the research examining the 'glass ceiling' is inconclusive, there is significant consensus that women and men have different experiences in pursuing their careers and that women experience greater barriers than men do through this process. There is strong agreement that the nature and definition of leadership needs to be broadened in ways that allow women's leadership to be recognised as such.

Following on from the review of work that has considered women's representation in organisational life, the context for this study was examined in terms of identifying the status of women in the public sector, comparing representation levels both nationally and internationally. The review also identified the context for this study in specifically identifying the Victorian local government sector its principles and its legislative framework, particularly in relation to the roles and responsibilities of the CEO. This has included an overview of the legislative changes within local government, clarifying the role and responsibilities of Council and its CEO as well as identifying the new public sector management focus that is more reflective of private sector principles and business activities.

## **Chapter 3 - Conceptual Framework**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to present a theoretical and conceptual framework which will determine the direction of this study. An extensive review of the literature assists in building theory and understanding (Carson, Gilmore, Perry and Gronhaug 2001). The theoretical and conceptual framework is based on the findings presented in the literature reviewed in chapter two. Chapter two examined the literature with both an historical account of the investigative findings relating to career barriers for women, and an identification of factors that assist in career advancement. It identified the different experiences for men and women pursuing management roles. Chapter two identified the iterative development of research approaches to the investigation of women's representation at senior levels in organisations and highlighted that over a 30 year period little has changed for women pursuing the most senior levels within organisations. Chapter two also highlighted the limitations of the research and identified common themes and findings, as well as contradictory and inconclusive findings.

This chapter will identify the outcomes of the literature review, which will form the basis for the development of the conceptual framework underpinning this study. The first stage in developing the conceptual framework for this study is the identification of the themes and significant findings in the existing research, and of the research approaches used previously. The second stage aims to identify the opportunity for new learning and research. This will then be used to develop the research approach and focus for this study.

### **3.2 The Research to Date**

The previous chapter identified the historical development of the research over almost three decades, which can be clustered into three major categories:

### **3.2.1 Gender-centred research**

Gender-centred research has an emphasis on comparing male and female leadership styles and approaches. Findings identified both the differences and the similarities in male and female styles. The main themes emerging from this research include:

- Women's deficiencies and inadequacy in meeting the leadership challenge (Riger and Galligan 1980; Morrison and Von Glinow 1990).
- Emphasis on determining differences in personality, behavioural traits (Jardim and Hennig 1990) and different leadership styles (Gilligan 1982; Helgesen 1995; Hennig and Jardim 1977).
- Determining that there are no differences in style based on gender (Bass 1990; Eagly and Johnson 1990; Dobbins and Platz 1986; Donnell and Hall 1980; Tavris 1992).
- Identification of more similarities than differences between both genders in leadership roles (Kolb 1999; Shimanoff and Jenkins 1991).
- Perception that women lack the relevant skills and knowledge (Tharenou 1999).
- Women's lack of confidence and assertiveness (Spero 1987).
- Men are more readily identified as leaders and women as followers (Davidson and Cooper 1992).

### **3.2.2 Situation-centred research**

The second major cluster relates to situation-centred approaches with a particular emphasis on establishing the impact of organisations' policies, culture and systems on women's representation in senior management. Included in this cluster is the interaction between the individual and the organisation. The major themes include:

- The formal organisation structure restricts women's career advancement (Kanter 1977; Fawcett and Pringle 2000).
- Women's management style is altered to reflect the dominant male culture (Eagly and Johnson 1990; Ferrario and Davidson 1991).
- Women as token appointments, and not fitting into the dominant male culture (Kanter 1977; Schein 2001).
- Women need to perform better than their male colleagues (Davidson and Cooper 1986; Harlan and Weiss 1982).

- Women need to exceed performance targets (Ragins et al. 1998).
- Women have more difficulty than men in accessing networks (Davies-Netzley 1998; Moore 1988) and mentors (Tharenou 1997; 1999).
- Style is more important than substance at senior levels (Still 1994).
- Existence of the ‘old boys’ network (Swiss 1996).
- Women rely more on qualifications rather than networks for promotion (Cannings and Montmarquette 1991; Powell and Butterfield 1994).
- Women are viewed stereotypically (Eagley and Carli 2003; Vecchio 2002).

### ***3.2.3 Redefining leadership – the third approach***

The third area relates to giving voice to women as leaders and building gender into the leadership arena by profiling women as equal to men in successfully leading organisations. The themes include:

- Women lack an identity as a leader, and their work as leaders may not always be recognised as such (Sinclair 1994; Olsson 2002).
- Leadership takes on forms of heroic masculinity (Sinclair 1998).
- Executive culture is seen as male/patriarchal elitism (Sinclair 1994).
- Networks are gender-based (Pringle 1999).
- Senior executive culture is adversarial (Marshall 1995b).
- Leadership is always viewed with a gendered lens and gender bias (Stubbe et al. 2000).

### ***3.2.4 Breaking the glass ceiling***

In addition to examining barriers to women’s career development at senior levels, the literature review highlights a number of key success factors for women breaking the glass ceiling. These include:

- Exceeding performance targets (Ragins et al.1998; Mainiero 1994a; Burke and McKeen 1994).
- Finding a style with which males are comfortable (Ragins et al. 1998; Eveline 2005).

- Opportunities for stretch assignments (Tharenou et al.1994; Mattis 1995; Olsson and Walker 2004).
- Accessing networks (Fagenson 1986; Hennig and Jardim 1977; Davidson and Cooper 1992).
- Establishing mentoring relationships (Tharenou 1999; Wallace 2001; Ragins 1999).

### 3.2.5 *Consideration of the research examining the barriers to career advancement (glass ceiling research)*

Both Chapter Two and the highlighted themes identified in this chapter demonstrate the limitations of the research that has not considered both internal (individual) and external (systemic) factors that are responsible for women’s low representation in senior management. Research investigations that focus on either the individual or organisational perspective tell only part of the story. Further, research that only considers entry to mid management levels may not necessarily offer relevant reflections on experiences at the chief executive level. For research to bring together all factors, it must consider both the individual and organisational perspectives and the relational issues between both (Oakley 2000).

**Table 3.1: Glass Ceiling Research Investigation**

Area of investigation	Research focus
Individual	internal factors e.g. personality traits, temperament
Organisation	external factors e.g. organisational policies, culture
Gender-organisation	both internal and external factors (informal and formal structures, individual behaviours and traits)

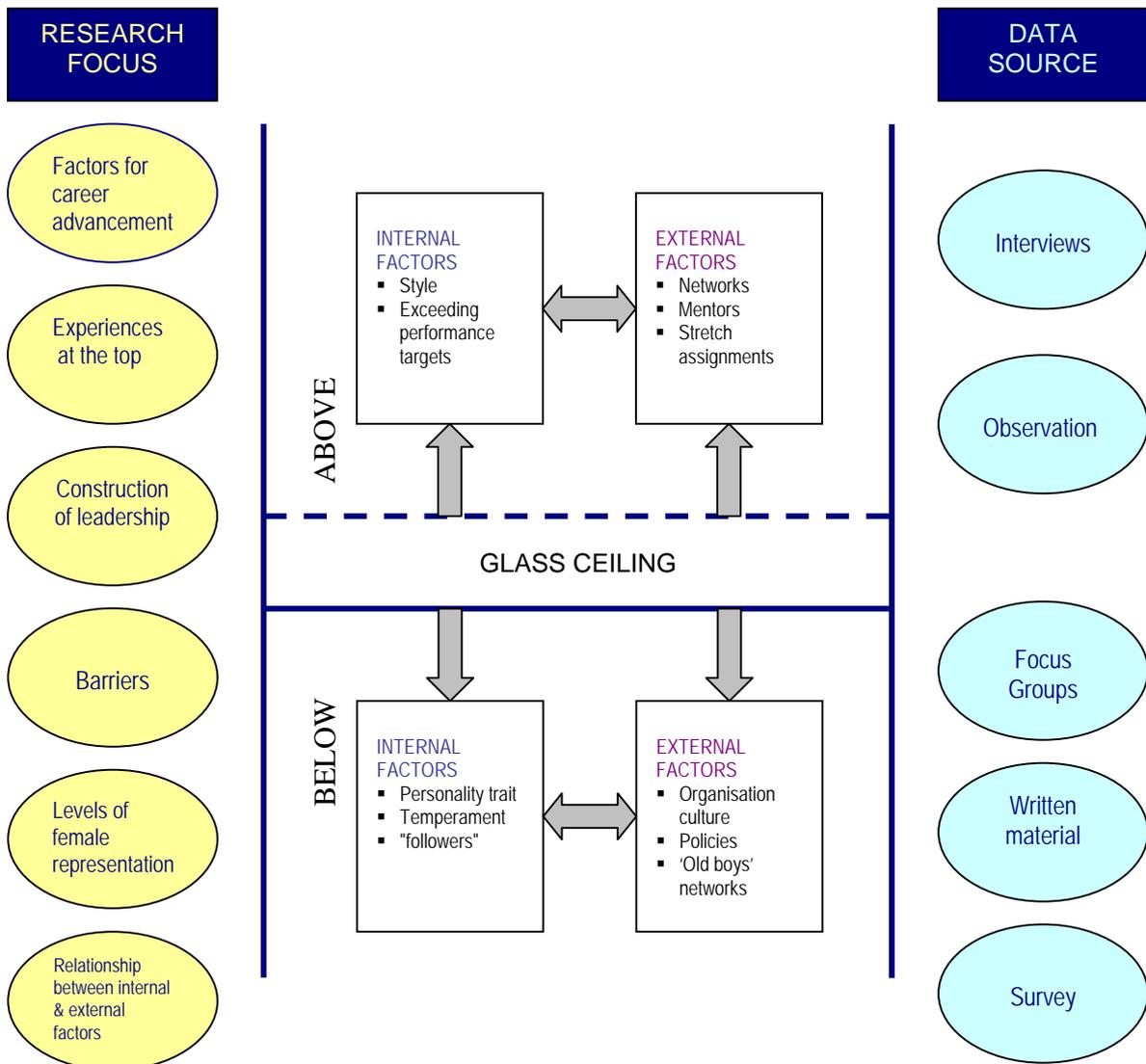
### ***3.2.6 Consideration of the research examining career advancement (breaking the glass ceiling)***

Unlike the examination of the barriers to women's career advancement, the research approaches for successful career development have more readily considered both individual and organisational factors (Tharenou 1999). There appears to be recognition of the relationship between the two factors, and an acknowledgement that the impacts of the organisation will differ according to the individual's personality and psyche (Oakley 2000).

### ***3.2.7 Developing a holistic (systemic) approach to the research***

Whilst there has been significant research on career barriers and on the factors influencing career advancement, only a small portion of the research brings these two phenomena together. The research which focuses on giving voice to women's experiences explores both issues, particularly the works of Olsson (2002); Sinclair (1998); Stubbe et al. (2000). This research aims at broadening the definitions and perceptions of leadership by creating greater visibility for female leaders. In accessing women's experiences of leadership the research has simultaneously tackled the issue of barriers. By understanding both of these phenomena, a richer perspective of leadership is gained. This research study aims at advancing this approach.

The following figure provides a framework that enables a comprehensive analysis of all the relevant factors in examining women's career development. It takes into account the range of considerations that allow for a holistic and comprehensive analysis of both career barriers and enablers

**Figure 3.1: A Systemic Model for the Examination of Women in Management**

### 3.2.8 Advancing the research

The research to date has clearly identified that the low level of women's representation at senior echelons continues to warrant examination. Research has been both quantitative and qualitative and has considered the following:

- The comparative levels of representation of each gender across organisational levels.
- The experiences of women, in relation to both career advancement and career barriers, in comparison to men.

- The differences and similarities between men and women in management styles and career development experiences.
- Establishing differing criteria and emphasis in selection of staff at senior levels to entry and mid level management. A more inclusive construction of the archetype of leader and giving voice to women as leaders, in so doing, making female leaders more visible.

The figure below provides a diagrammatic representation of the research emphasis to date.

**Figure 3.2: The Current Research Emphasis**

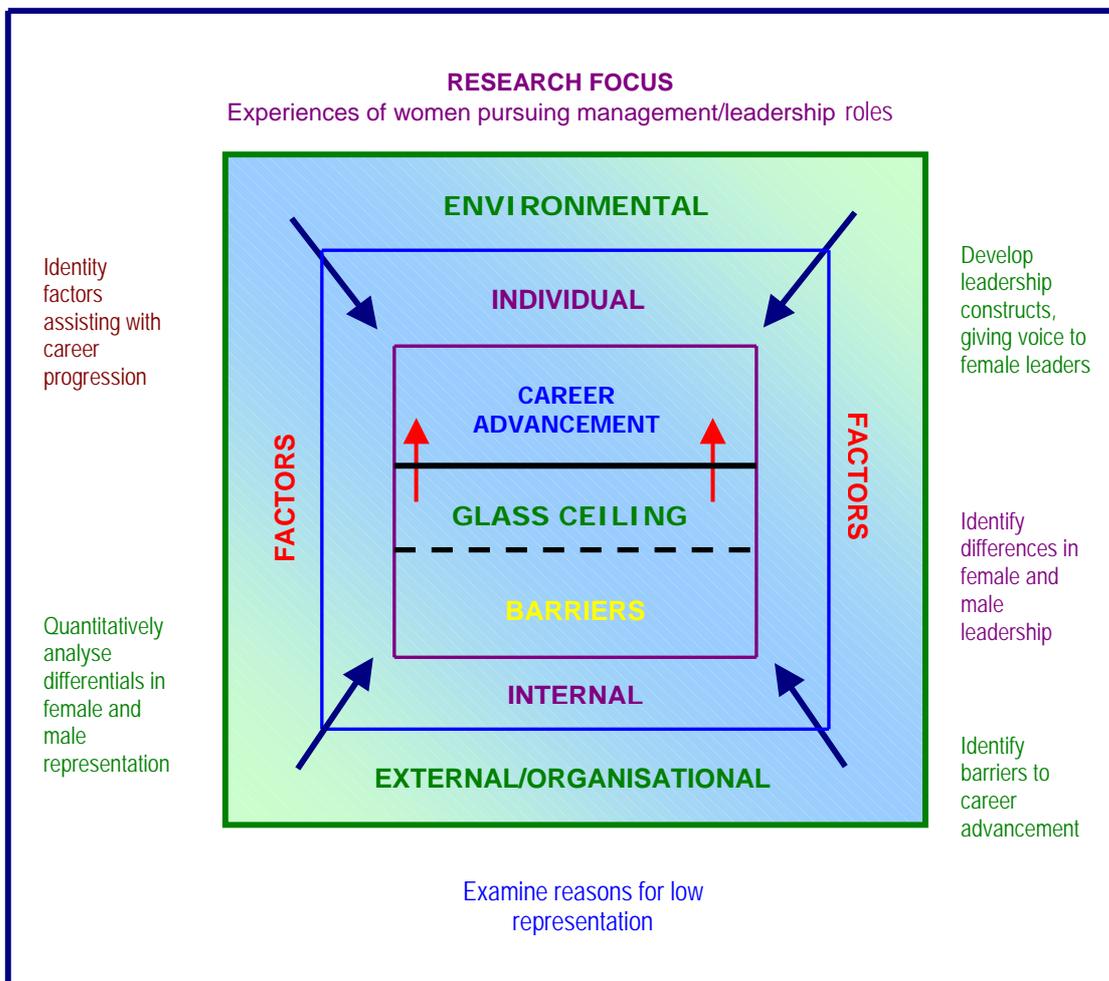


Figure 3.2 depicts the research as focusing on the experiences of women pursuing leadership roles from a range of perspectives, including quantitatively identifying the representation levels over time, and challenging the construction of leadership. The primary research aim has been to describe and understand women's under-representation at senior levels within organisations. Marton (1981) distinguishes between first and second order research. In research with a first order perspective, the researcher is interested in describing various aspects of the world (what the reality looks like and why it has these characteristics), whilst in second order research, the researcher is interested in describing people's experiences of various aspects of the world (how people experience and think about this reality).

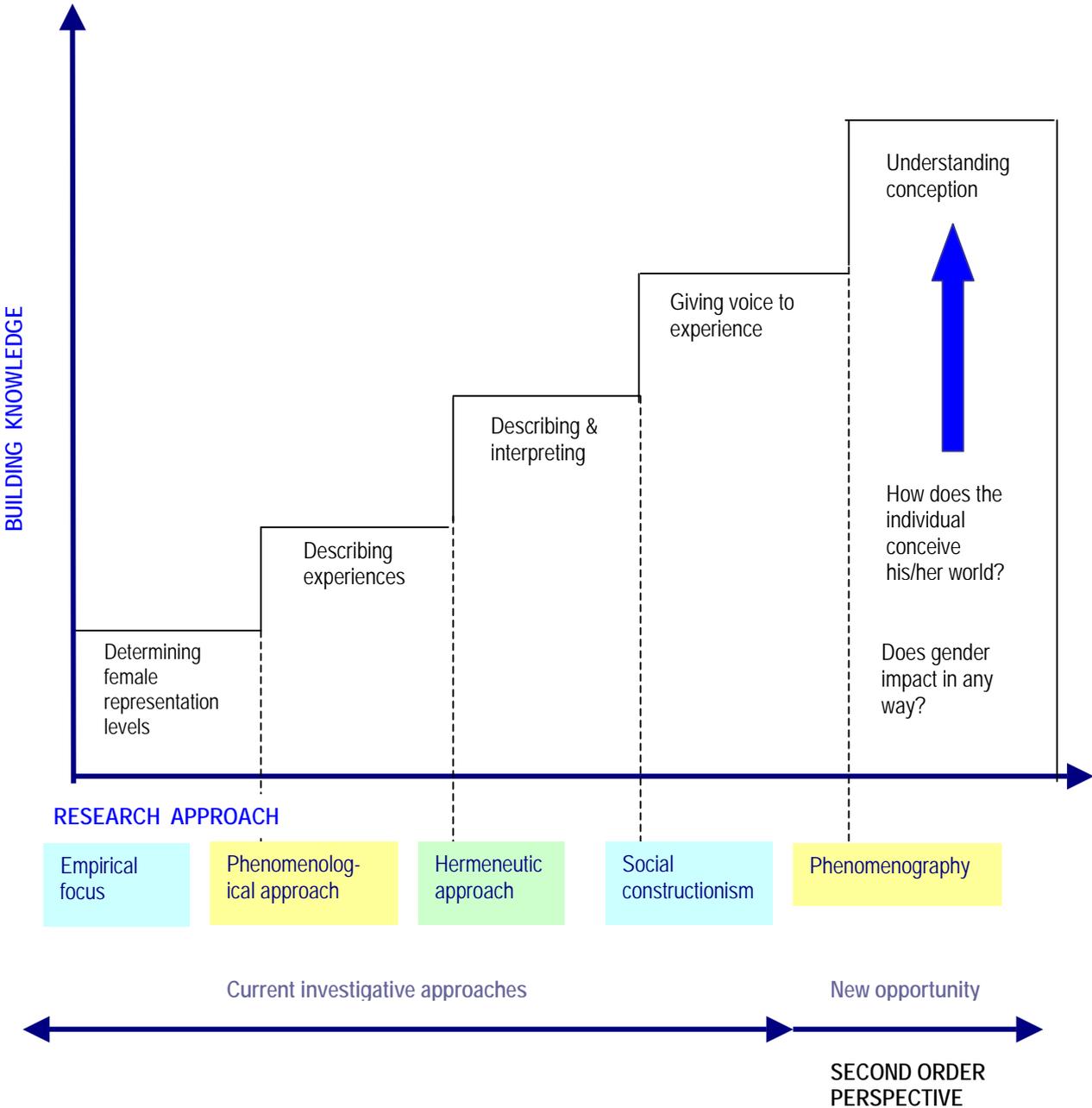
Most of the research to date has taken on a first order perspective; it has been more interested in identifying common experiences and less interested in how the individual or research participant conceives his or her world, and in describing variations in these experiences. This study is based on the premise that research which examines the experience of leadership from a second order perspective will advance the understanding of women's representation at senior levels as it specifically identifies the conceptions and considerations of the research participant. It also holds that to gain a thorough understanding of different conceptions, perspectives of both males and females should be considered.

The argument put forward is that research with a second order perspective enhances the investigations to date and adds to the existing research findings. Furthermore, it is also argued that research should take on an holistic framework, considering both career advancement and barriers simultaneously.

Victorian local government is seen as an appropriate context for conducting this research in that its governance arrangements and the roles of its CEOs enable this type of investigation. As the most senior officer, the CEO acts as the interface between Council and the administration. The relationship and employment arrangements between CEO and Councillors allow for the examination of the influence of external stakeholders on CEO career identity. Whilst the proportion of females among Victorian local government CEOs is higher than in the private sector the local government workforce is predominantly female and representation of women at management levels remains consistently lower than at other levels.

The figure below provides an illustration of the place of second order research in furthering the existing body of research.

**Figure 3.3: Identifying the Research Opportunity**



### 3.3 The Research Interest of this Study

The research interest and new research opportunity has now been identified as examining how individuals conceive of their own world and how they make sense of their own experience. ‘In order to make sense of how people handle problems,

situations, the world, we have to understand the way in which they experience the problems, the situations, the world, that they are handling in relation to which they are acting. Accordingly, a capability for acting in a certain way reflects a capability experiencing something in a certain way' (Marton and Booth 1997, p.111).

Central to this research approach, is an engagement with the research participant's lived experience, and in particular it seeks to identify the qualitatively different ways in which Victorian local government CEOs experience their career development and their role as the most senior executive within Council.

### ***3.3.1 Establishing an interpretative approach***

The identified gap in the study of women's under-representation and the research interest of this study are compatible with a particular research approach, that of phenomenography. Phenomenography originated in educational research conducted in Sweden in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Bowden and Walsh 2000). The objective of this research was to see the world from the student's perspective and in so doing, focus on the experience, as described (Ashworth and Lucas 1998). Since its emergence this research approach has been used across a number of disciplines including nursing, business and management (Sandberg 2000; Partington, Young and Pellegrinelli 2003; Sjostrom and Dahlgren 2002; Bendz 2003).

Phenomenography is a qualitative research approach which seeks to describe differences in conceptions, primarily in learning situations (Dall'Alba 1996). It aims at describing the qualitatively different ways in which reality is experienced (Marton 1981). 'Phenomenography is a research method adapted for mapping the qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualise, perceive, and understand various aspects of, and phenomena in, the world around them' (Marton 1986, p.31). In the phenomenographic approach, conception refers to people's way of experiencing or making sense of their world (Sandberg 2000). The unit of phenomenographic research is an emphasis on the way of experiencing something and the research object is the variation of experiencing something.

In this study, the phenomenon being studied is that of achieving the role of chief executive within the Victorian local government sector and the conception being studied

is an individual CEO's understanding of her/his career development and identity as a CEO. The relationship being examined is the one between the career path, including barriers to and facilitators of career advancement (the experience) and the CEO (the experiencer). The emphasis is on what has been experienced (career path) and how it is experienced (how the CEO understands this experience). Central to this study is a particular emphasis on gaining the perspective of the CEO, in accordance with establishing a second order perspective. In phenomenography the researcher seeks to capture how the world appears to other people (Marton 1981). The object of the research is therefore to determine the variation in ways of experiencing phenomena.

Marton and Booth (1997) argue that a way of experiencing something is related to how a person's awareness is structured. It contains both a 'what' consideration, which corresponds to the object, and a 'how' consideration, which relates to the act. The aim of phenomenography is therefore to discern and describe different ways of experiencing phenomena and individual conception. Its goal is to identify the structural framework within which various categories of understanding exist by identifying variation of the world as experienced. It is the emphasis on identifying difference and variation that set it apart from other research approaches. Marton and Booth (1997) suggest that a way of experiencing something is related to how a person's awareness is structured. To this end, the critically important questions are 'what is experienced?' and 'how is it experienced?' The 'what' aspect reflects the individual's way of experiencing a particular phenomenon. A way of experiencing a phenomenon can be described in terms of a structure of awareness. A particular structure of awareness has a structural aspect that is made up of both an internal and external horizon, as well as a referential component (Fai Pang 2003). The structural aspect of a way of experiencing is comprised of the relationship between different aspects of a phenomenon, which constitutes its overall meaning.

Marton and Booth (1997) explain the nature of the structural aspects as being made up of both internal and external horizons. The internal refers to the different parts that make up conception or experience, whereas the external aspects demonstrate how the experience is defined within its context. This framework for understanding experience draws on gestalt theory, where experience is seen as an identifiable whole that is created within the context it is experienced, recognising that the experience may be made up of

a number of different aspects (Marton 1988). This therefore determines that any experience considered, must incorporate identifying the whole experience and its component parts and that this must be considered within its context. The structure of awareness also has a referential component which specifically refers to the meaning attributed to the phenomenon. In this way the ‘what’ aspect of structure of awareness refers to the object itself, whilst the ‘how’ aspect relates to the act and is described as the dynamic relationship between the two components of human awareness - the structural and the referential.

The focus is on variation of experience and on interpreting this variation in terms of identifying different categories that capture the essence of the variation (Marton and Booth 1997). From a research perspective the research focus is on developing categories of description that will ultimately make up an understanding of the experience. Capturing experience in this way, by establishing categories of description that reflect experience, is referred to as the outcome space (Marton and Booth 1997). The outcomes of phenomenographic research are presented as a ‘hypothetical outcome space developed from the researcher’s analysis and interpretations of the collective experience amongst a sample group’ (Akerlind 2002, p.2). The outcome space is therefore the representation of the qualitatively different ways of experiencing the phenomenon in question.

### ***3.3.2 Establishing the experiential paradigm***

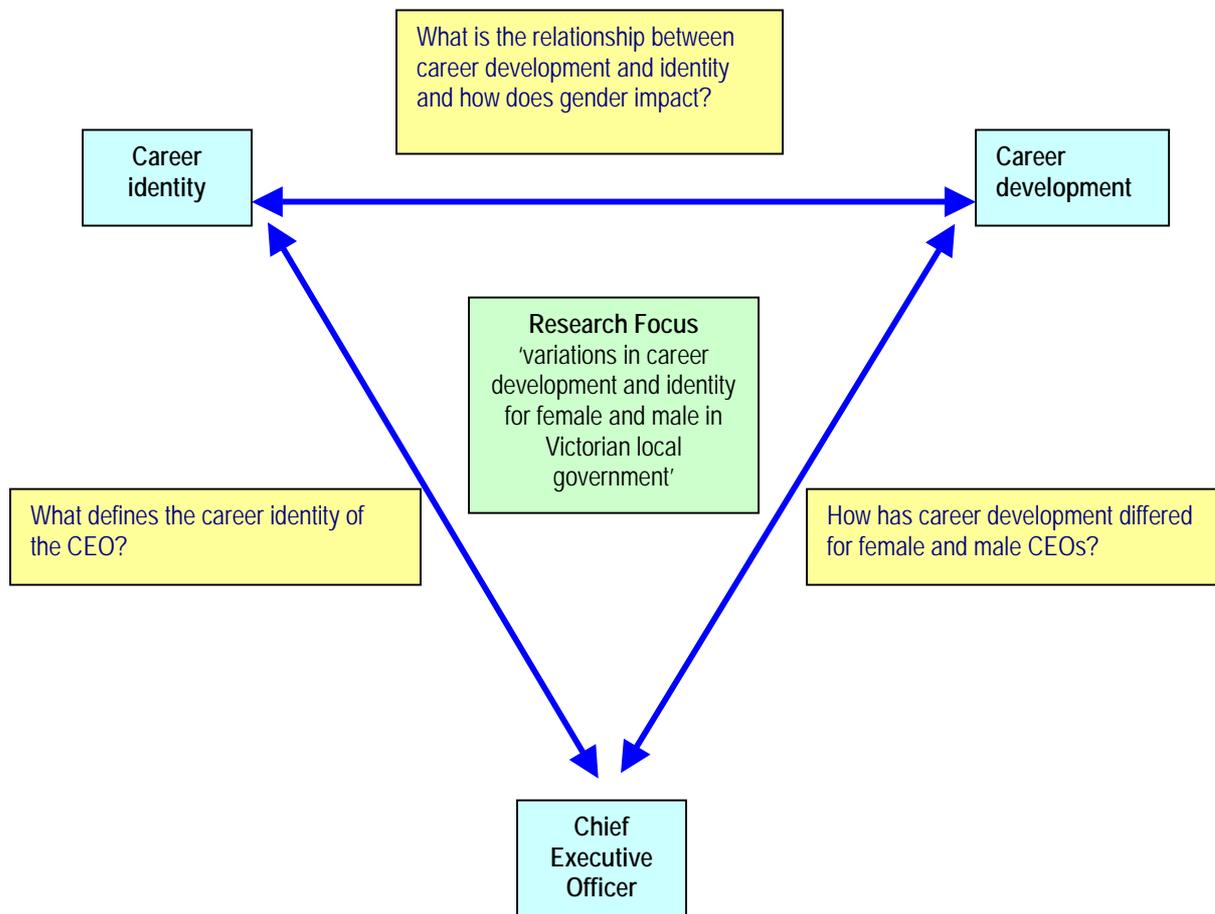
Phenomenography uses as its base an experientialist paradigm in that knowledge is viewed as an experience of the relationship formed between an individual and some aspect of his or her world (Watkins 2000). The relationship is internal, it is developed as individual awareness through the individual-world relationship and in this way is attributed meaning by the individual. By considering that the individual and world are internally related the experiential paradigm studied is interested in how individual-world relations differ and change (Marton 1996).

The experientialist paradigm proposes that it is impossible to quantify the range of individual experiences and knowledge of a phenomenon, and that the capacity of individuals to know about a phenomenon is also limited (Watkins 2000). This is explained by individuals not being able to be focally aware of all the possible ways of

experiencing a phenomenon, as well as individuals' shared social contexts limiting the range of experiences of a phenomenon (Marton 1996). In this context, where the range of meanings is limited, this paradigm suggests that different meanings can be understood as an interrelated and logically ordered continuum of experience (Marton 1996). Experiences therefore can be ordered, allowing for the examination of different conceptions leading itself to the study of variation of conception.

Such a paradigm lends itself to an empirical investigation, which focuses on identifying and differentiating a number of experiences.

**Figure 3.4: Identifying the Unit of Study**



The figure above identifies the framework of this study. Of primary interest is the examination of the Victorian local government CEOs' conceptions of their career development and identity. The core focus is identifying the different experiences of CEOs, as well as gaining an understanding of their own interpretations and

examinations of their career paths. In this sense the research takes on a second order perspective, examining both structural and referential aspects of conception. The framework also acknowledges the previous research in that it considers both internal and external factors affecting career development. One aspect of this consideration of external influences on career development and identity, is the consideration of the role of Councillors on CEO career identity. This, therefore, allows for a further point of reference in the examination of how Councillors as employers impact on CEO conceptions and a determination whether there is variation in CEO and Councillor conception of success for a CEO.

This study examines a number of relationships and how they impact on achieving CEO status. The first relationship is that of gender and career development. This relationship is explored by considering and comparing the experiences of both male and female CEOs across a number of areas, including personal demographic data, traits, behaviour, qualifications, career path, sponsors, promotional opportunities and networks.

The second relationship of interest is that of career development and the achievement of the role of CEO. Included in this examination is the identification of significant factors that facilitate or hinder career development. This consideration occurs on two levels. First, there is an examination of both barriers and facilitators, and then, a consideration of the extent to which these experiences are differentiated on the basis of gender.

The third relationship examined is that of the role of CEO and identity. Crucial to this examination is determining how CEO's view and describe themselves, and establishing if identity is shaped in any way by Councillors.

As a phenomenographic study, this research is founded on identifying CEO's own understanding of these relationships. The methods employed in this study must ensure that it is the research participant rather than the researcher whose analysis and conception guides the findings.

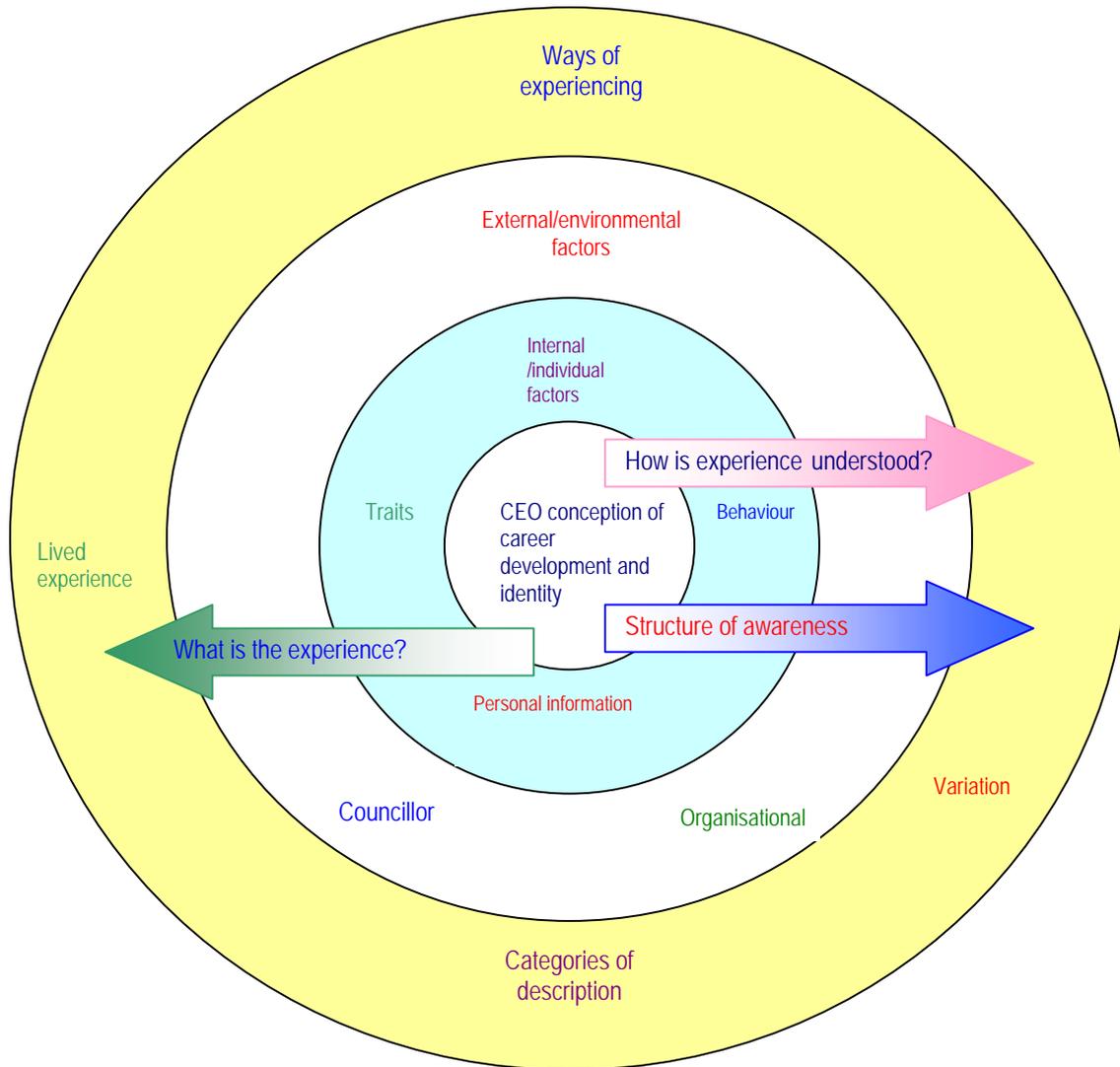
This conceptual framework clearly builds and uses the knowledge base established from previous research. It identifies the factors that prove to be significant for career development as well as those that act as barriers. It is from the literature review that the

key relationships are identified, as well as the opportunity to tackle the issue of career development and identity from a different and new perspective.

### ***3.3.3 The research approach for this study***

The previous section identifies the research approach as being interpretative, with a strong emphasis on identifying the lived experiences of Victorian local government CEOs, and understanding their reality from their own perspective. The aim of the research is to identify and capture the possible variation in the conceptions of CEOs as they reflect on their career path and subsequent move into the role of CEO. The research also considers the relationship between gender, career development and career identity. In this context the research is not about testing hypotheses, but rather an attempt to gain understanding of the research participants' own understandings and conceptions. Ashworth and Lucas (2000) assert that research of this nature requires some fundamental principles to ensure that the research is grounded in the lived experience of the research participants and not that of the researcher. To enable this, the researcher is to set aside his or her own assumptions, in order to register the participants' own viewpoint. This is known as 'bracketing' (Ashworth and Lucas 2000, p. 297). The process of setting aside researcher presuppositions is assisted by the researcher gaining empathy with the research participant. In this way the researcher detaches from his or her own life world and opens up to the experiences of the research participants (Karlsson 1993; Ashworth and Lucas 2000).

The research approach employed by this study is positioned within a phenomenographic approach, with a particular interest in gaining a second order perspective and understanding how CEO's understand their own careers. Whilst the research is not posited on a feminist methodology, it has a number of congruencies with it. A feminist methodology would explore women's accounts and descriptions of experience (Maynard 1994) and underpinning this methodology is a recognition that women have a perspective of their own lives, which feminist methodology would not discount (Ramazanoglu 1989). Similarly this study involves the eliciting of experience and understanding.

**Figure 3.5: Identifying the Conceptual Framework for this Study**

### 3.4 Summary

This chapter has examined the salient issues identified in the previous research that impact on this study. It has also identified the limitations of the previous research and the subsequent identification of a research approach that responds to the gap in the literature. Further, it has identified the need for future research to consider both career progress as well as career barriers and to identify this from the perspective of the research participants in this study. The argument put forward is for the research focus to take on a second order perspective, which implies that the research focus is on experience as described by the research participants. The emphasis of this study is on lived experience and conception of Victorian local government CEOs and in particular, an examination of variation of conception. The unit of study is an examination of the

different ways these CEOs experience career development and barriers in local government. The study aims to establish whether gender differentiates these experiences and in turn denotes identity. This chapter introduces the notion that experience is understood by examining the structure of awareness, which considers the context of the experience and the components that make up that experience. Of additional and significant importance is the understanding of the meaning that the research participant attributes to that experience. In responding to phenomenography's assertion, that context is important in determining the meaning given to an experience, this study also examines the impact of Councillors on CEO career identity and specifically examines if there is a consistent determination of success across both CEOs and Councillors. It is also argued that the research interest lends itself to a particular research approach - a phenomenographic approach – in that it specifically examines variation in conception from the perspective of the research participant. Two crucial considerations were raised, first the identification of the different ways of experiencing the phenomenon (the quest and role of CEO) and second a consideration of how these are related. The chapter concludes with the development of a conceptual framework for this study that introduces the research approach and the variables to be considered as part of this research.

In the next chapter, the methodology employed in this study is presented. This includes an explanation of the research approach, the research design and the methods employed for data collection and analysis.

## **Chapter 4 - Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the methods employed in this study. The discussion will include the rationale for using an interpretive approach, ethical considerations, interview structure and design, sampling technique, method of data collection, and data analysis.

As discussed in chapter one, the aim of the research is to investigate the variations in experiences, career identity and career development of female and male CEOs in Victorian local government, in order to establish if gender in any way either facilitates or hinders career success. The selected research approach outlined in the preceding chapter is consistent with the aims of this study in that it follows an interpretive, qualitative research approach, that of phenomenography, which explicitly examines variation in conception.

Chapter three identified the starting point for this study is not a hypothesis to be tested but rather an attempt to understand CEOs' own conceptions and the influence of Councillors on CEO career development and identity. Crucial to determining the research approach, as identified in chapter three, is that it allows for the consideration of the range of experiences that would ultimately capture the essence of the different ways of experiencing the phenomenon under investigation. In this case the phenomenon under investigation is the attainment, and subsequent experience, of the role of CEO in Victorian local government.

### **4.2 Selection of a Qualitative Approach**

Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest that qualitative research includes any research that produces findings that are not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification. Ueltzhoffer and Ascheberg (1999) argue that the aim of qualitative research is primarily of a sociological and psychological orientation, as it attempts to gain insight into the individual's subjective interpretative patterns, experiences and positions. Similarly Denzin and Lincoln (2003) suggest that qualitative research is most

interested in processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined. A qualitative approach allows the research participants to speak for themselves, and this is achieved as far as is possible, by the researcher allowing the interviews to go in the direction participants choose to take them and in writing up themes from the source data as they emerge from it, with as many direct quotes as is practical and with minimal intervention from the researcher in determining directions. In this manner their lived experience is further understood. Such an orientation is consistent with the aims of this study. It is acknowledged that since the researcher is the author of the ensuing report, the researcher must take responsibility for the final interpretation of the lived experience of participants.

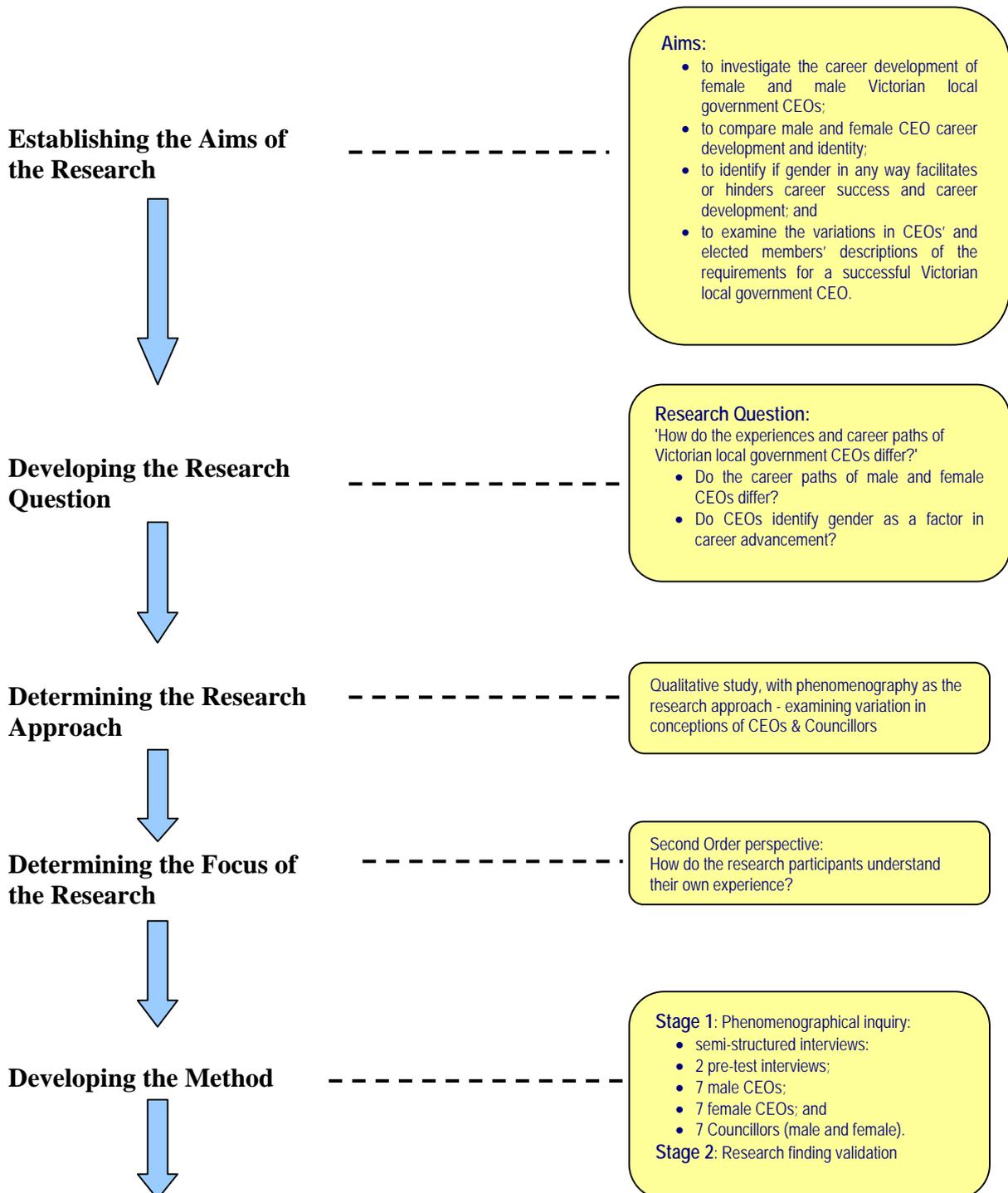
Phenomenography is the selected qualitative approach, as it allows for a range of perspectives to be examined. It is interested not only in describing experience, but also in examining variations in experience of a similar phenomenon. Phenomenography is a content-oriented research approach, which allows for the investigation of the different qualitative ways in which people make sense of their own world (Bowden 1994). The outcome of phenomenographic research is therefore the establishment of different content-related categories that describe the differences in people's ways of experiencing and conceiving their worlds (Sjostrom and Dahlgren 2002).

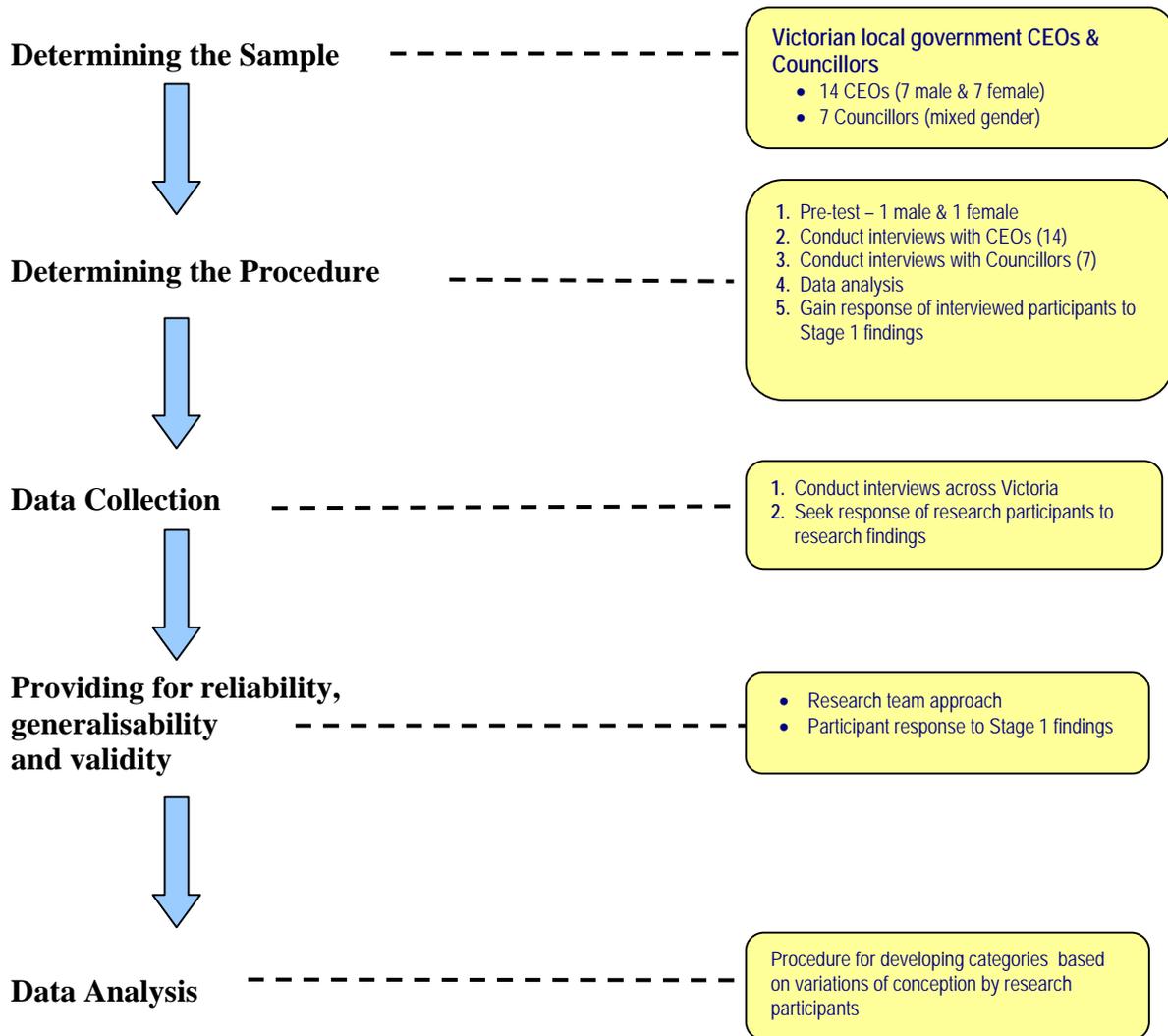
Marton (1988) identifies three lines of phenomenographic research:

- the first concerns 'content-related studies of more general aspects of learning' (Marton 1988, p.191). These studies investigate the relationship between learning process and learning outcome;
- the second line of phenomenographic research relates to the study of learning within particular content areas (Marton 1988, p.192). Typically these studies examine students' understanding of concepts and principles and have often been undertaken in considering applications within physics (Dall'Alba 1996); and
- the third line of phenomenographic research is identified as a study that has a '... knowledge interest as it is focused on the description of how people conceive of various aspects of their reality' (Marton 1988, p.190). Areas of investigation have included conceptions of political power, organisational change and health studies (Akerlind 2002).

Dall’Alba (1996) suggests that the difference between the second and third lines of research relates to whether the phenomenon being investigated has been the object of formal studies or not. This research study is positioned within the third line of phenomenographic study. Its interests are more congruent with the third line of investigation, in that its aim is to establish how Victorian local government CEOs view their role and their career development. The research approach is depicted diagrammatically in Figure 4.1.

**Figure 4.1: The Research Approach**





The next section in this chapter responds to each of the stages identified in this table.

#### 4.2.1 *Phenomenography as the research approach*

Phenomenography as a research approach has emerged from an empirical base rather than a theoretical or philosophical base (Akerlind 2002). This approach holds that irrespective of the nature of the phenomenon there are always a limited number of ways in which the phenomenon is understood or experienced (Marton 1986; Dall’Alba 1996). The range of ways people experience these phenomena are referred to as ‘conceptions’ (Marton 1986), or ‘understandings’ (Sandberg 2000), and can be presented in the form of categories of description (Sandberg 1997). These categories form the basis for the development of a hierarchy of understandings, known as the ‘outcome space’ (Marton 1986).

This study commits to the use of a phenomenographic research methodology for the purposes of establishing the qualitatively different ways people approach and perceive particular experiences. Whilst phenomenographic research has been described as empirical, it is also identified as a process more of discovery than of verification (Saljo 1988).

In phenomenographic research, the preferred method of data collection is the semi-structured interview (Marton and Booth 1997). All interviews are audio-taped and later transcribed verbatim. These transcripts constitute the empirical material for qualitative analysis, which follows certain consecutive steps allowing the researcher to identify both similarities and differences between research participants. The result of phenomenographic research is the identification of categories of description in which the different ways of conceiving a phenomenon are hierarchically and logically interrelated, and hence the establishment of a typology (Ashworth and Lucas 1998).

#### ***4.2.2 The research paradigm***

The research focus is on experience as described by the research participants themselves. The epistemological stance of phenomenography is grounded in the principle of intentionality, stemming from a non-dualistic view of human cognition, in that experience is seen to be an internal relationship between the individual and the world (Fai Pang 2003).

This study takes on three primary questions: first, what have been the career paths of male and female CEOs, and secondly what is a way of experiencing the role of CEO and what are the differences in the ways CEOs experience their role? This is examined in the context of determining how gender impacts on these experiences. To this end, consistent with the phenomenographic approach, this study is both descriptive and methodologically oriented. Stage one of the research follows phenomenography in its approach and method, whilst stage two maintains a qualitative approach whose method is not limited to phenomenography. This research study is interested in gaining a second order perspective as described by Marton (1986) as it is concerned not only with describing the experience, but also with accessing the research participants' own understandings of that experience. A first order perspective involves the researcher making statements about other people's experiences of the world, whereas with a

second order focus, the researcher's task is to investigate other people's experiences of the world (Marton 1981). In this manner, the approach to the research is that of an inductive process.

Stage two involved seeking feedback from the research participants by presenting them with a summary of the findings of stage one and seeking their comments. The research approach selected for this study responds to the gap in the research and the call for continued research into women's representation and experiences at senior levels, particularly where such research gives women a voice (Sinclair 1998; Marshall 1995a).

### ***4.2.3 The object and outcomes of phenomenographic research***

'The unit of phenomenographic research is a way of experiencing something ... and the object of the research is variation in ways of experiencing something' (Marton and Booth 1997, p.11). As described the outcome of phenomenographic research is in developing an outcome space that is made up of categories of description of the phenomenon under review. These categories of description are determined by the researcher's analysis and description of the individuals' accounts of their experience of the phenomenon.

Marton and Booth (1997) suggest that the categories of description should meet three criteria:

- each category should describe a different component of the phenomenon;
- relationships between each category should be hierarchically represented; and
- the outcome space should be made up of the minimum number of different categories that describe variation across the sample.

Every category in the outcome space is named, described and identified. In chapter three the experience of a phenomenon was described in terms of structural and referential aspects. The structural aspect represents the internal and external horizons of the phenomenon, whereas the referential aspect involves the meaning given to the experience. The referential aspect therefore relates to the relationship between the internal and external horizons (Fai Pang 2003).

The conceptual framework developed for this study identifies an examination of both internal and external horizons. The description of each category illustrates the uniqueness of that category and differentiates it from the other categories. The outcomes of a phenomenographic study are the development of a set of hierarchically ordered categories of description of the phenomenon under investigation. In this study the outcome space illustrates the experiences of CEOs and responds to the question of how gender differentiates that experience. The outcome space also considers the influence of Councillors and establishes whether CEOs and Councillors have similar views on the determination of career success and the impact of gender on CEO career development.

### **4.3 Research Design**

A research design is a basic plan that guides the data collection and analysis phases of the research project (Kinnear and Taylor 1996). It provides the framework that identifies the type of information to be collected, its sources, and the collection procedure.

The first phase of this study involved a detailed review of the literature to identify the theoretical background and factors that either enhance or constrain career development. The literature review was also interested in identifying the nature of the previous research. In chapter three the significant themes and the research interests, questions and approaches were identified in order to highlight this study's research focus. Chapter three also identified the context for this research, as well as the most appropriate research participants.

The methods employed in this study are qualitatively-based, and data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with Victorian local government CEOs and Councillors.

### **4.4 The Research Procedure**

This study was undertaken in two stages. Stage one involved conducting individual interviews with CEOs and Councillors. All interviews occurred in the relevant Council

offices. Fourteen interviews were conducted with CEOs, and then a further seven with Councillors. This approach was specifically taken so that interview questions for CEOs were derived solely from the pre-established questions and subsequent information provided by the CEOs, rather than allowing any influence from data collected from the Councillors. As this study primarily relates to the career development and identity of CEOs this data containment is regarded as crucial to minimise the importing of other variables and minimises data contamination from influences external to CEO considerations. Each interviewee was provided with a copy of her/his transcript and invited to submit further comments if she/he wished.

Stage two was conducted on completion of stage one data analysis and involved providing Councillors and CEOs with summaries of the research findings and conclusions. The purpose of this was to gain reactions and responses to the categories and findings developed from the stage one interviews. The findings relating to CEOs were only presented to the CEO group, as was the case for Councillor material. Neither Councillors nor CEOs were asked to comment on the data collected from the other group.

#### ***4.4.1 Determining the sample***

As this study relates to the impact of gender on the experiences of Victorian local government CEOs it was obviously important to involve both male and female CEOs. At the time of conducting this study, nine of the Victorian local government CEOs were female and 70 male. In conducting interviews with male and female CEOs it was deemed important to have equal representation so that both females and males were given equal voice and as such a sample size of a minimum of seven female and seven male CEOs was established.

The sample was drawn from across metropolitan Melbourne and rural Victoria, with four CEOs selected from Metropolitan and interface Councils and three from rural Councils, in both male and female groups.

**Table 4.1: Sample Demographics**

	Age	No.	Educational level	Work experience	Entry point into local government
Female	38-40	1	Bachelor level	Public Sector/State and local government	CEO
	40-45	0			
	45-50	5	Postgraduate	Not for Profit Sector; State and local government	4 at Director/2 <sup>nd</sup> level 1 at Manager/3 <sup>rd</sup> level
	50-55	0			
	55-60	1	No tertiary	Private Sector; State and local government	Director/2 <sup>nd</sup> level
Male	40-45	1	Postgraduate	Local government	Entry level position
	45-50	3	Postgraduate	Private Sector; Federal, State and local government	2 at Director/2 <sup>nd</sup> level 1 at CEO
	50-55	1	Bachelor	Local government	Entry level
	55-60	2	Bachelor Postgraduate	Federal, State and local government; Private Sector	CEO Manager/3 <sup>rd</sup> level

For the second phase of stage one a further seven interviews with Councillors were conducted. For this phase, the sample was selected to reflect geographical and gender variables. Hence, a mix of rural and metropolitan Councils was selected. Gender mix of CEOs was also taken into account in selecting Councillors to ensure that within the group were those who worked with both male and female CEOs. Councillors were selected from the same municipalities as the CEOs interviewed. A further requirement was that Councillors selected had been directly involved in a CEO selection and recruitment process as well as having a direct involvement in the performance management of a CEO.

In phenomenographic research, a sample of between 15 and 20 is considered to be sufficiently large, without becoming unwieldy, to reveal most of the possible viewpoints and allow a defensible interpretation (Trigwell, 2000). Some phenomenographic studies cite smaller sample sizes of between 10 to 15 (Bowden 1994).

The sample sizes reflected in phenomenographic studies are consistent with other qualitative studies. Strauss and Corbin (1998) posit that qualitative research usually involves much smaller sample sizes than in quantitative research. Patton (1990)

suggests that the optimal sample size is determined by the nature of the research and that a formulaic approach can be misguided.

For stage two, summary findings were sent to all participants for feedback and commentary.

#### ***4.4.2 Contacting the research participants***

Initial contact was made with the CEO sample. On completion of the 14 scheduled interviews with CEOs, contact was made with the Councillors. Both CEOs and Councillors were contacted by telephone and the nature of the study explained. Background information on the research approach was provided to each of the participants prior to the conducting of the interviews.

### **4.5 Selection of the Research Methods**

The methods selected support the phenomenographical orientation. Method, in this context, refers to the techniques and processes used to collect and analyse the data (Crotty 1998). In phenomenography, the semi-structured interview is regarded as the preferred data collection method, with an emphasis on providing open-ended questions that encourage the participants to express their own perspectives (Bowden 1994; Walsh 1994). This study has involved the use of semi-structured interviews as well as providing research participants with an opportunity to comment on research findings.

#### ***4.5.1 Data collection***

As described, this study is interested in gaining a second order perspective and this in itself has determined the data collection methods employed. The semi-structured interview is used in stage one of the research to elicit the experiences of people in relation to the phenomenon being reviewed. This type of interview allows for the exploration of the issues as well as enabling the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being investigated through the use of probing questions. A distinction is made between probing and leading questions, and it is crucial that the interviewer does not guide or direct the participant in any way (Marton and Booth 1997). Crotty (1998) suggests that when interviews are chosen as a research

method, the nature of the interview, the techniques used and the setting must be predetermined.

For this study, all interviews were conducted at the participant's workplace, where a private space was made available. All CEO interviews were conducted in the CEO's office. Councillor interviews were conducted in the office space made available to Councillors in their respective municipal offices.

Kvale (1996) advocates four crucial steps in the research process - collecting the research participant descriptions, enabling the participant's own process of discovery, condensing and interpreting the interview by the interviewer, and transcribing and interpreting the data.

The research methods employed in this study are presented in the next section.

#### ***4.5.2 The semi-structured interviews***

'Qualitative interviewing is a way of finding out what others feel and think about their worlds. Through qualitative interviewing you can understand experiences and reconstruct events in which you do not participate' (Rubin and Rubin 1995, p.1).

Seidman (1998, p.4) asserts that a research interview, '... provides access to the context of people's behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior. ... Interviewing allows us to put behavior in context and provides access to understanding the action.' Marton (1994a) identifies the significance of the semi-structured interview for phenomenographic studies. The interview should have few questions made up in advance, and more emerging from what the research participant says. The point is to establish the phenomenon as experienced and to explore its different aspects jointly and as fully as possible (Marton 1994a).

Questions are to be as open-ended as possible, so that the participants are able to choose the dimensions of the question they wish to answer. Interviews are tailored to suit the participant. The researcher is not to query the validity of the life world as defined by the research participant. External validity is less relevant in that the researcher is not to adopt a position on the validity of the claims made by the participant (Ashworth and

Lucas 1998). In this way the researcher always operates from a position of neutrality. Data gathering is seen as a process of discovery, initially concentrating on each individual as a separate case in order to later establish meaning as given by the participant. Bruce (2001) suggests that one of the major disadvantages of the semi-structured interview, compared to questionnaires involving short written responses, is the extraneous material that is collected from the former, as against the greater focus of the latter. Whilst this is acknowledged, in this research there is no attempt to limit the answers of interviewees. Rather, the participants are allowed, indeed encouraged, to determine what is important in giving their experience meaning.

Phenomenographic interviews are usually transcribed verbatim, making the transcripts the focus of the analysis. Of crucial importance is the need to ensure that any variation that is represented reflects the variation of experience of the participant, rather than a reflection of variation in interview structure and format. Whilst there is some variation in the methods used by phenomenographic researchers (Dall'Alba 1994), interview techniques are fairly consistent across research projects. As phenomenography calls for a limited number of entry questions, the researcher was at pains to ensure that all aspects of contact, including initial contact, description of the research project, place of interview, introductions, and initial questions, were standardised. Semi-structured interviews usually feature three to five questions interspersed throughout, and take between thirty minutes and several hours (Walsh 1994). In this research, the researcher has attempted to ensure a standardised approach to the facilitation of data collection. As such, a number of predetermined questions were developed for interviews with the CEOs and Councillors, and are described in the next section. All interviews lasted between 35 and 70 minutes.

#### **4.5.2.1 Structured questions for CEO interviews**

The interview was structured to elicit information relating to the interviewees' views concerning:

- their career path (questions 1 and 2);
- their attainment of CEO status and the experience of being a CEO (questions 3 and 4);
- their conception of what determines success for a CEO (question 5);

- what they believe Councillors consider as factors leading to CEO success (question 6);
- how they believe gender has impacted on their career (question 7); and
- whether being the other sex would have altered their career (question 7).

Seven main questions were posed, with probe questions identified and used if insufficient data was provided through the main question. The following questions and prompts were used consistently across all the interviews.

1. Please tell me a little about you, your family and early education.
2. Tell me about your background and career path. (further probes with identification of highs and lows of career, key milestones and academic background)
  - What do you think has been significant in your career path that you believe has ultimately led you to attaining a CEO role? (probes on major influences, opportunities, stretch assignments, mentors, networks)
3. Please describe the selection process for your current role.
4. How would you describe your experience of being a CEO?
5. What do you believe determines success for a CEO?
6. What do you believe Councillors would regard as important in determining success?
7. How do you think your gender has impacted on your career?
  - Do you believe your career development would have been different if you were male/female?
  - Do you think CEO experiences are different based on gender? If so, please elaborate.
  - Is gender management an issue that needs to be addressed in local government?
  - What are your next career steps/plans?
  - Would you like to make any final comments?

#### 4.5.2.2 Structured questions for Councillor interviews

The interview questions aimed at eliciting the following Councillor considerations:

- determination of the key role requirements of the CEO (questions 1 and 2);
- factors that impinge on CEO recruitment, including considerations of the importance of career path (questions 2 and 3);
- considerations in assessing CEO performance (question 4);
- awareness of CEO management issues and priorities (question 5); and
- establishing if gender plays a part in selecting a CEO ( questions 6 and 7).

Seven main questions were asked, with a number of follow-up probe questions introduced, seeking more feedback. All interviews included the following questions:

1. How would you describe the role of a Victorian local government CEO?
  - What are the key aspects of the role?
2. What are the factors you consider important in recruiting CEOs?
3. What do you think are the crucial steps/strategies for someone to achieve the role of CEO?
4. How do you know that your CEO is doing a good job?
  - How do you determine success?
5. What do you think CEOs would consider as the most challenging part of their role?
  - How do you think they might describe working with Councillors?
6. Do you believe gender is a factor in selecting a CEO?
7. Do you think gender influences the leadership of the CEO?
8. Would you like to make any final comments?

#### 4.5.3 Research finding validations

Once data analysis was completed, two separate summary documents were prepared relating to CEO and Councillor findings. This information was sent to all of the research

participants, who were invited to comment on the findings. CEOs were only provided summary findings relating to CEO data and Councillors were only provided summary findings relating to Councillor data.

This is consistent with a second order research approach, where the voice and conceptions of the research participant are central to the research methodology; as such, validation of CEO findings by CEOs, and of Councillor findings by Councillors, was considered the most ethical and consistent approach.

#### ***4.5.4 Interview transcription***

The interviews were all audio-taped and subsequently transcribed. Pauses and sub-vocals were edited out of the transcription on the grounds that the data analysis is based on content and eliciting meaning rather than taking a more sociolinguistic approach where the discourse analysis itself becomes significant. Transcription focused on collecting and recording all content-related dialogue.

#### ***4.5.5 Stage two – validation***

Written comments on research results were sought from all research participants. This step is crucial to ensure that researcher analysis is consistent with the participant conceptions and reflects the voice of the participants rather than the considerations of the researcher.

## **4.6 Data Analysis**

Hasselgren and Beach (1997) describe the data analysis stage as a process of discovery, in that categories of meanings must emerge from the data and are not hypothesised in advance. A major aim in the data collection process is to ensure that the outcome space is based on the interview data; accordingly, categories of description are not defined prior to the research but rather should emerge from the data (Svensson 1997; Marton 1986). Bowden and Walsh (1994) take a different position in favouring an approach

that draws on the literature first to create theoretical categories. This approach is taken to ground outcomes in the existing research. In this study, a review of the literature was undertaken prior to data collection and a conceptual framework developed as described in chapter three. Literature was also used in framing the interview questions but categories of description were not determined prior to the interviews. The interview transcripts are the source of the data collection and analysis.

The analysis usually involves an initial search for variation across the interview transcripts and a subsequent identification of structural relationships between the findings. Ashworth and Lucas (2000) have identified the differing approaches to the early stages of phenomenographic analysis, suggesting that some researchers caution against an early focus on identifying structural relationships, as this may impact on the researcher's capacity to maintain neutrality. Instead they argue that the early stages of transcript reading should involve openness, and that only at subsequent readings should there be a focus on relationships.

The analytical approach is iterative and involves the continual sorting and comparing of data for the purposes of establishing categories of description. A primary feature is the search for similarities within, and differences between, categories (Akerlind 2002).

'All of the material that has been collected forms a pool of meaning. It contains all that the researcher can hope to find, and the researcher's task is simply to find it. This is achieved by applying the principle of focusing on one aspect of the object and seeking its dimensions of variation while holding other aspects frozen.' (Marton and Booth 1997, p.133).

There is variation in the amount of transcript considered at one time by different phenomenographic researchers. Their strategies range from considering the whole transcript (Bowden 1994), or segments of each transcript (Prosser 1994) to the selection of even smaller quotes (Svennson and Theman 1983). The approach taken in this study is to consider the whole transcript initially, in order to establish interrelated themes and

meanings between transcripts, and then to subsequently consider the transcript in chunks and select excerpts that exemplify variation and meaning.

There is a strong argument that data analysis should not be the responsibility of a sole researcher but rather achieved through collaboration with other researchers to ensure open-mindedness as well as to gain alternative perspectives (Bowden 1994; Trigwell 2000). The data analysis in this study was initially the responsibility of the doctoral candidate but was also considered by both the supervisor and co-supervisor.

In this study, transcript analysis is based on the work of Akerlind (2002) and Bowden and Walsh (1994) and guided by the following:

- consideration of the referential and structural aspects of the categories of description. Chapter three introduced the importance of both these aspects, indicating that each category is made up of both a referential and a structural aspect. The referential component includes the meaning attributed to the experience, and the structural component represents the experience itself and considers both the internal components that make up the experience as well as the external horizons which place the experience in a context;
- a focus on both the ‘what’ and ‘how’ aspects of the phenomenon to gain both an understanding of the phenomenon, from the perspective of the research participant, and also a sense of their understanding and interpretation of the phenomenon. How the research participant gives meaning to the experience is a crucial consideration;
- identifying both similarities and differences between transcripts and within particular categories; and
- reviewing transcripts that do not appear to fit in.

The central tenet for phenomenography is that the research is guided by the data, ensuring that the analysis is not coloured by the researcher’s own preconceptions. The approach of having three reviewers of the data aims at minimising this possibility. In this study, the doctoral candidate conducted the initial analysis and a number of reviews with the research team subsequently occurred. This approach is outlined in detail in section 4.11.

## **4.7 The Role of the Researcher**

The outcome space that is determined by the researcher is seen as representing a relationship between the researcher and the data (Sandberg 1996, 1997; Marton and Booth 1997). The outcome space determined by the researcher is therefore not necessarily the only possible outcome of the data. However, as an empirical research approach, the research findings are grounded in the data, requiring the researcher to set aside pre-existing assumptions. The potential for interpretative bias by the researcher in this study is minimised by a research team analysing the data, rather than the research student doing this independently.

## **4.8 Questions of Generalisability, Validity and Reliability of Results**

Replicability is a common measure of reliability of research results (Sandberg 1997). However, in phenomenographic research, categories of description are developed by the researcher, may therefore be prone to subjectivity, and as such may not always be replicable. The following section highlights these issues and offers measures to enhance the study's generalisability, reliability and validity.

### ***4.8.1 Generalisability***

Generalisability is regarded as the extent to which the research findings can be replicated (Kvale 1996). Akerlind (2002) suggests that as phenomenographic research investigates variation, the sample should be selected on the basis of heterogeneity rather than representativeness and as such phenomenographic findings may not be easily generalisable. Marton and Booth (1997) suggest, however, that variation within the sample is likely to reflect variation in the wider population and therefore the range of perspectives is likely to represent the range of perspectives across the population. Hence, they argue, the results of phenomenographic research should therefore be generalisable to similar populations.

This study makes no attempt at seeking generalisability beyond the population being considered. The study solely relates to Victorian local government and its research findings are only considered as representative within this context. It is, however, noted

that emergent themes may be generalisable beyond this context, but such considerations are beyond the scope of this study.

#### **4.8.2 Reliability**

Kvale (1996) suggests that research reliability generally refers to replicability of results and that this is ensured through the use of appropriate methodological procedures to obtain consistency and quality in data interpretations. Phenomenography, by its very nature, makes this replicability problematical, because data analysis involves an inter-subjective approach where the researcher's interpretation of the data is determined by her/his own background and unique interpretation. This therefore limits the reliability of the results (Booth 1992).

Kvale (1996) however, argues that research reliability is enhanced through the use of several researchers to analyse the data. A research team approach allows for two strategies to be employed to improve reliability. The first approach involves two or more researchers independently coding the data derived from interview transcripts. The second approach involves the research team developing categories through dialogue and discussion. Sandberg (1997, p.205) describes this approach as 'interjudge reliability', where reliability is determined by the extent to which other researchers are able to recognise the conceptions and categories determined by the first researcher. The second approach is used as the framework for this study. The research student has been responsible for initially analysing data and developing categories, after which, through discussion with both supervisor and co-supervisor, categories of description are confirmed and adopted.

Reliability of categories of description can also be determined on the basis of the percentage agreement between the researchers' classifications (Trigwell, Prosser and Taylor 1994). Saljo (1988) asserts that 80 to 90% agreement on categories of description between researchers is an appropriate level (Saljo 1988). Furthermore, in this study a further reliability check is ensured by the interpretative steps being clearly delineated, thus highlighting the researcher's perspective and considerations at each stage of the research process.

### **4.8.3 Validity**

Validity in qualitative studies refers to the degree to which the research findings are reflective of the phenomenon under investigation (Akerlind 2002). Since phenomenographic research reflects the data as experienced by the researcher (Marton and Booth 1997), it is argued that the research aims should be appropriately reflected in the research methods (Ashworth and Lucas 1998; Francis 1996). The researcher is therefore cautioned to ensure that the sample is appropriate, interview questions are non-leading and data analysis is undertaken following pre-established guidelines (Sandberg 1996; Ashworth and Lucas 2000). The validity of the phenomenographic research approach is identified in the researcher's ability to justify and defend the outcome space and result findings (Booth 1992). Justification can thus be illustrated in a transparent and open presentation of research method and findings.

Kvale (1996) suggests that there are two types of validity measures that are appropriate for phenomenographic research - communicative and pragmatic validity checks.

#### **4.8.3.1 Communicative validity checks**

In developing and agreeing on the categories of description developed by each of the researchers in the team, it is argued that the researcher must convincingly argue her own interpretation and rationale, as a means of gaining agreement between the research team members (Sandberg 1996, 1997; Marton and Booth 1997; Kvale 1996). This study, as already described, involves data analysis being validated by the research team. In addition, other feedback mechanisms and checks were put in place, in particular the commentary sought from the research participants on the research findings. This is seen as a means of conducting a communicative validity check. This check directly addresses some of the criticism raised by Francis (1996) who suggests that little is done to validate the interpretation of the researcher. Clearly, in this study a group approach, involving the research team, addresses this issue of validating the findings.

### **4.8.3.2 Pragmatic validity checks**

Kvale (1996) and Sandberg (1996) argue that research outcomes can also be evaluated in terms of their usefulness to the group under study. A further check is in the acceptance of the research findings by the intended audience (Uljens 1996). Akerlind (2002) argues that if the study is considered useful, and has findings that can be applied to the particular situation under investigation, then it meets the pragmatic validity check. The issue of pragmatic validity is addressed by directly seeking the research participants' commentary on the findings.

Cope (2000) suggests the following guidelines for increasing validity:

- the researcher's own background and understanding of the phenomenon in question should be identified;
- the characteristics of the research participants should be noted so that the generalisability potential is more clearly understood;
- the interview question design should be justified;
- the steps taken to collect data should be transparent;
- the data analysis methods should be outlined;
- the processes for arriving at categories should be identified; and
- the results should be presented in a manner that allows for scrutiny.

These guidelines are used in conducting this study.

## **4.9 Ethical Considerations**

The following actions were taken by the researcher to ensure that the study complies with the accepted ethical guidelines, as identified by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC):

- approval to conduct the research was sought from the University Ethics Committee. This involved the research approach, methodology and sample selection being reviewed by this Committee;
- participants were informed that their involvement was optional, and that they could withdraw at any time;

- strict confidentiality guidelines were maintained, with identification of who would access the raw data and transcript material and information relating to data storage;
- written consent was provided by the participants prior to the research;
- a comprehensive briefing was given to the Municipal Association of Victoria prior to any contact with participants; and
- participants were made aware of the nature of the research and the approach taken.

#### **4.10 Section Summary**

This section has described the nature and approach of phenomenographic research and its application to this particular research study. It suggests that as phenomenographic research investigates and describes qualitative variation in the ways in which people experience specific phenomena, it is seen as a highly appropriate approach for this study. A case has been put forward for research methods to support the exploratory nature of phenomenographic enquiry by employing research methods which are open and non-directive, and which promote exploration. In this context the semi-structured interview is identified as the means of data collection for this study. A secondary research method involving the use of research findings validation is also introduced for this study and is seen as a means of obtaining the responses of individual CEOs and Councillors to the generic findings that are expressed in terms of both the CEOs and Councillors as a collective.

The categories of description that are determined as a result of the data analysis have been identified as representing the relationship between the researcher and the data, and the outcome space as representing the researcher's interpretation of the data collected.

The case for generalisability, reliability and validity has been identified through the research approach delineated. As such, data analysis and development of the categories of description are not only conducted by the researcher but also determined through the supervisory relationship. The validity of the study is further established through a detailed description of the methods employed and an explicit acknowledgement of the researcher's interpretations.

## **4.11 This Research Study**

This section provides a detailed description of the data analysis processes employed in the study. As has already been discussed, an effective way of validating phenomenographic studies is by providing an open account of the research methods and procedures. The sampling and data collection techniques have been described in detail, with interview questions provided. This section does, however, provide a detailed and transparent account of the data collection and analysis process. This is done by separating out the two stages of the study.

### ***4.11.1 Research stages***

Stage one involved two pre-test interviews followed by semi-structured interviews with 14 CEOs and seven Councillors. On completion of the data analysis from stage one, summaries of the research findings were provided to all research participants for their comments. The second stage of the research process, in this way, allowed for research participants to verify the findings and conclusions of the researcher.

### ***4.11.2 Data collection***

- All interviews were conducted through May to October 2006 and all took place at the participants' workplaces.
- The duration of each interview was determined by the participant and her/his willingness to elaborate on the prepared questions of the interviewer.

All CEO interviews ranged between 35 minutes and 70 minutes and were taped and transcribed. All 14 CEO interviews were conducted before the Councillors' interviews commenced. As described earlier, this was designed to prevent any data contamination or importing (by the researcher) of Councillor conceptions. As the main research focus is on CEO experience, this was the group where efforts were made to prevent and minimise suppositions.

Councillor interviews:

- all interviews followed the format described earlier, but probe and follow-up questions were based on responses provided by the participants;

- the doctoral candidate conducted all the interviews; and
- all interviews were audio-taped and transcribed and ranged between 25 and 50 minutes. Transcriptions were sent to the research participants, who were invited to comment on the transcription, either in writing or by phoning the interviewer. They were also invited to make further comments if they wished.

Four participants followed up, and offered minor modifications but no changes to content were required.

#### **4.11.3 Data analysis**

Stage one data analysis, like the data collection, involved initial analysis of CEO transcripts, after which Councillor transcript analysis was conducted. The following process was used for the analysis of both CEO and Councillor transcripts.

- First reading of each of the transcripts in its entirety was conducted for the purposes of highlighting main themes, interesting and unusual comments, and similarities and differences between CEOs.
- Second reading of the transcripts involved a process of identifying the range of responses to the particular areas of investigation:
  - early childhood/education;
  - career path;
  - CEO selection process;
  - attainment of CEO status and the experience of being a CEO;
  - establishing what determines success for a CEO;
  - possible Councillor considerations of CEO success; and
  - gender impacts on career.
- Responses were then differentiated on the basis of the gender of the participant.
- Comparisons were made between the individual male participants and then between the individual female participants, for the purpose of identifying similarities and differences within either gender. This was conducted across each of the particular areas being investigated. Explicit in this was always the consideration of both structural and referential components accounting for both a determination of what the experience is and how it is understood by the research participant.

- Male and female responses were then compared across each investigation area. Again, similarities and differences were identified.
- Initial draft categories of description were then developed, with particular interview quotes used as an evidence base for each of the draft categories.
- Draft categories of description were then reviewed by the supervisory team. This involved a process of developing an interjudge measure of communicability to ensure reliability. Categories of description were nominated if there was 80% agreement by the research team (student and two supervisors). This stage required several reviews.
- Categories of description were verified to form the outcome space.
- A final review was conducted and the categories of description making up the outcome space were confirmed.

## **4.12 Summary**

This chapter has identified the research approach that frames this study and then provided a step-by-step account of the data analysis methodology. It has explored the iterative approach to data analysis, the process of coding the data and the process of validating categories of description involving the supervisory team. Data collection and analytical approaches for both stages of the research have been articulated to enable a transparent account of the research process.

In the next chapter, the results are presented. This includes data analysis from both CEO and Councillor interview transcripts, as well as the feedback obtained through stage two of the research study.

## **Chapter 5 - The Results**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter detailed the research approach and methodology employed in this study. It also provided a step-by-step account of both the data collection and analysis procedures. The aim of this chapter is to present the results of the study.

The first part of the chapter relates to stage one of the research - the individual interviews with CEOs and Councillors. The second part of the chapter relates to stage two, and examines the comments of the research participants in relation to the research findings.

### **5.2 Examining Variation**

Determining variation of experience and conception is central to this analytical process. Variation is examined across a number of areas as identified in the previous chapters. The focus of the variation is in considering both the ‘what’ aspect of experience as well as ‘how’ the experience is understood or conceived by the research participant.

### **5.3 Variation in Conceptions**

As illustrated in the preceding chapter, 14 CEOs were interviewed, through a semi-structured interview process. The interview attempted to elicit information across a number of themes by asking questions pertaining to them, specifically on:

- the respondents’ significant early childhood experiences;
- their career paths;
- their experience of the selection process;
- their experience of being a CEO;
- determining success for a CEO;
- their consideration of how Councillors perceive CEO success; and
- the impact of gender on their careers.

Seven Councillors were interviewed - four male and three female. All were in the Mayoral role at the time of the interview. Questions were structured across the following themes:

- the role of the CEO;
- CEO recruitment;
- determining CEO success;
- Councillor identification of challenges for the CEO;
- gender considerations; and
- Councillors on Councillors.

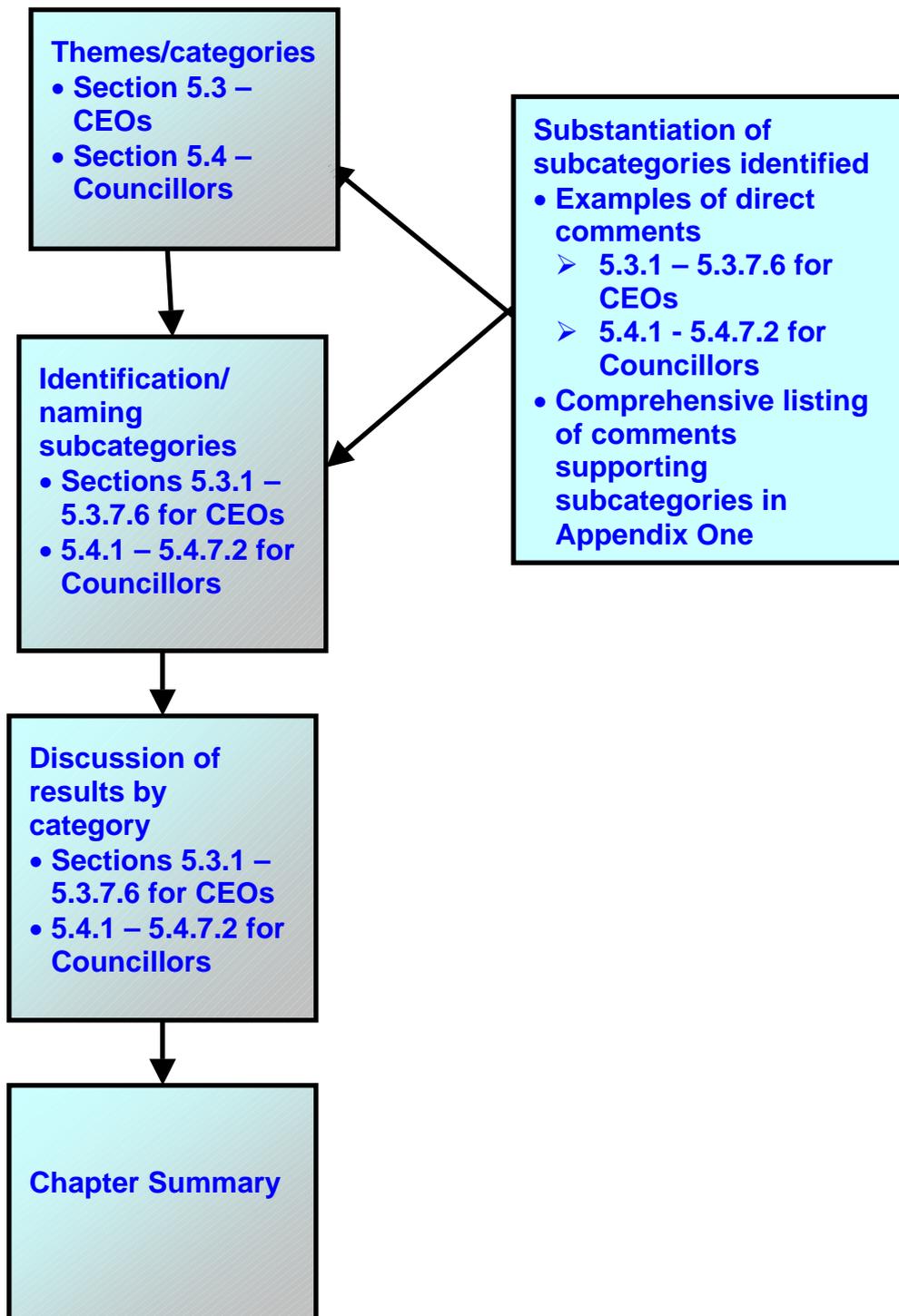
Interview transcript analysis was conducted with the purpose of describing and identifying an outcome space that captured the range of views across each of the themes identified above. The outcome space consists of qualitatively different categories of description for each of the themes. Each category of description takes into account both the structural and referential components. This therefore leads to each category being identified in terms of the experience itself and the meaning attributed to it. Each category describes a different component of the experience.

The categories are each named so that their identity and scope are clearly delineated. Where there appear to be relationships between categories this is identified and examined. Whilst phenomenography inherently focuses on group meaning to allow for integration of similarities (Trigwell 2000), individual comments are used in this analysis to illustrate specific aspects or meaning attributed to the category. Where there is a differentiation between male and female considerations this is highlighted within the specific theme discussion. The questions for both CEOs and Councillors aimed at exploring the identified themes under investigation. Interview transcripts were analysed to identify the categories of description. Categories are further broken down into subcategories illustrating the range of experiences relating to the category. Categories and subcategories move from the most complex and inclusive to categories that stand alone and are less complex and less inclusive.

Each theme is examined by considering the experience as conceived and understood by both the CEO and Councillor. The meaning attributed to the experience is also identified. Each of the subcategories is named and the different experiences captured. The information is presented in a tabular format relating to each of the seven categories and the subcategories that are identified as representing the range of conceptions. Where there are notable differences in the conception of CEOs and Councillors based on gender, the subcategory name is italicised and in red font. The tabular representation is structured differently for CEOs and Councillors, since CEOs describe their own

experiences directly whereas the emphasis for Councillors is on describing their expectations as CEOs as well as the way in which the outcome they are seeking is manifested. Direct comments from the research participants are presented as evidence to support this categorisation and are presented in each category and in Appendix One. Quotes are verbatim recordings of participants interviews.

**Figure 5.1: Presentation of Research Results**



### 5.3.1 Significant early childhood experience

This category aims to elicit information that allows the CEOs to identify aspects of their childhood through to their early career that they conceive as important factors in creating their career identity and determining their career path. This category elicits information pertaining to family of origin, early education and the early decision making of the CEOs. It captures the experiences that the CEOs identify as having relevance to their career development and identity. For this category, four subcategories of description are identified. Whilst each subcategory identifies variation of experience there is a relationship between the subcategories and in some instances the first three subcategories lead to the CEOs' own identification of being a young leader.

- Importance of family of origin.
- Early sense of responsibility.
- Finding my own feet.
- Identified as a young leader.

**Table 5.1: Significant Early Childhood Experience**

Subcategory	What is the experience?	How is it understood?	Gender
<i>Importance of family origin</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working class background/marginalisation</li> <li>• Mother as role model</li> <li>• Absent father</li> <li>• Strong focus on education</li> <li>• A focus on exceeding parental/father's expectations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achievement orientation</li> <li>• Strong family focus on being independent women, and education seen as the means to achieve this. This stems from a reluctance to rely on a male (where father is absent) or both parents nurturing daughter to succeed</li> </ul>	F
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working class background</li> <li>• Strong relationship with mother</li> <li>• Parents as role models</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family background not attributed direct significance, other than a focus to improve oneself (working class background/rural)</li> </ul>	M

<b>Subcategory</b>	<b>What is the experience?</b>	<b>How is it understood?</b>	<b>Gender</b>
<b><i>Early sense of responsibility</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking on family responsibilities at a young age due to family circumstance</li> <li>• Strong personal orientation towards taking charge without family pressures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster a great sense of independence and responsibility</li> <li>• Early development of leadership capacity</li> </ul>	F
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early school leaving – early exposure to workforce</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of strong work ethic, early exposure to the demands of corporate life</li> </ul>	M
<b>Finding my own feet</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong desire to gain direct work and life experience</li> <li>• Seeking alternative to family expectations of daughter following traditional roles as wife and mother</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exposure to different roles and environments assists in defining the individual's own capacity and goals</li> <li>• Strong work ethic assists in developing career goals and reshaping individual identity</li> </ul>	F
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unsettled time through studies and early working life, with a number of job changes</li> <li>• Built experience in local government starting at entry level and moving up levels to CEO</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through different experiences found 'calling' and pursued public service leadership</li> <li>• Understood local government sector by exposure to a range of roles and therefore gained confidence and was received as a leader</li> </ul>	M
<b>Identified as a young leader</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through secondary and tertiary studies and early work experience, identified by others as having leadership potential and directed towards developmental opportunities</li> <li>• Early promotion/high success rate with job application processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early development of leadership identity – developed belief in self as 'a leader'</li> <li>• Belief in self and development of positive work identity</li> </ul>	F
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong academic achievement; graduate recruitment process</li> <li>• Offered developmental and promotional opportunities</li> <li>• Achievement of CEO role at young age</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Belief in self; identifies as successful and wanting a leadership role</li> <li>• Early identification as leader by self and others</li> </ul>	M

### 5.3.1.1 Importance of family of origin

This subcategory of description highlights the significance attributed by CEOs to early family influence, socio-demographic status, migration and the role they played in the family. Working class background, migration, and family values were cited as important factors. For a number of the female CEOs, parental encouragement to pursue studies and gain independence is a common theme and is identified as a significant factor in promoting education and ensuring that they had the same rights, expectations and aspirations as their male siblings.

The following comments identify this conscious focus on education and career pursuits for female CEOs. Whilst family of origin is identified as important for the male CEOs, there is not the same level of conscious, planned focus on gaining an education, nor do their commentaries reflect the same level of parental encouragement regarding education as the females described. Both male and female CEOs acknowledge that childhood experiences shaped their development in some way.

Female - I come from a non-English speaking background; a Greek family who migrated to Australia ... but it was the days of assimilation not multiculturalism and also the time of extreme racism so it was wogs and dagos ... Part of their plan was to establish a family in Australia, which they did, two daughters, and they wanted us to be incredibly well educated and independent women.

Whilst the males recognise the significance of early childhood, this relates more to position in the family, background and the role accorded them within the family.

Male - Older sister, younger brother, and I hate to admit it ... I was really regarded as the senior child ... I was very close to my mother ... I've probably only realised late in life just how special that relationship was and, yeah, she definitely formed me in many ways, the values that I've got and the things that are important, and my brother and sister are quite different in personalities and I'd say in values as well.

## Discussion

Both male and female CEOs describe the importance of early family background in determining their career path and in shaping their identities. The majority of female CEOs emphasise the significance of their parents' focus on education as a means of ensuring their independence as adults. This is regarded as significant by the female CEOs and they characterise this parental motivation in terms of mothers ensuring their daughters had better prospects than they did, or both parents striving to ensure that their daughters had the same rights as the male siblings. In one instance this emphasis relates to migrant parents who were keen to ensure that their daughters were not disadvantaged in any way. For one female CEO, who did not experience the same focus on education as other females reported, her motivation was to prove to her father that she could do better than he would expect of a female. This focus on education and independence was identified by most of the female CEOs.

Whilst most of the male CEOs describe the importance of early family life, the influence of their parents is not as openly discussed as it is by the female CEOs other than for one male. Male CEOs do not appear to as readily acknowledge the impact of their family on their development, as the female CEOs did in the interview process.

### **5.3.1.2 Early sense of responsibility**

This subcategory highlights the considerations of a number of CEOs who indicate that family circumstances required them to take on early responsibilities to assist the family. This is evidenced in descriptions of needing to leave school early to assist with supporting the family financially, or taking on a parental role in the family after a parent had died or left. As with the previous subcategory these manifestations are more evident in the considerations of female CEOs. One female CEO describes leaving school early and entering the workforce so that her younger brother could remain at school.

A number of female CEOs identify taking on responsibility as formative in their personal development. Only one male CEO describes entering the workforce early; he does not

suggest that this was based on family need but rather that it was more reflective of his generation.

Female - But when I was in year 10 at school my father left and went interstate for some time so I was taken out of school and sent to work to help support the family, because my brother who is two years younger than me was the one that she (Mother) then decided probably needed to continue on with an education. She couldn't afford to pay for all of us ... I have no further education as far as formal education. It's all been the hard way.

Male - Family, two sisters, didn't finish school, left school when I was sixteen, immediately started work. I didn't do year twelve. Started on the railways and then did what you would now call TAFE, a TAFE certificate. Worked in the bus industry with Ventura.

### Discussion

This subcategory has a clear link to the first, that of family origin, where both male and female CEOs attribute some significance to their family background in determining their future directions. A number of female CEOs describe family circumstance as requiring them to take on early responsibility, either through entering the workforce prior to completing secondary school or as a result of family distress. In these circumstances they describe taking on additional family responsibilities and most of them link these experiences to their desire to lead and achieve. This theme is not evident in the reflections of male CEOs, other than the comment provided above. In this case the male CEO does not attribute any significance to early school leaving but rather suggests that early school leaving was common and he does not consider it to be unusual or significant. This male CEO later identifies his return to studies as a mature-age student and he is now the most highly qualified (academically) of the CEOs interviewed.

#### **5.3.1.3 Finding my own feet**

This subcategory focuses on the importance attributed by both male and female CEOs to learning gained through their own direct experiences. A number of male and female CEOs describe an unsettled time or a sense of not being sure of their future direction. This is evident in their descriptions of falling into roles, moving between studies and

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work, travel, and frequent job changes. For most CEOs there is an identified time in their lives and careers that heralds a ‘sense of having arrived’, marked by a key decision, study or role.

Female - Wanted to leave school at Year 10, went through a very unsettled time and again, my parents were very clever because I was wagging school and doing all the wrong things and they just sat down and said, ‘Okay, you can leave school on one condition - you get a job ...’ And once that was said I seemed to go back to school and settle down, so went through to VCE. Got into university to do a business degree. Worked all through studying.

Male - I went straight from school to working in the local Council at what was then known as the Shire of B, and B was a very small rural municipality. Wasn’t sure what I would do and when the job came up applied and got it ... never moved out of local government.

### Discussion

A number of CEOs describe periods of uncertainty and unsettledness in their early careers. Many cite the importance of self-discovery, as reflected in job changes and learning through direct experience. For some of the CEOs this required a number of moves, but many believe that the different opportunities and experiences assisted them later on in settling on a career path. Only one CEO reports his entire career being in local government, which he initially considered as an option only because he was uncertain as to what he might do. When he made this move it was not a conscious decision to work in local government. For one female CEO the idea of a career other than ‘being a farmers wife’ only became evident through her secondary schooling; prior to this, such encouragement never occurred at home.

This subcategory highlights the importance male and female CEOs attach to their own process of discovery and learning by actively trying out a number of different things until they felt comfortable with the direction they were taking. There is no notable differentiation between the descriptions based on gender. Of note is that none of the CEOs identifies any concerns with the level of change experienced; rather they see such changes as opportunities for development. Testing options, making changes and moving

into alternative roles and functions are identified as the norm. Risk-taking at an early age in this way appears to be a common element in the experience of both the female and male CEOs.

#### **5.3.1.4 Identified as a young leader**

This subcategory highlights that the majority of CEOs were identified as having leadership potential and either offered promotional opportunities early in their careers or groomed to take on leadership roles. Only one of the CEOs, a male, identifies the formal training he had in the public service as enabling him for a senior role. One female CEO describes being offered a trainee management role in the private sector, which she declined.

Female - I actually lied about my age to get my first job at Coles as a 'checkout chick' so I started working at 14 and when I went to leave that part-time job ... I was then doing the casual funding controller job, the red apron in charge of the front. They actually offered me a training management job through Coles. I knocked that back.

Male - I was good at academic work, good at sport, had an easy time. Went to Monash University. From there I went to Canberra as part of a graduate recruitment process for the Commonwealth Public Service ... Worked for the Commonwealth for nine years. Enjoyed it, I was part of an intake where they took 30 people from around Australia and the aim of that was to grow future secretaries of departments or CEOs.

#### Discussion

A number of CEOs describe themselves as having leadership qualities that were identified early on. For some this was evidenced in early childhood in terms of academic achievement, leadership roles that they took on at school or subsequently being promoted early in their careers. In some cases CEOs were afforded training and development opportunities which assisted with their career development. These experiences and opportunities are commented on by both male and female CEOs. For the majority of CEOs leadership is presented as almost a 'given'. Not one CEO felt surprised by their leadership achievements, which they all regarded as inevitable.

### **5.3.1.5 Summary**

All of the CEOs acknowledge the significant influence of early childhood experiences on later career development. Of note is the recounting by a number of female CEOs of the strong focus of their parents on education as a means of ensuring their independence and positioning them for their future career prospects. Male CEOs do not describe such a focus but do however attribute importance to their family of origin and early experiences. Female CEOs more openly describe taking on early responsibility due to family circumstance. For some female CEOs, being able to move beyond parental expectation is also discussed. This is evident in comments of parents reflecting expectations of being a farmer's wife, or only men being managers. These female CEOs describe wanting to prove to their families that they were capable of something more.

For many there is a sense of an unsettled time in their studies or early careers, with the need for individuals to determine their path based on their own experience. There is a common theme of both female and male CEOs moving between roles and studies until they were able to settle on a career path or role.

There are clear links between the subcategories particularly relating to early family experiences and taking on early responsibility. There is also evidence of the female CEOs describing this as important in shaping them and/or their careers. This is not as evident in the male CEOs' manifestations. It is along this theme that female and male CEOs' conceptions differ.

The majority of CEOs either identified themselves as leaders, or were recognised as such by others. Leadership is presented by many as an inevitable outcome, and for some described as being their destiny.

### **5.3.2 Career Path**

This category explores the career path of the CEOs, early work experience, tertiary qualifications, and significant factors, such as opportunities or contacts assisting or inhibiting their career. This category also allows for an examination of the importance of

mentors and the use of networks during the CEO's career progression. Four subcategories of description are identified:

- being the best I can be/standing out;
- risk-taking/out of comfort zone;
- sponsors/champions; and
- lucky break.

**Table 5.2: Career Path**

<b>Subcategory</b>	<b>What is the experience?</b>	<b>How is it understood?</b>	<b>Gender</b>
<i><b>Being the best I can be/standing out</b></i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First female to achieve a particular role</li> <li>• Others promoting their achievements</li> <li>• Seeking mastery over particular roles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breaking the glass ceiling, gaining sense of being equal to male colleagues</li> <li>• Creating visibility and identity as a leader</li> <li>• Sense of achievement, strengthening sense of 'work self'</li> </ul>	F
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Successful promotional opportunities</li> <li>• Identified as reformer/change agent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sense of own skill level</li> <li>• Development of confidence and self-belief</li> </ul>	M
<b>Risk-taking/out of comfort zone</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career moves based on pursuit of new and varied roles and learnings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thrive on risk taking, growing capacity and willingness to take on new challenges</li> <li>• Comfortable with job insecurity so long as new learning and development is occurring</li> <li>• Motivated by diverse role</li> </ul>	F
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pursuit of diversity of work experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motivated towards diverse and challenging roles – identifies local government as providing these opportunities</li> </ul>	M

<b>Subcategory</b>	<b>What is the experience?</b>	<b>How is it understood?</b>	<b>Gender</b>
<i>Sponsors/champions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of mentor relationships</li> <li>• Mentors mainly men</li> <li>• Learning through negative experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning opportunities; role modelling and networking</li> <li>• Mental preparation for role of CEO, capacity to defend own position</li> </ul>	F
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-reliant; informal learning opportunities</li> <li>• Learning from poor managers</li> <li>• Building relationships and connections with people who can assist as referees or in promotions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selective learning and ‘cherry picking’</li> <li>• Sense of establishing what not to incorporate in one’s own management</li> <li>• Importance of building networks</li> </ul>	M
<b>Lucky break</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Given opportunities that weren’t expected</li> <li>• Being in the right place at the right time</li> <li>• Lucky breaks through promotion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Importance of presentation and networks</li> <li>• Building relationships and profile</li> </ul>	F  M

### 5.3.2.1 Being the best I can be/standing out

Both male and female CEOs identify a strong achievement orientation, exemplified by strong performance. Whilst this is a common element echoed by most of the CEOs, there appears to be a difference in their interpretation and understanding of the experience of standing out and ‘shining’. The difference between male and female CEOs was not so much in experiencing achievement but rather in their interpretations of the reasons for standing out.

A number of the females experienced an awareness of standing out on the basis of being the first woman in a particular position or role. In these instances gender has enabled these women’s achievements to be identifiable. Both these women and others around them identify this achievement as being unusual for a woman. As such the achievements were often the first for women in attaining a position or working for an organisation. Of note is the preparedness of these female CEOs to move into new areas, and take on new challenges, and also their being motivated by challenging tasks or roles as well as

repeatedly seeking challenge and variety of role and experience. In describing these experiences many of the female CEOs speak of a strong desire to stand out and to exceed performance expectations.

Female - I ended up taking a job with what was then the Board of Works ... as their first admin officer for women. All women had only ever been assistants ... I was the first officer who was female in that job.

Like the female CEOs, the male CEOs also describe being motivated by new challenges and consciously pursuing avenues that would assist with their profile. The males tended to more openly attribute their standing out and career progression to their own skill levels and achievements. A common theme for the male CEOs also was one of being motivated by challenging assignments and a keenness to experience variety in their roles.

Male - My first job was working in the Prime Minister's Department in 1980 where I actually ended up ... in my first three months placement, I would write things that went to the Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser. I wasn't allowed to sign them, of course, but I wrote them and they'd come back with the Prime Minister's huge handwriting on them. And then if you did any good in that, you got accelerated, promotions.

### Discussion

Female CEOs were more likely than the male CEOs to suggest that outstanding performance on a gender basis, as a woman was a strong differentiator and reason for promotion. Whilst they acknowledged their own skills, achievement as a woman was seen as important in giving them an opportunity. Male CEOs more openly talked about their own skill as the reason for differentiation and standing out. There is a clear difference in the way in which male and female CEOs discuss their own achievements, males being more willing to personalise and 'own' their own success and achievement. Women were more likely to talk about opportunities given to them, as opposed to the men who talked about their own pursuit of particular roles and then their accession into these roles. The men were less surprised than the women by their own accomplishments and also appeared to be more comfortable discussing them. This subcategory identifies a common theme for both male and female CEOs in their career considerations, involving pursuit of assignments which would enable them to build a profile and reputation. The

key variance is in how male and female CEOs describe these achievements. The comments above highlight the males' capacity to proudly own these achievements whilst the female CEOs were more reticent to claim that their achievement was through their own capacity. Instead, many describe achievement in terms of achievements of women generally rather than specifically of their own. Of note is the willingness of many of the male CEOs to put themselves forward for promotional opportunities, whereas a number of women appear to have needed encouragement, or to be invited to take on a particular role.

For both male and female CEOs a primary motivator in determining career movement was the pursuit of challenge and variety in role. All CEOs identified local government as providing this opportunity.

### **5.3.2.2 Risk-taking/out of comfort zone/new challenges**

Both male and female CEOs identify the pursuit of new challenges as a prime motivator through their careers, and the initial move into local government for many is based on the opportunity for new challenges and the diversity of roles offered in the sector. Of note is the variety of role of most of the CEOs, predominantly based within the public service. Two of the male CEOs have worked in the private sector, but all other CEOs have worked across the three tiers of government and in the not-for-profit and education sectors. Two male CEOs and one female CEO entered local government at CEO level whilst most others entered at either manager/third level or director/second level. There were two male CEOs who commenced in local government at entry level positions. All of the CEOs discussed the need for challenge and stimulation in their roles. All of the CEOs noted their comfort and willingness to take on new roles and most described enjoying risk-taking, particularly in the early parts of their careers. This is evidenced in all CEOs moving between sectors and across portfolios.

Female - (On becoming a Director) they wanted a balance of gender and I applied and the consultants liked the fact I'd published a book. And so things were aligned and so I became the Director, which was sort of a fairly major leap for me, I'd been a manager, and into a portfolio that wasn't my background.

The male CEOs also identify similar motivational sources through the pursuit of challenging roles, and many of their responses focus on the desire to work in a diverse environment.

Male - ... I have to be stretched, like an iron man I've got to go to the limits so a comfortable existence just wouldn't suit me. I like to have 87 things going on. If I get to 97 I start to worry because things get messy but if I get to 77 I start to worry because I feel under utilised.

### Discussion

This subcategory has common elements with the previous subcategory in that both male and female CEOs present as driven personalities, which is evidenced in their strong motivation to be challenged and stretched. Both male and female CEOs' career paths involved numerous moves, predominantly within the public sector, both at level as well as for promotional reasons. All the CEOs talk about wanting to be stretched and express comfort with taking risks, as evidenced in moving into new areas, in some circumstances with limited knowledge of the function or service area. Only one CEO (male) reports making a move based on family circumstance and in this case he took a pay cut.

The common themes present for both male and female CEOs within this subcategory are the need for challenge, looking for opportunities for growth and development and seeking diversity of role. All CEOs express excitement in being able to work as broadly as they have. Whilst both the male and female CEOs highlight the pursuit of challenge and new opportunities as a major driver, a number of female CEOs describe being encouraged to take that step or being given that opportunity through a recruitment process. None of the male CEOs identify the need for, or experience of, such external encouragement.

#### **5.3.2.3 Sponsors/champions**

This theme highlights the importance of mentors and champions for career advancement. Both male and female CEOs identify individuals who either formally or informally have taken on the role of mentor, or who have assisted in their career development in some way. Most of the discussion relating to this subcategory focuses on positive learning

experiences. Only two CEOs describe more difficult relationships, and even then they still recognise the possibility of learning and developing through negative experiences.

Female - I think it was because he (manager) probably had some skills that I knew I had to improve and deliver and that was around the political know how ... I got some incredible learning there. He also gave me a hell of a hard time ... I'd followed him (to the new organisation); he had to actually treat me a little tougher than he did the others. I actually found that he really challenged me on my decisions and what was happening and I always felt I had to do the hard yards. Now whether that's a mental ... but I tell you what, the role modelling probably really toughened me up, made me more prepared and especially around the politics of it.

Male - I've had good quality people that I could learn from. Occasionally I've had people who I could learn what not to do from so I guess I always look at the positive side of that if you work for somebody who is not doing the things you think are the right things you actually learn by watching them what you don't want to do in the future when you find yourself in that sort of position. And occasionally I've worked with people who have given me very good advice at a peer level about my approach to things and that sort of thing.

### Discussion

Most of the CEOs identify the role of mentors or significant individuals in their career development. For both male and female CEOs, mentors were more likely to be male. The female CEOs present as more likely to seek out mentors, whereas the male CEOs recognise the role of significant individuals but do not as readily regard these relationships as mentoring ones. Female CEOs readily identify key individuals through their career who have assisted them, but male CEOs are more inclined to comment on informal learning opportunities and describe themselves as being selective in their learning.

As is evident in the comments, the male CEOs more openly talk about making connections specifically to assist with career development, whereas the female CEOs talk more about the learning opportunities gained from significant relationships. Both male and female CEOs attribute significance to networks, relationships and having a sponsor

and for most of the CEOs there is a level of conscious relationship-building and fostering relationships with individuals who are seen to be in a position to assist them with their careers or development.

Learning is described as being triggered by both positive and negative experiences. In this way the process of learning involves both a modelling of perceived desirable behaviours and a conscious attempt to avoid replicating undesirable behaviours. Learning is characterised by the CEOs as a conscious pursuit and is not always pain-free. Female CEOs are, however, more likely to attribute their learning to having been challenged, given a difficult time or made to suffer some discomfort. Whilst the male CEOs talk about negative experiences they are less likely to identify them as learning opportunities. Female CEOs are more willing to talk about on-the-job learning opportunities.

#### **5.3.2.4 Lucky break**

Whilst the previous categories highlight the recollections by CEOs of planning their careers, developing relationships and pursuing roles that would assist with career development, four of them indicate that at times through their career they have had lucky breaks. There is no differentiation of this experience based on gender.

Female - ... so it was probably the last year or two at X Council that I was thinking yes I can do it and I will start to think about it and then I put in for four or five CEO roles, you could not crack it in metropolitan ... But then I applied for and I did apply for a Metro Council first round, got it on numbers but got knocked out on politics and in fact it's amazing I'm sitting here now (same Council) or that I bothered to apply second time around because of all of that.

Male - I had some lucky breaks when I was younger. I had some very lucky breaks. You know, to go to Y, to within a couple of years end up as CEO, you know, that was clearly a lucky break. The restructuring of local government I think was a lucky break for me because it got me out of a comfort zone and I'm sure I wouldn't be sitting here today if restructuring didn't occur. It got me to stretch myself, gave me a whole opportunity around change management.

## Discussion

Both male and female CEOs acknowledge that at times career progression has been achieved through lucky breaks and being afforded opportunities that others may not have been given. Whilst skill level and achievement are regarded by CEOs as the main reasons for career progression, a number identify being in the right place at the right time as the basis for their move into particular roles. There does not appear to be any differentiation on the basis of gender.

### **5.3.2.5 Summary**

This category and its associated subcategories have highlighted the similarity of experiences for both male and female CEOs. Of note though is the varying importance which females and males attribute to a number of key issues. Female CEOs are more likely to suggest that standing out from others is based on their achievements being regarded as unusual for women, which therefore set them apart from other women. The males are more likely to suggest that they stood out on the basis of their own skill and experience. Female CEOs are more likely to recognise the importance of mentors and significant individuals in providing them with learning opportunities, career guidance and recognition of their future potential.

Males are more likely to discuss relationships in terms of strategic advantage and the gains made from these relationships. Males also appear to be more selective in terms of the connections and relationships they pursue for the purpose of career advancement and connection. Female CEOs appear to be more comfortable talking about negative experiences and relationships and are more willing to discuss the emotional cost to them of these experiences. Male CEOs, whilst demonstrating a preparedness to talk about negative experiences and relationships are less likely to discuss the personal impact on them, other than saying that such experiences were invaluable learning experiences. This category highlights the achievement orientation of both the male and female CEOs as evidenced in their risk-taking and seeking of challenges, and in their strong focus on education.

### 5.3.3 *The CEO selection process*

This category specifically invites CEOs to discuss their experience of the recruitment process for the selection to a CEO role. CEOs all describe a similar recruitment process, usually involving a recruitment agency, and interviews conducted by either a sub-committee of Council or the whole Council. The selection decision is entirely the responsibility of the Council, and is formalised through a formal Council meeting.

This category provokes discussion by CEOs on the selection process, the interview itself, reactions to the process and considerations on what they believe assists and hinders the process. Discussions also focus on gender in relation to the different experiences which CEOs believe men and women undergo, as well as the impact of the gender mix of Councillors. Five subcategories of description are identified:

- the selection decision is predetermined;
- it's all about 'the right fit';
- the need for personal disclosure;
- inexperience of Councillors; and
- 'Queen bee' - why women don't want a woman at the top.

**Table 5.3: The CEO Selection Process**

<b>Subcategory</b>	<b>What is the experience?</b>	<b>How is it understood?</b>	<b>Gender</b>
<b>The selection decision is predetermined</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council is clear on who they want in the role – this is based on personality and gender</li> <li>• This is a predetermined position of the Council</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More difficulty achieving CEO role, multiple applications</li> <li>• The recruitment process at CEO level is closed and limited</li> </ul>	F & M
<b>It's all about the fit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The potential relationship between Council and CEO is regarded as the most important selection criterion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CEOs need to demonstrate capacity to represent Council, its values and directions consistent with Council</li> <li>• Managing the relationship between organisation and Council requires ongoing nurturing and investment</li> </ul>	F & M

<b>Subcategory</b>	<b>What is the experience?</b>	<b>How is it understood?</b>	<b>Gender</b>
<i>The need for personal disclosure</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Females asked personal questions at CEO selection interview</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Believe Council is keen to understand how they will balance work/family life</li> </ul>	F
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not an issue for male CEOs</li> <li>• Limited personal disclosure sought</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council expects a more impersonal relationship with male CEO</li> </ul>	M
<i>Inexperience of Councillors</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No comment</li> </ul>	_____	F
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Councillors are inexperienced in senior executive recruitment and corporate governance</li> <li>• Councillors have limited capacity to accept their governance obligations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scepticism about process</li> <li>• Opportunity to build rapport and develop a close working relationship as Council learns of its role</li> <li>• Need to manage the organisation and Councillors separately</li> <li>• CEOs do not necessarily seek strategic direction from Council</li> </ul>	M
<b>‘Queen bee’</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Female Councillors are less likely to recruit a female CEO, who could be seen as a competitor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to manage dynamics between Council and administration, and monitor gender play</li> </ul>	F & M

### 5.3.3.1 The selection decision is predetermined

A number of CEOs suggest that the choice of CEO is settled prior to the selection process. CEO commentary suggests that many of them believe that Councillors enter the recruitment process having either a particular candidate in mind or a very clear sense of the characteristics and type of person they want.

Female - I was the Acting CEO while they were going to recruit a person that they needed which was male, Labor party, one of the boys and one of the clan and they (Councillors) were sure that I wouldn't mind that because they really valued me, but they really needed their own man and I said to them that's fine, I mean I'll keep acting until you find who you want but then you make your choices and I'll make my choices, that was the end of that but I'll apply because of the fact that you've asked me to, with no expectations, I know you want a man that's a Labor party ... So they went through the process and in the end offered me the position ... I guess I was the 'right man' in the end.

Male - They went through an interview. I suspect they probably already worked out that I was a good candidate and they may have looked at whether anybody was better.

### Discussion

A number of CEOs suggest that the appointment of the CEO is a predetermined decision by Council. This predetermination involves having a particular candidate in mind, seeking a particular personality or in one case being explicit about the gender or the politics of the CEO. For one female CEO, even though a particular outcome was sought - the appointment of 'a Labor party male' - having gone through the process she was offered the role. Although describing this outcome in jest, suggesting that 'she was the right man for the role', she does however note, that she was not the first choice. Whilst five CEOs referred to this perception, there is a stronger presentation of the view by the male CEOs, who use precise terms, such as 'predetermined view' and 'know what they want'. Female CEOs are less explicit in their discussion.

#### **5.3.3.2 It's all about the fit ...**

A number of CEOs suggest that Councillors' decision making is based on how well they perceive they will get on with the CEO. The issue of relationship between CEO and Councillors is again highlighted in section 5.3.5.

Female - The thing about Councillors, this is my view, is that they usually get three or four people that are all able to do the job. They pick the one they like; they'll pick the one that they feel they're going to get on with.

Male - Councillors are likely to choose the person they can get on with.

### Discussion

The majority of male and female CEOs comment on 'the fit' between Council and CEO as a major determinant in the selection process. They believe that one of the key factors that Council considers in making the selection is how well the CEO will represent their values, goals and organisation. Capacity to both engage with and represent the Council is regarded by many of the CEOs as of primary importance. Whilst a number of factors are

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raised by CEOs, including fit, relationships and ability to represent Council, not one CEO comments on skill level and capacity to do the job.

One female CEO discusses her capacity to do the job but comments that she was not sure how Council would regard her, given how few females there are in CEO roles. Only one female CEO suggests that gender assisted her in her pursuit of a CEO role. She suggests that she stood out from other applicants on the basis of gender and also stood out from other female applicants who had community service backgrounds.

### **5.3.3.3 The need for personal disclosure**

In reflecting on the selection interview, four of the female CEOs suggest that Councillors sought personal information from them. These questions pertained to family life, including marital status, children and location of home. Only one male CEO reports any personal questions being asked of him and he suggests that this relates to his young age at the time of the appointment. No other male CEO identifies any awareness of or concern with the requirement for personal disclosure at the CEO interview. One male CEO recalls being on an interview panel where a Councillor sought personal disclosure from the interviewee. One female CEO identifies her need to share her own personal circumstances with Council prior to her accepting the role.

Female - There was another woman Councillor who added a dynamic, advocating for one of the internal candidates who I know was very keen to understand the private name, rank and serial number and did I have young children and would I therefore not be capable of delivering the role and so on. So I think that dynamic was certainly there.

Male - They're very keen to know about who you are and that goes into family and all sorts of things, yes. I remember when I first went to Y, I was interviewed by the full Council there and this was for the accountant's role and they asked me how would I feel about moving out of home.

### Discussion

The discussion by CEOs suggests that they believe Councillors are interested in their personal background as part of the selection process. This is an issue that is raised by more female CEOs than male CEOs and represents a variation in their experiences. Not only do female CEOs anticipate these personal questions but they make allowances for perceived Councillor interest, and a number of them raise their own backgrounds preemptively with Council. The need for personal disclosure is seen as assuring Council of their ability to be available as required. Only one male CEO raises such issues, recalling a Councillor comment about his relative youth, when he was seeking his first CEO appointment. One other CEO remembers hearing inappropriate questions from a Councillor in an interview. This subcategory identifies very different conceptions and considerations between male and female CEOs. This appears to be an issue that female CEOs considered in advance, and many of them anticipated such questions and planned their responses. Only two male CEOs describe similar experiences, and they do not report the same level of personal disclosure that was expected of the female CEOs.

#### **5.3.3.4 Inexperience of Councillors**

Whilst this subcategory displays links with the previous subcategory, commentary by CEOs on the inexperience of Councillors is only voiced by the male CEOs.

Male - They short-listed, I don't know, four or five, my impression of the interview was that they were asking questions that the consultant had said they should ask. I don't think they necessarily understood the questions, let alone the answers.

### Discussion

Whilst female CEOs describe intrusive questions and what appears at times to be inappropriate behaviour by Councillors, it is the male CEOs who verbalise the concerns they have regarding the capacity of Councillors to undertake their role. A number of the male CEOs describe their concerns with the inexperience and quality of Councillors, implicitly make value judgements and label their perceptions. A number of male CEOs are openly critical of their Councillors and only one male CEO makes a positive

comment relating to the inexperience of his Council when he suggests that it established a bond between the Council and himself. No female CEO comments on perceptions relating to Councillor inexperience. As evident in the previous subcategory, female CEOs objectively describe the experience at interview but do not label or categorise the behaviour of Councillors in the way in which the male CEOs do.

#### 5.3.3.5 ‘Queen bee’

A number of male and female CEOs make comment on how they believe female Councillors view having a female CEO. Both male and female CEOs suggest that female Councillors are probably more comfortable with a male CEO. More male CEOs than female CEOs comment on their perceptions of female Councillors and how their gender may impact on the selection process.

Female - ... so I think it's partly that and I think it's to do with the, see you've got the males on one side where it's that subconscious thing and then of course you've got female Councillors that may see a female CEO as competition and so there can be that undercurrent of competition with the females as well because females will compete with one another.

Male - It's a funny thing that female Councillors sometimes don't want a woman as a CEO and I think we've probably got two or three there who would feel no we don't want a woman because they might be competition for me in a sort of weird sense of the way they look at it.

#### Discussion

Both male and female CEOs suggest that female Councillors may be more uncomfortable with a female CEO than a male one. As with the previous subcategory, whilst some female CEOs talk about their own experiences, it is the male CEOs who more openly describe their considerations.

The perception of both the male and female CEOs is that female Councillors may feel threatened by a female CEO, whom they may consider as competition. There is also a suggestion by one female CEO that female Councillors will use their sexuality to relate

to male staff. There is a strong suggestion by both male and female CEOs that female Councillors are less likely to support a female CEO than a male one. This subcategory was raised predominantly by male CEOs, even though a number of female CEOs report perceptions of female Councillors being more comfortable with their male staff.

### **5.3.3.6 Summary**

Comments from both male and female CEOs identify a number of concerns that they have about the CEO selection process. A common conception held by several CEOs is that Councillors have a clear sense of the candidate they want in the role, or of the characteristics they desire in a candidate, and appoint accordingly. This theme re-emerges in relation to the perception of most CEOs that in making the appointment, Councillors are more intent on focusing on the relationship and fit between CEO and themselves. This in itself appears appropriate, but inherent in many of the CEO commentaries is their belief that the process is a closed and limited one.

There appears to be a difference in female and male experiences in relation to the requirement for personal disclosure at interview. Many of the females believe the Councillors are interested in knowing of their backgrounds, and even if such questions were not asked a number of them would volunteer such information. Female CEOs seem to believe that the demands of the role are such that Councillors' concerns over their capacity to manage home and work are appropriate. Only one male suggests that he has been asked personal questions.

Male CEOs were critical of some of the selection processes and commented more strongly and openly on their perception that Councillors were inexperienced in them. There is also a strong perception by male CEOs that it is more difficult for women to become CEOs when female Councillors are involved. This category has identified some differences between male and female CEOs in their experiences and assessment of the recruitment process.

### **5.3.4 *The experience of Victorian local government CEOs***

This theme explores CEO conceptions of the role of CEO and focuses on what helps/hinders their experience of the role. This theme also elicits information on how

CEOs perceive their relationships across the sector and with each other. Six distinct themes are identified.

- The buck stops here ... taking on accountability for the organisation.
- It's lonely at the top/importance of networks/support systems.
- Sisterhood - the bloodline for female CEOs.
- It's a man's world - the role of local government CEO.
- Councillors ... the hardest part of the job.
- And it could all end in tears ...

**Table 5.4: The Experience of Victorian Local Government CEOs**

<b>Subcategory</b>	<b>What is the experience?</b>	<b>How is it understood?</b>	<b>Gender</b>
<b>The buck stops here</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being 'it'; being accountable and wearing full responsibility for the organisation</li> <li>• Being in a servant role</li> <li>• Public scrutiny</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ultimately the CEO wears both the organisational performance and weakness</li> <li>• Always accountable to the Council</li> <li>• Needing to balance the will of Council as a whole and individual Councillors' expectations</li> <li>• Limited sense of privacy</li> </ul>	F & M
<b><i>It's lonely at the top</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling of being isolated and solely responsible for decision making</li> <li>• Emotional toll of being solely accountable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Solely responsible for the organisation</li> <li>• Responsibility and accountability of the CEO at all times</li> </ul>	F & M
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sense of isolation; mistrust of colleagues; cautiously collegiate with other CEOs</li> </ul>	M
<b><i>Sisterhood</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to create support mechanisms</li> <li>• Opportunity to share vulnerabilities and concerns, and to seek advice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informal; arranged get-together with other female CEOs</li> <li>• Sense of safety and confidentiality with other women</li> </ul>	F

<b>Subcategory</b>	<b>What is the experience?</b>	<b>How is it understood?</b>	<b>Gender</b>
<i><b>It's a man's world</b></i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Victorian local government CEO roles the domain of men</li> <li>• Sense of 'not belonging'; not worthy enough</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The sense of visibility and exposure as the female CEOs stand out</li> <li>• Heightened sense of scrutiny</li> </ul>	F
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sense of middle-aged men in suits</li> <li>• Homogeneity of the CEO group</li> <li>• Good blokes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not representative of the community</li> <li>• Sense of mediocrity</li> </ul>	M
<b>Councillors ... the hardest part of the job</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Councillors start with a sense of mistrust of the organisation</li> <li>• Establishing the relationship with Council is the most significant part of the role of CEO</li> <li>• Difficulty managing the range of expectations of individual Councillors</li> <li>• At times need to separately manage Council requirements and organisational priorities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Needing to create transparency and openness in the organisation</li> <li>• Significant time investment in building one-on-one relationships with Councillors</li> <li>• Need to balance individual Councillor wants with that of the Council as a whole</li> <li>• Suggestion that at times there is an incongruity between individual Councillors and that of the organisational direction and key performance targets</li> </ul>	F & M
<b>And it could all end in tears</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Irrespective of the reasons for a failure in the relationship between Council and CEO, the CEO will always lose</li> <li>• A sense of a 'use-by' date</li> <li>• No loyalty to CEOs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sense of tenuous and frail relationship with Councillors</li> <li>• Experience of finality and insecurity around contract renewal</li> <li>• Insecurity; concerns with career options and future opportunities</li> </ul>	F & M

#### **5.3.4.1 The buck stops here ... taking on accountability for the organisation**

This subcategory identifies the range of CEO considerations of their role as head of the Council's administration and their feelings of needing to maintain a balance between simultaneously being a leader and a servant of the Council.

Female - And at the end of the day we are in a servant role and I don't mean that in a submissive way, but we are in a servant role and that is the role that we've chosen. As CEO I wear the responsibility for the organisation and its actions.

Male - Before I started, I made the front page of the local paper with my salary package in big bold letters across the front. I hadn't anticipated that level of scrutiny I suppose ... So the amount of public scrutiny of the leadership role if you like, that you play in the community is far greater than the metropolitan one and even Melbourne City Council does not come under that sort of attention.

### Discussion

A number of CEOs describe the nature of the relationship with Council in terms of the very clear sense they have of their responsibility as the head of the administration and the accountability that comes with this. This is captured by a number of female CEOs who suggest they consider themselves as being the pivotal point in wearing decision making and the actions of the organisation, as well as in responding to Council direction. Two female CEOs capture their experience as feeling 'owned' by Council and describe this as a servile relationship. One female CEO also describes the emotional toll of the work with Councillors, as does one male CEO who makes commentary on the level of public scrutiny. One male CEO suggests that there is an element of choice in how much responsibility he takes. If Council seeks advice from the designated organisational levels he will stand by his staff's advice. This subcategory highlights the strong female and male conceptions of the twin demands of offering decisive leadership to the organisation and at the same time recognising that you still report to the Council. For some of the male CEOs this appears to be an easier balance. There is however, no suggestion of any significant variation in the conception of male and female CEOs.

#### **5.3.4.2 It's lonely at the top**

This subcategory has clear links with the previous one which relates to the role of the CEO as the conduit between Council and the administration, and the CEO's consequent accountability for the organisation. In this subcategory CEOs describe the sense of aloneness, and the complexity and competitiveness of the environment they work in.

Female - I look back now and think you know sometimes I wonder how I made it through. I did pursue some external coaching at that time and that was very helpful particularly just in terms of, just in grounding yourself. Because it's very isolated,

because I didn't have the support of an exec team as such, you really can lose, I don't particularly think I did, but I think you can get to a point where you lose perspective and you just need to be brought back home.

Male - You feel lonely when it comes to decision making. At the end of the day you have to make decisions and you have to make those on the information to get the best result for the organisation and sometimes you've got to make decisions without having to talk to somebody else because you can't necessarily do that.

### Discussion

Both male and female CEOs describe the sense of feeling alone as the most senior officer of Council. This relates to having a sense both of being the leader within the organisation, a theme that is linked to the previous one, and of recognising the competitiveness with other CEOs. This is more evident in the conceptions of the male CEOs, who mostly describe an environment where they are collegiate but cautious as they recognise that ultimately they are competitors. Only one male describes a readily accessible support group at the national level but qualifies this by affirming the need to be resilient in your own space. Seeking support at a national level appears to provide a less intimate, more distant support system.

The female CEOs describe this sense of being alone in terms of the accountability and finality of their own decision making. This conception is a description of 'self', as distinct from the male CEOs who respond to this in terms of other CEOs and the environment they work in.

#### **5.3.4.3 Sisterhood/secret women's business**

This subcategory highlights the way in which female CEOs have developed a support network. All of the female CEOs make mention of this network and describe it as a lifeline and a safe environment for the female CEOs to discuss confidential matters in a supportive environment.

Female - ... it is a support network; it's a safe place to talk about what's happening for you to provide support and knowing it doesn't leave that table among ourselves.

## Discussion

This theme provides a significant point of differentiation between female and male CEOs. All of the female CEOs interviewed describe the female CEO network as a group that provides psychosocial support. This is distinct from the males who, in the previous subcategory describe a sense of competition and cautious collegiate support. Clearly the female CEOs have established a network which they describe as a safe place to share highly confidential material that they would not share in another forum.

### **5.3.4.4 It's a man's world - the role of local government CEO**

This subcategory elicits the perceptions of both female and male CEOs that the role of local government CEO is conceived to be essentially a male domain. This is captured by a number of female CEOs who believe that any failure of theirs is more visible than that of their male colleagues, and who comment on having to prove their readiness for the role and at times struggling to feel they belong at the top.

Female - I think the women also have a higher level of fear of failure as far as that they have to do a lot more because, it's almost like some of the females CEO's because we meet on a regular basis, it's almost as though they can't believe that they're in these roles and that they might be found out as being impostors, and then you get that group but you also get the others where they really believe that, they start to act more a bit like males where they start to believe their own propaganda and I'm in the middle.

Male - Well to be brutally frank I would describe the group as a group, as amateurish. I think there are too many, if you like all-rounders. People who, who are good blokes. I never cease to be amazed when you look around the room, there are always, dare I say, overweight middle-aged blokes in suits. I mean I think it's a classic photo, I really do. I mean a picture tells a thousand words.

## Discussion

There is congruence in both male and female CEO conceptions that the role of Victorian local government CEO is considered to be the domain of the male. Female CEOs

comment on their visibility and exposure because of their small numbers. One female CEO suggests that women still do not believe that they have the right/capability for the role of CEO and, as such, they feel like impostors. This is captured in the sentiments of one female CEO, who is concerned about both the higher level of experience the male CEOs have, as well as her capacity to be their equal. This is in contrast to one male CEO who questions the competence of his colleagues (in particular, his male colleagues) as well as their depth of experience. Not only do the female CEOs suggest that the role of CEO is viewed as belonging to men, but this is reinforced by their male colleagues. Indeed, one female CEO suggests that her male colleagues did not even consider that she would be an applicant, let alone a successful one, for a particular CEO role. The male CEOs acknowledge the limited presence of female CEOs and their commentary relates to the homogeneity of the CEO group not reflecting the heterogeneity of the communities they serve. Only one male describes a sense of testing by his counterparts and, as earlier depicted, he believes this is in relation to the fact that he is younger than many of his colleagues.

#### **5.3.4.5 Councillors ... the hardest part of the job**

This subcategory exhibits the most consistency and congruence in both female and male conceptions. The consistent message is that managing the relationship and expectations of Councillors is the most complex and hardest part of the role, irrespective of gender.

Female - A lot of my colleagues speak with some contempt about Councillors and in some cases that could be justified.

Male - Mind you, a lot of them (CEOs) have had bad experiences and being a CEO in local government is very stressful at times in dealing with Councillors. That's where most of the stresses come from. That's the biggest challenge of being a CEO in local government, not the complexity and diversity and multiplicity of the services you manage, but rather working to ten individual people who effectively form a board without a common sense of direction.

## Discussion

Both male and female CEOs agree that managing the expectations of Councillors is the most challenging part of the role. Whilst this is the consistent message, again the male CEOs appear to be more openly outspoken about the extent of this concern. They recognise that in part the difficulty stems from Councillors having different agendas, and as such the CEO needs to manage differing expectations. Some CEOs believe that when Councillors are assessing organisational achievement, they attach greater significance to the CEO and Council relationship and its shared values rather than performance. In some instances the language of the CEOs suggests contempt and mistrust between CEO and Councillors. Again, the CEOs highlight the complexity of the relationship and the need to set limits on Councillors, while simultaneously recognising that they are the employers. There is also a suggestion that managing the Councillors and the organisation might require two different sets of strategies, which might at times be conflictual.

### **5.3.4.6 And it could all end in tears**

This subcategory identifies the vulnerability and depth of concerns that CEOs have in relation to the perceived volatility and tenuous nature of their employment.

Female - You're always vulnerable in these roles in local government when you're subject to your performance being scrutinised by Councillors. But I think you just get to a point where you say well look the strength of my capability is my ability to manage the relationships with the Councillors. If I've failed to do that I probably should pull the pin myself and get out. I would never want to get to a point where they shafted me. I've got my speech written for when they think about doing that and they'll see me the time they do it and they'll never see me again and they'll pay.

Male - The most important one of the lot is probably relationships, but it's informed by all the others, but those relationships, that's where trust is born, but again trust is a by-product. You can't say, 'We can't work together unless we have trust.' The reality is if Councillors don't trust me they might as well get rid of me. If I don't trust Councillors I'd better go.

## Discussion

This subcategory highlights the perceived fragility of the Councillor/CEO relationship and the perception of both male and female CEOs that the management of this relationship is the key to a CEO's success. Both male and female CEOs share the same concerns and they all recognise that when there is a breakdown in the relationship, it is the CEO who is always forced to leave. There is an overwhelming sense that if the relationship sours, the CEO's future with that organisation is bound to suffer. One female most openly suggests that the sort of behaviours of Councillors that she experiences would be treated as bullying and harassment if it occurred within the administration.

### **5.3.4.7 Summary**

This category highlights the complexity and difficulty associated with the role. On the whole there are very few positive conceptions that either male or female CEOs share. Both male and female CEOs suggest that the role is fraught with tension, which predominantly relates to managing the relationship with Councillors. CEOs suggest that this tension is not unexpected and is often reflected in needing to balance the needs of individual Councillors with those of Council as a whole. A number of the female CEOs, in particular, note the emotional cost of this relationship, with one describing Councillor behaviour as abusive and unacceptable and yet at the CEO level being tolerated. CEOs suggest that they bear full accountability for the organisation, and several of them, particularly the males, suggest that they have set boundaries around the Council and staff interface to assist with this process. Carrying the organisational responsibility is, for a number of male and female CEOs, an isolating experience.

The female CEOs are more likely to seek peer support and have established a regular forum to do so. The male CEOs do not appear to seek the same level of support. Both male and female CEOs assert not only that men hold most of the CEO positions, but also that the role of CEO is essentially a role for a man. Both male and female CEOs suggest that when a female fails in the role she is subjected to more scrutiny than her male colleagues. There are numerous ambiguities and incongruous expectations that the CEO

must manage. These include providing frank advice to Council whilst managing the relationship, wearing organisational accountability whilst Councillors have access to all staff, and managing organisational performance whilst having to accept that one's own performance appraisal may reflect other factors, as mentioned earlier. There is strong consensus amongst CEOs about the role and its complexity. However there are differences in the ways in which male and female CEOs manage stress and seek support systems.

### 5.3.5 CEOs determining their own success

This theme examines CEOs' own assessment of their success and attempts to identify what CEOs consider to be the important markers of success. Four subcategories of description are identified.

- Managing outcomes and culture.
- Authentic leadership.
- Providing impartial and frank advice - the Westminster model.
- Caring for Councillors.

**Table 5.5: CEOs Determining their Own Success**

<b>Subcategory</b>	<b>What is the experience?</b>	<b>How is it understood?</b>	<b>Gender</b>
<b>Managing outcomes and culture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsible financial management</li> <li>• Managing communication with Councillors</li> <li>• Organisation culture – trust and respect</li> <li>• Delivering outcomes to the community</li> <li>• Team development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managing the bottom line</li> <li>• Ensuring Council feels well-briefed with no surprises</li> <li>• Staff retention and morale</li> <li>• Positive customer/community survey results</li> <li>• Strong teamwork consistency of message to Council</li> </ul>	F & M
<b>Authentic leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Making a difference' to the organisation and the community</li> <li>• Creating a strong direction</li> <li>• Shared responsibility by organisation in delivering Council's agenda</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feedback mechanisms</li> <li>• Clear expectations</li> <li>• Delegation and devolution of responsibilities</li> </ul>	F & M

<b>Subcategory</b>	<b>What is the experience?</b>	<b>How is it understood?</b>	<b>Gender</b>
<b>Providing impartial and frank advice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing frank and fearless advice</li> <li>• Straight down the line</li> <li>• Act as an advisor to Council</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Setting boundaries around how communication occurs</li> <li>• Delineation of roles – Council establishes policy and the administration is responsible for the implementation</li> </ul>	F & M
<b>Caring for Councillors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Councillors have the power – imbalance in relationship</li> <li>• Nurture and care for the relationship with Council and individual Councillors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The will of the Council is of utmost importance</li> <li>• Time investment</li> <li>• Ongoing priority</li> </ul>	F & M

### 5.3.5.1 Managing outcomes and culture

This subcategory identifies the considerations of the CEOs in successfully managing the organisation.

Female - I see success as working through a budget process and getting the Councillors focused on the big issues and agreeing. I see the successes around a really difficult issue and working that through and managing the communication with the Councillors and keeping staff on board and making sure we can live with a particular result.

Male 1 - My point is the most important work I do the Council actually doesn't understand at all because the most important work I do is select the key people and create a culture that ensures that they and everybody else have the opportunity to do their very best work. That's the single most important thing that I do and I don't think, there'd be one Councillor with some sort of organisational, ... who work in large organisational environments we don't actually have any. So when I talk to them about organisational leadership and that sort of stuff their eyes glaze over.

### Discussion

There is strong consensus amongst CEOs of the areas that determine success. The above comments highlight the focus on organisational outcomes, budget, team development and culture. Whilst the previous theme identified CEOs' conceptions of being lonely at the

top, a number of CEOs still emphasise team development, particularly at the senior level, and the nurturing of trust amongst staff. There is no differentiation on the basis of gender.

### **5.3.5.2 Authentic leadership**

This subcategory identifies the considerations of a number of the CEOs in citing their capacity to lead and direct as a determinant of success.

Female - I want to stay in local government and I love, absolutely adore the role of CEO because for me it's about being in that one position that you really can, and I know it's a lot of jargon and all of that, but that you can really feel that you have got that leadership, you can make change, you can make a difference, you can make a real impact.

Male - I think they would say has he or she actively generated a desired culture? Does the organisation feel empowered and supported? Do they as individual Councillors feel supported and treated fairly? Is leadership demonstrated daily and I mean authentic leadership demonstrated daily to themselves and to the organisation? Are the interpersonal skills facilitating open and strong relationships?

### Discussion

Whilst the discussion about leadership is limited to the above comments, they highlight some of the positive aspects about the role and clearly identify the CEOs' reflections on their capacity to lead and how this becomes visible to the organisation. One female CEO highlights the opportunity in local government to manage outcomes. One male CEO's commentary suggests that leadership skills are pertinent to relationships not only with staff but also with individual Councillors. Again, there is no evidence of differentiation on the basis of gender.

### **5.3.5.3 Providing impartial and frank advice - Westminster model**

This subcategory portrays the strong view of both male and female CEOs that the provision of impartial advice to Councillors is a key determinant of success. Conceptions of male and female CEOs identify similar considerations.

Female - I guess I've always had an attitude that, a bit Westminsterish, that if you're in a role and you don't provide the frank and fearless advice, then in a public sector role, in a government role then you may as well get out of the game than to try and second guess and see.

Male - I will never back away from telling them stuff even if they're not going to like it. In fact it happened this week at Council where we were finalising the budget and one of the newies was really just off on a big tangent and everyone knew it but no one had the guts to say it and I said no one wants to be the bad guy and I don't either but it's my job so the bad news is I've got to tell you some stuff, here's the reality of life. Now a lot of CEO's don't do that.

### Discussion

The provision of impartial advice is regarded by all of the CEOs as of major significance. This is the area most forcibly emphasised by all of the CEOs involved. Both male and female CEOs suggest that this is clearly an expectation they have of themselves and that they see it as the key to managing Councillor relationships. Inherent in these conceptions is the view that unless the CEO clearly maintains this impartiality, he or she is at risk of losing the relationship with Council as a whole. CEOs are clear in their considerations on how corporate governance works within local government. A number of the comments suggest that deviation from this principle, by aligning to either a Councillor or a political position, is the step that will lead to a CEO's downfall.

#### **5.3.5.4 Caring for Councillors - this is what counts**

This theme identifies the importance CEOs place on caring for Councillors. CEO comments also identify their considerations of the power base and the nature of their relationship with Council.

Female - I think the ones (CEOs) that have struggled with it have really; they've struggled with the relationships with Councillors. It's not unique to the women CEOs, I think a number of the men do, and they get into a power battle with the Councillors. Well you know at the end of the day the Councillors have got the power. You might be

able to wield it in a whole range of different ways if that's your agenda on an issue. But ultimately they can pull the pin and I think people just don't get that.

Male - Essentially the biggest challenge, as I've already inferred, for a CEO in local government is to find out what the hell the Council wants, but you can be naive about that and you can be a bit cute about it ... and you've got ten different people, ten different backgrounds, ten different personalities, knowledge and so on, who don't have the detailed understanding of the organisation as a whole. So it's got to be an iterative function.

### Discussion

Both male and female CEOs suggest that developing effective relationships with Council is a key success factor. This was a notion, like the previous one, which all CEOs commented on. The commentary of CEOs suggests that managing the relationship with Councillors requires careful nurturing that goes beyond developing shared mission, goals and achievements. CEOs also suggest that there needs to be careful management of individual Councillor expectations, ensuring alignment with the Council as a whole. CEOs also appear to set up mechanisms to minimise political interference within the administration. All CEOs identify specific strategies and effort directed to the satisfaction of Councillor needs. There is also a suggestion that Council goals are not necessarily always aligned with those of the organisation.

#### **5.3.5.5 Summary**

Both male and female CEOs consistently identify managing the organisation, its culture and its performance as the key success factors. They also suggest that establishing and maintaining an environment in which they can provide Council with fierce and frank advice is also a key success factor. CEOs recognise that the challenge is to recognise and cater for individual Councillor needs when at times this is perceived to be difficult due to the range of political interests of Council. Their strategy is to build impartiality in the way in which they work with individual Councillors and to recognise the differentiation of roles between Council as the policy maker, and the administration as the body responsible for the implementation of that policy.

Both male and female CEOs place considerable importance on building a trusting organisational culture that is evidenced by close team work within the senior executive. CEOs appear to see this as an essential tactic to minimise political interference within the bureaucracy. Both male and female CEOs identify similar indicators of success.

### 5.3.6 CEOs' considerations of what Councillors consider as CEO success

This theme explores CEO perceptions of what Councillors consider as important in determining CEO success. Three subcategories of description are identified.

- A responsive organisation.
- Ensuring the positive profile and exposure for Councillors.
- Perception and pizzazz.

**Table 5.6: CEO Considerations of What Councillors Consider as CEO Success**

<b>Subcategory</b>	<b>What is the experience?</b>	<b>How is it understood?</b>	<b>Gender</b>
<b>A responsive organisation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsiveness to the community</li> <li>• Delivery of the Council Plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive customer survey results</li> </ul>	F & M
<b>Positive profile and exposure for Councillors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managing individual Councillor profile and image</li> <li>• 'Making Council look good'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maximum exposure in media and events</li> <li>• Positive profile for Council</li> </ul>	F & M
<b><i>Perception and pizzazz</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Irrespective of how poorly the organisation functions, if the perception is managed carefully by the CEO, Council will believe all is well</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investment in Councillor priorities and keeping them happy</li> </ul>	M

#### 5.3.6.1 A responsive organisation

Some of the CEOs believe that Councillors consider organisational performance and responsiveness to constituents as the important factors. Others suggest that Councillors may focus less on strategic matters and more on caring for constituents' individual needs.

Female - I think they would talk about a partnership with the organisation so that the CEO provides us with advice; the CEO delivered what we wanted them to deliver from the chamber ...

Male - I'd like to believe very honestly that if one of the Councillors said today justify yourself, up front, justify yourself, it's okay, well let's look at the record and I could go through and say we've done 2030 like no other Council in Melbourne and I could go through and say and here's how we have fought above our weight, delivered exceptional outcomes and here's the role that I played in that and I could work through it.

### Discussion

The comments of the female CEOs suggest that they believe Councillors' expectations are aligned to their own and that Councillors seek a partnership between the elected members and Council administration. These conceptions are a positive reflection on the mutual goals of Council and staff.

One male CEO appears to hold similar sentiments to the female CEOs, but he places a greater emphasis on accountability and justification rather than the concept of partnership implicit in the female CEOs' comments. One male CEO's comments suggest that Council evaluation may not be as strategic as the administration's, or even his own, but the comment does highlight a degree of alignment and congruence in values and goals.

#### **5.3.6.2 Positive profile and exposure for Councillors**

This subcategory suggests that CEOs believe their success is judged purely in relation to how successfully Councillors are profiled. The suggestion is that profile and positive exposure for Councillors is fundamentally more important than the performance of the organisation.

Female - I think Councillors would determine whether their CEO has succeeded or not if there is a high level of public recognition and appreciation for what Council is doing and if there is a high level of exposure for Councillors, that they are actually valued in the community because you've got to remember it never relates to what they've done or their performance, it always comes back to what the organisation did do or didn't do for them.

Male - Why I don't take much regard of what the Councillors do is because they're clouded by their own personal feelings in terms of making a decision on performance or success because they don't approach it in a way that says how did you go at x, y and z. They just think no, I don't like him because he doesn't get me this thing or that thing or that, so they give you a mark that's not appropriate.

#### Discussion

The conceptions of both male and female CEOs highlight their view that irrespective of organisational performance, the factor that Councillors consider as important is how the CEO assists with their profile. These comments again highlight that some CEOs fundamentally believe that Councillors' concerns are predominantly about themselves and their ongoing political careers.

#### **5.3.6.3 Perception and pizzazz**

A number of the male CEOs suggest that it is not so much the performance of the CEO that counts but rather the way in which the CEO manages perception.

Male - I think it's possible to survive for a long time because you've been very good at managing the perception of you and not necessarily actually being all that good. I would naturally argue that I'm not in that category. I mean I do manage perception as well as manage reality but the way that I choose to engage with the Council is a very, very engaged approach that is upfront and personal, that's how it is. So when the Councillor gets elected and we go through that initial getting to know you, it's the Council and the facilitator and me and they do show and tell and I do show and tell.

#### Discussion

The comments of these CEOs suggest that managing perception is vitally important if Councillors are to consider a CEO successful. Implicit in this is again the theme that building relationships with Council is a significant factor in being well regarded by Council. Perception management in this way is only raised by a few male CEOs.

#### **5.3.6.4 Summary**

Both male and female CEOs indicate that organisational performance, insofar as it responds to both community and Councillor needs, is a criterion that Councillors would be likely to use in assessing their performance. Additionally, male and female CEOs also regard the maintenance of a positive image of Councillors as an important factor. This recognises the political nature of Councillors' tenure and their need to be seen to be responsive to the community. A small number of male CEOs suggest that irrespective of organisational performance, the CEO who effectively manages his/her profile and relationships with Council may also be assessed positively by Council.

#### **5.3.7 *On gender***

This theme aims to elicit views CEOs may have on likely career differentiators based on gender. Questions relate to their own assessment of how gender may have affected their own career and how they understand the reasons for less than 12% of CEO positions being held by women. This category demonstrates that there are differences in male and female experiences but the considerations and conceptions in relation to these experiences are congruent. Five subcategories of description are identified.

- Women do it tougher/failure more visible.
- Think manager, think male.
- Pipeline theory - not enough female managers.
- Doing leadership differently - a gender phenomenon.
- Discourse of domesticity.

Table 5.7: On Gender

Subcategory	What is the experience?	How is it understood?	Gender
<i>Women do it tougher</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A sense of being ‘on show’ constantly, exposed and under the microscope</li> <li>• More likely to be challenged than male colleagues</li> <li>• Needing to prove their worthiness</li> <li>• Fear of letting down other women</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased level of accountability and visibility over male colleagues</li> <li>• Questioned and challenged more – needing to always be prepared</li> <li>• Strong work ethic, put self under enormous pressure</li> <li>• Individual failure leads to a judgment on all women’s performance</li> </ul>	F
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Believe women are judged more harshly than males</li> <li>• Believe individual female failure leads to a judgment on the female gender</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set higher expectations</li> <li>• Awareness of the higher expectations on women than on men</li> </ul>	M
<b>Think manager /think male</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experience of men being appointed over women despite women having more relevant experience and qualifications</li> <li>• Absence of women in senior levels</li> <li>• A sense that Councillors prefer a patriarchal figurehead at the helm of the organisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sense of being marginalised</li> <li>• Male-dominated environment</li> <li>• Disproportionate representation of men in manager positions</li> <li>• Councillors do not perceive women as able to fulfill the CEO role</li> </ul>	F & M
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A sense that men do not think women are capable of CEO leadership roles</li> <li>• Belief that unless Council decides it wants a woman at the helm it is unlikely that a female will get the role</li> </ul>		
<b>Pipeline theory</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male-dominated professions in local government roles e.g. engineering</li> <li>• Women may choose not to go into senior positions because of the high demands of the role</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local government made up of male-dominated professions so there are fewer women than men available for senior positions. Increase female representation at lower levels and they will move up the management pipeline</li> </ul>	F & M

Subcategory	What is the experience?	How is it understood?	Gender
<i>Doing leadership differently – gender phenomenon</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women bring ‘soft’ skills to the role</li> <li>• Recognition that effective leadership needs both ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More in touch, more politically astute</li> <li>• Need to develop leadership capability</li> <li>• Implications for managing the political dynamic</li> </ul>	F & M
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women are better facilitators whereas men are driven by ego</li> </ul>		F
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Females are better collaborators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Females should be better represented in senior leadership roles</li> </ul>	M
<i>Discourse of domesticity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High demands of role requires a supportive partner. CEO cannot be primary family caregiver</li> <li>• There is personal cost to being a local government CEO</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficult to balance work/life</li> <li>• Need resilience and strong support network</li> </ul>	F & M

### 5.3.7.1 Women do it tougher

This theme highlights the visibility of the female CEOs in an environment that is predominantly male.

Female - When a woman doesn't succeed, they immediately think we tried a woman it didn't work and they go back to a male. Whereas if a male doesn't succeed it's just, he was a dud. They don't think, you know. They'll think we've tried a woman and it didn't work.

Male - I regard the females neither as better or worse than the males and what I'm really saying to you is I can see some problems amongst the female CEOs as I can against the male CEOs. So they're all people and so we've got a tremendous variety of people. Sometimes when you're in a situation where you're trying to give a particular group access you judge them more harshly and that can happen with female CEOs. Suddenly they're supposed to be bloody perfect, where you don't expect the blokes to be perfect ...

### Discussion

The conceptions of both male and female CEOs is that women's mistakes or downfall is much more public than that of a male. The commentaries of CEOs suggest that not only does such a fall affect the female CEO concerned, but it is also likely to affect future

CEO recruitment. A number of male and female CEOs suggest that men's failures are not as likely to influence future male CEO recruitment. This challenges the notion of the invisibility of women in leadership; that is, once in the role female CEOs are somehow more visible and more observable than their male colleagues.

### **5.3.7.2 Think manager, think male**

This theme captures the suggestions of male and female CEOs that the glass ceiling continues to exist in local government.

Female - Yes, it's just a reflection I've been doing about these Councillors and they sort of nearly want a patriarchal sort of role, wanting a man in charge ...

Male - ... I think Council will consciously need to decide they want a woman and that will be an advantage, but hard thing that goes no where near making up for the times when those other discriminatory prejudices at play, yeah.

### Discussion

The commentary of the CEOs suggests that both male and female CEOs believe it is more difficult for women to reach a senior position in local government. There is a suggestion that Councillors are likely to be more comfortable with a male in the role. The conceptions of both male and female CEOs suggest that Councillors are likely to have some discomfort when a woman is in authority.

### **5.3.7.3 Pipeline theory (on why so few female managers)**

Female - ... I think that combined with the fact that a lot of the professions were male-dominated professions, so engineering, finance, planning, are all professions that up until relatively recently had a lot more men in them.

Male - So historically and I've got to try and think back even to my limited time in local government, there were probably more male planners and less female planners ... if we look at engineering it was a male preserve full stop there. Obviously community services are quite different because aged and disabled is much more the preserve of females than

males. Recreation, bit of both but probably has been more males than females I think in the past, ... Child and family, again that's a bit of a mixture ... And then your community development stuff I would say probably more female than male I would guess. However at the risk of being not PC I doubt those folk are going to be the ones that are going to lead the charge for being CEO's because it's not in their nature to have, which no doubt leads on to other things, but it's not in their nature to have the kind of mix of skill sets and/or determined passions.

### Discussion

Most of the comments from CEOs indicate that many of them believe that there are not enough women in the industry or in particular service areas. The way to resolve the gender imbalance, they suggest, is to recruit more females into specific areas. The implication is also that Councils are more likely to recruit a CEO from the engineering, planning or corporate management areas, which have traditionally been male-dominated.

#### **5.3.7.4 Doing leadership differently - a gender phenomenon**

This subcategory identifies the CEOs' beliefs about the impact of gender on leadership.

Female - And I do have a theory on the difference between male CEO's and female CEO's is that I think males have got much more of an ego issue than females and females are facilitators and naturally want to try to get an outcome that benefits most people whereas I think males get caught up in who's got the biggest ornamental gaud, that sort of thing.

Male - The female CEOs that I know appear to have a very collaborative style. Very warm, supportive. In my view, are much more effective at networking. All things considered, you would've thought they would be better represented in local government because I think ... I think many Councillors appear to value those qualities.

### Discussion

Both male and female CEOs suggest that men and women lead differently and bring different skills to the role. The other commentary relates to the relative confidence of

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males and females, with the suggestion that women need to feel a sense of mastery before they will apply for a position.

#### **5.3.7.5 Discourse of domesticity**

This theme highlights the nature of the CEO role, and the burden it places on family life.

Female - I was programming on the night I went into labour and a week later was back programming. I just loved it. That was the idea but (husband) was still driving to Melbourne. He hated his job. I love (daughter) dearly but really couldn't stand all the mother stuff, mothers' groups, and playgroups and also I couldn't feed. I think that was part of it because I think if I was feeding I probably would've stayed at home but I couldn't. We swapped roles. We temporarily swapped roles and in 17 years we've never got around to swapping back.

Male - You really put at risk some of the home/family balance. I have a very understanding wife and the kids have been tremendous. It's a full-on role that I think tests you to a degree and I guess that's in some part related to how you undertake the role.

#### Discussion

Whilst the comments above identify the strong need for a supportive partner there is also a suggestion, underlying the comments of the male CEOs, that it may be difficult to be the primary family caregiver and to maintain the role of the CEO. The female CEOs suggest that the role of CEO requires a careful balance but with a supportive family arrangement can be managed.

#### **5.3.7.6 Summary**

This theme highlights the different experiences that female and male CEOs have. There is a sense that women do it tougher and that their performance is more scrutinised than that of their male colleagues. Both male and female CEOs hold this view. Again, both male and female CEOs believe that it is more likely for a male to reach the role of CEO than a female. Further, there are a number of male-dominated functions and it is more

likely that CEOs will be drawn from one of them. These specifically include finance, engineering and urban design.

Hence, the suggestions from the CEOs are that these fields should be vigorously promoted to women, and that women should be actively recruited into them. Both male and female CEOs suggest that leadership styles are differentiated on the basis of gender. Both male and females suggest that success at the top is enhanced by having a supportive family. The male CEOs go further and assert that it is less likely for a mother to combine career and family life successfully. Women CEOs do not make any such assertion. The final subcategory - discourses of domesticity - highlights the very different conceptions of female and male CEOs on work/life balance and career success.

### **5.3.7.7 Summary results for CEOs**

Seven categories are identified in describing the CEOs' conceptions. Within each category a number of subcategories, and variations within them, are identified. Where variation occurs on the basis of gender, this too has been identified. Gender variations of significance are identified across a number of categories - significant early childhood development, career path, CEO selection process and experience of being a Victorian local government CEO. Lesser variations occur between male and female CEOs in considering the impact of gender on career. The categories that showed the most similarity between male and female CEOs are CEOs determining their own success and how they believe Councillors evaluate their success.

## **5.4 Variations in Councillor Conceptions**

Seven Councillors were interviewed using a semi-structured interview process. At the time of interview all of the interviewees were in their Mayoral term. The interview was comprised of a number of specified questions aiming at eliciting information pertaining to the themes identified below:

- role of CEO;
- CEO recruitment;
- determining CEO success;
- Councillor identification of challenges for the CEO;
- gender considerations; and
- Councillors on other Councillors.

Information relating to the final theme was not specifically sought as part of the interview but emerged as an issue that almost all the interviewees raised and, as such, has been recorded. The analytical process for CEO transcript analysis (as described in section 5.3) was used for Councillor transcripts. This was conducted specifically for the purposes of developing categories and subcategories and identifying variation in Councillor conceptions on the themes identified above.

#### 5.4.1 *The role of CEO*

This category aims at identifying what Councillors consider to be the significant aspects of the CEO role. Questions are structured to elicit Councillor conceptions of both the formal and informal requirements of the role of CEO. Four subcategories of description are identified:

- leadership and management;
- delivering the policy ambitions of Council;
- capacity to manage and massage relationships with Councillors; and
- diplomacy - ‘how to make *no* look like *yes*’.

**Table 5.8: The Role of CEO**

<b>Subcategory</b>	<b>What is the experience?</b>	<b>How is it understood?</b>	<b>Gender</b>
<b>Leadership and Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff management skills</li> <li>• Staff relationships and morale</li> <li>• Leadership of the organisation</li> <li>• Manage the administration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working to the best of ability</li> <li>• Working co-operatively and effectively</li> <li>• Deliver on Council objectives; Council Plan and budget</li> <li>• Identified as leader</li> <li>• Systems in place</li> </ul>	F & M
<b>Delivering the policy ambitions of Council</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial acumen/management</li> <li>• Systems in place</li> <li>• Ethics and standards</li> <li>• Effective relationship between Council and CEO</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operations on target</li> <li>• Clear response to Council priorities</li> <li>• Delivery of Council agenda</li> </ul>	F & M

<b>Subcategory</b>	<b>What is the experience?</b>	<b>How is it understood?</b>	<b>Gender</b>
<b>Capacity to manage and massage relationships with Councillors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity to deal with Councillor expectations</li> <li>• Capacity to manage the individual Councillors</li> <li>• Effective, open communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsiveness to individual Councillors and whole of Council priorities</li> <li>• Ensure that the Council agenda is given highest priority and is not railroaded by individual agendas</li> <li>• No surprises</li> </ul>	F & M
<i>Diplomacy 'how to make no look like yes'</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Honest, carefully crafted dialogue</li> <li>• Manage Councillors without them feeling managed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity to say 'no' diplomatically to Councillors</li> <li>• Council maintains its policy leadership and agenda setting role</li> </ul>	M

#### 5.4.1.1 Leadership and management

Female - but for me the critical thing is having the staff management skills, and the critical part of that is excellent communication, a capacity to work with people, and really get people to be working to their full and to the best of their abilities, and to be doing all of the really tricky staff management stuff, and then there is the overall making sure that everything is running completely above board.

Male - there's two aspects to being a CEO. One is being a competent administrator and the other aspect is being a leader and being somewhat - something of an inspiring leader and we were particularly looking for, when we hired X we were particularly looking for somebody who would drive improvements in customer focus.

#### Discussion

Both male and female Councillors clearly and consistently articulate a strong emphasis on leadership and management. Leadership is identified as the capacity to identify new opportunities and direction for Council and to motivate staff to pursue the Council vision and direction. Management is identified by a number of Councillors as the ability to manage the Council administration through the establishment of processes, procedures

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and standards, and the achievement of Council plan and budget. Councillors clearly identify the CEO as the bridge between the Council and the administration.

#### **5.4.1.2 Delivering the policy ambitions of Council**

Female - The CEO needs to understand that Councillors are elected to achieve outcomes and those outcomes need to be agreed upon amongst the Councillors, informally and formally, formally adopted in the Council Plan, but you need to go through a process of formulating that, getting further information on those issues, articulating those objectives and then incorporating them into a work plan which will then be reflected in the budget and the accounts plan.

Male - Well, the CEO is the person who is in charge of delivering the policy ambitions of the Councillors and in a way that is again in accord with the kind of culture that we would like to have instilled in the organisation and the public face of Council to the ratepayers, so the Act allows Council to hire and fire the CEO but no other member of staff and essentially not to interfere in the operating of the staff. So the CEO is the absolute lynch pin in terms of getting the outcomes that Councillors want. If you have the wrong CEO, if the CEO is not cooperative, disaster.

#### Discussion

Both male and female Councillors identify one of the key tasks of the CEO as implementing the policy decisions of Council. In this context the Councillors suggest that it is Council that determines policy, and the administration that must implement Council policy. There is a clear expectation by both male and female Councillors that the CEO will commit to Council direction and ensure that the work of the administration is reflective of this direction. A number of Councillors identify the importance of the relationship between Council and CEO in order to successfully implement policy direction.

#### **5.4.1.3 Capacity to manage and manage relationships with Councillors**

Female - You are dealing with anywhere from eight to 11 Councillors, volatile, potentially volatile personalities, all coming from different points, stages in their life,

different backgrounds, different reasons for being on Council and within those ten or nine or whatever it is, there are different relationships too at any given time and it's a really hard ask for a CEO to be making calls based on what they think is the appropriate advice to a Councillor or to Council as a collective, but they also have to keep in the mind the individual personalities and it is, it's very difficult.

Male - It would be foolhardy and foolish of the CEO to ignore the dynamics with Councillors and simply say well that's not my concern to deal with Councillors individually, I simply need to deal with Council as a whole. So the ability to manage the Council interactions, between Councillors, between him or herself and Councillors and between the administration and Councillors is just as important.

### Discussion

Both male and female Councillors stress the importance of managing the relationship between CEO and Council, as well as with individual Councillors. The comments convey a sense that the responsibility for that management lies with the CEO. This dominates the conceptions of both male and female Councillors who articulate the careful balance the CEO must create between meeting each individual Councillor's needs and those of the whole Council. The Councillors clearly recognise this balance and believe that responsibility for the relationship rests with the CEO. The comments illustrate an awareness of the sensitivity of the situation, and of the potential conflict and tension that arises when the CEO and the administration need to respond to individual and sometimes divergent requirements. No Councillor made reference to Councillor responsibility in managing the relationship between Council and its administration.

#### **5.4.1.4 Diplomacy - 'how to make *no* look like *yes*'**

Male - Based on my experience of late the single most important skill perhaps that a CEO ought to have is the ability to manage Councillors, the ability to make sure that Councillors have their concerns addressed by the CEO no matter how silly, frivolous, irrational, lunatic they might be, is the only thing that will guarantee a CEO can be in a position then, to do what that CEO ought to be doing which is to be managing the administration.

## Discussion

This subcategory highlights the belief of male Councillors that the CEO should be responsive to the needs and wants of the Councillors. For some there is a recognition that this needs to occur even if requests are frivolous or unrealistic. There is a conception that CEOs need to very carefully manage saying ‘no’ to Councillors and at all times need to be diplomatic in their response to them. Councillors also identify the need to provide frank advice, yet simultaneously suggest that this needs to be managed very carefully. There is little recognition of the pressure this requirement places on the CEO and his/her capacity to provide frank advice. No female Councillors made comments relating to this requirement.

### **5.4.1.5 Summary**

The Councillors’ conceptions of the role of CEO include an expectation that the CEO leads and manages the organisation in response to Council’s policy direction. Both male and female Councillors consistently suggest that the CEO is charged with implementing the policy direction of Council. The Councillors also recognise that in order to achieve the organisational outcomes the CEO needs to carefully manage the relationships with Councillors. Some Councillors suggest that the role of CEO is to manage the Councillors, but also suggest that this is not how the Councillors would want to perceive this relationship. Most of the Councillors attribute comprehensive responsibility for the CEO/Councillor relationship to the CEO. The sensitivity of the relationship is drawn out further by a number of male Councillors who identify the expectation of the CEO to very carefully manage messages to Council. This is evidenced in section 5.4.1.4 where the male Councillors call out how sensitively the CEO needs to manage saying ‘no’ to a Councillor or even in humouring the Council. Councillors acknowledge that they do not like hearing staff challenging them or their direction. It is this that requires careful management by the CEO. This expectation and careful communication is the only area of variation between male and female Councillors.

### **5.4.2 *Councillor considerations in recruiting CEOs***

Information sought from this category relates to the identification of any factors that the Councillors may consider important in the recruitment of a CEO. Its focus is not so much

on the formal selection and interview process but rather on establishing Councillors approaches to their decision making during the recruitment process. Three subcategories are identified:

- management versus technical skills;
- it's all about fit; and
- political nous.

**Table 5.9: Councillor Considerations in Recruiting CEOs**

<b>Subcategory</b>	<b>What is the experience?</b>	<b>How is it understood?</b>	<b>Gender</b>
<b><i>Management versus technical skills</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong people and management skills</li> <li>• Decisive decision-making capability</li> <li>• Interpersonal skills</li> <li>• Strong communication</li> <li>• Reader of the political climate</li> <li>• Ability to access technical skills as needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity to lead and motivate staff</li> <li>• Ability to provide clear advice to Council</li> <li>• Ability to manage sensitivities in relationships with Council</li> <li>• Understand Councillor dynamics and motivations</li> <li>• Focus on CEO skill in leadership rather than specified technical skills</li> </ul>	F & M
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business and engineering skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical understanding</li> </ul>	One male
<b>Political nous</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand Councillor motivations/dynamics</li> <li>• Capacity to respond to divergent requirements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not hinder political processes</li> <li>• Measured but responsive advice and action</li> </ul>	F & M
<b>It's all about fit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understands the issues facing Council</li> <li>• Responsive and supportive of Council vision, values and direction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sensitivity in response</li> <li>• Ensure organisational priority to Council agenda</li> </ul>	F & M

#### 5.4.2.1 Management versus technical skills

Female - Strong communicator, strong reader of the political climate and the environment. I think that without those things you can have all the technical expertise in the world but you're not able to actually put them into practice. You're not able to implement them unless you know.

Male - An ability in interpersonal skills, everything else can be managed, can be done, can be fixed, can be addressed. The problems in the administration, you need somebody

who is relatively decisive however that needs to be tempered with being measured and considered.

### Discussion

The female Councillors consistently suggest that the major requirement for a CEO is the capacity to lead, communicate and demonstrate sound interpersonal skills. In addition one female Councillor calls for decisive decision-making and another suggests that reading the political climate is important. One female Councillor makes reference to technical skills (skills pertaining to the business of Council such as town planning or engineering). In so doing, she is not advocating that the CEO has the comprehensive technical skills but rather that she/he knows how to access this advice from within the organisation.

The male Councillors also recommend interpersonal skills, with a number raising other requirements including business and commercial skills. One male Councillor suggests that they would expect the CEO to have expertise in some technical areas including engineering.

#### **5.4.2.2 Political nous**

Female - I think they've got to have a political understanding of the world in the sense that they've got to understand that the Councillors are really fulfilling a political role and sometimes their reaction to a certain decision may be different to what you expect because they've got different reasons behind the scenes.

Male - ... you know, it's a new mix of Councillors, is it going to cause a problem, is it going to be better or whatever? But somewhere you've got to set aside the practical running of the city from the idealistic, the ideal of the democratic process and a good CEO, that's when I think you pick a good CEO where they just take that in their stride and say, well, this is how it should be. This is what it's all about.

### Discussion

Both male and female Councillors identify the need for the CEO to have political nous, namely the capacity to understand the dynamics operating at a Council level and in particular between the Councillors. The CEO is expected to understand these dynamics and to recognise how they may set the agenda for Council operations. One female Councillor clearly articulates the motivations for Councillors as being political and that this will influence the decision making of that Councillor. In this way Councillors acknowledge that not all decisions are made for the organisational good but may be made on the basis of political requirements and expectations. One male Councillor similarly suggests that the CEO may be required to mediate between factional issues on Council.

#### **5.4.2.3 It's all about fit**

Female - What I would be looking for in a CEO is somebody who understands the issues facing the municipality generally. Who's obviously got experience dealing with those issues, the day-to-day issues, but also someone that's got an understanding of dealing with their staff, but beyond that, someone that's got an ability to empathise with the Councillors because that's who, that's the changing, the changing factor is always the Councillors.

Male - ... to secure a CEO's position, I would expect that they'd have a very good understanding of what the main thrust of that municipality is.

### Discussion

Both male and female Councillors identify the need for the CEO to demonstrate knowledge of the municipality and the specific issues confronting that local government authority. They also suggest that the CEO must be compatible with the organisation's direction, priorities and values.

#### **5.4.2.4 Summary**

Male and female Councillors consistently suggest that the major factors that they take into account in recruiting at the CEO level relate to demonstrated management skills, a

sense of fit with Council and political nous. Councillors consistently rate interpersonal skills, general management experience and leadership capability as the key selection criteria for CEO recruitment. There is only marginal reference to demonstrated technical skills in areas of engineering and business, and this is prefaced by the assumption that the CEO would have strong interpersonal skills. Councillors consider the CEO's compatibility and fit with the organisation as important in recruitment. This is explained in relation to the expectation that the CEO will need to implement Council policy and will therefore need to relate to Council values, principles and direction. Capacity to recognise and understand the political interface is also seen as an important consideration. No Councillor commented on how they would seek this evidence through the recruitment process.

### 5.4.3 *Determining success for a CEO*

This theme aims to identify both formal and informal factors that Councillors take into account in determining CEO success. Its questions seek factors outside of the usual performance management processes that Councils use for the annual CEO review. Councillors identify two subcategories:

- achieving positive organisational outcomes 'ensuring the ship is steering smoothly'; and
- capacity to partner with Council.

**Table 5.10: Determining Success for a CEO**

<b>Subcategory</b>	<b>What is the experience?</b>	<b>How is it understood?</b>	<b>Gender</b>
<b>Achieving positive organisational outcomes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear direction, planning and objective</li> <li>• Staff morale/motivation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council plan targets met</li> <li>• Informal measures; feel of place; intuition</li> </ul>	F & M
<b>Capacity to partner with Council</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team approach</li> <li>• Shared priorities/agenda</li> <li>• Meeting individual needs of Councillors</li> <li>• Effective, timely and appropriate information/reports to Council</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective communication</li> <li>• Clarity of expectations</li> <li>• Agendas met</li> <li>• Not burdened by the number of reports or information</li> </ul>	M & one F

#### **5.4.3.1 Achieving positive organisational outcomes, ‘ensuring the ship is steering smoothly’**

Female - ... looking at how effective the teams are, I can’t remember the names of the processes that we have gone through, but basically really good feedback in terms of the effectiveness of how the group is working. Yes, and just generally a feel that it is a pretty happy ship, and that people are getting a fair hearing, and that things are being well managed and well organised, really quality General Managers, and the next rung of Managers down as well. So in that sense, it is a desirable place to work, and that people want to be working as part of a team with the CEO at the helm.

Male - And I guess it’s very much a case of, you know, if the ship’s steering smoothly then that’s the feeling you get the person is doing the correct job.

#### Discussion

Both male and female Councillors identify the major determinant of CEO success as the effective operation of the organisation. This relates to measures that are more formal and include the achievement of Council Plan, policy implementation and management. Staff factors including organisational culture, co-operation and mood are also identified. A number of Councillors acknowledge that informal, intuitive considerations may also be taken into account and used by them in determining CEO success. One Councillor acknowledges that the formal performance management systems do not adequately reflect these informal, and hard-to-measure factors.

#### **5.4.3.2 Capacity to partner with Council**

Female - I think local government will work well when there’s a really good team relationship between Councillors and the CEO because one can undermine each other if you don’t, and lack of communication, going in different directions. Councillors have one priority and the CEO might have another priority, so you have to agree on those.

Male - It’s not enough to be told somebody’s doing a good job and in that respect the method we use to do the formal assessment has let us down, it hasn’t really addressed the

issues that I've raised and canvassed with you. How I know he does a good job is first and foremost whether I feel as though I'm getting somewhere, are my own objectives being met, is he helping me get to where I want to go in a policy sense and an objective sense.

### Discussion

Male Councillors consistently suggest that a key consideration in determining CEO success is the evidence that the administration, and in particular the CEO, is working well with Council. This is evidenced when individual Councillor aspirations are being met and when there is open dialogue between Council and the CEO. A number of male Councillors also suggest that they become concerned when the administration appears to have its own agenda, or to be secretive about work. The administration may overwhelm them with paper work or take a bureaucratic approach to sharing information. Only one female Councillor suggests that the ability to develop an effective team approach between Council and the administration is a determinant of CEO success.

#### **5.4.3.3 Summary**

Councillors take two major factors into account in determining CEO success. Organisational performance is identified as the major consideration. It is measured both formally and informally, and a number of Councillors suggest that the informal measures are very important. Not all of the measures used by Councillors are captured within the CEO performance plan. Most male Councillors also suggest that a second factor that they consider is, how effectively the CEO is assisting them in meeting their own objectives. One female Councillor also identifies the relationship between Council and CEO as important but suggests that this is reflected in the achievement of effective teamwork.

#### ***5.4.4 Identifying CEO considerations of challenges in the role***

This theme aims to elicit Councillors' empathy for the role of the CEO and their capacity to identify what they believe CEOs may consider challenging components of their role. Councillors consistently indicated that meeting the needs of individual Councillors, and of Council as a whole, is the single most significant challenge for CEOs. One theme emerges:

- meeting the diverse requirements of Councillors.

**Table 5.11: Identifying CEO Considerations of Challenges in the Role**

<b>Subcategory</b>	<b>What is the experience?</b>	<b>How is it understood?</b>	<b>Gender</b>
<b>Meeting the diverse requirements of Councillors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity to manage the Council dynamics</li> <li>• Prioritising the needs of individual Councillors against the Council's agenda</li> <li>• Attending to the Councillors' egos</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptance of political play at the Council level</li> <li>• Ability to let down Councillors gently</li> <li>• Not getting Councillors offside</li> <li>• Ability to say 'no'</li> </ul>	F & M

#### 5.4.4.1 Meeting the diverse requirements of Councillors

Female - One would be balancing the dynamics, the political dynamics amongst the Councillors, and in some Councils it's much tougher than in others. I've just come from a MAV seminar on Councillor conduct which was prompted by some Councillors assaulting others in a couple of instances, and the CEO needing to manage some of this. Even though you expect the Mayor to manage the Councillors, this catches the administration up as well and the energy is lost and gone ... The second aspect though is really, I think, the CEO juggling the huge demands there are on Council. There are just so many demands, and it's the time management. Most nights there will be something that they need to deal with; apart from Council meetings there is meetings with the community, there's catching up with the enormous amount of paperwork and keeping that moving.

Male - The Councillors get all twitchy because they want immediate action, this isn't working and we want you to sack the director of whatever. Well he's not going to do that. It's a balance between again massaging the expectations of the Councillors.

#### Discussion

All Councillors feel that the single greatest challenge facing the CEO is managing the political interface with Councillors. Both male and female Councillors identify the relationship as complex and fraught with a tension based on the political motivations of, and differences between, the individual Councillors. Councillors recognise that there are

sensitivities and that very careful management is required to balance the needs of the individual Councillors and those of the Council as a whole.

#### 5.4.4.2 Summary

In identifying the most significant challenge for the CEO as meeting the diverse requirements of Councillors, there is recognition by the Councillors of the impact of political differences on the organisation and the responsibility of the CEO to keep this in check. Congruent with the findings in section 5.4.3.2, the work at the political interface is identified as the most demanding aspect of the CEO role. This is however, an area that does not appear to have much significance in the formal CEO performance plans.

#### 5.4.5 Gender considerations

This theme allows for the identification of Councillor conceptions on gender issues broadly. Four subcategories are identified:

- it's different for a woman;
- more likely to recruit and be comfortable with a male CEO;
- pipeline theory; and
- an emphasis on soft skills.

**Table 5.12: Gender Considerations**

<b>Subcategory</b>	<b>What is the experience?</b>	<b>How is it understood?</b>	<b>Gender</b>
<i><b>It's different for a woman</b></i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women judged more harshly</li> <li>• Women are not necessarily helpful to each other</li> <li>• Male Councillors treat female staff differently to male staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expect more from female CEO/Councillor</li> <li>• Women judge each other more harshly – do not always offer support to each other</li> <li>• More challenging and demanding</li> </ul>	F
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Men describe/ behave differently with women</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Differing expectations/ communication with male and female staff</li> </ul>	M

<b>Subcategory</b>	<b>What is the experience?</b>	<b>How is it understood?</b>	<b>Gender</b>
<b>More likely to recruit and be comfortable with a male CEO</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male Councillors more likely to select a male CEO</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women under-represented at CEO level</li> </ul>	F & M
<b>Pipeline theory</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women make career choice based on family circumstance</li> <li>• Management drawn from technical fields e.g. planning, engineering</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women's representation low</li> </ul>	F & M
<b><i>An emphasis on soft skills</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women are more likely to have the skills required at CEO level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role calls for soft skills, more akin to female leadership</li> </ul>	F
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women at the top perceived to be more aggressive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women judged differently – perceived as either too soft or too hard</li> </ul>	M

#### 5.4.5.1 It's different for a woman

Female - But look, it is hard for women and I think there's, I know all these years later that we should say we're judged on the same criteria as men, but even the other night the four women Councillors, four of us were talking, we say a woman has to be almost twice as good to be judged as good as a man by a lot of people.

Male - ... she's lovely and maybe that's the giveaway, I just heard myself saying she's lovely, well I wouldn't say that about a bloke. I'd say oh yeah he's a good bloke or he's a ratbag or whatever.

#### Discussion

A number of the female Councillors believe women are judged more harshly than men. These female Councillors do not however, differentiate between the experiences of the female CEOs and female Councillors. One female Councillor believes female and male executives in her Council are treated differently.

The male Councillors believe that working with a female CEO would be different to working with a male CEO and that this would be most evident in the way in which communication occurs. Three male Councillors describe the female CEOs and

executives in terms which they suggest they would not use to describe a male. This is evidenced in comments such as she is ‘lovely’, ‘bubbly’ and ‘not a bimbo.’

#### **5.4.5.2 More likely to recruit and be comfortable with a male CEO**

Female - I would say that there would be a tendency for male Councillors to choose male CEOs, and to value the strengths of firmness, making decisions, you know, and particularly, and often being a very strong and powerful leadership type figure, and value those over what can be more subtle, and less easily defined, and often can take a longer period of time to work out that these are the really important things.

Male - I know that some of the women felt that it had become a boy’s club, and that term was being used. So it’s been compounded by having the male CEO who I’ve got to say is not a blokey boy but I get on particularly well with him and so I think that the women viewed that situation as being overwhelmed by the boys. To come back to your question about how the women on this Council might operate with a female CEO I think they would operate perhaps better.

#### Discussion

All of the female Councillors suggest that with a predominance of male Councillors on Council it is less likely that a female CEO would be selected. They suggest consistently that Councillors are more likely to be comfortable with a male CEO.

#### **5.4.5.3 Pipeline theory**

Female - I think it is, to some extent, self-selection as well as the selection by Councillors. The demands of the task are such that many women, if they have got families, will not want to work at the intense level of the CEO. The biggest area of female employment in terms of increase has been part-time, and there’s no way known you can be a CEO part-time. So obviously you’re going to limit a large number of women who’ve got family responsibilities at a particular age in life. If they’ve got a supportive husband or spouse or their family are older, that might be a different case. So it’s all selection. Other areas might be a lack of experience or qualifications ... that’s increasingly less so ... if you looked at ten years ago, it might have been 1% or 2%

CEOs, so it has changed and improved. So there's going to be a range of reasons why that statistic is there and it's not necessarily discrimination, it's a historical factor, its personal factors. I'm not sure I would want to be a CEO.

Male - If we look at city planning as an example, before we reach here, before we reach a female, we have to go down two levels, so the directors are male, all the managers are male, then it gets some people there. And I think it's the same with the engineering. But perhaps even to a greater extent, all right? Now, with corporate communications we've got - our marketing manager is female, she's very good.

### Discussion

One male and one female Councillor suggest that women may choose not to move into a senior role because of their family circumstances and that in traditional relationships the expectation of caring for family falls on the female partner. The female Councillor also suggests that women, for a range of other reasons, may choose not to progress to CEO level. Only one male Councillor suggests that one of the reasons for the low representation of women in senior local government roles is that they are not represented significantly in the more technical areas of the administrative functions.

#### **5.4.5.4 An emphasis on soft skills**

Female - A lot of Mayors come in and they want to reinvent the wheel to leave their mark. They want to make massive changes ... I actually think that women do that quite well. I think we're a lot more flexible, we go with the flow and certainly the women Councillors that I've got this year, they're extremely smart. They've got a real understanding of the community, but they've got an understanding themselves and that's more important.

Male - I think with the gender imbalance in business there's a somewhat cynical view around, and don't take this as being a sexist comment, but there is a cynical view around that the women who get to the top are real hard cases, you know, but C (female CEO) is not one of those, which is interesting and so you know – she's firm, she's hard, she's tough but not a growly sort of person whereas you get some people who are and look the

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same thing applied to men. We wanted a particular type of person, she was the one who best fit the bill.

### Discussion

Similarly to the Councillors' emphasis on interpersonal skills, (5.4.2) a number of female Councillors suggest that females are more likely to possess the skills needed for the role of CEO. In contrast, one male Councillor suggests that it is the engineering and commercial skills that are more important and that women are less likely to be drawn to these fields. One male Councillor suggests that either gender can do the role but cautions that women who get to the top might be 'hard cases'.

#### **5.4.6 Summary**

This theme identifies a number of emerging conceptions as well as the suggestion that gender considerations are relevant in selecting, working with and assessing CEOs. The female Councillors suggest that women are treated more harshly than their male colleagues and they themselves identify this as their own personal experience. Male Councillor comments identify very different considerations in describing females and acknowledge that their communication style would be different depending on the gender of the CEO. Some Councillors still affirm that management is drawn from the traditionally technical areas of Council and that this accounts for women's low representation at the CEO level. With a strong emphasis on interpersonal skills, a number of Councillors identify that women are more likely to possess the skills required for a CEO role.

#### **5.4.7 Councillors on Councillors**

Through the process of interviewing Councillors, comments about Council and Councillors were freely made and as a number of considerations emerge these are presented as a separate category. Two subcategories emerge:

- relative inexperience of Councillors; and
- it's all about me.

**Table 5.13: Councillors on Councillors**

<b>Subcategory</b>	<b>What is the experience?</b>	<b>How is it understood?</b>	<b>Gender</b>
<b>Relative inexperience of Councillors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Councillors not appreciative of the dynamics of a large organisation</li> <li>• Councillors unclear of their/role or that of CEO</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Councillors make unrealistic demands or access organisation in inappropriate ways</li> </ul>	F & M
<b>It's all about me</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Councillors are egocentric in their requirements</li> <li>• Strong focus of Councillors on their own needs</li> <li>• Possible fractured relationship based on political preference</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unrealistic demands of administration</li> <li>• Reduces ability to work in a team environment</li> <li>• Decision making can be politically driven</li> </ul>	F & M

#### 5.4.7.1 Relative inexperience of Councillors

Female - Some of the other Councillors who have never had that background have real difficulty seeing the way that the administration or I suppose the executive brings their decision making to us and that's a real problem because I think it's important that we regard what the executive suggests.

Male - ... in my view Councillors, people don't understand their role as Councillors. Officers don't want Councillors to expand. They're not interested in their life story and their view of the universe and what it all means. They want a responsible policy issue, a specific issue; Councillors that will launch into the story of their lives and the meaning of the universe when it's totally inappropriate so it's almost as though Councillors are put in a spotlight on a stage and they feel as though they have to perform. Part of the challenge for the CEO is to be able to manage those interpersonal dynamics.

#### Discussion

Two female Councillors suggest that Councillors may be ill-equipped to understand the workings of the organisation, as they may not have had exposure to it. They may enter Council with a focus on one issue and as such have not necessarily considered the implications of their comprehensive governance requirements. Similarly, one male

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Councillor suggests that Councillors understand neither their role nor how to work effectively with the administration.

#### **5.4.7.2 It's all about me**

Female - ... but he has got a huge ego and really loves to see himself as a public speaker, you know the Winston Churchill type, and he can just go on and on and on, and puts a lot of people off, and I don't think he necessarily realises, and so I think having him as Mayor will be different, and would certainly be projecting a different image of Council from having me as Mayor.

Male - One bad thing outweighs ten really good things and when something annoys them they run off the mouth individually and then they natter to other Councillors and suddenly you've got what starts off as insubordination becomes a mutiny.

#### Discussion

The female Councillors suggest that the culture amongst Councillors is one of ego-driven competition, with Councillors not listening to each other, and that this is reflective of the strong dominance of male Councillors. They associate this dynamic with their male colleagues. The male Councillors similarly suggest that Councillors perceive their needs to take highest priority for the administration and do not necessarily understand how the organisation works. There is also a suggestion that it is the CEO's last mistake that always counts.

#### **5.4.7.3 Summary**

Councillors consistently identify that Councillors are ill-equipped for their role as Councillors, as evidenced in their requirements and expectations of staff. The culture at the Councillor level is described as ego-driven or egocentric, with power plays evident. The female Councillors associate this with the male Councillors. Whilst the male Councillors' conceptions are similar they do not associate them with either gender.

#### **5.4.7.4 Summary results for Councillors**

The role of CEO is primarily identified as providing leadership and management within the context of Council's policy direction. Councillors are very clear on the differentiation of roles and responsibilities between elected members and the administration. The key skills required by a CEO are leadership and management capability. Councillors suggest that they would only expect the CEO to have technical know how in a small number of situations, but they would expect the CEO to be able to engage the appropriate resources as required. The CEO must demonstrate a capacity to partner the Council in achieving its policy ambitions.

Councillors and CEOs consistently suggest that the achievement of specified organisational outcomes is a yardstick of success for the CEO. Additionally there is an emphasis on CEOs being able to engage with individual Councillors and effectively manage their expectations in concert with the Council agenda.

Councillors, like the CEOs, suggest that the interface at the political level with Councillors is the most challenging aspect of the CEO's role. They also recognise that this factor, above all others, is the key to Council satisfaction with the CEO.

Male Councillors are more likely to suggest that the gender of the CEO will make a difference to expectations and communications between Council and the CEO. The environment is described as robust and demanding, so women need to be able to cope with that.

Whilst Councillors are aware of the low representation of women at senior levels in local government, they generally attribute this to the low numbers of females within specific technical areas within Council.

### **5.5 Stage Two -Validation of the Research Findings**

Summaries of the research findings identified in this chapter were presented to all research participants for comment (Appendix Two). Participants were asked to provide feedback on the findings, and 15 of them submitted responses. Thirteen of the

participants provided brief feedback confirming the research findings. One female CEO suggested that her experiences varied from those of other female CEOs, and one female Councillor suggested that the research had not necessarily reflected the significance of the CEOs' organisational management and leadership. Some of the comments are presented below:

Female CEO - Gender has not been an issue for me. As a general comment I'm possibly one out on some of the findings but it's interesting what the other interviewees have said.

Male CEO - Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to participate in this study and I very much appreciate receiving your summary of findings. The findings are quite consistent with my thoughts on the matter.

Female Councillor - I agree with the primary leadership and management role, but think management role needs to spell out the importance of the management of the organisation as well as Council policy directions.

Female Councillor - The research findings call out what we have known but have never said out loud.

Male Councillor - Your study identifies the complexities of local government.

## **5.6 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has presented the research findings consistent with a phenomenographic approach. The outcome space has been presented through the development of categories of description and the variation between research participants has been highlighted. Stage two findings suggest an overall confirmation of the research findings by the research participants themselves.

The next chapter will discuss the results, develop conclusions and consider the implications for local government.

## **Chapter 6 - Summary and Conclusions**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to summarise the findings and use the literature to draw conclusions from the research results presented in chapter five. This chapter consists of six sections. The first section summarises the different stages of the research and the relationship to the research problem. The second section presents the conclusions that arise out of the research results presented in chapter five. The third section focuses on the implications for local government and the fourth section highlights the limitations of the study. The fifth section identifies considerations for future research. The final section provides a summary of the chapter.

### **6.2 Summary of the Stages of the Research**

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with seven male and seven female CEOs, and four male and three female Councillors, across both metropolitan Melbourne and rural Victoria. The interviews were transcribed following a phenomenographic methodology and the transcripts were analysed for variation in conception. Variation was examined within and across male and female gender groupings for both CEOs and Councillors. The CEO data was then presented in seven main categories, and subcategories, identified on the basis of variation.

A similar process was then followed with the seven Councillors, all in their Mayoral term, and representing both metropolitan and rural Councils. After interviews, data collection, analysis and presentation followed the same phenomenographic approach adopted for the CEO data with results captured under five main categories. The two phases occurred consecutively.

The second stage of the research involved both CEOs and Councillors commenting on the research findings pertaining to each group. Summary information was provided to all research participants who were invited to provide written commentary on the findings.

## 6.3 Conclusions on the Main Research Question

The research has focused on one main research question:

*‘How do the experiences and career paths of female and male Victorian local government CEOs differ?’*

Section 6.3.1 - 6.3.8 provides the conclusions relating to the CEO findings, and section 6.4.1 - 6.4.7 presents the findings and conclusions for Councillors.

### 6.3.1 Significant early childhood experiences

As identified in section 5.3, all of the CEOs acknowledge the significance of early childhood experiences to their career development. A number of the interviewees make reference to feeling different from their peers on the basis of position in family, loss of a parent through death or separation, ethnicity or parental values. Both parents are regarded by both male and female CEOs as influential, either by being absent or as role models. This is most notable for mothers of both male and female CEOs; many of the female CEOs identify their mother as a role model and a number of the male CEOs comment on their relationship with their mothers and the positive influence this has provided them. The majority of the interviewees come from families with three or more children. This is consistent with the findings of Sinclair and Wilson (2000) who suggest that the larger the family the earlier the capacity to develop skills in negotiation and communication and a sense of boundaries, attributes which are conducive to leadership (Sinclair and Wilson 2000).

The interviewees are predominantly the oldest, second oldest or youngest in their families. Birth order does not appear to be as clearly influential in this study as in other research, with the CEOs holding a range of birth-order positions, and there is no evidence of clustering around any particular position. This finding differs from the work of Mant (1997) who identifies a preponderance of first-born children, particularly sons, in senior roles within business and politics. Dempsey (2006) notes a high proportion of middle and youngest children in her study of local government CEOs. Sinclair and Wilson (2000) assert that the position in one’s family assists with gaining a sense of

one's place in the world and suggest that the first-born is likely to excel intellectually. Birth order in this study, however, is not regarded as significant.

In this study both male and female CEOs report a strong sense of early identity creation as young leaders. This occurs through academic and sporting pursuits and, particularly for the female CEOs, other significant adults such as teachers or religious leaders provide positive encouragement and identify their leadership potential at a young age. This experience is regarded as formative in the CEOs developing a sense of their own leadership identity.

Paternal influence and a sense of wanting to do better than one's family of origin is a major motivator for a number of the male and female interviewees. One female CEO identifies her strong desire to prove to her father that women could achieve senior roles, despite his assertion that this was the domain of males. For another, moving beyond family and community expectations of being a farmer's wife is identified as a major career incentive. Sinclair and Wilson (2000) similarly found, in their analysis of the backgrounds of leaders, that the experiences within family of origin significantly impacted on career development, with emerging leaders either replicating familial expectations or roles, or choosing to deviate from family expectations and assumptions.

Two areas in this study show significant gender differences. First, the female CEOs identify a much more focused and planned approach to education and identify their parents as being significant in their educational aspirations. Education is seen as a means of ensuring independence as women. Secondly the female CEOs reflect more directly on their early independence and assumption of family responsibility, either through family circumstances or through their own sense of how they wished to assist with the family dynamics. This early focus on independence as young females is identified as an important factor in females developing their work ethic and work identity.

These findings are consistent with the literature. As identified, Sinclair and Wilson (2000) found that early family experiences are noted to be important for future development, particularly in gaining a sense of identification, sense of self and capacity to work with others. As described above, in this research family of origin is

acknowledged by the research participants as a significant contributing factor in their future development.

This study appears to corroborate previous research in noting the different ways in which males and females acknowledge the meaning and significance of early life experience. In this study, female CEOs more frequently emphasise the influence of family of origin, family values and childhood experiences on their later careers than do their male counterparts.

### **6.3.2 *Career paths of CEOs***

As noted in the discussion above, a number of male and female CEOs are seen, by themselves and/or others, as potential leaders in their childhood and adolescence. This identification is reinforced by their early experiences of leadership opportunities, success and feedback, all of which assist positively in the development of work self. This is extended into early work life where both males and females identify occasions where they stood out from others through their academic achievements, early promotion or exemplary performance.

Males and females in this study explain and account for these experiences differently. The male CEOs characterise their achievement as individually-based and indicative of their individual skill and capacity. In discussing such experiences they make no reference to gender. The female CEOs also identify achievement, but most of them characterise it as something which differentiates them from other women. This is evidenced in a significant number of comments where the female CEOs suggest their achievement of a particular role is either the first for a woman or unusual for a woman. Female CEOs' career paths are therefore differentiated from those of other women and in this way they see themselves as standing apart from them. Significantly these female CEOs experience a recurring sense of being judged as a woman, rather than as an individual. Gender is always a consideration in explaining most of their career moves.

This is consistent with the findings of Wahl (2001) who similarly argues that men are seen to possess the necessary management skills, not as men but as individuals, and women managers are more likely to be regarded as not having appropriate skills because they are women. As such, judgement of women is based on gender rather than

the individual's own skill base. As cited above, in this study the male CEOs clearly suggest that their achievement is individually-oriented, whereas the female CEOs see their achievement as a statement more about women, than about the individual. Female CEOs appear less willing to attribute their achievements to their own skill and more inclined to cite significant externalities such as parents, mentors and lucky breaks as the triggers of their success.

In this way the individual woman's achievement appears to become less visible. This is congruent with Sinclair's analysis (1998), which holds that women's leadership is not always recognised as such and is often regarded as the exception rather than commonplace for women. Wahl (2001) suggests that in such instances these women are regarded as atypical of women generally. This is clearly the experience of the female CEOs in this study, who describe this phenomenon with a sense of pride and willingly accept the label of being 'the first or only woman' but also appear to work diligently at fitting into the dominant (male) working environment.

Many of the female CEOs describe their conscious efforts to fit into the dominant male culture while simultaneously acting as proud ambassadors for other females. This finding is consistent with current literature suggesting that women appear reluctant to draw attention to their gender, and disposed to fit into the existing culture and work environment (Pringle 1999; Olsson 2002; McConnell-Ginet 2000). It is as if being silent about being a woman may make their (unusual) achievement less noticeable or worthy of comment.

Consistent with the work of Olsson (2000a; 2000b; 2002), and Pringle (1999), the female CEOs appear to use adaptive strategies to cope with their minority status. Adaptive strategies are noted in the literature as a way for women to integrate and fit into the dominant male culture (Olsson 2002). The strategies used by the female CEOs, as evidenced in this study, include maintaining gender neutrality by ensuring that there is no disruption to the dominant male culture, not openly threatening their male colleagues, presenting as androgynous, using male mentors and not drawing attention to the female fraternity. This theme emerges consistently and supports Wahl's (2001) finding that women find ways to behave which fit the organisational norm and minimise the negative repercussions which could hinder career progress.

There is also a common theme for both male and female CEOs in demonstrating a preparedness to move outside their comfort zone in pursuing career opportunities. Many of them report seeking new challenges and learning opportunities and demonstrating a willingness to take risks. The motivation for both male and female CEOs is defined as a desire to keep learning and growing. There is no evidence of motivation for career changes being significantly different between the female and male CEOs. This contrasts with the findings of White, Cox and Cooper (1992) who suggest that females are more likely to be motivated to change roles on the basis of seeking heightened challenges, whereas men are more likely to be pursuing higher positions on the corporate ladder. Early career changes, for both males and females in this study, are primarily based on the pursuit of learning and development rather than a clear sense of direction and defined career path. Only a few of the males were overtly groomed for particular roles, notably within the Federal Government sector.

In pursuing challenges, a number of risk-taking career moves are reported by both male and female interviewees including moving outside one's area of technical expertise, accepting short-term contracts and changing sectors. Olsson (2002) and Sinclair (1998) both identify the pursuit of challenge by females in making their career choices but do not as clearly confirm this finding for men.

While both male and female CEOs acknowledge the importance of mentors and sponsors, the females more clearly identify the role of mentors and sponsors in their career development than do the male interviewees. In most cases mentors were male for both male and female CEOs. This confirms earlier research showing that mentoring and coaching are regarded as key contributors to career development, with mentors mostly being male (Ragins et al. 1998; Wentling 2003).

The key role of mentors for female CEOs is in accessing promotion paths and learning and development opportunities, but they are seen as equally important in identifying the female as a potential leader. Some female CEOs appear to have needed the reinforcement of a well-placed mentor or sponsor to assist them in identifying their capacity as a future CEO (see 5.3.2.3).

The male CEOs' descriptions suggest a more selective approach to learning from others, and the males appear to use mentors and sponsors more informally than do the female

CEOs. Female CEOs appear to be more inclined to label such interaction as mentoring and, in some instances, formally contract with their mentor. This is congruent with previous work that identifies the significance attributed by females to mentors as this relationship is identified as a means of breaking down career barriers (Ragins 1999; Tharanou 1997). This difference in the ways in which male and female CEOs account for the mentoring relationship does not appear to have been deeply examined in previous research.

Female CEOs in this study are more likely than male CEOs to suggest that their achievement was based on being in the right place at the right time, or was the result of a lucky break. The male CEOs more clearly view their achievement as a reflection of their own capacity. This suggests a fragility of the work ego and identity of the females, who still present as the impostors in a male culture. Sinclair (1998) similarly suggests that women's confidence and experience at senior levels still needs to be developed. Fox and Broussine (2001) found that female local government CEOs believed that they needed to perform better than their male colleagues to even be considered as equals.

The majority of the female CEOs' career paths have followed those of conventional male careers, with only one female CEO suggesting that she has had significant breaks due to family responsibilities, and another reporting that her partner took on home duties so that she could return to work within three months of childbirth. There is strong evidence of commitment to career by all of the female CEOs, with the majority working full time and minimising breaks, thus showing little difference in career progression from their male colleagues. This finding stands in contrast to Fox and Broussine's (2001) study of local government which found that women CEOs tended to have less vertical career paths than their male colleagues and were often balancing domestic and work responsibilities. While similar issues pertaining to family responsibility are clearly raised in this study, it is not identified as a career barrier by the majority of the female CEOs. As with White's (1995) findings, this study has found that career is central in the female CEOs' lives and family arrangements are adjusted to accommodate work demands.

### 6.3.3 *Selection experience*

The overriding conception for both male and female CEOs is that the CEO selection process is based mostly on the perceived fit between the CEO and the Council, as well as Councillors' comfort with their appointee. This confirms earlier work (Still 1994) which suggests that once a manager has moved beyond middle level management the recruitment process is likely to focus on style rather than substance. CEOs consistently comment that Council is likely to focus on the capacity of the individual to represent their values and direction. The underlying assumption is that, at this stage of career development, the requirement is not on technical skill but on political nous and the capacity to manage the diverse range of portfolios and interests in local government. This finding is consistent with Fawcett and Pringle (2000) who suggest that senior appointments are more likely to be made on the basis of networks, politics and relationships than on skills and experience alone.

Within this category there are two areas that are different for male and female CEOs. The majority of female CEOs suggest that at interview they were asked either directly or indirectly about their personal circumstances. In the one instance where Council did not seek this information specifically, the female volunteered personal information because she felt that Council should know that her family life would not hinder her commitment to the organisation. This finding is consistent with Fox and Broussine (2001) whose women respondents reported being subjected to questions at interview that they did not believe were asked of men. There appears to be limited research relating to the interview questions of Council or the emphasis on seeking personal information in the way described above. Only one male suggested that he was asked about family life and his sense was that this was related to his young age at the time of appointment. The findings noted demonstrate a weakness in the recruitment process of CEOs.

Both male and female CEOs believe that female Councillors may be less inclined to appoint a female CEO and in many instances where female Councillors are on the interview panel this may hinder the female applicant's outcome.

CEOs suggest that female Councillors probably feel threatened by a female CEO, or uncomfortable dealing with a woman in a senior role. This is consistent with the

findings of Wajcman (1998) who suggests that many women undermine other women's authority as they may be less comfortable dealing with women in positions of authority.

A number of female CEOs attest to this by suggesting that female Councillors were often more likely to approach their male managers for assistance and support, rather than working with the female CEO. The female CEOs, however, all had female Councillors involved in their selection process. The suggestion that females may experience discrimination by other women is well documented (Rindfleish 2000; Mavin 2006a; 2006b) but there appears to be limited research identifying this at Board/CEO recruitment levels or specifically within the local government context. In contrast to the findings in this study, Fox and Broussine (2001) suggest that in some cases women CEOs believe having other women on the selection panel may in fact be helpful to them.

The other area of difference between male and female CEOs is their respective willingness to comment on not only the interview process but also the interview panel. The majority of male CEOs make reference to the lack of preparation and experience of Councillors in making senior appointments. A number of them suggest that the recruitment process is usually managed by the external recruitment consultant, that Council is guided through this process and that Councillors lack the requisite knowledge and skills. Female CEOs do not make similar comments. It appears that female CEOs are not as confident as male CEOs in interpreting and commenting on the behaviour of Councillors, yet their experiences at interview were notably more discriminatory. Alternatively, they may have felt that it is prudent to say nothing in order to deflect attention from their minority position.

#### **6.3.4 *Experience of being a CEO***

Both male and female CEOs describe an overwhelming sense of organisational accountability, with the CEO taking responsibility for all aspects of the organisation and ultimately 'wearing' Council's assessment of organisational performance and effectiveness. This personal sense of accountability is experienced by both male and female CEOs. The role of CEO is also conceived as being the public face for the organisation, with a demand by Council and community for transparency at all times.

This overwhelming sense of accountability and 24-hour availability required, as described by the CEOs, appears to be a new research finding.

The dominant culture within local government, according to both male and female CEOs, is one of hegemonic masculinity. It is a homogenous culture that is dominated by white, middle-aged men. This confirms previous international findings, which suggest that women chief executives are still a rare sight in modern local government and that there is little diversity in the mix of CEOs (Hunt 2001). McConnell-Ginet (2000) also contends that gendered attitudes continue to favour males over females in executive recruitment. In this study it is evident that such circumstances lead the individuals, particularly women, to feel like impostors who constantly need to prove themselves. This experience was shared by only one male, who became CEO at a young age and as such was not representative of the dominant middle-aged male culture. In this way management is institutionalised as being male and of a particular age, and women are seen to be the exception.

There is strong congruence between both male and female CEOs in describing the role of CEO as being the domain of men. This finding confirms earlier research (Hunt 2001; Fox and Broussine 2001; Paddon 2005). The CEOs as a group are not representative of the broader community and are identified by both male and female CEOs as being dominated by middle-aged Anglo-Saxon males and, as such, an homogeneous group. Male CEOs appear to be more critical of their colleagues, as captured in commentary about mediocrity and limited experience (see 5.3.4.4).

The sense of the CEO fraternity being the domain of men creates perceptions of responsibility and heightened scrutiny for the female CEOs, who suggest that at all times they are mindful not only of their own performance but also of the impact it will have on other females. This strong sense of responsibility for all women is consistent with the research of Kram and McCollom (1995) who found that individual women's successes or failures reflect on all women. In this study the dominant group, middle-aged men, appear to be unaware of the gender imbalance. A number of these men comment that they are aware that there are significantly fewer women than men at all three management levels within local government but they do not see this as problematic; rather they see it as a reflection of the particular functions within local government. Only one male CEO suggests that he has attempted to deal with the issue

of gender imbalance at the second level, his executive management level, through actively seeking female applicants for roles.

The maintenance of the culture is not dealt with openly but rather appears to be informally maintained. Few, if any, male CEOs regard gender imbalance as an issue, and female CEOs receive constant subtle reminders that they are the outsiders and need to conform. This is evident in the comments, made to female CEOs when they gather together at mixed gender forums, of suggested takeovers and secret women's business (see 5.3.4). The female CEOs describe a collegial relationship with their male counterparts but characterise it in androgynous terms. It is only after a certain time, or a number of drinks, that the female's gender is acknowledged (see 5.3.4).

The female CEOs appear strongly motivated to ensure that they do not threaten their male colleagues or the prevailing culture. For many this is achieved by maintaining gender neutrality, using their male colleagues as mentors in what appears to be a patriarchal role and ensuring that the current power balance is not threatened in any way. While the female CEOs are aware of how few in number they are, and discuss it with each other, the topic is seldom broached with their male colleagues.

The female CEOs have attempted to assimilate into the male culture, recognising that their sparsity makes any cultural change difficult. Only one female CEO suggests that being a woman has been an asset, whereas the others believe it is harder for a woman. Many of the female CEOs suggest that, unlike men, if they fail this will be considered a failure for their gender. This sentiment is consistent with the literature (Wahl 2001). Kanter (1977) attests to the pressure this places on women who in this way become representatives of all women. The cost is the loss of individuality, and any visibility that a female CEO attains is as the exception to the rule rather than as an individual. The adaptive strategies used by the female CEOs are consistent with previous findings, which identified women's efforts to fit in with, rather than challenge, the dominant culture (Wahl 2001; Mavin 2001).

Both male and female CEOs suggest that there is a constant need to balance a number of dichotomies. One of these is the balance between master and servant. The CEOs all acknowledge their role as leader of the Council administration, with its associated responsibilities but also suggest that as servant to Council they need to ensure that

Council direction is followed. In managing this balance they describe a constant movement between a leadership role and that of agent of the Council.

CEOs find this balance most taxing when they are expected to implement Council policies that neither they nor their senior executive believe in. The framework that most CEOs suggest is crucial to their survival is a commitment to provide impartial advice to Council, supported by a capacity to then implement Council direction. The constant negotiation required to maintain this balance is a core theme in both male and female CEOs' conceptions. All CEOs are mindful that comprehensive responsibility for the organisation falls to them, and they acknowledge their accountability as such. While a number of the CEOs discuss the importance of ensuring effective team management and dynamics at the senior executive level i.e. the interface with Council, they also discuss their need to stand outside of this in terms of taking sole responsibility. Similarly Fox and Broussine (2001) attest to the requirements of the CEO to manage multiple priorities and directions.

The role of CEO is isolating and comes at a personal cost. Female CEOs identify the emotional toll of the role, but none of the male CEOs make any direct reference to a personal cost. While most CEOs suggest that networks with colleagues are important, a number of male CEOs suggest that theirs is a very competitive environment where CEOs vie for each other's jobs and therefore they approach the networks with a level of mistrust.

The female CEOs acknowledge this competitive environment but have established their own female network. Many of the female CEOs identify this support as a lifeline and a forum where they can openly and safely discuss issues. It is particularly telling that a number of the females suggest that they could not maintain the level of openness in the group if male colleagues were present. This female network represents a mechanism for women to test their own ideas and experiences in a way that allows them to drop their guard and share vulnerabilities. Again, this confirms the culture of hegemonic masculinity maintained by the dominant male culture and the women adapting to this culture. The conscious adaptation to this culture and the perceived sense of responsibility for other women, place significant demands on the individuals operating in this environment.

It is not surprising that the female CEOs do not openly talk about the female CEO group with their male colleagues; they fear that its very existence might be seen as a potential vehicle for the females to side against the males. It is important for these women to have a support structure that they own and control. The group also appears to provide the female CEOs with a collective power base and allows them to enter into the general forum of male and female CEOs with a sense of group solidarity behind them. While similar proactive responses by female CEOs do not appear to be identified in other local government studies, such support mechanisms and the importance of networks and support structures are well documented (Wentling 2003; Hennig and Jardim 1977; Ehrich 1994). The establishment of a women-only group stands in stark contrast to the strong literature focus on 'old boys' networks (Fagenson 1986; Linehan 2000).

All CEOs believe that the most complex and difficult part of their role is working with Council. This finding is consistent with Broussine (2000) who similarly found that the capacity to work at the political dimension is regarded by CEOs as the most challenging and problematic aspect of the role. Consistent with Kloot and Martin (2001) accountability to Councillors is regarded as high priority. In this study the tension manifests itself, for both male and female CEOs, in the need to manage Council objectives while simultaneously responding to the incongruous needs and wants of individual Councillors. Occasionally, tensions appear to be placed on the CEO because of political agendas and individual Councillor expectations, which run counter to those of Council. CEOs suggest that they must carefully manage such conflicting expectations and they need to interact at the political interface in an impartial manner if they wish to survive. In determining how to respond to and prioritise the needs of individual Councillors, CEOs make political decisions, despite their assertions that they attempt to remain impartial. By virtue of their role and interface with Councillors they inevitably make decisions based on the politics of the Council. This study therefore concludes that it is unrealistic for CEOs to maintain that they are impartial and do not behave politically. This assertion is supported by Nalbandian (2001; 2003) who argues that managers may on occasion find themselves with no choice but to act politically and furthermore, it is the work at the political interface, which will inevitably cause the CEO to make political decisions. While previous research (Broussine 2000; Fox and Broussine 2001; Fox and Leach 1999) identifies the implications for CEOs working at this political level, there appears to be little research that focuses on the belief of CEOs that they need to maintain impartiality in the way described above.

This study therefore contests the notion that CEOs can maintain perfect impartiality and furthermore, asserts that the CEO does act politically in determining which priority to implement, how to prioritise Councillor requests and even how communication occurs. Further work is required in assisting CEOs to define and understand this concept.

The tension associated with working at the political level continues to be problematic; the CEO must be able to not only build relationships with each Councillor, but also simultaneously provide a balance between individual Councillor demands and those of the Council as a whole. As indicated earlier, a number of CEOs manage this by striving to communicate openly, frankly and fearlessly. As suggested, this may be hampered by the conflicting agendas of the individual Councillors and the CEOs' attempts to satisfy each of them. CEOs agree that this dilemma creates enormous exposure and risk for them. This is consistent with earlier research which identified the relationship between administration and elected members as one that needs to be carefully managed (Fox and Leach 1999; Broussine 2000).

CEOs are mindful that while they minimise the possibility of the organisation becoming involved in Councillor politics, individual staff members may willingly or unwittingly enter this domain. Again, the CEOs feel accountable for this. A number of CEOs attempt to manage this by continually clarifying and distinguishing the roles and responsibilities of both Councillors and the administration. There do not appear to be any research findings which identify the sense of accountability CEOs feel for staff interaction with Councillors or the strategies used by CEOs to minimise exposure.

Most of the CEOs suggest that they recognise that theirs is a time-limited role by virtue of their contracts being time-limited, which leads many of them to reflect on job insecurity and a sense of a 'use by date'. This finding confirms earlier international work, which reported CEOs expressing concern that their appointments and performance evaluation could be linked to political outcomes (Fox and Leach 1999).

This finding appears to add to the research in that CEOs suggest that performance is not necessarily the most important factor in ensuring their ongoing employment; rather, it is the dynamic between Council and its CEO. This attests to the significance placed by CEOs on the Council/CEO interface. CEOs therefore operate in a difficult and tenuous

situation, where political will, relationships and Council response to advice, may in fact be the factors that lead to contract termination. CEOs therefore balance the need to provide fierce and frank advice with the need to maintain a harmonious relationship with Council. The inherent fragility and insecurity of this situation appears to be a constant thread in both male and female CEO conceptions.

This finding is consistent with earlier research, which suggests that CEO's consider working at the political interface as the most challenging and problematic aspect of the CEO role (Broussine 2000, Dempsey 2006). Similarly, Fox and Leach (1999) suggest that CEOs have the potential to become political appointees and their future is likely to be determined by political outcomes.

Both male and female CEO conceptions suggest that the primary generator of risk and uncertainty for them is the relationship with Council.

### ***6.3.5 Determining success for a CEO***

Male and female CEOs in this study identify four major success measures that they use as the criteria to evaluate their own performance. The first, is an emphasis on managing outcomes and culture as a means of ensuring that the organisation is well positioned to achieve Council objectives. Secondly, authentic leadership is identified as the capacity of the CEO to lead the organisation by providing clear direction and resources to achieve Council goals. Thirdly, providing impartial and frank advice allows for a separation between Council and its administration and is seen by the CEOs as a measure of effective corporate governance. Fourthly, caring for Councillors is a measure of the capacity of the CEO and the administration to ensure that Councillors' needs are met and given a high priority.

These criteria are consistent with the literature, which indicates that success is determined by both systemic and individual factors, including financial management, strategic planning, customer/community relations, operations and risk management, human resource management, ethics, values and innovation (Epstein and Josee Roy 2005). Kloot (1999); Van Gramberg and Teicher (2000) specifically identify the current local government agenda's emphasis on outcomes, performance and results as a means of demonstrating efficiency and effectiveness. Kloot and Martin (2000) identify four

dimensions of performance measurement. These include financial; community; processes; innovation and development.

The first three success areas identified in this study are regarded as positive indicators with both an external and internal focus. The externally-focused outcomes relate to the community and include capital, financial, service responsiveness and customer satisfaction outcomes. The internally-related measures focus on the operation of the organisation and include provision of adequate resources, policies, procedures and guidelines, as well as staff outcomes including morale, access to training and development and other organisational development opportunities. The fourth indicator, relating to Councillors, is seen to be the most weighty and significant measure, as well as being the most complex, risky and time-consuming.

All the CEOs place strong emphasis on achieving outcomes for both the community and the organisation. This is reflective of the modernising local government reform agenda, with its focus on demonstrating responsiveness and organisational capacity. Achieving bottom-line fiscal and community benefit outcomes are regarded as the important factors in considering how responsive Council is to the community's needs. Staff retention, morale, teamwork and effective communication are regarded as the internal measures of organisational health.

This focus on outcomes for both the organisation and the community is consistent with specified performance objectives for CEOs in both private and public sector organisations. The findings in this study are consistent with the focus on performance, effectiveness and efficiency, as they are identified to be reflective of the local government reform process (Pullin and Haidar 2003a; 2003b; Van Gramberg and Teicher 2000).

CEOs also believe that their success is based on their capacity to provide authentic leadership. This is an important issue for CEOs in creating a sense of their own worth and identity. As described in section 6.3.4, CEOs often have to balance a number of dichotomies including leader/agent and leader/servant. The impact of this is that in being both agent and servant of Council, CEOs do not operate autonomously or freely and as such may feel that their leadership is compromised. It appears that CEOs have needed to redefine for themselves the meaning of authentic leadership in the context of their relationship with, and responsibility to, Council. Whilst some research has

commented on the complexity of the relationship and reporting arrangements for the CEO, there appears to be little research emphasis on the impact of this dynamic on the CEO's own sense of leadership.

Irrespective of how compromised the CEOs may feel in their interactions with Council, the strong impression that they wish to give the organisation is that of providing authentic leadership. In this way they are able to demonstrate their authority and power base to the staff. Linked to this is the next subcategory, where all CEOs describe success as the capacity to provide impartial and frank advice to the Councillors. Ability to do this again reinforces the CEO's sense of authentic leadership. Both in this study and in previous research (Fox and Broussine 2001; Broussine 2000), management of the political interface is consistently identified as the most important factor in determining CEO success. The goal the CEOs establish for themselves and the organisation is the commitment to providing frank and impartial advice to individual Councillors and the Council as a whole. CEOs suggest that this is the one area where they cannot afford to compromise. All of them suggest that if they become aligned to a political party or issue they risk the ability to engage all Councillors, and in many instances this has cost other CEOs their jobs. Again, a central assertion arising out of this study is that even when CEOs do not align themselves to a political party or position they still operate politically.

A number of CEOs have attempted to create structures and protocols around the provision of advice so that it is impartial. These include strategies of ensuring that all Councillors receive the same advice and the same level of briefing and that any advice given by the administration is not of a political nature. This strategy must be balanced with a capacity to adequately respond to the needs of the individual Councillors. This fourth determinant of success is reckoned to be the most important and the most risky requirement of all.

Responsiveness to Councillors is therefore identified as crucial to CEOs' considerations of success. This measure appears to be more of a survival measure than a genuine self-assessment measure by the CEOs. They believe that without the support of the Council they will fail. The ability to respond to Councillors is discussed somewhat ambivalently by the CEOs, but ultimately they believe that it is pivotal to their survival. They go so far as to suggest that determination of their success is less about organisational

performance than about the nurturing and engaging of Council. This position is held by both male and female CEOs.

This is the one area about which CEOs expressed frustration and a level of cynicism, because they regard it as time-consuming and taxing. The sense from CEOs is that it occupies much of their thinking. While not all the CEOs showed the same level of ambivalence, this issue was raised by all of them as crucial to their survival or, more positively, to their success. This measure is not likely to appear in the performance plan of the CEO. In essence, while it is regarded as the most significant factor, the CEO has no formal measure of performance couched in terms of ‘caring for Councillors’. While it remains an un-stated and ‘silent’ measure, CEOs all identify the significance of caring for Councillors. This may therefore link with the findings outlined in section 5.3.4, where CEOs describe the vulnerability and time-limited nature of their roles in that their performance is measured on factors that do not form a part of their formal performance objectives. Dempsey (2006) found, similarly, that while CEOs were subject to performance appraisal systems the key factor in their measure of success was Councillor satisfaction with the ‘fit’ between the CEO and their own aspirations. Pullin and Haider (2003a; 2003b) go so far as to suggest that to take account of Councillor lack of competence in performance appraisal, a simple, quantifiable and ‘impersonal’ appraisal system should be put in place (Pullin and Haider 2003a; 2000b).

A number of tensions are associated with CEOs’ attempts to care for Councillors while at the same time providing impartial advice. CEOs describe undertaking numerous activities with Councillors to demonstrate this level of attentiveness, including one-on-one monthly meetings or lunches with each Councillor; providing advice and information on specific areas of Councillor interest, and promoting Councillors in the media and Council documents. CEOs all identify such attentiveness to Councillors as being resource intensive.

The determination of success by CEOs does not appear to be differentiated on a gender basis. CEOs’ conceptions of success are consistent across all the research participants. This is the one area where there is strong agreement by the CEOs and a clear sense of the success outcomes.

### **6.3.6 *CEO considerations of how Councillors perceive CEO success***

CEOs in this study were asked to identify the measures they believed Councillors used to evaluate their performance. Both male and female CEOs identify two crucial considerations by Councillors in determining CEO success - organisational responsiveness and maintaining a positive profile for Councillors. This is not differentiated on a gender basis. The third consideration presented by male CEOs, that of managing the Council's perception of the CEO's performance by meeting the needs of Council is not so much a performance measure but more a means for the CEOs to ensure a favourable review of their performance. This is further evidence of the expressed male CEO perception of Councillors' skills shortcomings.

CEOs suggest that most Councillors are genuinely concerned about community outcomes, which is captured in the subcategory of 'a responsive organisation'. A number of CEOs suggest that responsiveness is not necessarily well regarded universally by Councillors. Responsiveness can be a Council commitment to ensuring responsiveness is achieved, strategic planning, developing a vision or planning municipal development of a longer term nature.

In other instances, responsiveness may be measured by Councillors on more of an individual constituent basis, as evidenced in the organisation's capacity to respond to the needs and requests of individual ratepayers. Irrespective of the nature and definition of responsiveness, there is an identified congruence between the goals and aspirations of Council and CEOs.

The majority of CEOs believe that Councillors regard the success of the CEO as being determined by how positively the CEO and the administration manage the Councillors' profiles. CEOs suggest that Councillors hold them responsible for ensuring that the images of Council and individual Councillors are positively presented. CEOs identify this as a somewhat unrealistic expectation and suggest that, irrespective of the behaviour of Councillors, they are held responsible for the image of the Council. CEOs describe a range of activities undertaken to maximise the positive image of Council but a number identify a concern with the seemingly limited level of responsibility that the Councillors take regarding their own conduct and its impact on Council image.

A number of CEOs indicate a concern that the relationship with Councillors and the management of a positive image and profile for Councillors and Council is the key to their performance evaluation. While this may be a feature of the CEO's performance plan, it appears that the extent of this measure is not comprehensively addressed through any formal measures. Hence, CEOs suggest, irrespective of strong performance, the CEO may not have his or her contract renewed. This issue does not appear to be openly addressed between CEO and Council and warrants further attention. This finding is consistent with Pullin and Haidar's (2003a; 2003b) suggestion that quantifiable performance measurement would reduce the subjective informal measures used by Councillors in assessing their CEO's performance. Corporate governance literature highlights the importance of Board-CEO relationships and the CEO responsibility for maintaining the positive profile of the organisation (Carver 1997; Drucker 1990).

This measure, while un-stated in CEO formal performance reviews, nevertheless presents as a major determinant from the CEOs' perspective and is an issue for which they do not feel fully responsible. As identified, no other studies in the local government sector appear to identify this consideration by CEOs.

### ***6.3.7 The impact of gender on career***

While each of the categories and associated subcategories is presented in relation to gender variation, additional information is identified in response to specific questions asked of the CEOs on their considerations of gender issues. Five subcategories emerge.

The first theme has already been discussed in section 6.3.4 where the role of the local government CEO is identified by both male and female CEOs as the domain of men. Earlier it was noted that the female CEOs consistently suggest that while they are less visible as individuals their leadership roles create a sense of representation for all women and, as such, they describe a sense of intense scrutiny. In response to how gender impacts on career, the female CEOs consistently suggest that they do it tougher than men. They believe that they constantly need to prove their worthiness and capacity to be successful at this level. This results in the female CEOs setting high standards for themselves and being constantly achievement-oriented. These findings are consistent with earlier research which found that women believe they need to outperform their

male colleagues to be considered equal to them or worthy of a senior appointment (Mainiero 1994a; 1994b; Ragins et al. 1998).

Male CEOs acknowledge this phenomenon for women but in so doing, do not necessarily take responsibility for their part in perpetuating such an environment. This is presented by the males as ‘something that happens to the females’ but no males in this study appear to take responsibility for it, or even suggest ways to minimise the constant sense of women being on display.

The second subcategory ‘think manager, think male’ reflects the conceptions of both male and female CEOs. There is unanimous agreement by the CEOs that Councillors are more likely to appoint a male CEO and that only when Council consciously decides that it wishes for a change, will they select a female as CEO. Both male and female CEOs agree that Councillors do not necessarily think that women have the skills and capacity to manage at this level. The environment described by CEOs is consistent with a patriarchal workplace evidenced by a strong male culture and a tendency to appoint males to senior positions (Mavin et al. 2004).

In explaining why there are so few females in management positions, both male and female CEOs recognise that local government’s management positions are predominantly in those areas that men are drawn to, such as engineering, finance and corporate services. The findings also identify that it is more likely that CEOs will be recruited from the more male dominated functions and that this skill set is more highly regarded in recruiting CEOs. Consistent with the literature, the CEOs’ contention is that if women had greater representation in such male-dominated work areas, there would be a greater pool of women to select for management roles. This finding is consistent with the findings of Sinclair (1998) who describes a ‘pipeline effect’, whereby women are lowly represented at more senior levels because so few of them are recruited at entry level or at the start of the pipeline.

In accounting for women’s low representation, both male and female CEOs focus on individual factors that reduce opportunities for women, and do not appear to take into account structural or situational factors. In so doing, both male and female CEOs essentially still hold women responsible for their low representation at more senior levels.

Both male and female CEOs suggest that men and women bring different leadership styles to the role and agree that the skills required by a local government CEO are more aligned with the ‘soft skills’ that women are likely to bring to the role. These include a predilection for consultation, collaboration, empathy and consensual decision making. Fox and Broussine (2001) report similar findings and suggest that the modernising agenda of local government should create more opportunities for women, as the skill set they offer is congruent with the new reform agenda of creating more collaborative partnerships between the elected members and the executive. While this study and the literature quoted suggest enhanced opportunities for women, the striking evidence is that women’s representation at the most senior levels has decreased since the implementation of the modernising agenda (Paddon 2005).

At the CEO level there does not appear to be a strong separation of work and life, with CEOs describing a limited sense of privacy and being available to Council at all times. There is a perception that Councillors expect 24-hour-a-day availability from the CEO. This confirms previous evidence of CEOs identifying significant demands on them (Broussine 2000; Fox and Broussine 2001) but that research does not identify Councillors as being as significant in creating this demand as do the findings of this study. CEOs in this study suggest that their role impacts not only on them, but also on their family responsibilities. Both male and female CEOs describe the need for personal and family support at home to enable them to comprehensively fulfil their role.

### **6.3.8 *Summary of CEO findings***

The findings identify a strong and recurrent theme of institutionalised sexism and a culture of hegemonic masculinity. The experiences of females and males differ in a number of ways. This is particularly evidenced in early years and in early career. Female CEOs suggest women in management roles experience more scrutiny than do their male counterparts and believe that their actions are seen to reflect on other women, not just on themselves.

Both male and female CEOs believe that it is more difficult for women to be appointed to the role of CEO and that once appointed, they are subjected to much harsher evaluations than are their male colleagues.

Both male and female CEOs suggest that the most difficult part of their role involves the political interface, particularly the task of managing the relationship with Councillors. CEOs identify the complexity and risks associated with balancing the needs of individual Councillors with those of the Council as a whole. Both male and female CEOs suggest that irrespective of strong performance and ability to meet key performance indicators, the relationship with Council is the most important consideration by Councillors in evaluating their success. While the relationship with Councillors is considered as the crucial management issue, CEOs suggest that it is often not addressed as part of the CEO's performance appraisal, and when it is, it is done so informally and/or minimally. CEOs describe a sense of constant vulnerability and describe their roles as time-limited.

The experience of the female CEOs is notably different from that of their male colleagues. As a group they, are still tentative about their position within the CEO forum, have attempted to adapt to the dominant culture and have not in any way challenged it. This is also evident in the relatively cautious manner in which they describe their experiences, unlike their male colleagues who are far more open about their thoughts on Councillors. Undoubtedly from both a male and female CEO perspective, gender does play a distinctive part in the experiences of the CEO.

## **6.4 Results for Councillors**

In presenting the results for Councillors, comparisons will be made with the conceptions of the CEOs, and the likely implications in the workplace will also be discussed.

### **6.4.1 *The role of CEO***

Both male and female Councillors clearly identify their key expectation of the CEO as providing leadership and management within the context of Council's policy direction. In this way the CEOs' role-focus and Councillor expectations are clearly aligned. Councillors distinguish the role of policy development for the Council from that of implementation for the administration. Such clarity stands in contrast to earlier findings which suggest that Councillors are not clear on the role differentiation between elected members and paid staff (Cetinic-Dorol 2000). The differing result may be accounted for by the fact that this study's respondents are all experienced Councillors, serving their

Mayoral term. Councillors acknowledge the complexity of the role of CEOs, as well as their need to carefully manage the differing agendas and requirements of Councillors. This finding supports the work of Gilmore, Ferris, Dulebohn and Harrell-Cook (1996) who identified the role conflict that is inherent in local government because of the differing goals, values and perceptions between elected members and the administration.

Councillors also recognise that the fostering and development of effective relationships with individual Councillors, as well as with Council as a whole, is a very important part of the CEO role. Councillors clearly have an expectation that the CEO will take responsibility for managing Councillors, with the support of the Mayor. CEOs are expected to ensure that individual Councillor requirements are largely satisfied, but not at the expense of the Council agenda. The implication of this expectation is significant in that clearly the Councillors believe the CEO does have a role at the political level, and is required to prioritise and manage the Council agenda. In this way the corporate governance protocol of a separation of Council process from that of the organisation is no longer maintained, contrary to assertions in the literature that it is an important factor for effective Board-CEO relationships (Carver 1997). In fact, boundaries between elected members and the administration are necessarily/inevitably blurred. This is an issue that also emerged from the CEO interviews. The role of the CEO at the political level is further compounded by the expectation, particularly on the part of male Councillors, that communication between CEO and Councillors must occur with diplomacy as captured in the subcategory, ‘diplomacy - how to make *no* look like *yes*’ (see 5.4.1.4) and should not give Councillors a sense of being managed. While no previous research appears to so clearly identify the Councillor perception of the CEO’s responsibility for Councillor – administration relationships, this finding is consistent with earlier work. Previous studies identify the critical nature of the CEO-Councillor relationship as it is seen as the key to ensuring a synergy between organisational goals and direction between the Council and its administration (Nalbandian 2001; Broussine 2000; Pullin and Haidar 2003a; 2003b).

These expectations are problematic for the CEO-Council relationship on a number of fronts. Clearly CEOs identify the provision of frank and impartial advice as crucial to their success. In contrast, Councillors are saying they require carefully crafted and diplomatic messages. The Councillors identify the need for CEOs to actively operate at

the political level and manage the Councillors, but to do so in such a way that the Council does not feel managed. Such dynamics may potentially destroy the partnership between Council and administration and stand in contrast to the effective corporate governance practices that call for a clearer separation of roles and responsibilities between the executive and the board (Carver 1997).

#### **6.4.2 Councillor considerations in recruiting CEOs**

The majority of Councillors identify demonstration of management and leadership skills as the key decision making criterion in CEO selection. A number of male Councillors either directly or indirectly allude to the requirement for the CEO to have the technical skills associated with particular local government functions as equally important. The question that remains unanswered is whether the requirement for technical skills is weighted similarly for both male and female applicants. While a couple of male Councillors mention the different skills of females and males, this has not sufficiently been identified in this study to draw conclusions.

There is also a strong suggestion by Councillors that political nous is a key component. This ‘nous’ is crucial to understanding the motivations and political processes of the Council. This again reconfirms the previous findings that cast the role of CEO as a political one, and challenges the assertion by the CEOs that they remain outside the political processes. Very clearly the Councillors see this as a key component of their role. Councillor expectations are more aligned to the research findings of Nalbandian (2001) who argues that the CEO does have a role at a political level.

Similarly to the CEOs, Councillors attest to the importance of fit between CEO and Council and understandably this is a factor that is taken into account when values of Council are deemed so important (see 5.4.2.3).

#### **6.4.3 Determining success for a CEO**

There is a synergy between both the Councillor and CEO evaluations of success, with a strong focus on achieving organisational outcomes. While both groups identify CEO/Councillor relationships as important there is a very different emphasis from the two perspectives. For Councillors the emphasis is on effective partnership and an

effective team-based approach. For CEOs the emphasis is on the ability to provide advice and a recognition that they must care for the needs of Council so that they are able to effectively manage the organisation. Councillors are more confident than CEOs that an effective partnership between the Council and the administration can be achieved. CEOs appear to have a stronger sense of separating organisational functioning from working with Councillors, and a number of them identify the need to work with Council as a job requirement rather than an aid to achieving outcomes.

Inherent in the strong focus of Councillors on how they are managed by the administration, is the expectation that the CEO should be responding to their needs as required. This confirms the CEO conception of being the servant of the Council. While the interaction with Councillors is considered to be an important factor in assessing CEO performance, there appears to be little attention to this element in the CEOs' performance plans and formal assessment processes. Councillors acknowledge that the effectiveness of the relationship and the support they receive from the administration are not formal considerations, but very important nevertheless. Councillors indicate a difficulty in determining how they could incorporate these measures into a formal performance review process. Councillors interviewed also suggest that many of their colleagues do not understand the formal workings of the organisation and do not provide the robust and strong leadership required, which in turn is seen to lead to some of the confusion and inconsistent approaches to management. This is consistent with Jones (1981) who suggests that many Councillors have no management experience and are amateurish in their approach.

The work ideology expectations are not directly stated but implied in the level of service and 24-hour-a-day availability of CEO as required by the Council. This is also reflected in the experience of female CEOs at interview when asked about personal circumstances and their ability to meet the demands of the role. Again the issue of boundaries emerges, with many Councillors showing limited recognition of the work/family balance.

#### ***6.4.4 Identifying the CEO considerations of challenges in the role***

Councillors demonstrate empathy in reflecting on the demands placed on CEOs in meeting the diverse needs of individual Councillors as well as responding to Council as

a whole. The expectations however are all-encompassing and range from the CEO supporting individual Councillors on a constituent basis through to strategic planning and management. Councillors also hold the CEO and administration responsible for ensuring their positive public profile. The high expectations of Councillors on the all-encompassing responsibilities of CEOs are problematic and to a large degree hold them accountable for areas for which they clearly do not have sole, or even major, responsibility, such as the public profile of Councillors.

#### **6.4.5 Gender considerations**

The Councillors' comments suggest that expectations, performance review and communication are all influenced by gender. Councillors suggest that in most instances a Council is more likely to wish to appoint a male, and to be comfortable with a male. The requirement of virtually full time CEO availability puts into question, for some Councillors, a woman's capacity to meet the demands of the role due to her family circumstances. A number of the male Councillor comments, as evident in chapter five, reveals a bias against women both in their considerations and in the language used at interview (see 5.4.5.1).

Most Councillors see the role of CEO as requiring soft skills but also strong leadership and experience, and many believe that such credentials are more likely to be possessed by men. Female Councillors are more likely to recognise that the skills required for the role may advantage women but also acknowledge that despite this, male Councillors will most likely prefer a male CEO. The female Councillors are well aware of the difficulties of being a woman amongst male Councillors and suggest that their motivation is different to that of their male colleagues. They strongly identify with and mirror the sentiments of the female CEOs, citing their feelings of isolation, visibility, being judged more harshly and being judged as women rather than as individuals. Similarly, Tremaine (2000) reports female Mayors' belief that they are more vulnerable and more likely to be made the scapegoat than their male colleagues and describes the 'old boys' network as being strong in the local government sector. Both male and female Councillors, as do both male and female CEOs, suggest that the role of CEO is predominantly viewed as being the domain of men, and that women who achieve a CEO role are there by exception.

#### **6.4.6 *Councillors on Councillors***

Consistent with the literature (Jones 1981; Nalbandian 2001; Dempsey 2006) Councillors suggest that elected members are often ill-equipped for the role of Councillor, in that many do not have relevant management experience or an understanding of the comprehensive and diverse responsibilities of local government. They suggest that this sometimes leads to role confusion and a lack of understanding of the separation of roles and responsibilities between Council and administration. This is consistent with Cetinic-Dorol (2000) who identifies Councillors as having difficulty in coming to terms with their roles, leading to interference at the staff level.

They also suggest that many Councillors are ego-driven and have unrealistic expectations of their officers. Consistently Tremaine (2000) suggests that personal worth and value may be determined by achieving the role of elected member.

There are no notable differences in conceptions between male and female Councillors.

#### **6.4.7 *Summary of Councillor findings***

Councillors identify the role of CEO primarily as leading the organisation in response to Council direction. Councillors also identify an expectation that CEOs will manage their relationship with Councillors and balance the needs of individual Councillors with those of the Council as a whole. In this way the role of CEO is perceived to have a political orientation in that the CEO is required to translate the political will into organisational direction. The CEO is perceived to have comprehensive responsibility for maintaining a positive partnership with Council.

Capacity to work with Council is one of the main determinants of a positive outcome for the CEO, but Councillors suggest that this is an area that is difficult to evaluate objectively and may in fact not even be present in the CEO's performance plan and objectives. Councillors suggest that the skills most needed by CEOs are those of management and leadership, but some also indicate that technical know-how may be considered a necessity.

Both male and female Councillors suggest that the gender of the CEO will lead to differing relationships and communication styles between Council and CEO. Female Councillors are more likely to suggest that females are subjected to greater scrutiny and held more accountable than their male colleagues. Female Councillors also suggest that this is their own experience as well. The culture at Councillor level is described as male, competitive and ego-driven. Both male and female Councillors suggest that the role of CEO is viewed as being the domain of men, and that women who achieve the role are there as exceptions.

## **6.5 Implications for Local Government**

Increasing female representation in the local government workforce, is not an overt goal for Victorian local government. At best there is an acknowledgement of the limited numbers of women at management level, but on the whole this is rationalised away as a reflection of the industry and its inability to attract women into some of the technical areas. Local government could do much to maximise opportunities for women across all technical areas, as well as looking at traineeships and placement opportunities for women in the more technical areas that do not attract many women.

Until local government acknowledges the bias against women at the most senior level, the opportunities for women will remain limited. Male CEOs appear to exhibit limited awareness of, or concern for, gender issues and the lack of women in senior positions. Female CEOs are reluctant to raise the issue of gender as it would be in conflict with the way in which they have attempted to adapt to the male culture. Councillors in the main are more comfortable with a male at the helm of the organisation. Gender awareness and overcoming gender bias should be placed on the local government agenda at both the Council and organisational level.

Councillors have sole responsibility for the appointment of their CEO, and this study highlights the need for further development and training for Councillors in understanding the industrial context of the appointment, selection processes, equal employment opportunity (EEO) considerations and appropriate behaviour at interview. A number of CEOs have identified inappropriate behaviour by Councillors as well as limited Councillor experience or preparation for taking on the governance of large organisations. This too should be incorporated as part of all Councillor induction

schemes. While induction is provided by the administration of each local Council, this study's findings would suggest that all newly-elected Councillors mandatorily attend a centrally-run program delivered through the State Government Office of Local Government. Such training should emphasise role and responsibility delineation, duty of care, EEO provisions, harassment and bullying, and performance management and provide the organisational context within which Councillors operate. There is exposure for Councils and individual Councillors in the current context where women and men are treated differently through the recruitment process as well as in some of the ways Councillors describe communicating with staff on the basis of gender.

Formal performance appraisals are widely used, and while there appears to be a degree of satisfaction with this process there is an indication that a number of informal measures relating to the CEO/Councillor relationship form a fundamental but hidden part of the appraisal process. This study would suggest that further work be undertaken to allow for the development of performance measures that permit open and transparent appraisal of this relationship whose importance is acknowledged by all stakeholders. Furthermore, it appears that much of the responsibility for the success of the relationship is placed on the CEO, with Councillors taking little responsibility for their part in it. The performance appraisal process should also allow for consideration of Councillor behaviour. The sensitivity of this relationship makes a two-way assessment process difficult, and further work is required.

The role of CEO may not be nearly as apolitical as CEOs suggest and while they all comment on the need to separate themselves from Council politics, many of their decisions and actions occur within a political context. An overt recognition that some activities are of a political nature may assist CEOs in their own self-evaluation.

## **6.6 Limitations of the Study**

This study has specifically focused on the Victorian local government context, using an in-depth research approach with a small sample. The study has highlighted variation of conception as well as variation of experience and provides a detailed account of the experiences and views of a sample of twenty-one participants. The research findings have relevance to the Victorian local government sector but, as the findings are based

on the specific experiences within this context, may not all be relevant to other local government contexts where provisions and requirements are different.

## **6.7 Implications for Future Research**

The importance of the relationship between CEO and Councillors has been identified in this study. Incorporating the relationship between CEO and Council into the performance appraisal process requires further investigation. Developing appropriate measures will require sensitivity to the employment dynamic between Councils and their CEOs. Objectively assessed performance goals and measures should be jointly established and agreed.

The sense of local government still being a boys' club, with a dominant male culture, is identified at the CEO level and this study identifies similar sentiments expressed by female Councillors in relation to the Councillor forum. This area also warrants further investigation. In a workforce dominated by females at lower levels there appears to be have been little research examining gender dynamics at the lower organisational levels. Further research should be undertaken to establish whether the culture at the lower levels is reflective of that at senior levels and if not, to determine the level at which male domination becomes pervasive.

## **6.8 Summary**

This research confirms that female CEOs' experiences do differ from those of their male colleagues. This difference is notable from the point of selection for the role of CEO. The career paths of male and female CEOs do not differ markedly but most female CEOs have entered local government at more junior levels and have been promoted from within the sector. Males appear to have been able to access more senior positions without substantive local government experience.

The selection process for females reveals a different set of concerns that Councillors have in making the appointment and a need for Councillors to be assured that the female CEO will not be distracted by family issues once appointed. Upon appointment the female CEOs suggest that they are subjected to much harsher scrutiny and are constantly aware of how they not only represent themselves, but are also seen to

represent all women. The local government senior executive arena is regarded as a male domain, where masculine culture and behaviours predominate.

Councillors have a very significant impact on the career development and experiences of CEOs. While outcomes for CEOs are clearly influenced by Councillors, CEO identity does not appear to be as influenced by Councillors. CEOs do however, suggest that performance is not the major determinant of their success. Instead, they see their capacity to engage Councillors as the most crucial factor in gaining a successful outcome.

In conclusion this thesis has provided an in-depth account of the experiences of CEOs. The research has established that gender awareness and concerns with low female representation appear to be given little priority at either the CEO or Councillor level. Instead, the relative scarcity of females in management positions and the dominant male culture are both explained away as ‘the way things are in local government’.

Gender does matter, if you are a woman.

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## **APPENDIX ONE**

This appendix provides a summary of detailed quotes pertaining to each of the themes and subcategories developed in chapter five. These verbatim quotes provide the raw data used in identifying and naming each of the subcategories and forms the basis for identifying both the experience and the meaning attributed to it by the CEOs and Councillors interviewed.

Section 5.3 relates to CEO quotes. Section 5.4. relates to Councillor quotes.

The structure of this appendix directly reflects the structure of chapter five.

### **5.3 CEO Quotes**

#### ***5.3.1 Significant early childhood experiences***

##### **5.3.1.1 Importance of family of origin**

Female - Working class background, both parents living together, oldest child, ... father worked long hours, wasn't home very often; a mother who was home most of our young years but then went and did some quite entrepreneurial things ... A father who never felt that there's a gender issue, was you can go and do whatever you want to achieve sort of attitude, so, very supportive.

Female - I was brought up in the western suburbs with uneducated parents ... Subsequent to that they both had a very strong wish to have all their children educated ... and between us we've all got a multitude of qualifications ... And it was a very much a goal that they did have so it was quite a directed purpose that they had in educating their children.

Female - I was educated at a Catholic primary school and a secondary Catholic girls school in Malvern ... that came about because my mother had great aspirations for her daughters to basically get a proper education so that they could be self sufficient and

independent of males and I think that reflected the relationship that she had with my father.

Female - Parents were obviously very influential, as I said they were very young, very focused on academic pursuits.

Female - He (father) did say to me that women could not be managers because they're too emotional. I also think there's a little bit in me that am trying to prove to my father that in fact it's not true. It's one of my biggest regrets that he wasn't alive by the time I became a CEO.

Male - I come from a working class background and I really want to be in a place where I think I can improve the life and the quality of things that those people have.

Male - I had expectations of doing better than my family. I strove for more.

Male - I grew up on a wheat farm. I was the eldest child ... And having a tertiary educated mother was also a little unusual in that environment. We were always considered a little different.

### **5.3.1.2 Early sense of responsibility**

Female - My mother died when I was 14 and I was sent to boarding school after that and I have a very overdeveloped sense of responsibility because of having to take responsibility for myself at a very early age.

Female – I've just spent my life just doing things. I've obviously always been someone who just can't help doing things and getting involved. Recently when my mum was very ill with cancer she and I had this massive discussion how I kept usurping her role as eldest daughter we just laughed about it. Obviously that propensity to be in charge has been in me from a very early age. The other thing that's interesting gender wise is I was the substitute boy.

### **5.3.1.3 Finding my own feet**

Female - You couldn't even have a conversation about what your career would be (with parents). Your career was to be a farmer's wife. So to go to a school where it was an all girl's school and you ... we had classes on assertive behaviour in the early 1980s. It was incredible stuff and gave me the grounding I needed.

Female - I didn't have any financial support and struggled financially and eventually dropped out (of university). I started working at the university's food cooperative as a sort of coordinator, though everyone was a coordinator because it was egalitarian. And then finished up there and started just doing casual gardening work and then eventually applied for a job as a neighbourhood house coordinator more because I was unemployed and you were meant to apply for jobs and I particularly wanted to do it. And I got the job and I sort of thought oh well, okay, I'll give this a go and found that I was like a duck to water.

Male - Here's a few twists and turns in my career. Grew up in Sydney, school in Sydney. I actually came down to Melbourne. I was in the Jesuits for a couple of years from a Jesuit novitiate. Back to Sydney again, studied unsuccessfully, probably failed more tertiary courses than most people have started ... Dropped out of a couple of things. Then moved to the Public Service Board ... and the rest is history.

Male - Started working at 16 in the railways. Moved around a bit, mostly in transport and did different things until I started doing company doctoring, realised I was good at change management and that's how I came to local government.

### **5.3.1.4 Identified as a young leader**

Female - I said when I was ten and the local parish priest said to my parents if I was a nun I'd be Mother Superior.

Female - I saw an ad in the paper from Community Services Victoria asking for a coordinator of the Neighbourhood House Program and I thought, I will put in for that and I got that and from there I had a very successful career in what's now called the

Department of Human Services and so successful, in fact, that during the whole time I was there I probably applied for two jobs and both of those times I applied because I was asked to apply. I never took the initiative to actually apply for a job and got promoted all the way to being a director ...

Female - I was 22 years old. I was only there a year when I was promoted to Acting Senior Social Worker and I like to think it was because I was brilliant; it was because everyone left ... I seemed to get promoted a lot.

Female - I used to describe it as I had sense that someone had their hand in the middle of my back and was pushing me. Because while I'd say I was ambitious I didn't do what everyone said you had to do.

Male - I was 25 at the time and two Councils approached me and said did I want to do the job. And the position wasn't even advertised and two weeks before my 26<sup>th</sup> birthday I was CEO ... I was the second youngest person on staff at Council when I was appointed the CEO.

Male - Early on in my career I developed a reputation for change management and I kept being given those opportunities.

Male - Got a chance to keep doing different things in local government, moved between departments and given roles in areas that I had not worked in before.

### **5.3.2 Career Path**

#### **5.3.2.1 Being the best I can be/standing out**

Female - He introduced me at a conference this is X she'll be a CEO one day and that was when I was still at third level. So other people saw me as a CEO before I did.

Female - So I had a career at the Gas and Fuel for a few years. I left there when I got married and I went to WA. I worked on a sheep station for two years there, came back to Victoria, same people from the Gas and Fuel said, we believe that you're back in Melbourne permanently, would you like to come back and work with us and then my

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career progressed through the Gas and Fuel in various jobs and got promoted and promoted ...

Female - I went from the Victorian Solar Energy Council over into the Energy Policy division of the Victorian Government and that was because there was a female that was running that whole area and I've had a bit to do with her and she wanted me to join their team because I was unorthodox and that was really what they were saying.

Female - And I desperately kept on looking for different opportunities that were not in that traditional community services area and I had skills that were management that I'd argue were not community services ... so I picked up additional responsibility including some of the finance area and I really think that I got such a good experience and grounding of different functions and the role I had was so broad there that then when I applied at X Council I had a substantial knowledge and skill that was suitable for the CEO role.

Female – Women wait until they can do 90 per cent of the job before they apply, men wait until they can do ten per cent and go for it. Whenever you tell a group of women that, they all go yeah.

Male - ... it came down to two people and I've managed to get a bit more intelligence as to what happened and I know who the other person was, which is unfair and I can't mention who it was, but it was another male, so that's relevant to you, and I think personally, with no humility whatsoever, I think I was the better choice of the two.

Male - I didn't wake up one morning and decide to go into local government per se, despite the fact that there is no doubt that I was put on earth to do what I do, there is no doubt about that. Like I'm one of those, I don't know what proportion of the population gets to wake up and go great, it's a work day, but I do. This is what I was meant to be doing. I thrive on making a difference rather than making a buck.

Male - (on being headhunted for a CEO role in local government) My suspicion would be that there would be a perception by those in government at that time that I was somebody that was embracing the notion of reform and had demonstrated some competence in understanding what it was about and how it might be done.

Male - The other bit was I will have a qualification that no one ever forgets because it's there every time they say my name and people who are not from that end of the academic world they are almost, in awe of it putting it too strongly, but it's like oh my god, this person must be a genius which clearly I'm not. But it's kind of like this person has gone further than everybody else has gone so there must be something about what he does that sort of reflects in that. So again quite unashamedly to say I will get a qualification that I don't have to tell people about because it's there on my name plate, I don't apologise for the fact that I did that.

Male - I found that the public service suited me and that the real skill is to express complex things in a very concise way and I was good at that and people recognised it. So I got thrown into difficult things or complicated things. It's still what I enjoy most about this job.

Male - And I did the MBA because I looked around me at people who were secretaries of departments, heads of agencies, CEOs and I thought, you know, they may have, sort of, political type skills but most of them were amateurs. They weren't very rigorous. Most of them were financially inept.

### **5.3.2.2 Risk taking/out of comfort zone/new challenges**

Female - By then I'd worked for about six years working with families at a local interface and I was getting a bit stale and it wasn't stimulating enough for me in terms of the policy side of things. So every position I've taken a step up and that's always been quite a deliberate goal for me. I've never moved sideways I've always moved up, always progressed and so that leaves me thinking what do I do now.

Female - ... then I went to the State Government and it was actually JM who gave me my initial career opportunity. She took me on for a three month project writing a report on podiatry for the HACC program and I was very nervous about resigning from a permanent job and JM kept saying take the risk, because it's a calculated risk and you will succeed, so do that.

Female - I was a social worker for about three years and I was doing this course. I thought, I wonder if computing is my career. So I thought I'd try it and I actually got a job at Chisholm Institute teaching teachers how to use computers. I was then promoted to a senior lecturer, there I was lecturing with no qualifications. Again, I suppose looking back, people did very quickly recognise, I didn't, that I had leadership I suppose. So I was made a senior lecturer but I only worked there for a year, 18 months and I really missed social work.

Female - Until I became a CEO I never did any job for more than 18 months because I was always given a new challenge and I think the sense was – once I mastered something I was always looking for either a promotion or a sideways step.

Female - ... my three key drivers are I need variety, I get bored easily, I love administration, I love finances but I also need to make a difference. I couldn't work this hard for shareholders wealth, nothing wrong with it, I couldn't do it. So that's what I love about local government and why I really like the fact that within an hour, same with you, you're dealing with 18 different things roads, and whatever.

Male - The local government provides, as you know that magnificent opportunity to get in and do things. High levels of government as you also know you're a cog in a much larger machine so you know you don't get to really drive things. You can't grab something and say I'm going to do x whereas in local government you can do that.

Male - I started I suppose mentally preparing to do something different which was quite unusual in those days because people had, and I often talk about here, you had the career path where you stayed with the one organisation.

Male - ... did an engineering course, saw me then move to work in the mining industry and went to Western Australia, Queensland, returned and worked as a project engineer on the Newport Power Station, worked at the SEC, had two young kids and at that stage was travelling more than the half hour ... I wasn't seeing my kids morning or night so I thought I'll make a change, even though I took a substantial loss in salary I took a job at the adjacent municipality which then was the Shire of Romsey and that was my first entry into local government where I've been since and loved every minute of it.

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Male - I literally got to do everything from going out ... whilst I was an administrative officer I used to go out with the engineer doing surveying. I did building inspections with him right through to financial accounts and rating and attending Council meetings, so I had a full gamut of exposure.

### **5.3.2.3 Sponsors/champions**

Female - ... but at the same time some of my mentors and role models through my career have been men and they have been the most amazing support.

Female - I think most of my inspiration and support have always come from males that I have worked for and they've been very encouraging and very supportive and always given me opportunities and it's always been that way. I haven't had a lot to do with females in my career progression.

Female - ... but then I've really had a number of people who have encouraged me along the way, and so after Collingwood, like GM who was the CEO at Collingwood ... he was so encouraging, always recognising and supporting and encouraging my further development and even to this day he looks back with pride that ND and I, ... were both at Collingwood and you know two of the very few (female) CEO's, so not that he takes credit because he's a very humble man but he does sort of, there's something there as to why two of us, would then become CEO's.

Female - In hindsight I've recognised that a number of these people have provided me with so much encouragement and support ... and now I've really reflected on it to see the critical role that some of those people played and look a couple of other CEO's in local government where as the new kid on the block I was just so nervous.

Female - He's a larger than life character, he'd put his feet on my desk and say CEO to trainee CEO and then he'd discuss the Council meeting and all the politics that had gone on and what he'd done. So he was significant even though I laugh about his notches on his belt.

Male - I can say though certainly I've grown referees over the time and so there's a range of people I can call on, but they've all changed continually over the period.

Male - And the engineer of the day when I look back now was a fantastic mentor. He used to say to me essentially back your own judgement, I think this is the way we do it, you do it and I'll support you and he gave me fantastic opportunity and confidence to have a go and when I look back I was probably fairly successful at it and the Councillors were very supportive of me and I had a fantastic five and a half years at B.

Male - I had no help getting my first job and who then looked for opportunities and tried to grab them when they occurred. I have never - I don't think I've ever got a job with any organisation on the basis that I knew someone there or someone particularly put a word in for me.

Male - There's a lot about connections in this business I think.

Male - My own attitude to life is that you cherry pick a bit, looking around learning from what is around you. I read widely as well and I just don't learn from the organisational life. I learn from other areas also.

Male - There are people who I've relied on for their judgement, but I really haven't developed a mentoring relationship as such. I think there's a bit in that about my own personal style and preferences, that I don't feel a great sense or need to bounce ideas off people a lot of the time.

#### **5.3.2.4 Lucky break**

Female - Whereas I hadn't even applied for that job, I applied for the corporate services job, which was more, my background. So that's why, I say whether it's luck, but it was a fluky type of scenario and then they phoned me and said well we're thinking of offering you this job, not that, what do you think?

Male - ... that new Council at the time only had one person on it that had been a previous Councillor so they were rather inexperienced in their role. They afforded me the opportunity to act in that role whilst they went through a formal process of some five months. It was a longer period because they were getting used to a lot of things and they had been guided by myself objectively in how to do things.

### **5.3.3 *The CEO selection process***

#### **5.3.3.1 The selection decision is predetermined**

Female - I put in for four or five CEO roles, could not crack it in a metropolitan ... they had a different view of who they wanted.

Male - So what stands out for me is that in that process was that Councillors quite often have a predetermined view about what they want before they even get to the selection between the people that they're looking at.

Male - Councillors usually know what they want and mostly they know who will fit the bill.

Male - The consultants were saying to this Council that this municipality needed an experienced CEO and they actively worked to not afford me the opportunity to have the role. It was only because the Councillors had worked with me for about five or six months that in the end said no, they were going to give that opportunity.

#### **5.3.3.2 It's all about the fit ...**

Female - I only applied for one other before I applied for this. And got short-listed and the feedback from the consultants ... was that I wasn't cuddly enough. Quote, they were the words ...

Female - I think the fact I'm a woman helps, because you jump over a thousand boring engineers, who they see as boring, and so a consultant will always, I think want to put a gender balance. Maybe, I haven't thought about this, maybe it's easier then, so therefore you look at that circle of women who will be applying. A lot of women come from the community services. Some Councillors will perhaps think that's not the right base, so planning is, so you go through to the next hurdle. Published a book, CV looks good. I think that helps. Certainly I think being a woman gets you over the line, when

you get the 80 applications. Seventy-five are going to be men. They're probably going to be engineers.

Female - I presented myself as I am, and what I've achieved and what I thought I could achieve and left the rest to them really. I knew that there weren't many female CEOs. I thought it was ... I never for once thought I was a shoe-in for the job. I knew I could do the job. I knew I'd do a good job, but I never for once knew whether or not I'd get the job or thought about whether or not I'd get the job, other than I didn't want to be an embarrassment. I wanted to prepare well and present well and if there was someone else that they wanted to choose, well that was their choice. I wasn't going to worry about that.

Female - ... and look I think it's really the luck of the draw. I could still be in a Director, General Manager role it's just one of those things with Councillors making the decision it's a peculiar sort of fit; it's a bit of luck.

Male - The key power brokers in this organisation had already determined where they wanted to go with this position and that was pretty difficult for them when what they thought they were going to get they didn't end up getting because I was very strong and very persuasive at the interview and also I have a very strong track record here from the time as group manager so they weren't just talking to somebody who they'd never seen before. I was saying things that they thought, yes we know you can do that because we've seen you do it. So I guess my presentation was even more powerful than somebody who they'd never seen before because they could relate back to things that I had done in the previous three years and they knew they could work with me.

Male - The full Council interviewed and interviewed twice and I thought it a bit obscure in terms of a) did they not have trust amongst themselves to delegate to a group, a sub group who did the interviewing and selection recommendations. But in hindsight and perhaps I've got this reflection because I was successful, it was actually very good for me to actually meet them all because I had a sense then, albeit very brief from two initial meetings but a sense of who they were and you get a bit of a feel for the dynamic between them and perhaps some individuals and whose going to be dominant amongst them. It gave them an opportunity to test the dynamic between them and me. I don't

have any ... so that was something for me a bit of an observation I suppose more than anything.

### **5.3.3.3 The need for personal disclosure**

Female - Being a woman wasn't the most challenging thing. It was being a lesbian and I know that's not strictly speaking a gender issue, but that was the much more difficult issue and I decided to go and meet with the Mayor prior to signing my contract to let him know about that and to check with him that if that was going to be just an absolute ... too much for them to deal with that they should say so now.

Female - ... you could see she (Councillor) wanted to know what I did; you could see she wanted to explore and she was struggling, so she said, 'Well what do you do outside work? Do you have a dog?' was the question. And so I took it on face value, I knew there was a lot more to it and I actually said yes, I told her about my dog. And I said while I'm there, can I also tell you about my family.

Female - There was always a bit of a latent view about me leaving before I started and once I was there, for a few reasons. Part of it would have been because I was commuting and they wanted me to live up there. It wasn't a requirement and I never, ever led them along that I would but I know with one of the people who's still a Councillor there was always this bit of a latent but oh yeah I might get married and have children or where they felt that I was so career driven that I might leave there. So there were a couple of different things happening. One is more a female gender issue, the children and so forth and you know anyone potentially thinking of career break and the other is the other side of it which was people thinking oh this person is so driven, she's very career minded, and they were wrong on both accounts, wrong because I had a commitment.

Female - You've got two choices, one it's none of their business and if they're professional they'll never ask and they shouldn't. However they're Councillors, they're not professional people, they're not; if you were going for General Manager's role that's different. So pre-empt it, I tell them. I tell them everything about myself. So they don't have to ask me unprofessional questions.

Female - ... but that's the issue that's been the hardest for me because it's just assumed that you're married with children really. That's the assumption and that's what the newspapers, when they want to know who you are, where you're going to live, where your children, sort of thing are. Well, none of your bloody business. Not that you can say that.

Male - Well you see in business no one would regard that as unusual (being asked personal information) because I mean maybe the business world has changed but when I was in it the expectation was we own you or something very close to we own you, you know, we're paying you money, we are always going to be your priority ... My Council is extraordinarily respectful; I think that's the best word, of me and of what I do. They know I work very hard, they know I put in the big hours and they vaguely are aware that I do other stuff, lifesaving etcetera and they've never, ever questioned that.

Male - I've been on panels for manager's positions, director's positions here, where one of my Councillors asked that question and I cut him off, I said sorry you can't ask that question, that's contravening the law and I guess it's a function of the fact that we've got Councillors in Victoria who are not professional people generally and they don't understand that these are not relevant questions to ask and actually they jeopardise themselves and the organisation by asking those questions.

#### **5.3.3.4 Inexperience of Councillors**

Male - (comparing private sector Board appointments of CEOs to Councillors undertaking selection) ... so you can say okay for this business we need a CEO with this sort of background. They'll actually understand those competencies, they're an informed purchaser and the objective is simple. I mean the objective in business is simple, make a buck. The two key differences in local government are firstly that our goals are extraordinarily disparate so the objective measurement of success is awfully difficult, it is awfully difficult and no two jobs are the same ... And the other half is that that process is being undertaken by people who have absolutely no idea in most cases what the job actually involves. That's the blunt, harsh reality.

Male - Most Councillors have never run anything, they've never supervised anybody, they've never employed anybody and the idea of sort of strategic level work for a very large organisation is a difficult thing for them.

Male - ... and they being inexperienced in their role, myself being experienced in local government but not being experienced in the CEO role we formed a bond that gave them the confidence to give me the opportunity on a formal basis and to this day I thank those Councillors for that.

Male - I guess it's a function of the fact that we've got Councillors in Victoria who are not professional people generally and they don't understand that these are not relevant questions to ask and actually they jeopardise themselves and the organisation by asking those questions.

Male - It's a tough job in this organisation because fundamentally most of our Councillors are very poor quality people. We've got one or two Councillors who can hardly speak English very well or write English very well or understand things so when you're dealing with some of the concepts we're dealing with here ... fairly complex concepts these people most of them are not really able to grasp the strategic importance of all of that and put it all together. I often say they can't join the dots. And even when you join the dots for them they can't see the picture.

#### **5.3.3.5 Queen bee**

Female - But I watch how some of these new females treat me who are older female Councillors, the ones who have said we're having trouble with the trust and how I've been thinking just about a gender issue of talking to another female and they want that referral point with the male managers ... how they'll go to one of the male executive management team's meetings for information rather than me and not because it's a professional area or how they'll go to one of the females and sit with them and what I would call some of that girlish flirty behaviour and it's really interesting to watch.

Male - The current Council I think the Mayor we've got at the moment would struggle to work with a woman because he's fifty-nine, he's been on his own, he's never been

married so I think women frighten him a little bit. I'm not sure that he would be in favour of a woman.

Male - The Councillors we have now would more than likely go for a man. We have got a pretty even Councillor make up. We've got six men and five women so it's a pretty even distribution in gender at the Council level. But I think actually the women would work against a female CEO rather than the other way around. Most of the men I think, bar the Mayor I don't think they'd really have any view except they'd be after the person they think is the best person.

Male - They're very impressionable in momentary impressions and that's why I was successful at the CEO's appointment last time because I actually blew them away at the interview and they made the decision based on that as much as anything else. It could well be that a female presenter who makes a very strong presentation that sort of hits the spot with them could get there but I think it's more than likely to me that it will be a male.

### ***5.3.4 The experience of Victorian local government CEOs***

#### **5.3.4.1 The buck stops here**

Female - But when you're CEO you're 'it' and in a director's job you're not in a sense, because you're not likely to be the target directly in most cases and at the end of the day you are still answerable to the CEO who is answerable to the Councillors. And when you're the CEO that was more different than I thought, you are really it ...

Female - And I think that's probably the biggest adjustment with no, casting no aspersions on any predecessor CEOs here but there are a number of Councillors that had a view particularly around planning issues that the advice would be tailored to their decision making and from when I walked in the door it wasn't like that, so that was an immediate point of conflict that I had to ride out.

Female - I think I feel owned by the Council and I feel like I'm a servant of the Council and an extension of that is of the community in a way that I, no matter how much intellectual preparation I have done for the job, I would never have realised the impact

of that and I feel terribly conscious about how I present to the community as a result of that. I think it takes its toll.

Male - One of the things I always say to Councillors very early on is, 'Listen deal with anyone you like in the organisation. I don't care who you deal with. If you want policy advice make sure you deal with a senior officer and I'll accept accountability for whatever that senior officer advises you', but you need to know the way I get away with that is I expect those senior officers to escalate any matters that need to be escalated, so if it's a manager to tell their director and the director will pass it on to me if it's something particularly sensitive.

Male - I've been often surprised at the extent to which new Councillors see me as running the show and I've spent a lot of time reminding new Councillors that this is their show.

#### **5.3.4.2 It's lonely at the top**

Female - ... wouldn't share that information and it was also what happens to the information. So as much as we all know that one day we might be applying for the same job, we just have a different way of going about it.

Female - I really didn't have a thick enough skin to do the job and I've had to develop that really fast, but other than that it's fantastic. The one thing that I find completely debilitating and I still don't cope with well is personal criticism that's unfounded. I can cope with anyone telling me I've done a bad job if I've done a bad job, but being told ... seeing things in the media that you supposedly said or did that you didn't do or say and having no recourse for that.

Female - Where I really needed the support from females in that same area it was like I had to earn my stripes and I was out in the cold for a number of years because I hadn't come from a social work background or an occupational therapist where they had all come at the time or a nurse.

Male - I would have to say that there are a lot of people who have influenced me and they probably don't know it. There aren't people I'd share, like if I've got a problem, I'd better go and have a talk to Jack, Bill or whoever. I don't have anyone like that.

Male - I suppose the biggest challenge for me which I identified was the existing shire engineer who was also an aspirant to be CEO at Y. He'd been there for probably ... for like 10 or 12 years. Very much older than me and I realised immediately that that was a relationship that I had to manage carefully and I had a very frank discussion with him immediately that I took on as CEO and that discussion was about recognising his needs, his expectations. It was about him understanding mine. It was about me making it clear to him that I wanted to work with him and I wanted to have a productive relationship and fortunately he was accepting of that and we enjoyed a very, very good relationship.

Male - It's a natural thing that for each CEO or if you work for an organisation your focus and bias is towards what's happening. We all think we're doing the biggest and greatest and best things and all that sort of thing. I don't go to many MAV type things. I don't go to a lot of CEO group meetings and LGPro type things. I really find that often these become a competition about what I'm doing better than you and how well we're going and how much money we've got in the bank and how much debt have you got and why have you got all this debt, you shouldn't be doing that and I think well at the end of the day people do what's right for their organisation and their community not what somebody else is doing.

Male - Just because we're in the same structure of government doesn't mean to say that we're in the same place at the same time, in doing things. I don't mingle with a lot of CEO's.

Male - ... but having that national group has also been a useful one for ideas but you do get to know some people quite well and because they're not local and it might be just even having a dinner with someone the next night, you've stayed on an extra night so you can catch up and it's a chance to just reflect and talk openly about issues and it's certainly a broad, getting of ideas, if you've got an issue, broadcast email, it goes out, what are you doing with this situation. But I think you do need to be quite resilient in your own space.

### 5.3.4.3 Sisterhood/secret women's business

Female - I think it was an MAV CEO Forum get together and it just naturally happened, the drinks beforehand that the women ended up in a group together and I just think it naturally happened. A lot of them came over and congratulated me and had a chat and I think one of the males came up and said hey, what's this, is this exclusive and we kind of thought I suppose we better go and mingle and merge with our male counterparts, but before we left we said let's catch up. I mean there's only ... at that stage I think there was only seven or six of us that was one of the lowest figures we'd had at the time and we said we should catch up, a bit of support network.

Female - No I think it's just grown out of the fact that there's a lot more of them than there are of us. It's like a sisterhood, like sisters need to stick together regardless and I think that's what it is and I think that depending on who's around the table on the night the level of openness changes so it's not always the same ...

Female - The female CEO's and in fact we've got dinner this week, it is a fairly tight knit supportive group, where in a way isn't it interesting, why it needs to be there because you'd think that, that should be across the sector but it's there for a reason and that is that some of the CEO's have experienced some, I think some very significant issues associated with gender and sexuality and you've only got to delve a little bit further.

Female - (on the female CEO network) ... and so they can sit down and they can have a laugh and they're not really being judged and there's not much competition at the table whereas I think when you're in the CEO environment in local government it's competitive in as much as how is your Council placed, how are you going, blah, blah, blah and nobody ever talks about problems that they've got.

Female - I've shared some of my stories and listened to other stories from my colleagues and that's been incredibly helpful, just to realise it's not about me. The second thing is recognising that no amount of me explaining the facts makes any difference and therefore it's purely political and there's nothing I can do.

Female - It is interesting because when we all meet as a group and three or four women talk together every single time, there's almost no exception, one man at least will come up and say what's this secret women's business? Every single time. And the minute they do that you go I'm a woman. I don't feel like a woman amongst the CEOs I'm just one of the CEOs.

#### **5.3.4.4 It's a man's world - the role of local government CEO**

Female - You would just stand out and you'd just look around at all the suits in the foyer and people would just notice you and you'd just talk to people and they'd know who you were, you would just stand out.

Female - I can remember the first CEO Forum thinking oh this is frightening, you know these highly experienced men invariably and a number of them that have been CEO's for twenty years and how on earth am I going to be able to deal with it ...

Female - (on applying for her current CEO role) Talking to some of the CEO's and they're all gossiping about so and so and nobody mentioned me, not for one second did the men think I was in there.

Female - But they (male CEOs) are quite threatened by it and when there were 14 women CEOs they were starting to say you've got to be a woman to get a CEO's job. Now that's classic stuff.

Female - When you go to conferences or the national CEO's meeting. A certain time in the evening you turn back into a woman. You're having dinner, you're all chatting, the alcohol starts flowing, the look, the flirting starts and that's when I go to bed by myself. That's when you notice that you're a female and you feel like oh god I'm now being treated as a woman instead of an equal CEO.

Female - Everyone knows when a woman has not done so well in the role. It becomes a real point of discussion.

Male - Yeah, I go to a lot of meetings with CEOs where it seems to be all males and that surprises me.

Male - It certainly looks very strange when ... well certainly here and I expect in most Councils, the very large majority of employees are female, and probably the large majority of clients in many of the services are women, and yet the higher you go the more likely it is to be male.

Male – There’s basically no diversity of any kind. Not just gender, but anything else you care to name. It’s not representative of Melbourne or Victoria. I think, I think there’s a great lack of diversity of experience. I think most CEOs have been in local government all or nearly all their career. You know, there’s the facetious saying, so and so hasn’t had 20 year’s experience, they’ve had one-year experience 20 times. I think there are a lot of people that haven’t, haven’t really learnt a lot along the way. What they’ve learnt is how to ... how to compromise, how to get on, how not to make waves, how not to stand out. I think the system doesn’t encourage sharp thinking.

Male - I think it’s pretty fair to say that colleagues in the region saw me as a young bloke on the block and probably were sitting and waiting to see how it was going to go; I think is how I read it. I think that’s changed in the last two years or so but that would be my reflection of how the relationship was in those earlier days coming to this Council.

#### **5.3.4.5 Councillors ... the hardest part of the job**

Female - I’ve seen so many CEOs in local government get crucified, sometimes for all the wrong reasons. Occasionally for the right reasons. And irrespective I think the reality is if you’ve got a commitment to community government at the end of the day they’re the elected people, you’re the appointed person.

And there’ll just be a cost associated with it. It’s really quite simple from their point of view, they’ll just pay for it and I’ll want the protections of my reputation in that process and I’ve got to take control of that if that’s what I’m after. So I have rehearsed that, I have thought about it.

Female - ... but they (Councillors) start from a point of no trust, don’t trust the organisation, questioning and challenging everything but at the level of we’re going to

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catch you out. So that's been really hard and what I call some inappropriate behaviours and rudeness, so it definitely affects your job satisfaction ...

Female - My contract is coming to an end in September of next year and I've already indicated to the Mayor that I wouldn't be heartbroken if I wasn't offered another one because I've been here a long time and I'd be quite happy to not have an offer made ... I've gone from nine Councillors to eleven and of that eleven I've got seven new ones and I said to the Mayor I'd be quite happy if basically you might want a new CEO now to take you to the next step because there's a high expectation, they're all very anxious about wanting to achieve and perhaps the time has come and no hard feelings.

Female - It is a tough environment and if you get some Councillors that are quite fractious and predominantly Councillors are males and so it gets into that business about oh have I upset Dad or if I disappointed Dad. It's not a conscious thing. I think it's a very deep subconscious reaction that they're probably feeling, that Dad might be a bit upset, I've got to actually prove to Dad that I can do this or that I know what I'm doing.

Female - ... and you can't really move around much when you're CEO. When I was head hunted for this job I thought there wasn't a chance in hell ... this was a very sought after job even though they're as mad as snakes and they chew up and spit out CEO's. One of the Councillors the second day he goes like this, this job will make you or break you. I thought, you'll do everything to make sure it breaks me ... running the organisation but I have to say to you that's shit easy ... Our job is so much harder than private sector CEO. But their job is to run the organisation, they have to manage their shareholders, they have to get the bottom line. It's really hard, all the industrial relations but, compared to managing the relationship with the Council and the community.

Female - You have staff who say you should tell the Councillors off for this, this and this. You can't. They're my boss but you have to pick your times, you have to keep your powder dry, you have to not overdo it. The Councillors hate being told off, they see you as a bit like a parent but they're also your boss.

Male - So getting that sense of direction is critical and it's very difficult at times because all of them are accountable individually to their constituencies and all of them

have different backgrounds, different perceptions, different natures, personalities and so on ... For all the people who criticise Councillors, the reality is at the end of the day they've got very serious responsibilities and, whilst you can say they mightn't have the knowledge in many cases and the expertise and management, they still have the responsibilities and have to live up to them.

Male - I mean one of the Councillors who finished at the last election who was a bit of a loner, she was a monumental pain in the arse at times, very cunning but I had an enormous respect for her and she and I would trade blows, absolutely trade blows because she would make assertions that required me to almost call her a liar to correct her and I'd say sorry, I just don't accept that, it's not true.

Male - Look I tell people I have two jobs. I have a job leading the organisation and I have a job managing the Councillors. They ought to be linked but often they're not. If you want to be truly successful you have to be good at both. And if you're only good at leading the organisation but you can't get on with the Councillors you won't last. The Councillors will get rid of you one way or another, either formally or they'll just make life unbearable and you'll end up going. If you can only do the second one and be pals with the Councillors but not ... not lead or run the organisation then you may survive for a very long time but you won't achieve very much.

Male - You run a million book loan, a million loan library service and it goes on and on and on and all the media print is lunatic Council are doing, saying something outrageous in Timbuktu and that's ... that's the problem you've got, you've got, I think, a terribly important service but the, the veneer, the packaging is terrible and that's why I think the MAV really ought to do something to weed out some of these rotten apples, because they spoil it for everybody.

Male - The downsides are, and there are always downsides, potentially the relationships with the Councillors and the Mayor in particular. It became a fairly challenging time ... with the Mayor and that's why I didn't even try to get a new contract there because I knew it wouldn't happen. It was a total clash of values and ways of operating.

#### **5.3.4.6 And it could all end in tears**

Female - Two things are important, one is the relationship with the Councillors and secondly the financials or they can be your downfalls in my view. You have a budget blow out you're gone; you get the Councillors offside you're gone.

Female – I've also watched or heard of CEOs that have gone down supporting either of political component of their Council or popular view just to keep the peace in their Council and they come unstuck when the power changes in next Council. Councils, like they quite often change with the wind anyway so I've always had the sense of keeping a straight bat and I think long term you've got more chance, and if not you've done the straight bat, well is it the job you want to stay with.

Female - Look I just adore it and I am worried about my future in the sense that there's no loyalty to CEO's. That's not a gender issue, that is a general issue.

Female - ... I said to (female CEO) are you really sure that you want to go on with this because I don't think you can win and it's really about the parting with some dignity and a bit of grace because why take it on if you're not going to win. Well she was really full on about well I can do this, I can do that, but not anybody else really around the table made much more of a contribution I think because they didn't want to be seen to be negative with (female CEO's) campaign but because I'm the ultimate pragmatist I'm thinking you're not going to win this one.

Female - I mean it is really hard work. I mean I'm not just talking about little things ... stuff that just goes to the heart of my professionalism when I haven't of course. And you just think oh, you just feel embarrassed. You feel infuriated and you feel powerless, but I don't know whether or not that's a gender issue. I certainly know of plenty male CEOs who are coping enormous personal abuse and I actually think it's endemic ... I think CEOs in local government put up with things that they shouldn't and I've said this in forums of CEOs and I felt like a bit of a lone voice. But there's a sense that you're a wuss if you can't put up with it and I just don't think it's right. I don't think anybody should put up with that sort of ... what I've put up with which is abuse, getting yelled at and screamed at.

Female - I mean I guess there by the grace of god go I, you know, like it is so volatile local government and I could imagine getting sacked and having performed really well, so I don't necessarily think that being sacked means that you haven't done a good job. I don't know that, but you'd still have to take responsibility that you've got to manage the whole kit and caboodle. You've got to manage your relationships with all your Councillors, you've got to manage your relationship with the community, you've got to manage your relationship with your staff, with your fellow CEOs, you've got to manage that authorising environment and if you don't you're more vulnerable than if you do.

Male - ... and it's a great wonder to me that there aren't many more CEOs that disappear and fail and many more Councillors don't get their names in the paper and that's another part of what you're dealing with in local government, a poor image, which all of us have responsibility to do something about, but local government is a cheap shot for the tabloids.

Male - I mean given that the system basically says I mean, as you would know it used to be you virtually have to advertise the job unless something or other and I can't remember. Now it's a case of saying if the Council thinks the CEO is okay and the CEO is happy to stay on stick an ad in the local paper and if nobody objects life rolls on. So it's not that hard for a CEO's term to continue.

Male - The trouble was they weren't prepared to accept responsibility. What they ... the easiest way for all politicians to take control of a Council is for the CEO to make unpopular decisions and then they can say it didn't go to Council, it wasn't our call. Now, that wouldn't work because I made it quite clear that if they wanted to take significant decisions, they would be by Council resolution, they wouldn't be by siding up to me and saying would you mind going and doing that.

Male - We have a coalition who's in charge here and they have a reform agenda, so that does play on my mind and the reason that plays on my mind is that part of who I am has a security driven fear and I like a sense of security and a sense of insecurity generates a sense of fear. I don't mean a trivial fear.

Male - He was the Mayor and we worked okay together as Mayor but he now has a political agenda so that stuff you become the focal point for that. That can be debilitating so how do you try to protect the staff if you like from that, particular when it's the Mayor who's trying to drive things for a personal agenda and has a large part of the Council, a very clever politician, but it's all self serving.

Male - As CEO you do have to make choices. You do have choices. You don't have to stay but in the end you're the one that's going to have to leave.

### ***5.3.5 CEOs determining their own success***

#### **5.3.5.1 Managing outcomes and culture**

Female - It's probably the culture in the organisation, to me organisation and the staff is absolutely vital, so it's about the culture and the leadership you get within an organisation, so I'll use the words like the organisation accountability and their performance.

Female - ... being able to provide a level of service to the community within the constraints that you operate under and they were severe here, and having a sense of achievement that your people are reasonably happy with coming to work here but also you're providing the best value service that you can and not the trendy best value but really doing what you can and having strategic plans in place that basically give a sense of direction so that you can measure your outcomes and I think that's really what it is. I think the other thing is that if you've got an executive team that works well together is an indication of being successful.

Female - I think it's incredibly important to me that the feedback I get from Council is on the whole positive and if that started to change I'd find that hard to cope with and obviously I sense that the executives are working well and that staff feel comfortable working with me and we get on well and we're getting things done really.

Male - Anyone who builds 'yes' people around themselves is a fool and I'd say they don't get very far in management, but I'd have to say also that I look around in local government and I've seen managers who don't, to my mind, manage at all well in that

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regard, who manage too much for their own well being and their own interests and looking good.

Male - Is about building a preferred culture around trust, respect, mutual confidence, giving people a sense of pride and giving people a sense of personal and professional growth. And I measure that success by the cultural experiences that are demonstrated and that comes in a number of ways. It comes in people's level of confidence, it comes in issues, the likes of climate surveys, staff opinion surveys, 360 degree feedback, the vibe and the vibe is very important, you know, what is the barometer.

Male - A lot of it I think comes from your senior group and both your perception and how they feel it's operating so there's a how effective are you, what's the culture of the group, how are we going in the leadership of the organisation.

#### **5.3.5.2 Authentic leadership**

Male - I mean sometimes people can put an awful load on a CEO and expect the CEO to be doing everything. I force things away from me to a large extent. I insist on devolving things, but I make a point and I'd hope people would say this of me, but it's my judgment that I'll always give credit to people and I'll always recognise I never achieve anything on my own.

Male - So I mean my view about all our business is ... is you should be hard headed ... My view is a CEO should lead, you should back your judgement and you should aim high.

#### **5.3.5.3 Providing impartial and frank advice – Westminster model**

Female - I think there's a real strong sort of tension happening through that political stuff and political appointment, you think about other models and the fact your contract is based on what the Act says is in your role. All that about good public servants, which is the fearless advice.

Female - And one of the ways I have explained it to Councillors from my perspective is, that in a government perspective you've got a minister and you have advisors and the

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role of the advisors are to protect the minister and in local government they are miniature politicians and my role is to protect them or at least tell them if they're going down a particular path it could end up in tears for them.

Female - Totally straight down the line, totally. The Mayor and the Councillors know that I ... treat none of them differently and we do not at all enter into the politics.

Female - I totally respect Councillors, I respect their role and I think they've got a really difficult one because everyone just whinges at them all the time. But trying to keep them on the straight and narrow and I recently had a budget and they were just going right off.

Female - I sat down with them on a one to one, not as a one to 12 and said I'm really concerned about the direction you're going. My job is to give you advice, I always put it in that term, and I talked about conflict of interest. Individual decision making they don't have the right to do that. They were wanting to do things outside Council policy and it went on and on.

Female - They come on Council with an agenda and they want to see after four years that they're at least heading down that track. They want someone who listens to them and funnily enough even though they might say they want me to do what they want they also don't want me to do something that gets them into trouble. So while they say do this, they actually respect the fact you don't if it's illegal or if it actually politically gets them into trouble. So they do want me to look after them.

Male - As far as I'm concerned, corporate governance is the way in which the board of an organisation, the authority of an organisation, the ultimate authority, ensures the organisation achieves the mission it wants them to achieve and to do that you've got to have regard to all sorts of tools in corporate governance, structure, systems, staffing, all sorts of protocols.

Male - I'd probably put more effort into leading the organisation, trying to make it rigorous and effective and so on. Probably slightly at the expense of being palsy walsy with the Councillors ... I tend to probably take more of the Westminster view that my job is to give you advice, here it is. When you've made a decision I will go away and

basically implement it and I'm not particularly interested in talking about the football and having a beer, you know. I mean, you know, we have dinner together and so on, but I don't think any of them would ever have described me as their mate.

Male - ... when the Council ran into difficulties and it had its first municipal inspection and one of the outcomes of that was that I played a bigger role in trying to liaise between the Council and the administration. So I took on that role and we created a thing that we're famous for, called the Secretariat. Which was an idea I stole from the Commonwealth Government where really there's a part of the administration that tries to look after the interests of the minister, or in this case, the elected body.

Male - My experience with Ministers is what they want from officials is frank advice. They don't want officials to behave like politicians; they've got more than enough politicians in their political parties and on their ministerial staff and so on. They want to know what are the facts and what do you think. And then they want you to stop and let them apply whatever political judgement needs to be applied and that is my, my own view. So what our, our process tends to be that ... That, you know, whether it's on swimming pools or town planning or anything else we say well here's the information, here are the options, here's the recommendation, over to you. Now if for political reasons that's unpalatable, go for your life, you're elected I'm not, I frequently have quoted back at me one of my famous sayings that, you know, why would you be surprised if politicians behaved politically.

Male - But if you're a Councillor here, you quickly get in the habit that you get, you get clear advice, you get clear information, you get clear options, if you don't want to pick the recommended option, nobody will be upset. Nobody's going to, you know, take their bat and ball and go home and it's your decision. But we're not going to, sort of, roll over and tell you what you want to hear.

Male - I've made myself very unpopular with a couple of Mayors at times, she (Mayor) was not very impressed when I told her on many occasions, because you want something doesn't mean I can do it. You individually have no executive authority. What I'm doing is responding to the Council. If you believe something should be done, I've got to believe that that's the will of Council and the best way to do it is to test it if necessary, but if we can talk together we can even talk about ways in which we might

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need to explain to Council why it's a good idea, but because you say it, doesn't mean the organisation does it.

#### **5.3.5.4 Caring for Councillors – this is what counts**

Female - But the hard part about it is that sometimes you're dealing with absolute trivia like the Mayor has got this article today and it's in the Sun, and Council and he is furious. I've just had a meeting where he's really shitty because of that and so he obstructed the whole meeting. It was late and a debrief about how we get that back on track. Why - because his picture wasn't in the paper, now that sort of trivia if you let it can absolutely get you down. You think why have I got three qualifications, get paid all this money to baby-sit. Sometimes you feel like you're a kindergarten teacher.

Female - (on managing relationships with Councillors) I don't sit here and think I won't say that because of that, but I do sit here and think now how do we put this so that we can see it through their eyes, which is being more politically astute. I mean you don't go out and shoot yourself ... Now I had to manage that very sensitively. You just don't go in and you know, you've got to use your nous about that. And you pick your time, you can do that more easily in your honeymoon period than you can further down the track. So it's a matter of judgement, but I don't think they might sack me next week. It's more how you manage the politics.

Female - I think in local government, it is the relationship with Council for a CEO. I think that is its success. My issue is it's one of those critical success factors that I'm not always convinced that it can be entirely up to the CEO. It's a bit like a dance. It actually takes two of them to dance with you in those dance steps. You can try and influence them, your style so that openness and being transparent and how you can trust as in coming and asking me a question I think is vital so you try and build that really open relationship. But I think if you said that didn't work and you had to reflect on that not working – it would be a joint responsibility between Councillors and CEO.

Female - You need to make them feel a bit protected, it's a huge thing. It's like the Local Government Act they've never read it, you wouldn't expect them to. So I have to guide them and help them through that and protect them to some extent from their own foibles as well as risks.

Female - I'm not at all trying to say look I've done a brilliant job or that it's just me but I do absolutely know what's going on. I know everyone of those nine Councillors better than anyone else does, better than the other Councillors do to the others, because number one I have made a point of ensuring that I need to deal with them and understand them all, but also I do think in terms of some of those, I, if to use that language and I don't use it, but more that emotional intelligence there is no doubt in my mind that there are some positives associated with women that you can just see some of the more bravado and the egos.

Female - But I think on a level of CEO and relationship with Councillors they would measure a good CEO from a bad CEO is whether they have a sense that you are treating them even handedly and whether you will look after them and protect them.

Male - So if there isn't trust there the first job of a CEO in local government is to say, 'How the hell do we build this trust', and it's a very difficult - it's not a commodity. It's something that's really earned and then maintained over a period and at times it's at risk, quite frequently at risk, and that's the way it is.

Male - ... if I fell under the proverbial tram I think they'd pick somebody different. I think they'd pick somebody who was far more lovey dovey ... Somebody who's politically sympathetic. I think that's probably the word, sympathetic. I would ... I think they would want what they would call their own; I was going to say their own man. Their own person.

Male - It is difficult for Councillors to closely understand cultural impact generally. It's difficult for Councillors to understand the power of effective leadership, so if they are regarded as key elements of the role of the CEO and if they have difficulty understanding that there's going to be misalignment at times and that misalignment is, I suppose, one of the successes of a CEO is how that misalignment is managed, because at the end of the day it depends on relationships and you have to be able to deal with those misalignments in a way that relationships remain positive.

### **5.3.6 CEO considerations of what Councillors regard as CEO success**

#### **5.3.6.1 A responsive organisation**

Female - I think that what they would say is responsiveness, responsiveness to their constituents and not just meaning that we just pander and we do, meaning that we listen and we hear and we follow up; the relationship with them and then with the rest of the organisation, not with just barriers and it's a one on one but with the collective, treat them all equally; the commitment to in general to the organisation, to the Council; absolute openness.

Male - Some of the things that are important to Councillors may not be, they might be priority number twelve, not priority number one. So I know one Councillor who the thing that I do that most impresses him is I go to Anzac Day, if they have a fundraiser in his town.

Male - So I put virtually no weight on the fact if the Councillors think I'm successful or unsuccessful. It doesn't really matter to me. It's the empirical analysis, what does the community think of what we've done and what we've provided or how we've done it that really tells me whether I'm successful.

#### **5.3.6.2 Positive profile and exposure for Councillors**

Female - I've found they really hook it; they put the label they have in terms of how they define their success and just transfer it. So it's how well known they are.

Female - She should be there to do what we want her to do and she's got to make us look good ... It is about them and their profile so no problem about that, but it would be at that popular stuff, don't upset the apple cart even if it's a hard decision, don't make it because it might make us look bad or unpopular with a particular part of the community, deliver what we want to deliver.

Male - I remember talking to a CEO, many years ago about a revaluation and I said what's happened in your municipality? And he said I don't know, but I know what's

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happened to the values of the how ever many it was, seven Councillors and that's all he'd done. He'd worked out whether his Councillors' values had gone up and whether they'd be paying more or less rates and he couldn't care less about the municipality. And his, his approach to life was, you keep the Councillors happy and that's the only thing you have to do. And it doesn't matter whether the organisation is good, bad or indifferent.

### **5.3.6.3 Perception and pizzazz**

Male - There are CEOs one I can think of is not in local government anymore whose part of his success, he may well have been very competent in his job, I just don't know, but he was a raconteur, he entertained the Council, they liked being in his presence, he had a bit of a larger than life thing about him and fill the glass and bring in speakers that made them feel like they were in the presence of greatness and I don't do that. So I think there are a number of ways that you can continue to be well regarded by your Council.

Male - I mean most, most Council CEOs I would say, and dare I say are warm and fuzzy. Probably more fuzzy than warm in my view. But to be brutally honest I think they pay a price in, dare I say, mediocrity. That their organisations tend not to do anything particularly well. They do a whole lot of things that people like and ... but they don't stand out ... Maybe they're more acceptable, maybe, you know, the Councillors are more comfortable doing that.

### **5.3.7 On gender**

#### **5.3.7.1 Women do it tougher**

Female - And if anything, the barriers and some of the tough things actually has helped me get where I am ... I was the only female on executive management teams at that second level for a long time in my career ... so I would say and it is a gender issue that I always had to be more prepared, have my arguments, my dollars, my information, everything because I'd get challenged every way on something. Where I'd watch other things go through and it was a bit of that boys' network, oh that's right mate, you know,

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half the information and I'd absolutely be the evil witch if I questioned and challenged their work, so I saw some of that.

Female - again I think that this is one of the issues for women, just even when I described to you about my feeling about, can I do the job, what will it be like and I'm really terrified, can I do it and can I do it well and unbelievable expectations of myself. I do really believe that that's something much more common with women.

Female - I think for women in local government you do need to work, I can't say doubly hard but one of the lucky breaks I believe is that I managed a non-traditional area and that gave me the broader scope to then pursue a CEO role.

Male - At amalgamation and appointment time people were putting females into positions to try and get a better balance and did they put females in the CEO positions as a gender thing rather than an experience thing. I mean if you get two or three female CEO's who don't cut it it's going to have a much bigger impact on the potential for other females than if you get one or two males who don't cut it. That's the perception. They're going to say well we had a female and she didn't work out so we better get a male but they often forget that other males in other places didn't work out either but on percentage basis it looks worse so they shy away then from the future CEOs.

### **5.3.7.2 Think manager think male**

Female - ... my first job in local government about 20 years ago, which was a trainee role, an opportunity to learn in local government. There were questions such as, why are you applying for this job because you're just going to get married and have kids and I could respond even then ... I said, yeah and I will work too, so I faced all those barriers that were there and I would face some of those ones around gender and age even with my first management job and the battle I had to go through because it was going to be given to someone else, a male who was older, who wasn't schooled, had some real issues around his own performance and I had to fight for the job and look, I knew it wasn't because he could do a better job, I'm convinced it was about gender and age at the time.

Female - ... being a tall woman doesn't hurt because I can stand next to men and not that I particularly wear high heels these days, you know I'm sort of tall and big and so that I think that probably hasn't hurt because people see you in a bit of a different light.

Female - Whereas there's no doubt that women still face a lot of potential conflicts, even at the CEO level. You look around and there are still quite a few management groups where there are no women, if you looked at the annual reports. It's more often in the country than the metropolitan area and certainly I think old local government would have had; some of the Councillors that I met that were previous Councillors like your old diggers wouldn't have chosen a woman CEO not in a million years. And they look at me and think how did you get there? So I think it's a generational thing.

Female - So I was really lucky I had this rapid rise, I was only a director, second level for three years, very unusual. So I was CEO at 40 at X Council and a woman.

Female - But commissioners were partly briefed to actively increase females at second and third level. And Councils were predominantly male but even having said that a lot of women feel it feels natural to have a male in charge. It's almost ingrained in them; they don't consciously think about it it's just natural.

Male - ... there will be no doubt in my mind that it is more difficult for women to get top jobs, even to get senior jobs and it wasn't - yes, I suppose it's just outright discrimination. Blokes really didn't think the women were up to it. I mean there was that attitude that women hadn't educated themselves and also, of course, the women were still climbing up through the ranks and there weren't many women available to take that next step to CEO. I mean it's a fascinating that in State Government at present I would be surprised if there's more than three, maybe four, women CEOs, just to make that point, and that's a lot.

Male - I think the glass ceiling certainly exists. What are the drivers of that? I think there's probably still a predominance of it being seen as a male dominated industry at the top. I think the time commitments required to the role, quite frankly, at times are disproportionate and I think that probably has an impact ... there is every reason why a female could do the role, but I think the male dominance, traditional male dominance I

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think still lives on, but I also think it must be incredibly difficult balancing maternal roles with the role of CEO.

Male - ... I was born in 1953 and so my experiences in my teens and my twenties and my thirties and my forties are male ladder climber experiences, in my case in the private sector, then it's relatively unlikely that there are female versions of me walking around, relatively unlikely there are people that have had the mix of experiences that I've had simply because they weren't available twenty or thirty years ago whenever I was doing it thirty years ago. Those options weren't there.

Male - Yes, M (former female CEO) was appointed by the Commissioners. Going back to those years, we had one Councillor who, in my opinion, had great difficulty with the concept of a woman in authority, a fundamental difficulty. And I don't think there was anything M could've done to get on with that particular person. And when she left, the only thing I was sure of is that the next CEO would be a man because this guy, the Councillor, really could not have ... yes, could not have coped with a woman in authority. If they were filling the job now, I think there would probably be a couple of Councillors who either consciously or unconsciously would be far more comfortable with a traditional male authority figure.

Male - In, in our case, I think it has been that you have had very strong and influential individual Councillors who don't, don't want, and don't seem comfortable with women in positions of authority.

Male - I think it would've been incredibly difficult for me to do what I've done if I was a female and there are two elements to that. I think particularly in the rural area it would've been very difficult for a female to be appointed to the position.

### **5.3.7.3 Pipeline theory (on why so few female managers)**

Female - I'm talking about women who are at third level here who are smart, articulate, got all the quality leadership stuff ... I've asked them about their career succession stuff and there is one that works with me at second level and she just said no, I don't even want a CEO role. I do not want your job for anything, right, and what it seems to be

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around conflict and the power stuff and the politics, so I wonder if that's an issue for women...

Male - The short answer I think is that the management if you say right, there are eighteen management positions historically a number of those have been in fields that have been predominantly male and we didn't talk about finance, governance, IT which again were more blokey than not but again that is changing.

Male - I'll say I didn't practise positive discrimination as such, but I have a standard rule and I say this to every head hunter I speak to when I'm recruiting for a senior management job, 'These are the criteria. I want you to go out there and find the best people available. If when you do that you find you haven't got any women on your short list, I want you to go out there again and find women who are just as good as the blokes and then I'll look at the short list and we'll work through a process and make a selection and we will make the selection on the basis of the best person.' Now that's all I do and that's not positive discrimination even. It's probably taking an extra step, but that's only countering what I know to be a fact that the blokes are more likely to turn up on the list ...

Male - ... a few years ago we had an executive group where there were 50% male and 50% female and as the women left we got very few female applicants to replace them and my personal view is that was because of the dynamic here. (This Council) had a reputation of being a very vicious, nasty Council and as the, as the Council went through its decline and fall from 2002 to 2005 every time a director level job got advertised, there were hardly any women applicants.

#### **5.3.7.4 Doing leadership differently – a gender phenomenon**

Female - ... women bring soft skills in leadership and this has become more prominent and recognised as important and I think that's really useful. I think the other thing that's tagged that is that a lot of women don't want to do it (CEO role). They don't want to forgo the family role or the freedom or whatever the choices of their particular lifestyle are, they don't want to do it because they see it as compromising so much but they've only had the male figures predominant in their vision of what a leadership or a senior role is.

Female - ... there used to be that question about female CEOs or managers have to be more blokey or male stuff ... I remember I said no, you don't. I refused to go there, where you had to be that tough and change your style. You've got to be aware of it. You've got to be able to work in that environment and know how to get around it and I used to say if you can't get in the front door, through the males, how else can you work through an issue. So I would say most women have that much more collaborate leadership style, a much more supportive role. Now there are some great males that do that too and I think there is a change with more males are doing that and getting that, but there is that gender difference.

Female - ... and people like M. and other CEO's who were just so welcoming and so supportive and I never felt as a woman that I'd been treated badly. I didn't feel going in to, yes there is quite a bit of bravado and you know blokesy people but I don't ever feel that I'm not treated with respect or you know acknowledged, it's just there is at times some of that blokesy behaviour that goes on but I haven't felt disrespect.

Male - It's different in terms of content. Now I happen to have a very strong commitment to human services. I actually know about planning and infrastructure and stuff and I put a lot of time in there but I put in I think a much higher proportion of my time into human services than most of my male colleagues if I dare say that would because it's a personal passion ... So in content terms there's likely to be a different focus but also without revisiting all the research that no doubt exists on average statistically if you look Myers Briggs types or any other measure you want to use of the nature of the way people go about their task and if you say CEOs want to rule the world and do their best to make sure they do, how many of them are males and how many are females, etcetera, etcetera, so the people that want to get to the top and want to do whatever they have to do to get there I think are more likely to be males than females on average.

Male - I think women have got people skills and guile and intuition that males don't necessarily have that I think people underestimate what they bring to the role. I guess it's unfortunate we often see not many females applying for jobs at say an executive level. I've replaced one, two, I put two new people into the organisation when I came in as CEO and there was very, very few females applied for those jobs and I was very keen

to have, I wanted a female in the executive team but I didn't want a female just as a token female. I wanted a female who had the ability to match it with the rest of the executive team because I think the worst thing that can happen to a female is to belong to an executive team where they're really a token female and they feel dominated by males because they're not up to the same level.

Male - I think females have in general and this is just my view of the world I just think they have less self confidence in themselves than males do and I see a lot of females who are far superior operators but they don't realise it or they don't want to take the next challenge because they're not sure that they're ready. I see lots of males who are putting their hand up for the next challenge and I think you're not even up to the challenge you've got now. So I think it's a sex thing. I think females want to be more ready than males want to be ready to take the next step.

#### **5.3.7.5 Discourse of domesticity**

Female - And the other part of it is I've always had very supportive partners and so I haven't spoken at all about that but that has been a huge impact in terms of having partners who are both understanding about the work commitments but also prepared to take their full share of the other side of it which is the family responsibilities. So I mean I've got two dogs and my partner is just amazing with cleaning, supporting, cooking, being there, and coming along to functions. Now I think that would be more difficult if I had children and also if I didn't have a supportive partner.

Female - I'm a safer bet Andi, because I'm fifty and that means that, well people who know me, I'm not going to have children now. But I think that there's some of that latent stuff that no matter how good the recruitment and that they may not ask the question that if you're a thirty to forty year old woman or maybe even a twenty-five, although it's not that likely that the twenty-five year old group would be going for the CEO, but that group where there would be some latent perceptions about we're going to get the best value out of this person or we're going to have a period where she might be out of the workforce or as primary carer if she had young children or children are they going to be spending time concerned about their children.

Male - I mean there's the whole question of who has the babies obviously but again that's changed so dramatically in the last generation that you work until as long as you can and you can sort of drop the baby off on the way back to the office. I'm being sort of facetious but really I think community's attitude to that has changed to a fair extent but there's then the question of who wants to live that lifestyle. Is it possible for example for a female CEO to live the life that CEO's do and that raises the question of well what are the reasonable demands and the unreasonable demands if her partner works in a high flying corporate environment and the whole question of kids and stuff and I don't pretend to have answers to any of those questions at all.

Male - I don't assume anything much at all but the reality is I'm fifty-two going on fifty-three years old and I grew up in a world where the males did these things and the females did these things. Now in my changed circumstance it all got rewritten a bit and that's all fine but I don't think that process has worked its way through the system yet.

Male - It's been part of our compromise of who does what in terms of jobs and tasks and roles but she's been able to do that and so there have been some challenges in terms of how families work out work life balance and stuff.

Male - ... if I was a female and I had a family I think it would be incredibly difficult for me to have done what I've done. My wife has made enormous sacrifices for me to get where I've got to and that's been through study, it's been through an absolute commitment to my work, it's been through relocating several times and she really has managed the home side often very much on her own and I think that would be incredibly difficult if I was a female ... sorry, if I was a female and I had two children which I have, I think it would be incredibly difficult - a) because of time commitments and the sort of commitment that a role like this seems to require. I'm sure I've overdone that commitment at times.

## **5.4 Councillor Quotes**

### **5.4.1.1 Leadership and management**

Female - I think the CEO needs to be able to obviously relate to their staff because they've had a hand in selecting staff that they obviously feel are equipped to do the job.

Female - the requirements are set out under the Victorian Local Government Act, section 3F, I think, or something like that. So that's what the key role is, but apart from that is leadership of the organisation, essentially, to manage the organisation, to deliver on the objectives that the Council has set in its Council plan, budget and other policy documents.

Male - My view is very much that a CEO needs to manage the administration. A number of my fellow Councillors see other things for the CEO, for example the need for a CEO to be seen out there in the community as heading up the administration, to be seen around town. I personally completely reject that notion.

Male - I suppose there are two angles. What I'd be looking for firstly, what I perceive an organisation such as this is needing, I think the needs of the organisation in the CEO is vision in the sense of what needs to be done and what can be done to identify and recognise opportunities and present those opportunities to the Council or your Board, but also to be able to carry out the role with strength and be able to withstand the criticism, to clearly identify that there are other managers in Council and the strength of belief and follow through even in the knowledge that you mightn't have initially the majority of support, but still test the decision making process.

Male - Because it's really no different to a chief executive officer at a large private company really. They'd have a number of general managers reporting to them in different divisions and so down the chain and it's really the responsibility of that person to pull it all together and hold it all together and report to the board of directors.

#### **5.4.1.2 Delivering the policy ambitions of Council**

Female - ... having the financial acumen, but also just in terms of things, really making sure that they are being done properly, so that everyone can have trust that the systems are in place and that things aren't going awry, and I suppose part of that is just absolute quality rather than the role, with the absolute highest ethics and standards, and knowing the trust and honesty and all of that. And then there is a whole range of all the other management issues.

Female - So I think it really is important that you do have that team relationship. It can operate, and a CEO can be very effective in running an organisation at a distance from the Council, but the relationship can break down when that happens. Unless the CEO is reading what the Councillors want, the Councillors could then raise questions at Council meetings or with the media or a whole range of ways to be critical of the organisation and that's not what you want. It's a diversion from the energy of achieving outcomes for the community.

Female - I've been around long enough to know that what seems to be superficially a brilliant policy objective might have unintended consequences and it is a role of CEO, of management and staff to flesh out a proposed policy and to identify whether it will have adverse consequences which might be totally counterproductive to the objective.

Male - ... you need to be able to lead an organisation, or a CEO does, so that the rest of the business of the organisation can proceed professionally and amicably without one particular issue derailing the organisation – that could be fairly difficult. Particularly with big ticket items, very expensive proposals, that can be difficult so it does take a lot of strength and Councillors should beware and as a manager, if you try and please everyone, you finish up pleasing no one.

Male - ... my evaluation of the candidates was based particularly on the ability to convince myself and the rest of the panel that that CEO could lead the organisation through a specific type of change over an identified time period and that that's within the period of zero to about eight years within the context of the major proposals. Now to me, that was the overarching requirement of the CEO's appointment. You've got excellent managers in each of the respective fields and we weren't looking for a very capable Community Services Manager, we weren't looking for an engineer.

#### **5.4.1.3 Capacity to manage and manage relationships with Councillors**

Female - I think it's also important for them (CEOs) to have the flexibility to deal with the Councillors and the Councillors by definition are being elected every three years and you do get them from all segments of the community, and you will find that they've got

a varying understanding of the role of the CEO and their expectations of the CEO were very much varied, so I think that's a difficult thing for the CEO to deal with.

Male - I would say that probably the best thing that one can do in a sense is to share the information that you have. I think there is a tendency of some people (administration) to beaver away on their own, and to be a bit secretive about what they're doing and sort of say 'Councillors, but out, we're actually doing this.'

Male - ... think that's a big problem in a lot of Councils with different agendas, particularly if they're very divided Councils. We're fortunate at the moment that we're not. We have – we're pretty much of a mind at our Council and so you know I don't think there's – I mean there's obviously shades of expectation. There's some radical extreme left wave to this sort of very conservative extreme on the other end but we don't really have the extremes.

#### **5.4.1.4 Diplomacy, 'how to make *no* look like *yes*'**

Male - My expectation is that he (CEO) will be forthright with the Councillors and say I can't necessarily do anything about what you want but what I can do is point out how you can get to where you want to be, this is what you've got to do, you need to get five other Councillors to agree with you but these are the steps, a, b, c, and d. I've been involved over the last two years in particularly as Mayor and prior to that, induction courses with staff, senior management workshops and so it goes and I clearly recall that, to just about everyone of them I say the last thing a Councillor wants to hear is an officer say no sorry you can't do that.

Male - So Councillors look to the administration for support as individuals to get where they want to go but I think it's an unrealistic expectation with Councillors are of the view that the administration will somehow bend the rules, do things that they ought not to do to favour a Councillor achieving a certain aim.

Male – They've got staff to manage, they've got the culture, they've got, dare I say it, the Councillors, to manage. I mean I think CEOs do manage the Councillors, there's no question about that. I know Councillors like to think they're in charge.

Male - So to get around to your question what sort of CEO, again perhaps I'll attest with my recent experience but the ability of fine judgement between when to tell a Councillor like it is and then to humour them, that would be my one top skill requirement for the CEO.

#### **5.4.2.1 Management versus technical skills**

Female - (in reference to current CEO) ... she has everything that you could possibly want in a CEO she was, and particularly the things that I think that she just absolutely shines at are her people skills and her management skills, working together with people, and her lovely warm style, but at the same time the firmness and sharpness, and that's right, nothing goes past her.

Female - ... a lot of the skills that G (female CEO) brings to the position are, I would say, more likely to be female skills than male skills, in having a real sensitivity in relationships and such a strong focus on relationships. So, for me the fact that G was a woman and she had those skills was an absolute bonus, but that is for me as a woman, and as a woman Councillor I know probably given people in local government, the vast majority are male Councillors, won't necessarily be the number one thing they are looking for.

Female - I think the CEO needs to have a really strong confidence in where they are and what their decision making ability is. They have to be able to not be swayed from a point of view that they believe is correct, but they do have to temper the way they deliver that depending on the individual Councillors too.

Female - I think really the CEO has got to have very strong interpersonal skills. They've got to have a very broad view of the community generally. They've got to have a political understanding. They've really got to understand that there are other motivations at work.

Female - She's able to, or he, is able to know where that technical expertise is, it may not be them, it may not even be a staff member, but they need to be able to find it. But it's also got to, the Mayor, sorry the CEO has got to be able to balance the technical side

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with the human side and how it can be managed both at a Council level but also in the community and I think they're things I look for.

Female – I don't think it's any single issue other than leadership. If you wanted to sum it up it's leadership capacity, but it's management capacity, capacity to follow though, capacity to follow through on the policy directions of Council, it's a capacity to work with Councillors and understand the relationship between the CEO and Councillors, it's understanding the dynamics of organisational change and the dynamics of the difference between a structural change, not necessarily leading to outcomes but the leadership issues and the setting of goals and objectives and following through on those with your management plan.

Female - I've been around recruitment long enough to know that you need to rely very extensively on reference checks and feedback, not just from people they worked with in administration but Councillors. So certainly you make judgements in interview ... well, first of all in making judgements you look at the credentials which come through the job application, and have they worked at that CEO level or effectively at the second level rather than the CEO level? And you need to follow through on leadership, ask examples on how they've resolved conflict, how they've dealt with management, what their management style is. So you can ask a lot of questions and you get some understanding, but ultimately I think the interview should only be ... certainly less than 50% of the weighting. I would tend to give it about 20% or 30% and then rely very much on the credentials, the experience, background, which you determine from paper and referees rather than what's said at the interview.

Male - I think a lot of Councillors come to Council with very naive expectations of how things work and relating to your question specifically about what a CEO needs to have in their suite of skills. It's really very much an interpersonal or the ability to deal with Councillors of one lunatic extreme to the other, your ability to deal with that diversity of personality types quite frankly.

Male - I think had a built in bias towards people who had experience, but at the commercial and engineering level, and with that inherent bias in the position description, it is a pretty effective applicant who can jump that barrier, if their experience wasn't related in those fields.

Male - I guess business acumen but also personal skills, I guess, and leadership would be the key things.

#### **5.4.2.2 Political nous**

Female - Apart from those areas of a corporation, a CEO really needs to have some political nous about the links with the community and the importance of keeping Councillors informed, and while the CEO is responsible for staffing and running of the organisation, Councillors aren't, they're responsible for the policy directions and the goals and objectives and the Council plan and the documents and monitoring implementation of those.

Male - ... well a demonstrated expertise in the area of responsibility which is maybe hard to do but the applicant would need to do two things, one demonstrate that they were at the top of the game in the area of their responsibility, for example our guy in planning, it was widespread view he's at the top of the game and there's probably no one better in the area of urban planning. The issue then is not so much that he's simply at the top of his game but he demonstrates a broader knowledge of politics, small key politics and he's very skilled in dealing with areas beyond his immediate area of expertise and you combine those two abilities and you've got a perfect operator.

Male - Yeah, so I was certainly very much looking for that customer focus, that match of ideas because if you know free and frank advice is one thing but it's got to be free and frank advice in the context of what the Council is trying to do and if the Council is divided of course then you end up with a CEO who is a mediator and a broker between the two sides and that's just getting messy.

#### **5.4.2.3 Its all about fit**

Female - The CEO will be attuned to keeping Councillors informed about staffing, key staffing and management matters that are in her responsibility but they both need to understand how each other work; Councillors understand how the CEO is working,

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CEO needs to understand how the Councillors work, how the dynamics between Councillors can support the organisation or might undermine delivery. So it's quite a complex series of requirements.

Male - I mean I think you've got to have a compatible CEO. If your CEO is just incompatible there's going to be a big problem.

#### **5.4.3.1 Achieving positive organisational outcomes 'ensuring the ship is steering smoothly'**

Female - I would have to firstly say that you've got to look at the formal stuff, look at the Council plan. Actually, the fundamental thing must be delivery of what's in the Council plan, the budget, because that's what we've agreed to do and implement, so those formal things have to be delivered. And does the CEO monitor or get her executive team to monitor delivery on those formal things, so that's fundamental. But apart from that it is how does the CEO motivate staff to ... there's a whole lot of things which wouldn't be set out in the formal documentation necessarily, although we do have words to that effect in the formal documentation ... how do you motivate staff to give their 110% if ... well, it's never possible to do that but, you know, give as much as possible to a role and take their role seriously, return phone calls from constituents, follow through on that, do things in a timely way, deliver on reports. Look, I don't think there's any single mechanism of determining success in the role of CEO. I think it's got to be a combination of all those things. At the end of the day, though, there are a lot of personal judgements you make, just personal judgements that you make at a meeting; how effectively does the CEO respond to questions from Councillors at meetings or questions from the community.

Male - ... what's the feedback I'm getting from my colleagues, what are the whispers from the organisation in general, do you hear careless conversations that are critical of the organisation, what's the vibe, the mood, the sense of culture and then lastly from the community and I think, I may be blinkered, but certainly I think the sorts of feedback we're generally getting is now more positive than it used to be.

Male - I judge how the administration is doing primarily on my intuitive sense of my interactions with the CEO himself, the administration, my fellow Councillors and the community and they all juggle for prominence depending on what day it is.

Male - We do have a formal process and we've actually just gone through a phase of that, assessing our KPIs and sort of redefining the KPIs going forwards. It's enormously hard to define KPIs as you probably would be aware of. I mean there's some things that you virtually can't measure and you know we ask for some things and C says, 'Well, give me all these KPIs but how do you measure the time I take sitting down with a Councillor when I sit down with a Councillor for two or three hours working through their issues? That's distracting me from the KPIs. That's not in my KPIs?' And it's true, it's not and how do you have a KPI that says, 'Deliver a happy, cooperative environment between staff and Councillors'. How do you measure that?

#### **5.4.3.2 Capacity to partner with Council**

Male - It's a partnership and the Councillors – I think there's a – and it may be true in some cases that Councillors are a nuisance but they're often seen to be a nuisance, but they are in a sense a part of the process. Councillors are elected; they are the ones who are elected. They are the ones who have the mandates from the community as to how the process should run and even though they're part-timers and, you know, amateurs sometimes, very amateurish, they have that mandate and collectively they have, one hopes, usually a considerable amount of wisdom.

Male - I think where things go wrong is where there's friction between the staff and the Councillors, particularly the CEO obviously, and I think that tends to go wrong when the CEO sort of tries to drive his or her own agenda that's different to that of the Councillors and I guess in doing that you're doing something that's – it's always going to end up with some sort of secret agenda because you can't openly – like CEOs can't openly be driving a different agenda to what Councillors want, other than by white anting or you know various – so to me it's about building that partnership, it's about cooperating, it's about sharing information, sharing wisdom, not holding it back and so.

Male - I mean we constantly get the refrain from staff, 'We don't have the resources to do it.' Now, I – but then you know Councillors have day jobs, most of them. Some of

them are retired. But those who have day jobs have tremendous burdens and yet they're asked to get on top of that much reading every week.

Male - You see the relationship that the CEO has in dealing with a number of different Councils, with different personalities. You see the respect that he gets from his EMT (executive management team) and managers, in particular, where he has close dealings with, and to some degree other staff, but certainly the management, you get that feedback, and a lot of it's visual.

#### **5.4.4.1 Meeting the diverse requirements of Councillors**

Female - I mean since our election we have got a challenging group of Councillors, and a group of Councillors that don't want to be working together as a team, and basically want to be throwing and scoring political points off each other, and so in fact both G (Female CEO) and myself I think have been working together on walking through this mine field and trying to do what we can to get people to work together as a team and to be effective as a Council, but knowing that things can just blow up at any moment and people can really, you know, you can take one wrong step and suddenly it is World War III which has broken out.

Male - ... it's the management of Councillors, some call it stroking Councillors, I think that's demeaning to Councillors. I think it is much more about how those dynamics between Councillors and between the administration and between the CEO themselves is managed.

Male - Probably managing the Councillors so that the Councillors don't go on a path which erodes the work and the merit of the organisation because of their own political or personal goals or failings.

Male - And that's really the great thing about our democratic society is the elective representatives, if they're truly representing the people they are elected by, well then it will be a difficult relationship because here we have, you know, a chief executive officer who is trying to run the machine.

Male - It must be that again in personal and working environments such as local government if they couldn't cope with that particular challenge and that is one of the significant challenges but still it would be very frustrating as a manager to have the staff members to enjoy their work and have a belief and commitment in what they're doing only to see the public benefit being undermined or eroded by the behaviour of the Council.

Male - They've got staff to manage, they've got the culture, they've got, dare I say it, the Councillors, to manage. I mean I think CEOs do manage the Councillors, there's no question about that. I know Councillors like to think they're in charge.

#### **5.4.5.1 It's different for a woman**

Female - I've always made the comment that women's own worst enemies are other women. I call it the greasy pole syndrome. You've probably heard that one and I have a number of friends that are actually very good at greasing poles over the years too and I've watched them. It is a hard one because women are often harder on other women than they need to be but it depends on the woman Councillor.

Female - We quietly call them the trolls (reference to male Councillor colleagues). They're not necessarily older than us, in fact this one's younger than the two of us, but they're locked in a bit of a time warp and they've got a different, a completely different attitude and we love watching them because it's interesting. They give one particular female executive member a bit of a hard time, well the two of them do, they are very critical and they will make her more accountable than they do the male counterparts and we can see that.

Male - My observation of the two lady CEO's I know is that they are of limited capacity. I'm also conscious at the same that there are a lot of male CEO's are also of limited capacity but sex raises its ugly head and so I see women and it may be unfair in retrospect and upon reflection that I might be applying a different set of standards of expectations.

Male - Now thinking about my interactions with the males and I know I can say and behave in a way that's quite different than I can with the women. I feel myself much more guarded, much more conscious of any repercussions or ramifications that might flow from ill considered comment so I feel much more vulnerable in the presence of women and intimidated than I do with men because I will tell the male directors what I think in no uncertain terms and do not worry about self censorship and modification.

Male - I would need to be much more circumspect in the form of communication. The language I think would be different and the path to the objective and because I am the way I am I think it would be easier to reach the end objective with a male CEO, that is getting the point across, than with a female CEO. Maybe that's totally wrong but it's a perception and I'm willing to entertain that I am wrong in this matter because I've not actually worked with women CEO's.

Male - Most of the female managers here are quite confident and - I don't want to say this in the wrong word - the word becomes 'more bubbly'. Now, that doesn't mean in a bimbo way.

#### **5.4.5.2 More likely to recruit and be comfortable with a male CEO**

Female - I think traditionally, it's been very, very hard for women to get up the top of the ladder not just in local government but in any other large organisation. I am surprised; I guess that it's hard in local government because I would have thought that that's where women's assets are probably stronger than men.

Female - ... you're not going to get to CEO level unless you are open and non-discriminatory yourself because I don't think you'd be successful. So I would downplay the female aspect of it, but on the other hand I think a female CEO has got characteristics that enable success; they've usually had to operate through the glass ceiling and fight more battles, women often have good interpersonal and organisational skills. I think they've learned that through life, particularly if they've had to raise a family and juggle different demands, so I think they've got, in some way, an advantage. So that operates well, but I'd have to say that I know in some Councils where you've got a female CEO and you've got a dominance of male Councillors, they may not ... the relationship might be tense, initially anyway, but I think a female CEO would prove

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herself and have the male Councillors eating out of her hands. That has happened in other instances, and one often finds that people who could be seen to be prejudiced against females, if you just deal with the issues and demonstrate achievements and outcomes, people who were critics on sex and thought women had their place will change their opinions. The evidence will force them to change their opinion and I've always operated that way, and I'm sure most female CEOs would operate that way.

Female - I would say that there would be a tendency for male Councillors to choose male CEO's, and to value the strengths of firmness, making decisions, you know, and particularly, and often being a very strong and powerful leadership type figure, and value those over what can be more subtle, and less easily defined, and often can take a longer period of time to work out that these are the really important things.

#### **5.4.5.3 Pipeline theory**

Male - I guess there is that perennial problem of conflict between family and work and the traditional values of women being with their children and bringing up the kids and so on. I'm sure that stands in the way of many women. You know men have sort of abdicated that role and said, 'Yep, that's my wife's role. She's the mother, she will look after them'. Other than that I don't know and of course there is that image of men as being firm and tougher.

#### **5.4.5.4 An emphasis on soft skills**

Female - And then the preceding CEO having been a male who they hadn't been nearly as happy with, who they felt, you know, showed a lot of the traditional male attributes of being a strong, charismatic leader but who would, you know, hide information and didn't let them know what was going on, and all that sort of stuff, who didn't have the openness and the trust in relationships that they had developed with P (previous female CEO), and certainly we have got with G (current female CEO).

Male - ... the position hasn't been intended to be gender exclusive the way it has been drawn up, but some of the criteria have been for areas in which women haven't historically studied or pursued professional qualifications and employment. The engineering and commercial background that was required by the position description

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of the present CEO appointment process, advantages people who have studied and worked in that area and traditionally that has been men.

#### **5.4.6.1 Relative inexperience of Councillors**

Female - ... look there is no key selection criteria for Council. There is no interview process, well I suppose there is in ballot, but there is no interviewing for your skills. You don't need to have skills. You could seriously be out there wanting to save a tree and if you were lucky enough to get enough people angry about that tree, you would be elected and you might have absolutely no skills, no abilities to look at the broader picture than that tree and nothing to offer and that's the worrying thing that you can, I suppose, hypothetically, get seven or eight Councillors that are all one issue without an understanding of the broader picture.

#### **5.4.6.2 It's all about me**

Female - Yes, and the fact that the dynamics of the Council this year, in terms of the political structure, with me as one Green, three Independents, three members of the Labor party most of whom, not all of them, but you know, a lot of their relationships have been scoring points off each other. So, with me and particularly with some very strong facilitation skills and wanting to do what we could, and so with P (female CEO) and myself working together to do what we could to bring them together, and it will be a different dynamic with G as one of the Labor party Councillors next year, which I think will be very challenging, and I am not looking forward to it.

Female - ... and I mean the main thing is that you know it is just going to be blokes who are Mayors who stand up and talk and take the floor, and just not listen to other people, and just go on and on and on and on, you know, for an eternal amount of time, not being tuned in to who their audience is and just be much more about themselves than about communicating with what they are doing, and so that is very evident at the mayoral level.

Male - I want the CEO to run the administration and often the Councillors I think have a somewhat misguided view that anything they say should take precedence over anything else that happens in the world. The slightest thing that pops into their head ought to be

something that the CEO slavishly then follows up and makes sure it happens. I think that many Councillors don't understand how the system works and importantly how it doesn't work. It doesn't work by having the CEO running around after all the Councillors catering to their every whim. The Council works on the basis of six Councillors here out of ten or five with a casting vote in meetings resolve that something will happen then it happens.

Male - There are only three types of people that present themselves for election to Council, the mad, the lonely and the ambitious. Maybe that's a bit cruel but it cuts a bit close to the bone because my experience of a number of Councillors, lovely people but the problem is we only come together for Council purposes, I rarely see these people outside of the Council environment. We're not best friends. It is unrealistic to expect that we will behave like best friends. The best we can hope for is civility, cooperation, tolerance and the desire to achieve the same outcome and objective of community well being, that's our central vision for this city.

## **APPENDIX TWO**

### **Summary of Research Findings for CEOs**

The findings of this study identify the culture of local government being reflective of hegemonic masculinity. This is evident in the valuing of masculine values and behaviours and is particularly noted in the way in which CEOs and Councillors describe the role and requirements of being a CEO. The environment is described as competitive, homogeneous in its predominance of Anglo Saxon males, not representative of the diverse community, survival of the fittest, tough, challenging and yet a valuing of community outcomes, an emphasis on team and responsible stewardship.

The experiences of females and males CEOs differ in a number of ways. This is particularly evidenced in early years and in early career. The identification of education as assisting females in gaining independence is a strong theme. Parental influence is also regarded as crucial in female CEOs focus on education as a means of ensuring independence. A trend that is carried through in their careers. There is a more notable trend for females where career development and advancement is premised on pursuit of learning and challenges. This has led to more horizontal moves for females than males. Both males and females demonstrate a preparedness to take on risks and have moved between sectors and areas of operation. There is more formal grooming for senior management roles for the males than for the females. Males are more likely to emphasise networking as important to career advancement whereas women are more likely to emphasise the importance of mentors. Women are more likely to have entered local government at more junior levels than their male colleagues. The majority of CEOs interviewed hold tertiary qualifications but the females are more likely to have pursued post graduate studies than their male colleagues.

Both male and female CEOs believe it is more difficult for women to be appointed to the role of CEO and, once appointed, women are subjected to much harsher evaluations than are their male colleagues. There is a perception that Councillors are more likely to be more comfortable with a male at the helm. CEOs also believe that Councillors are more likely to believe men are more likely to have experience in the technical areas of local government and even if they do not have this experience are perceived by Councillors to have more capacity in those areas than women. There is also a perception

that female Councillors are less comfortable with a female CEO than a male CEO. Female CEOs are likely to be judged not only as individuals but also their behaviour, success or failure will be seen to reflect on all other females.

Consistently both male and female CEOs suggest women are evaluated and judged differently to men. Women in management roles experience more scrutiny than do their male counterparts and for many they are aware that their actions are seen to reflect on other women and not just the individual. In this way the outcomes of the female CEOs are regarded as reflecting on not just their own capacity as an individual but rather reflective of women's ability in general.

The main determinant of success for both male and female CEOs is the achievement of organisational outcomes as well as establishing a workplace culture that is reflective of a positive staff morale as well as staff having a clear sense of direction. CEOs consistently suggest that managing the relationship with Council is the key to their ongoing survival. CEOs constantly balance the dichotomy of being a servant/agent of Council as well as that of the role of leader. Whilst CEOs identify the focus of Councillors on the achievement of the organisation they also believe the majority of Councillors are more motivated by their own individual outcomes and hold the CEO to account for ensuring they have a positive profile.

CEOs identify the complexity and risks associated with balancing the needs of individual Councillors with that of the Council as a whole. Both male and female CEOs suggest that irrespective of strong performance and meeting key performance indicators, the relationship with Council is the most important consideration by Councillors in evaluating their success. Capacity to provide impartial advice is identified as the means to survival. There do, however, appear to be times where CEOs' activities are political, as evidenced in decision making around priorities, briefing of individual Councillors and carefully crafting key messages. Despite a strong theme across all CEOs of the importance of providing impartial, fierce and frank advice and the need to remain distant from the political sphere, the separation of the administrative function from that of the political sphere is not as apparent as CEOs suggest.

Whilst the relationship with Councillors is considered as the crucial management issue and key to their survival, CEOs suggest that this is often an informal measure and often

absent or minimally addressed as part of the CEO's formal performance plan. Responsibility for the success of this relationship is seen to rest with the CEO, and is not necessarily regarded by Councillors as a shared responsibility. A number of the CEOs suggest that they invest disproportionate time on managing the Council interface.

A number of CEOs describe a sense of constant vulnerability and describe their roles as time limited. Long standing CEOs are regarded as the exception. There is also a suggestion that there are times where the behaviour and expectations of Councillors make the work environment unsafe.

The experience of being a CEO as a female is notably different to that of their male colleagues. This is evident in the recruitment process, communication with Council and the way in which the female CEOs describe the environment and their relationships. Women are more likely to have experienced personal questions asked of them at interview and are very focussed on maintaining effective, impersonal and professional boundaries with their Councillors.

Both male and female CEOs identify the lack of diversity at the CEO level as evidenced by the high proportion of Anglo Saxon males at the helm. The environment at the CEO level is regarded as highly competitive, cautiously collegiate. Female CEOs are more guarded in the way in which they describe their experiences unlike their male colleagues who are far more open about their thoughts on Councillors.

Whilst there is a clear sense that women are under-represented at management levels within local government this is seen to reflect the technical functions of local government. There is also a suggestion that women may choose not to pursue senior roles because of the nature of the role, the time demands, and vulnerability of the more senior roles, particularly that of CEO.

In summary, CEOs suggest it is harder for a woman to achieve the role of CEO than a male, and when she does, she is likely to be evaluated differently to that of her male colleagues and her actions not only seem to represent her, but is seen to reflect on other women. CEOs consistently suggest the hardest part of their role is managing the political interface and suggest that a disproportionate amount of time is spent responding to the needs of individual Councillors. Males are more openly critical of

their Councillors. The CEO forum is regarded as highly competitive and relationships between CEOs is seen as professionally collegiate.

Undoubtedly from both a male and female CEO perspective, gender does play a part in the experiences of the CEO, particularly if you are a woman.

## **Summary Research Findings for Councillors**

The role of CEO is primarily identified as providing leadership and management within the context of Council's policy direction. Councillors are very clear on the differentiation of roles and responsibilities between elected members and the administration.

Councillors identify a successful relationship between Council and CEO is key to the achievement of policy outcomes required. The CEO is seen as having comprehensive responsibility for balancing the needs of individual Councillors with that of Council as a whole. Whilst there is recognition of the principle of providing impartial advice by the CEO to Council there is also a suggestion that CEOs are not nearly as politically neutral as they suggest. Councillors describe the CEOs intervention in managing and prioritising the Council agenda as having a political orientation.

Role conflict is also identified as a tension in local government due to the differing goals and expectations between elected members and CEOs.

The key skills required by a CEO are leadership and management capability. Councillors suggest that it is only in a small number of situations that they would expect the CEO to have technical know how but would expect the CEO to be able to engage the appropriate resources as required. The CEO must demonstrate a capacity to partner the Council in achieving its policy ambitions.

Councillors and CEOs consistently suggest achieving specified organisational outcomes is a determinant of success for the CEO. Additionally there is an emphasis on CEOs being able to engage with individual Councillors and effectively manage their expectations in concert with the Council agenda.

Councillors, as with CEOs suggest it is the interface at the political level with Councillors that is the most challenging aspect of the CEOs role. There is also recognition that this factor above all others is the key to Council satisfaction with the CEO.

Male Councillors are more likely to suggest that gender of the CEO will make a difference to expectations and communications between Council and the CEO. The environment is described as robust and demanding and therefore women need to demonstrate a capability at this level. Female Councillors are more likely to suggest that gender does not matter but are also more likely to suggest that the leadership and communication skills required for the role are more likely to be held by females than men. Female Councillors suggest that male Councillors may have differing expectations of them as Councillors than they would male Councillors and in this way female Councillors described a similar sense to the female CEOs of being judged differently, being more visible and being held more accountable than male colleagues.

Whilst Councillors suggest that they are aware of the low representation of women at senior levels in local government they are more likely to attribute this to the low numbers of females within specific technical areas within Council.

In summary, overall Councillors suggest that gender does make a difference at the CEO level.