

## **Exemplary Nordic female leaders and their challenges to climb the corporate ladder: Insights from Iceland and Finland in the context of The Nordic Leadership Model**

Conservative, male-oriented company culture makes the corporate ladder more slippery for women, who are probably more likely to deal gender-based obstacles than their male counterparts. The lessons drawn from the experiences of women, who have accomplished unusual success as top directors in their organizations, are important guidelines to improve management by controlling stress load and use coping techniques against burnout. This presentation reports primary findings from an Icelandic study on the characteristics of exemplary Icelandic female leaders and top managers and their leadership styles. Data was collected through qualitative semi-structured interviews with a chosen group of women that have got nominations and/or prizes for excellent leadership record in recent years in Icelandic organizations. Participants provided various narratives on their experiences of bad leadership (mainly from men in management positions), the more experienced interviewees felt pressured at times in their career to assimilate themselves to the male culture in their corporations and that the glass ceiling was indeed visible until they tried to break it by pushing forward and obtain power positions. Majority of the interviewees had experienced tunnel-vision, narrow-mindedness and resistance to change among their male counterparts and tendencies of old-fashioned, top-down management, arrogance and pride, leading to incompetent old-fashioned mode of communication that can lead to weaker, non-professional decision-making with lack of diversity and open dialog ending in worse results for the organizations. Findings indicated that unacceptable working conditions, the implication of stress and the challenge of balancing the third shift and gender-based, societal expectations with climbing the corporate ladder presented an increased pressure on women in leadership positions.

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**Einar Svansson** is associate professor at the Faculty of Business at Bifröst University, Iceland. At Bifröst he has been leading the Summer School program as an academic director in the course of Sustainable leadership for the 21st Century. He also heads the research program about the Nordic Leadership Model in Iceland. Has lectured on various topics like Leadership and strategy, CSR, Sustainable management in Iceland, Spain, Romania, Finland and Austria. Best paper award in the Tourist and Travel Research Association (TTRA) conference for his paper about the Blue Lagoon in Iceland. Einar holds two master's degrees, one in Strategic Management and Business Administration, and another Marketing and International Business. His double master thesis was based on the international INNFORM framework about organizational changes and management in the 21st century and focused on international management & performance indicators and got 'magna cum laude'. Professional carrier: 20 years as a CEO & quality manager in the food production industry. In the year 1997 he implemented the first green strategy in the Icelandic seafood industry, highly praised by big customers in Europe. Einar worked as a senior business consultant for 5 years for ParX, an IBM company.