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Exploring the Career Journeys of Female Leaders at For-Profit Companies

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EXPLORING THE CAREER JOURNEYS OF FEMALE LEADERS
AT FOR-PROFIT COMPANIES

by

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Abstract

This case study explored the career journeys of female leaders at for-profit companies. The participants were chosen via purposeful sampling and the qualitative study was conducted employing face-to-face interviews. Major themes found in the review of literature were similar to the study findings and included: a desire to be challenged, self-motivation with a commitment to oneself, a strong desire to make a difference, varying degrees of mentorship, overcoming gender barriers and unique leadership characteristics and styles possessed by women as opposed to men. This study also provided insight to some of the struggles that these women faced throughout the ebbs and flows of their careers, including the need to juggle families with their career aspirations, discussion of differing perspectives of gender barriers, and conflicts encountered when having to compete with other women. Each woman shared a unique perspective of her career journey and no two were exactly alike; yet each spoke to a desire to leave their mark on the world as well as on the lives that they touched along the way.

Keywords: career journeys, female leaders, leadership, gender barriers

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This study was truly the crowning piece towards my Masters degree, and was especially poignant as I continue to navigate my own career journey. I would like to thank my fellow students who offered me the opportunity to challenge my own thoughts and perspectives throughout all of my courses. Specifically, I would like to thank Steve Anderson whose encouraging comments kept me going when I was ready to settle for "half-way." I am also grateful to all of my professors at Marquette University who helped me appreciate and hone my leadership strengths. Thank you to my parents and husband who were there to listen, support, and offer insight to the impact this might have on my future. Finally, I wish to extend sincere appreciation to the six research participants who welcomed my questions and opened their personal and professional lives to share with me their history, insight, and advice of which I found invaluable.

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More than ever before, women serve in leadership roles at for-profit companies. Women are also pursuing and completing higher levels of education so that they can compete for roles that offer higher levels of influence, pay and recognition. However, the question of what exactly contributes to their overall success still remains. Carli and Eagly (2001) state that "In order to be influential, women must combine agentic qualities, such as competence and directiveness, with communal qualities, such as warmth and friendliness" (p. 632). Findings from this study will help to provide a deeper understanding and unique perspectives on the personal experiences and journeys of women in leadership positions. Additionally, findings will provide insight for other women hoping to achieve leadership roles at for-profit companies.

The purpose of this case study is to explore the career journeys of female leaders at for-profit companies. The focus of this study will be to determine the primary factors that have guided these female leaders through their career journeys supported by their personal stories, strategies for success and advice for other women on similar paths. For the purpose of this research study, female leaders are defined as women serving in for-profit company management positions having at least one direct report. Six women were interviewed for this study.

Review of the Literature

While many research studies have been conducted on gender and career advancement, it is this researcher's desire to better understand the primary factors that have guided women through their career journeys towards advancement. Opportunity is sought and adversity is met at many levels within organizations and there are themes in the research that suggest there is a pattern that women tend to either seek and follow, or steps that women inadvertently go through in order to achieve success and progress in their careers. The following selected studies uncover

similar elements or themes that most women have described as being present and influential along their career journeys. The themes from these studies included:

1. Commitment to Self and Motivation

2. Leadership Characteristics

3. Corporate Structure – Overcoming the Glass Ceiling

4. Gender Role Congruency

5. Leadership Styles

It is these five areas that will be the focus of the literature review. It is important to note that the results of some of these studies are limited by the size and nature of the sample used.

Commitment to Self and Motivation

A key factor in moving along a career path is to invest in oneself. This investment may be in time, education, or training. All, in some form, are critical to the contribution of seeking greater rewards throughout one's career. This has held true for both men and women, although motivations between the genders do seem to differ. Reimers-Hild, Fritz and King (2007) describe this entrepreneurial approach to career development as an investment in human capital. By investing in themselves women are able to obtain a greater sense of self as well as accumulate a greater sense of social, personal and economic gains. Moreover, these are contributors towards a successful career.

In order to partake in such investments of time, education or training, women must be motivated and committed. Motivation was a key theme in the findings of White's (1995) study on the career development of successful women. In her interviews with 48 female managers, entrepreneurs, and senior members in law and accounting, White (1995) found that the strength of women's commitment to their careers was a principal factor to their success. Further, many of

the participants in her study "described their career as an integral part of their lives and as part of their identity" (White, 1995, p. 11). In essence, the job becomes a central point of her life, her thoughts, and her goals and as well as can be linked to her personality.

Offering a different point of view on what motivates women in their careers, Eagly, Makhijani and Klonsky (1992) in their meta-analysis on gender and the evaluation of leaders as well as Ridgeway in his early 1982 study, found that women were more group-oriented in their motivation behaviors as opposed to self-motivated. This is not to say that women did not seek achievement for themselves, rather that they found greater accomplishment in obtaining buy-in from the team as opposed to achieving their interests only. Leveraging others and gaining mutual support forged a way for women to move along in their career journeys.

As prior studies have shown there are a multitude of motivations and reasons as to why people seek continued education and additional training. For some it is to advance themselves as a person, for others it may be because their employer mandated it as a way to further develop their skill-set or keep up-to-date on occupational duties. And still for some, it may simply be because of a desired salary increase. Although, in White's (1995) study, the motivating factor for advanced self development was to achieve more than just a larger paycheck.

In her study on motivators for women superintendents, Harris (2007) found that key motivators for women in educational leadership and management positions included the desire to make a difference, the ability to initiate change, the urge to have a positive impact on people and the challenge of the experience. All of these are visionary goals. This is in line with one of Gerzon's (2006) eight tools on effective leadership, having integral vision for what one wants to do and where one wants to go. As defined by Gerzon (2006), integral vision is "the commitment to hold all sides of the conflict, in all their complexity, in our minds and hearts" (p. 52). With the

many directions women are being pulled, being motivated to push one's self to the next level takes vision, commitment and drive.

Yet vision and commitment to self-development alone do not guarantee women career advancement to the next level or onward to achieve leadership positions. The role of a leader varies from person to person and from organization to organization. "Leadership roles, like other organizational roles, provide norms that regulate the performance of many tasks, which would therefore be similarly accomplished by male and female role occupants" (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001, p. 784). Every working person has a job to perform and on some level has a set of goals and objectives to obtain. For some, responsibilities may also include managing subordinates' duties and overall performance. Within these particular responsibilities there are often company processes or norms that are predefined to help manage people (either on an individual and/or team basis). As summarized by Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) in their study of leadership styles of women and men, there are pressures in every organization to conform to existing company norms; however, managers generally have some input and leeway as to how they fulfill their duties. It is in these areas where we see "aspects of organizational behavior that may be most likely to vary according to gender" (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001, p. 784).

For most manager-leaders success is dependent upon achieving specific tasks in order to continue to receive pay increases, promotional advancement and/or ultimately peer recognition (Gerzon, 2006). This type of working style is similar to working in a silo situation or having tunnel-vision. The motivation for these types of managers is often to keep checking items off their individual task lists in order to complete more tasks faster, and with fewer resources as defined by their manager. This theme follows from the sense to satisfy the requirements of the

managerial role that has traditionally existed in hierarchic organizational contexts, particularly

with business firms (Minor, 1993). Even if a manager wanted to change the course of how she

completed her job, including managing her subordinates, there is often little to no opportunity or

incentive to change and still advance in the company. In studies summarized by Eagly and

Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) assessing one's motivation to manage, "men scored slightly higher

than women, especially on subscales that assessed the desire to manifest competitive and

assertive qualities in managing" (p. 785). Thus, having and performing these competitive and

assertive qualities (such as checking off the most items from a list or doing so in a faster

timeframe) seems necessary in order for one to be deemed successful and move up to a

leadership or senior management level.

Leadership Characteristics

In her article on gender stereotypes that prevent women from moving up the organization

ladder, Heilman (2001) states this about leadership, "Top management and executive level jobs

are almost always considered to be 'male' in sex-type. They are thought to require an

achievement-oriented aggressiveness and an emotional toughness that is distinctly male in

character" (p. 659). Characteristics that are often attributed more strongly to men than women

describe primarily an assertive and controlling tendency (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001).

Such agentic characteristics include being dominant, forceful, daring, and competitive. In

contrast, Eagly and Johannesen-Schmid (2001) also noted communal characteristics which were

more strongly ascribed to women and also resembled the findings of Harris (2007). Communal

characteristics described a concern for the well-being of others. Examples included women

being affectionate, helpful, kind, sympathetic, interpersonally sensitive, nurturing, and gentle. In

employment settings, communal behaviors might consist of "speaking tentatively, not drawing

attention to oneself, accepting others' direction, supporting and soothing others, and contributing

to the solution of relational and interpersonal problems" (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001, p.

783). Leadership characteristics and motivation for success seem to vary greatly between men

and women. This can prove to be challenging for women as they hope to advance in their

careers as it is these agentic, "stereotypical male qualities" (Heilman, 2001, p. 659) that are

thought necessary for one to advance to leadership or executive level positions, aside from one's

desire to further one's education and invest in oneself. Despite the high volume of women

obtaining advanced degrees, the reality of women in leadership positions is daunting. Men

constitute 96% of the five highest earning officers in Fortune 500 companies and more than 98 %

of CEOs (Catalyst, 2000), 87% of senators, 86% of congressional representatives, and 90% of

state governors (Center of the American Woman and Politics, 2001).

Nonetheless, investment in oneself has shown to be a critical step in furthering a person

along one's career path. With each step forward, success provides richer rewards such as higher

pay, progressively higher ranks, benefits and/or promotions, and a sense of admiration from

peers and subordinates. This can also provide a greater sense of personal accomplishment as

well as impart a positive impact on others.

Corporate Structure – Overcoming the Glass Ceiling

One can not broach the topic of successful women in leadership positions without

encountering the topic of the glass ceiling. In their book, Kolb, Williams and Frohlinger (2004)

state that, "women have an advantage of [having] improv skills, [being] relationship-centric, less

rank conscious, self-determined, trust sensitive, intuitive, natural empowerment freaks, and

oriented toward intrinsic motivation" (p. 2). These seem like traits that any company would

want their leaders to posses. These are in line with Gerzon's (2006) traits for an effective

mediator leader. However, women historically and still today are missing from many leadership, senior management or executive roles.

"Explanations for this sparse representation of women in elite leadership roles traditionally focused on the idea that a lack of qualified women created a 'pipeline problem'" (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 573), and that there were not enough women with the appropriate education or background to supply the necessary desire or demand for female leaders. However, women possess 45% of the advanced degrees that have been awarded (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000) and earn 42% of PhDs and 43% of professional degrees (Morgan, 2001). However, while aggregate statistics on workforce participation and education suggest gender equality, the reality of women that actually hold management level positions is different. Less than ten years ago, 30% of lawyers were women – likely higher in the subsequent years, and yet even today, women only make up 15% of managing partners in large law firms and five percent of partners in large law firms (Carli & Eagly, 2001). According to their findings, Carli and Eagly (2001) stated that while the pipeline problem is a popular one amongst male executives, "its plausibility has been eroded by the dramatic increases in women's employment as managers. Because the pipeline is full of women, this idea has given way to the glass ceiling [which is] a metaphor for prejudice and discrimination" (p. 631).

White (1995) also provided evidence as to why women were unavailable in the pipeline or were missing from prime leadership positions. According to White's findings, reasons included that some women had to follow the career paths of their husbands, while others had family or domestic responsibilities.

It would stand to reason that no company wants to be labeled or defined as being prejudice or discriminatory towards women (or any race or minority). This has led some

companies to hire women into management or leadership roles. Nonetheless, it is often

suggested that of the women who do occupy such leadership roles, their being there is "rooted in

the suspicion that [she] has not really earned [her] appointment […rather] she landed a prized job

because she is a woman, because she work[ed] hard, or because she [simply got] lucky" (Kolb et

al., 2004, p. 3).

Many organizations today also employ diversity councils and women's initiative teams.

However, as Kolb et al. (2004) point out, while

> these initiatives aim to increase diversity in the short term and strengthen the leadership
>
> pool over the long run, they can easily be equated with quotas. As women succeed in
>
> moving into leadership roles in these organizations, their promotions can be attributed to
>
> their sex and not to their competence (p. 4).

Kolb et al. (2004) go on to state that in order to pass this token test, a woman needs to be

clear on why she was selected for the role and what she is able to bring to the table. "Only then

[is she] positioned to negotiate [her] way around these negative attributions" (Kolb et al.,

2004, p. 5).

Gender Role Congruency

Role congruency, as defined by Eagly, Makhijani and Klonsky (1992) is "the extent to

which leaders behave in a manner that is congruent with gender-role expectations" (p. 5).

Specifically, women may adopt a leadership style that is relatively feminine and therefore

congruent with her gender role. Alternatively, a woman can adopt a more masculine leadership

style which is incongruent with her gender role. In the results of their meta-analysis, Eagly et al.

(1992) found that "women are negatively evaluated when they exhibit masculine leadership

styles" (p. 16). They also found "that whereas feminine styles ameliorate female leaders' role

conflict, they do not compromise male leaders' success" (p. 16). This stereotypical feminine

behavior serves to demonstrate women's group-oriented motivation in a potential leadership

situation (Ridgeway, 1982). "This proof of acceptable motivation was evidently a perquisite for

effective leadership by women" (Eagly et al., 1992, p. 16). This motivation is again in line with

Gerzon's (2006) mediator leader who strives to act on behalf of the whole, not just the part. The

findings from Eagly et al. (1992), go on to say that "men, in contrast, were not required to prove

their group-oriented motivation, because group members perceived them has having an inherent

right to lead" (p. 16). These outcomes do not seem equal or fair as rationale measures by which

to evaluate and/or compensate leaders. Instead they seem to convey a prejudice that still is

perceived to exist today.

Eagly and Karau (2002) also offered that "Prejudice can arise when perceivers judge

women as actual or potential occupants of leader roles because of an inconsistency between the

predominantly communal qualities that perceivers associate with women and the predominantly

agentic qualities they believe are required to succeed as a leader. People thus tend to have

dissimilar beliefs about leaders and women and similar beliefs about leaders and men" (p. 575).

Heilman's (2001) "Lack of Fit" model can be applied here. Her model is based on the idea

that expectations about how successful a person will be in a given role is the "driving force

underlying personnel decisions" (p. 660). Her model further specifies that the perceived fit

between one's attributes and the specific skills and abilities required for the job determine

performance expectations. If the fit is perceived to be a good one, then success will prevail. If

the fit is perceived to be bad, failure is to be assumed. It seems that attributes presumed to be

required to handle male sex-typed roles effectively do not correspond to the attributes believed to

characterize women. Women in stereotypical, leadership roles would be expected to fail. But

what about those women who possess the agentic qualities that are often associated with good

leadership? Based on the above model, it would seem that they would be expected to succeed.

Heilman (2001) offers a response that is prescriptive in nature, versus the descriptive bias from

above. She states that "When women are acknowledged to have successfully performed male

sex-typed jobs, they are by definition perceived to have the attributes that are necessary to

effectively execute the tasks and responsibilities required" (p. 661). This is finally good news

for women. They can be seen as successfully excelling at men's work, "eradicating the

perceived lack of fit deriving from the descriptive aspect of gender stereotypes" (Heilman, 2001,

p. 661). However, there is now a different problem that women must overcome. According to

Heilman (2001), women's "success is a violation of the prescriptive norms associated with

gender stereotypes" (p. 661). Despite the good fit between the woman and the job description,

there is now a bad fit between what the woman is perceived to be like and the conceptions of

what she should be like. And should women ignore these prescriptive indicators, it is likely to

induce some sense of disapproval (Heilman, 2001). Subsequent penalties, such as lack of

promotional opportunities, movement to a more "well-suited" role, fewer reporting subordinates,

or worse yet – removal from the position or company all together, are all possible outcomes.

There are many other organizational conditions that facilitate the devaluation of women's

performance and success. According to Heilman (2001), these include five conditions. First,

there is an ambiguity in evaluation criteria whereby the more vague the judgment criteria, the

more easily information can be distorted to fit preconceived ideas. "In the case of gender bias,

the preconceived ideas are expectations about the lesser capability of women to perform

competently" (Heilman, 2001, p. 663). It would seem that it is more difficult to distort concrete,

objective outcomes, such as test performance or dollar earnings, than to distort vague and

subjective outcomes such as being an inspiring boss or team player. Secondly, the lack of

structure in the evaluation processes "eases the way for the reliance on stereotype-based

expectations in making inferences about performance excellence" (Heilman, 2001, p. 663), "and

escalates the potential for gender bias in decision making, culminating in the judgment that

women are not competent in fulfilling traditionally male work roles" (Heilman, 2001, p. 664).

Third is ambiguity about the source of successful performance. As long as there is a question

about whom or what is truly responsible for the success of a particular project, a woman's role in

bringing it about can be denied. "Mentoring programs, for example, although often set up to

mitigate against sex bias in organizations, may inadvertently promote it by providing onlookers

with a plausible explanation for a women's success that does not involve her competence"

(Heilman, 2001, p. 665). This means that a woman's mentor may be credited with the true

rationale or idea behind her proposed solution. Next is ambiguity about the reason for successful

upward mobility. With diversity councils and affirmative action for women and minorities, it is

not far reaching for some to assume that this is the reason for some women's progression up the

chain of command, despite whether they are truly competent or not. "Affirmative action has

become associated with preferential treatment, which suggests lowered quality standards [… as

well as] a stigma of incompetence" (Heilman, 2001, p. 665). Further, affirmative action is only

one organizational program that can trigger this perception. Outreach and diversity programs are

also possible targets for this same feeling. In times where many companies are seeking to reach

out to new markets and expand their services and products, as well as hire representative

individuals to work on and service them, these outreach efforts can be seen as a negative. Last is

the assumption that women have had special relationships with those in power. This is

particularly problematic for attractive women.

"Women, quite simply, are not supposed to excel at jobs and tasks that are designated as male in our culture" states Heilman (2001, p. 667). And although women "may move with ease through an organization's lower ranks and appear poised to pierce the glass ceiling to the upper strata of the organization, their success may be hindered by the disapproval their competence evokes because it violates prescriptive norms" (Heilman, 2001, p. 667). Women do achieve success, but it seems to follow that competent woman may pay a price for being just that – competent, while their comparable male counterparts are afforded more opportunities at faster rates of upward mobility. Heilman (2001) went on to summarize that because advancement within companies is dependant on not only competence assessments but also on general approval and social acceptance, women who are able prove themselves to be competent in traditional areas are likely to be met with a lack of enthusiasm or negativity; and doing so could be disadvantageous to their careers as they strive to get ahead.

There is still further research that states that women are not always fans of their own gender. Biernat and Fuegen (2001) summarized a variety of reasons for this. They include:

> …[t]he Queen Bee Syndrome" (Staines, Travis & Jayarantne, 1974) [which] suggests that successful women may tend to view other women as intruders or competitors given the zero-sum nature of women's positions in the organizations. Another reason suggests that women may devalue the competence of assertive women as a means to reducing the dissonance they feel over not being assertive themselves. Still another explanation is that women may believe that their own credibility will be questioned unless they judge other women harshly – if an unqualified woman gets ahead it may reflect badly on all women. And a [final] related account is that women hold other women to higher standards because they know that women need to be exceptional to succeed (p. 719).

Thus, it appears that women can be their own worst enemies as they struggle to move up in the ranks of leadership within organizations.

Leadership Styles

Leadership styles offer some insight as to the differences in gender and the journey women encounter in their careers. In research, evaluating leadership style can come from a leader's colleagues and/or subordinates. Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) researched the gender differences on task-oriented, interpersonally-oriented, democratic and autocratic leadership styles and found that "men were more autocratic or directive than women, and women were more democratic or participative than men" (p. 788). It follows that perhaps women may encounter more negative reactions from subordinates when they take charge, provide direction or act in authoritative manners. Instead, Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) posit that "because women's communal repertoire encompasses social skills, it may be easier for women than men to behave in a participative manner" (p. 790) such as allowing subordinates to make and determine decisions and have control over the outcome of projects. Women may gain confidence by collaborating on decisions where they can assess and predetermine outcomes that they feel their associates would agree with. By following such a process, this "enables female leaders to overcome others' resistance, win their acceptance, gain self confidence, and thereby be effective" (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001, p. 790).

Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) also researched the gender differences on transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles. They found that on their basis of transformational leadership, female managers, more than male managers, "manifested attributes that motivated their followers to feel respect and pride because of their association with them. They showed optimism and excitement about future goals [and] attempted to develop and

mentor followers and attend to their individual needs" (p. 791). In their study they also found

that women exceeded men on their transactional scales of contingent reward. In contrast, "Men

exceeded women on the transactional scales of active management-by-exception and passive

management-by-exception and on laissez-faire leadership" (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001,

p. 793). Their findings went on to suggest that male managers, more than female managers:

1) focused more on the mistakes and problems of their followers; 2) subsequently waited until

problems became severe before attempting to solve them; and 3) found that male managers more

than female managers were absent and uninvolved at critical times. When questioned about why

women faired so much better, Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) offered that one possible

interpretation was that "women [had] to meet a higher standard than men to attain leadership

roles [as well as had] to maintain better performance to retain these roles" (p. 793). Another

possibility offered was is that "female managers may encounter resistance if they proceed in the

more traditional command-and-control leadership styles, and they opportunistically discover the

advantages of a more interpersonally sensitive but inspirational type of leadership that is

captured by measures of transformational leadership" (p. 794).

   Yoder (2001), found that "How women enact in their role as leader is inextricably

intertwined with the basic realization that they are women, bringing with it all the stereotypical

baggage that comes with gender roles" (p. 815). She posited that "Leadership is a process that

occurs with a social context that itself is gendered, [… which] ultimately forms a setting that is

more or less congenial to women and thus affects what is and is not effective for a woman

operating within a specific context" (p. 815). Leadership does not take place in an androgynous

vacuum. Instead one must evaluate the opportunities for women who want to succeed and seek

to understand the situations where this is most possible. Yoder (2001) proposes a "gender-

sensitive model" whereby "leader effectiveness is operationalized as positive leader and follower satisfaction, enhanced group and individual performances, and unit cohesiveness" (p. 816). Her model offers a more contemporary vision of leadership that proposes transformational or charismatic leadership by "emphasizing influence, not power, and empowerment (power to) of self and others" (Yoder, 2001, p. 817).

According to Yoder (2001), the underlying issue about what makes leaders effective in masculine settings is power. She states that the fundamental point to be made is that "because social status and power are confounded with gender, the playing field is tilted for women leaders before they even begin to act as leaders" (p. 818). She goes on to suggest two ways to counter the imbalance. One is by reducing differentials and another is by enhancing women's status. Research has shown that enhancing women's status is difficult to come by and should women be able to overcome it, they are likely to be met with additional barriers. In order to be effective, "Women leaders need to combine status-heightening strategies with status-leveling efforts" (Yoder, 2001, p. 818).

The review of the literature offers various studies that identify key elements or themes regarding the primary factors that have guided women through their career journeys and towards advancement. Being committed to success for one's self as well as being motivated by the additional benefit of others, as a result of one's efforts, is one central theme. Similarly, another theme focused on the inherent communal characteristics of female leaders, which the research as shown to be in contrast to the agentic characteristics often found in male leaders. These differences can prove to be challenging for women in companies where there are more men in top-level, leadership positions. Another key element found in the research relates to gender. Women have stated that they have encountered unique challenges within their corporate structure

because of their gender. The glass ceiling is still prevalent for many women as well as expectations and prejudices about gender role congruency. The final element found consistent in these research studies was the difference in leadership styles between men and women, whereby women tend to be more participatory than men in their actions and management of teams, and tend to emphasize empowerment over power. This literature review identified key themes to be further explored through interviews with female leaders at for-profit companies.

Method

Design and Methodological Choice

The purpose of this case study is to explore the career journeys of female leaders at for-profit companies. The use of qualitative research allowed this researcher to gain a deeper understanding of these women's career paths and share their stories and insights from a unique point-of-view with rich and descriptive detail (Trochim, 2006). With "Intensive descriptions and analyses of a single unit or bound system such as an individual, event, group, or community" (Merriam, 1998, p. 19), selecting a case study as a method of conducting qualitative research was ideal as it provided this researcher with an opportunity to better understand how each of the women arrived at their current position, what success meant to them as a female leader, and how they set out to achieve it.

Creswell (2007) provides standards for assessing the quality of qualitative research and offers characteristics that include: focusing on the participants and conducting research in a natural setting; rigorous data collection procedures with adequate summaries; allowing data to emerge and evolve within the design; and ensuring a holistic view is kept throughout the study (p. 212). These standards were adhered to as this researcher conducted the present study.

Creswell (2007) further specified that there are different types of case studies; a single instrument case study, collective or multiple case studies, and an intrinsic case study.

For the purposes of this research study, a collective case study method was chosen. By employing the collective case study method, this researcher was able to focus on the one issue – exploring the career journeys of female leaders at for-profit companies – and explore several studies or cases to illustrate the issue. Yin (2003) suggests that collective or multiple case study design uses the logic of replication, whereby the researcher replicates the same procedures for each case. In the present study, this was done by developing an interview protocol that was used as a framework for all of the interviews. As it was the desire of this researcher to understand intricate details about the specific, single topic for a small group of participants, case studies allow for a thick description of information from the participants' point-of-view (Yin, 2003), which provides data that is more human and relatable in context. In such studies, results are based on personal details of only a few participants, thus the results can not be assumed to be generalizable to a larger population. This makes it difficult for one to test for validity or to provide a solution to a prescribed problem (Yin, 2003). Still, the rich details and thick description (Merriam, 2002) provide the opportunity to look at a topic from a unique perspective, which is not often affordable or scaleable for those researching larger masses of the population. As this researcher was able to narrow in on the topic of exploring the career journeys of female leaders at for-profit companies, she was able to use multiple cases to gain insight into the distinctive motivation, behaviors, and preferences of the individual participants (Creswell, 2007) leading up to and throughout their career journeys.

Strengths with this method include flexibility in design, as well a strong focus on the intensity and context of the topic. These attributes allowed for the ability to gain in-depth insight

on what motivated and guided female leaders. It also sought to better understand what proved to

be challenging for the women in their careers.

Challenges with this type of study include constraints on time and limited availability of

participants. Restricted time and resources of the researcher can also complexity. Inherent

subjectivity and personal bias are also common concerns found with qualitative research studies,

thus sensitivity must be taken into consideration when conducting these types of studies to

ensure any possible conflicts of interest do not jeopardize the credibility of the study or

its findings.

Participants

Six female leaders at for-profit companies in the Midwest of the United States were

selected as participants for this study. They were chosen via purposeful sampling in order to

"show different perspectives of the problem" (Creswell, 2007, p. 75). This allowed for ability to

select the individuals for the study because they could "purposefully inform an understanding of

the research problem and central phenomenon [of] the study" (Creswell, 2007, p. 125).

According to Klenke (2008), despite the small sample size, the value of the research is not

lessened, as it is equally worthwhile to understand the deeper meaning and true insight that

comes from the study. Further, the "Concept of saturation or the point in [the] course of the

study [that comes] when adding another data element such as another interview, participant

observation, or narrative study does not add new information" (Klenke, 2008, p. 10-11).

Therefore, a key element in conducting a qualitative study with limited participants is to ensure

that credible and ideal candidates are selected. In part, it is important for the researcher to

determine common, yet key elements for inclusion criteria and determining, prior to conducting

the study, what participant attributes are important for the study. In doing so, purposeful

sampling can be utilized. Specific to this study, convenience and criterion sampling methods

were utilized. Criterion for the six selected participants in this study required that:

         a) All participants be women at the manager level or above at their current company.

         b) Each participant must have a minimum of one direct report.

While not part of the inclusion criteria, the participants did offer additional demographic

information about themselves either directly or during their responses, which is discussed in

more detail in the Findings section.

Informed Consent

       Upon obtaining approval from Marquette's Institutional Review Board to conduct this

study, six participants were contacted with preliminary details. Upon agreement to participate in

the study, the participants were then provided a copy of the consent form that explained the

purpose of the study including the impact of their involvement, as well as the assurance that

throughout the study the researcher would ensure their individual and their company's

anonymity (see Appendix A). The consent form also informed the participants that their

participation in the study was strictly voluntary and that they could remove themselves from the

study at any point.

       According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005), it is critically important to keep personal data

confidential. It was their recommendation to assign pseudonyms to participants in order to

distinguish them within the study, yet not make their identities known. In order to accomplish

this, the researcher assigned random pseudonyms to the participants: Paula, Olivia, Gina, Kathy,

Andrea and Belinda. The pseudonyms were used for each participant throughout the data

collection and coding processes, as well as in the discussion of the Findings. Direct quotations

from the participants were used, and approved by the participants via member checks, while

maintaining the anonymity of the participants and their respective companies via their

assigned pseudonyms.

Data Collection

The scheduling for the six participant interviews took approximately one week. All of

the interviews were conducted in the month of October 2009. The location of the individual

interviews was determined and conducted at the convenience of the participants.

Face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection tool in this

research study and it was via these interviews that the researcher was able to "understand [their]

experiences and reconstruct events" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 3). Prior to each interview,

participants were sent the interview protocol via email and also told that the interview would be

audio-recorded. A brief description of the study was also provided in the email as well as the

approximate length of expected time the interview would take (one hour). Each interview was

confirmed and a reminder was sent prior the meeting. Only one of the interviews required date

and time changes due to schedule conflicts with the participant. The locations of the interviews

were chosen by the respective participants based on their convenience. Most interviews were

conducted in private conference rooms at the participants' place of employment and

organizational approval forms were obtained prior to the interviews taking place. There was

only a brief interruption in one interview due to a need for the participant's co-worker to retrieve

materials from the conference room.

Three of the participants came to their interview with prepared responses and notes and

three had only briefly reviewed the questions prior to the interview. This difference did not seem

to have a major impact on the interview process itself, although some participants felt strongly

about wanting to answer all of the questions, as well as add additional insight and information on

the greater topic. A few times, this researcher had to reference the time and interview protocol in order to stay focused on the research topic and ensure that the necessary questions were being covered for sake of consistency.

Research Questions

Prior to interviewing the participants, an initial draft of the interview protocol questions was developed. After revising the wording and editing the questions, this researcher also made changes to the order of the questions, with the goal of capturing similar information from each participant in the most natural conversational flow possible. By employing the use of open-ended questions, this researcher was able to applicably deviate from the protocol as necessary in order to ask follow-up, probing questions and elicit richer feedback, and to clarify any uncertainty in the provided responses. Table 1 references the eleven interview protocol questions (also in Appendix B).

Table 1
Interview Protocol Questions

1. How do you define success for yourself?
    a. Intrinsic?
    b. Company/corporate structure?
2. Please describe your current role within your organization.
    a. How long have you been at the company?
    b. How long have you been in your current role?
    c. How many roles/positions have you had at this company?
    d. How many other positions have you had outside of this company?
3. What more do you hope/want to accomplish in your current role?
    a. How long do you think it will take to achieve this? Why?
4. Did you have a plan to get where you are now?
    a. If yes, tell me a little about that plan. Describe the steps.
    b. If no, what events took place that contributed to you being where you are today?
5. In what ways did others impact your career journey?
    a. Did you have a mentor?
        i. If yes, describe your relationship with him or her.
            1. What is the best advice you received from him or her?
            2. What do you most value from that relationship? Why?
        ii. If not, do you feel that having a mentor would have allowed you to achieve more? Why?
6. Describe your successes along the way.
    a. What are you most proud of?
7. Describe your challenges along the way.
    a. How did you overcome these challenges?
8. Where do you see yourself next?
    a. What steps will you take to get there?
9. If you could go back, what would you change or do differently? Why?
10. What advice do you have for women looking to advance their careers?
    a. Recommendation?
    b. Avoidances?
11. Are there any additional thoughts you would like to share regarding your career experiences/journey?

Data Analysis Procedures

Each interview was audio-recorded and then personally transcribed by this researcher. With the exception of one interview, which lasted one and half hours, each interview was completed in about an hour. Following transcription, notes were made about the context of the interview and so began the initial process of coding the data. Data was coded according to the constant comparative method until themes began to emerge (Merriam, 1998). The interview protocol was used as a framework to "ensure that the research problem [was] thoroughly examined and that each part of the broad topic [was] explored" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 135). Not all questions were asked in the same order, as each interview took shape in a different way depending on the style and preference of the participant. Some participants chose to elaborate via stories; others were more succinct in their responses, which required more prompting for description.

In each interview, it was re-stated that the participant, their various employers, and all data collected would be kept confidential and only referenced by their assigned pseudonyms. Given the nature of this researcher's known relationship to the majority of the participants, confidentiality was a concern for some. As a way to address this, member checks, also known as respondent validation (Klenke, 2008), were conducted throughout the research to help verify correct interpretations. This process involved each participant receiving a summary of her data for review and clarification. This process also helped to increase dependability of the findings. This was of particular importance in order to ensure that this researcher was not "inadvertently projecting her own experience onto these women while missing the real salient points […] from their perspectives" (Tisdell, 2000, p. 70). Credibility of the research is further enhanced when researchers employ reflexivity which "involves self-awareness and critical self-reflection by the

researcher on [her] potential biases and predispositions as they may affect the research process and conclusions" (Klenke, 2008, p. 43).

Findings

Introduction

All six participants in this study were passionate individuals with an inner drive for achievement. Whether that achievement was for themselves, for their families, for others around them, or for the general greater good or accomplishment for the companies they worked for this sense of seeking and attaining was prevalent for each of them. None of the women seemed to have started out knowing who they wanted to be or where they wanted to go; as long as it was upward and onward from where they started. A need to feel challenged was critical for their sense of success, as was their over-arching desire to make a difference. Each of them had support from friends, family or mentors throughout their career journeys, but each participant's network of support was unique to her circumstances. A common theme arose from every participant in regard to desire to help other women; and seemed to be especially critical in industries that were predominantly male. Therefore, one might expect gender prejudices or the perception of the glass ceiling to be a focus area, however in discussing the topic, responses varied.

Throughout their interviews, the participants were eager to share their perspectives and even volunteered demographic data about themselves perhaps as a way to deepen their point-of-view. Demographic information included education level, age, relationship status (and for some their history of this), and if they had children. All had a completed a four-year undergrad degree. All but two of the participants had completed their Master's degrees and one had completed her

Ph.D. All of the participants are under the age of 50 and have position titles ranging from

Manager through Vice President.

Table 2 offers a visual snapshot of the participants' comparative demographic

information as described. Total Number of Roles indicates how many positions these women

have held to date since graduation from their undergrad, and is more specifically broken out by

the number of positions held at their present company which can be found in the parentheses. It

was also found that all of the participants had held several positions/roles within their current

company and that each had moved laterally at some point in their careers and linearly, upward at

least once within their current company. All had held previous positions prior to their

employment with their present company. This researcher felt that this demographic information

was important to include in the study, as these elements were found to be integral to the

participants' sense of achievement and feelings of success.

For the purposes of this study, Relationship Status is meant to mean that these women are

or have been married or involved in a domestic partnership at some point in their lives. At the

time of this study, half were in a committed relationship, two had been previously divorced and

one had never been in a committed relationship. Each participant noted that her career was

impacted in some form by her involvement in a relationship as well as the need to care for

others. Three participants have children. Two of the three participants currently not in a

committed relationship did divulge that they had been in previous committed relationships, but

were living single at the present time.

Table 2

Comparative Snapshot of Participants

Pseudonym	Total Number of Roles	Education	Age	Relationship Status	Kids
Paula	9 (7 in current company)	Masters	40	Single (divorced)	No
Olivia	4 (1 current company)	Masters	36	Single (divorced)	No
Gina	8 (2 in current company)	Masters	45	Committed	Yes
Kathy	6 (2 in current company)	Undergrad	48	Single	No
Andrea	6 (5 in current company)	Ph.D	41	Committed	Yes
Belinda	7 (5 in current company)	Undergrad	35	Committed	Yes

In summary, the participants were close in age range with no one under the age of 35 or

over the age of 48. They were also educated, with the majority holding advanced degrees. Each

had held a minimum of four positions throughout their careers to date and all had moved both

laterally and linearly within their careers; the majority advancing upward within their present

company. All but one had been involved in a committed relationship at some point and half have

children. All of the participants spoke to these various elements in their interviews. Along with

their individual career motivations, these other aspects influenced many of their occupational

decisions and had an overall impact on their career journeys.

Participant Profiles

Paula. Paula moved to Milwaukee more than 11 years ago specifically because of her

desire – "her dream", to work for her current company. She had worked in the same industry her

entire life although initially at various local levels before moving into the corporate environment.

Paula is 40 years old and holds a double Masters degree. She has several siblings, nieces and

nephews to whom she is very close. She values family relationships and conveys a strong sense

of spirituality. Paula is currently single, but has been previously married. She has no children.

Success for Paula is multi-faceted:

> Challenging myself to set goals and reach them, as well as to help others do the same,
>
> both personally and professionally. I really want to make a difference and see real people
>
> benefit from my efforts ultimately share in some of my passions. I created my own path,
>
> although it's important to have different plans throughout different stages of your life.
>
> Have faith and be open to feedback. Tell God your plan and listen to him laugh. Be
>
> realistic and set goals. At the same time, depending on your priorities, be flexible to
>
> what's out there for you. I'm very passionate and am not a person that is content with the
>
> status quo. Money isn't as important to me as it used to be (Paula, personal
>
> communication, October 16, 2009).

Olivia. Olivia is the second youngest participant in the study. She is from a mid-sized,

Midwestern town, but has lived and worked internationally as well as in various cities

throughout the United States. Having owned her own business at one time, Olivia is proud to

work for her present company. She hold's a Masters degree, is currently single and credits her

parents for grounding her with "good Midwestern values". She holds the opinions of those

around her in high regard; especially her manager's. Olivia feels that success can come in many

forms, but most importantly that women should continually push themselves to try new things:

> Don't wait. You'll spend your time finding reasons not to do something … as soon
>
> as I get married … as soon as I have kids … as soon as I make more money … and one
>
> day you'll wake up wondering where all the time went. I look up to the people I report to
>
> and value their input, although when it comes to wanting to excel, learn more, or move

positions, I was probably on my own. I'm self-motivated in that sense. And if what I'm

doing isn't going to make a difference, then I have no motivation to do it (Olivia,

personal communication, October 19, 2009).

Gina. At 45, Gina is the mother of two children, has always worked full-time and is in a

committed relationship. She did not have a specific plan to get where she is at today, but always

knew she wanted to be in an industry where she could travel. Growing up as one of three girls,

her father stressed the importance of an advanced education and never allowing anyone to take

advantage of you. Gina holds a Masters degree and has worked predominantly for two, major

international companies. She places great value on the importance of a company's culture and

how it relates to and works with internal and external stakeholders. She has made lateral moves

in order to broaden her experience and is currently serving in a director-level position. She is

motivated in her career by being part of the team, feeling that she has a voice at the table, and

being able to take on new challenges. Gina contributes her success to her internal drive, her

mutual respect for herself and others, and all of the experiences she has been able to take away

from her relationships – both good and bad:

> I've had some pretty good bosses and only a couple that were really bad, but they helped
>
> me too, because I could learn how *not* to behave. As a woman, sometimes people test
>
> you and you have to be able to confidently and appropriately respond. In my industry
>
> you really have to know what you're talking about and I've found that people respect my
>
> effort to learn and push myself. Relationships are critical and you have to adjust your
>
> style depending on who you're talking to. Emotional intelligence is also important. I
>
> always wanted to do more, contribute more, learn more and the onus was always on me.
>
> It started with me knowing what's important to me and being able to express that. It bugs

me when people feel they're entitled to a promotion just because they've been around for awhile – you have to earn it (Gina, personal communication, October 20, 2009).

Andrea. Andrea is in a committed relationship with one child. At 41, she is the most educated of the participants, having earned her Ph.D. She has held six positions throughout her career and five of them were within her current company. Success for Andrea requires the need to have a balance between being connected to people in their roles and being reflective of oneself. She has had mentors throughout her career and values insight from a variety of people with different points of view. She values personal relationships and trust, and feels that everyone in an organization, despite their title, can provide valuable insight. Having worked in the non-profit sector before to moving into a for-profit, corporate industry, she brings a unique perspective to the research regarding leadership and authenticity:

> Being a leader is about how you bring yourself into that role and how you're authentic in that role. If you do good work and you're authentic about it then some of the external rewards like title and money will follow. Success for me is defined by whether I'm living up to my potential. Am I giving back all that I am capable of giving back? Am I making a difference? I think people come first; if the people succeed then the organization will succeed. When looking to move up, focus on developing and building relationships verses making an impact right away; and when you get to a certain level in an organization you have to be conscious of the choices that come with that, because there are definitely things you give up as a result of that. Leadership is a lot about self-awareness, being intentional in your choices, and not compromising your integrity (Andrea, personal communication, October 21, 2009).

Kathy. Kathy is the oldest of the research participants at 48. She has an undergraduate

degree, and holds the highest title of all participants. She is a senior vice president at a large

financial institution in mid-sized, Midwestern city. Kathy is single and has not been involved in

a committed relationship. She did not have a plan to get where she is at, although was driven to

do the things that made her happy. She found sage advice from a range of people throughout her

life, such as the pastor's wife at her church who told her to, "start where you are, with what

you've got;" as well as from one of the vice presidents that she would conveniently "bump into"

every morning in the break room during her first job. She constantly challenges herself to

advance in her career and is strongly convicted in her belief that women should not allow the

issue of gender to impede their ability to progress; nor use it as an excuse. Success for Kathy is

two-fold and is based on making a difference:

> First, I am I contributing to the goals of the organization and second, am I using the
>
> talents that I have in ways that excite me? Find the things that you love and do more of
>
> them. Find a mentor wherever you go and keep moving yourself along. I have never
>
> been held back or passed up or treated with less credibility (that I know of) in my job
>
> because I am a woman. Sometimes the women who aren't getting where they want will
>
> use gender as an excuse or weapon. Although I realize that we need to embrace change,
>
> different schools of thought, religions and belief systems. Ultimately, I'm grateful for
>
> what I've accomplished and would advise other women to continue to push themselves to
>
> do what they love. It's okay to have both strengths and weaknesses and above all
>
> remember to be kind to yourself (Kathy, personal communication, October 27, 2009).

Belinda. Mother of one, in a committed relationship and the director of an entertainment

facility in a mid-sized, Midwestern town, Belinda has accomplished a lot in her 35 years. She

always considered herself to be a leader and finds fun in "blazing new trails". She credits her

success to having good mentors, a strong drive to do what others said she could not, and making

a difference in people's lives. She strongly advises women to have a plan and to evaluate it on

an annual basis. Furthermore, it is important to always have options and be in control of your

own career. While climbing the corporate ladder does not necessarily appeal to her based on title

alone, she does seek opportunities where she can "fulfill her leadership desires".

> I have always been in pursuit of things that were a challenge and a match for my
>
> leadership skills. It's important to be proactive and find people that can help you. Avoid
>
> assuming that anyone's looking out for you; it's not their responsibility. Be accountable,
>
> responsible, and own, own, own. It's okay to bring problems to your boss, but also bring
>
> solutions. As a woman, don't let your emotions cloud situations, as it can block good
>
> business progress. I think the great thing about being a woman is that we are intrinsically
>
> high on emotional intelligence. I'm really optimistic that some of the issues around
>
> equality and work/life balance will start to change in the next 20 years (Belinda, personal
>
> communication, October 29, 2009).

Themes Uncovered from the Interviews

All of the participants have a strong sense of motivation, drive, and internal desire to have

their efforts make a difference. The need to feel challenged was also prevalent in each of their

interviews. But it was not enough for these women to find success for themselves, it was also

critical that these women be responsible for helping other women throughout their career

journeys. From the analysis, six major themes emerged from the interviews exploring the career

journeys of female leaders at for-profit companies. These themes revolved around:

1. Self-motivation

2. The Desire to be Challenged

3. The Need to Make a Difference

4. Support and Mentorship

5. Gender Barriers

6. Advice for Other Women

Self-motivation. Each of the six, female participants was self-motivated. Whether it was

to put themselves through school at the undergraduate level, to earn a Masters degree (or for

some several Masters degrees) and for one her doctorate; take on a position that was traditionally

held by a male counter-part; or in the case of three of them, to move across country (or across the

oceans) simply to try a new experience. It appears that this trait was an underlying requirement

that helped each of them maneuver through any obstacle that stood in the way. It was this

characteristic that kept them engaged when choosing to move laterally or even downward at

times, taking a brief pause in their upward career climbs in order to gain additional knowledge

and round-out their abilities. Gina describes how her move to her present company initially as a

manger, down from a director at her former employer, was acceptable to her because she was

motivated in her desire to work at this particular company:

> People asked why I took a step back, that it didn't make any sense and several people
>
> who interviewed me were suspicious that I was trying to get away from something. I said
>
> that I believe in myself and that I can come here and work hard, prove myself and move
>
> up, but that I was ready for a change and I wanted to be in this culture – at this company.
>
> But the onus was really on me to prove myself and within a year I went to my boss and
>
> asked for a promotion. I was ready (Gina, personal communication, October 20, 2009).

Paula also described how she took charge of her career and created her own path by expressing

what she wanted. By drafting new job descriptions and taking the opportunity to talk to people

of influence, she carved out the position she has today:

> I was trying to get my foot in the door and I knew that if I wanted to move up I would
>
> have to find my replacement first. I was really passionate and really tried to look at as
>
> many opportunities as possible, even creating opportunities where I saw the need. I had a
>
> dream for what I'm doing today, but 14 or 15 years ago the industry just wasn't ready for
>
> it, so I took the time to develop my leadership and strategic skills. I got my MBA. I took
>
> jobs that would give me [different experiences], and well, I think it's important to have a
>
> plan and think about next steps and where you want to go (Paula, personal
>
> communication, October 16, 2009).

Many of the women alluded to wanting to move to a new position only after they felt they

had sufficiently learned something. Olivia describes the importance of using her education

and skill-set:

> I really like to use my skills. That's what I went to school for. I was motivated to climb
>
> the ladder and well if I'm here for the next ten or 15 years that might be okay for some,
>
> but I get bored easily. I even owned my own company for awhile, although I found that
>
> I'm more motivated when there is other people around me and we're working together on
>
> things, so I went back into corporate. I'm glad I owned my own business though; it was a
>
> good learning opportunity. I learned a lot about myself (Olivia, personal communication,
>
> October 19, 2009).

This theme appeared in each of the participants' interviews, although none of the women

specifically mentioned the term "self-motivation" until further probing questions clarified their

meaning and confirmed the characteristic. It is as though they did not realize the trait until they

were asked to reflect upon times where it became evident. As part of being self-motivated,

having some sort of plan was evident in all of their careers journeys, although the details of that

plan varied by participant. Table 3 comments the input from participants regarding having a plan

as part of a successful career path. Some had structured plans; others were much more loose and

uncertain when starting out. For these women it was more about having a vision and being open

to what presented itself as an opportunity to learn and grow.

Table 3
The Importance of a Plan

Participant	Quote
Paula	Have a written plan to get where you want to go and a timeline, and make sure you communicate that to your boss. Make sure that your boss gives you feedback and also has accountability in that plan.
Olivia	No, I didn't really have a set plan, but I knew that I wanted to manage people and that I wanted to be challenged by new things. I set myself up to be open to those experiences and wanted to make sure there were opportunities for me to grow.
Gina	I had a plan at the basic level. Most of the companies I've worked for require you to have a short and long-term plan, so that kept me on track; and although it took me longer to get where I'm at, I basically marched myself through it.
Andrea	I didn't have plan coming out of college because I didn't even know these types of careers existed. There was a lot of experimenting in the roles I had. I had a passion for learning and sought out opportunities where I could do that.
Kathy	I was the most directionless person. I had big visions of getting my Master's at Northwestern and my doctorate at Harvard, but I was undecided on what to go back for so I decided to make some money first. I never did end up going back and that's okay.
Belinda	Every year or so I do kind of the full-life assessment of, 'what do I want to accomplish in my life" and I think about it in categories: family, friends, my career, my health, and maybe finances. I also have some career milestones that I keep an eye on. It's not a spreadsheet or anything, but more of a mental checklist - am I happy sort of thing. I try to be thoughtful of the many dimensions of my life.

Most of these women did find and follow a set procedure to get where they are today. In

many cases, the roles that they are in now were not even on their radar and many did not

formally exist. Nonetheless, all of them pushed forward, sought out opportunities, and were

motivated by doing the things that they enjoyed and excelled at. Self-motivation was a

distinctive quality that each of these women possessed and it proved to be critical in their ability

to maneuver themselves into their current (and likely) future roles.

     The Desire to be Challenged. Closely aligned to self-motivation is the desire and in

many cases the need to take on a challenge. This was evident throughout all aspects of the

participants' careers and came through unanimously for all of the women. So strong was this

calling that many of the women found themselves creating new roles within their companies.

For others it was being comfortable moving into lateral positions at times so that they could add

a new skill-set to their knowledgebase. Some referenced that this drive was part of their inherent

personality and that they could never really envision themselves being happy with the status quo.

Paula noted:

> I am not a person that is content with the status quo. From my [various roles] through to
>
> my current role, I was always wanting to make it better. Continual process improvement
>
> is very important to me. Being able to overcome these things and what I've learned
>
> along the way has made me a better manager. I'm very proud of that (Paula, personal
>
> communication, October 16, 2009).

Paula also agreed with the notion about the need to take on challenging activities, but for her

those challenges were on a more personal level:

> I think the biggest challenge for me has been my passion, [which can be] a lot stronger
>
> than other people's, and my frustration that they don't want to do things as intently as I
>
> do. I've been impatient at times, although I think I'm better at recognizing that everyone
>
> has different levels of passion. I've had to learn how to adjust my style so that [as a
>
> team] we do what's best for the company (Paula, personal communication,

October 16, 2009).

Olivia mentioned the desire to take on challenges as part of her career development and journey:

> I think a lot of things going on lately with the economy forces people to look at their
> work differently. It's a new challenge for me at least, because I see there are so many
> things that we can improve on. I never really like for stuff to be static anyway, I want to
> constantly be improving (Olivia, personal communication, October 19, 2009).

Despite working at large corporations with high public visibility, a few of participants noted that they saw a great deal of opportunity and the need for change in their organizations. As part of that change they hope to be integral in the ongoing process of the team that works to help to identify the problem areas and be part of implementing the solutions. Said Gina:

> I'm happy here and I still have a lot to learn. I think there's a lot of work though. I
> personally can learn a lot about our business and about our products, but I also see
> opportunities for the company to be much more global. That's a challenge and a passion
> for me. I enjoy being part of the team, but not everyone is good at that. Someone
> once told me that there are different kinds of teams. There are swim teams and there are
> volleyball teams and there are soccer teams. And right now we're acting like a volleyball
> team, we're all trying to get the ball over the net, but we're crashing into each other. So
> I'm excited to take on the challenge of getting our team together and improving the end
> product, not just for the customers, but for ourselves too (Gina, personal communication,
> October 20, 2009).

Belinda echoed the context of team challenges and stated that it was the people, more than the work, which always posed the biggest challenges. When asked what the biggest challenges that she encountered were, she responded:

Ah, the people. It's always the people, it's never the work. In general, that's somewhat true whether it be personalities that you need to win over or need to learn how to work with, or simply you need to learn how people think and figure out how to best deal with them when they're in their grip, you know, when they're way stressed out. I guess what it really comes down to is knowing how to influence people (Belinda, personal communication, October 29, 2009).

When asked about making the switch from non-profit to the for-profit sector, Andrea posited that while the money was better, the desire for the change was primarily because she needed a new challenge. She stated:

I was very restless and ready to do something different. I had reached the highest amount of responsibility I could achieve in that role and I was actively exploring what else I could do. I was very open to new opportunities. I guess I'm one of those people that get bored easily and I need to be challenged. I need some intellectual stimulation (Andrea, personal communication, October 21, 2009).

From lateral moves to complete industry changes, the desire to push themselves and overcome a challenge resonated with all of the participants. Kathy discussed how she used her underlying creativity to challenge the executives in the financial industry:

There was only so much we were allowed to do, but my answer was always 'sure, let's try it!' During my time here, I've seen the market crash and all of a sudden things mean more and the money we were spending was being watched more closely. But even then, I push to try new things. It's part of who I am, even if I am constrained (Kathy, personal communication, October 27, 2009).

The old motto of 'this is how we've always done it' was rarely accepted or adhered to with the participants in this study. Their ability to overcome obstacles of any kind helped to feed the passion for these women, and was a major contributor to the continued development and successes throughout their career journeys. The desire to be challenged seemed to be part of their core identities.

The Need to Make a Difference. One might think that these women were ruthless in their career advancements. Following the findings from the literature, perhaps their intentions and actions were not congruent with the general population's perceptions of the female gender. After all, each of the six participants presented an inner drive to succeed, pushed themselves and their organizations towards change, and challenged the status quo. A predominant theme that became evident for all of the women was their inherent need to make a difference. Their work must matter in order for them to want to continue doing it.

Andrea described herself as being successful only if she was "making a difference":

Making a difference has to do with making a difference for other people. It goes back to proving to myself that I could be successful here, that I'm able to add value and make a difference to those around me (Andrea, personal communication, October 21, 2009).

Belinda echoed Andrea's words and expanded on her experiences managing people:

I want to have career that's fulfilling and rewarding and making a difference in people's lives. I just completed an employee review and her response to me was that she had grown so much in the past few months and that she loved her job. That's really rewarding. I love managing a team of people and helping them achieve their personal goals and seeing where their potential is. I've been really lucky in my career to be able to work on a variety of things that have enriched people's lives in different ways. It's a

good reflection exercise and helps me feel good about myself, although I think that's also

part of being leader (Belinda, personal communication, October 29, 2009).

Making a difference was a critical aspect to the success and perseverance of the six

participants' career journeys. It was a key element that drove them to dig deeper, work harder,

and motivate themselves to take on new challenges and step outside of their comfort zones. Gina

referenced the discussion with her manager at the time of her promotion, saying that:

It was because of my contribution to the company at a level above my current role that I

received my promotion. I remember him telling me that he appreciated the quality of my

work and the types of strategies that I was providing (Gina, personal communication,

October 20, 2009).

This trait was inherent in many of these women from the very start of their careers,

whether they fully realized it or not. Even before she got into a prestigious position, Kathy knew

that success for her meant making a difference. She noted:

I wasn't exactly sure what I wanted to do after college, but I knew I wanted to do some

thing that mattered. I wanted to make a difference and had a big passion around that

(Kathy, personal communication, October 27, 2009).

Kathy also spoke to the personal satisfaction she received when she felt she was adding

value to the bottom line or to the personal development of her peers:

I'm happy when I'm contributing to the goals of the organization. That whatever I'm

doing is helping to move the story the forward on both a macro level, but also on a

personal level. I still get that high when I see a person's light bulb go on or when I a

great thank you email or phone call (Kathy, personal communication, October 27, 2009).

For Paula, making a difference primarily revolved around helping mentor others and fostering their personal or professional growth. She argued that this quality should be a requirement for leadership-level managers and that it was an incremental aspect in moving herself along in her own career:

> I get satisfaction knowing that what I'm doing is making a difference. There's a fine line between motivating people to want to be better, and we need to recognize that that line is different for everyone. For some it's like running a triathlon, for others it might only be a 5K, but both are okay. It all goes back to your leadership style and knowing what works for different people. I try to be a good role model for the company (Paula, personal communication, October 16, 2009).

Support and Mentorship. All of the participants credited elements of their personal or professional growth, the knowledge of some of their preferred management style methods, and portions of their success to various mentors. Mentors varied from family members to bosses, but each of the participants stated that she could not have gotten to where she currently is without the input, guidance, and perspectives from those around her. Andrea speaks to one of her mentors who helped her become more aware of herself:

> You run into people who can help you see yourself; you know hold that mirror up and let you see things a little clearer. I have certainly been helped along the way by some key individuals who have taken an interest in my development and wanted to see me succeed. I think you need to have other people helping you because you can't do it all by yourself (Andrea, personal communication, October 21, 2009).

Belinda spoke to her experience loosing both of her parents early in her career and how the absence of parental guidance drove her closer to her other family members when in need of advice and input. When asked about how others impacted her career, Belinda replied:

My parents probably did a lot. Well actually their death. After they died, I looked to my

brother and sister for support and advice. They're both older than I am and at the time

had been through a lot of the things I was just starting to go through. I would really talk

with them about what I should do next or how to approach certain things. "Here's the

pickle I'm in now, how would you handle this? What should I do?" They would help me

think through it and help me decide what to do. They had the muscle memory to help

coach me through it (Belinda, personal communication, October 29, 2009).

Each of the participants spoke to the open and honest feedback they would get from their mentors and that a critical element of their mentors was that they be trustworthy. Find a person of influence was the advice from many as a key attribute when selecting a mentor. For Paula, (personal communication, October 29, 2009) it was someone who would give you time:

One of things I value most from a mentor relationship is that a person takes time for me.

Everyone is busy so it's important to set aside specific amounts of time to get the most

from it. I learned along the way that structured mentor relationships with more meetings

would have perhaps provided more consistent direction.

Despite the level of their position or where they were in their careers, each of the women advised that having another person to bounce ideas off of or to go to when unsure about how to handle a particular situation was invaluable. Table 4 reflects memorable advice and input that the participants received from their mentors.

Table 4
Advice from Mentors

Participant	Quote
Paula	I talked to one of my mentors about the international markets because he had done so much there. He gave me some great advice and tips and I follow up with him even today. Sometimes when you have so much stirring in your head, it helps to have that other person to sit down with and help you focus.
Olivia	He was this grump old man in my department with a very challenging personality and I don't know why, but I made it my mission to get under that guy's skin and sure enough we became friends and he took me under his wing. He worked on my account for 35 years. He knew in the ins and outs of things that others didn't.
Gina	I've never been in a formal mentor program, but there have been several people who have guided me along the way. My parents really gave me some great advice My dad was the one who said, 'you must get your Master's degree' and 'don't ever, ever let anybody push you around or walk on you. Never.' It was my mom who said, 'you must send thank-you notes'.
Andrea	Two of my mentors were former bosses. Some were overt, others covert. Find someone you can trust, who will give you real feedback and input, guidance and insight. My mentors never sugar-coated anything, and at times I may not have liked it, but I would always know that it was their honest feedback. Ultimately, the best advice I received was around the importance of relationships … that all of the work really happens through relationships. It's really more of art than a science and has been my mantra ever since.
Kathy	You know, the things you learn aren't always A-B-C direct reference types of things, but more life skills. There are a lot of people who have great things to contribute – if you can learn to listen.
Belinda	Besides my family, I was lucky and got to work for 'Betty'. She had been around for awhile and had seen many things before making her way to the top as an executive. She said to be careful of the snapshots you're making of yourself; especially with the executives. She also taught me that good leaders are those who remain positive and harness things in a positive direction. So in an organization that can sometimes feel obstacle-ridden, I've learned to not let my barriers be my downfall. I admired her – still do.

From brothers and sisters to bosses and consultants, support networks were critical and valued as a way to glean new insight or see alternate perspectives. It was evident that the participants will continue to cherish their mentor relationships as they continue through their careers. For some, their mentors may remain the same through the duration of their careers. For others, it might mean seeking new individuals who have experience in a particular field of interest or who may possess greater influence in an area that has yet to be identified. The opportunity to learn from another person offers greater rewards. Be open to the perspective of others, listen, and learn.

Gender Barriers.   For some of the participants the idea of gender inequality and the glass ceiling still has not completely been overcome. For other participants, the issue is one that some felt women tend to focus on as a reason or excuse as to why they have not reached their desired potential. Although the participants do not all completely agree on a single aspect of gender discrimination, they do all recognize that the issue exists and that women today face some obstacles because of it. Andrea (personal communication, October 21, 2009) explains her perspective on the issue:

> As I've talked to women at other companies, I think it's still very much a man's world. I think other cultures and countries are further along how women are considered in leadership. I also think there are some interesting things happening from a generational perspective. The baby boomers tried to break the glass ceiling, the Gen-Xers are wondering if they need to give up their careers to stay home with their kids, and the Millenials are wondering how to balance both worlds. There is no right or wrong answer, but we certainly have not won the equality battle yet. There's a lot of work to be done.

Gina commented on her experience with company cultures and having felt that many were very much like a "boy's club". She noted that she experienced this at her previous and existing employer, although did see opportunities for change:

> Yeah, it was a boy's club there and in many ways still is here. Although I was surprised to see a women get promoted to the head of manufacturing, which was unheard of. I couldn't quite figure it out exactly. I mean she was quite capable and was the right person for the job, but the general feeling there was that in order to be promoted, you had to be male (Gina, personal communication, October 20, 2009).

Later in her interview, Gina offered more of her perspective on the gender issue, specifically around the state of the current economy. During a conversation she had had with her insurance agent, they had discussed that more men were getting laid off from their jobs than women. Gina posited that perhaps women were putting in extra effort:

> In my experience women have had to work really hard. And I'm not saying that men don't, but women have had to worker harder to prove themselves. So maybe, that's paying off a little right now (Gina, personal communication, October 20, 2009).

Gina concluded by referencing a new sport that she recently undertook – learning how to ride a motorcycle, and that traditionally this was a sport that more men did. However, because she had been able to succeed at doing this, the men around her congratulated her more so because she was a woman. In this instance, she argued that being a woman presents a double-standard:

> There's a bit of a double-standard I suppose. I mean I think if I were a male, they would have been more subdued, with a pat on the back or something. But in a way it is a bigger deal because it's harder for us; there's just not as many female riders. So I guess we get

more credit for some things and less credit for others (Gina, personal communication,

October 20, 2009).

Quite the opposite of Andrea and Gina, Kathy who is from the baby-boomer generation,

had a completely different reaction when asked if she encountered gender issues in her career.

Almost angry at the thought of it, she conveyed a sense of disdain regarding the topic:

No, I have an issue with that. I want to be fair as I know it's been substantiated that

women make X on the dollar compared to men and I get all of that, but I can count on

less than one hand the number of times I have been discriminated against. That said there

are guys here who are male chauvinists, but it's who there are, it's how they're built;

they're close-minded people and I don't expect any more from them. But it's never

occurred to me to use that as a complaint. If I've been passed up, it's because I'm not

credible enough or I don't have the expertise. Or it's perhaps because I've been too

impassionate and emotional and I haven't shown that I'm here with a business solution.

If I have [issues], those are *my* [issues], not female [issues] (Kathy, personal

communication, October 27, 2009).

Olivia and Belinda, two of the younger participants stated that while they know that gender

inequalities have existed and perhaps still do, they have not personally felt the effects of it in

their careers. Said Olivia (personal communication, October 19, 2009):

I don't feel we really face that glass ceiling anymore. And I'm glad we don't live in a

time when we did. I feel like we can do anything. So that's good. I would recommend,

tell other women that they shouldn't settle for 'good enough', if what you want is 'great',

but as women, we don't have to settle anymore. If someone says you can't do it, that's

bull – you can.

Likewise, Belinda offered the following regarding her thoughts for the change for younger

women in business going forward:

> I think there are so many things that women bring to the table that as a gender we should
>
> feel really good about. I think that as our generation starts to take the leadership reins,
>
> some of the weird work/life balance issues like working from home will sort will work
>
> themselves out and women will be able to have more of an impact on it. I guess it's my
>
> hope at least. As long as we can rein in some of those outlying issues, we have what it
>
> takes to move things forward. Ultimately, there would be more balance and perhaps we
>
> can remove some of the stereotypes (Belinda, personal communication,
>
> October 29, 2009).

It was a pleasant surprise to see women propelling themselves forward for the good of their

own gender, but also for the general benefit of the business world. Hopefully, as women

continue onward and upward in their careers, some of the obstacles that they have encountered

will not be as common. The generational changes seem to be quickly affecting the behaviors of

those in the work force and might offer additional insight and new perspectives all together

different than gender alone.

Advice for Other Women. The final theme that emerged from the research was the

notion that women not only want their work to make a difference – for themselves as well as to

their employers and industry overall; but as a gender, women seem to want to offer advice to

other women. They seem highly interested in the vested outcome of other women. Throughout

the research, participants either of their own accord or upon being asked, offered advice for other

women. This advice took a divergent path. The first was regarding encouragement and

suggestions for what to do. The other direction focused on what to avoid; what not to do. In

these cases, almost all of the suggestions of what to avoid revolved around women maintaining

control of their emotions.

Table 5 focuses on the suggestions for what not to do; in the participants' words, the types

of things that women should avoid as they evolve and progress in their careers.

Table 5
Suggestions for What Not To Do

Participant	Quote
Olivia	▪ Don't pull out the "tears" card, it reduces your credibility. I guess I wish I would have been tougher at times or less hard on myself where I wouldn't have gotten to tears to begin with. ▪ Women tend to put so much pressure on themselves … you know we have to be the perfect mother, the perfect worker, the perfect wife and well … we can only do what we can do.
Paula	▪ Lead with facts, not emotion. ▪ Don't get defensive if challenged. ▪ Keep the serenity prayer in mind and focus on the things you can control and worry less about what you can't. ▪ Avoid being too aggressive, especially with other women. Often that behavior just doesn't resonate with other women, they don't respond to that. ▪ Avoid getting sucked into gossip and negative energy. ▪ Don't try to change people's core personalities.
Andrea	▪ DO NOT compromise your integrity, because you can't get it back once you give it away. I could never live with myself if I did that. Even if it meant I would be President or CEO, if I had to compromise my integrity, I wouldn't want it and I'd be miserable the whole time.
Belinda	▪ Avoid assuming that anyone's looking out for you and don't let things happen to you. ▪ Avoid letting emotion cloud situations. ▪ Avoid dwelling or stewing or getting wrapped up in things from that perspective. Women start loosing people that way; women start to loose other women and we need to be cognizant of that.
Gina	▪ Some of the most difficult people I've dealt with in business are other women. Bullying happens all the time and there's a feeling that there can only be so many women. Don't let that happen. ▪ Don't make issues personal and don't burn bridges.
Kathy	▪ Avoid making your gender an excuse for what you aren't able to yet achieve. Don't make it a weapon or an excuse.

All six participants had an equal amount of advice regarding the actions of what women should do. All expressed a desire to share their learnings, successes, and achievements with other women so that they too could benefit from the good things that had happened to them. Opportunity seemed to ring loud for them as well as to encourage other women to be kind to themselves and other women. It appeared to be an expressed obligation to the female gender to act in good faith in order to continue the foundation and growth for other women following behind. Table 6 notates the suggestions for actions other women should take, to ensure that as individuals and on a greater scale the female gender is able to continue to excel and advance in whatever aspects they choose.

Table 6
Suggestions for the Advancement of Other Women

Participant	Quote
Kathy	- Embrace change and be more inclusive of people's perspectives. - Use your talents. You can absolutely do what you're good at. - It's okay to take lateral moves. I think we've been sold a bill of goods to think we have to climb a ladder. Instead, we just have to fill out.
Andrea	- Be true to yourself and know who you are. - Be really intentional in your choices. I don't think it's impossible to separate work and life; rather find a way to integrate them. - You don't get something without giving something up. There's 100% out there, not 101 so know and manage your own expectations. Be really clear about what you're willing to accept and what you're not willing to sacrifice. - We as women owe each other. We have an obligation to help each other.
Belinda	- To the best of your ability, be on good terms with your boss. Always bring your boss solutions. However, always your resume in order, watch the market and be in touch with what's going on. When there are great opportunities, interview for them and then ask your boss to talk through the options. Make sure you know how valuable you are. - I think women need to stick together. We need to support each other and dust each other off when we get emotional at times. I think women need to reach out and in particular to those who are just coming up in their careers. - Reflect, have a sense of self-awareness and be responsible for yourself. Join a professional organization or find a mentor in someone you trust.

Paula	- Bring others along with you and build others up along the way because people notice. Be aware of what influences others. - Have faith. Having faith in God has helped me in my career, it's helped me be more patient and also to try and understand people better. - Find the inspiration of the women you meet and know that most days are good – because we make them good, we have to.
Gina	- Really try to get along with people, but when they cross the line know how to stand up for yourself. - Treat everyone with respect and learn how to work with different people and how to get things done. - Believe in yourself; take care of yourself. This starts with knowing what you want, knowing what you don't want, and expressing that to people in a constructive manner.
Olivia	- Always push yourself. You can do anything you set your mind to, so have faith in yourself. And if you fail, just try again. - You only live life once so make sure you do as much as you can. Have no regrets and do the things that make you happy. - Recognize your strengths and weaknesses; be aware of them.

In sum, these six women are encouraging in their personal fulfillment, their roles as managers of others, and in their diligence to make a difference. They have experienced different upbringings and have different view points on gender inequality; yet all agree about the greater possibilities for what the future holds for women. All stressed the need to push themselves to try new experiences and seek out opportunities that bring forth new challenges. Each spoke about bringing other women into the fold and working together to continue to pave a wider path for younger women coming into their own. Their career journeys are ones of plans, for some they are loose, for others they are full of timelines and specific details. All of the participants had an intuitive sense of self. They found possibilities, not limitations, and are optimistic for what is yet to come.

Conclusion

This purpose of this case study sought to explore the career journeys of female leaders at for-profit companies with a focus on better understanding the primary factors that have guided these female leaders to where they are today as successful managers, directors, and vice presidents. During face to face interviews, this researcher was able to elicit common themes from their personal stories including: a strong sense of self-motivation, the desire to be challenged and closely tied to that ensure that their efforts are making a difference, the shared idea of needing support from others around them, facing gender barriers, and setting other women up for success via kindred advice and suggestions.

This study also gained insight to these women's struggles that they faced throughout the ebbs and flows of their careers which surfaced in their explanations of needing to juggle families with their career aspirations; discussion of their differing perspectives on gender barriers including how to best address those issues when encountering them, and even the conflicts encountered when having to compete with other women. Each woman shared her perspective of how she was able to get where she is today, and no two career paths were alike. Despite their six distinctive journeys, all of them found success in where they are in their careers and in whom they are as women.

The themes found in this study closely aligned with those noted from the literature review. Being committed to motivating oneself was evident. Having keen communal leadership characteristics go hand in hand with the findings of the participant's desire to take into account the working styles and opinions of their teams, as well as other people's cultural values and working styles. The topic of the glass ceiling was abundant in the literature and despite the

somewhat varying perspectives that the participants had on the issue, each spoke to the topic and fully realized the affect it has had on working women.

In regard to gender role congruency, the study participants did not address this term directly; however, the context was addressed during their interviews and they spoke to having experienced this as some point throughout their career journeys. Gina mentioned the double-standards on expectations between the genders, and Olivia brought up the pressures women often feel about having to be the perfect mother, wife, and career women. Finally, there appeared to be a similar leadership style that the study participants shared, one that required them to lead with positive vision and encompassed the idea of leading through influence. Yoder's (2001) model proposes this by stating that effective leadership should, "emphasize influence, not power, and empowerment (power to) of self and others" (p. 817).

An area of difference that came up during some of the participant interviews that the literature review did not directly reference was the generational differences and progress that women are beginning to notice. There seems to be less societal assumptions for what women should be as they develop and in what they engage themselves in, which might begin to inform different perspectives or expectations for what female leaders should be. This study found female leaders to be resilient, motivated, and caring towards one another. They want to leave their mark on the world, but more importantly on the lives that they touch along the way.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study is that it focuses on the career journeys of only six female leaders and further, an even more narrow scope of females working at for-profit companies. Six women alone are not able to fully represent the career experiences, emotional struggles, or even successes of all female leaders. Despite the valuable information collected and

learned during the course of the study, this researcher is aware that this sample size of the population is extremely small. Further, the findings offer only a sample of what others may or may not find valuable, or context with which one may be able to resonate with.

Regardless of exposure to other states and countries throughout various points of their lives, the individuals selected for participation were at the time of the study, all living in the Midwest region of the United States. Lastly, the leadership criteria for selecting the participants for this study are subjective in nature. Position title and number of direct reports does not constitute sole criteria for definition of a leader.

Implications for Future Research

There is a fair amount of research on the differences of gender and leadership, yet change appears to be inevitable and evolving. Expectations of leaders themselves (male or female) seem to constantly be reassessed and evaluated for maximum impact. Add to this additional generations of women and cross-cultural employment opportunities, and there would appear to be a multitude of additional insights and perspectives. Participants from this study began to touch on these very concepts and seemed eager to see what lies ahead for young, female leaders-to-be. Additional research in this area would prove interesting and valuable. A similar study conducted in different parts of the United States and in other countries might offer alternate experiences and additional insight on career journeys of female leaders; as would perhaps a comparative view of female leaders at non-profit companies.

In sum, a similar future study following the career journeys of female leaders might find interesting results to add to the findings from this study. Perhaps the next ten to fifteen years may prove that women are encountering similar struggles as they continue on their journeys. Or perhaps women will have been able to surmount some of the seemingly more traditional barriers

and will have shown to be more prevalent in leadership positions at for-profit companies. They

may come to the table with different approaches to leadership as a whole. Future research

exploring similar elements could provide additional insight and value to others.

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Appendix A: Consent Form

MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY
AGREEMENT OF CONSENT FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

A Case Study Exploring the Career Journeys of Female Leaders at For-Profit Companies
Laura (Denissen) Scherr
College of Professional Studies – Marquette University

You have been invited to participate in this research study. Before you agree to participate, it is important that you read and understand the following information. Participation is completely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether or not to participate.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this research study will be to explore the career journeys of six to eight female leaders at for-profit companies. The focus of this study will be to determine the primary factors that have guided these female leaders through their career journeys (i.e., mentor connections, motivations, management styles, etc.) supported by their personal stories, strategies for success and advice for other women on similar paths. At this stage in the research, female leaders are defined as women serving in Management level positions at for-profit companies with at least one direct report. The results from this study will be presented to other professionals and published. You will be one of approximately six to eight participants in this research study.

PROCEDURES: If you agree to be a participant in this research study, you will participate in an interview that will be audio taped to ensure accuracy. The audio recorder will be stored in a locked drawer in the researcher's home. The interview will later be transcribed and the transcription will be destroyed three years after the completion of the study. For confidentiality purposes, your name will not be recorded.

DURATION: Your participation will consist of one 45-60 minute interview conducted in a location of your choice. The interview will be conducted at a time that is convenient for your schedule.

RISKS: The risks associated with participation in this study are no greater than would be encountered in everyday life discussing your career. If you are uncomfortable answering any of the interview questions you may skip those questions.

BENEFITS: The benefits associated with participation in this study will help to provide a deeper understanding and unique perspectives on the personal experiences and journeys of women in leadership positions. Additionally, findings will provide insight for other women

hoping to achieve leadership level roles at for-profit companies. There are no direct benefits for participating in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY: All information you reveal in this study will be kept confidential. All of your data will be assigned pseudonyms rather than using your real name, including any information that could identify you as an individual. When the results of the study are published, you will not be identified by name. The data will be destroyed by shredding paper documents and deleting electronic files three years after the completion of the study. Audio recordings will be transcribed and destroyed three years after completion of project. Transcription will be kept on a password protected computer and destroyed after three years beyond the completion of the study. Your research records may be inspected by the Marquette University Institutional Review Board or its designees, and (as allowable by law) state and federal agencies.

Voluntary Nature of Participation: Participating in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. At anytime before, during or after the interview, you may request to withdraw from the research study. After February 3, 2010 the research study will be submitted and you will not be able to withdraw after that point. If you withdraw prior to February 3, 2010, all audio tapes and transcriptions will be immediately destroyed.

Contact Information: If I have any questions about this research project, you can contact Laura (Denissen) Scherr at 414-763-1545 or 414-477-6207 (cell) or laura.scherr@marquette.edu. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you can contact Marquette University's Office of Research Compliance at (414) 288-7570.

I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO READ THIS CONSENT FORM, ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT AND AM PREPARED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT.

_____ _____

      Participant's Signature   Date

_____

      Participant's Name

_____ _____

      Researcher's Signature   Date

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY
INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

A Case Study Exploring the Career Journeys of Female Leaders at For-Profit Companies
Laura (Denissen) Scherr
College of Professional Studies – Marquette University

1. How do you define success for yourself?
    a. Intrinsic (self)?
    b. Company/corporate structure?

2. Please describe your current role within your organization.
    a. How long have you been at the company?
    b. How long have you been in your current role?
    c. How many roles/positions have you had at this company?
    d. How many other positions have you had outside of this company?

3. What more do you hope/want to accomplish in your current role?
    a. How long do you think it will take you to achieve this? Why?

4. Did you have a plan to get where you are now?
    a. If yes, tell me a little about that plan? Describe the steps.
    b. If no, what events took place that contributed to you being where you are today?

5. In what ways did others impact your career journey?
    a. Did you have a mentor?
        i. If yes, describe your relationship with him or her?
            1. What was the best advice you received from him or her?
            2. What do you most value from that relationship? Why?
        ii. If no, do you feel that having a mentor would have allowed you to achieve more? Why?

6. Describe your successes along the way.
    a. Successes: What are you most proud of?

7. Describe your challenges along the way.
   a. How did you overcome these challenges?

8. Where do you see yourself next?
   a. What steps will you take to get there?

9. If you could go back, what would you change or do differently? Why?

10. What advice do you have for women looking to advance their careers?
    a. Recommendations
    b. Avoidances

11. Are there any additional thoughts you would like to share regarding your career experiences/journey?

   *Additional follow up questions may be necessary for clarification and inclusiveness.