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Success Factors of Women in Leadership Roles and Breaking Through the Glass Ceiling:
A Phenomenological Qualitative Study

by
Heidi S. Richards

An Applied Dissertation Submitted to the
Abraham S. Fischler College of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Nova Southeastern University
2017

Approval Page

This applied dissertation was submitted by Heidi Richards under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

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Statement of Original Work

I declare the following:

I have read the Code of Student Conduct and Academic Responsibility as described in the *Student Handbook* of Nova Southeastern University. This applied dissertation represents my original work, except where I have acknowledged the ideas, words, or material of other authors.

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Heidi S. Richards

Name

May 15, 2017

Date

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Dedicated to my Mom, Rosaline Murray, Grandma Amy, Uncle Allan, Aunty Olive and Denise.

Abstract

The Success Factors of Women in Leadership Roles and Breaking Through the Glass Ceiling: A Phenomenological Qualitative Study. Heidi Richards, 2017: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education. Keywords: glass ceiling, women, leadership, mentorship, careers, leadership barriers, organizational culture

While literature that which focuses on the barriers that women encounter to grow in their careers exists, there seems to be a lack of research focusing on the success factors that positively impact women in leadership roles and their ability to break through the glass ceiling. The information provided in this phenomenological qualitative study is twofold. This study explored the experiences of female leaders to assist with empowering and guiding women who want to grow in their careers, as well as to allow women already in leadership roles to recognize the challenges they may encounter, along with how they can remain successful in their careers while balancing their professional and personal lives.

The researcher completed a comprehensive analysis of the factors that focused on women in leadership roles and their ability to break through the glass ceiling to land successful leadership roles in the private sector. Findings of this study revealed that the following were the most significant components that best described the factors that may help women be successful while climbing the career ladder: (a) training, (b) mentoring, (c) networking, (d) ability to balance careers in leadership and their personal life, (e) organizational policies and practices that assist women, (f) demonstrating leadership capacity, and (g) ability to remember one's self-worth.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

According to Skard (2014) women in leadership roles are truly underrepresented. Not only is there still the perception of a glass ceiling, but women in leadership roles have a difficult time maintaining their positions due to several barriers which include balancing their careers and their personal lives, the inability to navigate role changes, and also the negative effects of gender bias (Pew Research, 2015a). Carli noted that women in leadership roles struggle to learn how to develop effectiveness, build relationships with mentors and continuously network, balance work and family, successfully delegate, deal with sexism and discrimination, and grow into a prosperous transformational leader that propels others within their organization (2010). The statistics remain low for women who have successfully navigated through the trenches to break through the glass ceiling only to encounter further challenges once they take a seat at the leadership table and successfully manage a leadership career while balancing home life. Current CEO's, Presidents and Executive VP's such as Kathleen Tierney and Ruth Mahoney suggested that in order to be successful, women should always follow these rules (Katen, *n.d.*):

1. Work alongside your employees and your management team while being a good decision-maker.
2. Research trends and set goals.
3. Stand up for yourself without being overly aggressive.
4. Cultivate relationships with people you respect and admire.

Dawson and Kleiner (1992) realized that women in leadership roles all share common traits that include believing in themselves, not bending to the pressures of society and the norms of organizational cultures, refusing to let the discrimination of others stunt their growth and putting their careers first. In order to create a healthier and more vibrant organizational culture, it

is important that women in leadership roles decipher the strategies on how to excel in their careers and how to maintain a balance in leadership roles.

Using a qualitative methodology, the researcher explored (a) women in leadership roles and their perspectives on breaking the glass ceiling; (b) their experiences and expectations as leaders in their organizations; and (c) how to be successful as a woman in a leadership position.

The Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed in this research study focused on how women can break through the glass ceiling and remain successful in their leadership roles. Women have a difficult time balancing their work and personal lives after being promoted into leadership roles. It is more difficult for women to break through the glass ceiling than men, regardless of education level, knowledge of managing an organization and skill sets. Yet, according to consultants, Zenger Folkman, studies have been done to prove that women work better in a team setting and also have better leadership skills than men (Wirthman, 2014). Gender bias also plays a large role regarding women climbing the career ladder into leadership roles. Lindborg stated this should no longer be ignored (2014) as women and men should have equal opportunities. Dow suggested that establishing a mentoring/development program would allow women to maneuver through the glass ceiling in an effective way, providing the support from higher level executives who have maneuvered through the glass ceiling and barriers, while balancing work/life challenges (2014).

The number of women in leadership roles has increased, but men still hold the most leadership roles, both in the public and private sectors (Wirthman, 2014). Fewer women in the public sector are being promoted and once they are promoted, they lack the necessary support needed to be successful in their roles. Even more fascinating stated Watson (2015) is the unequal wage gap between men and women. Per the American Association of University Women

(AAUW), an organization that focuses on advancing equity for women and girls through advocacy, education, philanthropy, and research, in 2015, women in the United States typically were paid just 80 percent of what men were paid, a pay gap of 20 percent (2017).

Studies have also shown that men are chosen over women to lead non-profit organizations which have larger budgets. Dawson and Kleiner's (1992) research proved that women are committed to being successful in both their careers and at home but find it difficult to juggle both. At times they find that they have to choose one over the other, which is a difficult task when majority of women fight to break through the glass ceiling to get into a leadership role. Per the study, many organizations have stated that they have improved upon policies and procedures to benefit women in leadership roles along with changing the normal culture that has plagued the boardroom for many years, yet the amount of women in leadership roles still remain low. Per Reitman (2014), organizations are losing women in upper management positions at a high percentage. The author also stated that the support system simply does not exist for women and organizations do not realize how valuable women are to them. Per Adams (2014), the companies that perform best financially have the highest numbers of women in leadership roles at their helm, per a 2014 study and survey by the Pittsburgh-based human resources consulting firm Development Dimensions International, Inc. (DDI) together with the nonprofit business research group The Conference Board.

Phenomenon of Interest. Women in leadership roles hold a unique place in society. They have navigated through the glass ceiling to hold positions but the amount of women who hold C-Suite senior management and leadership positions are still at a low percentage rate. They are ideal role models for staff members who want to advance in their careers but are having a difficult time not only advancing to a higher level but also maintaining the job once they fill the

seat. Women in leadership roles need to be able to define what barriers are in place that most men cannot understand in an organizational setting, evaluate the challenges they now have as leaders and determine how they can successfully maneuver through the challenges without losing their seat at the table. The amount of women in leadership roles are growing distinctly, but the numbers can definitely be improved upon. Alternatively, the women in C-Suite roles who have successfully broken through the glass ceiling, are having issues remaining successful once they have reached a certain level in an organization. Several barriers keep women stuck in certain positions yet Man, Skerlavaj, and Dimovski (2009) stated that there are certain strategies that organizations can incorporate in their culture to ensure the glass ceiling remains broken and which would also would assist women to maneuver through any barriers they may encounter as they grow in an organization.

According to Man, Skerlavaj, and Dimovski (2009), women in leadership roles do not have enough managerial support, nor networking capabilities, mentoring opportunities and family support for a stable work-life balance (p.1). Organizational cultures should include work-life balance alternatives and mentoring programs as these have been referenced as key tools for advancing women's careers. Hodes (2016) conducted research on whether mentoring is beneficial for women in leadership roles and it proved that it is indeed vital as it allows for leadership opportunities for women who want to climb the career ladder. In a 2006 research done by the firm Catalyst, only 16 percent of women were in leadership roles in Fortune 500 companies and there were only 10 female CEOs nationwide (Tahmincioglu, 2006). The number has increased ten years later with currently 21 companies with women in C-Suite roles as CEO's. Unfortunately the numbers are going down compared to last year when 24 women lead Fortune 500 companies in 2014 and 2015 (Zarya, 2016). A lack of ongoing, consistent mentorship

programs for women to remain successful in their leadership roles at companies could be to blame along with a deficiency in a work-life balance. Eikhof, Warhurst and Haunschild (2007) stated that there were not many family friendly policies in the workplace that would benefit women, especially in a work culture that expects management to work long hours and at times weekends, if necessary.

The findings of this research provided responses to the following six research questions: What are the experiences of women in leadership roles? How do women in leadership roles describe their experiences regarding the glass ceiling? What are successful factors for women in leadership roles? How do women in leadership roles successfully balance challenges? How do these challenges relate to the culture of an organization? How does the culture of an organization relate to career advancement?

The researcher interviewed women who hold leadership roles in different types of organizations. For the purposes of this study, how to remain successful while leading an organization or department was limited to the perceptions and understanding of the three females who hold roles as a President, Director and Senior Manager. According to Carli (2010), women in leadership roles can “benefit by learning from others in leadership positions, managing their time, maintaining relationships at home and work, addressing any conflicts that may take place due to balancing career and family and developing effective methods of leading and wielding influence” (p.697).

Background and justification. Wilson (2014) indicated that women have not made many advances regarding breaking the glass ceiling. While there are many factors that cause this including gender bias and sex typing, Dow believed that women could benefit from internal policy changes and development programs to assist with advancing their careers (2014).

Although research has also shown that women lack the confidence and other skills to advance, mentoring from other women in leadership roles would guide them towards advancing into senior leadership roles. Crampton and Mishra argued that organizations should establish development and mentoring programs that hone in on certain skills that employees display which could guide them towards future leadership roles (1999). Crampton and Mishra also suggested that women should take part in a mentoring program if any are available, which would allow them to excel in their careers.

Deficiencies in the evidence. The literature revealed that women are not being supported in their roles as they climb the career ladder. Lindborg stated that women have to deal with animosity from coworkers and they face a lot of obstacles that deter them from pursuing a career in politics or climbing the ladder to executive status, and at times this may be from other women (2014). Karelaia & Guillén found that many women are not confident as leaders, often times questioning their own leadership abilities, which in turn affects their staff's perceptions of them (2014). This could be the effects of trying to balance their personal and work life responsibilities and doing so ineffectively.

Audience. This qualitative study served as a guide to assist women in leadership roles on how to break through the glass ceiling and how to remain successfully in their roles as leaders. The audience of this research study is tailored towards women who want to climb the career ladder, are currently in lower to middle management and are aiming to be leaders in their organizations. These women will learn how to maneuver in their career as they break the glass ceiling, build certain skill sets and learn how to effectively balance work/life. The women that were interviewed shared their experiences and perceptions about being a leader in a leadership role and how they effectively handle the issues that they encounter while in those roles.

They also expressed the benefits of how to successfully lead others while building a successful organization and career while balancing work-life responsibilities. According to Hansen (2009), it is important that women assist other women on how to break through the barriers that still exist in today's society regarding getting into leadership roles. Organizations can also benefit by improving upon current policies and procedures that will assist women who wish to lead in their organizations.

Definitions of Terms

Border Theory. Theory focused on the multifarious organizational and individual factors tied into balancing work-life balance (WLB) (Karassvidou & Glaveli, 2015).

Brick Wall. The term used to define the thicker glass ceiling non-Caucasian women in leadership encounter due to non-traditional lifestyles (Key, Popkin, Munchus, Wech, Hill, & Tanner 2012).

Cultural Dimensions. In this study, cultural dimensions is defined by researcher Geert Hofstede as an organizations creation of a cultural system, deeply embedded in its employee's mentality and thought processes (Saseanu, Toma, & Marinescu, 2014).

C-Suite. In this study, referred to a corporation's most important senior executives (Harvard Business Review, 2017).

Feminism. The belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities (Merriam Webster Dictionary, 2016).

Glass Ceiling. In this study the glass ceiling is described as an invisible barrier that women encounter which disallows them from climbing the career ladder into leadership roles (Elacqua, Beehr, Hansen, & Webster, 2009).

Glass Cliff. The glass cliff depicts an invisible edge of a mountain where women are teetering and trying to stay steady while being blamed for issues in an organization that others have caused prior to her appointment (Ryan & Haslam, 2006).

L4 Strategy. A series of basic organizational styles created by Stanley Truskie in 2002 which focus on the culture of an organization (Tweed, 2003).

O Level. The O level is defined in this study as a level of management. These include CEO, CFO, CIO, CTO in the corporate world, and comparable levels in the public sector, academia and political office (Cheung & Halpern, 2010).

Organizational Balance. Creating an effective balance of both female and male leadership styles to ensure success (Anonymous, 2012).

Success Factors. Success factors is defined as the necessary skills needed to advance in one's career (Quast, 2012).

Work Family Balance. Work family balance is defined as the ability to balance between work/ and family life (Anonymous, 1999).

Work Life Balance. Work/Life balance is defined as the ability to balance between work/home lives (Mannes, 2015).

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to explore the experiences of women who have achieved success in their careers as leaders. Watson determined that women continue to have challenges progressively climbing the career ladder (2015). While politically women are gaining support, the Pew Research states that public and private sector organizations still lack women in leadership roles (2015b). The research focused on how women in leadership roles were able to break the glass ceiling and what factors assisted them in successfully maintaining a career in leadership while balancing work-life responsibilities.

Women have had a difficult time climbing the career ladder. Once they break through the glass ceiling, they must also find ways to navigate through the other barriers they encounter, which include gender bias, work-life balance, gaining additional skills to be successful, and maintaining the confidence to lead. The Pew Research Center confirmed that while women are

considered equal, many barriers still exist that cause them to be unsuccessful in leadership roles (2015a). This study focused on the barriers that women in leadership roles encounter and how they successfully maneuver through them.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The glass ceiling, which depicts a figurative barrier, has prevented women from excelling in their careers for many years. Along with the inability to sustain a work/life balance, lack of opportunities to gain training and development skills and little to no mentoring for women who wish to climb the career ladder, women are unable to grow into leadership positions and maintain success while in their new roles. Lindborg postulated that it is imperative that women have positive reinforcement to assist them in succeeding in their roles as leaders (2014). Other women in leadership roles can assist in guiding women in lower managerial positions by offering mentoring advice and suggesting that organizations offer development and training workshops to assist women to build the necessary skills in order to become effective leaders within their organizations.

Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical framework used in this study is Border Theory. Components of leadership were used to theorize that effective leadership was contingent on the ability to balance work and life stressors successfully. Clark (2000) defined Border Theory as the ability to balance work and family life by proactively dealing with stressors that may affect an employee's performance. The author states that the theory is based solely on being human than emotional. Women are known for being transformational leaders which is linked quite often with leading and reacting with feelings. The author negated this by concentrating on how women manage work and family life while attempting to balance both at the same time. Weber and Cissna-Health (2015) believed this is manageable, if the work is meaningful and there is a passion for it.

Huang stated that the Role Theory is centered on how individuals are able to balance different roles at both work and home (2010). The authors confirmed that women in leadership

roles tend to find it difficult to separate work and home priorities. Per Karassvidou and Glaveli (2015), work and family balance (WFB) is a complex subject that is centered on an organizations culture along with human resources involvement in modernizing policies and common practices. The study done by the authors, focused on leaders based in Greece and their how they balanced work and family. The results determined that while employees do want to establish a work and family balance, it is essentially up to the organizations management and human resources leaders to establish an organizational philosophy that would incorporate work values and family values and that they should also be prepared to consider that employees all have different circumstances and interpretations of what they consider to be a work and family balance (2015). Per Höpfl and Matlal (2007), since the 1990's, groups and foundations have called for new books and training programs that focus on more modern leadership styles and theories that incorporate a WFB. Since then, small shifts have been made to redefine leadership and bring together a balance of both male and female skill sets. Border Theory differed from the Role Theory whereas BT focuses on the connections between work and family life stressors and how different roles impact stress levels.

Another theory that is based on how women can break through the glass ceiling and also continually advance in their career, is grounded in the Think Manager, Think Male theory (1996). This theory was originally developed by Schein in 1973 and was primarily used to study how individuals believed that the best type of manager was one who displayed male characteristics – assertiveness, ego, and dominance (Schein, Mueller, Lituchy, & Liu, 1996). The theory of Think Manager-Think Male indicated that worldwide, sex typing is prevalent in the workplace. Although Schein's study of this theory took place in 1973, when female managers included only 5 percent of the workforce, the amount of women who hold leadership positions

forty years later is only at 51 percent, per the Bureau of Labor and Statistics (Laud & Johnson, 2013). Schein's concerns were based on the perception that women are not considered capable of handling management positions due to their emotions and behavior instead of their skillsets, which in turn leads to gender inequality. Schein et al. suggested that many male managers believed in the Think Manager-Think Male theory, therefore human resources and Senior Management should initiate the changes in policies and procedures in the workplace regarding training and mentoring. This in turn would assist in dispelling the Think Manager-Think Male theory.

Characteristics of a Leader

While there are several characteristics or skill sets leaders exude, Berkery, Morley and Tiernan (2013) discussed how gender plays a significant role in the workplace and whether the Think Manager-Think Male theory still existed. The authors delved into the Lord and Maher's Leadership theory on whether an increase in female managers would reduce the thought processes regarding the Think Manager-Think Male theory. Most female managers believed that in order to be successful, they must exude male characteristics (Berkery et al., 2013). The authors stated that male characteristics were more associated with leadership roles. In testing Lord and Maher's theory, the authors found that an increase in female managers did not dispel the Think Manager-Think Male theory. Most participants that worked for both male and female managers were more inclined to treat their superiors as an individual, not labeling them regarding their gender. Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell and Ristikari (2011) argued that although recent studies were already done confirming that men were perceived as better managers, certain characteristics aligned with female managers in the past were beginning to change. Males still aligned managerial roles with men while females believed both men and women can hold

managerial positions. The authors believed that the cultures of many organizations are changing, but it is important to utilize the skills that women can bring to their company by ensuring more women were promoted into leadership roles. Koenig et al. (2011) also delved into the portrayal of females as managers, using the Think Manager-Think Male role theory. They discussed the challenges women faced as leaders. The authors described that women were viewed as having certain characteristics such as compassion and warmth but leaders are seen as being more forceful and competitive. This type of stereotyping makes it more difficult for women to break through the glass ceiling and attain more leadership positions. The authors also determined that men were more seen as being leaders and holding those type of positions than women were. The authors also argued that the existence of more women in leadership roles (government, politics, and the boardroom), would change the perception that women cannot be leaders. The authors stated that men have less conflicts and barriers facing them in leadership roles compared to women, but they do not believe that changes in perception would occur anytime soon.

Nixdorff and Rosen both agreed that leadership styles differed between men and women. Men take on a formal command and control style of management while women tend to be more informal and more times than none, involved others in tough decisions they needed to make (2010). Women believed in cultivating relationships and focused on loyalty in the workplace, while men focused on business functions (using the mantra it's not personal, it is business). The authors agreed that women also found it difficult to delegate responsibility to others, no matter how minor the task. This all stemmed from women in managerial roles inclining to build personal relationships with their employees while men are more prone to lead and build relationships based on a business model. Elkhoully and El Sedfy (2014) conducted a study in Egypt that focused on the glass ceiling effects of women in public organizations. They

determined that a women's style of leadership is considered participative while men are more inclined to an autocratic style of leadership. Women values and men values also differ, per the authors. Women are cooperative, accepting, intuitive and receptive while men lean more towards being competitive, perceptive, controlling and assertive. The authors confirmed that women across the globe have the same issue regarding career growth and garnering respect in their leadership roles. They found that women find it difficult to balance work and family and many times are penalized for the choices they make while holding leadership positions.

In a study done by Malecki and Askari (2013), where the participants consisted of 307 women in managerial and supervisory roles in a public sector organization in Africa, the results proved that women made for more effective and efficient leaders than men. A combination of factors included the competence of team building, having long term vision in accordance with the organizations goals and mission, intellectual and psychosomatic capabilities, the capabilities to bring continuous improvement of organizational performance, the ability to mentor others and effectively cross-collaborating by creating operative relationships within their organizations.

Vinnicombe and Singh (2002) investigated whether a woman's perception of what a leader should exemplify causes them to have their own reluctance in becoming an effective leader. The authors realized that female managers were not taken as seriously as their male counterparts. They also found that male and female managers succeeded more in using androgynous leadership style, not just feminine or masculine but a combination of both. The authors determined that women in managerial positions, who displayed masculine leadership skills like their male manager counterparts, were thought of as too aggressive and the behavior was frowned upon by their peers and supervisors. The author's observed that women also believe strongly in the Think Manager-Think Male theory, which in turn causes hesitation in advancing

into managerial positions. The consensus was that women believed that men belonged in what they considered traditional roles of leading organizations. There seemed to be a lack of confidence from women in their perceptions of managing effectively. The author's suggested that organizations should develop mentoring programs that would assist women in advancing into leadership positions while also improving upon their skill sets and abilities to lead.

Schein created the Think Manager-Think Male theory in 1970. She conducted further studies thirty years later to determine if her theory that male characteristics and gender bias was still an approach that permeated top leadership positions in companies worldwide (2007). Schein stated that although the amount of women who are in leadership positions have increased, the process of climbing the ladder is still sluggish and slow-moving. Schein's study focused on what both men and women believed was the necessary traits managers should display. Over the past thirty years, Schein continued research with the most recent ones occurring in 1992, 1993 and 1996, with a total of 1414 participants that spanned four different countries. After doing another study, Schein's results determined that thirty years later, males associated other males with leading in top management positions and so did women. Men did not think that women had the necessary skill or characteristics to be managers. Schein proposed that organizations should involve their legal departments to draft better policies and procedures which would allow administrations to begin changing their cultures in terms of women leading. The author believed that these remedies, along with continuous research, would discourage further issues that impede women from successfully advancing in their careers.

Leadership Types. There are several types of leadership styles (Northouse, 2015). Democratic leaders like to guide their employees rather than direct them and do not use top-down communication. They are participatory in nature and are employee centered. Women

leaders are usually categorized more as being this type of leader. They believe in a more transformational type of leadership. Democratic leaders are more relationship-oriented and are more prone to supporting, motivating and developing their staff. They believe in collaboration, communication and building strong relationships with employees. They also believe in mediation and don't usually discipline their staff.

Autocratic leaders are more task-oriented on the other hand are more focused on achieving goals and establishing structures. They are known to be less focused on their staff and are transactional leaders. Yet, they know how to delegate effectively and manage their time well. Men are known to be more autocratic leaders as they enforce rules, discipline staff, and believe in loyalty and control.

Historical Perspective

The road to leadership and breaking the glass ceiling has been long for women who have wanted to get past the stereotype and climb the career ladder. But within the 20th century, women have been making major progress. Data proves that girls outperform boys in academics. Women also lead men in regards to degrees. Per the Pew Social Trends (2015a) reports, in 1965, only 39 percent of women were in the labor force. Fast forward to 1999, and the number climbed to 60 percent. As of November 2014, 57 percent of women are in the labor force, yet only a small percentage, 22 percent hold senior managerial positions. Nickols (2011) noted that for many years, women have tried to build their skills and push their case to gain acceptance to get a seat at the leadership table. What has taken place includes the slow progression of changing HR practices, implementing policies that benefit women, studying certain career behaviors that have hindered women from excelling and training women on successful leadership styles (Doherty

and Manfredi, 2010). The barriers that have paused the acceleration of women are beginning to ease, yet the obstacles and stagnation still remain.

Glass Ceiling

The glass ceiling continues to be a deterrent for women who seek to attain leadership roles in their organizations (Downes, Hemmasi and Eshghi, 2014). The authors defined the glass ceiling as one that is clear enough to look through, but extremely hard to break through, not only for women, but also for minorities. They also stated that gender bias and certain stereotypes can hinder women from advancing. Many women do not advance in their careers due to several different factors which include family obligations and balancing work-life challenges. The authors also believed that at times, women lack the confidence in advancing. The authors specified that structural factors also hinder a woman's advancement. Whereas men have an old boys club, women need mentoring and more networking opportunities. The authors confirmed that women believe that there is a glass ceiling and that they face many different challenges when trying to advance their careers. The authors insisted that it is impossible to prove that a glass ceiling exists in an organization, yet they do believe that the perception of a glass ceiling does exist. The authors also argued that further testing needs to be done and it depends on the culture of the organization. The authors agreed that if there is a perception of a glass ceiling it may stem from upper management deterring progressive movement by not providing women with guidance, mentorship and training on how to advance in their career successfully.

In an article by the Healthcare PR and Marketing News (1999), a top ranking Senior Vice President who worked at SmithKline Beecham by the name of Tamar Howson was interviewed regarding her thoughts on being in a top management role, the glass ceiling and finding the right WFB. Howson stated that there are many crucial skills and strategies that one can follow to

remain a successful female leader in an organization. She specified that it is crucial in a leadership role to make a commitment and identify what the priorities are both with work and family. She indicated that her and her husband made the decision that he would be a stay at home dad since her job took her away from family duties about 75 percent of the time, but she still remained very involved in her family life. She stated that it is up to the individual to make those tough decisions when it comes to WFB especially after one breaks through the glass ceiling. She also said that it is important to respect your adversaries and they in turn would do the same. That would alleviate a lot of the friction that occurs in the workplace. Furthermore, she agreed that it is very difficult to break the glass ceiling, so she provided mentoring and career advice regularly to other women. Over 30 percent of her professional staff were women and she provided plenty of opportunities for growth and encouraged the women on her team to venture out if necessary to other organizations. Howson was a huge advocate of women succeeding and maneuvering in leadership roles.

Race and the lack of minorities in leadership also plays a large role when discussing the glass ceiling. Currently there is only one African American woman, Ursula Burns, who is the CEO of a Fortune 500 company and in less than two years she plans to step down leaving no other African American women on the list of women who play large leadership roles in the nation. Per Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010), women have a difficult time ascending into leadership roles, but minorities have an even more difficult road to the C-Suite. The authors stated that minorities not only have to break through the proverbial glass ceiling but due to racism and sexism their “concrete wall” and “stick floor” creates even more unnecessary challenges. They also believed that due to a lack of direct networking and mentoring, racial

stereotyping, the cultural equation of old boy networks, nepotism and tokenism, women that are minorities are usually overlooked for promotions.

Nixorff and Rosen (2010) stated that some of the reasons given for the slow progress of women of color in leadership include lack of line experience, inadequate career opportunities, racial differences in speech and socialization, ethno sexual stereotypes, “old boy networks,” and tokenism. They agreed that there is a lack of role models available to women which in turn leads to an absence of self-efficacy. This in turn causes women to leave many organizations to begin their own businesses. The authors stated that as of 2008, the number of women who owned their own businesses was estimated at 10.4 million and these businesses were generating annual sales of \$1.9 trillion (2010). While this statistic is great, the reason for this is based on the fact that there is a lack of women advancing into leadership roles in the workforce, per Nixorff and Rosen. Tibus conducted a study in 2010 that also confirmed that women-owned businesses are growing at a record rate. The author stated that it is imperative that the leadership styles of women, no matter their leadership role, be closely examined, as leadership is an important factor in any organization. The author confirmed that while several organizations are working on initiatives to improve diversity and inclusion, studies still prove that more work needs to be done to understand how women can be successful in different work environments and organizations alternatively need to understand how to retain them in their leadership roles. These studies would benefit both corporate and public policy managers and administrators.

Self-Efficacy. Many studies have focused on self-efficacy and how it affects women in attaining leadership roles and staying successful in their roles as a leader. Leaders with high self-efficacy are known to be more confident. Per Nixdorff and Rosen (2010), this distinguishes the leadership styles of men from women. The authors stated that a lack of self-efficacy in young

female students affected them from their days in college to their time in the boardroom. Per their research, low self-efficacy hindered a leader especially when tough decisions need to be made. Leaders with a level of high self-efficacy are known to be strong, level-headed, motivated, focused, resilient, and able to handle pressure.

Organizations must instill a culture where there is a lack of female-male competition, create opportunities for leadership development, and establish mentorship programs for women with other women in leadership roles. Ryan and Haslam (2006) conducted a study centering on the glass ceiling and the results proved that many women feel that they are at a disadvantage when trying to climb the career ladder. They are overlooked for many promotional opportunities and are not trained to handle certain tasks, and are therefore set up for failure. Their study also revealed that women are placed in leadership positions where the company is in a bad state and have to fend for themselves on how to fix issues that were in place before they were positioned in the role. The author's stated that women find themselves more often than not placed on a glass cliff and are blamed for negative issues that occur while in their leadership roles.

Gender Bias

Women face challenges in regards to gender bias and discrimination in the workplace in male dominated occupations, and this in turn affects their job role and longevity in the workplace (Martin and Barnard, 2013). Following the Constructivist Theory, the authors investigated whether women felt supported in their roles and if they could maintain a balance at work and in their personal lives. The authors also suggested that women do not feel supported in their leadership roles and there is a lack of initiatives in the workplace that guarantee successes for women in male dominated occupations. The authors believed that women have a difficult time balancing home life and work life, which in turn could affect their health. The authors revealed

that women encounter different levels of stressors not only at work but at home. They also touched on police officers who similarly have to deal with sex typing and bias behaviors from their male counterparts. The authors discussed that organizations should develop specific and transparent gender policies and procedures that would guarantee women be successful and have longevity in male dominated occupations while balancing their home and work lives.

Olcott (2004) mentioned that those in management need to realize that women bring a great deal of positive attributes when they are placed in leadership positions. They offer empowerment, cross-collaboration, and build countless relationships with employees. He specified that there are several actions women can take to be on the same playing field as men. He stated that women must make the changes associated with breaking the glass ceiling. These include:

1. Continuously networking – women need to build professional networks by joining professional associations.
2. Professional development opportunities – focus on the ones that prioritize women and leadership.

Most human resources experts such as Talent Innovations, preferred an organizational balance when it relates to leadership styles and effectiveness (2012). The company analyzed thousands of organizational leaders and managers to determine how men and women were rated on leadership aptitudes and skills. While men were deemed more strategic and visionary, women were ranked as better project manager and more sociable. Overall the study revealed that creating an equilibrium where both types of leadership were displayed, would create a successful organization.

Zane discussed after completing an anonymous study focused on women managers and how they viewed themselves compared to their male counterparts, that the word “feminism” was

often raised (1999). The author stated that the balance between men and women in managerial roles were only often questioned by women and those same women were considered defiant and unmanageable for attempting to change the status quo. The women became more aware of the truncated support they received, and felt more empowered in a group setting. It allowed them to discuss ways to strategize and take action to improve their conditions. The author's study also brought to the forefront how organizations are mostly male-dominated and therefore propagates independence, value, distinction and gender-impartiality (1999). Saseanu, Toma, and Marinescu, (2014), stated that feminism is at times tied into certain qualities and many organizations should appreciate and include it as a part of their modern culture. These include flexibility, instinct, motivating others and developing better communication. The authors believed that there were four cultural dimensions tied to how an individual identifies themselves. These include:

1. Short or long distance from power – this specifies the degree to which an individual accepts the fact that power is dispersed unjustly.
2. Collectivism versus individualism – the extent to which someone has assimilated within a team atmosphere.
3. Femininity versus masculinity – dissemination of roles between men and women; prior studies have shown that the values of women differ less than those of men.
4. Low level versus high level of avoiding uncertainty – shows humanity's degree of tolerance to doubt and uncertainty.

The author's also stated that the femininity and masculinity dimension is most noticed when leadership is involved. Since leadership attributes are mainly associated with male characteristic, this gender divide can be alleged as biased.

Laud and Johnson (2013) also investigated if there were gender differences between men and women regarding advancing in their careers. The authors decided that although prior studies have determined that most individuals propel their careers due to their personality, educational background, maneuvering and networking skills, no theoretical research has garnered what the major differences are between male and female strategies on attaining higher-level positions. The authors stated that although management styles differed between men and women, there are no particular tactics that either men or women use to advance in their careers. The authors further stated that additional research should be completed worldwide to determine if men and women use different maneuvers to reach leadership goals.

Nixdorff and Rosen believed that gender is used as a guide when selection panels and evaluators decide who to choose to fill positions (2010). In the past, women were evaluated by how they are perceived to those who tend to believe men are better leaders than women. Studies showed that women were being offered positions to fill a quota and were thought of as helpless and emotional. Per the authors, this way of thinking is being phased out with many organizations providing trainings and establishing practices that focus on gender equality and creating a culture and policies that address these issues. Weyer stated that there are several theories that coincide with gender roles and breaking the glass ceiling. Both social role and expectation theories are related but differ in that one focuses on how men and women perceive how leaders should behave and the other centers around the performance expectations of a leader (2007). Both are viewed as the reason why women cannot break through the glass ceiling. The author considered that in order to have more women be placed into leadership roles, social ideologies have to be altered both within and outside of the workplace.

Organizational Culture

Human resources and senior management teams also play a role in the shifts in cultures in ensuring that their organizations guarantee that women in leadership roles are successful in their careers. Coffey, an Executive Vice President of government affairs and Tombari, a senior manager of diversity and workforce solutions at RBC Financial Group, the largest financial services organization in Canada, agreed that women who perceive that there is a supportive organizational culture would feel that their work life is satisfactory (2005). Women would feel more capable, committed and engaged if they saw that their organization were in tune to their gratification of a WFB. More importantly says the authors, recognizing that this is an important aspect of organizational culture should tie into a company's strategic goals and vision. The authors also stated that this would not only create a productive environment, it would entice and retain talented individuals and allow the company to remain competitive while satisfying their stakeholders.

Woodard wondered in 2006, what are organizations doing to recruit, develop and retain women in leadership roles. At his company, Dell, he stated that women are a key asset in the organization and play a major role in making important decisions. He believed that organizations were not implementing policies or taking the initiative to change how the glass ceiling was perceived. He stated that at Dell there were two business reasons why diversity and gender equality was a priority and they included:

1. Recruit talent that will improve the organizations modernization and ingenuity in order to move forward and remain competitive.
2. Organizations must imitate the global market not only regarding race and gender but also focus on incorporating different cultures.

Dow (2014) believed that staff would be empowered if management set policies and procedures dependent on the organizational culture. The author also suggested that a mentoring program should be established that would allow employees to be mentored by a senior level employee. The authors determined that mentoring was a necessary organizational tool that could guide staff with their careers, assist with learning how to network and for those who weren't necessarily interested in advancing, how to navigate at work on a daily basis. The authors believed that a mentor program allowed for less negativity and no competition that concerned some upper level management staff from giving advice to help middle managers. The author also proposed that upper management work closely with human resources to establish long-term plans for new hires in order to guide employees as they decide on their career goals.

Tweed established that leaders inspire performance if they receive positive stimuli and encouragement by their organizational cultures (2002). He listed four basic organization styles defines as the L4 strategy that all companies should use as a blueprint when creating their company's organizational culture. They included:

1. Cooperation culture – instill trust and build on relationships especially in a team setting.
2. Inspiration culture – have a strong sense of belonging and membership. This style is built on the sense of purpose and morals and how can one empower the organization and those they work with. Self-leadership is encouraged and employees realize that the organization works for them in a positive manner than the opposite.
3. Achievement culture – values and respects the employee and promotes innovation and new theories and technology. Human resources recruits only the most capable individuals, who in turn uses their talents to improve the organization.
4. Consistent culture – focuses on probability and direction. Policies and measurement tools

are used to achieve success and progressive results.

Matsa and Miller stated that to improve organizational cultures, women must hold executive roles, such as board members (2011). In this way, women would be able to increase female representation in leadership roles and build the ratio of men to women that hold management positions (2011). Also, women in leadership roles are able to better strategize to instill policies and decrease the negative notions and perceptions of other women who want to attain leadership roles. Per the authors study, women who sit on the board of organizations can help to change the culture of an organization by creating a cycle that could establish positive guidelines, not only by increasing the amount of women who would be in management, but serving as role models and mentors to women in lower positions within the company.

Clarke (2011) studied a group of women who were a part of a development program that included women in both the public and private sectors. Crediting Burke and Vinnicombe's process (2005), the author stated that organizations should stop overlooking female staff members whose talent and skills could be utilized in upper management roles. The author found that the reason there was a low amount of female leaders in organizations was due to gender bias and negative support for advancement opportunities and guidance. The author specifically stated that sometimes women can break the glass ceiling in order to propel their careers by learning how to better navigate through the labyrinth (Eagly and Carli, 2007). The author also suggested that an organization should create developmental programs which would not only be a good investment, but would assist women in gaining confidence by taking on more challenges and responsibilities, balancing home life and work life more effectively and allow them to understand the importance of networking. The author believed that a program such as this would be a great tool for women that would guide them in advancing their careers successfully. The author did

note that although a development program was worthy of building confidence by teaching women how to navigate on a personal level, on a professional level the program did not guarantee participants would advance as those decisions were made within the organization where they worked.

Success Factors

While the glass ceiling is difficult to navigate, there are tactics that successful women in leadership roles can speak on that have helped them along the way. Laud and Johnson (2012) described these factors in their gender based study done in. The authors stated that while the results did not necessarily show that men and women were divided when it came to certain factors that were used to propel them to success, women were more inclined to use networking, education and mentoring to climb the career ladder. Once in the leadership role, women were more motivated to build on their brand as a leader and seize opportunities as they came along. Lansford, Clements, Falzon, Aish and Rogers (2009) observed that women felt more secure using their feminine interpersonal skills in their leadership roles and were more collaborative than their male counterparts.

Ginsberg (1998) wrote that once women successfully break through the glass ceiling, they must make a way for those who are also trying to do the same. He stated that organizations such as the International Women's Forum, an international network of women in leadership roles, assisted women who wish to create a mentoring program at their company and also offers a fellowship to women who are interested in being with a cohort of women who wish to break the ceiling. Per several interviews that he conducted, many women wish to have a mentor who can guide them regarding the ins and outs of climbing the career ladder from a woman's point of view. The International Women's Forum website also offers a fellows program that offers training using a customized curriculum and multi-disciplinary training intended to develop

leadership and strategic management competences. This allows women to build a great network with like-minded women such as themselves.

Mattis (2001) confirmed that women can be successful in a leadership role if the following behavior and actions are supported from upper management:

1. Provide benchmarking tools and talented staff to assist as additional resources.
2. Provide strategic direction and goals.
3. Establish culpability on both ends.
4. Initiate progression planning.

Cheung and Halpern (2010) determined that despite the successful career ascent most women experience, few women make it to an “O” level position. Most remain stuck in middle management roles and many in other countries outside of the United States, are generally chosen for executive jobs. The authors suggested that in order to be successful, focus on education which helped propel many women into higher level positions. The authors also described a study that focused on women who are college and university presidents who confirmed that they remained successful by actively pursuing personal and professional development along with self-awareness, while taking on challenging tasks, while constantly inspiring and mentoring others. The authors stated that the women in the study wanted to create a better atmosphere for those who were climbing the ranks behind them by creating a prototype of leadership that was dedicated to other women who also had to balance between work and family.

Another important factor is work/life balance (WLB). Many women find it difficult to determine what takes priority over the other and at times this can cause issues for them on both ends of the spectrum. Moore (2007) stated that more organizations should implement programs and initiatives that focus on flexible working conditions that positively benefit women. The

author believed that this would increase productivity and better relationships with internal (employees) and external (customers) stakeholders.

Keown and Ada (1982), completed a study in 1982 that focused on the success factors of women in leadership roles and much has not changed in the past 34 years. The authors mentioned that one's wardrobe is extremely important. How a leader carries themselves is still an important factor. They also stated that the women in the study demanded challenging careers and they found that having a good relationship with their boss was significant for them to remain successful in their careers. Also revealed was the importance of having a mentor, education and detailed long-term goals.

Key, Popkin, Munchus, Wech, Hill and Tanner (2012), completed a study to conclude if race was a factor with women and the glass ceiling and their level of success rates. The sample size included over 70 women who were psychologists. All of the women were given questionnaires containing questions related to their childhood, difficulties and the different roles they played as spouses and mothers. Results proved that non-Caucasian women faced more hardships and adversities such as discrimination and economic hardships compared to Caucasian women. The Caucasian women experienced more sexual discrimination than the non-Caucasian women. Caucasian women also propelled further in their careers independent of their gender, and while the glass ceiling was a major factor to why they had not excelled as much as they wanted to, the non-Caucasian women cited that it was a substantial barricade. Other factors that affected the non-Caucasian women were the sense that most organizations support middle-class traditional family structures and Caucasian women received more assistance from both men and women in the form of mentorship and guidance. The authors suggested that this double-jeopardy

issue is a hindrance for non-Caucasian women and builds on the fact that race and gender affects the success factors that many non-Caucasian women encounter.

Lott (2009) also stated that in order for women in leadership roles to remain successful after breaking the glass ceiling, they should continue to build relationships with senior management and take on bigger responsibilities that will in turn allow them to become more visible. While there is a lack of female role models, Bennett stated that women in leadership roles should assist other women in entry level and middle management roles by discussing their own personal success factors that allowed them to navigate and maintain their roles as a leader. This would also include how to balance work-life issues and how to continuously advance in their careers (*n.d.*).

Research Questions

This phenomenological study was guided by the following central research question:

1. What has been your professional and personal experiences as a woman in a leadership role?

The following sub questions assisted in understanding the experiences of women in leadership roles:

2. How do women in leadership roles describe their experiences regarding the glass ceiling?
3. What are successful factors for women in leadership roles?
4. How do women in leadership roles successfully balance challenges?
5. How do these challenges relate to the culture of an organization?
6. How does the culture of an organization relate to career advancement?

Summary

Per the 2014 Global Gender Gap Report and score card, there is still a large gap between men and women in leadership and managerial roles worldwide. The United States is ranked at number twenty, due to closing nearly 75% of its gender gap. The report highlighted that there is still a lot to accomplish to ensure the percentages continue to rise and gender equality is achieved (World Economic Forum, 2016). Finland scored the highest as the best country for working women and Norway mandated a law in 2008 that stated that 40% of public company board members must be women (Luxton, 2016). Per the author, the United States ranked below the average Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development and the gap has expanded in five nations. What can be done worldwide to enact laws to ensure women are successful and can break through the glass ceiling, even after leaning in and acquiring the necessary mentor-ship to succeed? Per Athey (2014), although there has been a lot of progress with gender equality, there is still a lot of room for improvement. The author stated that in 2012, over 2/3 of women were satisfied with WFB, the rewards of their career and the respect they received. More men are agreeing to be mentors to women, which allows women to receive guidance, better career prospects and access to influential networks. The author confirmed that less women are in the 'O' level status in the healthcare management field, and the salary gap remains competitive and unequal between the two.

There are many different factors that affect women from attaining leadership status in their organizations. While previous research has determined that theories such as the Think Manager-Think Male model has played a major role in determining how far women climb in their career, many researchers also insisted that women have to take the reins and break through the glass ceiling on their own. Researchers also insisted that organizations instill policies and procedures that would assist women in balancing home and work life and developing training for

both men and women in the workplace which would benefit organizations where the Think Manager-Think Male perceptions still exist. Developmental programs would also assist women in gaining leadership skills and provide services that would assist them in succeeding in their new leadership roles.

While organizations are not responsible for creating WLB, they should be held accountable for providing resources and opportunities to assist women manage and incorporate WLB into their work lives (Coffey & Tombari, 2005). Further literature review analysis and a projected purpose statement along with interview research questions lead to a phenomenological qualitative study which allowed women in leadership roles to expand upon their own personal lived experiences (Creswell, 2014). This study also assisted in determining what types of policies and programs should be created to support women who are already in C-Suite and middle management roles. In turn this would assist those who exhibit leadership capabilities in entry level positions who could possibly be mentored. Per Mattis (2001), human resources managers and executives should support the hiring and retention of women in leadership roles by:

1. Promoting or hiring two or more women for every vacancy in a department.
2. Aggressively intervening when the behavior of other employees suppresses a woman's contribution to the organization/department.
3. Assigning an equal representation of women on projects/task forces/work groups/committees/boards.
4. Include women on hiring and interview panels.
5. Assign a diversity member to the department who attends diversity workshops

and events, works with a diversity consult outside of the organization on women's issues, works with task and work groups on how to identify issues and who discusses diversity related topics at all staff meetings.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This phenomenological study aimed to assess the impact of the glass ceiling with women in leadership roles, how they sustained a work/life balance and their success factors for remaining in their leadership positions. The primary purpose of the study depicted the experiences and perceptions of three women who hold leadership roles and how they maintained their careers so successfully. Through interviews, formal and informal conversations, the researcher obtained robust descriptions from the women describing their different experiences as leaders who run successful organizations in the private sector while balancing their work and home lives. By using a phenomenological study to obtain research, Towers and Chen (2008) stated that qualitatively, this allows for researcher's to view participant's in their natural setting, attempting to make sense or interpret phenomena in terms of a real-world understanding.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this phenomenological study was to gain awareness into the active, real-world life experiences of three senior level women who are leaders in their organizations by researching and investigating their ideas, opinions, thoughts, perceptions, notions and beliefs regarding breaking the glass ceiling, successful insights and balancing work/life as a leader. This allowed the researcher to gain valuable insight into the female leaders' experiences. A qualitative phenomenological research design was used to understand the perceptions and experiences of women who currently hold leadership positions and the success factors that have allowed them to maintain their roles effectively while navigating through the glass ceiling. Further literature review analysis and a projected purpose statement along with interview research questions lead to a phenomenological qualitative study which allowed women in leadership roles to expand upon their own personal experiences regarding the glass ceiling. (Creswell, 2014).

Participants

Purposive sampling was used to identify female leaders from specific organizations in Broward and Miami-Dade Counties. Per Oliver and Jupp (2006), this type of sampling ensures that participants are specifically knowledgeable about the research study subject matter. The three research participants ranged in ages from 35-55 and hold leadership positions in organizations located in Broward County and Miami-Dade. They were able to describe to the researcher the success factors that has allowed them to be successful in their current roles as they climbed the glass ceiling. They also discussed how they were able to balance work/life responsibilities and the issues they have encountered throughout their careers. Several emails and phone calls were sent to women in leadership roles in Broward County and Miami-Dade with details about the research study, requesting their participation in the study in early 2017. The researcher utilized social media, email and telephone to reach out to the participants and to solicit participation. According to Creswell (2007), this type of research required certain participants who have experienced the phenomenon and who would expressively communicate their perceptions. Per Cresswell, qualitative methods are used to retrieve details regarding phenomena that include emotions, feelings and frame of mind. Conditions of being a participant in the study included:

1. Female
2. Leadership role in an organization (private sector)
3. Ability to commit time to participate in the study

Interviews and observations took place while the participant was at her workplace via telephone. The researcher chose to interview the participants while they were at their workplace as it allowed for them to be more genuine while they were in a familiar setting. Once the Institutional Review Board at Nova Southeastern granted the researcher approval, participants were contacted

to ensure they fit within the conditions. Consent forms were issued to the participants stating the purpose of the research, procedures of the research, risks regarding the research, benefits to the research and most importantly how their identities would be kept confidential.

Data Collection Procedures

Interviews were conducted to determine success factors of women in leadership roles and their ability to break through the glass ceiling. The participants selected possessed different professional backgrounds and experiences, and were able to share how these experiences influenced their leadership roles. Structured questions were created with the intent to allow participants to expand on their experiences and allowed them to feel more comfortable to explore their career path experiences as they climbed the professional ladder. The researcher validated the questions by creating a pilot test interview committee. The interview guide was pilot tested with two individuals (Appendix A). The feedback that was given from both pilot test participants was that the central research question, number one was confusing. Because of this, question number one was revised. After attaining an agreement with the committee, the researcher adjusted the interview question to reflect all the changes that were recommended. Then the researcher steered the interview protocol (which included a script and the interview questions) which were created to test the quality of the questions (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

According to Castillo-Montoya (2016), the qualitative researcher can strengthen the dependability and trustworthiness of their interview protocols as instruments by refining them through the Interview Protocol Refinement (IPR) process. Per the authors, this consists of four phases (p. 812):

- Phase 1: Ensuring interview questions align with research questions
- Phase 2: Constructing an inquiry-based conversation

- Phase 3: Receiving feedback on interview protocols
- Phase 4: Piloting the interview protocol.

The five interview questions were based on the preliminary research questions. The interviews were conducted by using open-ended questions. This format allowed the researcher to retrieve rich narrative data from the participants. By using open-ended questions, the researcher was able to give participants the freedom to be open and honest and provide personal information regarding their experiences as leaders in their respective fields. A personal interview protocol (Appendix A) was also used as a guide during the interview process.

The following interview questions served as the main topics of discussion and were designed to address the research questions directly:

1. What are your personal experiences as a leader in your organization? Describe both positive and negative.
2. Do you think that the glass ceiling still exists? Have you ever experienced it?
3. What kind of programs and policies should be created to support women who aspire to lead?
4. What significant success factors do you believe influence your determination to continue to lead?
5. Do you believe that men are much more likely to be promoted in your organization than women? If so, please explain.

The researcher utilized an interview guide that helped the participants stay on track to complete the interview within the 1 hour time frame. During the pilot interviews, it took 45 minutes to complete the interviews, therefore the researcher extended the time just in case the participant needed more time to speak. Creswell (2014) stated that it is essential to be considerate of the participant's time and not interrupt the participant during the interview. Since multiple interviews were done, the researcher ensured that all participant's interviews were done

in the same manner in order to exclude bias. To ensure confidentiality and to protect the identities of the participants, their names nor organizations were referenced and pseudonyms were used for all of the participants. While collecting the data, the researcher took measures to ensure that the findings were valid and accurate. Per Creswell (2014), this is important to ensure that the researcher remains self-reflective throughout the research by conducting an external audit and constantly communicating with the participants to ensure that the data collected is precise and truthful.

This procedure helped the researcher to test if the interview protocol generated the information proposed as well as assessed potential researcher biases. The pilot also contributed by highlighting the importance of using handwritten notes as a backup to the recording in the case of batteries dying or noise interference during the recordings. The researcher took detailed notes and also used recorders during one-on-one interviews with participants and recorded the responses using open-ended questions using the iMac recording app. The researcher also transferred the files to a computer, flash drive and created a backup copy. Notes and recordings are stored in a safe archiving system for three years.

Data Analysis Procedures

Open coding was used to better analyze the data. Per Punch (2009), coding allows the researcher to better organize their data by indexing with colors, tags, labels and names. To gain a sense of the content that was collected, each transcript was read by the researcher several times. During this stage, the researcher took note of any thoughts or feelings that arose. This helped the researcher to explore the phenomenon as experienced by the participants themselves. The researcher then extracted significant phrases from each transcript. These phrases were used to formulate meanings. Using the data, the researcher created a table and color coded what was said by the participants. Per Creswell (2014), this allowed for the researcher to develop an overall

picture of the data collected, portrayals and themes to explain the findings by breaking down the data collected into first level concepts or master headings, and second-level categories or subheadings. Then the researcher used different colors to highlight and distinguish each broad concept and category. The researcher also utilized the Rev App software program which allowed for the data collected (coding, memos and graphics) to be transcribed and organized in a more cohesive manner.

The researcher analyzed the data after each interview by reviewing transcripts of the interviews (Creswell, 2014). Analyzing the transcripts involves capturing every detail of what was said, with an emphasis on speed, tone, the participant's voice, the timing of words being said and also pauses. The researcher also acknowledged the participants voice, language, laughter, and other verbal cues.

Ethical Considerations

The participants were not forced to participate in this study. They were able to withdraw from the study at any time, at which point their recorded interviews would have been deleted from the research. The participants also got the opportunity to review any notes the researcher took throughout the interview and had the opportunity to have anything they wanted taken out or stricken from the record. The researcher was respectful of the participant's views regarding the study while also keeping all participants names confidential by using pseudonyms. The researcher allowed the participants to review their interview transcripts to ensure accuracy. An Institutional Review Board (IRB) took place once the proposal portion of the author's dissertation had been approved by the dissertation chair and dissertation member. Per Nova Southeastern University's webpage regarding Institutional Review Board, this important process is housed under the Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness and ensures that a human

research is protected. The IRB reviews a researcher's data collection to ensure that protocols are adhered to and focus on ethical principles since human participants are involved. The process entailed several levels of review which included an initial, expedited and full review process that required review of the research by different levels of individuals including the faculty advisor/dissertation chair, IRB office, and funding agency, to name a few.

Trustworthiness

Shenton stated that many criticize the trustworthiness and credibility of qualitative research (2004). In order to provide credible data, Shenton determined that researchers must:

1. Use well established research methods that have been used in other studies.
2. Develop credible relationships with the participants of the study in order to build trust.
3. Use random sampling instead of purposive sampling to negate the possibility of biased data.
4. Triangulate data collection tools (i.e. using interviews, observations, and other techniques together instead of one or the other).

To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher determined that certain aspects of the study were focused on Shenton's strategies to confirm trustworthiness regarding qualitative research (2004):

1. Credibility regarding internal validity – one of the most important aspects of any study is to ensure that the study tests exactly what it sets out to test.
2. Confirmability - a researcher's bias is inevitable. Therefore it is important for them to remain unbiased and objective.
3. Dependability – warranting that the study is reported in precise detail, permitting future investigators to repeat the work as a prototype.

Per Krefting (1991), it is important that truth, applicable-ness, consistency and neutrality are present throughout the entire research process. The author stated that these aspects are defined as Guba's model of trustworthiness of qualitative research, and are used by educators during research studies. This model ensured thoroughness and consistency was being used without forfeiting the importance of the research that was being completed. Krefting also listed a summary of strategies that guided qualitative research for trustworthiness. For example, transferability strategy will need a criteria that would include a dense description and background information of the participants and the research.

Potential Research Bias

Due to the type of sampling, the researcher was at risk for potential researcher bias. Per Shenton (2004), with a random sampling of participants, researchers reduce the chances of bias within the study. In qualitative research this can include biased questions, biased answers, biased samples and also biased reporting. Biased questions can be interpreted as the researcher can influence the participant's answer based upon how a question may be asked during the interview. Per Creswell (2014), personal bias should be put on hold when doing research. Biased answers are quite common in qualitative research. This all ties into the trustworthiness of the research. As the researcher, it was imperative to ensure that the interview questions were not leading and confirm that the questions flowed in a functional and unbiased order.

Limitations of the Study

Creswell (2014) noted that limitations or weaknesses can affect a research study. Defined as problems with the study, limitations can be associated with the lack of participants that would be used for the research and also inadequate measures of variables (p.199). Internal validity played a large role regarding limitations, per Shenton (2004) as they can determine what extent the research findings become a true representation of other variables that cannot be controlled by the researcher. The small sample size of the study caused limitations along with time constraints for those participants who were too busy to have face to face interviews. Also, the amount of data that needed to be interpreted was overwhelming. Additionally, the amount of time it took to complete the study was too short as the doctoral program was completed within three years.

Chapter 4: Results Overview

Introduction

In order to better understand their life experiences, this phenomenological study explored the successful pathways of three women who hold leadership positions and how they were able to break through the glass ceiling. The researcher utilized a phenomenological design because it allowed for a structured interview format with the participants. The following topics will be discussed: (a) the participants' demographic background information, (b) review of the research and interview questions, (c) presentation of findings, and (d) summary of key findings.

Participant Demographics and Background Information

The three women who participated in the study all currently work in the private sector. They are all of African American ethnicity and reside in Broward and Miami-Dade counties. They all hold senior leadership positions and have ascended in their careers from an entry level to senior management role. Two have bachelor's degrees and one holds a doctoral degree. Participant one is 31 years old and recently quit her leadership position last year as a Program Manager at a local South Florida University to start her own robust and successful six figure online consulting firm. She stated that her passion had always been to work for herself and was ready to branch out on her own to pursue her long term goals when she resigned from the job she had been in for over six years. Participant two is 58 years old and has risen rapidly throughout her career in IT and Finance from an entry level role many years ago to now a C-Suite position in South Florida. She believed that she was only able to rise to this level in her career due to mentorship from other women in C-Suite careers and returns the favor to other young women who she meets who also need guidance on how to break through the glass ceiling. Participant three is 37 years old and works in a field where there are hardly any women, Compensation. While she has experienced the glass ceiling many times over, she believes that

her aggressive behavior and self-efficacy values have allowed her to not only be at the top of many head hunter's call lists, but encourages her male counterparts to respect and value her work.

Study Overview

After the researcher obtained formal IRB approval, the data collection began. The data for this study was collected through individual interviews, specifically, three face-to-face telephone interviews were conducted with the three women who have leadership roles within their organizations in South Florida. All of the women were of African American ethnicities and their age ranges were 31 years of age to 58 years of age. All three participants currently work in the private sectors as senior managers and hold top management roles within their organizations. The researcher used the snowball technique for one of the participants and personally knew the other two. Per Creswell (2014), snowball sampling consisted of two steps:

1. Identify the potential subjects in the population or subject matter you are seeking to participate in the research study.
2. Ask others who are aware of the study to recruit other people and then if necessary ask those individuals to help in recruiting others.

The researcher brought up her research and need for participants at a sorority meeting for Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated. One of the sorority members mentioned that she knew of someone who was a leader in her industry and would be interested in participating in the current research study. She gave the researcher the individual's email address and told her to reach out to her via email. An introductory email was sent to all participants and once the participants agreed to be a part of the study, the researcher called them to confirm that they met the necessary criteria and to arrange the interview times. All of the participants signed a copy of the

participant's consent letter before the interviews were conducted. To ensure their privacy and anonymity, each participant was informed that the interviews would be recorded and asked if they wanted to use a pseudonym, which all three agreed to. All interviews were scheduled according to the availability of each participant and then were conducted via telephone. The researcher conducted all the interviews in a private and locked office where others could not hear the interviews. The interview began with a script to describe to the participant what was to take place during the interview.

Afterwards, each recorded interview was downloaded onto a password protected flash drive and personal laptop. Additionally, detailed handwritten notes were taken before, during and after each interview. When the interviews were completed, the recordings were transcribed using Rev, a transcription service that charges \$1/minute. The researcher sent the transcripts to each participant to determine that the interview was accurate and to ensure that they were okay with what they read. The participants were able to review the transcripts for accuracy, precision and meticulousness (Creswell, 2014). The transcripts allowed the researcher to identify words and sentences that each participant continually repeated throughout the data. Additionally, the researcher used triangulation by listening to the participants while they answered the research questions during the interview. According to Creswell (2014), triangulation is the use of multiple sources to establish a clear representation of the research outcome and to achieve validity of the data collection process. In order to establish the validity of this study, the researcher used theory triangulation by utilizing color coding to confirm that the interview transcripts were correct. Per Campbell, Quincy, Osseman and Pederson (2013), coding reliability depends on how specific and narrowly defined the interview questions are and how much nuance is required in interpreting and coding the answers, therefore each question was coded separately. The

researcher then color-coded the words and sentences based on the different categories that began to emerge which included feelings, goals, education, skills and frustrations regarding women growing in their career, the glass ceiling and success factors of women. After reassessing the interviews and the categories, several themes were identified which included leadership traits, respect, work-life balance, the glass ceiling and mentoring. The researcher determined the major themes by assessing how often each were mentioned by the participants after transcribing the interviews and tallying the themes (See table1). The themes were then classified according to a certain research question (See Appendix C).

Presentation of Findings

At the onset of the study, six research questions were identified; they included one central question and five sub questions:

1. What has been your professional and personal experiences as a woman in a leadership role?

The following sub questions assisted in understanding the lived experiences of women in leadership roles and the glass ceiling effects on their advancements in their careers:

2. How do women in leadership roles describe their experiences regarding the glass ceiling?
3. What are successful factors for women in leadership roles?
4. How do women in leadership roles successfully balance challenges?
5. How do these challenges relate to the culture of an organization?
6. How does the culture of an organization relate to career advancement?

Based on the aforementioned research questions, the researcher created and asked the participants the following open-ended questions during the interviews:

1. What are your personal experiences as a leader in your organization? Describe both

positive and negative.

2. Describe the different paths you have pursued and their impact to your career.
3. What kind of programs and policies should be created to support women who aspire to lead?
4. What significant success factors do you believe influence your determination to continue to lead?
5. Do you believe that men are much more likely to become leaders in your organization than women? If so, please explain.

The researcher identified several factors that positively influenced the participants' career mobility path. Through the processes of interview transcription, coding, and data analysis, three themes emerged that tied together breaking through the glass ceiling, the border theory and climbing the career ladder successfully. The three themes were: Mentoring/Support while being in a leadership role – getting assistance from others to navigate through the glass ceiling, Respect – gaining acknowledgement from counterparts, particularly men once becoming a leader, and Work Life Balance – how to positively balance work and personal life responsibilities without faltering in either.

Quotes were selected for each of the themes. The quotes represented the participants' perceptions in regards to answering all of the research questions.

Work-Life Balance. Hillary Clinton stated in 2016, “Don’t confuse having a career with having a life” (Martinez, 2016). One theme that was important throughout the data collection process was how women in leadership roles can maintain a successful career while balancing their personal life. Participant 1 (P1) has been in a management role for over 10 years and currently is a CEO of her own consulting company. She decided to start her own company last

year because of the lack of work-life balance she was experiencing at her previous organization. While she is aware that if she does not work she will not get paid while working for herself, she enjoys the freedom of being able to work really hard some months while also having the ability and flexibility to take a few months off to travel or spend time with family.

Mentoring/Support. Madeline Albright has stated “Glass ceilings have been broken, but more have to be broken” and “There is a special place in hell for women who do not help other women” (Wallis, 2015). Participant 2 (P2) began her career in finance as a middle manager, landing her first leadership position in a top Fortune 500 company over 20 years ago in the Northeast. Today, she is a leading Executive Director in South Florida and leads a large team of individuals in the Finance and IT field. She noted in her interview how hard it was for women to get into leadership roles many years ago in the 80’s and 90’s, when women in leadership roles was scarce. P2 stated that times have definitely changed and she has seen more women in leadership roles than ever before but there is still a shortage of women in upper management. She fully believes that thanks to being able to connect with women within her organization, she was able to grow in her career. She believes that it is important that women be mentored and supported by other women and truly feels that it is the only way they can be successful in a leadership role. She also mentioned that what she enjoyed most about being a leader was being able to mentor other women. The most significant theme that materialized from all of the three participants during the interview was that they all believed that mentoring other women was extremely important. Participant 3 (P3) noted that her last organization was the only one who provided mentoring for women in leadership roles, aligning newer executives with seasoned executives. All three participants also noted that women have a harder time breaking the glass ceiling especially in the private sector.

Respect. Participant 3 (P3) has been in upper management for over 5 years and is climbing the career ladder in her current organization. She along with the others, mentioned the lack of respect most women in leadership roles have. Kanye West stated “My presence is a present” (Carley, 2015). All of the women stated that it was important that women demand respect from their coworkers and continue to lead in a positive manner even when it made others around them feel uncomfortable. P3 stated that women need to look at their work life as a career not just a job and that they should not be dissuaded when they are passed over by a man, but instead fight harder and demand to be noticed, in order to climb the career ladder, as she had to do so in the past. She believed that respect is necessary and it should be well earned.

As mentioned in the procedures section, the interviews were transcribed and read repeatedly by the researcher. Then specific words and sentences were color-coded to allow for the researcher to determine the common themes. Appendix D exemplified the themes that emerged from the individual participant interviews. The three themes represented all the participants’ responses during the interviews and explained why the women believed that the glass ceiling still existed and how women can be more successful, especially with a work-life balance. Table 1 (p. 51) showed the theme tally, demonstrating the consistency of each individual’s responses for each theme and the number of times it surfaced in the transcripts. Once the themes were determined, the researcher studied the number of times they were mentioned. Table 1 clearly identifies that Mentoring is extremely important to any women looking to get into a leadership role and still extremely important, even for those who are already in the role as it was mentioned a total of 19 times. Work-life Balance was the theme mentioned 13 times and Respect was mentioned 9 times.

Table 1

Theme Tallies

Themes	Number of Responses
Mentoring	19
Work-life Balance	13
Respect	9

Table 2 (p. 52) displays evidence supporting Research Question 1, presenting the themes that address the research question and the supporting quotes from the participants that illustrated the theme. Research Question 1: What are your personal experiences as a leader in your organization? Describe both positive and negative. The themes for Research Question 1 were Mentoring and Work-life Balance. The women were adamant that mentoring was a huge influence on their career rise into leadership roles. Participant 1, 2 and 3 stated that not only were they mentored but they offer mentoring to other women to help assist them. They also stated that a mentor can also help other women navigate the ins and outs of what is still a good old-boys system that still exists in most sectors. Work-life balance was also mentioned when this question was asked. Participant 2 believed that a negative aspect of being a leader as a women was the inability at times to balance work and one's personal life successfully. The themes for Research Question 1 were Mentoring and Work-life Balance.

Table 2

Evidence Supporting Themes Related to Research Question 1

Themes	Evidence to support the theme
Mentoring	<p>I own a successful business helping other women on how to build their online presence. (P1)</p> <p>Positive attribute is that I get to help others. (P1)</p> <p>Being able to mentor new female employees especially those not that skilled in the field. (P2)</p> <p>Love being a role model to other women. (P2)</p> <p>I have had really great opportunities in getting insight on how to climb the career ladder. (P3)</p>
Work-life Balance	<p>Negative aspect of being a leader: balancing work load and personal life. (P2)</p>

Table 3 (p. 53) displays evidence supporting Research Question 2, presenting the themes that address the research questions and the supporting quotes from the participants that illustrated the theme. Research Question 2 was: Do you think that the glass ceiling still exists? Have you experienced it? The themes for Research Question 2 were Work-life Balance and Respect. Work-life balance seemed to come up quite often by the participants in regards to this question. P2 believed that women are deemed unfit to lead an organization due to other personal responsibilities. She believed that it was definitely more worst 20 years ago, but has sporadically gotten better. She believed that there is still a lot more work to be done in an organizations culture to remedy the issue. Participant 1 stated that she believed that the glass ceiling is not wholly the blame for women not excelling in their careers. She believed that more need to be more confident, more assertive, and she more aggressive, like men.

Table 3

Evidence Supporting Themes Related to Research Question 2

Themes	Evidence to support the theme
Work-life Balance	<p data-bbox="625 495 1255 558">Women run business different than men. May not be based on glass ceiling. May be other personal issues. (P1)</p> <p data-bbox="625 590 1255 653">Family is frowned upon for women, was way worst years ago. (P2)</p> <p data-bbox="625 684 964 709">No fair work-life balance. (P2)</p>
Respect	<p data-bbox="625 772 1255 835">A lot of women in this field but they are not well regarded like men are. (P1)</p> <p data-bbox="625 867 1255 926">Seems natural for males to be considered for financial and operational careers. (P2)</p>

Table 4 (p. 54) displays evidence supporting Research Question 3, presenting the themes that address the research questions and the supporting quotes from the participants that illustrated the theme. Research Question 3 was: What kind of programs and policies should be created to support women who aspire to lead?

Table 4

Evidence Supporting Themes Related to Research Question 3

Themes	Evidence to support the theme
Mentoring	<p>Women should support women, and women support men, but men don't support women. (P1)</p> <p>More men need to support women period. (P1)</p> <p>Definitely women should partner with other successful women. (P2)</p> <p>Women in power should create opportunities for women who need help. (P2)</p> <p>Women should mentor other women. (P2)</p> <p>Tips should be provided to college grads to circumvent difficult situations and help women excel in their careers. (P2)</p> <p>We didn't have that years ago. (P2)</p> <p>Prior organization had a mentorship program and was the only organization I had ever been in that had that program where women in the executive level were partnered with other women higher up so that women could have the opportunity to network and be around others with same challenges. (P3)</p>
Work-life Balance	<p>Women are so busy with family and fighting to get ahead that they don't pay attention to helping others. (P2)</p>

Table 5 (p. 56) displays evidence supporting Research Question 4, presenting the themes that address the research questions and the supporting quotes from the participants that illustrated the theme. Research Question 4 was: What significant success factors do you believe influence your determination to continue to lead? The themes for Research Question 4 were Work-life Balance, Mentoring and Respect. All of the participants focused on the three major themes when asked this question. The Work-life balance issue came up with Participant 1 when discussing the success factors that influence the participants to lead. Per Participant 1, she knew that she wanted

to create her own work and personal balance and that influenced her decision to quit her previous job working in Higher Education and open her own consulting firm. She stated that in the past, she had to work her vacations and family trips around the colleges schedule and now she takes long trips and decides when it is necessary to take on clients. Participant 2 focused more on the mentoring theme when asked this question. She stated that 20 years ago she was lucky enough to be surrounded by other women and even some men in leadership roles who helped to propel her into her leadership career. Participant 3 focused on respect when asked question 4. She believed that women had to demand respect and had to aggressively go after what they wanted regarding their careers. She stated that they must be focused on a career and set high goals. She focused heavily on the respect factor as she mentioned that she has had to deal mostly with the old boy's network for the majority of her career in leadership and it had been very difficult for her to always feel the need to have to prove herself for promotional opportunities.

Table 5

Evidence Supporting Themes Related to Research Question 4

Themes	Evidence to support the theme
Work-life Balance	<p>Being able to do my own thing on my own time. (P1)</p> <p>I have the ability to travel when I want and can take as much time as I want. (P1)</p> <p>Lots of highs and lows but great Work-life Balance. (P1)</p>
Mentoring	<p>There were strong women who helped me up the ladder. (P2)</p> <p>Men mentored me too but more women did. (P2)</p>
Respect	<p>Women must have a career path not just have a job. (P3)</p> <p>Have to have goals. Be willing to step forward. (P3)</p> <p>I understand it's difficult because I have experienced it as the only women in the group especially in an all boy's network. (P3)</p> <p>Must make presence known. (P3)</p>

Table 6 (p.57) displays evidence supporting Research Question 5, presenting the themes that address the research questions and the supporting quotes from the participants that illustrated the theme. Research Question 5 was: Do you believe that men are much more likely to become leaders in your organization than women? If so, please explain. The themes for Research Question 5 were Respect and Work-life Balance. When asked this question, Participant 1 stated that she preferred and enjoyed working more with men than women. She further stated that she believed that men were tougher and extremely more strategic than women and that would probably explain why they were chosen for more leadership roles and were at times more respected. She also believed that they went after more promotional and leadership opportunities than women did. Participant 2 believed that men are more respected and thought of than women

in regards to finding the right fit when choosing individuals for a leadership role. Participant 3 said that men respected other men more than they do women in their respective organizations and that it was evident by their behavior such as playing golf together and networking more while leaving women out of the networking opportunities. The Work-life balance theme came up in regards to this question for Participant 2. She stated that more men are chosen for leadership roles because they are believed to have less responsibilities at home to worry about.

Table 6

Evidence Supporting Themes Related to Research Question 5

Themes	Evidence to support the theme
Respect	<p>I choose to work more with men than women. (P1)</p> <p>Men are more tougher and strategic when it comes to business. (P1)</p> <p>Women can get more caught up in their feelings. (P1)</p> <p>Some organizations are geared towards putting men at the top but I see it changing. (P2)</p> <p>Men are more respected than women when it comes to obtaining leadership roles. (P2)</p> <p>Men are more comfortable around other men. Men like to give men more opportunities. (P3)</p> <p>Men play golf together and chat at the water cooler. Women are not brought into that world. (P3)</p>
Work-life Balance	<p>They feel that men can travel more and focus more of their energies on work and not family. (P2)</p> <p>They feel that women are more focused on family but if they are single they will focus more on work. (P2)</p>

Narrative Summary

All of the participants during their interviews stated that they have had to deal with professional challenges as they have ventured into leadership roles caused by the glass ceiling, not gaining the necessary respect from their male counterparts and attempting to balance work and life.

RQ1: What are your personal experiences as a leader in your organization? Describe both positive and negative.

P1 stated that “she recently began her own company after being in another field for many years as a senior manager and that was one of the reasons she wanted to begin her own business. P1 started off in her career part-time but she then realized how huge coaching had become.

She helps women build their brands and has been having a great time doing it. She wants to show others the ropes and helps others be successful. Positive experiences include that she’s able to be successful as an entrepreneur by working with others in different countries and working her own hours. Negative experiences include skepticism of jumping into the business, but it can be difficult for others to establish themselves, it can be hard. 9-5 jobs and traditional jobs are becoming non-existent and millennials want freedom instead of security and generational differences matter.”

P2 stated “being able to mentor new employees and others who are not as skilled in their field. I’ve always looked at that as I am a role model. Negative as a women in a career where it’s mainly financial and operational there is not as many opportunities as men in this career path.

P3 stated “Positive experiences including having positive opportunities in getting the inner workings of how they operate. The flip side is that there aren’t many women at my level so finding other women to connect with who have similar experiences is difficult.”

RQ2: Do you think that the glass ceiling still exists? Have you experienced it?

P1 stated that *“the glass ceiling still exists and women are killing the game. Having said that women have not reached the level like some of the big level men out there. I think it’s because of how women run business and I don’t blame the glass ceiling so much. Men are more pushy and women lack that trait. I have experienced more as a minority not so much just as a women. There are no minorities out there. It’s not representative of the industry or the country. Does it directly affect me? I can’t qualitatively quantify that”*.

P2 says *“Still seems natural for males to be chosen over women for leadership roles in finance and operations. It shouldn’t be taken into consideration and isn’t as bad as it used to be but it’s still there”*.

P3 *“Absolutely it does exist. I have seen it and experiences it. I’ve seen other people get an advancement because they are male and more aggressive than me and want to achieve certain goals where I had to work harder to get to the entry level of where they are”*.

RQ3: What kind of programs and policies should be created to support women who aspire to lead?

P1 stated *“I think women support women and women support men but men don’t support women. It’s sad to say, but it’s so true. I can say it but if a man says it’s a problem. I think if men supported women it would help especially in this industry. It would be awesome to see more men supporting us”*.

P2 stated *“that women should partner with women in positions of power and they should create opportunities for other women and look at how they can better mentor other women and create opportunities for them. It’s hard for women in leadership roles to pay attention to help them climb the ladder.”* *“Programs should be put in place by other women. So many other*

organizations that have a lot of women can create policies to help other women. We should catch women early and provide them with tips to help them so they know what they are getting into when starting out and this includes college graduates and high school graduates and how to circumvent these situations”.

P3 said they had a mentorship program at my prior organization where they singled out women in the executive level to mentor and lead others. I think it’s important even for small organizations to do this as it will allow women to network and it’s important that organizations focus on their women and figure out how to elevate them”

RQ4: What significant success factors do you believe influence your determination to continue to lead? And how is your work life balance?

P1 stated “I think because what I do affords me the life that I want, that is considered a success to me. It’s a lifestyle that I want. If I want to be on a beach it’s what I want to do”. “I believe there is an ebb and flow and like with most careers there is gonna be ups and downs. There is downtime but I know when it’s time to work and when I can be free. I know in April I may be free but then it can get busy”.

P2 stated “I have always wanted to get ahead and there were other strong women who assisted me along with building me up but I was definitely fortunate in being able to partner with women who had the ability to help me. I also had a lot of goals that helped me to get ahead”.

P3 stated “I realized that you must have goals and a career path and you must be willing to open your mouth. I think it’s hard for women to step forward and I’ve seen it. When I’ve been the only woman in the room it’s hard to have an opinion on something because it’s an old boy’s network. Once you make your presence known and keeping your eye on the bigger picture and looking at others and how they go t there and can you follow in their footsteps try not to reinvent the trail”.

RQ5: Do you believe that men are much more likely to become leaders in your organization than women? If so, please explain.

P1 said *“If a man has a 7 figure business and a woman has a 7 figure business of course they will be admired but men always stand out. For example my life coach and business coach are men. I’ve worked with women in the past, but men have more of a go-getter image. It resonates with a lot of people. When I want to go for the gold, I’ve chosen a man. I think women get more caught up in their feelings, which I love and admire many women, but men are just more strategic”*

P2 said *“Some organizations are still geared towards putting men at the top. But I feel that it is changing even though it hasn’t changed yet. I feel that they feel that a man can put all his energy in travel and work while for a women if she has young children the thought process is that that will hinder her. If she is single then she will maybe be promoted. Today’s society is focused on putting women at the top”*.

P3 stated *“In my current organization yes absolutely. Men are more comfortable around other men and will give there men the opportunities. Women have to prove ourselves and we have to wonder who sets the bar. Men are given the benefit of the doubt when women are not. Men in my field are generally at the top for the organization, and if women are at the executive level they are in HR and PR and Marketing and not a CFO or in IT. There are women out there but we are not given the opportunities. I have sat in meetings and listened how men have relationships with other men offer roles to other men who aren’t even qualified. In the current climate, men are given the benefit of the doubt. They play golf together and talk at the watercooler.”*

Summary

In Chapter 4, the researcher provided an overview of the data collection and also a narrative summary of each participants' transcripts regarding the research questions and their responses. Focusing on the glass ceiling to help shape and guide the interview questions, three themes appeared. These themes were: Work-life Balance, Respect and Mentoring. While their individual experiences differed, the participants definitely shared a camaraderie in the three themes. The findings of this study indicate that the participants perceived that the glass ceiling still exists, especially in certain fields and that mentoring would help most women remain successful in leadership roles once they got into a certain position. The results of this phenomenological study revealed the following regarding the participant's experiences:

1. A perception of the glass ceiling being a barrier to many women who want to become leaders and remain successful is still apparent;
2. Their perception that women are not respected as much as they should be in the workplace;
3. The perception that having a work-life balance is difficult especially for women in leadership roles who have to juggle careers and family;
4. A perception that mentoring policies need to be created for women to help them remain successful in their leadership roles;
5. Their view that women in leadership roles should help other women as much as possible as early as high school and college to direct them towards being successful;
6. Mentoring and networking with other men and women is important to be successful;
7. Perceptions of women in leadership roles are defined by how both men and women see those women in leadership roles;

These results are further examined in chapter five, which presented a discussion of the findings, the implications for practice, and the recommendations for future research regarding successfully breaking the glass ceiling.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of women who still believed that the proverbial barrier regarding career advancement, ideally called a glass ceiling, still existed, how women remained successful in their leadership roles and if they believed a Work-life Balance was achievable. Historically, the glass ceiling has been a difficult barrier for women to get through. Women have fought tirelessly to prove that they can handle a leadership role in organizations for many years. Per Baker and Cangemi (2016) women only make up 51.4 percent of leadership roles but have earned 57 percent of all Bachelor and 60 percent of all Masters Degrees. They are highly skilled and competent for leadership roles and well educated. However, per the authors, they only account for 18.7 percent of the U.S. Congress, 16.9 percent of Fortune 500 board seats, and only 4 percent of the CEOs in Fortune 500 companies. The disparity is enormous.

Elfman explained (2017) that there are only a few effective ways to break through the glass ceiling and organizations along with other individuals in senior positions must illicit this change. She explained that organizations must provide career development opportunities and implement policies that benefit career advancement along with increasing the ability for women to be successful in their leadership roles. Alongside that, programs must be created that ensure women can balance a successful career while having a normal personal life. Baker and Cangemi (2016) suggested first and foremost that organizations focus on increasing this issue by bringing awareness to it, creating exemplary organizational policies that require consideration of women for executive leadership roles, and incorporating the value of women in leadership roles into organizational mission, goals, values and vision plans. They are many negative connotations and

perceptions that prohibit and impede women from trying to excel in their careers. Creating policies that allow women and now men more time off for maternity leave alongside allowing for flexible work hours and ongoing training, allows for women to grow successfully while being supported in their leadership role. In this chapter, the researcher provided interpretations of the findings, social implications and recommendations for further research.

Findings and Interpretations

The interpretation of the research findings was addressed based on the main research questions and sub questions. The phenomenological study was guided by the following central research question:

1. What has been your professional and personal experiences as a woman in a leadership role?

The central research question was guided by four sub questions:

1. How do women in leadership roles describe their experiences regarding the glass ceiling?
2. What are successful factors for women in leadership roles?
3. How do women in leadership roles successfully balance challenges?
4. How do these challenges relate to the culture of an organization?

Personal and professional experiences. All of the women had obtained leadership roles after beginning entry level positions and climbed the career ladder rapidly. All of them also worked mostly in the private sector and had both witnessed and experienced the glass ceiling throughout their careers. They had all learned how to maneuver through the barrier by either being a part of a mentoring program provided by their organization or by given insight on how to excel in their careers. Per Bombuwela and DeAlwis (2013), individual factors, family factors, organizational factors and cultural factors all affect a woman's career and also determines

whether she remains successful or not. All of the women stated that they supported mentoring other women and assisting them as they too try to navigate through the glass ceiling. P2 mentioned that when she was an entry level employee, she was lucky enough to meet women and men who assisted her in climbing the ladder successfully and nowadays pays it forward with other young women. Personally she feels that it is her duty to do so. P1 recently resigned from the corporate world and owns her own business and as an entrepreneur realizes the difference between the successes of women and men in her field. Personally she has been very happy with her trajectory and believes that other women can too be just as successful. P3 has also excelled into a senior management position and believes that professionally this is where she wants to be in her career and believes that more women should be in her field.

Glass Ceiling. All of the women have experienced the glass ceiling sometime within their career. P1 stated that she witnessed it not only in the corporate world, but now also as an entrepreneur. She even admits that she sometimes chooses men to coach her and consults with them more than women because of certain traits that women exhibit, such as non-aggression. P2, the oldest of the participants, states that she has been in the career world for over 20 years and has witnessed the decrease in the cases of glass ceiling barriers affecting others, yet admits that the problem still blatantly exists. She believes that organizations should create more policies to decrease the amount of barriers that young women encounter in their organizations and the culture of organizations need to be constantly updated. Per Bombuwela and DeAlwis (2013), the glass ceiling still exists and is based on gender stereotyping. Once policies are created to ensure that job fit is not based solely on gender stereotyping and based more on skill and the right fit, the glass ceiling will continue to be an issue in organizations.

Success Factors. Successful leaders know how to balance work and personal life. P1 stated that one of the joys of her career was the ability to take vacations when she wants but also knowing when to work overtime in order to pay her bills. Bombuwela and DeAlwis (2013) stated that support is also an important factor regarding work life balance. A woman who has great family support is able to be successful at home and at work. They know when to concentrate on one while working on the other. Balancing is their forte. P2 believes that more women would be able to balance work and personal life if their organizations would implement employee initiatives that focus on working women. Allowing for flexible schedules, for example, would allow a mother to work half days and also spend time with her children if need be. Unfortunately, most women in leadership roles sometimes feel too guilty to leave work early to catch their child's sports game or sometimes do not want to stay home with a sick child for fear that they would look incompetent. Organizations must change the culture and stigma as it relates to working women and should aim to support women who have no other choice but to balance work and life responsibilities.

Culture. It all begins with the culture of an organization. Most organizations need to create better policies and standard practices that support women who want to grow within the organization. Per Sahoo and Lenka (2016), gender diversity initiatives are important for any organizations success and performance because women in leadership roles increases an organizations output and efficiency. The authors completed a study that focused on the importance of an organizations policies to include growth, mentorship and development training just for female employees which in turn would effectively break the glass ceiling and push for employees to respect women by recognizing their capabilities to lead.

During the interview, P3 mentioned that she had only worked at one organization that had a mentoring program focused on women in leadership roles. Imagine if all organizations implemented modern day policies and mentoring programs that benefitted working mothers or young women leaders. Women would be treated differently and the respect levels would change in a positive manner. Women would be considered a man's counterpart and their equal instead of just a women in a leadership role, leading others. The culture cannot change if policies and standard procedures do not change.

Central Question

At the beginning of the study, the researcher intended to answer a central research question which was: What has been your professional and personal experiences as a woman in a leadership role? The study has shown that most women have experienced the glass ceiling and have had issues growing in their organizations without the guidance and mentorship from other executive women. Yet when they have met exemplary leaders in similar careers, they are told to ensure that they garner respect from their counterparts, continue with ongoing mentoring opportunities and have a great work-life balance.

Three themes emerged from the data: (a) mentoring is important, (b) garnering respect from their counterparts is necessary (c) work-life balance allows for a successful career. These themes represent the individual, societal and organizational related barriers that have plagued women in the working world for many years. Igniting change would allow women to build on their abilities, experiences and competencies that enable them to have a positive effect on their organizations and the world on a whole. It would ensure that equal pay is honored and that women and men are on the same playing field. Gender stereotypes would be eliminated and out-of-date recruitment techniques would be a thing of the past.

Relationship of Findings to the Literature

The literature dug deeply into the factors of the glass ceiling, its impact on women who not only want to one day be considered for a leadership role, but also how to maintain that role in a successful manner. The historical context of the glass ceiling dates back to the feminist and suffrage movements where women had to fight to vote, work and make wages that were not anywhere comparable to a man's wage, even while doing the same type of work. Many years later, women are still fighting to be equally yoked in the boardroom and the pay gap still is an issue. Many women state that the glass ceiling still exists and that they find it difficult to compete with men who only have to aggressively lay stake to a position to acquire it while sometimes more qualified women fight harder to prove that they are worthy of the role. The findings confirmed along with the literature, that women have to deal with gender bias, leadership trait definitions, and at times race issues. But like the findings noted, self-efficacy does affect women in attaining leadership roles and their ability to stay successful in their roles as a leader. Per Nixdorff and Rosen (2010), women at times lack the confidence to believe in themselves and their worth. Per the study, women have to fight for what they want and believe that they can achieve success and be an effective leader. Overall, it is quite important that organizations take the lead in ensuring that women get the same opportunities as men and that policies are in place to ensure that training emphasizes the importance of gender equality in the workplace.

Implications of Findings

The results of this study confirmed that further research needs to be done as the glass ceiling is still a barrier for women to conquer. The data collected would benefit future qualitative studies to determine what type of policies should be created, what type of mentorship programs should be instilled, should working hours be minimized for women in

leadership roles so that their Work-life balance can be equally yoked and the importance of eliminating out dated programs and implementing more modern programs by discussing gender bias in the workplace.

Views of the glass ceiling. While the participants have witnessed and experienced the glass ceiling, those who create and change policy must also admit that a glass ceiling exists or that it could affect future policies and practices. This may ultimately affect how human resource manager's and other leaders design future organizational structures and promotional opportunities for future generations of women. Downes, Hemmasi and Eshghi (2014) confirmed in their research that the glass ceiling definitely exists even though many will disagree. The authors stated that while it may not be an apparent structure, the barrier has barred women from the leadership seat for many years and in many organizations worldwide. Many studies regarding the issue note the low percentage of women who hold leadership roles and those who are able to do so successfully for long periods of time. The authors believed that those who do not believe there is a glass ceiling are individuals who have easily maneuvered through the process or may not have to worry much about a Work-life balance. Two of the participants of this research study believed that it is sometimes more important that women ignore the barriers and focus instead on their own individual effort on achieving their goals. Most importantly, they all believed that all women in leadership roles should seek to educate their coworkers, especially their male colleagues on the different ways the glass ceiling can create gender inequality for women.

Recommendations for Future Research

Organizations. Several recommendations were provided for organizations to promote leadership for women and to also ensure that women successfully maintain their leadership roles.

1. Encourage women to participate in conferences and trainings. Many women can network and learn from other women and men about breaking the glass ceiling and

building upon their skills to remain an effective leader while balancing Work-life responsibilities.

2. Implement mentorship programs within the organization. This has helped many women feel more comfortable to talk about the issues they may be having with their employees and allows for a safe space for those who are unsure of how to handle difficult work issues.

3. Bi-annual leadership retreats. Allow both men and women to gather bi-annually to talk about issues and have open and honest dialogues about gender equality and how to uplift employees especially women.

Policy implementation. Societal, governmental, internal business fundamental barriers affect women from leadership roles (Johns, 2013). Researchers should work closely with human resources, local elected officials and other leaders within their organizations to create a real policy that would effectively implement change. If policymakers want to ensure that women of all income levels and educational backgrounds enter the workplace and advance in their career, there must be forward thinking policies that include items such as affordable and universal child care, progressive parental leave for both men and women and readily available opportunities to work flexibly if necessary. Johns (2013) believed that elected officials and administrators in the public sector can assist in promoting gender equality by bringing the issue to the forefront that focuses on gender inequality and how it negatively impacts women, families, communities, organizations and the nation as a whole. Johns also stated that enacting laws and resolutions and fighting back against existing legislation that does not support gender equality is also very important.

Other themes. Other themes that can be researched include gender bias, leadership traits, stress factors, minority factors and education levels. Gender bias and leadership traits are important themes as they can directly be associated with the impact of the glass ceiling regarding women growing in their careers. Gender bias is a large proponent of why women seem to encounter the glass ceiling and should be researched further. There are not enough structures put in place to ban gender bias and more intensive research should be done especially in organizations where they should focus on this theme more extensively.

Most women are considered to be weak and too emotional to lead and that is why they are looked over for leadership roles. Sulpizio (2015) states that women should focus on the following traits if they want to be effective leaders:

1. Persistence
2. Optimism
3. Strong and Powerful Voice
4. Strong Sense of Self and Confidence
5. Authenticity

Education is not as important a theme to research further because it is a known fact that pursuing higher education is extremely important for both men and women who wish to be placed into a leadership role.

Other professions. All of the participants were leaders who came from the private sector. Other professions to research and should also be taken into account is healthcare, the public sector, education and science, as this would allow for a more extensive study from women with different types of skills, background and organizational cultures. Per Burbridge (1994), the private sector has more women in a leadership capacity than the private sectors. It is important to research and study why some sectors are more successful with assisting women

while others are not. In this way, the different sectors can learn from each other especially when policies and practices need to be updated.

Limitations

While completing this study, several limitations were identified. Participation was limited to three women in leadership roles in the private sector. All of the participants were based in the South Florida area and exhibited a small sample size with similar backgrounds. Per Creswell (2014), the second limitation of this study was that the researcher did not establish extended relationships with the participants. The researcher interviewed each participant once. Creswell stated that more than one interview would have been best as it would have allowed the researcher to get to know the participants better. The small sample size can allow for issues regarding the overall findings. A small sample size would only be appropriate if the data collected did not affect such a large population of individuals. In this case, the participant's may have differing views regarding certain topics, but a larger sample size would have relayed more information that could have largely impacted the study. It also makes it difficult to generalize the data to other populations like maybe less successful women, women who do not believe in a glass ceiling and women in different age groups and ethnic backgrounds. Moreover, internal validity allowed for some bias within the research and asks the question on whether if the research gathered was sufficient enough to support the claim that the glass ceiling is a barrier that prohibits women from being successful leaders.

Additionally the participants were selected using purposeful sampling and the snowballing technique and therefore that introduced bias and the data does not reflect the population the study intended to. Per Creswell (2012), other studies should include a large sample of women with different age ranges and in different career sectors. Furthermore, future researchers should gather more extensive data by asking the participants more detailed questions

about their issues with the glass ceilings and even possibly allow the individual completing the research to produce a long term study that follows the participant from the beginning of their journey as an entry level or mid-level manager to the end in a C-Suite role, to see if the glass ceiling still exists.

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Appendix A
Interview Protocol

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer Name:

Interviewee:

Hello. Thank you for taking time out of your day to meet with me and participate in this study. The information you provide will be very valuable and meaningful as I seek to answer questions that may connect the relationship between career advancement, the glass ceiling, and achieving success. You have been selected and asked to participate in the research because you are a leader in your field.

I want you to feel comfortable and as relaxed as possible. If at any time during this interview you have any concerns, please let me know so that I can help you feel at ease. In an effort to ensure the interview questions are clearly organized,

The interview is scheduled to last approximately 45 minutes. However, please keep in mind that based on your personal experiences and your answers to the questions, the interview may go over, therefore, additional time may be required to complete the interview.

Research Topic: Success Factors of Women in Leadership Roles and Breaking through the Glass Ceiling: A Phenomenological Qualitative Study

Open-ended questions will be used in this interview process as a means of gathering data focused on the themes as expressed in the sections of this protocol. A total of one interview, lasting approximately 45 minutes, will be conducted and the questions below will be used to guide each interview session.

Interview Questions

1. What are your personal experiences as a leader in your organization? Describe both positive and negative.			
2. Do you think that the glass ceiling still exists? Have you experienced it?			
3. What kind of programs and policies should be created to support women who aspire to lead?			
4. What significant success factors do you believe influence your determination to continue to lead?			
5. Do you believe that men are much more likely to become leaders in your organization than women? If so, please explain.			

Appendix B
Leadership Profile Overview

Leadership Profile

Participants	Current Position	Sector	Years in Leadership Role
P1	CEO	Private	10
P2	Director	Private	20
P3	Senior Manager	Private	5

Appendix C
Coding Results

Theoretical Framework	Theme Number	Theme	Codes
Border	1	Mentoring/Support	Creating policies for women
	2	Respect	Capable of being successful
	3	Worklife Balance	Balancing work and personal life

Appendix D

Participant Thank You Letter

Date:

Dear _____,

Thank you for meeting with me regarding my study and for the structured interview along with sharing your lived experiences. I appreciate your willingness to share your unique and personal thoughts, feelings, events and situations. I have enclosed your transcribed interview and ask that you review the entire document. Please review the transcription and ensure the interview fully captured your experiences. After reviewing the transcript, you may realize that an important experience(s) was neglected. Please feel free to add comments, (utilizing red track changes), which would further expand upon your lived experience(s). If preferred, we can arrange a meeting to audio record your additions or corrections. Please do not edit for grammatical corrections. The way you told your lived experiences is what is critical. When you have reviewed the verbatim transcript and have had the opportunity to make changes and additions, please return the transcript via email to the below email address. I have greatly valued your participation in this research study and your willingness to share your thoughts as a woman in a leadership role and your experiences regarding breaking the glass ceiling. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me directly at (954) 980-3757 or h1254@nova.edu.

Best regards,

Heidi S. Richards