Gender & Leadership: Do Human Resource Policies and Practices Affect a Woman's Ascent in Organizations?

The Honors Program
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ABSTRACT

As more women began assuming leadership roles in organization, researchers established a number of consistencies in the promotion of women into the upper ranks of an organization. Jonsen, Maznevski, and Schneider have taken a look at these differences in their study, "Gender Differences in Leadership: Believing is Seeing." In this study they examine three ways in which organizations view women and the Human Resource policies and programs that support these views. Based on this and other research, I conducted a study in hopes of assessing the validity and existence of these views as they are evident in Southern New England organizations. Through interviews with ten prominent women in eight organizations, I have found that these views are evident in many organizations. Some organizations, however, have Human Resource Programs that do not fit into these categories and should therefore be classified into separate paradigms. Additionally, a clear disconnect has been assessed between the programs an organization has in place and those programs that women believe they would benefit the most from. This leads me to believe that there is a lack of communication between employees and human resource departments.

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<u>INTRODUCTION</u>

As a general rule, today, in the year 2010, research done nearly two decades previous is considered outdated for student to use in a research project. Times and technology change so quickly, that research done decades earlier may have been disproved or expanded. Tax and human resource laws have changes, scientific discoveries have been made, planets have been found and then downgraded, and more history has been added to the books. In the studies of gender and work, however, it is not unusual to find pertinent information in sources dating back to the 1980's and 1990's. While helpful in research, this fact demonstrates that despite the many strides women have made in the work force, some things never change. The gender biases, stereotypes, wage disparities, and the "good ole boy's club" exist to hinder women's assent in an organization today as they did nearly twenty years ago. These issues may stem from perceived domestic roles of women or the legal responsibilities of organizations.

We hear continually about the differences between directive, transactional men and communal, transformational women (Bono & Anderson, 2005). While no one seeks to disprove the research presented, one could argue that this research is not helpful in remedying the problem. Nearly all the research in this field is descriptive in nature; few, if any researchers, have prescriptive solutions to change the ever present inequality between men and women.

The most recent research in the field of gender, work, women, and leadership has been conducted by Jonsen, Maznevski, and Schneider (2009), who suggest that organizations view the importance of gender in one of three ways and have organized these views into three paradigms: *the gender-blind view*, *the gender-conscious view*, and *the perception creates reality view*. Their research further suggests that human resource practices and policies may be influenced by the paradigm with which an organization aligns. The first paradigm asserted in the paper is the gender-blind view, in which it is assumed that "women and men leaders are *not* significantly different and should therefore be treated the same." The second paradigm, the gender-conscious view, asserts that "Women and men leaders are significantly different and should be treated accordingly." And finally, the third paradigm, *perception creates*

reality, suggests that "women and men leaders are not significantly different, but people *believe* they are different and these stereotypes create barriers" (Jonsen, Maznevski, & Schneider, 2009). The following review has integrated prominent literature on women and leadership into the framework of Jonsen, Maznevski, and Schneider's study. The purpose of this paper is twofold. The first is to explore if such paradigms do exist and second to assess if there is a paradigm that has not been considered. Research will explore the potential influence that these paradigms have on human resource policies and practices, in particular the impact on a woman's potential for advancement in an organization.

LITERATURE REVIEW

While many researchers have discussed the topic of women in executive leadership positions over the last two decades, no research has assessed the information in the same way as Jonsen, Maznevski, and Schneider (2009) in their study "Gender Differences in Leadership: Believing is Seeing." This paper has divided research on gender's role in leadership into three different paradigms: *gender blind*, *gender conscious*, and *perception creates reality*. Much research has been done prior to the publication of the Jonsen et al. study, in which many organizational policies would likely follow the patterns associated with their paradigms.

The Gender Blind Paradigm
The first view discussed is the gender blind paradigm. Under this category, is research that focuses on struggles to the top of an organization based on the route itself since men and women in this "blind" view are believed to lead in a similar fashion. One of the ideas behind this paradigm is that providing women opportunities in the workplace, is just the right thing to do based on the sheer number of women that have entered the workforce in the last decades. According to Helfat, Harris, and Wolfson (2006), if a company is to benefit from having as large a pool of candidates to fill positions as possible, then it should follow that women make up approximately half of the pool, as women now represent roughly half of the workforce. These authors found, however, that almost 50% of their sample of 1000 firms, had no female representation as top executives. Those organizations which did have females represented in top ranks, actively recruited and promoted women to these ranks. Helfat et al.'s study focuses on the situation or organizational explanation of the small numbers of women in management. At this level, the top management teams (TMT) along with the CEO have important roles to play in the strategy of the firm. "The effectiveness of decision making teams, including TMTs has to do with the diversity of the team. Diversity within organizational teams leads to greater search for information, range of perspectives, and generation of alternative ideas" (Helfat, Harris, & Wolfson, 2006, p. 44). This heterogeneity should include all aspects of diversity including age, race, nationality, *and* gender, not just those aspects that are easy to implement. According to the CEO of Newell-Rubbermaid, a company must promote managers who understand its customers. By including women in such pools, companies will have additional

insight into the purchasing decisions of other women and the average family as women control 88% of the purchases in the U.S. Companies could therefore benefit from including women in the top management team.

One of the major concerns associated with the pipeline to the top for women specifically, lies in the fact that women are more likely to be found in staff jobs as opposed to line jobs. Line jobs are those functions that are directly related to a company's bottom line, where as staff jobs serve as support staff for the line staff. For example, manufacturing and sales are considered line positions, whereas human resources is a support function for those who work in the sales or manufacturing departments. "Because line positions, and more recently the CFO position, are often a route to the top, women struggle to break into the pipeline itself quickly enough to be promoted" (Helfat, Harris, & Wolfson, 2006). In the most promising companies that Helfat et al researched, they found that the women in upper management positions were younger and less tenured, which suggests active hiring and promotion of women into the upper echolons of organizations. It is also likely that this aggressive search for highly ranked women stems from an expanded talent pool including a porportionate amount of women. This is encouraging to women as a gender, who will now view themselves as competent and right for positions they may have previously assumed to be a male's job. Behind this paradigm may lie a legal dimension that employers encounter. Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and Affirmative Action programs, force employers to focus on the number of people of different minorities that are currently employed at an organization. However, a major concern with this paradigm especially with regard to these legal requirements, is that increasing the size of the talent pool to include a proportionate number of women or minorities, does not mean that this pool of candidates will necessarily be as talented and qualified as necessary to hold a specific position.

A second concern associated with the gender blind paradigm is the idea of women's historical roles, laying the groundwork for gender typed jobs and thus workplace inequality. This paradigm does not take into account the traditional lack of women in the workplace due to decisions to remain and work in the home raising children and completing other domestic

work. In response, many of the jobs in todays working society have been gender labeled into male and female positions. While women are not banned from traditionally male positions, it has been found that it is a struggle for women in management, especially in the male gender typed positions of finance or logistics. When a woman succeeds at such tasks she is viewed as cold, uncaring, and unfeminine because they seek to be viewed as a leader. The "traditional" leader is a male, so many female leaders feel the need to assume masculine traits to be effective. Terms like "bitch", "ice queen", and "dragon lady" are frequently used to describe women who assume these masculine qualities leading to social rejection, which hinders a female's ability to climb the ladder in an organization.

In her article "Women as a Business Imperative" Felice Schwartz writes that "It is imperative that you help women advance in your company" (Schwartz, 2000, 105). She urges upper management to seek out women for the tops ranks in their organizations because women are as skilled, capable, and enthusiastic about their work as men and organizational human resource policies reflect this, but by segregating women, the best people are not getting equal opportunities. "Women are now earning 55% of all undergraduate accounting degrees and 35% of MBAs. So, if you attempt to depend solely on male graduates from the top 10% of the best schools in the country, you will drastically reduce the pool from which you draw" (Schwartz, 2000). Schwartz argues in accordance with the first paradigm in that she suggests that by sheer number of women in the workforce, the talent pool should be equally divided into men and women. With a shrinking workforce as babyboomers retire, it is not feasible to expect the same productivity with just male job applicants. The pool of qualified applicants should include women as well. Based on EEO standards in the U.S., many organizations are assumed to operate under this paradigm in which all employees are created equally, but many concerns are associated with the idea of ignoring important distinctions between men and women. These include women not being able to get into the managerial pipeline at all, given their current roles and social isolation, which inhibits a female's ability to network with the necessary people to promote herself.

<u>The Gender Conscious Paradigm</u>
The second paradigm is the gender conscious view which states that men and women should be treated differently as they are notably different beings. Under this view, there is an emphasis on differences between men and women. Gender consciousness seeks to change the standards by which evaluations take place because using same standards currently to evaluate both genders, leads to a struggle for women, who feel they cannot be directive in management roles for fear of negative evaluations. Key attributes of this paradigm include changing what is assessed in performance reviews to reflect the competencies of women, one-on-one mentoring for low rankings women in the organization, and other programs developed especially for women, such as directiveness or negotiation training. Linda Carli claims that the "female leaders are evaluated more harshly when they use directive styles of leadership, whereas male leaders have a greater latitude to use a variety of styles" (1999). Because women are held to higher standards of performance, "women actually do have to outperform men for others to consider them equally competent because the standard for what constitutues competence in men is lower than the standard for what constitutes competence in women" (Carli, 1999, p.84) Due to this, changes in the evaluation criteria will seemingly level the playing field, by evaluating both genders, assumed to be significantly different, on the measures that apply best to their inherent talents.

The women found at the highest levels of the organization reported "more obstacles due to the lack of personal support and less culture fit than did lower level executive women" (Lyness & Thompson, 1997). By offering a mentoring program in this situation, lower level women could be developed by women have succeeded in their given career path. An upper level mentor for the lower level women in the organization could serve as a sounding board and personal support system for the mentees. By allowing women to develop such networking relationships, the playing field will be more level in relation to men who are typically granted more network abilities inside and outside of work. Despite society's efforts, the "good old boys club" still exists and generally discriminates against women by engaging in activities geared at male bonding or that women would not be able to attend do to domestic responsibilities. "Fast-track managers 'spent relatively more time and effort socializaing,

politicking, and interacting with outsiders than did their successful counterparts…'" (Eagly & Carli, 2007). This suggests that sociability is necessary for success as a manager and advancement in the company, however women typically find it difficult to engage in these types of informal networking events due to other responsibilities. For example, as recently as 2004, female employees at Meryl Lynch filed discrimination complaints that were largely ignored by management. These women alleged that "managers often went to strip clubs with male brokers and once held a meeting at Stringfellows, a strip club in Manhattan" (McGeehan, 2004, p. 4). These are the situations where informal networking leaves women feeling out of place. This club is a place where women feel that they do not belong and therefore leads not only to feelings of discrimination, but also gives male employees a relationship with senior management on a different level than women. This relationship may then give male employees a better chance at promotions and assignments based on the friendships developed within and outside of the workplace.

Lyness and Thompson reported that "many successful female executives apparently perceived limits to their prospects for future advancement" (1997). Despite the progress that could be made if all companies instituted a formal networking program, more would have to be done to integrate the sexes, so that women will perceive the same barriers to advancement that men do, but no more. A way to give women the opportunities to connect with colleagues without having to forfeit domestic responsibilities are networking lunches, where entire offices can have a chance to mingle and make connections that are imperative to advancement up the corporate ladder.

The Perception Creates Reality Paradigm
The final paradigm to which organizations can ascribe is the *perception creates reality* view. Whereas the *gender conscious* paradigm recognizes the disadvantages in opportunities for women and seeks to create programs to create face-time for women with prominent members of their organization; the *perception creates reality* view does not recognize the differences between men and women and hopes to educate employees that differences are nonexistent. This view contends that men and women are not drastically different, but people believe they are, so stereotypes are formed and create barriers for women. The authors heavily emphasize

diversity training and understanding differences between people as a way to combat stereotypes under this view. Adams, Gupta, and Leeth (2007), have seen the evidence of these stereotypes in their work. They found that "regardless of market conditions, females appear to be appointed to the CEO position following a better corporate performance relative to the appointed males" (pg. 8). This information implies that the board of directors and stockholders feel safer when males are at the helm. In troubled times women are not likely to be promoted to high levels as men are more trusted to bring the company out of its financially troubling situation. This trust is based on the misconception that women are not competent and cannot lead, especially in precarious situations.

A second common stereotype that impacts women is that an effective leader is one who embodies predominantly male qualities and characteristics. Campbell (2002) believes that there is an overlap in people's minds between qualities of leadership and of masculinity (Campbell, 2002). Because men are stereotyped as being decisive, aggressive, competent, and agentic, they are seen as the natural leaders. This "natural" leadership capability that people perceive in men creates barriers for women as both men and women perceive men as having better leadership capabilities. Many studies underscore more male qualities perceived positively in leaders. Alice Eagly and Linda Carli (2007), write that "A widely shared set of conscious and unconscious mental associations about women, men, and leaders" lead to the resistance to women's leadership and discrimination Due to a long history of male. dominance in leadership, many people have difficulties separating leadership qualities from male qualities. For example, as the former Prime Minister of Canada in 1993, Campbell noted that she had to be quite assertive and use a nontraditional type of speech as a female in this role. While some people were bothered by this, she felt it was the right way for a leader to speak, although not necessarily the right way for a woman to speak. Based on her experiences, Campbell believes that the goal of organizations should be creating an open culture in which women can express the "forceful, dynamic leadership qualities they have without being penalized and men can express the intuitive, empathetic qualities they have that are often not valued and get suppressed by the masculine culture" (Campbell, 2002, pg 20). It

is time for leadership to be multifaceted because business is multifaceted. Companies cannot be just masculine or just feminine in it's focus if it wants to succeed in their given industry.

This perspective views the lack of women in upper management as an issue of gender biases, particularly in evaluations. "Devaluation of their [women's] performance, denial of credit to them for their successes, or penalization for being competent" are all obstacles women face based on the stereotypes of how women are or should be (Heilman, 2001, pg 661). Because executive positions are gender-typed as male, evaluations for these positions are typically skewed to assess male gendered qualities that may inhibit women from being recognized for their tremendous efforts. The assumed lack of fit between how women are perceived to be and how a leader should be in an executive position is likely to create an expectation that any woman in said position will fail. These psychological barriers to hiring, placement, and promotion have an enormous impact on women in managerial positions at all levels of an organization.

Gender discrimination and stereotypes are common and accepted based on cultural and societal values. These stereotypes help constrain women to lower levels of management because " all other things equal, a ratee's gender affects the personnel decision" (Agars, 2004, p. 105). This quote has been proven daily as hiring managers interview young women, and while they cannot ask the questions, in the back of the interviewer's mind he or she thinks about the odds that this woman will marry and have children and eventually leave the company. How much time do we have with her and is she worth it if she plans to leave in the next 5-10 years? Agars asserts that as one reachers higher levels of an organization, the impact of stereotypes will be greater, which is logical because as one climbs the organizational ladder, the fewer female colleagues one will have (Agars, 2004). He also cites evaluation criteria as a problem because higher level managers have more subjective evaluation criteria for assessments for everyone being evaluated, not just women.

While much of Jonsen, Maznevski, and Schneider's research makes sense and there is much literature which supports their basis for organizing literature on women and leadership into such categories, my interest was prompted as to the validity of these paradigms in local

organizations. Additionally, while the authors' work can be applauded, I sought to find if organizations truly view their female employees in one of these ways.

I have set out to prove not only whether or not such paradigms exist, but if there could be more paradigms. Have the authors missed a key group of organizational perspectives on women and leadership that does not fit into one of the previously mentioned paradigms? What of those organization that do not fit into these paradigms? What are the consequences of these other potential paradigms?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

By comparing the existing literature to data collected from interviews with prominent women in local organizations, this study seeks to assess the validity of the existence of the above mentioned paradigms for organizations throughout Southern New England in regards to a woman's ascent in an organization and any other strategic options and consequences of Human Resource Policies.

Based on the information gathered, interview protocol was developed to compare prominent themes of the literature to the thoughts and comments of local and prominent women in business. After this protocol was developed, approval through the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) was granted for the use of human "subjects" in this research. Women self-selected into the sample, through their attendance of the Bryant University Women's Summit in March 2009. Specifically, these women attended the session, "A View from the Top: Leading in a New Decade." These women were in their late 20's to mid- 60's and all were Caucasian. The average number of years that each individual spent with the company was 10.3 years and the range of years was from just under 1 year to 25-years of employment with their current company.

Each interview followed a set of interview questions (Appendix A) and lasted between 20 and 60 minutes. At the completion of all interviews, recorded interviews were transcribed and notes from those interviews not permitted to be recorded were organized into lists and charts to allow for ease comparative analysis of responses to one another. The data collected was analyzed, compared to prevalent themes of the literature, and assessed for relevance to the three paradigms in the research of Jonsen, Maznevski, and Schneider in their paper "*Gender Differences in Leadership: Believing is Seeing.*"

Content analysis was used as the qualitative method to analyze the interview transcripts to assist in the examination of words or phrases within a wide range of notes or transcripts. It also helped to develop themes within the information gathered. First, a coding system was developed to analyze commonalities across interviews based on the coding scheme of

Michael Roberto's paper *Strategic Decision-Making Processes* (Roberto, 2004). Responses were categorized based on similarity of responses between interviewees. For example, if four interviewees commented on their organization having established a mentorship program for women, all four of those responses were grouped together. Next, responses were coded again based on the responses alignment with one of paradigms from Jonsen, Maznevski, and Schneider. If responses aligned with a blind, conscious, or perception paradigm, it was coded as such, if not the response was coded into a miscellaneous group to be analyzed separately. These miscellaneous responses were assessed separately to determine if the group constituted a four paradigm that the Jonsen et al. have yet to develop.

FINDINGS

Demographic Information

The first interview question's purpose was to develop of general understand of what each interviewee's role was within the organization and what type of work they do. Interviewees ranged from Office Managers to Presidents and a complete list of positions, organizational information, and years experience with the company can be seen in Appendix B.

Career Development

Questions regarding organizational development programs returned many different results. Of the ten women interviewed, five of them cited that their company offered tuition reimbursement as a means of career development. The second most common answer was some kind of management training. Other common programs included talent review processes, goal setting processes, and individual online trainings. The most interesting outlier was found in the answer of the property development company, where the president of the organization explained that because of the size of her company there were no written policies or programs regarding career development. For a full list of responses to this question see Appendix C.

Despite the vast range of answers that were given in response to question two, when the interviewees were asked to think of any programs that are targeted to women, the vast majority could think of nothing. Seven of the ten interviewees were either not aware of any programs or there was nothing specific that the organization offered that was targeted specifically to women. Two of the women, both from the health systems company, noted that although there is nothing currently in place targeted to women, the idea to start such a program has been discussed and many people within the organization have recognized the need for such programs. Similarly, the member of the health insurance provider organization is currently working with her peers to develop such a program for their largely female organization. Finally, at the post-secondary education institution, the Chief Human Resource office noted that the institution used Affirmative Action policies as well as a "balanced slate" of candidates to ensure the access of women into the organization. Contrarily, the Associate

Dean for Student Life at the same institution described neither of those things and focused primarily on the institution's Annual Women's Summit and Wellness programs. These programs she observed are not specifically marketed to only women, but much more women take advantage of them than men.

The responses to whether or not these programs have helped in career development, were split nearly in half. Six of the women responded that yes, the programs in place for career development do indeed help with career advancement. Four of the respondents replied they did not believe these programs were of much help in career advancement. One woman from the health systems organization responded that she had seen these programs help people advance and witnessed incidences where such programs did not result in career advancement, therefore six women responded yes, while five women responded no.

Overwhelmingly, the interviewees struggled to think of programs with the goal of attracting women to upper management. Either nothing specific was thought of or interviewees perceived the movement to upper management as related to seniority, meritocracy, the "old boys' network," or one's own initiative to request a more challenging position.

Personal Benefits to Women
When asked what initiatives each woman had personally benefited from, unlike most of the responses, this answer had many similar results. The most common answer was that tuition reimbursement programs were the most helpful to four out of ten respondents. Mentoring programs as well outside events and affiliations were found to be the most helpful to three women out of ten each. Outside affiliations included regionally based professional organizations such as "Leading Women" or associations with local colleges and universities in the area that promotes networking and continuing education. Again a notable stand alone answer stemmed from the property development company. The president of this organization expressed that while Human Resources have protected her from outright exclusion, there were no policies within her organization, or other corporate organizations she had previously worked in prior to taking over in her current position, that she believed had truly helped her to succeed. All other answers can be seen in Appendix C

Though subjective, this question gives the researcher some idea as to how women perceive others to value them in the organization. The two most common responses were 1) the organization is a meritocracy and focuses on your skill level, rather than personal characteristics and 2) it depends on who you work with. The Associate Dean for Student Life at the post-secondary education institution commented that differences are divisional. In student affairs where she works, value is equal. Contrarily on the University President's advisory or executive board, there are no women, so the value of women is presumably less. Similarly, the Vice President of Human Resources and Administration at a software and simulation company as well as one of the Director of Human Resources in the health system, expressed that it "gets tough at the top" where women are few and further between. Other interesting responses included: lack of recognition, empowerment, and vastly underserved in the health systems organization, a sense of plateau-ing in the health insurance company, and educationally based differences are more prevalent within the software and simulation company, than gender differences. On a more positive and gender neutral side, the investment company boasts a sense of "blindness" and a focus on inclusion; the property and casualty insurer as well one of the women involved in the health system feel that their opinions and abilities are valued by their place of employment. The office manager of the engineering company expressed feelings of equality and no gender based distinctions and similarly the Chief Human Resources Officer at the post-secondary educational institution explained that she believed that diversity awareness and thus appreciation of women is something that is instilled in the organizational culture. All responses can be seen in Appendix E.

Improvement Ideas
The results from a question discussing what an organization could do to improve the working environment for women were the most varied. Each woman, presumably based on their personal needs, had different ideas as to how their organizations could balance work and life more effectively. There were two instances of repeated answers which included two women recommending the use of role modeling or mentoring programs as well as two different women commenting that they could think of nothing specifically to improve their work life balance. The latter two women worked in the Human Resources departments of the post-

secondary education institution and the financial services company respectively. While there were many other answers (see Appendix D), the one respondent who stood out was, again, the president of the property development company. She replied that were her company larger, she'd find balancing work and life more necessary, but in a bigger company she'd have less flexibility to "inflict her will" and change the rules about time off, vacations, etc. For example, she has been known to not give people bonuses and instead buy them plane tickets to enjoy a vacation that she believes the individual has earned. In a larger company, this type of flexibility would likely not be permitted.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to determine if organization view when differently and if these differences are reflected in the Human Resource policies and procedures as set forth by Jonsen, Maznevski, and Schneider (2009). I sought to assess the consequences of such views and determine whether or not there was missing information in the research. In general, the findings appear to be consistent with these groupings, but there were responses at particular organizations that lend themselves to the development of a new paradigm. Using a methodology of semi-structured interviews, the paradigms that organizations most closely aligned with, what types of programs women thought would be the most beneficial to them, and the paradigm that these desired programs aligned with have been analyzed.

When asked to describe the current programs or policies in place at specific organizations for career development, most interviewees expressed programs that were indicative of the gender blind paradigm (14 of 22 responses). These types of programs spread awareness and gives opportunities for growth without changing policy content to cater specifically to women. For example, management, skills, and online trainings, internal grading and individual development plans were common as responses. All of these programs offer women opportunities, but the content itself is no different from the content a man would get in a similar program. Why are these programs so prevalent? Perhaps due to ease in which a department can use a one-size-fits-all program rather than the monetary and time expenses that would arise from developing programs for the different minority groups of employees. The cost, both of time and money, of developing and implementing these additional programs to cater to minority groups is likely a factor in this decision. Especially in a time of slow economic recovery, when the resources of each department in an organization are cut, departments such as Human Resources often take a hit due to the decreased need for recruiting in a suffering economy. Another reason for the use of one-size-fits-all programs may include a lack of creativity on the part of Human Resource Departments. Are companies stuck in a rut? Many organizations study the "best practices" of successful organizations and have taken to modeling these practices. According to Zingheim, Ledford, and Schuster (1996) of Schuster-Zingheim and Associates, "the ability of an organization to replace copied

competencies with their own… will determine which firms gain unique advantage from competencies and competency models." Applying this to the Human Resources department the authors continue, "… companies have had great difficulty breaking free of one-size-fits-all job evaluation models once they were implemented" (62). The belief that because these practices work for the best companies in industry, that the same practices should work for every company may be a reason that a Human Resources department is not pushed by top management to think creatively in order to retain the best talent in the organization.

The outliers not fitting the mold of one of the three paradigms included the property development's company, which has no policies at all. Stemming from the lack of necessity in such a small company (less than twenty people are employed), this company does not even have a Human Resources department. Additionally, the property and casualty insurance corporation sets expectations that once an employee has reached a predetermined level within the organization, they will sit on the board of a nonprofit organization. This policy brings talent to nonprofits that may not be able to afford it and helps with the personal development of organizational employees as an external steward of the company. While interviewees from both of these organization believed that these programs were crucial for career development, neither seemed to fit into the previously defined paradigms. Because these outliers each have a very different focus it could be labeled *alternative pathways*. It is worthwhile to note that not only is it uncommon to see employees sitting on the board of non-profit organizations, but the lack of Human Resource department in the property development program is the least common response. Were the research to delve deeper into small businesses, it is likely that a lack of Human Resource departments would increase in such lean companies. Additionally, large corporations with a focus on community service and corporate social responsibility would likely increase the number of programs observed that assist the community as well as career development.

Less than half of the respondents recognized programs such as staff advisory or employee resource group, networking, and mentoring as prominent career development initiatives. All of these programs are an opportunity for employers to tailor the working environment to their

female workers in order to make women feel more comfortable, develop their skills and gain face-time with prominent organizational members (Jonsen, Maznevski, & Schneider, 2009). As was first hypothesized, the majority of organizations seem to use *gender blind* approaches and promote *gender blind* programs such as individual development planning or training sessions that do not focus on changing content for the different genders to make the content more applicable to the audience. As most of the interviewees were members of larger EEO bound organizations, this likely stems from continual focus on being an equal opportunity employer. These statements typically confirm that a given organization

> …prohibits discrimination with respect to the hiring or promotion of individuals, conditions of employment, disciplinary and discharge practices or any other aspect of employment on the basis of sex, race, color, age, national origin, religion, disability, marital status, sexual orientation*,* gender identity, pregnancy or veteran status (Human Rights Campaign, 2010).

The desire to assume a neutral role has led many organizations to decide against catering to minorities at all with flexibility, mentoring, networking, etc. This became increasingly evident when eight respondents struggled to think of any programs that directly target women within each of their organizations. This prohibits minorities from being able to develop the skills necessary to help them climb the corporate ladder, such as being directive, making oneself heard, and negotiation. Without these abilities such minorities will never be considered for the promotions that will help them to get into positions destined for the c-suite.

Of those individuals, only one saw that the lack of programs specifically targeted to women (and other minorities) was a considerable issue and has taken initiative to work with peers to develop such a program. This program, she hopes will be modeled after the Rhode Island based group "Leading Women" which prides itself on "Advancing women from career-start to the c-suite and onto corporate boards." This organization focuses on teaching women how to be mentors, how to be protégés, strategic networking skills, as well as confidence and effectiveness as a leader (Leading Women, 2010). Note that these solutions for individuals are aimed at helping women to adapt successfully to the rigors of working in a corporate management or c-suite level environment. While some of these practices clearly have gender consciousness in mind, the educational aspects and focus on adaptability concepts are

indicative of the *perception creates reality* paradigm. All of these sessions and workshops for development center around getting people to change the way they think about what is "the norm" for a workplace and accept changes in the times and women in nontraditional roles within the organization

The next question asked was about the interviewee's perception of successful career advancement based on the programs offered. The responses to this question were completely divided, with the exception of the Director of Human Resources at the health system organization, who noted she had "seen it work both ways." She noted that people have gone through the leadership programs, been mentored, and when an opportunity arose this individual was recommended. "But I've also seen people who have gone through the programs and because they don't have the same support or visibility by the right person that they aren't necessarily being given the opportunity because they went through something." This interviewee's experience is the perfect example of just how divided women's perceptions are of how these programs affect themselves and others in advancement opportunities. What does it say that half of the interviewees think that self-selecting into such programs that they will not help them succeed? What is the benefit of spending your time in these programs if you think you it will not open new opportunities for you? This divide begs the question "Why should women bother?" The essential changes employers must make to enhance a woman's participation and success within an organization is to correct this perception of policy and program usefulness. With a belief that no amount of programming or training will help them to climb the corporate ladder, women will eventually stop trying and become complacent. In terms of the three paradigms, this divide shows that although an organization my follow a specific paradigm in lower level management positions, there very well may be a paradigm shift, once an individual reaches a certain level in the organization. This will ultimately result in an even more disproportionate numbers of men succeeding in the workplace as compared to women. This is evident in the experiences of the Assistant Vice President of IT at a local health insurance provider, in describing the promotion process from Assistant Vice President to Vice President, this woman said,

> I have seen where people have gone up and if it's a guy you know a step from AVP to VP… they seem to naturally step up there. If it's a woman, the position gets posted and they look for the outside. And I've seen it happen several times where we haven't been consistent and again I go back to HR" (Anonymous, 2009).

Based on the responses to what actually existed in each interviewee's organization, I was curious as to what these women though their organization could improve on to create a better working environment for women. Overwhelmingly the responses were based in the gender consciousness paradigm. Responses included a work from home option; fewer required extra hours, and generally more flexibility. These responses represent customization of the work experience to facilitate a female employee's more active participation in the workforce. These programs also seem to take into account the dual roles that some women still have to be active participants in the work place and still have a prominent role in family life. Why then, if employees feel a strong need for flexibility and consciousness of gender issues, do employers choose those programs that are gender blind? This calls into question the existence of, or quality of, employee feedback collected by the Human Resources department. Research on employee need in terms of programs and policies that are offered and those that employees feel they could benefit from that do not exist is essential. In a follow up question, asking interviewees to describe what programs are used to attract women to upper management, the only response aligning with the *gender conscious* paradigm that women in this study find most helpful is a mentorship program. This was the health system company's program and while not targeted to women specifically, at present; mostly women are involved in the program. The mentorship program is run by the COO of the organization and members are selected by top executives personally. The existence of such a program shows that the organization recognized the potential in their female management staff and has sought to create networking and face-time with the executives who could dictate the future of each protégé's career. These are the types of programs, whether aimed specifically at women or not, would be beneficial to all middle management seeking to get ahead. As the Director of Human Resources noted, "That's really what we're trying to do, why we're in this group, to be mentored by what we aspire to." After all, such programs are very attractive to women and men, because after all, who would not want to spend time with a c-suite level individual,

have their voice heard, and make a contribution to change management, communication and how things are done within the organization.

 One of the final questions asked again underscores the disproportionate amounts of gender blind versus gender conscious initiatives in place at these organizations, despite women's perceived needs. Upon asking which initiatives the interviewees feel that they have benefited from personally, of eighteen responses, six were aligned with the *gender blind* paradigm, only four with the *gender consciousness* paradigm, and three with the *perception creates reality* paradigm. The seven included traditional benefits offered to all employees, talent reviews, tuition reimbursement, management training, and training & development. Each of these programs and policies are available to every member of the organization regardless of gender and the topics covered do not differ based on gender either. Because the content does not change to meet the needs of minorities, we call these programs gender blind. Were management trainings differentiated, allowing different minorities to develop a specific skill set that was lack, it would be more in line with gender consciousness. This high can be attributed the number of organizations that do not offer programs aligning with the consciousness paradigm.

The four gender conscious programs included flex-time, mentoring, the ability for one interviewee to design her own job, and the Women's Summit. Flex-time and the ability to design one's own job, shows that an organization is aware of the roles of women (more often than men), as the primary caregiver and the need for an organization to be flexible in term of the hours set fourth for women who may be raising children as well. Next, the most common conscious response to this question was a mentoring program of some sort. These types of programs allow women one-on-one time with higher ranking organizational members who in the future could recommend them for a promotion. By getting the maximum amount of face-time with those who may dictate their future, women may be able to overcome the obstacles created by the "old boys' network." Finally, the Women's Summit, as one might assume from its title, is a day of sessions and speakers (mostly female), who have made it in their

respective organization. The topics and overall content is specifically catered to a female audience, which is indicative of gender consciousness.

Finally, only the two members of the post-secondary education institution mentioned initiatives that aligned with the *perception creates reality* paradigm and all three of their responses seem to go hand-in-hand. More diversity resources have been developed at this institution, leading to increased diversity awareness, and thus less overt exclusion. The increase in diversity resources signifies this paradigm because according to this paradigm education is instrumental in changing employee beliefs that men and women are inherently different. Diversity resources that are available at this institution have increased the level of diversity knowledge and acceptance through educational initiatives. Although it may seem logical that the *perception creates reality paradigm*, through education, would best serve the entire organization and not just women, this research has not uncovered a strong presence of or desire for programs that would align with such a view. This may be attributed the fact that only women were interviewed. Because of this, they do not notice the misconceptions about their abilities because they do not hold such beliefs.

The programs that this population feels they have benefited the most from, span each of the paradigms. It has also been uncovered that when prompted, female employees will express that in order to create a more beneficial and productive working environment, programs that align with the gender conscious paradigm are more helpful. Therefore, it is recommended that organizations not only assess their current policies and programs through post-program evaluations, but also ask for feedback from employees in with regard to what programs or policies they believes will help them to make more positive contributions and become more effective employees of the organization.

Organizations should also assess the contributions that gender conscious programs could make to their organization in terms of being mindful of gender related issues and differences as well as providing women (and minorities) the chance to be mentored/advised by higher ranking members of the organization. Programs that teach females in particular, how to use their valuable traits and characteristics, thereby empowering them to perform successfully,

would also benefit an organization seeking to tap into the unknown potential of female managers. Women can be taught how to be adaptive to new roles in order to be successful in the organization. The benefits of mentoring and other such programs can be instrumental in teaching women what is needed to succeed and what they may be lacking. For example, "Linda Henman, a management consultant, says almost without fail that women lack one tangible skill that mentors could help them acquire. 'So many women don't have the financial acumen to handle a P&L (profit & loss) statement or a budget'" (Laff, 2009, p. 34). With the help of a mentor, women would be able to overcome the obstacles that cripple them in terms of organizational advancement.

Finally, the hypothesis that the three paradigms of Jonsen, Maznevski, and Schneider's research are too broad has been legitimized. While many organizational policies do fit in one of those categories, there are those organizations that do not. Particularly small organizations that have no need for Human Resource policies such as the property development company or the organizations such as the post-secondary education institution whose Human Resource staff is aware of programming opportunities, but whose employees outside of that department are unaware that most programs exist. This category seems be the "Awareness paradigm." Here programs are either nonexistent or employees do not know that the options for career development exist.

Contribution
This is the first empirically done study which makes a connection between the three paradigms of Jonsen, Maznevski, and Schneider and organizations throughout Rhode Island. This study is the first of its kind to validate three paradigms and assess the theory that there could be alternative paradigms, which were found. The managerial recommendations based on this study include standardizing or increasing communication between management and employees about the programs offered. Additionally, management should seek to increase the opportunities for employees to engage in upward communication. Opening doors for employees to express their needed in career development programs will result in less of a perceived disconnect between what programs and policies are in place and those that women perceive the most value in.

Limitations

The first limitation on this study is that all interview participants were self-selected based on their attendance at the Bryant University Women's Summit, rather than a nation-wide, random sample. Needless to say, this reduces the level of diversity in the sample. Secondly, all participants work in Rhode Island. State and regional differences may be present in programs, policies, and value of women. As noted in an interview with a member of the health system organization, the systems or programs put in place to attract women to upper management were described as "very seniority based" and "very Rhode Island." This implies that such programs may differ based on state and region. People who live and work in these regions are also likely to have different values. Secondly, the sample size was limited to ten individuals, so the opinions and observations of the work face may be very specific to their organization and not necessarily the industry in which they work or workplaces as a whole. Third, this sample represented an entirely female perspective. By including men in the interview sample, different organizational policies, perhaps that women see as less pertinent would have come to light. Finally, a more telling sample would have included an employee from each company who worked in Human Resources and one employee who did not work in Human Resources. This would have allowed for the analysis of the discrepancies in the type of number of programs that the Human Resources professionals plan and execute and the number of programs that female employees are aware of and take advantage of.

Directions for Future Research

Future research in this area would likely be the most beneficial with a considerably larger sample from more diverse regions. Regional diversity would limit the amount of focus on southern New England companies and mentalities. An industry analysis would be an interesting addition to similar research. Assessing which industries have the most proactive programs and policies to help women climb the corporate ladder, would be hugely beneficial for women especially, to see if certain industries are the most female friendly and thus where the opportunities lie for those individuals who seek c-suite offices in the world's best companies. Armed with this knowledge, women will be able to overcome the plateau that so many of their peers encounter, eventually get to the positions they aspire to by seeking out the organizations that will be most beneficial to them. Finally, future research should include men

in the interview sample, this may bring to light programs that align with the underrepresented

perception creates reality paradigm or other missing paradigms not yet discovered.

<u>**APPENDICES**</u>

Appendix A – Interview Questions

1. Can you describe your position and role within this organization?

2. What types of programs are in place at your organization for career development?

3. Are there specific programs targeted to women?

4. Do you find that employees take advantage of these programs?

5. Have you found that it has helped in career advancement?

6. What do you believe your organization can do/do better/start doing to impact the work-life balance for women?

7. What types of HR initiatives does this company use to attract women to upper management?

8. What initiatives do you feel, you have personally benefited from?

9. How do you think women are valued in your organization?

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Appendix B – List of Interviewee Demographic Information

Interviewee's Organizational Type	Interviewee's Position within the Organization	Years with Organization	Size of the Company
Four-Year, Post-Secondary Education Institution	Chief Human Resource Officer	12 years	501-1,000 employees
Health Insurance Provider	Assistant Vice President of Information Technology	25 years	1,100 employees
Property and Casualty Insurance Provider	Human Resource Director	2 years	1,001-5,000 employees
Engineering Company	Office Manager, in charge of all Human Resource Work	20 years	30 employees
Four-Year, Post-Secondary Education Institution*	Associate Dean for Student Life	12 years	501-1,000 employees
Investment Services Company	Sourcing Director of Human Resources and Staffing	9 years	47,000 employees
Property Development Company	President	11 years	20 employees
Health System	Business Manager of the Simulation Center	Less than 1 year	11,000 employees
Software/Simulation Company	Vice President of Human Resources & Administration	3 years	8,020 employees
Health System*	Director of Human Resources	8 years	11,000 employees

Note (*) Indicates that that two interviewees are from the same organization

Appendix C – Question 2 Responses

What types of programs are in place at your organization for Career Development?
Management Training
Staff Advisory Group
Performance Management Classes
Organizational Development/Training
Internal Grading System
Individual Action Plan
Leadership Academy/Development Programs
Employee Resource Groups
Goal Setting
Skills Training
Diversity Training
Talent Review
Networking
Online Training
Mentoring
Executive Development
Needs Analysis
Quality Programs
Tuition Assistance
9 Block Gridding
Network/Communication Training
Service on Not-for-Profit Boards

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Appendix D – Question 4 Responses

What do you believe your organization can do/do better/start doing to impact the work-life balance for women?
Nothing Specific
Work from Home Options
Less extra/after hours work
Support Systems for Upper Level Women
Battle Institutionalized Racism/Sexism/etc
Skill sets training for Women
More Extensive Day Care/Subsidy
Manage Talent from a Learning Perspective
Take ownership of programs offered
More flexibility
Recognize the need for female directed initiatives
Role modeling/mentoring
Family Sick Time
Job Sharing
"I wouldn't be able to inflict my will…"

Appendix E - Question 6 Responses

What initiatives do you feel you have personally benefited from?
Increase awareness of diversity
More diversity resources
Tuition Reimbursement
Flex-time
Women's Summit
Communication
Management Training
Outside Events/Affiliations
Less over exclusion
Mentoring
Talent Review
Collaborative Environment
Ability to design own job
Family Orientation
Training and Development
Benefits Programs
Formal Sick Policy/Vacation Accrual
Volunteering
Skills Training
Nothing

Appendix F – Question 7 Responses

How do you feel women are valued in your organization?
More appreciative/awareness of women's issues
They Plateau
Opinions are valued
Depends on who you work with
Focus on inclusion
Would like to hire more women, but that's not a realistic expectation given a traditionally male industry
Skills are not valued at the same pay rate
Educationally based value more than gender based
Diversity is instilled in the culture
Meritocracy
As Equals/No distinction
Opinions give less from women
Sense of "Blindness"
Not recognized/empowered
Underserved in executive ranks

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