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Nonprofit Women Rising in Leadership:
Strategies for Identifying Barriers

A Master's Thesis

By

Ellen Tolleson Hegge

Submitted to the Graduate College of Winona State University in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Organizational Leadership

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Women have entered the workforce at about the same rate as men for twenty-five years and yet are underrepresented in leadership positions (Ely, Insead, & Kolb, 2011). Historically, only 10-20% of leadership roles in the United States have been held by women (Warner & Corley, 2017). This is true in nonprofit organizations as well, where the gender leadership gap is quite apparent given that women account for 72% of all nonprofit staff positions (Di Mento, 2014) and yet hold 20% of the top positions. (Jones, 2014).

Schuh, Bark, Quaquebeke, Hossiep, Frieg, and Dick (2013) substantiate “Even though statistics indicate that gender parity has nearly been achieved in some areas of the workforce, women are still underrepresented in leadership positions” (p 1). Women achieve academically at a higher rate than men in obtaining undergraduate, graduate and doctoral degrees (Warner & Corley, 2017; Northouse, 2016). This demonstrates women are motivated to acquire requisite educational knowledge and skills that leadership positions demand. Yet, the leadership gender gap remains.

Statement of the Problem

Women represent only 14% of the top management positions in the United States (Schuh et al., 2013), despite accounting for 47% of the labor force (Warner & Corley, 2017). In the nonprofit industry, this imbalance in leadership and those who comprise the sector’s workforce is even more significant (Dobin & Tchume, 2011). Women staff 72% of the nonprofit workforce yet hold only 20% of the executive leadership positions (Jones, 2014). Gipson, Pfaff, Mendelsohn, Catenacci, and Burke (2017) effectively capture the prevailing reasons for this significant imbalance: gender stereotypes and biases result in prejudice and discrimination

against women aspiring to be senior leaders. Identifying barriers may lead to potential increases in representation of women in leadership and explaining over representation of male leadership.

Background of the Problem

On a national level, statistics show that women lag men in promoted into leadership positions and in compensation (Pew Research Center, 2015). It is no secret that women have historically faced greater barriers than men when it comes to fully participating in the economy. Across geographies and income levels, disparities between men and women persist in the form of pay gaps, uneven opportunities for advancement, and unbalanced representation in important decision-making (Rockefeller Foundation, 2016). Despite advances in the workplace and education, women are still largely underrepresented in the not for profit sector due to gender-specific challenges (Jones, 2014).

Efforts to prohibit sex discrimination, such as adopting gender equity policy and filling employment pipelines with female candidates, have not resulted in closing the gender gap at senior leadership levels (Ely et al., 2011). What was true in 2011 remained so in 2016. “Although there is a pipeline of educated and experienced women in the U.S. workforce, something is limiting their ability to ascend to top leadership” (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). Gipson et al., (2017) confirm that women are in the pipeline, however there are systematic barriers in place preventing women from reaching leadership roles. Researchers Diehl and Dzubinski (2016) point to “second-generation bias” as a significant barrier that women face, especially because these biases are built into ordinary institutional functions and are often invisible to men and women. Workplace structures, practices and patterns of interactions inadvertently favor men. Second -generation bias stifles the advancement of women due to pervasive beliefs about gender (Gipson et al., 2017). When these barriers accumulate, they can

inhibit women's ability to see themselves as leaders and the ability of others to see them as leaders (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). Gipson et al., (2017) confirm that developing a leader identity for women is challenging due to the need to display leadership characteristics that violate gender norms. What other barriers are contributing to the dearth of female leaders – and for purposes of this study – their diminished standing in the social impact world of nonprofit leadership?

Underrepresentation of female leaders is not only an issue of successful female leaders but successful mission – driven nonprofit organizations. Research indicates that charitable organizations are missing out on donations and other resources to forward their missions by not employing women in executive positions and on governing boards (Di Mento, 2014). In addition, Catalyst research data shows that in the 1990's, the percentage of women in leadership roles positively correlated to better financial performance of Fortune 500 companies (Eagly, 2007).

The social enterprise sector grew proportionally faster than the government and business sectors from 2007-2010. In addition, the nonprofit sector makes up 5.4 percent of our gross domestic product, or \$878 billion (McKeever, 2015). This sector provides an increasingly large impact on our national economy and our local communities. Furthermore, charitable organizations save governmental resources (McKeever, 2015). Explains McInnes (2013), as government entities downsize or offload programs and services they have historically provided, local communities' need for a vibrant nonprofit sector will continue to rise (pg.2).

There is an apparent glass ceiling, as only 18% of not-for-profit organizations employ women at the top leadership level if the total budget size is \$50 million or more (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). In further research, the gap of women in leadership begins at an even lower level of budget size. D'Agostino and Levine (2011) present that in not for profit organizations

with budget sizes of \$10 million or more, women only represent 46% of executive leadership roles (p.287).

Outlined by the Minnesota Council on Nonprofits 2017 state report, the nonprofit sector plays an integral role in the state's economy showing consistent growth over the past 10 years and employing every 1 in 9 workers. Minnesota's social impact sector accounted for over 328,000 jobs in 2017, making up 12% of the state's workforce (Aanestad, Pratt, Fox, & Lee, 2017). What is lacking in the state is the number of women executives. Data collected by the Legislative Commission on the Economic Status of Women in Minnesota show that of full-time, year-round workers, Chief Executive positions did not make the top 20 list of occupations for women, yet for men, it was in the 11th position within the top 20 list (2000). Corroborating the national data showing the disproportionality of representation of women in top leadership positions.

In the 11-county region of Southeast Minnesota, including this area's largest city, Rochester, nonprofit employees make up the largest percentage of overall workforce, growing 13 percent over the last 10 years (Aanestad et al., 2017). Reflected by the Rochester Chamber of Commerce (2019), of 50 locally based charitable organizations, 60% of executive leaders are women. This represents a more favorable landscape than state or national trends. Little is known as to why Rochester data displays a more opportunistic setting for women, or whether, Rochester – Southeast Minnesota is unique in comparison to other similarly sized cities in Minnesota.

Theoretical Framework

Creswell (2014) posits that the importance of identifying a theory within qualitative research is to provide an overarching lens for the researcher to view behaviors and attitudes of groups of people, it informs the questions that are asked in research, impacts how data is

collected, and includes a call for action or change (pg. 64). Utilizing a feminist perspective speaks to an overall orientation for the study of questions of gender, with an intention to bring to light social justice or oppressive situations for women (Creswell, 2014).

A study of women in leadership roles would be incomplete without consideration of gender roles and individual beliefs about women and men. Gender roles are consensual attributes of men and women, including expectations regarding behavioral tendencies of each group (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Additionally, Eagly and Karau (2002) define gender roles as those concordant behaviors which males and females actually do (descriptive norms) and what those groups ideally ought to do (injunctive norms). These beliefs and expectations lay the groundwork for understanding some of the barriers that women may face in elevation to leadership positions and how individual perspectives weigh in decision making.

This study focuses not on the gender barriers that women may encounter but on the relationships that support and assist women in the acquisition of leadership roles in nonprofit organizations. Women are likely to have relationships with many types of individuals including peers, and business associates who provide various types of support. Based on the idea of how relationships impact career success researchers have offered multiple theories to establish how social interactions enhance professional development and career advancement.

Mentoring theory presents that a dyadic relationship, wherein a more experienced organizational member provides a less experienced member with support and assistance in navigating the socialization process, can lead to promotions, raises, and a higher level of career satisfaction (Sweitzer, 2008). Kram and Isabella (1985) confirm that mentoring relationships have great potential to enhance the development of individuals in various career stages. According to Higgins and Kram (2001), "A mentor is one of the most complex and

developmentally important relationships” (p. 264), providing high amounts of career and psychosocial assistance.

Social networks theory examines the interactions that take place within social relationships, and how connections to others facilitate access to information and resources (Sweitzer, 2008). An individual has an overall social network system and within that system develops specific relationships with others who are defined as important to the individual’s career development (Higgins & Kram, 2001). This theory emphasizes that an expansion from a 1:1 mentor relationship to a multitude of contacts within a network may produce access to others and information that will assist in career advancement.

Siebert, Kraimer, and Liden (2001), define social capital as any aspect of social structure that creates value and facilitates the actions of individuals within that structure. Social capital theory posits that benefits (information, resources, and sponsorship) can be realized by an individual when specific relationship ties are developed and maintained (Siebert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001). Visibility, legitimacy, social credentialing, and career opportunities are benefits to middle managers with an investment in social situations and networking (Siebert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to examine the barriers that women may encounter in striving to advance to nonprofit leadership roles.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this study:

RQ1. How do women in nonprofit careers describe potential opportunities to obtain leadership positions?

RQ2. What barriers do women identify that impeded professional advancement?

RQ3. What strategies do women employ to minimize the barriers to obtaining leadership roles within nonprofit organizations?

Definition of Terms

Listed below are definitions of key terms that are relevant to this study.

Glass ceiling: refers to artificial barriers based on organizational or attitude-based bias that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward into senior level positions and implies women are misled about the opportunities due to it not being easily seen from a distance (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Nonprofit organization: known as charitable organizations, non-governmental, or tax-exempt organizations, are organizations or corporate entities that are formed for the purpose of fulfilling a mission to improve the common good of society rather than to acquire and distribute profits (MN Council on Nonprofits, 2019).

Second generation bias: cultural beliefs about gender as well as workplace structures, practices and patterns of interactions that inadvertently favor men. Actions are subtle, often unintentional, and are supported by gender norms and practices entrenched within the institution (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016).

Concrete wall: analogy displaying barriers to women's opportunities including explicit rules, clear cut norms and operating practices prohibiting women to access. A division of labor dictating that men should be breadwinners and women should be homemakers (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Labyrinth: describing the indirect path some women take to leadership roles, laden with subtle barriers and obvious barricades. Symbolizing that leadership access is obtainable for some women who find the circuitous path (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Social Capital: defined as any aspect of social structure that creates value and facilitates actions of the individuals within that social structure (Coleman, 1990).

Network: relationship ties that link a set of people (Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001)

Limitations

A qualitative inquiry requires collecting data from respondents regarding personal experiences. Creswell (2014) outlines limitations present during a qualitative study that include respondent's availability during the timeframe needed, disengaging and/or discontinuing participation from the study before completion. In addition, due to the fact that the researcher is utilized as a data instrument, personal biases may arise affecting the lens in which data is viewed. Women in nonprofit leadership, as the topic for this study presents a limitation for this researcher as she qualifies as a participant. Based on the questions posed to participants, the researcher had her own viewpoint as to potential responses and discussions. In addition, as the study participants work locally within the researcher's community, this allowed the researcher to have inside knowledge of the landscape of the nonprofit community. Future studies may benefit from choosing a different, unfamiliar community in which to engage participants from. Participants may provide responses that are not accurate or honestly reflect lived experiences, additionally responses collected may contain private information not usable within data analysis or reporting.

Delimitations

Participants included in this qualitative study will be restricted to women who are employed in the nonprofit sector and have a minimum of three years of nonprofit work

experience. Additionally, participants will have a desire to advance to leadership positions. Employment organizations will have budget sizes in excess of \$250,000, representing various aspects of nonprofit agencies. This inquiry will engage participants from Southeast Minnesota.

Significance of Study

First, this study may be significant to fellow students within the Organizational Leadership program at Winona State University as they define and determine their unique, individual leadership styles. Results of this study may provide benefit to leaders in nonprofit organizations and prompt an assessment of current promotion, and workplace practices regarding gender. Gipson et al., (2017) theorize recognizing challenges in advancement of women to leadership roles as the first step towards instituting better practices for selecting, developing, and evaluating women leaders. It may inform practices specific to the nonprofit sector and how to address barriers that will allow for elevation of leaders in a workforce that experiences significant lack in candidacies for available leadership roles. Finally, this study may be beneficial to women within the for-profit and nonprofit sectors who strive to become leaders. This research may inform future practices within organizations to uncover bias currently in place in the workplace, highlight challenges facing women in advancing to leadership positions, and generate ideas about professional development opportunities that should be available to women.

Summary

Chapter one began by highlighting the issue of the lack of women in leadership positions within the nonprofit sector. This paucity of representation of women leaders is prevalent at a national, state and local level. Organizations may be handicapped by a limited perspective by not benefiting from diversity in sector leadership. Included in Chapter one, the statement of the problem, background of the problem, theoretical framework, purpose of the study, limitations,

delimitations, and important definitions. Additionally, this chapter introduced three research questions that will guide this study.

Chapter two reviews literature relevant to second generational bias and additional gender-based leadership challenges within the mission guided sector. This chapter integrates current research on the phenomenon and identifies gaps in the knowledge base. Chapter two offers information about the history of the problem and of the scarcity of women leaders in the nonprofit sector and the resulting challenges. Chapter three explains the research design and outlines how data was collected. In addition, chapter three explains the sample size, invitation of participants to provide individual experiences, and setting of the study. Chapter four presents the results of the study, including a discussion of the results and findings from participant interviews and reflections. Chapter five provides an overview of the research and study of women in the nonprofit sector considering successful achievement or lack of achievement in advancing to leadership roles. In conclusion, Chapter five provides suggestions for additional research.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to identify strategies that will uncover barriers for women who desire to advance to leadership positions within mission-based organizations. Chapter one presents the purpose of the study and the background of the problem. Social capital theory is offered as the theoretical framework to guide the research and examine how social connections attribute to the opportunities that women have to advance to leadership roles.

Chapter two imparts a summary of the research. Chapter two examines a literary review of historical information of women in the workforce and in leadership positions. The literature review displays how these historical views of gender roles contribute to the overrepresentation of men in leadership roles. In addition, charity landscape, potential barriers that women may encounter, and suggestions for overcoming these perceived barriers to leadership roles are included in Chapter two.

Historical Perspective

Eagly and Carli (2007) highlight that effective prevention of people advancing in the workplace is to block their path of elevation with overt, absolute barriers (p. 2) In history, explicit rules and clear-cut norms obstructed the path for women in the workforce and to leadership roles (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Women were not afforded legal or political equity at the beginning of the 20th century. Concrete wall is the best descriptor of the unavailability of opportunity for women in the workplace and an absolute mindset that men should be breadwinners and women should be homemakers (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Barnett (2004) reflects that World War II brought an influx of women to the workforce which previously was almost non-existent. Strong beliefs that female gender roles were limited

to homemaker and mother and men were inherently suited to the workplace (Barnett, 2004). Opportunities for women to excel in historically masculine roles was an anomaly during a time of crisis (p.1). Upon the return of the male workforce from war, women were returned to home and caretaking duties. Harvard Business Review affirmed in 1956, that due to the strong belief in the importance of home and family, it made sense that only one person pursues a career and due to the women's biological role in the relationship, men should engage in the workforce (Eagly & Carli, 2007). The concrete wall mentality endured until the 1970's.

Married woman with children in the 1970's entered the workforce at a stronger pace and barriers that were previously in place to exclude women began to shift (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Leadership positions at the highest levels were not made accessible to women, however there were some limited job opportunity within lower level positions of authority (p.4). During his tenure, President Nixon was recorded stating women were erratic, emotional and no woman should be in any government job (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Extolling the ideology women could only be contributors to the workforce in certain roles and at certain levels.

Journalists Hymowitz and Schellhardt, coined the phrase glass ceiling in an article written in 1986 describing an invisible barrier that women encountered in the rise to leadership positions (Eagly & Carli, 2007). This article led to the formation of the Glass Ceiling Commission by the U.S. Congress. The Commission reported in the mid-1990's that discrimination against women was persistent and was focused on male beliefs that women's leadership roles would be interrupted by the obligations of a family, unlike men who could work for life. Additionally, women were not seen as viable company representatives with male customers (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Eagly and Carli (2007) push past the idea of glass ceiling in the mid 2000's to offer the labyrinth as a more fitting description to the exclusion of women in leadership (pg. 6). A labyrinth suggests that there are numerous barriers that women will face in elevating to authority roles. These barriers may be obvious, subtle or unseen (Eagly & Carli, 2007). These researchers pronounce labyrinth as better illustrating the circuitous path for women to leadership.

Heilman (2001) proclaims that stereotyped beliefs about men and women are pervasive, widely shared, and very resistant to change in the workplace. National survey data collected by The Rockefeller Center (2016) reflects that both men and women are aware that traditions of and expectations for male leadership in workplace culture contribute to the overrepresentation of men in executive roles.

Data from 2018, one year ago, continues to express that despite commitment to gender diversity and training to improve the representation of women in leadership is stagnate (Women in the Workplace, 2018). Also emphasized in this same commentary, 24% of woman convey that their gender has played a role in missing out on raises, promotions or opportunities to get ahead. The historical perspective is heavily laden with the idea that beliefs surrounding traditional gender roles are the explanation for the lack of women in leadership. This study utilizes a gender-neutral theoretical framework for the study of women in leadership roles.

Social Capital Theory

Social capital theory (Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001) posit that the act of networking allows for greater access to information, resources and sponsorship which positively correlates to career mobility. Examining the role that social processes affect career success aids in providing data to middle managers who desire to achieve a higher leadership position. A study by Luthans,

Hodgetts, and Rosenkrantz in 1988 discovered that successful managers spent 70% more time in networking activities than their less successful peers (Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001).

Integrating theories of networking to develop social capital theory allows for a comprehensive picture of each aspect of networking previously provided in research. Numerous theories seeking to explain how networking leads to success in career have been offered including Granovetter's weak tie model, Burt's structural hole model, and Lin's social resource model.

In 1973, Granovetter offered the weak tie theory as a concept for individuals who were job seekers, positing that an individual has both strong ties to a social clique and weak ties. Within a social structure, members of social cliques have strong ties to each other, these relationships tend to be friends and coworkers, where information flows quickly through the group and can become redundant due to the closeness of these relationships (Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001). Through Granovetter's study, more success in obtaining a career position by job seekers was found through weak ties within the social structure. A weak tie is one described as a connection outside of an individual's social clique that is not frequent and restricted to one type of relationship (Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001). This weak tie connection brings unique information and a broader relationship pool to the individual, hence new opportunities to job seekers.

Burt's structure hole theory examines how an individual benefits from the pattern of relationships within a social structure (Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001). A structural hole occurs when two people in a social clique are not connected to each other. For example, Person A has a social relationship with Person B and Person C, however Person B and Person C are not personally connected. This structure allows for an individual to benefit in three ways, more

unique and timely access to information, greater bargaining power, and greater visibility and career opportunities (Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001).

Finally, Lin contributes the concept of social resource theory to the study of networking and its effects on individual's career success. The focus of this theory is placed on the nature of the resources within the social structure and not the ties to the members, as the previous theories displayed. What the members of the social structure are offering as resources will positively impact an individual who desires to obtain a new position (Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001). Mentorship, professional development advice, and support are highlighted as examples of the richness found in the content of the social structure in Lin's social resource model.

Each of these three models provides the structure for the social capital theory to support career success. Seibert, Kraimer, and Liden (2001) speculate that focusing on both the ties within the social structure and the content of the members is an investment that an individual will benefit from within a network. By maintaining a focus on both relationship ties and content, individuals will realize the benefits of access to information, resources and career sponsors. Sweitzer (2008), concurs that the interactions and connections that occur in networks facilitate a multitude of outcomes including information acquisition, professional advancement and developing a professional identity.

Charity Landscape

Nonprofit organizations fill the gap when societies challenges grow, and government resources become constrained (The Bridgespan Group, 2006). This economic sector performs the work to support a compassionate and well-functioning society addressing the depth and breadth of human and environmental conditions.

In 1873, the New York Society for Improving the Condition of the Poor provided 5000 families with relief. One year later 24,000 families received assistance, troubling community leaders regarding the increase in the level of poverty (Hansan, 2013). The genesis for providing aid historically occurred when a population or individual was afflicted by unemployment, sickness, old age or physical disability. This unique crisis combined with the lack of family and/or financial resources, channeled individuals or families to rely on public relief, appealing to charities or begging from strangers (Hansan, 2013). In a review of Charitable Organization Societies (COS) in the late 1800's, Hansan (2013) provides insight that communities dealt with poverty and providing support through COS initiatives. In the United States COS created structure, process and coordination of private resources and the many independent community efforts to support those in need.

Throughout the decades, governmental programs have been available to assist and support populations through public assistance and social security (Hansan, 2013). Alongside governmental support, the nonprofit sector historical timeline mirrors that of government aid. Dating back to 1741, the first known charity, a home for orphaned children, is opened. Charities begin to dot the landscape with the creation of youth development programs like the YMCA in 1844, to one of the largest humanitarian organizations, The American Red Cross, founded in 1881 (). Nonprofit organizations continue to identify human condition and need and provide care, proliferating through the past century to today. Most recent reports by Giving USA (2019) touts the astonishing value of charitable gifts made by the American public, over \$427 billion was donated by individuals to support work across all sectors of nonprofit organizations in 2018.

Barriers to Women Rising to Leadership Roles

Barriers are encountered by women who strive to advance to executive positions in various manners and at different points in advancement. In study results by Mesch and Rooney (2004), it was highlighted that women's careers may zig zag and do not move in a progressive pattern as do men's (pg. 14). This connects to Eagly and Carli (2007) theory that liken a female career trajectory to a labyrinth, expelling that women may experience various challenges on indirect paths to executive roles (pg. 1).

A study conducted by Wellesley Centers for Women in 2000, surveyed 60 women in leadership roles, the review of results illuminated both existing institutional structures as a roadblock, as well as individual barriers unique to women (Erkut, 2000). Barriers may consist of individual identity, prejudice, lack of organizational structure to support women, and lack of resources that are generously afforded to men. An audit of barriers provides crucial information to the study presented.

Lack of Networks: Ibarra (1993) defines prescribed networks as formally specified relationships between superiors and subordinates, who must interact to accomplish organizational task. Emergent networks involve more discretionary patterns of interactions where relationships could be work or social interactions (Ibarra, 1993). Eagly and Carli (2007) profess that women who build their personal social capital both internally and externally are more likely to rise to leadership positions. Ely, Ibarra, and Kolb (2011) theorize that the composition of a women's network may open the doors to leadership opportunities, who will grant and see or not see an individual's leadership claims, and shape what one learns in the process (pg. 478). Positive relationships within networks allows for support, information sharing, prospective clients and the ability to give and receive advice (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Summarized in a report on bias written by the American Association of University Women (2016), having the access to influential networks is critical to advancement in the leadership conduit. Ibarra and Hunter (2007) reflect on three types of interdependent networking that can lead to success for emerging leaders; operational, personal and strategic. Operational networking allows for leaders to build relationships with those who can assist them in doing their job. This can include peers, direct reports and supervisors. Applying this type of relationship allows for the building of trust and cooperation within work teams (Ibarra & Hunter, 2007). Personal networks widen the circle of acquaintances, typically outside of the organization. Connecting to professional associations, alumni, and community groups can provide new perspectives that may lead to career advancement (Ibarra & Hunter, 2007). Groysberg (2008) agrees that successful female leaders integrate themselves into existing network structures and cultivate relationships. Finally, Ibarra and Hunter (2007) maintain developing information sources and relationships with people of diverse affiliations, backgrounds and objectives provides leaders with a web of prospects to connect with and these opinion leaders can support ideas and suggest approaches from unique perspectives.

Lack of Mentoring and Sponsorship: Mentoring relationships provide encouragement and acceptance which are crucial to achieving upward movement towards leadership positions (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Eagly and Carli (2007) site informal and formal mentorship relationships are ways in which to succeed and result in developing positive, trusting relationships. Diehl and Dzubinski (2016) discovered that women sensed men were well groomed and sponsored at earlier points in their career, where women sat in limbo lacking a mentor or sponsor relationship. In addition, when women benefited from the opportunity of a sponsor relationship, that sponsor was more likely male. The underrepresentation of women in

leadership roles leads to the lack of available women to sponsor other women aspiring to elevated roles (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016), creating an endless cycle involving the lack of high-ranking women to new professional women. Scarcity of senior female leaders can signal a lack of legitimate female authority making them unfit role models (Ely et al., 2011). This poses an indicator to other women that being a female is a liability and limits rising women with potential to reach out to senior women leaders for support (Ely et al., 2011).

McInnis (2013) conducted a research study involving young women and women in nonprofit leadership. Of those women in leadership positions interviewed, 57% responded that seeking out mentors was a key piece of advice (pg. 13). In addition, they designate three components for successful mentoring. First, from the perspective of the leader; creating intention spaces and places for mentorship will aid in developing future leaders. Second, organizations should formalize programs focused on workplace mentorships, and finally advice for individual women, be an advocate and seek out networking and mentoring opportunities for yourself (McInnis, 2013). Suggested within the McInnis study (2013) is to develop a cross-sectoral networking circle that includes not for profit, public and private sector connections (pg. 23). A 2010 survey conducted by Mercer on women's development, promoted that 43% of respondents stated that the lack of an executive sponsor was one of the top three factors preventing elevation of women to executive positions (2010). Depicted in the study conducted by Wellesley Centers for Women, women leaders recognized and acknowledged strong support of their career, early on, from mentors and business associates as being a key factor in advancing to leadership roles (Erkut, 2000).

Lack of Women's Leadership Development Programs: Eagly and Karau's (2002), role congruity theory includes a focus on the evaluation of women within the leadership role and how

they may be evaluated less favorably than men. To this end, women need development programs tailored to the unique experiences and paths that rising female leaders may take to obtain senior positions. Definitively stated in a 2010 survey conducted by Mercer, 70% of organizations do not have a clearly defined strategy or philosophy for the development of women to assume authority roles (Mercer, 2010). Ely et al. (2011) prescribe a women's leadership development trajectory based on 10 years of program delivery. Themes included include: 360-degree feedback, leadership and networking, everyday negotiations, leading change and finally career transitions. Focus on these specific areas lend to enabling female candidates to develop an internal leadership identity and focusing on a leadership purpose (pg. 488).

Women responding to the Mercer (2010) survey reflected ascetically positive responses to efforts for development training programs within their organizations. Agencies offering gender specific executive programs accounted to 30%, moreover, 40% of females among those companies described the support of the employer as moderate. Additional outcomes within the Mercer survey related to women's development programs offered a comparison of what programs were most frequently offered; coaching and mentoring, mirrored what respondents felt was most effective in supporting women's excelling to supervisory roles (2010).

Challenging to mission-based organizations is the lack of resources and capacity to provide meaningful career development options and investment into recruitment and human resource functions to support those activities (The Bridgespan Group, 2006). Corporate business data indicate that 60 – 65% of senior management positions are filled from internal promotions, while the fill rate for not for profits is at 30 – 40% (The Bridgespan Group, 2006). Investment in leadership capacity building is one of the top suggested responses within The Bridgespan Group report to further the efforts of developing and retaining a pool of next generation leaders (2006).

From the perspective of women executives, success in leadership is gained by having a strong focus on results, with equal concentration to the growth and development of the people around them (Erkut, 2000).

Emphasized in a study by Zheng, Kark, and Meister (2018), 64 senior women leaders were interviewed, and five strategies were identified by the respondents to assist women in successful advance to leadership roles. The first of these strategies is to adapt to situations and possessing the ability to assess situations and audience before determining an approach. Furthermore, build relationships, establish trust, and engage people before using tougher more demanding or directive approaches. Additionally, identifying win-win situations to influence positive team results. Moreover, employ a perspective of being soft on people but tough on tasks. Finally, successful female leaders are able to reframe situations to highlight what may be considered by others as weaknesses into strengths (Zheng et al., 2018).

Lack of Self Identity: DeRue and Ashford (2010) aver that possessing a strong internal leadership identity lends to a greater acceptance for the leader to exert influence over others (p. 628). Social identity theory proposes that individuals attach a set of meanings to themselves, and this set of meanings include a social component (Karelaia & Guillen, 2014). Karelaia and Guillen (2014) express that if women develop and adapt a positive social identity which includes the identity of a leader, they are less likely to be vulnerable to negative thoughts that leaders and women are incongruent. They postulate that when women maintain a positive self-identity it can lead to alignment of female and leader roles, enrich their behavioral repertoire, and blend the identities of woman and leader, thus reframing the notion of female and leader being incompatible to compatible (Karelaia & Guillen, 2014). Confirmed by Erkut (2001), women who are tenacious and optimistic, despite obstacles are more likely to be successful.

Summary

Chapter two provides a review of the literature that is relative to the study of nonprofit women accessing leadership opportunities and proposed strategies to contend with lack of opportunity. Subsections of chapter two included a retrospect of women in the workplace, a perspective of charity landscape, insight into role congruity theory, and finally barriers to women rising to leadership roles.

CHAPTER III

Research Methodology

The purpose of this study is to identify barriers women encounter on the path to leadership positions within not for profit organizations. Chapter three presents the research design, rationale, and questions. Furthermore, chapter three displays the research sample, selection of participants and research setting. Chapter three concludes with a discussion of the researcher's role, method of data collection, analysis, ethical considerations, and chapter summary.

Research Design

The nature of this inquiry commands a qualitative research approach to discover and develop a better understanding of barriers that women may encounter in rising to leadership positions in nonprofit organizations. Creswell (2014) asserts that a qualitative research approach seeks to explore and understand individuals' experiences and meaning they attach to life events. Also called a phenomenological approach, qualitative research (Pietersen, 2002) aims to parse meaning from the ways individuals describe their experiences understand the phenomena they experience. Wilson (2015) contributes that phenomenology is the way in which a person experiences or understands his or her world as real or meaningful. Furthermore, studies rooted in phenomenology contain an overarching idea that people are naturally disposed to experience the world as meaningful and that meaning is embedded in human existence (Wilson, 2015).

Wilson (2015) posits five elements to phenomenological study, these key focus areas aid in guiding the researcher to a successful outcome. First, investigators should possess a sense of curiosity about what it is like for a person to have a particular experience. Grounding in a curious nature will assist in driving research and helping the researcher maintain focus (pg. 41). In

succession, research moves into a design phase, relying on creativity to determine a strategy that will progress the researcher from a curiosity state, through posing research questions to participants, and analyzing data to satisfy research aims (Wilson, 2015). Ensuing focus is on participants, understanding that quality data is better than quantity. In addition, not all participants are suited to sharing lived experiences nor an open-ended question format. Trust between the researcher and participant plays a key role in collecting quality data. Furthermore, a successful study gathers quality data from observations, anecdotes, art, or diaries (Wilson, 2015). Finally, Wilson hypothesizes that the conclusion of a phenomenological study will link back to relevant literature and extend conversations on the subject of what is known and what is yet to be understood about the phenomenon (pg.42).

Research Rationale

Listening to the voices of women who seek leadership roles in the nonprofit arena and applying a phenomenological approach to data collection offers scholars the opportunity to analyze and draw conclusions from individual experiences.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this study:

RQ1. How do women in nonprofit careers describe potential opportunities to obtain leadership positions?

RQ2. What barriers do women identify that impeded professional advancement?

RQ3. What strategies do women employ to minimize the barriers to obtaining leadership roles within nonprofit organizations?

Research Setting

Southeast Minnesota provides the ideal setting for the exploration of women working in the non-for-profit industry. The city providing the backdrop has a rich, lengthy history, and is designated as a medical destination. Built upon the joint partnership of a faith-based Christian group and the medical sector, this community's strength of collaborative work and support of others lends itself to a superlative location to study women and leadership (Rochestermn.gov, 2019).

In 2016, the estimated population exceeded 110,000 residents and benefits from robust employment opportunities in the medical field and business district (Rochestermn.gov, 2019). The community's ethnic composition includes, Caucasian 76.4%, Asian 7.3%, and Black 7.2% (Cubit Planning, 2017). The average median income is \$41,761 for men and \$30,653 for women displaying a 27% lower average for women in the workforce (census.gov, 2017). There is potential for a large population of rising leaders as the average age within this community is 35.5 years old (Cubit Planning, 2017). Within the locale, there are over 17,000 students enrolled in K-12 education and three post-secondary and post-graduate schools with enrollment surpassing 17,000 students (RAEDI, 2019).

Research Sample

The respondents consisted of a) women who are employed in the nonprofit sector, b) have more than three years of experience working in nonprofit organizations, c) intend to advance to leadership positions within a nonprofit environment. Moreover, criteria for selected organizations include a) a budget in excess of \$250,000 annually, b) geographically located in Southeast Minnesota.

Selection of Participants

It is important that subjects for this inquiry include women with professional experiences in nonprofit organizations. Participants have a minimum of three years of experience and have a desire to advance within social sector organizations. Leveraging relationships with nonprofit executive directors allows discovery of potential respondents who meet criteria for review and have the willingness to share their career trajectory and experiences. The study consisted of one to one interviews with seven participants, and a women's executive leader focus group with five participants. Creswell (2014) offers that three to ten participants within phenomenological studies is appropriate (pg. 189). Cohen and Crabtree (2006) confer: sample size is an important consideration and saturation, or informational redundancy will assist in informing the researcher if the sample was appropriate. Relative to the types of nonprofit organizations study participants represent, the following descriptors reflect the rich diversity of size, type, beneficiaries of services, and financial capacity.

Organization A

Organization A provides living and care options for seniors, including independent living, assisted living, memory care assisted living, short term rehabilitation and long-term care. Supported by a budget of approximately \$37M, currently 238 number of residents call this organization home, and 359 number of staff provided the skilled care needed to provide a fun, homey environment.

Organization B

Organization B provides a free lodging service for children and their families who travel to the community for medical treatment. In 2018, 467 families benefited from the support they

received at the house. Supported by a budget of approximately \$25M, this agency employs 23 staff to further the mission of providing a home away from home.

Organization C

Organization C works to support varying populations within the community through the improvement of health and well-being, equity and access, cultivation of socially responsible and cause-driven leaders, and opportunity, access and achievement for youth. Supported by a budget of over \$10M, this organization supported over 2300 families.

Organization D

Organization D is a unique program that works to eliminate poverty using a two generational model. Local program delivery is supported by a national organization. Supported by a \$600,000 annual budget and serving 40 families in the current year.

Organization E

Organization E supports community philanthropy and addressing local issues by convening stakeholders and providing a platform to generate discussion and resolution. Sustained by an annual budget of over \$300,000, this agency works to achieve its mission of building better communities for all.

Instrumentation

Phenomenology provides a way of exploring lived experiences of populations versus traditional natural sciences perspectives of observation and measurement (Osborne, 1994). Qualitative research includes the researcher as a key element for data collection (Creswell, 2014). Common methods for data collection within qualitative studies include, observation, interviews, and collection of text or artifacts (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Conducting interviews

may involve a variety of formats including structured, unstructured, informal, and focus groups, each providing various perspectives and formats of facilitation. (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

Role of the Researcher

Qualitative research is interpretive (Creswell, 2014), with the researcher a primary source for data collection (pg. 185). Researchers need to disclose personal bias, assumptions and values that may shape the interpretations of the study (Creswell, 2014). Sutton and Austin (2015) propose that researchers utilize reflection before and during the research process as a way to identify and articulate biases, which assists in understanding the filters through which research questions are developed, data will be gathered and analyzed, and findings will be reported. O'Connor and Gibson (2003) avow that the outcome of the interviews may be affected by dynamics between interviewer and interviewee, including differences in age, education, and background. Osborne (1994) theorizes that investigators need to have the ability for empathic rapport and communications in order to gain access to the life of participants. Moreover, Osborne (1994) states researchers' aim should be to make the interview process as minimally intrusive as possible and allow for individual's experience to present itself as spontaneously as possible. An invitation to participate in a conversation and the use of open-ended questions, with minimal structure is best (Osborne, 1994).

Informed Consent, Confidentiality, and Ethical Considerations

Qualitative research learning is gained from understanding lived experiences of a certain population (Creswell, 2014). As a researcher, engaging with people to gain these experiences requires developing a relationship based on trust (Creswell, 2014). Ethic concerns such as protecting respondents, personal disclosure, and authenticity are paramount concerns for integrity of the study (Creswell, 2014). Aluwihare-Samaranayake (2012) declares that within

qualitative research, guidelines and principles are utilized to protect participants and researchers, minimize harm, increase the sum of good, assure trust, and ensure research integrity.

Corti, Day and Backhouse (2000) interpose, research should be based on participants freely volunteered informed consent, which implies an obligation to explain fully and implicitly what the research is concerning and how data will be disseminated. In addition, party's need to be aware of their right to refuse to respond, how confidentiality will be maintained, and finally the potential uses of the collected data (Corti, Day & Backhouse, 2000).

Data Collection

Winona State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol guided this research with respect to using human subjects. With approval provided by Winona State University, various methods were employed to capture respondents lived experience data. Phenomenology focuses on experiences of participants and gathering perceptions of those experiences. Osborne (1994) deems that the main data sources for phenomenology research is usually spoken or written accounts of personal experiences. Researchers most commonly use interviews (Osborne, 1994).

Document Review: Creswell (2014) outlines document review as providing written evidence in the language and words of participants, that is familiar to participants (pg. 191). Data collection included a thorough review of organizational annual reports of each participant. Bowen (2009) proclaims five reasons to include document review as part of qualitative analysis including, documents can provide organizational context for where the respondents operate, information obtained from document review may suggest questions that need to be asked or situations that should be observed as a part of the research, documents provide supplementary data to the study, and reviewing documents expands the researchers' knowledge base. Finally,

documents provide a way of tracking organizational changes and development and document analysis provides a way to verify findings or validate data from other sources (Bowen, 2009).

One -to-One Interviews: One-to-one interviews with respondents included questions to build rapport between researcher and participants. In addition, open-ended question prompts encouraged storytelling about individuals' experiences within the workforce and personal reflections. During the interview process a greater understand of the phenomenon became clearer based on the participant's responses. One participator's narrative may inform the next respondents, until like themes are uncovered (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

Small Focus Group: A small focus group was convened to collect executive women's perspectives regarding their experiences in obtaining the leadership roles they have acquired. Kitzinger (1995) speculates using the interaction between respondents as a key principal, focus groups capitalize on communication between research participants in order to gain additional data. A focus group allows for broad conversation within the group, encouraging participants to speak with each other, ask questions, exchange anecdotes, and commenting on each other's experiences. This provides a richer experience for both researcher and respondents (Kitzinger, 1995).

A single method of data collection will not adequately shed light on a phenomenon, using multiple methods will help facilitate a deeper understanding, justifying the reason to triangulate the data (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Using a methods triangulation model is appropriate for qualitative study as it; confirms the consistency of findings generated through the various collection methods and highlights complementary themes of the phenomenon, and finally, locates where the data diverge, which is informative to the researcher (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Bowen (2009) theorizes that by triangulating data, the researcher can corroborate findings across

data sets, reducing the bias that may exist in a single study. In addition, triangulation provides a “confluence of evidence” that supports credibility (Bowen 2009).

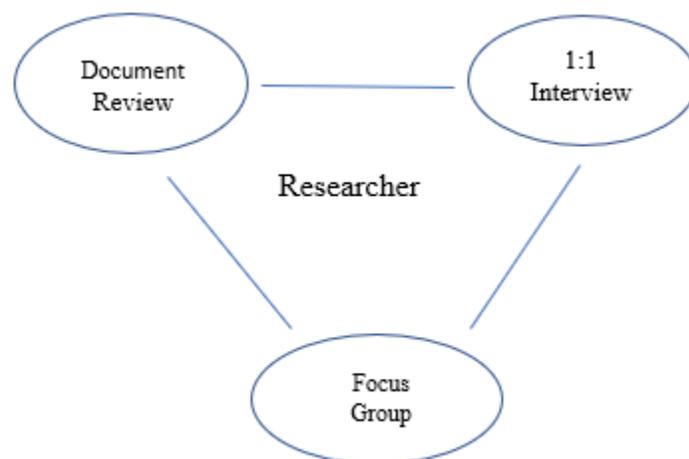


Figure 1. Data methods for triangulation.

Data Analysis

Creswell (2014) indicates data collection advances hand-in-hand with data analysis. Respondent interviews may be ongoing while the investigator analyzes previous interviews and notes. Qualitative research allows for a parallel process structure (Creswell, 2014). The decision on when to complete data collection in phenomenology is when the phenomenon has been illuminated for the researcher (Osborne, 1994). O'Connor and Gibson (2003) identify five process steps in qualitative data analysis. The process begins with assessment - transcribing interviews and focus group data, and in turn, organizing and displaying the data for easy reference (O'Connor & Gibson, 2003). In subsequent steps, the researcher identifies salient themes and recurring ideas. Once these ideas and concepts are identified, a coding method is used for ease in reference. Following coding of collected data, the researcher determines if any overarching themes have emerged within the data (Grand Canyon University, 2019). The

research then validates and confirms her findings, which includes considering the ways in which data was collected from respondents. At this point, the triangulation method can assist the researcher in corroborating findings or display inconsistent or conflicting findings within the methods of data collection used (O'Connor & Gibson, 2003). In concluding the analysis portion of the study, time is spent on summarizing findings, identifying implications of the study and final reporting (O'Connor & Gibson, 2003). The most important part of data analysis and management according to Sutton and Austin (2015) is to be true to the participants and ensuring that it is the contributor's voices that are captured through the research process.

Institutional Review Board

Guided by the Federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA), an Institutional Review Board (IRB) review is required for any research study that includes humans participating as research subjects. An IRB panel reviews all aspects of a proposed study, including research protocols, and documents related to recruitment of respondents, to ensure the protection of the rights and welfare of participants (FDA.gov, 2019). Winona State University requires graduate level students to follow a prescribed process to obtain IRB review and approval before proceeding to interact with study respondents (WSU, 2019). Creswell (2014) states as a researcher, engaging with people to gain lived experiences requires developing a relationship based on trust. As student learners, utilizing knowledge gained through the IRB process, and strictly following approved protocol demonstrates to informants a high level of preparedness, appropriateness, and integrity of the interviewer.

Summary

Chapter three provided the methodology for the research study, including the phenomenological qualitative approach that explores barriers that women face in obtaining leadership roles. This chapter contains sections explaining the study setting, sample, and selection of participants. Concluding chapter three is narrative on the role of the researcher, instrumentation, ethical considerations, Institutional Review Board, data collection and analysis. Chapter four will present study results and findings.

CHAPTER IV

Results and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine barriers women encounter in advancing to leadership roles in nonprofit organizations. Chapter one substantiates the gross inequity of women in leadership positions within the nonprofit sector, outlines the theoretical framework for this study, and discusses the three research questions this study aims to answer. Chapter two summarizes a literature review of generational bias and gender-based leadership challenges within the nonprofit sector. Chapter three describes this study's research design, method of primary-source data collection, and scope. Chapter four summarizes key themes that emerged from the research, better clarifying the problem of gender inequity in nonprofit leadership.

Review of the Problem Statement

Women represent 24% of the top management positions in the United States (Women in the Workplace 2019), despite accounting for 47% of the labor force (Warner & Corley, 2017). This imbalance is significantly greater in the nonprofit sector (Dobin & Tchume, 2019). Women staff 72% of the nonprofit workforce yet hold only 20% of the executive leadership positions (Jones, 2014). Gipson, Pfaff, Mendelsohn, Catenacci, and Burke (2017) present prevailing reasons why so few women advance to executive leadership: gender stereotypes, biases resulting in prejudice, and discrimination against women aspiring to be senior leaders. Unpacking barriers women face may increase our understanding of inequities women face in nonprofit leadership and provide opportunities to balance the playing field.

Review of the Research Design

Qualitative research is designed to discover and better understand life experiences and the meaning individuals attach to the events in their lives (Creswell, 2014). The nature of this inquiry commands a qualitative research approach to discover and better understand, first-hand, from primary sources, experiences women have with barriers that inhibit them from advancing to leadership positions in nonprofit organizations.

Pietersen (2002) suggests that experientially based, qualitative research aims to identify the various ways individuals understand phenomena they encounter: the meaning they draw from their experience(s). This study seeks to explore the lived experiences of individuals regarding a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). Wilson (2015) offers that phenomenology is the way in which a person experiences or understands his or her world as real or meaningful. A phenomenology qualitative study provides scholars with opportunities to gather these unique, individual experiences. Listening to the voices of women who wish to obtain leadership roles in the nonprofit arena is vital to unpacking barriers women face and better understand the nature of the inequity.

Data Analysis

O'Connor and Gibson (2003) define a researched and proven five-step process to conducting an authentic qualitative data analysis. Assessment begins with transcribing interviews and focus group data, and in turn, organizing and displaying the data for easy reference (O'Connor & Gibson, 2003). Subsequent steps include identifying salient themes and recurring ideas; then, utilizing a coding method for ease in reference, the research may determine whether overarching themes are presented within the data (Grand Canyon University, 2019). The most important part of data analysis and management according to Sutton and Austin (2015) is staying

true to the individuals participating as subjects in the investigation; that is, ensuring contributors voices - their meanings and truths drawn from experiences - are correctly understood and documented.

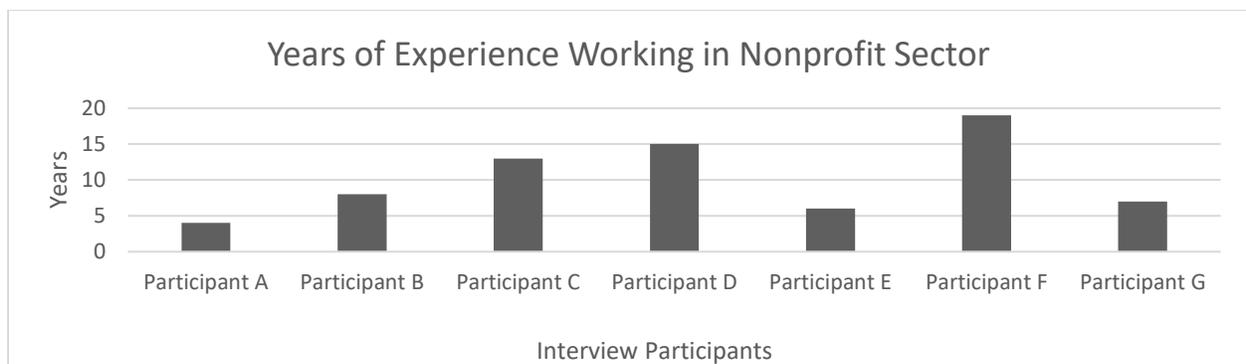
The scope of this research study included transcribing seven individual participant interviews, reviewing the written transcripts, and listening to each individual interview to capture emergent themes. These nascent themes were categorized through a coding process and grouped in compatible thoughts. Focus group data from five individuals was collected with detailed note taking during the group discussion session, reviewed for concurring thoughts, and these perspectives were grouped with the individual interview transcripts to identify overarching themes.

Participant Demographic

Seven female nonprofit employees participated in individual, 1:1 interviews. These seven interview participants represented five unique nonprofit organizations located within the same Southeastern Minnesota geographic area. Nonprofit career experience ranged from 4 to 19 years as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1

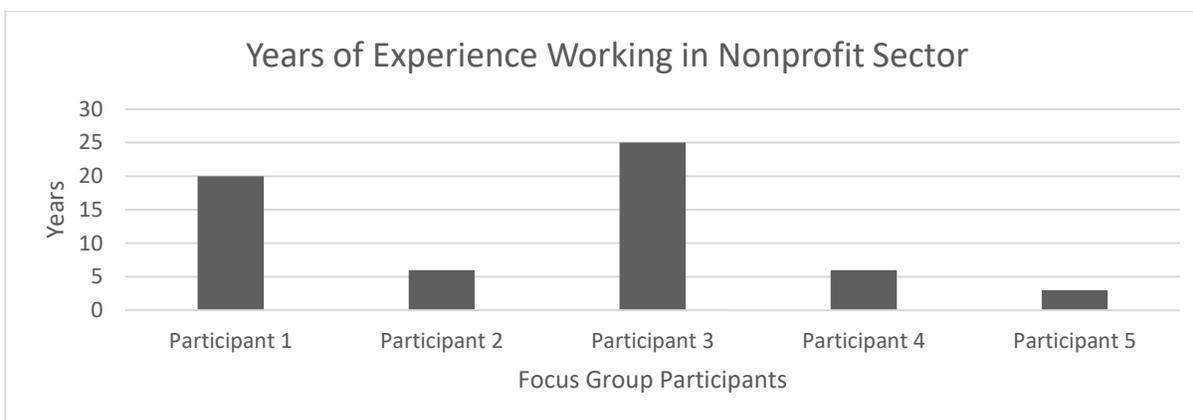
1:1 Interview Participants Years of Experience in the Nonprofit Sector



Five executive nonprofit leaders participated in this study's focus group, with career experience ranging from 3 to 25 years. Participants represented five unique nonprofit organizations, which provided varied and rich perspectives.

Table 2

Executive Leader Focus Group Participants Years of Experience in the Nonprofit Sector



Findings

The findings of this research study originated from 1:1 participant interviews and from a focus group of female executive leaders. Interviews were scheduled at the convenience of each participant and conversations were held between twenty minutes and forty-five minutes. Each of these participants, referenced as participants A – G, shared their personal experiences and thoughts with the researcher, responding to each research question and offering her perspective(s) on advancing to a nonprofit leadership role.

The focus group lasted approximately seventy minutes. Participants included five females who have experience in the role of Director, President or CEO of nonprofit organizations. Participant responses were analyzed and grouped together when similarity in ideas emerged. Focus group participants, referenced as participants 1 – 5, reflected on their career pathways in responding to research questions. The researcher identified overarching themes from the

collective participants, which offered insights into strategies women may find successful in advancing their career into nonprofit leadership.

RQ1. Findings Related to Advancement Opportunities

This study aimed to determine how women perceive opportunities to advance into executive leadership roles in nonprofit organizations.

RQ1. How do women in nonprofit careers describe potential opportunities to obtain leadership positions?

Follow-up questions aimed to further establish viewpoints on prospects for promotion:

IQ1. Can you describe opportunities that you have had to be mentored by a female leader?

IQ2. Can you describe opportunities that you have had for networking?

This study found that women identify networking and female advocates as critical factors to advancing into nonprofit leadership positions.

Networking. Ibarra (1993), publicizes two types of networking in organizations, prescribed and emergent. Prescribed networks are those that contain specified relationships, for example supervisor and staff that interact to achieve task completion. Emergent networks may contain relationships and interactions that are not solely focused on work however may be of a social manner. These emergent network environments can be categorized into organizational networks, where the populations reside within a company and those of a personal setting, where contacts are defined by the individual participant (Ibarra, 1993).

Of the seven participants, all seven reported that networking is crucial to their current roles and identified the importance that networking may play in obtaining a succeeding career

role. Participant G stated, “networking in your next job” signifying that one’s ability to network in the present will lead to obtaining a new, higher level, or different position.

In addition, Participant B, Participant D and Participant E directly contributed the relationships that they had developed via networking resulted in obtaining their current positions. Forret and Dougherty (2004), state that networking behavior helps build relationships with others and may serve to extend women’s reach into the upper echelons of organizations, thus echoing the participants understanding that this is a vital skill that should not be discounted. Reaffirmed by Longman and Anderson (2016) the ability to link women to networking within leadership development programs can assist in redirection of a career path. Maintaining relationships with others who have the potential to assist individuals in their work or career is a strong benefit to networking (Forret & Dougherty, 2004).

Four of the seven participants described having access to strong and vibrant networks is a benefit as a result of being employed with their current organization and connected to a national organization. These national organizations offer opportunities to engage with others in similar agency position roles, or within the framework of a geographical area. These participants explained that the networking activity is offered, available, and encouraged. Beckwith, Carter, and Peters (2016) confirm the idea that social networking could be the single most important tool one can have as they try to ascend. In addition, one top strategy used in career advancement, when available, is to achieve recognition through participation in national organizations (Beckwith, Carter, & Peters, 2016). Participant B acknowledged her participation and endorsement for membership in the local branch of an international service group is where she is able to develop the deepest networking relationships which has led to unique opportunities. “that

has probably been the biggest network of people who I have been able to bounce career questions off of.”

Female advocates. The second theme identified as important in successful achievement of a leadership role was having female advocates. Participants emphasized the advantage of working for and with women leaders as a conduit to higher responsibility and obtaining new career roles. Longman and Anderson (2016), validate this sentiment by stating that women with internal confidence and verbalized support from colleagues and supervisors is a key motivator for women’s willingness to consider moving into leader roles.

Of seven participants, five revealed how women advocates were important to their careers and assisted them in skill building and moving to roles with more responsibility. Participant C expressed two very positive experiences with female leaders. She related how one supervisor encouraged a lateral career move within the same organization to have the involvement of working on a new project, and through that new venture, she gained skills in financial management which will increase her scope as a manager. Furthermore, another supervisor provided encouragement, “she had a heavier hand in guiding me and mentoring, those things that really helped me and helped me to grow as a person.” This guidance, led to Participant C’s acceptance of roles and tasks she wasn’t experienced in or necessarily comfortable with, however, boosted her personal growth and opened her up to new opportunities. Tharenou (2005) posits providing challenging assignments gives preparation, visibility and credibility to women for advancement.

Participant E detailed how a previous female supervisor provided her with support and encouragement that she did not find in a male leader. She recollected being a younger staff member, new to her role, and how a female leader guided her, offered resources, and generally

gave encouragement during her times of uncertainty. Grover (2015) posits that successful women leaders need to prepare women in middle management roles and give justified opportunities to occupancy of higher positional posts. In addition, women need to create synergy, celebrate individual success, and show concern for women by creating community and network (Grover, 2015). Participant G detailed the encouragement by a female supervisor to apply to an executive role provided affirmation and endorsement of her skill set while building her confidence therefore accepting herself as a potential nonprofit leader. “I think that was really helpful and affirming to me that she did see value in the work I was doing, and she could see me doing work beyond my current job description”.

The focus group participants identified the need to have women supporting women within the community. All five participants discussed the need for strong female advocates supporting other females personally and within career roles would be beneficial. According to Haung, Krivkovish, Yee and Zanoschi (2019), employees are more likely to think they have equal opportunities for growth and advancement when their manager helps them manage their careers, showcases their work, and advocates for new opportunities for them on a regular basis.

Participant 1 described a meeting situation in which she was the only female executive in attendance and felt at a disadvantage. Upon attending a second meeting with the same group of individuals, she purposefully invited a female colleague to attend to boost her personal confidence and comfort level within the meeting. Participant 5 recounted working with an all-male construction team and demanding women be represented on the project and to include that expectation within the subcontractor bidding process. Recognizing that as a female leader, if she didn't advocate for this representation, no one else would. Sponsoring a female protégé gives her visibility, credibility, legitimacy (Tharenou, 2005).

RQ2 – Findings Relative to Barriers That Inhibit Advancement

To gain an understanding of women's perceptions of barriers existing currently that inhibit advancement to nonprofit leadership positions, the following research question was proposed:

RQ2. What barriers do women identify that impeded professional advancement?

Interview participants brought forward three key assertions that challenged them as they envisioned advancing into leadership roles. Those themes included the perception of maintaining a healthy balance between work time and family time, having personal confidence to take on challenges, and the confinements of smaller nonprofit organizations.

Work Life Balance. Three of the seven participants expressed thoughts about anticipating that when you accept a leadership role, and as that role expands, the lines between home and work become grey. Expectations exist that you be engaged in work activities outside of what is viewed as a traditional eight-hour workday. Participant B reflected that she when she accepts a leadership role she anticipates "working 60-hour weeks on average as a nonprofit leader", which would cause an imbalance in investment in career and investment at home. Participant E indicated she understood that being in an executive position in the future meant that you wouldn't be taking as much paid time off and that something personal would have to give to make the time investment. Participant F indicated that she considered what the work life balance will be when she considers her next career opportunity and contemplating accepting a leadership role. Participant D comparatively stated that she did not feel that she personally had any barriers to advancing to leadership roles because she was not married or had kids and had the ability to move wherever the opportunities were.

The theme of work life balance was discussed amongst the focus group of executives. All five participants recognized that at some point in their career, they were trying to be everything to everybody and got lost within the sheer volume of the leadership role. Participant 2 shared how she invested “too much” time at work over the course of her leadership role. Her passion for the mission and the work that needed to be done was hard to let go of. Participant 3 echoed that sentiment, recalling that at times as a new executive, she felt frustrated that she was not doing anything well, referring to being in a role as leader, mother and wife. According to a study by Mercer (2010), the respondents who were surveyed rated the lack of work life balance in the top three barriers inhibiting women from advancing to leadership roles. As suggested within the Women in the Workplace 2017 report, in order to increase the representation of women at all levels, companies need to find more ways to help employees balance work and family (Thomas et al., 2017).

Lack of Self Confidence. The second theme regarding potential barriers was the lack of self-confidence. Four of the seven interview participants identified that a personal low confidence level in certain areas of leadership was a barrier. Interestingly, three of the four participants spoke specifically to lack of knowledge of organizational financial information and budget process is a current hindrance to advancement. Participant A had recently applied for and had interviewed for a management position. It was due to the lack of budget management experience that she was not offered that higher-level position. She spoke of her own awareness that her confidence would be higher when she thought she had enough experience. Participant B stated, “I have observed much more confidence in male counterparts, specifically in working through a budgeting process or in financial tasks, versus women colleagues”. Concurring, Longman and Anderson (2016), express a lack of confidence can hamper the leadership potential

for some women. Participant F felt as though at times it was a “catch 22” situation, that you are not able to learn the skills in your current role, like finances, but they are needed in order to round out your skill set to become a leader. Participant G related a previous career experience in which she personally was confident to take on more responsibility in her role however it was the lack of confidence in her skill set by the decision makers that were a barrier to her advancement.

Participant 2 in the focus group spoke to her uncertainty and even some uncertainty of those around her when she accepted an interim leadership role. She admittedly lacked knowledge in certain areas and that was a challenge at the beginning. She needed to prove herself and her appointment to the position was a good decision. Participant 1 shared her start as a nonprofit leader was in creating her own nonprofit and all the things she didn't know as she began. Her belief in the work carried her through the lack of knowledge and confidence. Additionally, Participant 4 experienced feeling low confidence when faced with aspects in her new leadership role she was unfamiliar with. She related the experience of having to serve clients while running the business, including securing revenue, in addition to managing human resources and staffing.

Nonprofit organization limitations. The final theme that emerged from discussions about barriers to advancement was specific to the nonprofit career track. In some cases, nonprofit organizations are small in scope, budget size, and exhibit a flat hierarchy. To have the opportunity to advance to leadership, you need to take a role outside of your current agency. Concurring, Word (2011) declares that high turnover in professional positions is normal because small nonprofit organizations offer little opportunity for advancement, and employees must often change organizations to advance.

One participant in the focus group and three participants in the interviews spoke to this barrier to leadership. The idea that you must move out to move up was experienced by each. Participant G related a story from her career experienced in which she had a conversation with a female leader and asked to take on greater responsibility, with additional tasks, and was told “we are not going to be able to accommodate that here”, and if she wanted those additional things she should probably be looking elsewhere for a job. Participant E acknowledged that moving to a smaller branch of the national organization would be a step she would have to take to move up. Participant B identified that to stay in nonprofit work, more than likely you would have to take a position in a smaller nonprofit, accept a barely livable wage, and work your way up and out, or grow the organization to advance her salary and gain additional employee supports.

In a prior nonprofit career, focus group Participant 3 experienced how advancement was limited due to the size of the organization, and staff left to take on greater roles. Subsequently as an executive, she has watched many people transition to other organizations in order to take on higher level positions.

RQ3 – Findings Relative to Resources and Strategies For Advancement

To gain an understanding of women’s perceptions of how women advance to leadership roles the following research question was proposed:

RQ3. What strategies do women employ to minimize the barriers to obtaining leadership roles within nonprofit organization?

To further ascertain female viewpoints on the pathway to promotion, interview participants were asked the following questions:

IQ4. What resources can you identify that would minimize barriers to obtaining a leadership role?

IQ5. What strategies can you identify that would minimize barriers to obtaining a leadership role?

The researcher identified three themes that emerged from participants of strategies to implement that would be beneficial in obtaining future leadership roles: networking, female advocates, and professional development.

Networking. The first theme which six of seven participants referenced as a strategy was networking. Discussed continually in reply to research question 1. Responses regarding networking focused on within your own organization, within the community, and within your larger organization. Participant A shared that she had been getting to know others within her organization and networking within other departments. Forret and Dougherty (2004) declare that increased internal visibility was significantly related to promotion and career success in a study on networking and career outcomes. Participant D affirmed that she thought it came down to networking and who you know for career advancement opportunities. Ibarra (1993) establishes that individuals need to play an active role in structuring their networks to achieve their goals and maximize the benefits. Conversation with executive leaders in the focus group concentrated on taking advantage of networking and working within the community to learn and grow. Participant 1 offered the suggestion to get involved in volunteer committees or as a community board member to gain a greater perspective and network. Participant 3 expressed the need to find opportunities to network in your community but also within your specific industry if possible. Creating a broad network of individuals working in similar areas but at other organizations is a strategy to foster learning and building nonprofit talent (Hannum et al., 2011).

Female Advocates. A resource that interview participants identified to minimizing barriers was access to females who currently hold executive leadership positions. Three of the

seven participants recognized that their current female supervisor or other female executives are a key component to advancement to leadership roles. Career support from women to women translates most into advancement because mentees gain from being sponsored, challenged and coached by someone who may have incurred the difficulties that women face (Tharenou, 2005).

Participant A expressed the value of understanding other female manager's experiences and education as a way for her to obtain higher positions. Participant E communicated about the ability to reach out within her local organization, regionally, or nationally to current female executives and ask them to share their personal stories. A recounting of how they obtained leadership roles would give her potential pathways in her own career. Concurring, Hannun et al. (2011), aver that emerging leaders should consider interviewing your own organizational leaders and those at other organizations to gain different perspectives. Participant E related that attendance at a recent conference, and hearing a female keynote speakers' journey, gave her ideas about self-advocacy and how to continue to strive for leadership roles when faced with obstacles. Participant F acknowledged that her current supervisor had the ability to assist her in learning additional skills and supported skill building. When managers help employees manage their career, showcase their work and advocate for new opportunities on a regular basis, employees feel positive about opportunities for advancement (Women in the Workplace 2019).

Focus group participants 2, 3, and 5 all acknowledged that as women leaders, they had a responsibility to take on the role of being a mentor and resource for other women. Casto, Caldwell, and Salazar (2005) avow that women who mentor women can reduce feelings of isolation or fears of failure of the mentee, and provide objective, critical feedback without the influence of gender bias.

Professional development. Five of the seven interview participants concurred that by building their skill set through trainings and displaying personal growth would assist them in obtaining higher level careers. The leadership role in the nonprofit sector is one that is increasingly complex and requires a wide range of skills to effectively manage the tasks required to successfully run a modern nonprofit (Word, 2011). Participant A declared she was making a concentrated effort on learning and expanding her knowledge base while outwardly showing her growth. Participants C, D, and E have the opportunity within their national nonprofit to earn certifications. They all recognized those endorsements as a precursor to leadership roles. Participant C indicated that for her, additional certifications would set her apart from others and provide her with a different viewpoint to bring to the table. Participant D shared appreciation for the variety of leadership certificates and paths available to prepare her for her next role. Participant F spoke to investing “more resources put towards professional development that is not just skill based, but leadership, networking, and more formalized mentorship”. Justifying the need for training in leadership concepts to lower level staff in addition to skill-based trainings. Participant 5 in the focus group celebrated the benefits of education in securing advanced positions.

Summary

Seven female interview participants and five female executive leaders provided rich data responses to inform this research on the barriers to advancing in nonprofit leadership roles. The understanding the participants brought to this phenomenon was varied.

Table 3 displays the research questions informing this study and the emergent themes brought forward by the interview participants and focus group executive leaders. Seven unique themes emerged in 1:1 interviews, which were reaffirmed by the focus group participants.

Women middle managers do perceive that they have opportunity for nonprofit leadership roles provided that they have 1) female advocates to assist with providing support and opportunity and 2) dynamic networks to build relationships with community members who may connect them to new prospects to gain skills and become aware of leadership opportunities. Interview participants readily identified barriers that impeded their opportunities and/or acceptance of leadership roles. Those include 1) work life balance and the perceived imbalance of investment of time at work versus home, 2) the lack of self-confidence of the necessary skill set to be successful and the overall confidence in their own abilities, and 3) the landscape of the nonprofit sector being small in scope, and the perception that in order to advance you need to move outside of your current organization. Finally, participants identified both resources and strategies that would strengthen the probability of them obtaining future leadership roles. These include 1) current female executive leaders who can share their experiences and offer support, 2) building vibrant networks of colleagues to learn from and connect them to unseen opportunities.

Table 3
Research Questions and Emergent Themes

	Emergent Theme	Emergent Theme	Emergent Theme
RQ1. How do women in nonprofit careers describe potential opportunities to obtain leadership positions?	Female Advocates	Networking	
RQ2. What barriers do women identify that impeded professional advancement?	Work Life Balance	Lack of Self Confidence	Small Nonprofit Organizations
RQ3. What strategies do women employ to minimize the barriers to obtaining leadership roles within nonprofit organizations?	Female Executive Leaders	Professional Development	Networking

Chapter 5 will provide a review of the findings, recommendations, suggestions for future research, and conclusion to this qualitative research study.

CHAPTER V

Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine barriers women encounter in advancing to leadership roles in nonprofit organizations. Chapter's one through four offered information regarding the background of the problem and significance. Furthermore, emphasized was the qualitative research approach including the research questions posed and the findings of the study. Demonstrated within the findings, women currently do experience barriers to obtaining leadership roles in the nonprofit sector. Alternately, these women in middle management positions do see opportunity and a pathway with provided or secured resources. Chapter five will present the theoretical connections, leadership implications, and recommendations for future research.

Theoretical Connection

Social capital theory served as the theoretical framework for this qualitative study. Interview participants identified that based on their experiences, networking was an opportunity and a strategy to obtaining a leadership role. Each and every one of the interview participants and focus group participants spoke to the positive benefits and need to engage in networking activities. As social capital theory hypothesizes, in order to experience career success, an individual needs to engage in a network comprised of strong and weak tie connections, in addition to developing relationships with individuals who have a resource to offer that assists in fulfilling a goal.

Kram and Isabella (1985), suggest maintaining many relationships is important to career professional development. In addition, Higgins and Kram (2001) offer that studies have shown varied relationships are related to enhanced career development, career progress, higher rates of

promotion and total compensation, career satisfaction and clarity of career identity and sense of competence.

Barriers that were identified by female participants included 1) lack of female advocates 2) lack of strong networks 3) contemplation of a healthy balance of time at work and home 4) lack of self-confidence 5) the limited capacity of advancement within small nonprofit organizations. Furthermore, female executive leader participants in the focus group experienced the lack of female advocates and lack of self-confidence at various points in the career pathway to their current leadership role.

Conclusion

Based on data as current as 2019, women are heavily represented within the nonprofit workforce sector yet underrepresented in leadership roles within that same sector. Women continue to face barriers as this researcher discovered by means of hosting an executive leader's focus group with five participants and individually interviewing seven middle level managers. The following conclusions are drawn from this qualitative study, a review of pertinent literature and document review.

Females who hold careers in the nonprofit sector are driven by the mission to serve others and see the value in doing work in this sector. They identify that nonprofit organizations employ a majority of women, however women become underrepresented at the executive leadership level.

Networking. Networking was identified as an opportunity and a resource that will assist women in obtaining their next leadership role. This includes building relationships within your current organization, within the community, and within the nonprofit and business sectors.

Work Life Balance. Women foresee making decisions on accepting future leadership roles based on the ability to balance work and family. Although driven to advance to make a greater impact in organizations, there is hesitation based on the perceived cost of loss of family time.

Professional Development. Developing a level of self-confidence with additional professional development opportunities is important to make female leadership candidates feel they are ready to accept the role and prove to themselves and others they are qualified.

Female Advocates. Middle level management women desire connections with current female executives as advocates and sources of information on pathways into higher level leadership roles. Understanding how the executive obtained that positions and gaining suggestions for skill building and training to prepare themselves is important.

Limitations of Small Nonprofits. Small nonprofit organizations are a limiting factor in having opportunities for advancement within the same organization. The idea of having to move out to move up is a barrier, as many women are passionate about the mission they are currently serving.

Leadership Implications

Established by the collected data and perspectives of females in nonprofit organizations, this study presents the following leadership implications.

Networks. Building strong relational pieces into career pathways are important for women to advance into leadership roles. Viewed as both an opportunity to advance and as a strategy, female participants promote and encourage obtaining broad networks to bolster opportunities in nonprofit leadership. Additionally, access to building relationships with current executive women leaders is a gateway to understanding the pathways of others and securing a

female advocate who will provide assistance, guidance and feedback to women in middle level management roles. Nonprofit organizations offering mentors, sponsors, or networking to women at all levels, provide women the opportunity to make connections that are beneficial personally and professionally and will advance career performance and advancement.

Professional development. Professional development should be readily made available to women that offer skill specific opportunities and conceptual leadership training. Women in this study brought a level of self-confidence that was impacting their own view of leadership. Proving training and additional learning will add value. Understanding that nonprofit organizations may have limited financial resources does not reduce the obligation to provide this crucial training. Cooperative partnerships, and other avenues should be considered to make training available. Building skills and confidence within women will lead to the acceptance of women themselves as leaders and those around them.

Work Life Balance. Removing barriers to leadership positions for women will require removing the mindset of a traditional ways in which people work and integrating methods in which women can feel more balanced in career roles and family roles. Nontraditional work settings and approaching career leadership utilizing technology or other avenues that benefit both the organization and women to realize maximum impact.

Recommendations for Future Research

More research is needed to examine the barriers that women face in advancing to nonprofit leadership roles. This should include a broader geographic region to acquire additional female participants. A study that focuses on a larger variety of nonprofit organizations with varying service models and budget sizes would provide additional perspectives to inform further results. Additionally, a focus on the barriers that minority women face in the nonprofit sector

would provide additional knowledge. A final suggestion for research would be to determine if the barriers that women face in the nonprofit sector differ from those barriers that women face within the for-profit sector. Expansion on the research questions utilized in this study to include further focus areas could highlight additional themes and barriers that women experience.

Summary

This qualitative research study offered data collected by women currently working within the nonprofit sector who have aspirations to obtain executive leadership roles. As the nonprofit sector provides benefit and supports the human condition of our society it is important that there are leadership opportunities for all who serve and are invested in this workforce sector. Representation of all by all is essential for valuable and beneficial impact.

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