Redefining Leadership to Include Women: A Qualitative Study

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study is to advance the understanding of women's lived experiences and perceptions throughout their careers. The study is based on women's work life experiences, taking into consideration the cultural factors that impacted their decision to take on or remain in leadership roles. This study is focused on both the perceptions of women when it comes to leadership and understanding their decision-making experience within the engendered cultural context of Canadian organizations.

This study considered the experiences of 23 women in traditional and not-for-profit Canadian organizations, employing a qualitative approach study that included semistructured interviews. Eight themes emerged that identify the barriers that women face and the cultural environment that prevents women from advancing and/or staying in leadership positions.

The themes also address the conditions that impact women's career decisions as they relate to leadership and pursuing leadership positions. Additionally, the research presents themes that highlight the cultural environment that empowers women, makes them feel supported in the workplace, and enables them to thrive in leadership positions in their current traditional organizations, new ones, or not-for-profit organizations.

I offer recommendations based on the findings of my research. Organizations should focus on mentorship of women by female and male leaders. This creates a learning environment as well as a mentoring environment.

Another finding speaks to flexibility in work schedules, empowering women to define their workday and how work is done. Career maps were identified as a recommendation, implementing a process of clear career mapping for women. Finally, women in leadership roles should pair with other women in the organization to support them and raise their voices.

Chapter 1: Introduction

A review of existing literature on women in leadership revealed a gap in the understanding of the intersection between engendered organizational culture and women's decisions to take on leadership roles. The purpose of this dissertation was to analyze cultural expectations of women within organizations and how intersectionality factors into women's personal experiences to influence whether they decide to take on leadership positions.

Gender equity and inclusion practices have been a large part of most Fortune 500 organizations for the last 2 decades, as extensive arguments point to a business advantage when there is a gender-balanced leadership team and board (Catalyst, 2016). Gender-balanced boards drive positive, sustainable business results and have taken center stage in leadership forums and across organizational strategies, and scholars have debated them consistently over the past 2 decades (Catalyst, 2016; Deloitte, 2017; Milliken & Martins, 1996). Despite scholars and business leaders' work to address the gap pertaining to women in leadership positions, organizations still struggle with attracting, promoting, and retaining women in leadership positions (Catalyst, 2017).

Research has suggested that women's reactions to and involvement in organizational gender diversity programs are influenced by the intersectionality of the women and the culture of their organizations (Olsen et al., 2016).

A leading researcher in the field of organizational study described organizational culture as

> a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be

considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to

perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems. (Schein, 2010, p. 18)

This research is guided by Schein's definition of organizational culture. Other scholars

(Longman et al. 2018) in the field of organizational culture have suggested that organizational

cultures tend to be gendered in nature, meaning organizational assumptions about leaders and the

values and attributes of effective leadership are usually male-normed.

Olsen et al. (2016) reported that women, depending on their positions within the

construct of their intersectionality of race, gender, and socioeconomic status, often believe

organizational gender programs are put in place to make a company and its leadership feel better

about themselves rather than address the systemic structural and cultural barriers that exist within

the organization. Consequently, women often choose to opt out of such programs or consider

those programs to be disempowering.

"Traditionally, research and media attention has concentrated on discriminatory practices

within organizations, and the barriers that women face as they climb the career ladder" (Ryan &

Haslam, 2007, p. 266). Scholars and practitioners continue to discuss the following

organizational barriers and cultures: sex categorization, gender stereotypes, women being viewed

as less capable than their male peers, cultural norms, men promoting and mentoring only men,

double bind, and the glass cliff (Egaly, 1990; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Manne, 2018a; Ridgeway &

Correll, 2004; Ryan et al., 2007). Even with this knowledge, there are still persistent gaps and

inequalities regarding women in leadership.

Research Background

Leadership is an individual's ability to motivate, influence, and encourage employees,

coworkers, managers, and staff to work efficiently and contribute toward an organization's

success (Avolio et al., 2009). Leadership can be conceptualized in three steps: first, creating a

vision that embodies achieving the organizational goals; second, designing a strategy to realize

the vision in real time; and third, communicating the organization's vision to the working

members. Through leadership guidance, support, and motivation, an individual enhances their

capabilities to contribute to an organization's success (ALAPO, 2018).

Leadership describes a person's position and their ability to set and articulate a vision to

activate organizational growth. A survey was conducted by Pew Research Center (1964–2017) to

determine the position of women leaders in the world and found that most nations had never had

female leaders in their organizations. Figure 1 shows the details of women leaders around the

globe.

Figure 1

Years Served by Female Heads of State or Government, 1964–2017
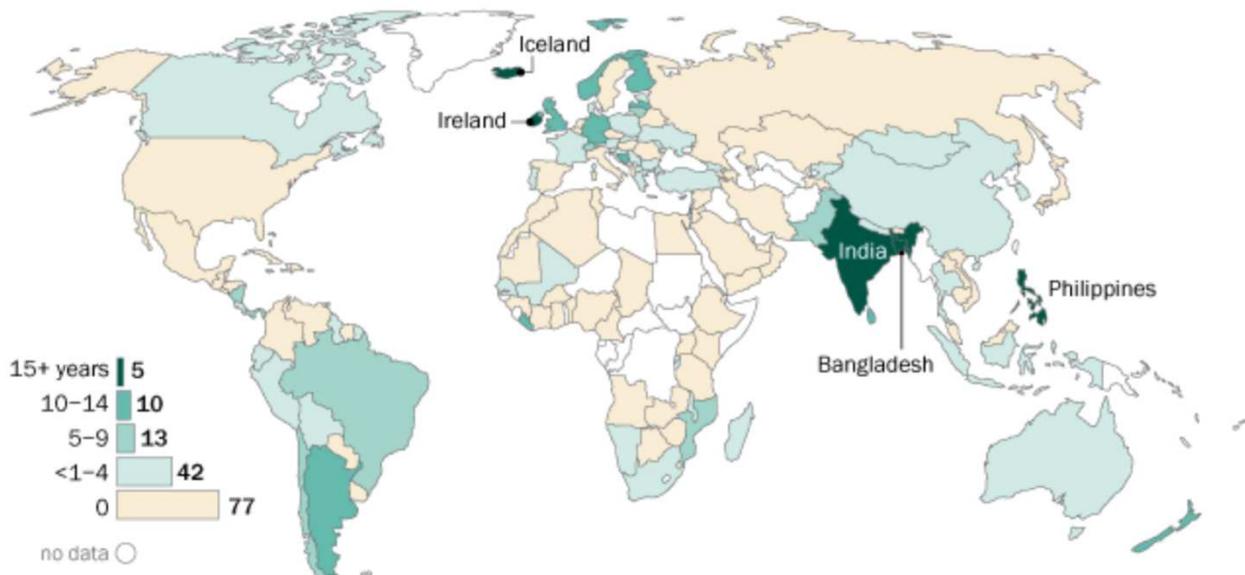
Note: Pew Research Center.

As Figure 1 shows, the number of women as heads of state has been low since 1964. For

example, countries such as Chile, Estonia, Germany, Liberia, the Marshall Islands, Mauritius,

and Nepal were governed by women for the first time in 2017; the status of female leadership around the world has been extremely poor. The major reason for women having such minor roles in leadership in general is the adoption and continuation of discriminatory practices within organizations (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). These practices continue to hinder women from climbing the corporate ladder. Women also face other challenges, including cultural barriers, men being promoted over women, only men being mentored, double binding (in which no matter what a woman does, she will be always doing something wrong; Jamieson & Hall, 1995), gender stereotyping, role incongruity, and the glass cliff—a situation in which women are promoted to leadership roles in reaction to a crisis, which in turn has negative impacts to their long-term career (Skelly & Johnson, 2011). These challenges adversely impact women's progress in realizing leadership roles in Canadian organizations. As a result, women leaders and the workforce, both currently and historically, have taken part in an opt-out revolution, choosing not to take on leadership roles and instead limiting themselves to nonsupervisory roles (Yousafzai et al., 2018).

In Canada, gender discrimination against females can be observed from the age of 10 years. Per an Ipsos survey, 35% of girls faced discrimination in their preteens and were victimized by sexism (Bivens & Dawson, 2013). According to these authors, women's environments become less attractive as they progress to leadership levels within organizations that require them to compete with their male counterparts for higher-position job roles and responsibilities. Women face issues such as cultural barriers and gender discrimination in the workplace, which can hamper their professional growth and aspects of their career development. In this environment, it becomes important for organizations to adopt mitigating measures, such as revisiting work policies, removing systemic barriers in talent-management processes, and

implementing diversity programs to improve women's leadership attributes globally. The removal of gender-equity barriers will provide many opportunities for women to display their talents in the workplace; gender-inclusive environments also encourage work equality and reduce the organizational diversity issues faced by managers and leaders (DeFrank-Cole & Tan, 2020). Researchers have only recently started to focus on the intersection between organizational culture and women's decisions to take on leadership roles. This study is based on an exploration of the concept of leadership and organizational culture and ascertaining their effect on women's decisions to opt in or out of taking on leadership roles in Canadian organizations. The research in this study relates to information on barriers that create issues in acquiring a leading position within an organization as well as mitigating interventions required to enhance women's leadership positions.

Problem Statement

Leadership is a core component of all companies because it plays a major role in motivating and encouraging the workforce to carry out organizational activities; it is the practice of inspiring a team to achieve a shared purpose. However, organizations do not provide many opportunities for women in the workforce to grow professionally and acquire leading positions within a firm. Catalyst (2017) highlighted the delimiting conditions of women in Canadian organizations, reporting that women acquire only 9% of organizations' leading positions in Canada. Catalyst's (2017) findings were consistent with those identified by other scholars; major reasons for this unequal distribution were sex categorization, gender stereotypes, women being viewed as less capable than their male peers, cultural norms, men promoting and mentoring only men, double binding, and the glass cliff (Acker, 2006; Eagly, 2002; Manne, 2018a; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Ryan et al., 2007). Additionally, the diversity programs conducted by Canadian

organizations do not empower women and mostly are conducted to fulfill government regulations or address legal concerns. Organizational gender programs make companies and their leadership feel better about themselves instead of addressing the systemic barriers within organizations. As a result, most women do not opt to participate in such programs and do not consider them to be effective enough to empower women. This limits women's promotion to senior leadership positions and forces them to compromise on their career growth ladders. Therefore, mitigating measures such as establishing gender-balanced language and equal opportunities must be adopted to improve women's conditions (Kelly, 2020).

The purpose of this research is to investigate barriers women face when making the decision to move into or opt out of leadership positions, with a specific focus on engendered organizational cultural factors and their roles in gender inequity at leadership levels. This research addresses the following question: What organizational culture factors impact women's decisions to take on leadership positions?

Research subquestions:

- To what extent are women successful in leadership positions in Canadian organizations?

- What barriers exist for women as they consider leadership roles in organizations?

- What organizational culture factors impact women's decisions to take on leadership positions?

- What measures or mitigating interventions must be adopted to enhance women's leadership positions?

Rationale of the Study

My intent is to better understand the organizational barriers that women face when seeking leadership positions. This will also encourage organizations to introduce organizational gender

programs, work–life balance opportunities, a supportive and flexible organizational culture, and improved opportunities for women to take on leadership positions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of the literature review chapter is to comprehend and study the existing literature regarding women's barriers when moving into leadership positions. In particular, this chapter contains an analysis of organizational culture and its role in gender inequity at leadership levels. The literature review is focused on furthering understanding and awareness of existing research and articles on leadership, gender equity, and organizational culture.

Leadership

Leadership is a complex concept and is defined in many ways, depending on context and ideologies about human relations (Northouse, 2015). However, leadership has multiple forms and dimensions that are not easy to categorize. Leadership can be found among family, friends, communities, colleagues, informal groups, and informal hierarchies outside or within organizations. Leadership may arise instantaneously, such as in the case of an emergency, or it may appear gradually. It can also manifest in a wide variety of circumstances, and it can be adaptable over time and responsive to circumstantial change (Keohane, 2012).

There are as many views of leadership as there are traits that separate leaders from nonleaders. Much of the research available suggests a shift from the traditional trait- or personality-based theories to situational leadership theory. Some examples of traditional leadership traits noted in the literature review were strategist, dictator, and decision-maker (Catalyst, 2007). Situation theory posits that the situation in which leadership is exercised is very much tied to the leader's skills and characteristics (Avolio et al., 2009). In considering Charry's (2012) eight theories of leadership, as well as Landis et al.'s (2014) synthesis of leadership

theories and styles, leadership theories can be categorized by the following three perspectives:
leadership as a relationship, leadership as a combination of traits or characteristics, and
leadership as certain behaviors/skills. The commonality of all of the theories and styles is the
idea that leadership involves establishing relationships with people and reaching common goals
(Charry, 2012; Wolinski, 2010).

This study leverages both situational and trait leadership theories. When considering
leadership within the context of an organization, the goals and execution of organizational
strategy should be considered as they relate to leadership and the impact of the organizational
culture's influence on leadership. Both theories speak to female leadership traits and styles
(Charry, 2012; Jago, 1982; Jogulu, 2010; Landis et al., 2014; Wolinski, 2010).

A leader must encourage individuals to perform efficiently to accomplish an
organization's goals. Thus, leaders must possess a personality that motivates subordinates to
follow them, in addition to sufficient creative, logical, and dynamic skills to make efficient use
of the resources available to the company (Goleman et al., 2012).

Landis et al. (2014) argued that most of the historical research on leadership theories is
firmly tied to men and male characteristics—modeled after leaders who were considered great
leaders of the time, all men. Women have been absent in the discussion, historically and
currently, from academic and societal lenses (Jogulu, 1982; Landis et al., 2014). The world is
evolving rapidly, but recent statistics reveal that women often lag behind in terms of holding
leadership positions. Currently, only 26 women occupy CEO positions at Fortune 500
companies, comprising only 5.2% of the CEO population. The numbers remain nearly the same
for female CEOs of Fortune 1000 firms (5.4%), suggesting that only a few women have
opportunities to advance into leadership positions (Forbes, 2019). These continuously low

numbers have initiated the need to explore organizational culture and how it affects women's decisions to opt into or out of leadership roles. This research, therefore, addresses the issue of what organizational culture factors affect women's decisions to take on leadership positions.

Organizational Culture

Culture describes the social norms and behavior pertaining to human societies as well as the beliefs, knowledge, laws, customs, arts, habits, and capabilities of the individuals within these groups (Barker, 2004). The cycles of enculturation and socialization that reveal the diversity of cultures through communities enable people to learn the culture. An acceptable cultural standard codifies acceptable behavior in society; it functions as a framework for conduct, language, dress, and behavior in a context that serves as a guideline for societal norms (Deacon, 1998).

Schein (2010) identified organizational culture as a shared basic assumption pattern learned by a community over time as it faces challenges pertaining to internal integration and external adaptation that has shown significant results. Thus, this culture can be shared with new team members as the right way of thinking about, feeling about, and perceiving organizational issues. Schein (2010) further suggested that unit members comprehend organizational culture and communicate it to new members through various socializing and networking mechanisms.

Helgesen (2017) described an environmental barrier that suggests women are challenged in the early formative parts of their career to find a place or see themselves within the culture of an organization. Helgesen and Johnson (2010) conducted a study that focused on the corporate sector looking into why capable women were opting out of good jobs, suggesting that increasing numbers of women saw and learned of the barriers and that organizations' values were created to favor an all-male workforce, not accounting for domestic responsibilities. The research

suggested that organizational cultures within North America continue to recognize and reward male-centric leadership.

In considering Hofstede's theory of femininity and masculinity (2001), it is accepted through other dimensions of culture that men are more concerned with economic, political, and goal-oriented phenomena, and women are more concerned with caregiving and nurturing. He suggests that this transfers into organizational culture and, as such, leads to male dominance in leadership and the structures of organizations and society.

Scholars have identified various external, behavioral, and internal influences that can impede women's success in leadership, many of which are associated with the culture of the organization in which they work. According to Ely and Rhode (2010), women who try to reach top levels within any corporation face several attitudinal and behavioral challenges. Moreover, they believed that women who try to reach top management positions follow an organizational and cultural pathway distinct from that of their male colleagues, with roots that penetrate deeply into the engendered organization. The diversity of miniscule interpersonal forces that form women's experiences in reality disrupts the learning cycle at the very core of leading (Ibarra et al., 2013), which adversely affects perceptions regarding women's leadership positions. Women's growth, whether identified overtly or subconsciously, is partly judged according to the perceptual correlation between leadership and maleness (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Koenig et al., 2011).

Similarly, Longman et al. (2018) stated that women who aspire to leadership positions encounter a range of social, internal, and behavioral influences that are directly connected with an established organization's culture. Moreover, according to Helgesen and Johnson (2010), rewards, organizational structure, performance management, recognition of achievement, incentive plans, and promotions are all defined by and reflect the culture of men within a construct of industrial

leadership. Culture can play a role in creating or breaking down the barriers women face in organizations. Although many definitions of culture exist, for this paper, I leveraged Schein's (2010) description of culture as a collection of perceptions, behaviors, and assumptions that are considered the norm and, in turn, are used to inform, structure, and guide an organization's behavior and decision-making process.

Women worldwide face many challenges as they reach top management levels. Despite unending demands and regulations related to gender representation, junior and senior management in all branches of organizations have often been blamed for promoting gender disparities. Makori (2011) examined the effects of corporate culture, socioeconomic influences, and demographic factors on women taking top positions in management. The results indicated that corporate tradition and culture often discourage women from being top managers. According to the results, administrators should follow strategies that ensure equality and gender equity in appointments and promotions for leadership roles. Moreover, Makori found that bias against women based on gender prevented them from reaching top levels of leadership. The researcher proposed that organizations must establish and adopt strategies to promote gender equality in employees' appointments and personnel growth.

The Value of Women's Leadership

This paper was conceived as a literature analysis of emerging studies on gender inequalities in top leadership positions between men and women. Although women might be high performers, they still do not achieve top-level leadership roles relative to their male counterparts. I aimed to comprehend why women have trouble scaling company hierarchy and how stereotyping and gender contribute to leadership.

Researchers have observed that leadership by women has distinct advantages and that women leaders are likely to embody qualities such as teamwork skills, compassion, and empathy (Offermann & Foley, 2020; Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014). Worldwide studies have revealed that increases in women's participation within organizational leadership improve several factors within those organizations, such as financial performance, value, innovation, economic growth, social responsiveness, philanthropy, and solvency (Campbell & Vera, 2010; Joecks et al., 2013). Baker (2014) analyzed the literature on emerging developments in leadership roles for women. Women are reported to have outstanding leadership qualities globally and are complimented more than men are for the qualities and styles associated with successful leadership. Catalyst (2020), a nonprofit organization, analyzed women's participation in leadership roles and noticed that businesses with more women board members had significantly higher stock gains, revenue returns, and returns on investment capital than companies with fewer women board members. Women often benefit from tighter control on company boards and fewer ethical breaches, such as bribery and misappropriation (Adams & Ferreira, 2009; Cumming et al., 2015).

Barriers to Women's Leadership

The subtle sex predispositions of communities, society, organizations, and families pose a strong challenge to women's leadership (Acker, 1990). Social organizations, governments, and private corporations have all made efforts to try to include women in leadership positions (Lacerda, 2015). Even though such efforts are intended to create a developed and progressive human community, a variety of challenges continue to impede women's development as independent leaders.

Because of the persistence of intense stereotyping, gender inequalities, and inadequacies in organizational reactions to such challenges, women might not take account of their leadership

or feel they have the personalities or skills required to be leaders (Johns, 2013). Compared to men, women take fewer career risks and are less likely to have organized management and leadership positions (Johns, 2013). To better understand why it can be so difficult for women to cultivate a leadership attitude, one first must accept that women are omitted from a litany of hidden advantages that benefit men. The general effect of these exclusions is that women are more likely to acknowledge their anatomy and identity as barriers to progress (Krivkovich et al., 2017).

Another critical barrier to women's leadership is the maintenance of work–life balance (Brue, 2019; Schueller-Weidekamm & Kautzky-Willer, 2012). Women are expected to attend to childcare and domestic responsibilities, even as full-time employees. In this scenario, women often encounter the dilemma of how to achieve a perfect equilibrium between expectations at home and work (Johns, 2013). Maintaining a balance between work and the rest of one's life is one of the most dynamic challenges to women's leadership. It is stressful for women who work outside the home to try to balance work and motherhood. The evolving nature of the work environment—especially at the top of the hierarchy, which requires work around the clock—poses a deadlock for many women who want to expand their lives beyond their workplace (Bennetts, 2012).

The "lean-out" scenario is a further obstacle specifically related to work–life balance, in which women "choose to slow or stop a very demanding career" (Orr, 2019; Warner, 2014). The idea of leaning out of a career is a stark contrast to the popular lean-in ideology encouraging women to take charge of their careers, lean into the barriers, and take a place at the table (Sandberg, 2013). For instance, approximately two-thirds of qualified women who possess bachelor's degrees reduce their work hours and start flexible or part-time jobs. Additionally, one-third of such deserving women apply for a long leave. Such off-tracking occupations can be harmful to women, particularly as opposed to men, "who tend to remain fully employed and uphold their career

ambitions". Therefore, well-published internal organizational strategies and procedures that standardize flexibility in working hours and emphasize job efficiency over time served are essential in addressing barriers to women's greater inclusion in leadership positions (Orr, 2019; Powell, 2020; Warner, 2014).

The lack of external and internal networks, visibility, opportunities, and support is an additional significant obstacle to leadership (Chengadu & Scheepers, 2017; Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017). Women generally are given less incentive, both within and outside of their organizations, to establish formal and informal networks for a range of reasons, including women's limited availability to engage in technical corporate meetings (where networking frequently takes place) due to family and job responsibilities, a lack of supporters willing to introduce them to internal and international leaders and policy makers, and gender issues within organizations. Researchers have also found that men and women in management have stronger casual networking and connections with other managers and that substantial interactions with others in similar roles can be beneficial for managers (American College of Healthcare Executives, 2012; Mate et al., 2019; Wajcman, 2013). Women who neglect decision-making and other business avenues to show leadership acumen are removed from the so-called rich old boys' network. This network is considered an informal group in which wealthy, typically White men with the same social and educational backgrounds help each other in their professional networks to maintain success. Women are not considered for leadership roles, as they are not a part of the club (Chengadu & Scheepers, 2017).

Another source of inequity for women is pay. The Joint US Economic Committee (2016) reported that although various factors lead to pay inequalities, up to 40% of the differences stem from discrimination. The slogan "equal pay for equal work" is well known in the battle against the

gender pay gap. Yet, whereas the economic penalties of the pay disparity can be evident, the social effects are more insidious (American Association of University Women, 2016).

Platt et al. (2016) established a clear correlation between the pay gap and elevated prevalence of depression and anxiety disorders among women compared with men, as well as a decrease in anxiety disorder rates where women's wages are higher than men's wages. It has also been speculated that the depreciation of women's jobs and efforts, which symbolizes the wage divide, could contribute to women not taking on leadership positions, which would lead to fewer women filling those roles and even greater deficits in women's leadership (Platt et al., 2016).

Gender Stereotypes and Lack of Ability or Skills

Eagly and Karau (2002) revealed that the shortage of women leaders is partly due to perceptions of their gender position. Women are stereotyped as caring, warm, indecisive, nurturing, passive, and emotional because of the societal roles they have played for ages. However, these assumptions often carry over to the workplace environment, where the main attributes of leadership are strength, rationality, and decision-making power, and women often are not considered to possess these attributes. The congruity theory of prejudice against female leaders proposed by Eagly and Karau (2002) states that incongruity in both stereotypes generates prejudice against women leaders, which means women have fewer chances to take on leadership—this indicates that women encounter more barriers when taking up leadership positions (Hoeritz, 2013).

Kossek et al. (2017) demonstrated differences between women and men in their values, interest in career advancement, and expectations of workplace culture. Organizational culture theory suggests that organizations are biased toward a series of male-centered expectations (Kossek et al., 2017). Women are often seen as disruptors or less motivated as they aspire to work–life balance and expect to be taken seriously for their abilities and capabilities within the workplace

(Kossek et al., 2017). The problem for women is that the value structure integrated into a company's culture may be based on a stereotypical perspective regarding gender-based characteristics and actions, resulting in a series of deep perceptions of the role that each gender wants and should be expected to play. For instance, a masculine organizational culture holds different expectations for men and women. In a masculine culture, men are expected to be competitive, focused on material success, and assertive. However, women are expected to focus on nurturing people and enhancing the quality of life. Furthermore, Kossek et al. (2016) stressed that implicit interpersonal racism encourages people to uphold assumptions and provides leadership teams social cues about their attitudes and acts. Such assumptions also affect how leadership treats women staff and leaders and the extent to which it values them. Women are not associated with the masculine definition of leadership, which creates roadblocks to leadership opportunities for women because this often translates into them being viewed as less qualified, which, naturally, is a misleading interpretation.

Double Bind

Part of feminist theory involves discourse over the extent to which women's actions are seen to be constrained by social, cultural, and organizational structures, particularly patriarchal structures (Ben-Noams, 2018; Brescoll, 2012; Eagly & Karau, 2012; Ibarra et al., 2013; Ridgeway, 2011). For women in particular, social roles and disparities in gender communication raise dilemmas. Gender differences and stereotypes establish a double bind in which women are penalized for expressing either too little or too much ambition, assertiveness, and self-confidence (Barrett & Davidson, 2006). For instance, a traditional style of women's speech is less directed, warmer, and more moderate than that of men. This kind of communication generally lowers expectations of women's abilities. On the other hand, if a woman displays enormous

assertiveness that contradicts the stereotype, her likability, impact, and power may be diminished. Women's ability is also judged distinctly from the ability of men. Society assesses women's talents more harshly than it does those of men, holds women to a higher degree of experience, and analyzes women administrators and leaders more objectively than it does male leaders occupying similar positions (Johns, 2013).

Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) stated that for women in the workplace, the double bind emerges as they move into leadership positions. Women are often trained and encouraged to adopt male-like traits so they can take on leadership positions successfully. However, once they successfully take on these male-like traits, they are penalized for adopting qualities that do not conform to the socially acceptable behavior for women; as a result, they are often held back from leadership promotions (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Similarly, a Catalyst (2007) report on the concept of the double bind highlighted that women are put in difficult situations when they aspire to and achieve leadership positions. The double bind is dominant in the cultures of many organizations and the styles of leadership considered effective within them. For instance, to gain superior leadership, women often take on traits such as being powerful decision-makers, being authoritative, and taking control. However, women in this case are also portrayed as ineffective leaders because society feels that they are pushing themselves too hard (Catalyst, 2007). Tarr-Whelan (2009) also discussed the double-binding dilemmas women face. The researcher asserted that on one hand, women can seem too feminine, inadequate, or delicate and cannot make hard, harsh, and domineering decisions. On the other hand, they might be perceived as aggressive, nonfeminine, and too ambitious, which are contradictory to societal norms.

Social elements influenced the first generations of women in leadership in male-dominated environments. The women still tried to fit in with convention, but fear and domination constrained

them, unconsciously or consciously (Reciniello, 2011). Women lacked confidence, were unsure of their abilities, and were reluctant to make any decisions pertaining to important aspects (Sandberg, 2010, 2013). Corporate sexism also affects policy makers on the job in supporting high-powered women. This encompasses the prejudicial attitude toward professional and assertive women and the appreciation they receive following criticism due to certain unavoidable circumstances. For instance, a working woman generally is perceived to be less committed to her service within the organization due to the rare times when she leaves early, while ignoring the occasions when she extends her office time to meet deadlines (Rhode & Kellerman, 2007). Societal stereotypical viewpoints affect young women, who internalize them and stay silent about being perceived in cliché ways (Sandberg, 2013). Carli (2001) suggested a manner in which society can be satisfied by integrating agentic and communal attributes. This implies combining the masculine characteristic of making decisions and the feminine characteristic of loving (Ben-Noam, 2018).

Gender stereotypes might involve a specific issue within their context, in which perceptions of the leadership position conflict with the gender role. A lack of compatibility between the traits perceived as important for management and women's more traditional gendered roles can contribute to gender norms and leadership perceptions of women in leadership positions. Eagly and Karau (2002) argued that an incongruity exists between the women's roles as stereotypical and prototypical leaders, which results in two types of prejudice against women: (a) a lower evaluation of women's capacity as leaders as compared with men's, given the stereotypical belief that agentic behavior is predominant in men rather than women, and (b) evaluations of women leaders' real behavior as less positive and women's organizational leadership being viewed as less suitable than men's. Therefore, women face a double bind: Retaining their status as women might lead to a failure to meet the criteria of a leadership position, whereas complying with a leadership

role could lead to gender-role failure. These opposite aspirations lead to the so-called "our impossible selves," as Ibarra and Petriglieri (2015) identified. Gender stereotypes must be considered as a context in leadership roles, while requirements and norms associated with leadership roles can restrict actions to mitigate gender disparities. Furthermore, the abovementioned background variables may intensify or diminish a double bind, such as the degree to which an organization is controlled by men.

The double-bind challenge for women in leadership roles has applied to women in companies trying to address competing expectations for leadership, results, and actions. Catalyst (2007) defined a double bind as a collection of contradictory expectations forcing women to exhibit conflicting conduct that renders them hardened, regardless of actions, and requires them to choose between similarly unsatisfactory alternatives. The double bind is embodied in two ways— the high threshold of ability and competent yet discouraged—articulated in the theory of stereotypes and male leadership (Catalyst, 2007). Extreme views reflect the gender norms that describe women as nurturing and caring. These assumptions generate a challenge in which women leaders are considered too soft if they comply as they should (i.e., being nourishing and compassionate). If a woman leader is assertive and firm (not nourishing and comforting), she is labeled as being too rough. High skill thresholds define a challenge in which women need to reach higher degrees than men do, often with fewer benefits. This ensures that women face a high skill threshold if they must show leadership potential repeatedly or must work more frequently and on a higher level than men do to obtain only the same or lower pay, praise, or opportunities (Schulz & Enslin, 2014).

Women often are forced to prove that they are as visionary as their male counterparts, and doing so makes women more vulnerable to imitating male leaders, which squelches their ability to act as independent leaders. Moreover, every individual possesses unique traits that can be beneficial to successful leadership. Simply imitating male leaders can prove detrimental for female leaders and result in the failure of their leadership.

Additionally, management roles involve societal standards that require well-developed relational and technological abilities and embrace masculinity (Skelly & Johnson, 2011). The theory of social roles claims that certain characteristics, such as assertiveness, are related to the attributes a man normally exhibits as per societal norms. Consequently, some leaders might assume that women do not have sufficient male-type attributes and may not move them to senior roles. Social role theory also indicates that women in leadership roles face engrained stereotypes (Lyness & Heilman, 2006). Furthermore, the congruity principle notes that people are penalized if they do not behave according to society's standards (Skelly & Johnson, 2011). Because successful women leaders appear to transgress gender norms when they manifest stereotypically male agentic characteristics and do not manifest stereotypically female communal characteristics, those who embrace conventional gender regulations and roles might judge gender role violations unfavorably (Eagly & Karau, 2002). A woman still encounters negative responses while receiving a positive assessment for her success in a leadership role.

Saint-Michel (2018) investigated the role of leaders' sex and gender identity in understanding followers' views regarding transformational leadership. Gender orientation describes a traditional and stereotypical male or female self-awareness. Society expects men to have characteristics of agency, such as competitiveness and assertiveness, and expects women to show communal features, such as personal regard and benevolence for others' individualized

concerns. The study results indicated that female leaders with strong agentic and community-based characteristics were rated as exhibiting more transformative leadership by their supporters compared with male leaders. Contrary to the hypotheses proposed in the study, male leaders who identified themselves as possessing strongly agentic or group features were considerably less transformative than women leaders were (Saint-Michel, 2018). Although multiple reports have concentrated on the bias against women leaders, findings indicate that men can also be damaged by transformative leadership. Transformative leadership is a particular leadership style that encourages supporters to reach beyond their personal interests to fulfill a shared purpose. The findings show that both female and male leaders experience the weight of gendered expectations.

How Women Advance in Organizations

The fact that women continue to be underrepresented in senior leadership positions in organizations (Clots-Figueras, 2012; Smith & Suby-Long, 2019) represents numerous challenges influencing the glass-ceiling scenario. However, some women have attained success in leadership positions, prompting researchers to determine the circumstances in which women are promoted despite seemingly unpleasant and recorded challenges. Cook and Glass (2014) investigated systemic-level mechanisms with which to promote women's entrance into top positions. They tested three systemic-level concepts that may influence the access and tenure of women in top ranks: the glass cliff, the plurality of decision-makers, and the savior effect. To test these hypotheses, they used a dataset that included all CEO changes over a 20-year span in Fortune 500 companies.

In contradiction to the glass-cliff forecasts, diversity among decision-makers—not firm results—dramatically raises the probability of women being elevated to top management roles. In

addition, diversity among decision-makers improves women leaders' tenure as heads of management regardless of firm results, contrary to outcomes predicted by the savior effect.

Role Incongruity

The theory of congruity explores the connection between social and gender roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Social positions should be aligned, and the two must have congruence. Roles can also be mismatched, and a person can play two social roles concurrently. The key role a person plays is that of a female or male. Gender is the key mechanism people use to understand and execute social conduct (Ridgeway, 2011). Both sexes are identified as dominant and socially shared, but they are still stereotyped due to gender roles. These gender roles for men and women can be seen as agentic behaviors. Moreover, women are known to be more compassionate, nourishing, and focused on others in the group dimension. On the other hand, men are supposed to display greater agentic aspects that predominantly highlight control, independence, and self-assertion (Ferguson, 2017).

When women enter heavily male-dominated employment, they may not fit in with the traditional standards of the expertise required for that profession (Joshi et al., 2015). The role-incongruity theory discusses how gender stereotypes and stereotypical logical inconsistencies contribute to biases to which male leaders are predisposed. The theory states that two challenges exist for working women: managing female-oriented gender roles and taking on leadership positions (Rudman et al., 2012).

As per the role-incongruity theory, it is difficult for women to achieve leadership roles due to their underrepresentation within business leadership positions and the discerned incongruity between leadership demands and women's social roles. Generally, corporate-level leadership positions are gender-oriented and aligned with the concept of the masculine work ethic, which

justifies the idiom "think manager, think male" (Braun et al., 2017). Cultural stigmas that establish a relationship between masculinity and leadership lead to the development of assumptions on who can execute leadership roles effectively. Such cultural stigmas falsify women's appropriateness for leadership roles, leading to derogatory assessments of women regardless of their ability, performance, and adequate skills. The principle of incongruity indicates that women leaders' performance is likely to be overexamined and scrutinized critically. Such a scenario decreases women's capacity to lead effectively and increases their turnover due to this degree of control (Brescoll, 2012). Women leaders generally view themselves as outsiders within any organization and as being under intense scrutiny, expected to perform better than their male counterparts. Due to women's status in leadership roles as numerical minorities, they are extremely visible and are judged continuously based on their performance. They often are judged negatively and adversely for conduct required to lead effectively. For example, female managers who talk more frequently than their colleagues appear to be too assertive and are judged negatively, whereas male managers who speak frequently are judged positively (Brescoll, 2012). In comparison to men, women are often more commonly penalized for self-promotion or conduct that encourages diversity (Heckman et al., 2014). Moreover, beyond the conventional correlation of such actions with successful leadership, women who exhibit superiority or power face unfavorable judgments for failure to follow conventional gender expectations (Livingston et al., 2012). This analysis generally leads to lower work satisfaction, higher levels of depressive symptoms, and higher turnover rates for women leaders (Pedrovska & Karraker, 2014; Taylor, 2010). Such stresses lead women to exhibit poor performance in relation to their skills and preparation.

Research suggests that prejudice exists toward women in leadership positions because of inconsistency between stereotypes associated with the female gender and the stereotype that

leaders are typically men. Women commonly experience barriers due to workplace roles perceived to be socially acceptable for them, which often do not include leadership roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002). According to social role theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), individuals in gender-typical roles build and observe gender stereotypes, and these expectations are disseminated in the organizational structure. Furthermore, Eagly and Karau (2002) suggested that social role theory determines how people in leadership positions categorize individuals and their capability for leadership. These defined characteristics of members of social groups create prejudice against women and men for taking on leadership roles. An apparent incongruence has been observed within society and organizational culture, which suggests a divergence of the characteristics that women must possess.

George et al. (2006) highlighted that the failure to recognize a leader's implicit ideas about the gender roles that individuals can play within an organization may explain the continued hegemony in organizations, rife with patriarchal barriers. If a leadership team comprises men exclusively, structural boundaries are formed based on the organization's collective male-centered brain and culture. From this view, the male-centered brain often affects the policies, practices, strategies, and choices that lead to the exclusion of women and their needs from those policies and standards.

Organizational Cultural Barriers to Leadership

In some cultures, in which women traditionally have been portrayed as of lower status than men even in leadership positions, women have still emerged as successful leaders. Toh and Leonardelli (2012) claimed that in a traditionally rigid society, the intensity of customs and social sanctions prevents changes, traditionally positioning men as leaders. Inflexible communities would generate fewer women in the top ranks. Additionally, in inclusive traditions (wherein both

men and women are treated equally), women receive more opportunities to become leaders; however, this is still influenced by cultural tightness. In fact, disparities in feminist traditions are more likely to forecast women as leaders in strong rather than in loose societies because such disparities are tighter than in loose cultures to apply those practices. The authors concluded that loose cultures are more open to changes in current cultural practices, but tight cultures excel at introducing and preserving these changes.

Manzoor (2015) explored the challenges placed before women and their careers due to Pakistan's indigenous culture by analyzing the perspectives of 30 employed women. The thesis was based on a phenomenological–theoretical qualitative analysis methodology. A holistic image was generated of Pakistan's indigenous culture and its effects on women's career development by conducting interviews with 15 women from urban areas and 15 from rural areas. Seven groups were established by open coding from the collected data, followed by three clusters determined by axial coding. Eventually, a theoretical structure was generated by selective coding. The study results suggested that women's active careers in Pakistan are heavily affected by the indigenous culture. Manzoor (2015) concluded that Pakistan's indigenous culture positions women in a way that affects their leadership skills adversely and inhibits job development in the forms of family expectations, behavior, and structurally imposed lower status. The author further concluded that indigenous cultures have negative consequences for women's career progression, and although attempts have been made to attain equal rights for women in Pakistan, such efforts will become more meaningful if society's general view of women and their position shifts, which will require the further cooperation of academic and political institutions.

Gender equity problems permeate society, especially in the workplace, where nearly 75% of leaders are men. Coleman (2020) conducted interviews with 60 women leaders from diverse

places in the United Kingdom. The author discussed the interviewed individuals' views of three areas: barriers for women who choose to take advantage of access to leadership positions, key factors of women's career advancement, and improvements they have seen and expect to see at work. The biggest hurdles or problems were discrimination, gender stereotypes, the glass ceiling, a masculine work culture, and the complexities of balancing work and families. With respect to women's challenges at work, the glass ceiling was seen as steadily increasing, although it was more difficult for women to negotiate in some stereotypically male sectors. The participants did not embrace feminism or a positive position on feminism, with the exception of women in higher education, and they acknowledged the importance of business motives over gender concerns in the private sector.

Eddy and Cox (2008) suggested that organizations historically have used male-centric language—and still do. This language and tonality are used throughout organizations in processes and policies, further solidifying the male-centric view that comprises organizations' culture. Relatedly, Acker (1990) argued that the concept of gender is not additive to organizational processes but instead is a core component of the processes that contribute to gendering organizations.

Previous literature has led to the development of a concept stating that women who achieve and are successful in leadership positions generally acquire male traits, maneuver around a gendered organization, and face more pressure to prove their capability and positional power. Cech and Blair-Loy (2010) highlighted an interesting perspective similar to that of Lewis et al. (2017), suggesting that women who have achieved success appear to have accepted, consciously or unconsciously, the structural barriers of inequity. Cech and Blair-Loy (2010) found that women often alter their natural leadership styles and feminine traits to work within the implicit boundaries

that exist for women who aspire to acquire leadership positions. Due to this desire to achieve leadership success, many. However, one might wonder whether this is a free choice or whether women's decisions about when and how to advance into leadership positions are dictated by male-gendered cultural norms and expectations. The programs made available to women within organizations, such as those based on work–life balance, development, and coaching, have been developed to situate women in the workplace and teach them how to fit in. Thus, these development programs for women in leadership are built to maintain culturally oppressive and biased structures while creating an illusion of progress through targeted goals of greater inclusion.

Acker (1990, 2006) introduced five interacting processes that contribute to the creation of a male-centric gendered organization. The first instance in which gendering occurs within an organization is the division of roles based on gender, with women playing traditional roles such as assistants and men playing roles such as executives. The second is the use of symbols and images that reinforce gender stereotypes, highlight gender lines, and visually gender an organization's culture. This is seen through marketing materials that often highlight men as successful leaders and women in more junior or supporting roles. Perhaps an interestingly gendered process is how women and men interact—that is, how tolerance and acceptance of behavior differs when two men are interacting versus when two women or a man and a woman interact. The last two areas upon which Acker (1990, 2006) focused were how employees are portrayed and the importance placed on those roles.

Strategies to Remove Barriers

In the present situation, women's leadership is a matter of intensive discussion because women are making substantial strides in the workplace. This evolving situation has offered women a liberal chance to thrive. In addition, there are a limited number of women executives and women

who might become senior managers later, meaning it is time to deal with the problem of women's leadership and develop strategies to promote women in leadership positions. Companies have implemented many new support systems, such as various coping mechanisms for growing the number of women in top roles. Vidyakala (2020) addressed coping methods women use in their leadership roles on a personal level, including defining personal and structural roles, prioritizing work–life balance, pursuing reactive roles, recreation and setting priorities for social support, cognitive reappraisal, maintaining high self-esteem, awareness of gendered structures in society and organizations, taking direct action, seeking advice, self-care, and positive thinking. Procedures such as changing cultural beliefs and conventional attitudes among organizations and women lead to increased gender diversity and motivate firms to develop a friendlier work culture that focuses on participatory leadership, a determination to win, and dealing with cognitive reappraisal, which will enhance women's participation in leadership. Moreover, subordinate mentorship and authority delegation, ongoing preparation, and planning allow female leaders to confront many of their career obstacles. Job rotation is an alternative in which men and women are granted equal opportunities to lead an organization without prejudice. The organization of programs, training, learning services for women, seminars, educational curricula, and role models of accomplished women in multiple processes or leadership positions reduces gaps and improves female leadership skills.

Corporations face difficulties in seeking out and developing potential leaders to fill significant positions left empty by baby boomers' retirement. These difficulties can be eased by using all outlets to find potential leadership talents, especially women, who are underrepresented in top management. The fact that promotional choices at the C-suite level are based on a variety

of unstated requirements for progression handicaps the evolution of potential leaders in most industries.

Additionally, a lack of women in leadership roles is not always due to a lack of talent. Many women are blocked from senior levels due to all-male succession lines. Stereotypes must be altered to crack these succession lines. For instance, society must avoid identifying accounting, law, and engineering as male-oriented jobs and marketing, HR, and communications as female-oriented jobs.

The unique skills and experiences necessary for leadership positions must be explicitly defined and transparent, and organizations should establish relevant frameworks to help women gain exposure to the situations they need to advance.

As per the Catalyst (2017) report, firms have started focusing on ways to overcome the barriers associated with gender equity. Organizations can work to remove these barriers and develop equal opportunities for women to be successful leaders. The report recommends certain measures that organizations can adopt, such as establishing an organizational culture that embraces diverse values and celebrates the differences women bring to the workplace; removing systemic barriers in talent-management processes such as performance management, recruiting, and leadership development; and establishing gender-balanced language and implementing diversity programs to support women (Eddy & Cox, 2008; Olsen et al., 2016).

A disparity already exists in women's occupation of leadership roles, but so do proof of women's challenges and possible mechanisms for overcoming them. An immediate need exists to move past researching the barriers and potential solutions and instead enact an interdisciplinary plan to address the inequity.

Strategies to Increase Motivation for Women to Take on Leadership Positions

It is not sufficient to simply remove organizational barriers that women face when aspiring to leadership positions; a focus on increasing women's motivation to take on leadership roles is necessary. Beeson and Valerio (2012) identified strategies that aspiring women leaders can use to mark their positions in higher management roles. By considering feedback from skilled people, aspiring leaders can hone their skills and seek out management roles that will build their strategic skills and market knowledge, build their presentation skills, develop networks, help them think strategically, and prompt them to seek alliances regarding career development. Moreover, women can ask for professional coaching and seek mentors, actively manage their careers, seek feedback regarding executive presence, seek task forces and high-profile projects to display imperative skills, and find time for reflection.

A Supportive Organizational Culture

In addressing the barriers that women face within leadership succession and women's motivation to advance into leadership roles, it is necessary to focus on women's cultural fit within an organization. Longman et al. (2018) conducted a grounded study to analyze the importance of organizational fit and culture in determining women's aspirations for leadership. They found that the definition of organizational fit must also be addressed when assessing a working environment for women in relation to the complexities that arise from organizational culture. The existing culture tends to be described and understood in institutions in which men predominantly generate processes, frameworks, the environment, practices, and experiences in a way that reflects male norms (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Helgesen & Johnson, 2010; O'Neil et al., 2008). Lindholm (2003) described two ways of fitting for an individual to operate comfortably or to lead to dysfunction or misalignment. First, the organization–individual fit theory applies individuals' goals, beliefs, and capacities to related organizational characteristics

(Lindholm, 2003). Thus, fit represents a high degree of consistency or alignment between an individual and an organization in an organization–individual model. In comparison, the person–environment model applies to the aspects of connections among people and vocations, working teams, and specific jobs (Lindholm, 2003). Moreover, Longman et al. (2018) concluded that environments, institutional systems, processes, structures, interactions, and policies that strongly reflect male norms and do not consider women crucially influence the careers of women aspiring to leadership roles.

According to a viewpoint developed by Ridgeway and Correll (2004), hegemonic cultural convictions on gender and their social relational influences are among the key components that perpetuate and alter the gender structure. In these all-inclusive settings, if gender is dominant, then societal assumptions regarding gender act as a part of the game rules and systematically bias the behaviors, outcomes, and assessments of otherwise identical qualifications for men and women. Although the partial influences of gender convictions in any situation can be negligible, the effects aggregate over individuals' lives and contribute to dramatically different outcomes for women and men (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004).

According to Burnford (2019), women have come a long way in many respects within the workforce. Attention to gender equity is growing, more attempts are being made to incorporate additional women on panels, and gender pay transparency is making headway. The fact is that the development of programs, quotas, and diversity training for female aspirants in the current business culture, which is often uninformed, hinders any step toward improvement in gender diversity. To change an individual's behavior, it is imperative to consider first all the values and perceptions that support assumptions and beliefs regarding the organizational culture. Then, the work practices must be modified accordingly to embrace a new approach.

Summary

In this chapter, I first highlighted the barriers women encounter in leadership. Several scholars have asserted that women often encounter intense stereotyping and gender inequalities and lack organizational support and reactions to such challenges. Additionally, women are often seen as caregivers. This stereotypical role expectation often frames them as less efficient in taking up leadership roles. Apart from this, women encounter several cultural barriers that prevent them from taking leadership roles. Societal culture positions women in a way that affects their leadership skills adversely and inhibits their job development in the form of family expectations, behavior, and the structurally imposed lower status of women. Additionally, the double bind emerges as women move into leadership positions. Women often are trained and encouraged to adopt male-like traits so they can take charge of leadership positions successfully. However, once they successfully develop the male-like traits, they are penalized for adopting qualities that do not conform to socially acceptable behavior for women; as a result, they are often held back from leadership promotions. All these factors ultimately affect women's decisions regarding taking up leadership positions.

While reviewing the existing literature, I identified a gap in understanding regarding the intersection between organizational culture and women's motivation and decision to take on leadership roles. A theory is needed that speaks to the role of organizational culture in women obtaining leadership positions without compromising their internal values. Many organizations and social researchers hold that a crucial emphasis must be placed on organizational culture and its function for women who opt for leadership roles. Additionally, researchers should look at not only the framework of the processes and systems but also their epistemology, which consists of social pressures, individual and collective cultural beliefs on leadership, and power. Manne (2018)

claimed that post feminism has opened up the discussion around women's agency and how women view themselves related to gendered female roles in society and in the workplace.

The literature review chapter of my study was instrumental in providing the prevailing trends, concepts, and issues surrounding my research question. In that chapter, I strategically outlined women's roles in leadership and their relative effect on distinct dimensions. Furthermore, the literature review chapter was conducive to providing an understanding of the barriers to women's leadership, including gender stereotypes, lack of ability or skills, cultural barriers, the double bind, and other areas concerning the research area. This, in turn, assisted me in identifying the gap in the literature that can be addressed through the course of the study.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative research is to better understand, through women's lived experiences and perceptions, what organizational cultural factors affect women's decisions to take on leadership positions.

Using a qualitative approach, I sought to understand the lived experiences of women who choose to take on (or not) traditional leadership roles. Given that I seek to understand women's lived experiences within their careers and describe the phenomena as they have experienced it, a phenomenological study proved to be the most suitable approach (Shafi & Bose, 2015). Groenewald (2004) suggested that researchers who choose phenomenology as their research method are keen to understand people's lived experiences and how they influence additional experiences related to the topic at hand. Phenomenology is a comprehensive approach aimed at describing any phenomenon's essence by analyzing it from the viewpoints of those who have directly experienced it. Basically, phenomenology tends to explain the meaning of the experience,

how it was experienced, and what exactly was experienced. This approach generally is used to acknowledge and address challenging problems (Neubauer et al., 2019).

Additionally, I used an exploratory qualitative research design to explore women's perceptions of the course of events and issues they had encountered in the workplace. This approach is also more conducive to answering "why" queries in research. Exploratory analysis is intended to define and evaluate the expertise in evaluating research questions (Rahi, 2017). It is usually adopted during the initial research stage to reveal new and unique insights about a research phenomenon (Rahi, 2017). I selected this approach because the aim is to formulate a problem to study more effectively. The approach generally is applied to areas in which there are very few or no prior investigations (Malhotra & Dash, 2016).

Utilizing an exploratory qualitative approach to my research enabled me to gather in-depth perceptions and opinions from the participants on the why, what, how, and when queries that affect women in leadership and the role of organizational culture in women's decisions to take on leadership roles. In a qualitative research approach, the researcher uses a broad lens to look for interaction patterns between unspecified categories of previously established concepts. In addition, qualitative researchers use themselves as tools to test the cultural hypotheses they establish and the conclusions that arise from the results. This approach focuses mainly on observing study participants (Brannen, 2017).

Through semistructured interview questions (noted in Figure 1), I explored female participants' experiences and assumptions regarding leadership and how organizational culture may or may not affect their personal decisions to opt into or out of leadership. The most common data-collection approach used in any qualitative analysis is the interview method. A qualitative interview can be defined as a framework wherein the standards and practices are not only recorded

but also challenged, reinforced, and achieved. Because every research interview has a structure, qualitative interviews are lightly structured, in depth, or semistructured. Unstructured interviews generally are utilized more in long-term fieldwork, which permits participants to express themselves in unique ways (Jamshed, 2014).

Interview Questions for All Participants

The following list highlights the questions that were asked of the participants.

1. How would you define leadership, organizational culture, and leadership success?

2. Are there any cultural expectations within your organization that have worked for or against you as a woman?

3. Over the course of your career, have you had to change your personal leadership style as a result of existing organizational cultural norms? If so, where did these expectations come from?

4. How has the rate of promotion vis-à-vis your male peers factored into your career development?

5. What role does intersectionality (gender, race, and socioeconomic position) play in women's decisions to take on leadership positions within your organization?

6. Describe the thought process that went into your personal career progression.

7. What would an ideal organizational culture that empowers and supports women in leadership positions look like?

Interview questions for participants who have taken on leadership roles included the following.

1. Considering a future leadership position, what cultural values and workplace norms would you look for, in both the organizational culture and the existing leadership team?

2. What advice would you give to women considering a leadership position in your organization?

3. Did you experience any barriers as you moved into your leadership role?

4. How have you played a role in removing barriers for women within your organization?

Interview questions for participants who opted out of leadership roles included the following.

1. Why did you choose to opt out of a leadership role within your career?

2. Were there any external factors (e.g., family obligations) that led to your decision not to take on a leadership role?

3. Did the culture of the organization have any influence on your decision to opt out of a leadership position?

4. Would you consider a leadership role in an organization in the future, and what criteria would you use to make that decision (e.g., value alignment, workplace culture)?

For my research, I recruited 23 participants using purposive sampling through two professional networks of women. I selected individuals who identified as women and who either were in or looking to take on leadership roles or had decided to opt out of those roles in favor of nontraditional leadership roles. Using a phenomenological approach to my research allowed me to explore the participants' lived experiences and gain insights into why they made the decisions they did in respect to leadership and what influence, if any, organizational culture had on their decisions. Given the unique situations currently affecting society, with the COVID-19 pandemic and the social unrest among Black and Indigenous people of color worldwide (WHO, 2019), I was concerned that it might be challenging to reach my goal of 20 research participants. I was pleasantly surprised that the concern was unwarranted.

I sent two emails out to my networks. The first email went to WomenED, a network for female entrepreneurs and nonprofit/social profit leaders. The second email went out to the Women's Executive Network, a network of female leaders across Canada. The response to my request to participate in my research was overwhelming, with over 100 responses asking for further information or indicating agreement to participate. I decided to select a pool of 30 participants on a first come, first serve basis. The final research pool comprised 23 participants. All of the selected participants identified as female, worked for Canadian organizations, and held traditional leadership roles (11 participants) or had opted out of traditional leadership roles (12 participants).

In the current study, I utilized thematic analysis to convert the raw data acquired through the interview procedure. Thematic coding of the data began during the interview phase. Once all of the interviews were completed, transcribed, and coded, I began the data analysis. All of the original interviews were conducted via phone and recorded digitally, then transcribed into Word documents with any identifying information removed for confidentiality reasons.

I used a deductive reasoning approach, which helped me outline and summarize overlapping themes that arose from the interviews. Leveraging a deductive reasoning approach was also instrumental for highlighting specific facts and evidence, given that the main goal of doing so was to identify the evidence applicable to current generalized ideas highlighted in the interviews. The deductive method consists of developing and establishing a study strategy to test a theory relating to the research hypotheses (Cramer-Petersen et al., 2019).

Data Collection

I collected the data for my research study through semistructured interviews (see interview questions). The interviews were 30 to 45 min long. I conducted the interviews on the phone over a 4-week period in December 2020.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were defined as the prescribed set of rules and regulations that a researcher should follow to maintain dignity and the standards of the study, and for the confidentiality and autonomy of the research participant. By following this set of rules and regulations, my research addressed the study objectives strategically without forcing or indulging in inappropriate practices. This highlights the notion that research should be conducted without compromising the necessary ethics (Taylor et al., 2015). I applied all research ethics with due consideration. The participants' personal information was kept private, and the data were used solely to formulate the analysis findings and not for commercial use. Furthermore, the collected data were valid and reliable because I collected them from reliable websites, documents, and interviews with participants.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data. This analysis method is implemented on a group of texts, predominantly identified as interview transcripts. The researcher inspects the data to generalize themes—that is, patterns, ideas, and topics that occur repeatedly within the transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2012). To ensure the thematic analysis is successful, certain principles are essential. First, diverse and extensive raw data must be structured into a comprehensive and compact framework. Doing so will assist the researcher in determining, comparing, and identifying the important data. Second, establishing an association between the data and the research objectives is imperative. Finally, the thematic analysis must enhance the study's conceptual basis (Alhojailan, 2012). This analysis method is flexible, which allows the researcher to undertake any means of presenting the analyzed data; therefore, thematic analysis is not tied to any theoretical perspective (Nowell et al., 2017). According to Attride-Stirling (2001), thematic analysis is advantageous in terms of allowing the researcher to learn

different ways to analyze the data and ensuring the analysis is well interpreted by carefully evaluating the responses.

Chapter 4: Findings

The current study was conducted primarily to address the following research question: What organizational culture factors affect women's decisions to take on leadership positions?

As observed in the literature review chapter, women often opt out of leadership positions for several reasons, including cultural and organizational barriers. This has resulted in the need for research on women's perceptions regarding the barriers and challenges they face. I employed an interview method to explore 23 participants' perceptions.

Thematic data coding occurred during the interview phase. Once all the interviews had been completed, transcribed, and coded, I proceeded with the data analysis. The questions were divided into three segments, with the first section aimed at extracting general information from the respondents to understand their level of awareness and knowledge on the current subject. The second section was aimed at understanding the perceptions of participants who had taken on leadership roles, and the third section explored the perceptions of the participants who had opted out of leadership roles. In total, I explored 26 open-ended questions in this manner. I then proceeded with a thematic analysis of the qualitative data.

Several steps were identified in the thematic-analysis process. The first step was to transcribe the data from the interview responses and arrange them into tables. The second step was to familiarize myself with the data by reading and rereading the interview transcripts to comprehend the participants' responses effectively. After familiarizing myself with the data, I generated initial codes to categorize the data into relevant codes. Afterward, I developed themes, into which I segregated all of the codes. Following this, I modified and edited the themes

according to the research objectives and finalized only the themes relevant to the research topic.

The last step was to write up the finalized themes. Here, the arguments were supported with

participants' quoted statements (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

Familiarizing Myself With the Data

I carefully read and reread the data to understand them and form an overall picture. The

study results revealed that of the 23 respondents, only two identified as people of color. The

majority of respondents did not belong to visible minority groups, with only four people

belonging to a visible minority group. Of the 23 respondents, only two belonged to the

LGBTQ2S+ group, and none of the respondents had any sort of disability.

Generating Initial Codes

After familiarizing myself with the data, the next step was to organize the transcripts and

data in a more meaningful and systematic form. This allowed me to identify the initial codes

from the transcripts to be used for the research themes. Coding reduces a large amount of data

into smaller, more relevant texts. Here, I used open color-coding to clarify the complete coding

process and ensure the codes were related to the study's research questions (Maguire &

Delahunt, 2017). By color-coding the responses, I could organize the information according to

the relevant responses or codes. I did so by reading the transcripts and highlighting the relevant

text corresponding to the codes. Only the transcript segments relevant to this study's research

objectives were coded. There were no preset codes; I developed and modified every code when

analyzing the data. The relevant themes identified through the coding process are presented in

Table 3 (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Notably, not all of the transcripts' data were used to

generate the initial codes because some data did not refer to the questions supporting the research

or were conversational in nature, such as exchanging introductions and general discussions that are part of natural conversation.

Initial Coding

Throughout the initial coding, I identified several initial codes. With regards to organizational culture, nine initial codes were identified: values (such as diversity, inclusion, and work–life balance), practice, connections, expectations, proper management, shared vision, new ideas and innovations, the organization's actual behavior, and respect for individuals.

Regarding whether the participants had experienced any barriers over the course of their careers simply because they were female, the initial codes identified were "Yes, I would have been treated differently if I were a male," "Yes, in my personal life," "Yes, I have experienced barriers," and "No, not at all."

Concerning whether the participants could describe their thought process regarding their careers, the initially identified codes included facing many struggles, breakthroughs, passion, strength in leading and managing, personal situations, personal beliefs, education and influence, work satisfaction, a clear path, and family support.

Initial codes concerning leadership were vision, maintaining a connection, being inclusive of people, values, confidence, excellent skills, and goal achievement.

Leadership success was defined by the initial codes of shared vision, result, process, teamwork, collaboration, accomplishing goals, and managing critical situations.

Regarding whether the participants had to change their personal leadership style over the course of their careers as a result of cultural norms, and if so, where the expectations came from, the initially identified codes were organizational values, changes over time, new responsibilities,

self-awareness, gender roles, leadership roles, age factor, leadership models, team demands, and integrity.

The initial codes identified to address cultural expectations within an organization that worked for/against a woman were freedom, taking progressive action, female-oriented environment, a respectful environment, fewer benefits for women, gossip and judgment culture, unconscious biases, and male domination.

The initial codes identified when analyzing how intersectionality factored into women's decisions to or their personal experience of taking on leadership positions within an organization were understanding a person's uniqueness, making others comfortable, providing guidance, relating on the personal level, and the positive affect of intersectionality.

The initial codes identified for addressing an ideal organizational culture that would empower and support women in leadership positions or encourage them to take on leadership positions were safe environment, work–life balance, development, healthy competition, no judgment or ego, inclusivity, and a supportive environment.

While identifying how promotion rate in relation to male peers factored into career development, the initially identified code was promotion rate affecting one's career. There was a difference in promotion rate when looking at gender and time of promotion.

Considering whether the participants experienced any barriers when they moved into leadership roles, the initially identified codes were "Yes, at times," "Didn't notice," "Due to organizational culture," and "No."

Concerning themes related to women's motivations and decisions to move into leadership positions—specifically, into a social-profit world as an alternative to the corporate world—involved the following initial codes: motivation to help others; observing nature; organizational

structure, policy, and culture; integrity challenge; lack of inclusivity; passion; personal life; money; mental health; and leadership role.

The initial codes regarding the decision to transition to a different company rather than continuing with an organization involved tiring work, struggles with the board, work–life imbalance, unsatisfactory work culture, lack of inclusion, personal and health situations, passion, parents' support, and poor leadership.

Taking on a leadership role in a different organization in the future and the criteria the participants would consider when taking on a leadership role involved the initial codes of clear structure, rules, and governance; personal integrity; shared values; development; inclusive environment; value of opinions; financial aspects; empowering culture; progressive culture; and good organizational culture.

Considering the advice that one would give to women considering a leadership position, the initially identified codes were understanding people, generosity, leadership skills, value integration, considering team members' opinions, being open about interests and desires, strong relationships, integrity, and self-confidence.

Regarding advice to give to women experiencing barriers because they are women, the initially identified codes were being strong, asking for help, strategizing to break through barriers, and not seeking others' opinions.

The initially identified codes for how the participants played roles in removing barriers for women were influencing women around them, hiring women, giving women development opportunities, providing education to women, supporting women in work, and removing bias.

A total of 124 initial codes were identified in this section.

Searching for Themes

This step was intended to collate the initial codes into larger themes. In the previous step, I generated 124 initial codes by extensively and rigorously exploring the transcripts. Here, I divided the 124 codes into relevant broad themes that were more specific to the research objectives. Table 2 demonstrates the preliminary themes along with the codes related to them. Here, all of the codes fit under one or more of the 17 themes; they are further presented in various colors for clarity.

Reviewing the Themes

In searching for themes in the previous step, I sorted all of the initial codes into 17 themes. Here, it was essential to review and modify all of the developed themes and to confirm whether they were relevant in context to the present research topic. Any repetition in themes or codes had to be identified to ensure the most efficient analysis and interpretation of the responses. In this stage, I read the data associated with each theme and code again and confirmed whether the data supported the developed themes. Moreover, in this step, I ensured the retrieved themes were relevant to the research study's topic. Further, I ensured the themes were distinct and did not overlap, and I determined if the themes had any relevant subthemes. Table 3 in the appendix presents the finalized themes, where the codes are not colored.

Overarching Themes

The 17 preliminary themes were sorted into nine overarching themes.

Moreover, I executed the following steps here:

- I combined Themes 1 and 6 into the theme of cultural factors essential for empowering women.

- I combined Themes 2 and 3 into the theme of leadership and leadership success.

- I combined Themes 7 and 8 into the theme of reasons to switch to the social-profit world rather than the corporate world or to start something new.

- I combined Themes 9 and 11 into the theme of motivation for leadership.

- I combined Themes 10 and 13 into the theme of barriers women faced in careers because of their gender and advice for women who were experiencing barriers.

- I combined Themes 12 and 17 into the theme of barriers experienced when moving into leadership roles and advice for women who were considering a leadership position.

- I combined Themes 14 and 16 into the theme of how the promotion rate in relation to that of male peers factored into career development and the role in removing barriers.

- I modified and removed repetitive codes to avoid repetition.

- I edited codes for clarity and deleted irrelevant codes.

- I also modified some of the themes for clarity.

- I confirmed eight themes at this stage.

The eight themes are as follows.

The first three themes address the barriers and highlight the cultural environments that discourage women from moving into or retaining leadership positions.

1. Overcoming limiting organizational culture; organizational bias and preferences for men. Participants highlighted women's experiences as they worked to overcome barriers.

2. Inclusion and empowerment of women. This theme highlights the role that empowering and including women had on participants' experience.

3. Organizational preference for male leaders. Data highlights a clear preference for male leaders within organizations.

The fourth and fifth themes highlight the conditions within an organization that impact women's decision to take on leadership positions.

4. Women are motivated to help make a social difference. Participants highlighted their impact on society through leadership.

5. Leadership success through collaboration. Participants highlighted that success in leadership came from collaboration and teamwork.

The three remaining themes address the organizational culture that supports and empowers women to be successful in leadership positions at either their existing company, a new company, or a not-for-profit company.

6. Organizational culture and a culture that values diversity. This theme concerns the influence and impact of an organization's culture and values on the participants.

7. Cultural expectations within an organization. This theme concerns organizational cultural and perceived expectations for women in leadership.

8. Clear organizational structure, process, and procedures. There is a correlation to participants' success and having clear organizational structure, process, and procedures.

Interpreting Key Themes

The interpretation of the nine overarching themes as the participants expressed in the following groups.

Theme 1: Overcoming Limiting Organizational Culture

Subtheme 1.1: Barriers Experienced When Moving into Leadership Roles. Two-thirds of the respondents believed they would face barriers when moving into leadership roles. Some believed this generally was due to organizational culture. In this context, one of the respondents stated, "I did. Mainly from the organizational structure." The rest of the participants had similar perceptions.

Subtheme 1.2: Foundations for Moving into Leadership. Approximately one-third of the respondents did not agree that they faced any barriers while taking up leadership roles. One respondent revealed that she did not notice this only in her professional life, whereas the others clearly stated that they did not experience any such barriers.

The participants' suggestions for women when moving into leadership roles included comprehending people, believing in generosity, developing leadership skills, and valuing integration. One participant believed it was essential to build values and skills to take up leadership roles. She further asserted, "I would say, define your values. Personal values are always powerful to navigate the world and decisions. And know how to behave and integrate with the values. Go for it. Failing is growing, rather than losing it." Another respondent backed up this statement and revealed, "My advice would be have excellent skills, and do it from your interests."

Theme 2: Organizational Bias and Preference for Men

Subtheme 2.1: The Promotion Rate in Relation to Male Peers Has Affected Women. Half of the participants revealed that women's promotion rate in relation to male peers affected their careers. They revealed that a huge difference existed between genders, and men received better opportunities and earlier promotions. In this context, one of the participants stated, "Since

my career evolved over the early 80s and 90s, I would say that White men, heteronormative men dominated and got several advantages. They took the lead, and my situation was pathetic."

Approximately half of the participants agreed that their male peers were treated equally. One stated, "I don't think that the promotion rate was an issue with me. I was the forefront person in working part-time, and that worked for my leadership to shine." The rest of the participants believed this varied by sector. For instance, such scenarios often are not visible in the social profit or health care industries. In this context, one of the participants stated, "I haven't felt it because my field is in the health care sector and social experience."

Subtheme 2.2: Intentional Hiring and Opportunities for Women. Another aspect discussed under this theme was women's roles in removing barriers. Several respondents stated they had influenced women around them and had hired women to support them. Hiring women and motivating them to work can be essential in building their self-confidence and empowering women. One respondent affirmed, "I hired many women. Mostly in the interviews." Others revealed that they played essential roles in motivating women, both within and outside their organizations. Additionally, many women leaders have provided opportunities and education to support other women at work and remove gender biases. This can be deduced from the answer, "By trying to give women development opportunities, leadership, [and] projects that are outside their scope for them to understand various opportunities." Other women leaders stated, "Yes. In my organization, I have planned focus groups, meetings and opportunities to discuss diversity, but it's at a smaller level" and "I have encouraged women in my organization to take different diverse opportunities."

Theme 3: Organizational Preference for Male Leaders

A majority of the participants (approximately two-thirds) believed that they would have been treated differently if they were male and stated they had faced barriers both in their personal lives and at the organizational level. In this context, one of the respondents stated, "Obviously. I would have been treated differently if I was male." The rest of the respondents simply agreed that they had faced barriers in both their personal and professional lives because of their gender.

However, approximately one-third of the respondents revealed they had not faced any gender-related barriers in either their personal or their professional lives.

Subtheme 3.1: Strategies of Courage and Positive Attitude in the Workplace. Regarding the advice that the participants shared for women facing barriers, most of the participants believed that being strong and developing strategies to break through barriers could prove successful. Several women's perceptions can be quoted here—women revealed that it was essential to maintain hope, be strong, and face obstacles bravely. Additionally, asking for help and using one's own brain without letting others' opinions affect oneself were important in building confidence and solving problems. This can be deduced from the following responses: "Seek help from senior members"; "Attach yourself with a leader who has transformed the team, lots of skills, experience and be ready to work better"; and "Do what makes you happy."

Every individual face barriers within an organization; however, due to gender biases, women are more vulnerable to such issues. Women can mitigate these challenges by seeking assistance, maintaining confidence, and developing skills.

Theme 4: Women Are Motivated to Help Make a Social Difference

Subtheme 4.1: Considerations for Pursuing Not-for-Profit. Women identified several reasons to switch to the social-profit world from the corporate world, such as motivation to help others; a love of nature; organizational structure, policy, and culture; lack of inclusivity; and

integrity challenge. Switching to the social profit sector is a matter of choice and passion. A participant in this context revealed,

> I think I just can't relate. The corporate world is not who I think I am. I was fortunate to start with a lot of opportunities. Spending a lot of time outdoors, [in] nature, and knowing you are helping lots of people, social justice and [there is] not too much economic pressure.

This statement shows that the respondent quit the corporate world because of her desire to help others and her love for nature. Two other respondents believed the integrity challenge and the policy and organizational culture motivated them to switch to the social-profit world rather than work in the corporate world. Other factors that encouraged people to switch to the social profit world included passion, personal life, money, mental health, and leadership roles being offered. The aspect of personal reasons was highlighted in the response, "Personal reasons such as family, kids to manage, and health issues. Mainly, it's the external factors. In addition, the culture of the organization is not more empowering. Opportunity was very limited." Another respondent revealed that she switched to the social-profit sector to restore her mental health and maintain work–life balance. She stated, "Mental health. I like having segregation with my work and life."

Subtheme 4.2: Motivation to Make a Career Change. A further aim of the analysis was to assess the reasons that encouraged people to start something new. In this context, several participants revealed that factors such as tiring work, struggles with management, and work–life imbalance motivated them to start something new. One of the respondents revealed,

There are a couple of things. One is I'm getting tired of some of the struggles with the board. Leading as an executive director in such an organization is tiring. It's not as much fun. It is a crisis and governance model.

Another stated that work–life imbalance motivated her to start something new. Other factors included unsatisfactory work culture, lack of inclusiveness, personal and health situations, passion, parents' support, and poor leadership. This can be gleaned from the statements, "I would say that I am not happy with the organization culture. So I moved out"; "My personal choice rather than the external factors. I also got support from my parents"; and "The pay and benefits are very good. In addition, I don't know what else I would do. My parents encouraged me."

Subtheme 4.3: Motivation for Balance Between Work and Personal Life. Working women are responsible for managing their personal lives without hampering their performance in the corporate world. In such a scenario, working in social profit sectors is sometimes beneficial for women. Leaders in these sectors often understand the problems women face and provide a flexible work culture and promote work–life balance for women. This is why many women prefer to work and hold leadership positions in the social-profit sector and tend to start something new, where they can balance their personal and professional lives.

Theme 5: Leadership Success Through Collaboration

Leadership involves building connections, valuing developments, and including people to accomplish an organization's goals effectively. A participant in this context asserted, "Leadership is executing the vision and maintaining a connection with the team." Another participant supported this statement, revealing, "Leadership is living in alignment with your values and generally for the society or for the greater good. Mainly, it's when you are able to live in alignment with the values." Moreover, the analysis affirmed the most prominent skills for a

leader are confidence, excellence, and a vision to accomplish the organizational goals. A participant stated, "Leadership success comes from everyone. In other words, it is who is steering the ship, and it is clear where the ship is directed. And the arrival of the journey is leadership success." Furthermore, leadership involves support from every individual within the organization.

Subtheme 5.1: Leadership Confidence. One of the participants made a comment suggesting that confidence was a critical leadership trait.

Leadership is confidence. Someone who has strong emotional intelligence and brings people on a clearly stated vision. And get them excited and each individual contributes to that particular vision. If it's open and transparent it gives value to the organization in an authentic way. (Participant citation)

Another respondent stated, "Leadership is the ability to get the best of people and who have excellent skills and giving them opportunity to grow."

The analysis further focused on the factors responsible for leadership success. Several respondents revealed that shared vision, teamwork, and collaboration can prove imperative to successful leadership. This can be deduced from the following statement:

I think it's around helping to make things happen that you want to see happen. There are both results and processes. Both are equally important. Whatever results you are achieving, you are also doing it in a way that is sustainable and kind of perpetuates more of success. Also, it's fluid, like life. (Participant citation)

Another respondent believed, "It's being able to help your team in achieving a goal that you had initially set, in a way where you as the leader and everyone on the team feel good about

the process and achievement." Thus, leadership is a way of accomplishing an organization's objectives by directing the team and incorporating a sense of belongingness to the organization.

Thus, women can achieve success in leadership positions by working on factors such as shared vision, teamwork, and collaboration. Additionally, to ensure leadership success, it is essential to motivate the team to work toward a shared goal.

Theme 6: Organizational Culture and the Cultural Environment that Values, Diversity, Inclusion, and Empowerment for Women

The respondents had various views regarding organizational culture. The current research highlighted that organizational culture should involve values such as inclusion, diversity, and work–life balance. Apart from this, the research participants believed the organizational culture must be well managed, include a shared vision toward accomplishing the organization's goals, encourage new ideas and innovations, and respect individuals. In this context, one of the respondents stated,

> Organizational culture implies that everyone is responsible for the success of the organization. It is open, and ideas are welcomed from every employee without any discrimination. An environment where they can bring new ideas and innovations, also the organization welcomes that.

Subtheme 6.1: Shared Organizational Values, Including Diversity, Inclusion, Work–Life Balance, and Safety. Several respondents perceived that every organization should be well managed and respect its employees. This can be deduced from the following statement: "Organizational culture is one where an organization is well balanced, well managed, and respects individuals and teams." Values that organizations must possess, such as work–life balance, diversity, and inclusion, were deduced from the response of a research participant who

asserted, "In my perception, organizational culture includes values like diversity, inclusion, work–life balance, and a sense of shared vision and purpose. It encompasses all unconscious aspects as well."

Another respondent shared her personal experience and revealed,

My career was not planned. I struggled a lot to get a job in Canada. Later, I got an opportunity, and there were people who always supported me. My personal beliefs also supported me to be in a successful position as I am now. (Participant citation)

Other factors and considerations in taking on a leadership role included education, work satisfaction, a clear path, and family support.

According to the participants' perceptions, a safe environment, providing work–life balance, development opportunities, and healthy competition were essential for motivating women to join leadership positions. One of the respondents believed that safety and personal development were crucial factors that could motivate women to join leadership positions, and asserted, "I think creating safety is too important: an organizational structure created in time and space for reflection, professional development, and celebration. Finding those resources and sharing those."

Subtheme 6.2: Culture that Promotes Healthy Competition for Leadership Roles. Another aspect highlighted in the current study is the call for an environment that encourages healthy competition. This can be deduced from the response of one of the participants, who stated, "Healthy competition is always good. Women have to support other women." One respondent highlighted the importance of an inclusive, supportive, nonegoistic, and nonjudgmental environment. The organizational culture must be flexible, built on trust, and support collaboration. This can be observed from a response wherein the participant mentioned,

"An ideal organization is one which is empowering everyone irrespective of gender, class, and race. It also provides various opportunities."

Thus, inducing an organizational culture that promotes a safe environment, provides work–life balance, offers development opportunities, and involves healthy competition is essential for motivating women to join leadership positions. Additionally, an inclusive, supportive, nonegoistic, and nonjudgmental environment can increase the number of women taking up leadership positions within an organization.

Subtheme 6.3: Cultural Expectations of Respect and Freedom for Women in the Workplace. The participants held several cultural expectations for organizations, such as freedom, doing progressive undertakings, and a female-oriented and respectful environment. Several participants revealed that during the initial stage of their careers, women received fewer opportunities and benefits; however, today, organizations were working toward developing a comfortable environment for women. In this context, one of the participants stated, "At the beginning of my career, what worked against me was the fact that the terms and benefits [were] less for women, whereas now, in the public service, women are treated with respect." Another respondent believed that the freedom to participate and perform new functions was an essential aspect within an organization. The participant stated, "Inside my organization, there was a cultural expectation. We do progressive things, and I had [the freedom] to do progressive works. I had freedom to perform new things." Additionally, several sectors, such as the social sectors, had mostly female employees, which also played an imperative role in motivating women to work within the organizations.

Moreover, the organization must encourage an inclusive environment; value opinions; consider the financial aspects; and have an empowering, good, and progressive organizational

culture. This can be deduced from two responses. First, "I wanna be in a place where work and decision-making matters." In addition,

> I am looking for evidence that the organization is empowered in governance structure. I would like to see diverse cultural values, PR aspects, and inclusiveness of women. In addition, I look at the values of the organization in terms of empowering people and empowering society as a whole. (Participant citation)

Theme 7: Cultural Expectations Within the Organization

Subtheme 7.1: Cultural Expectations Within the Organization that Worked Against Women. However, more than half of the participants had completely different viewpoints. Several women believed the organizational culture to which they were exposed worked completely against them. They indicated that in the absence of positive cultural values that empowered and supported women, there was an undertone of a subculture rich with disrespect and judgement. They affirmed that women often received fewer benefits than their male counterparts. Additionally, some organizations had a major gossip and judgment culture, women were often subject to unconscious biases, and some organizations were male-dominated. One of the participants explained that it was often difficult for her to maintain work–life balance. She further stated, "Yes. I would say many organizations I worked for expected people to be available essentially at all times, even on the weekend. I think it's difficult." Additionally, the respondents believed their organizations were materialistic, hierarchical, and male-dominated. This can be deduced from the statement, "Yes. My organization is a militaristic and hierarchical organization. Also, it is dominated by men. Therefore, it commands and controls a certain type of culture. As a woman, I found it harder. To be heard is more challenging." Several women stated that they were not respected and were considered inferior to the male employees.

Theme 8: Clear Organizational Structure, Polices, and Procedures

The participants identified several reasons for taking on a future leadership role in a different organization. These included having a clear structure, rules, and governance; personal integrity; shared values; and opportunities for development. Women generally prefer to work in a transparent environment. In this context, one of the participants stated that her criteria for considering taking on a leadership role were, "clear structure, process, governance, and rules. [The] [o]rganizational culture must be strong enough." Another respondent believed that personal integrity, shared values, growth, and development were imperative factors women considered when undertaking leadership roles.

Another respondent believed that the organizational goals must align with her personal goals, stating, "I think they would have to show some progressive environment, and my values must align with the organization's values."

Moreover, the aspects that influence the career thought process include struggles faced, passion, strengths in leading and managing, personal situations, and personal beliefs. One respondent shared their personal experiences and stated, "It's not a clear-cut path. I have reached this position through lots of struggles."

In comprehending women's aspirations, organizations can attract more female leaders by incorporating transparency within the organizational processes, considering women's views and opinions, and enhancing inclusiveness within themselves.

Summary

The findings indicate that these women faced organizational and cultural barriers that often restricted them from taking on leadership roles. An organization can enhance women's participation by improving the workplace culture, providing benefits and equal opportunities for

women, and promoting a flexible and congenial working environment. In the current study, I highlighted the reasons participants switched to the social-profit world from the corporate world, the reasons and criteria for considering taking on a future leadership role in a different organization, and the career thought process. Finally, I analyzed the barriers women face in career development and provided recommendations for women experiencing barriers. I aimed to highlight the participants' perceptions to redefine leadership to include women as well as to understand cultural and organizational barriers causing women to opt out of leadership roles. This analysis was intended to address the following research question: What organizational culture factors affect women's decisions regarding whether to take on leadership positions?

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In Chapter 4, I explored the data that represent this study's emerging themes. Chapter 5, the conclusion and discussion chapter, includes the progression from the data and literature review to the overarching findings and general observations and recommendations that are inspired by the 23 participants' lived experiences. This discussion is framed by the context of my research questions:

- To what extent are women successful in leadership positions in Canadian organizations?

- What barriers to women's leadership create an issue in acquiring a leading position in an organization?

- What organizational culture factors affect women's decisions to take on leadership positions?

- What measures or mitigating interventions must be adopted to enhance women's leadership positions in an organization?

The eight themes from the data analysis, as outlined in Chapter 4, are restated below for ease of reference.

The first three themes address the barriers and highlight cultural environments that discourage women from moving into or retaining leadership positions.

1. Overcoming limiting organizational culture

2. Inclusion and empowerment of women

3. Organizational preference for male leaders

The fourth and fifth themes highlight the conditions within an organization that impact women's decisions to take on leadership positions.

4. Women are motivated to help make a social difference

5. Leadership success through collaboration

The three remaining themes address the organizational culture that supports and empowers women to be successful in leadership positions at either their existing company, a new company, or a not-for-profit company.

6. Organizational culture that values diversity

7. Cultural expectations within the organization

8. Clear organizational structure, process, and procedures

Women play important roles in promoting social commitment and organizational success. The presence of women in leadership positions leads to an entrepreneurial ecosystem that increases workability efficacy. However, increasing the number of female leaders in the topmost positions is a critical issue because most of the female workforce faces gender barriers while moving up the career ladder (Carli, 2001).

This research helps formulate an unbiased picture of women leaders' present state in Canadian organizations and the absence of women in leadership positions. I analyzed the reasons and organizational culture factors that affect women's decisions regarding whether to take on leadership roles. Moreover, this study offers insight into the issues and challenges women leaders encounter in their work lives and how they cope with these challenges.

Similar to Johns (2013), this study suggests that women face challenges such as organizational cultural barriers, social barriers, and gender stereotyping, which reduce their ability to reach leading positions in an organization. Some women indicated they had not experienced barriers in achieving leadership or in their current leadership roles. Those who indicated they felt that way were in the not-for-profit sector. The not-for-profit or social-profit world tends to have a more favorable cultural context for women leaders. This was noted in two participants' answers: "I don't think so, because I haven't had male peers" and "I have never felt that."

The research findings highlight that there is opportunity for the corporate world in adopting some of the values and leadership expectations from the not-for-profit world. Many of the participants from the not-for-profit sector indicated they did not have gendered expectations of leadership put on them. They knew what the organizational goal was and were able to lead in their authentic way to realize that goal; male-centered cultural norms were not present, perhaps because of the demographic composition of many of the teams and organizations. Given that they were founded by and led by women, the historical male-centric systematic barriers and gendered culture did not exist. It is worth additional research to explore why there is a difference between the two sectors.

Women also face other challenges that limit their successful career growth, such as a lack of external and internal networks, visibility, and opportunities; poor managerial support; and fewer incentives, both within and outside their organizations. I found that roles of incongruity and cultural stigmas exist in organizations and create favorable conditions for male leadership opportunities while limiting female leadership aspects. As highlighted in Eagly and Karau's (2012) research, my findings also support the theory of role congruity in that women perceive they are held to dual standards. The cultural stigma associated with working under a woman leader also limits women's capability to reach leadership roles. This results in disparaging assessment outcomes, regardless of women's abilities, performances, or skills. All of this places immense pressure on women leaders to perform their responsibilities well to justify their roles as competent leaders and prove their worth to staff members and others who doubt their capabilities (Joecks et al., 2013).

I discovered that female employees and executives face challenging situations, including gender discrimination, male favoritism, and biased job roles, that adversely affect female leaders' career growth and their desire/ability to take on/stay in leadership roles. There is a lack of networks, leadership opportunities, resources, and policy to support women in leadership (Changhu & Scheepers, 2017). I found that Canadian organizations conduct diversity programs to improve women's positions within those companies. However, such initiatives' success is restricted in the absence of adequate funds and organizing events to meet government regulations. As a result, these programs do not have a significant effect on the female workforce, many of whom prefer not to participate in such programs. Therefore, to increase women's participation and ensure they reach top leadership positions, organizations must adopt mitigating

measures, such as removing gender bias and providing equal work opportunities (Cumming et al., 2015).

Mitigating interventions also must be adopted, such as improving organizational culture, because they play important roles in creating a positive work environment. Improving organizational culture lessens the attitudinal and behavioral challenges that women face when reaching top levels. It also eliminates the diversity of fine interpersonal forces and reduces disruptions women face within an organization. As a result, women feel encouraged to take on leadership roles, and such actions ensure an organization's sustainability with the cooperation of the workforce, peers, and coworkers. Adopting the right measures will help empower women and allow them to acquire top positions in an organization (Longman et al., 2018).

The findings suggest that implementing intentional strategies, such as job rotation, could provide equal opportunities to male and female employees. This would also likely help to expand their capabilities within an organization. Job rotation can alter cultural beliefs and conventional attitudes, which helps create gender diversity and encourage organizations to develop a friendly work environment. This also promotes women's active participation in organizational activities, increases their role in businesses' decision-making processes, and encourages women to opt for leadership roles, reducing the gender-associated leadership crises in corporations. Hence, empowering women and increasing their roles in an organization is highly essential to ensure sound management, minimize employee turnover, and establish a congenial working atmosphere. Increasing women's leadership opportunities within an organization will increase that organization's growth and development opportunities because women leaders tend to be more committed to firms and provide uniform growth opportunities to all (Sandberg, 2010).

This may further aid organizations to adopt unique practices, such as internal diversity and inclusion programs, opportunities for work–life balance, and a supportive and flexible organizational culture, all aimed to help develop appropriate strategies and reasons for women to take up leadership positions. This study will also prove useful for women who aim to become future leaders because inferences can be drawn from the interviews that identify tactics for coping with the challenges women face when taking up leadership roles within an organization. Additionally, this study will provide a significant foundation from which to influence similar research that must be pursued to make progress and address various issues and challenges associated with women's leadership. Future scholars should undertake research in this domain and study the alterations and improvements in organizational practices for improving women's inclusion. The study offers new insights within the current study domain and opens new avenues for research in this field.

Recommendations

The results of this research highlight how an organization's culture must involve values such as inclusion, diversity, and work–life balance. Additionally, the organizational culture must be well managed, promote a shared vision toward accomplishing the organization's goals, encourage new ideas and innovations, and respect individuals. Furthermore, an organizational culture that promotes a safe environment, provides work–life balance, offers development opportunities, and involves healthy competition is essential for motivating women to join leadership positions. This study suggests that all individuals face barriers within organizations; however, due to gender biases, women are more vulnerable to such issues. Women can mitigate these challenges by seeking assistance, maintaining confidence, and developing their skills. Issues pertaining to women in leadership can compel executives to implement and develop

unique practices to ensure sound management of women leaders, which can minimize employee turnover and establish a congenial working atmosphere. The present study will help executives to innovate and introduce practices that can address women employees' concerns, thus enhancing worker satisfaction. Further, it underlines the gaps in the current procedures and techniques that must be revisited. The output of this extensive study will contribute strongly to scientific knowledge and prove to be of immense value for policy makers and managers, ensuring they can provide solutions to women's challenges when taking up leadership roles or continuing their positions as leaders as well as suggest the most effective future practices.

I sought to enlighten the reader about the benefits of encouraging women to advance in their careers and the repercussions of women executives' absence within an organization. This study offers a platform from which to identify the social and practical aspects of the practices currently proposed for women employees in Canadian organizations, in turn encouraging scholars, scientists, and researchers to identify the current tactics' limitations and address these limitations in new policies and frameworks. I aimed to add new theories to the existing literature on women in leadership.

According to my findings, I offer the following recommendations:

- Organizations must adopt a reverse mentoring process in which the mentor takes the lead in the conversations and both creates and is the recipient of learning. This helps create visibility and expose the female workforce to the most strategic work positions in an organization.
- Adopt a buddy system in which women in leadership roles partner with more junior women to increase women's leadership roles in an organization. This will

increase organizational diversity and encourage gender equality in the organization.

- Implement flexible work schedules. This will allow the female workforce to work diligently and increase their capability and work efficiency (Chin et al., 2017).

- Adopt transparent and collaborative career mapping. This will create visibility and link women's workforce efforts with organizational goals and success.

Chapter 6: Limitations of the Study

This study involved collecting primary data, which is often a complex process and includes financial and time constraints. Furthermore, I adopted a qualitative approach to the data collection, wherein, through thematic analysis, I analyzed the data gathered via the questionnaire survey, which often involves researcher bias. The current study was conducted from the perspective of Canadian organizations. Thus, the results obtained in the current study cannot be generalized to all organizations globally, and the solutions provided might be insufficient to address the problems women in other countries encounter.

Future Research

The current study only addresses the problems women leaders in Canadian organizations encounter; however, the problems women encounter when taking up leadership roles can vary according to cultural norms in other countries. Thus, future scholars can undertake research in this domain and compare the problems women belonging to different regions face and how they manage these challenges. Additionally, researchers can compare the measures various organizations worldwide take to retain, motivate, and encourage their female workforce. The current study will provide a significant foundation with which to influence similar future research.

Table 1

Interview Schedule

Date and time	Interview #	Opt in/out of leadership
Dec. 11: 12 p.m.	1	In
Dec. 14: 1 p.m.	2	Out
Dec. 14: 4 p.m.	3	In
Dec. 15: 7:30 a.m.	4	In
Dec. 15: 10 a.m.	5	In
Dec. 15: 11 a.m.	6	In
Dec. 15: 1 p.m.	7	In
Dec. 15: 3:15 p.m.	8	Out
Dec. 15: 4 p.m.	9	Out
Dec. 16: 7 a.m.	10	Out
Dec. 16: 8 a.m.	11	Out
Dec. 16: 9:30 a.m.	12	In
Dec. 16: 1 p.m.	13	Out
Dec. 18: 7 a.m.	14	In
Dec. 18: 10 a.m.	15	Out
Dec. 18: 11:30 a.m.	16	In
Dec. 18: 2 p.m.	17	Out
Dec. 22: 9 a.m.	18	Out
Dec. 22: 10 a.m.	19	Out

Dec. 22: 12 p.m.	20	In
Dec. 22: 1 p.m.	21	Out
Dec. 22: 2 p.m.		In
Dec. 23: 9 a.m.	22	In
Dec. 23: 3 p.m.	23	Out

Table 2

Finalized Research Themes Based on the Data Analysis

Theme 1: The organizational culture and cultural environment provide values, diversity, inclusion, and empowerment for women	Theme 2: Leadership and leadership success	Theme 3: Cultural expectations within the organization
Values (e.g., diversity, inclusion, and work–life balance)	Maintaining a connection	Worked for women:
	Inclusive of people	Freedom
	Values	Doing progressive things
Practice	Confidence	Female-oriented environment
Connections	Excellent skills	Respectful environment
Expectations	Achievement of goals	Worked against women:
Proper management	Shared vision	Fewer benefits for women
Shared vision	Result and process	Gossip and judgment culture
New ideas and innovations	Teamwork	Unconscious bias
Organization's actual behavior	Collaboration	Male dominated
Respects individuals	Accomplishing goals	
Safe environment	Managing critical situations	
Work–life balance		
Leads to development		
Healthy competition		
No judgment or ego		

Inclusive Supportive environment		
Theme 4: The role of intersectionality factoring into personal experience for women to take on leadership positions within an organization Understanding a person's uniqueness Making others feel comfortable Providing guidance Personal level Positive effect of intersectionality	**Theme 5: Women are motivated to help make a social difference** Motivation to help others Observing nature Organizational structure, policy, and culture Integrity challenge Lack of inclusivity Passion Personal life Money Mental health Leadership role Tiring work Struggles with the board	**Theme 6: Clear organizational structure, policies, and procedures** Clear structure, rules, and governance Personal integrity Shared values Development Inclusive environment Valuing opinions Financial aspects Empowering culture Progressive culture Good organizational culture Facing many struggles Breakthrough

	Work–life imbalance	Passion
	Unsatisfactory work culture	Strengths in leading and managing
	Lack of inclusiveness	Personal situations
	Personal and health situations	Personal belief
	Passion	Education and influence
	Parental support	Work satisfaction
	Poor leadership	Clear path
		Family support
Theme 7: Organizational preference for male leaders	**Theme 8: Overcoming limiting organizational culture**	**Theme 9: Organizational bias and preference for men**
Yes, I would be treated differently if I were male	Yes	Has impacted career
Yes, in my personal life	At times	Rate of promotion affected
Yes, I have experienced barriers	Did not notice	Huge comparison between genders
No, not at all	Due to organizational culture	Men are promoted early
Being strong	No	No impact
Asking for help	Comprehending people	Influenced women around me
Strategy to break through barriers	Generosity	Hiring women
	Excellent skills	
	Value integration	

Not seeking others' opinions	Considering other team members' opinions	Giving women development opportunities
	Being open about interests and desires	Providing women with education
	Strong relationships	Supporting women in work and removing the bias
	Integrity	
	Self-confidence	

Table 3

Searching for and Identifying Themes

Theme 1: The organizational culture and the cultural environment provide value, diversity, inclusion, and empowerment for women	Theme 2: Leadership and leadership success	Theme 3: Cultural expectations within the organization
Values (e.g., diversity, inclusion, and work–life balance)	Maintaining a connection	Shared vision
Practice	Inclusive of people	Result and process
Connections	Values	Teamwork
Expectations	Confidence	Collaboration
Well managed	Excellent skills	Accomplishing goals
Shared vision	Achievement of goals	Managing critical situations
New ideas and innovations		
Actual organizational behavior		
Respects individuals		

Theme 4: Cultural expectations within the organization	Theme 5: The role of intersectionality factoring into the personal experience of women to take on leadership positions within an organization	Theme 6: An ideal organizational culture that would empower and support women to take on leadership positions
Worked for me Freedom Doing progressive things Female-oriented environment Respectful environment Against Fewer benefits for women Gossip and judgment culture Unconscious biases Male-dominated	Understanding each person's uniqueness Making others feel comfortable Provides guidance Personal level Definitely a positive affect	Safe environment Work–life balance Leads to development Healthy competition No judgment or ego Inclusive Supportive environment
Theme 7: Decision to move into the social profit world rather than stay in the corporate world or enter any other sort of traditional-style leadership	Theme 8: Reasons to start something different rather than continuing with the organization	Theme 9: Reasons and criteria for considering taking on a future leadership role in a different organization
Motivation to help others	Tiring work Struggles with the board Work–life imbalance	Clear structure, rules, and governance

Observing nature	Unsatisfactory work culture	Personal integrity
Organizational structure, policy, and culture	Lack of inclusiveness	Shared values
Integrity challenge	Personal and health situations	Development
Lack of inclusivity	Passion	Inclusive environment
Passion	Parental support	Valuing of opinions
Personal life	Poor leadership	Financial aspects
Money		Empowering culture
Mental health		Progressive culture
Leadership role		Good organizational culture
Theme 10: Barriers women face in careers because of gender and the career thought process	Theme 11: The career thought process	Theme 12: Advice for women who are considering a leadership position
Yes, I would be treated differently if I were a man	Faced significant struggles	Comprehending people
Yes, in my personal life	Breakthrough	Generosity
Yes, I have experienced barriers	Passion	Excellent skills
No, not at all	Strengths in leading and managing	Value integration
	Personal situations	Considering other team members' opinions
	Personal beliefs	Being open about interests and desires
	Education and influence	
	Work satisfaction	
	Clear path	

	Family support	**Strong relationships** **Integrity** **Self-confidence**
Theme 13: Advice for women who are experiencing barriers because they are women **Be strong** **Ask for help** **Strategize to break through barriers** **Don't seek others' opinions**	**Theme 14: A role in removing barriers for women** **Influenced women around them** **Hiring women** **Giving women development opportunities** **Providing education to women** **Supporting women in work and removing biases**	**Theme 15: The expectations to change personal leadership style as a result of cultural norms** **Organizational values** **Changed over time** **New responsibilities and self-awareness** **Gender roles** **Leadership roles** **Age factor** **Leadership models** **Team demands** **Integrity**
Theme 16: How the promotion rate in relation	**Theme 17: Barriers experienced when moving into leadership roles**	

to male peers has factored into career development	Yes	
Has affected career	**At times**	
Promotion rate has effects	**Have not noticed**	
Huge difference between genders	**Due to organizational culture**	
Men get promoted early	**No**	
No effect		

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