

What are the beliefs of women who lead?

by

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Abstract

The focus of this study was to discover what beliefs women leaders hold and provide an opportunity to share their advice with future leaders. Adhering to Royal Roads University Research Ethics policies, ten women, from private sector organizations, who held senior level leadership positions, ranging from director to chief executive officer, were interviewed. Using grounded-theory methodology, the study discovered the beliefs of women leaders and conceptualized them within a framework of self, self-in-relationship with others and self as leader. The study offers conclusions based on linking the framework to constructs related to positive self-concept, high self-efficacy, internal locus of control, trust, valuing relationships, understanding and living ones values, behavioral integrity, aspects of humanism, authenticity and advice giving. The recommendations are focused on the empowerment of women and are a result of the conclusions.

Key words: beliefs, internalized beliefs, leader beliefs, mental models, and women leaders

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Chapter One: Introduction

At the core, this thesis is about the beliefs of women leaders. I have always been driven to learn about what beliefs leaders hold because as a leader myself, I have experienced both the positive and negative effects of not only my own beliefs and their influence on my leadership practice, but also those of other leaders. The Dalai Lama said, “The world will be saved by Western women” (Chan, 2010). Although I do not believe that it will be only women who will save the world, I do believe the world is awakening to the need for more conscious and influential women to lead the way.

There has been considerable research for fruitful review in areas of psychology related to beliefs, including Johnson-Laird’s (1983) work in cognitive psychology and mental models; Lipton’s (2008) biological work that focuses on how beliefs present themselves in the brain; and Double’s (1989) review of the arguments against beliefs such as the one made by Stich (1983): “the common-sense concept of belief has no legitimate role to play in a developed cognitive psychology” (p. 421). These works, however, have not focused on the specific beliefs that people hold.

Furthermore, the research in leadership theory related to beliefs, such as Senge’s (1990) research on learning organizations, Gibson’s (2011) work on diversity in the workplace, and Rook’s (2013) research in organization development has been helpful in defining beliefs within the context of leadership. However, there has been little focus on the beliefs of women leaders or how their beliefs influence how they lead.

When it comes to the gap in research related to women and leadership, Stead and Elliott (2009) point to “a paucity of critical work on women’s experiences of leadership” (p. 1). They focus on women’s experiences in becoming leaders, and search for “a more nuanced

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view of how women lead, and what enables or hinders them in their leadership practice” (p. 59). Their work focuses on and contributes to the same overarching topic as mine; however, my research focuses specifically on the beliefs of women leaders.

Bosak and Sczesny (2011) provide evidence of beliefs that 160 female and male management students have about women as leader. They show that the beliefs these individuals have about men as leaders are different from those they hold about women. However, Bosak and Sczesny’s research does not address the same issue as my research in that the former is focused not on the beliefs of women themselves.

Finally, Hertneky’s (2012) research asks the question, “what personal attributes do [women] believe allow them to be leaders,” (p. 143) in order to determine how women’s lives inform their career development. Though Hertneky focuses on what women believe, the purpose of his study is to understand women’s career paths, not to lay a foundation for understanding what beliefs women hold thus empowering women to understand how their beliefs influence how they lead.

When it came to a focal point from which to ground the topic and inquiry of the beliefs of women leaders further, and given the complexity of the overarching topic of beliefs, I had to set a starting point. That beginning in this case is the discovery of what beliefs a sample group of women leaders hold. I hope it will generate continued research into how such beliefs influence women’s actions.

Furthermore, from the perspective of ensuring a balanced view of leadership in society, giving voice to women is critical. Yet Stead and Elliot (2009) observe “the dominant literature on leadership draws largely on studies of men” (p. 1). This practice must change.

Finally, from the perspective of integrative leadership practice, Hitt (1993) states that

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Warren Bennis (1989) provides us with a linchpin for integrating the manifold notions about effective leadership: ‘The process of becoming a leader is much the same as the process of becoming an integrated human being. For the leader, as for an integrated person, life itself is the career’” (p. 5).

Therefore, reflections on life experiences and learnings matter in the process of leadership development. When we listen to the widest possible range of personal experiences and learnings we ensure that the stories of leaders are reflective of the society as a whole.

Lipman-Blumen (1992) makes this point forcefully:

Contrary to traditional beliefs, female leadership is no longer an oxymoron. Viewed from the perspective of global interdependence, it contains the seeds of connective leadership, a new, integrative model of leadership more suited to the dramatically changing workplace of the twenty-first century” (p.183).

I believe the challenge for theorists today is to discover what aspects of leadership can help society and its institutions become more integrated and interdependent; understanding what leaders believe is a part of that pursuit.

My inquiry asked this question: What are the beliefs of women leaders? The objectives were to understand what beliefs women leaders hold and provide a chance for participants to accumulate and pass on advice to future women leaders. This project provided women the opportunity to share personal stories of their career journeys, their triumphs, their challenges, and their current successes. Through research and analysis, I established, for the purposes of this study, how their beliefs inform their leadership.

What emerged was a framework of beliefs about self, beliefs about self-in-relationship with others and beliefs about self as leader. Using this framework, I linked the beliefs to multiple

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constructs; self-concept, self-efficacy, locus of control, trust, valuing relationships, understanding and living ones values, behavioral integrity, aspects of humanism, authenticity and advice giving.

Rhode (2016) observes that “unlike much of the popular literature concerning women and leadership, analysis suggests that the problems [pertaining to why women are underrepresented in leadership] cannot be resolved at the individual level; structural and cultural solutions are essential” (p. 2). Given that the process of acculturation is interactive and integrative, investigating the individual beliefs is valid cultural exploration because individuals make up the culture and, therefore, is in essence working towards advancing the field of research related to women and leadership.

My research contributes to a deeper understanding of what beliefs ten women leaders hold and how those beliefs are connected to multiple constructs. My findings create a foundation for future research to determine how beliefs influence behavior.

This chapter provided an overview of the research and its significance. Chapter Two includes a review of scholarly literature relevant to this inquiry. In subsequent chapters, I outline how the study was conducted, the findings of my research, my conclusions and my recommendations for future study.

Chapter Two: A review of the literature

The purpose of this literature review is to examine research related to the beliefs of women leaders using the terms ‘beliefs’ and ‘mental models’ synonymously. I intend to demonstrate how beliefs are defined and to show that beliefs influence our actions, that leaders have beliefs, that beliefs are connected to self-concept, and that beliefs influence how we exist in relationship with others. My premise is that leaders are in some form of a relationship with others. I will show how the literature review in this chapter fits into the body of relevant literature and identify areas where more research is needed.

Defining beliefs

I knew as I began my research that the topic of beliefs would likely be interdisciplinary and I would need to examine various perspectives, and this process has been challenging and highly beneficial.

Osterholm (2010) observes, with respect to the study of beliefs,

When studying beliefs, instead of analyzing and arguing around different types of definitions of beliefs, it seems most common to describe different definitions found in the literature and then choose one of these or create your own for the study in question (if a definition is at all given) (p. 3).

This observation is in part why I use common terms related to beliefs interchangeably. Osterholm (2010) advises researchers to be clear about the perspective they choose: working without a singular focus can “result in a messy construct” (p. 154). Accordingly, I am clear that I am not interested in the “investigation of the formal characteristics of believing” (Da Costa &

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French, 1989, p. 432), as explored in doxastic logic. I am also not interested in investigating beliefs from the perspective of epistemology, which according to Double (1985) is “crucially concerned with what beliefs we ought to hold” (p. 421). I am, however, interested in what the individuals, in this case women leaders, believe, and I am interested in how their beliefs influence their behaviours.

Double (1985) refers to a common-sense version of the concept of beliefs:

1) beliefs are real mental conditions; 2) beliefs represent facts and, thus, can be characterized sententially as processing a whole range of semantic properties such as being true, false, justified, etc.; 3) beliefs are often produced by an interaction between things outside our skins and our nervous systems; 4) beliefs connect up with other mental conditions, often to produce other beliefs and behaviour; and 5) beliefs are often knowable to us directly by simple reflection (p. 424).

This common-sense perspective supports my view that, despite ambiguities surrounding differing perspectives about what beliefs are, how they are developed, and what they mean to human existence, beliefs are real for the individual who holds them.

Another way to define a belief is through model theory and mental models. In the field of management, Senge (1990) includes one’s mental models in what he calls “personal mastery” (p. 131), which “is the discipline of personal growth and learning” (p. 131). As an organizational learning consultant, he advises clients that, for them to achieve a learning culture, they must persuade individuals within the organization to commit to their own growth and development, in part by examining their personal beliefs or mental models. Senge (1990) describes mental models as “deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that

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influence how we understand the world and how we take action” (p. 8). His definition sparked my interest in the history of model theory, which includes mental models.

Among early researchers on mental models, Craik (1943) theorizes that mental models are about thinking, reasoning, perception, and comprehension. Many researchers in the 19th and 20th centuries were drawn to mental-model theory, but in the early 20th century, when psychology focused on behaviorism, mental models seemed to fade away until the theory and term were resurrected in the early 1970s (Johnson-Laird, 1983). According to Johnson-Laird (1983), “Human beings construct mental models of the world, and they do so by employing tacit mental processes”(p. x), which suggests that we see the world through inferred meaning and that much of the processing that goes on in the mind is about what is unsaid or implicit.

Gibson (2011) refers to mental models as “‘running subtext’ that accompanies our interactions with others” (p. 158). She is studying mental models from the perspective of diversity. She posits that bias comes from our culture and bias forms our mental models.

Rook (2013) describes a mental model as “ a concentrated, personally constructed, internal conception, of external phenomena (historical, existing or projected), or experience, that affects how a person acts” (p.42). She studies mental models in terms of organizational development.

After investigating many perspectives on beliefs and mental models, I conclude that beliefs are opinions, philosophies, expectations, perceptions and judgments that one holds about one’s self and others; they are based mostly on one’s experiences throughout life. Furthermore, beliefs do not just exist, they influence our actions.

Beliefs influence actions

Senge (1992), like many theorists argues that our beliefs affect how we act: “What is most important to grasp is that mental models shape how we act. If we believe people are untrustworthy we act differently from the way we would if we believed they were trustworthy” (p. 5).

Social psychologists like Myers (1986) assert that “attitudes are beliefs and feelings that pre-dispose our responses to objects, people and events” (p. 557). Attitudes we learn or adopt can bias what we think about a person, group, or thing and thus influence how we behave in relation to them. Myers (1989) states that, from a social psychology standpoint, there has been much debate over how and when our actions are influenced by our attitudes. The debate caused significant tension in the field of study. However, psychologists now agree that “our behavior is affected both by our attitudes and by social influences” (p. 558).

Myers (1989) postulates that, under certain conditions, our attitudes do in fact guide our actions. The first condition is met “when other influences affect our actions and our actions are minimized” (p. 558) that is, when influences such as the expectations of others or situations and a felt need to conform to what others want or need leads us to base our actions more on conformity or compliance rather than our own true attitudes. Nonetheless attitudes are still influencing our actions. The second condition is met “when the attitude is specifically relevant to the behavior, [but] people easily profess general beliefs and feelings that are inconsistent with their actions” (p. 558). In simple words, we say one thing but do another. The third condition is met “[when] our attitudes guide our behaviors [because] we are keenly aware of our attitudes” (p. 558). When mindful of deeply ingrained beliefs learned over time, we consciously base our actions on those beliefs.

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Some theorists believe that our beliefs are linked to our perceptions. Argyris (1970), originator of the ladder-of-inference model (Friedman, 2014, p. 1), shows how individuals interpret data through assumptions that affect the way they act, setting in motion a perpetual loop that reinforces existing beliefs. Argyris's (1970) model postulates that one reinforces a belief by first observing data and experiences in a given interaction; then, one filters or selects information that one deems is important or relevant from that original data source; next, one adds meaning from one's upbringing, values, beliefs and cultural background to that data; all of the above leads to assumptions based on that meaning. A person makes conclusions based on that hierarchy that lead to a new belief or reinforces an existing one. The final step on Argyris's conceptual ladder is for the person to act on his or her new or reinforced belief.

Lindholm's (2012) comparative analysis investigates different modes or kinds of belief within the context of religion. It acknowledges that people's beliefs affect how and what they decide: "...some deeply held beliefs serve as motivating forces to instigate action. These are the beliefs that one is willing to fight for and die defending" (p. 345).

In a study about teachers' beliefs and self-regulated learning, Spruce and Bol (2011) examine how beliefs can affect classroom practice: "If teachers do not believe their students capable of self-regulation, this may limit their willingness to incorporate opportunities to initiate activities to offer students the opportunity to practice SRL [self-regulated learning] in the classroom. (p. 258).

Finally, from the perspective of modern neuroscience, there is growing evidence to suggest that much of what we have related to processes of the mind—thinking, feeling, and cognitive processes—can now be researched from a physical perspective in brain function, linking two

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important domains to advance a more holistic view of the human being. In researching self-awareness, neuroscientists have discovered that “each individual is capable of building a mental model of self within his or her environment; one that has meaning and influences day-to-day behavior” (McDonald, 2009, p. 55).

Harris and Kuhnert (2008) investigate how belief, disbelief, and uncertainty differentiate themselves within the brain. Their research is relevant because it shows that believing something is true influences how we act:

The difference between believing and disbelieving a proposition is one of the most potent regulators of human behavior and emotion. When one accepts a statement as true, it becomes the basis for further thought and action; rejected as false, it remains a string of words (p. 141).

Although Harris et al do not investigate how someone determines if a statement is true, the study does reinforce the theory that our beliefs influence our actions.

Leaders have beliefs

Leadership researchers have also investigated how leaders are influenced by their beliefs. Weinberg (2013) shows that “epistemological beliefs fundamentally affect the degree of knowledge sharing that takes place in the context of a work team” (p. 53). Although this research focuses on knowledge sharing, we can easily make the connection to leadership because leaders must share knowledge. Kouzes and Posner (2010), argue that leaders must share knowledge willingly and that a sharing mind-set is a fundamental aspect of effective leadership: “Your job as a leader is to make sure that people get the information they want and need, when

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they want and need it” (p. 87). A leader who shares information may also be sharing knowledge and is likely to know how to differentiate and impart both thoughtfully.

Knaeps et al (2015) have investigated how beliefs of vocational-rehabilitation counsellors influence their work with clients with severe mental illness. They found that counsellors with similar but unique roles within a system sometimes hold different beliefs about the benefits a group of clients might gain from competitive employment. Such differences might involve counsellors’ beliefs about the potential impacts of competitive employment on clients and beliefs about their own ability to support clients to be successful. These differences “may result in a lack of an integrated approach” (p. 176) to service delivery that leadership must recognize and address while respecting their organization’s expectations and their own beliefs.

Finally, in a study about the Civil Rights Act and sexual orientation minorities (SOM) in the united states, Martinez et al (2013): “highlight how [leaders’] beliefs about religion, morality, controllability and occupational stereotypes contribute to prejudice and lack of support for SOM protective organizational polices” (p. 455). The two obvious impacts of such beliefs are that members of minority groups are likely to experience prejudice and that the leadership required of organizations to support anti-discrimination policies is hindered because of individual leaders’ beliefs.

Having provided evidence that beliefs exist and have influence over our actions, and that leaders have beliefs, I now examine the psychological concepts of self and the connection of self to beliefs.

Beliefs and Self-concept

According to developmental psychologists, the early development of self-concept occurs in the first year of life. Myers (1989) postulates that self-concept, which can be described as positive or negative, is derived from experiences, feelings, and thoughts (p. 426). Riding and Rayner (2001) state that “self-concept has typically been defined in terms of the cognitive appraisal one makes of the expectations, descriptions, and prescriptions that one holds about one’s self” (p. 243).

According to Myers (1989), “many people assume that a positive self-concept is a key to happiness and success, that acceptance and empathy help nurture positive feelings about oneself, and that people are basically good and capable of self-improvement” (p. 427). Most cognitive psychologists believe that the first five years of life are when we learn the most about who we are and what our clan believes, which creates a significant foundation that we draw upon throughout our lives.

According to Markus and Kitayama (1991), “people in different cultures have strikingly different construals of the self, of others, and of the interdependence of the two” (p. 224). How individuals interpret such construed beliefs about themselves and others has a significant effect on how they think and feel, as well as what motivates them.

Hamilton (2012) observes that “unquestionably culture is the screen through which we view our lives, and interpret the world around us” (Day et al, 2012, p. 88). She suggests “this knowledge is implicit, learned through advice, correction and non-verbal interaction” (Day et al, 2012, p. 88). Her recognition of the implicit nature of self-construal complements proposition to the ideas proposed about the implicit nature of mental models. How we see our lives, as

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Hamilton (2012) points out, is another way to articulate how we see our selves and is a part of our self-concept.

Layering on more complexity, self-concept is also often considered in terms of what we think others believe to be true about us. Riding and Rayner (2001) observe that “the appraisals of others act as mirror reflections that provide the information that individuals use to define their own sense of self” (p. 243). Markus and Wurf (1987) theorize that approaching self-concept as dynamic and multidimensional grew out of “an increasingly large volume of research indicating that individuals are heavily influenced in all aspects of judgement, memory and overt behaviour by their currently accessible pool of thoughts, attitudes and beliefs” (p. 306).

It is clear that the concept of self is complex. Markus and Wurf (1987) argue that “self-concept can no longer be explored as if it were a unitary, monolithic entity. [Self-concept] is a dynamic interpretive structure that mediates most significant intrapersonal processes and a wide variety of interpersonal processes” (p. 300). This complexity is evidence that self-concept comprises multiple constructs that include its function in interpersonal processes, including beliefs. Complexity provides researchers with opportunities to investigate self-concept from multiple angles and with an interdisciplinary lens. According to Sedikides and Brewer (2015), “While multiple perspectives on the self proliferate, it is relatively rare that theorists from different perspectives are asked to confront competing views of the nature of the social self” (p. 3). Complexity, therefore, is to be embraced as an opportunity for disciplines to find common ground.

Self-concept and beliefs are demonstrably connected. I have shown to this point that beliefs exist and influence people’s actions, that leaders have beliefs, and that beliefs are interconnected with the concept of self.

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I now review relevant literature regarding self-in-representation with others. Leadership is rarely a solitary act, and it is most often thought of in terms of interpersonal relationships.

Interpersonal relationships and beliefs

In this section of the literature review I demonstrate that beliefs are interconnected with the concept of interpersonal relationships, and that who we are influences those relationships.

For the purposes of this thesis I am defining relationship in the collective sense (I am in relationship with others), not the individual sense (I am in relationship with myself), or the universal sense (I am in relationship with the world, the environment, and so on). This is not a review of typologies or theories drawn from areas of relationship research, such as reinforcement theory, social exchange theory, or attachment theory (Jackson-Dwyer, 2014). Nor is it a focused review of the typology of relationships between leaders and followers (Popper, 2004), or of strategies to support those relationships, such as Leaders Member Exchange (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995), as effective ways to lead.

I am, however, suggesting that any leader is in some form of relationship with others. I am also attempting to position beliefs within the context of interpersonal relationships and leadership. Although I am not focusing on relational leadership theory as such, many theorists support the idea that leaders are in relationship with others. Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011), for instance, suggest that “a relational leader sees people not as objects to be manipulated but as human beings-in-relation with themselves” (p.431).

I am reviewing from this perspective because I believe that an individual brings her beliefs into any relationship. Who a leader is, or believes herself to be, inevitably influences her relationships.

Hatch (1993) states that, “According to Schein, culture exists simultaneously on three

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levels: On the surface are artifacts, underneath artifacts lie values, and at the core are basic assumptions. Assumptions represent taken-for-granted beliefs about reality and human nature” (p. 659). If we agree with Schein’s argument, then we can see beliefs as an integral element of how an organization’s culture is created and maintained. Organizations are made up of multiple interpersonal relationships and, therefore, beliefs are naturally integrated into the dynamic of each relationship.

Working from the perspective of cognitive psychology, Berscheid and Regan (2016) introduce the concept of expectancies, defined as “the beliefs we hold about the probable behavior of other people and the probable occurrence of future events” (p. 226). Individuals in relationships naturally have such expectancies about each other’s behavior. Because our beliefs-as-expectancies are primarily derived from our experiences, our experiences shape our expectations of others. We inevitably bring who we are, our experiences and our beliefs, into every relationship that we join. Berscheid and Regan (2016) add that “social interactions flow forward on a river of the partners’ expectancies about each other’s behavior” (p. 227).

Given the evidence that beliefs exist and that they influence our actions, it seems logical that individuals who enter relationships with others bring their existing beliefs and are likely to be influenced by those beliefs.

Ridgeway and Kricheli-Katz (2013) remind us that people hold beliefs about race and gender that reflect personal experience and can influence how leaders perform:

It is] widely known [that] gender and race stereotypes differ in many ways, but research suggests that they have in common the inclusion of beliefs that people in one category of the difference (men, whites) are of higher status and diffusely more competent, especially

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at the things that count most in society, than are those in the other category (women, people of color). Thus, to the extent that gender or race stereotypes are salient in a setting, they bias expectations for one person's competence and suitability for leadership compared to another (p. 299).

Wubbels et al (2015) state that there is ample evidence that teachers' self-efficacy, which is the belief individuals have about how capable they are at something, is linked to the "quality of the teacher student relationship" (p. 372).

Jong et al (2013) have found that beliefs do not appear to be "related to the student-teacher relationship in terms of affiliation or influence" (Abstract). However, in their review of relevant literature, they do state that "higher self-efficacy, [in teachers] is positively related to cooperative interactions aimed at finding compromises and teachers with higher self-efficacy offer their students more support and positive reinforcement than teachers with lower self-efficacy" (p. 297).

In a study related to cancer patients' trust of their physicians, Holwerda et al (2013) connect patient trust of their doctor to patients' attachment styles and beliefs: According to attachment theory, childhood experiences with caregivers influence individuals' beliefs about how worthy they are to receive love and care, and what behavior may be expected from important others. These beliefs in turn influence their attachment style, i.e., how individuals perceive, feel and act within social relationships when they are confronted with a stressor (p. 110-111).

This means that if patients have secure attachment styles, meaning they believe in their worthiness of care and love, then they are more inclined to trust a physician. This tells us that beliefs in fact can influence our relationships.

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Beliefs about women leaders

In addition to the related research about beliefs referenced in the introduction, the literature includes a small but informative discussion about women and leadership. Bosak and Sczesney (2011), examine gendered beliefs held by women leaders about women leaders. Ellemers et al (2012), Latu et al (2011) and Cook & Glass (2011) look at implicit gender stereotyping and gender, and leadership bias with stakeholders, and Desai et al (2014) turn to men's beliefs about women in the workplace.

As Latu et al (2011) note,

Devine, Plant, Amodio, Harmon-Jones, and Vance (2002) found that individuals high in IMS [internal motivation scale] and low in EMS [external motivation scale] displayed lower implicit racial bias than did individuals characterized by any other IMS/EMS [internal/external] combination. Participants high in IMS showed less implicit racial bias because their nonprejudiced beliefs became internalized over time, thus leading to implicit positive attitudes toward Blacks (p. 255).

It is important for leaders to understand that their and their colleagues' implicit biases and beliefs become internalized over time, so they can anticipate and adjust to inevitable changes.

The reference to implicit bias and beliefs becoming internalized over time, adds to the research reviewed earlier regarding beliefs and beliefs influencing action. However, it cannot be overlooked that there is still limited work related to the beliefs that women leaders themselves hold.

Conclusion of literature review

I have demonstrated that beliefs exist within individuals and between and among individuals; that beliefs influence actions; that they are connected to self-concept; and that they

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are inevitably part of who we are and act in our relationships with others. I have shown that leaders need to understand how beliefs influence their actions and relationships. I have shown that, while there is much literature on the role of beliefs in leadership, some of which is referenced in the Introduction to this thesis, there is not much research specifically on the beliefs of women leaders. These conclusions support the purpose of this thesis, which is to discover the beliefs women leaders hold as a precursor to future research on how those beliefs influence their actions.

The following chapter is a description of my research methods and will be followed by my research findings, conclusions, recommendations and study limitations.

Chapter Three: Research Design

This chapter is a description of how this grounded theory research project was designed and conducted. I describe the participants, the way in which the study was directed, the methods I used for inquiry, and my research methodology. The scope and limitations of the research will also be noted.

Participants

I employed purposeful sampling, which Stringer (2014) describes as consciously selecting “people on the basis of a particular set of attributes” (p. 77). The attributes I used were women in senior leadership positions, holding a senior level position, their length of time in that senior leadership role, and the experience they had in leading people who reported to them. I interviewed 10 women holding positions in the private sector that ranged from the level of director to chief executive officer. Some worked for an organization and some were business owners. Each had more than five years of senior-level experience and had managed at least one employee.

Study conduct

Potential participants were recruited by e-mail. I cold-called over 60 organizations to obtain the ten participants. Mindful of Stringer’s (2014) advice that “researchers usually need to take specific steps to ensure that participants come to no harm as a result of their participation in the research project” (p. 89) and of Royal Roads University’s ethics policy, I had each woman sign a consent form that included the “purpose, aim, use of results, and likely consequences of the study” (Stringer, 2014, p. 89). The signatures confirmed their “informed consent” (Stringer, 2014) and registered their participation. The consent form clearly stated the participants’ right to

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withdraw from the study at any time; none of them exercised this right. Each in-person interview, lasting sixty to seventy-five minutes, was audio recorded and transcribed; the data were not analyzed until all interviews were done and transcribed.

Inquiry methods

Stringer (2014) notes that, “interviews provide opportunities for participants to describe the situation in their own terms” (p. 105). It was important to me to have women share their stories in a way that was meaningful to them; therefore, I used “grand tour” (Stringer, 2014) questions, which “provided focus without giving direction or telling” (Stringer, 2014, p. 107). This means that the main questions began with a “tell me about...” position. I based my research sub-questions on Satir et al (1991) “transformation process” (p. 147) and framed them around expectations, perceptions, and feelings, categories that help reveal a person’s beliefs.

By beginning with a personal historical narrative of the participant’s career journey, I set the stage for a candid narrative in which each participant explored past and present experiences, triumphs, challenges; current successes as a leader; and advice to future women leaders (Appendix A).

Stringer (2014) advises that “a researcher’s presentation of self should be as neutral and nonthreatening as possible” (p. 82). I began each interview by very briefly sharing my interest in understanding what the participants’ beliefs were. I said that my intention was to listen openly and to create a safe space for them to share as much personal information as they were comfortable sharing; my interest was in *hearing* what the participants had to say about *their own* beliefs. I explained that I was not attempting to prove a theory but rather looking to see if a theory emerged from the data, which was what grounded theory was all about. The purpose of *hearing*, then becomes critical to the process.

Methodology

This was a qualitative research study using grounded theory as its methodological framework. I understand grounded research to be about mindfully listening to what is being said; not waiting to hear what I think needs to be said. Urquhart (2013) says

The idea [in grounded theory] that we should seek to see what the data indicates rather than shoehorn it into a theory that already exists means there is more chance of discovering something new. It also seems to have more integrity as a research process, because it does not seek to impose preconceived ideas on the world. (p.7)

My intention to listen mindfully aligned with Urquhart's (2013) description of grounded theory, and I believe it helped me hear what the women were saying. It was critical to ensure that my own biases did not cloud the findings. The focus was to find out what the beliefs of women leaders are, not to confirm what I thought those beliefs were or should be. What emerged fit into a framework of beliefs about self, beliefs about self -in-relationship with others, and beliefs about self-as-leader.

Grounded theory is about "emergence" (Urquhart, 2013, p. 17). Critical aspects include the ability of the researcher to have no "preconceived ideas [but be] steeped in the field of investigation" (Urquhart, 2013, p. 16). The approach requires great discipline, because there is a high degree of potential for personal biases to influence the research. It is difficult to say with certainty that my own beliefs and bias have not influenced this research, but I believe that to be the case.

There are two major areas of possible bias. The first is in the collection of the data. I feel confident that my biases did not affect the collection of the data, because I was able to maintain neutrality during the interviews. My research journal reflects how I was processing internally,

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and it does not indicate any major bias in what I was hearing. Although I was obviously subjectively interpreting what the participants were saying, these observations did not appear to influence my interactions.

I engaged in a mindfulness practice of meditation before each interview. My purpose was to bring my attention into the here-and-now, practicing the skills of attending, centering, and grounding (Anderson, 1998). The four foundations of mindfulness are mindfulness of the body, mindfulness of feelings, mindfulness of the mind or consciousness, and mindfulness of mental phenomena (Tirch et al, 2016). These foundations helped me to focus on the present and were beneficial in that my own emotions were not left unattended; I was able to limit the unconscious impact they could have had on my research.

After completing each interview, as part of my reflexive journaling, I asked myself the mindfulness-based question: What is it that I need to be aware of in this moment? I asked that question to help capture the emergent nature of the process, understanding that “mindfulness is experienced and practiced in order to provide insight and understanding into the true nature of ourselves and the world around us” (Tirch et al, 2016, p. 92). Such mindfulness is often used in Buddhist psychology and cognitive behavioral therapy. It is a widely accepted way to promote self-awareness.

The excerpts from my journal responding to the mindfulness-based question shed some interesting light on my beliefs about self. I do not feel these beliefs caused bias, but rather provided opportunity for learning--what research is really all about. If we are entirely candid about our research, part of what can be discovered in mindful research is ourselves. The writing in my journal is raw, unedited, and intimate. It provides insight into how I was thinking and feeling at the time. For example, I wrote: Finding where you fit is so important (message I got

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from her) What if where you fit is no where? (my own internal dialogue at play) I cannot seem to find my home anywhere these days. Each interview offered up an opportunity for me to self-reflect and re-frame a belief I had been carrying about myself. I guess in some ways I cannot see one without the other. Without the research project I would not have had the opportunity for my own growth, with out my own growth could I have truly heard what was being said throughout the process?

Kalof et al (2008) argue that, for qualitative research studies to be reliable and valid, they must be judged using concepts that build on reliability and validity, understood as “credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability” (p. 162).

With respect to the criterion of research credibility, that is, “how accurately the data reflects reality” (Kalof et al, 2008, p. 162), I have adhered to strict processes for collecting and analyzing the data, thus ensuring that my own beliefs and biases have influenced the process as little as possible. I continually asked myself the question, “am I seeing what I want to see or is this truly what is being said?” I can only say that my intention was to be objective, and that I was aware of the things that I wished I had seen as part of the study, but didn’t, more so than projecting what I thought they were supposed to say.

With respect to the criterion of dependability, “how truthful the researcher is and how truthful the research is” (Kalof et al, 2008, p. 163), I believe I have presented the data accurately and that the process can be replicated.

With respect to the criterion of confirmability, which Kalof et al (2008) describes as an “audit trail” (p.164), I achieved that through transcripts and journal notes.

I believe that what I have reflected in my findings is truly what emerged from the data and that this study is valid.

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I taped each interview and transcribed each one myself. I transcribed all ten interviews before beginning analysis. I then read each interview through completely, scanning to see what intuitively struck me as relevant.

I chose not to select a particular coding methodology before beginning because my strengths are my intuitive abilities and my willingness to trust in what seems to be relevant to investigate further. This was an advantage I wanted to invest in. Saldaña (2013) notes, “Coding methods choices may happen not just before but even during and after an initial review of the data corpus, based on emergent or new conceptual framework and methodological needs of the study” (p. 66).

For my first round of coding, I made penciled notes in the margins to the right of the transcribed interviews, underlying sections, words and sentences that stood out for me. This process is what Saldana (2013) refers to as “first cycle coding” (p. 3). I followed the same process for all ten interviews in several sittings, simultaneously looking for patterns and beliefs. I toggled between the interviews, looking for similarity (Saldana, 2013). I was applying a combination of “values, InVivo, and Eclectic coding” (Saldana, 2013). According to Saldana (2013), “Values coding is the application of codes onto qualitative data that reflect a participant’s values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or worldview” (p. 110). His insights were a perfect complement to the way in which the interviews were conducted, using Satir et al (1991) transformation model. “InVivo coding” according to Saldana (2013) is “designed to keep the data rooted in participants’ own language” (p. 7). This helped me to capture the participants’ voice, but my decision to code in this fashion was intuitive.

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I then transferred the codes to sticky notes, marking each note with a reference number so that I could refer it back to its source interview. I wanted to be certain that what was being generated came from all the participants, not a few loud voices.

Subsequently, I took all the notes and tried to group them into categories. Although this proved very challenging, I believe instinctively I was doing more than simply applying codes, I was trying to connect ideas and concepts, which according to Saldana (2013) is “linking (p.8),” a process that “leads you from the data to the idea and from the idea to all the data pertaining to the idea” (p. 8).

Labeling the categories did not come easily and none of my categories seemed to relate to beliefs of any kind, except for those about self. Saldana (2013) states that, “Qualitative inquiry demands meticulous attention to language and deep reflection on the emergent patterns and meanings of human experience” (p. 10). This description certainly reflects my experience and often angst over the semantics of the words and the conceptual conundrums.

Eventually, I grouped the sticky notes into three broad categories; self, others and leadership and believed that what had emerged was completely reflective of the data. Glaser and Strauss (2008) note that “Grounded theory can be presented either as a well-codified set of propositions or in a running theoretical discussion, using conceptual categories and their properties” (p. 31). I reorganized the notes again to verify if they fit in the broad category. Some stayed in the same spots, some moved. I took each broad category and re-grouped the notes to see if there were evident themes. I was attempting to find more conceptual language to describe themes, versus notes that seemed to just describe a thing or an action. Kalof et al (2008) highlight the importance of conceptual language for themes when they write,

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Grounded theory methodology places special emphasis on a process of finding similarities and differences in the data. A pattern of similarity in data is given a unique theme, which is a term for a name or a label that reflects the substantive concept” (p. 90).

Finally, I started to feel as though I was capturing the concepts and the essence of what the data was saying to me. The entire process was iterative, continually evolving as the concepts began to take shape; I continuously reflected back to the data and asked myself, “What did the participants say that led me to that conclusion?” This question was my guiding mantra.

Scope and limitations

The scope of this study was to interview 10 women from the private sector and discover what beliefs they held. Demographics such as age and race were not taken into account. No women from public sector or non-profit organizations were interviewed, thus potentially limiting the perspective that those sectors might have brought if they were different from the private sector. Also, beyond the scope of this research was the comparison of women’s beliefs to those of men. The small sample size was intentional and there was no intent of generalizing the results of the study. Therefore this study achieved what it set out to do.

In summary, this research project has been conducted in the only way I know how to be, which is authentic, self-reflective, and present to what I am seeing, feeling, hearing, and accepting as meaningful. I have learned that being true to my natural way of being does not prevent me from designing and conducting a research project that meets academic standards.

The next chapter is an in-depth review of the findings that were revealed through this study.

Chapter Four: Research Findings

This chapter provides a summary of the findings from the interviews conducted. What emerged from this study was a theoretical framework that I have categorized as beliefs about self, beliefs about self-in-relationship with others and belief about self as leader. What follows is a summary synthesis of the beliefs of my study participants. Subsequently, I develop the themes with reference to my participants' own words.

Beliefs about self:

1. I believe that one should and can learn from one's mistakes, that being resilient is important, and that one should strive to develop oneself.
2. I believe I am driven; I believe am confident in my abilities; I believe in setting goals and accomplishing what I set my mind to.
3. I believe in having an optimistic view of life.

Beliefs about self in relationship with others:

1. I believe I can trust others and myself and that relationships are valuable and important.
2. I believe in my actions being aligned with my words, living my values, and modeling the behaviors I wish to see in others.
3. I believe in supporting my success through engaging with my peers, as well as seeking mentorships and coaching.

Beliefs about self as leader:

1. I believe in valuing the individual, developing others, and coaching and mentoring others whenever possible.
2. I believe business is about people, that I am responsible for setting a vision for them and ensuring there is cultural fit.

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3. I believe in being authentic.

Advice to future women leaders:

1. I believe women should aim higher, work hard, and model what they want to see in others.
2. I believe women should develop themselves and take time to self-reflect.
3. I believe women should have mentors and networks.

The following is a summary of what the participants said, laid out in accordance with the framework. Within the conclusions, I have connected the findings to the constructs embedded within the framework.

Theme One: Beliefs about self

I believe one should and can learn from ones mistakes:

The women spoke often about learning from their mistakes and about their ability to learn as important parts of their personal and leadership development. They viewed mistakes and challenges as opportunities to learn and seemed to embrace the fact that challenges are inevitable and the best approach is to accept them.

My perception of challenging experiences overall is that they are coming for me no matter what I do. So there is only one way and that's through, and it is always OK at the end. It might be chaotic, or scary, or emotional along the way, but there is only one way to go through it. My perception is that you have to face those challenges head on; you can't hide from them (I-8).

One participant reflected that mistakes only facilitated her own evolution: "I made mistakes along the way, but even with those side steps or back steps I experienced evolution and progress toward something real and tangible" (I-3). Another woman recalled how her beliefs about mistakes have evolved and how that evolution helped her to be a better leader:

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I am more OK with my mistakes than I am with other people's and...well, I would rather save you from making a mistake, by telling you what my experience was and what to do, than just to let you do what I did: which was fail, feel the pain and then learn from it. So, I now have to be OK with letting you fall on your face, and letting you learn from it, [even] at a cost to yourself and the company. That's a tough transition, because I like to save people. I like to be a problem solver, and I am darnn good at it, but it had a negative connotation of being a micromanager or not a listening coach (I-1).

Despite all the challenges faced by the participants, not one of them shared a sense of defeat. They all expressed a sense of awareness and growth as the result of challenges:

Even the biggest challenges...were a tremendous learning experience for me. I kind of think that some of our challenges, or some of the things that you had to learn the hard way, are always the ones that are your best lessons. You know, I think challenges make you better. They force you to reflect on being more strategic. It's just an obstacle (I-1).

The belief that the women thought they had the ability to learn was often stated explicitly, but I also sensed that they felt comfortable learning and that they valued the experience, because they referred to learning positively on many occasions.

The participants spoke about learning from their mistakes and growing from facing challenges; they spoke about the need to continuously learn and the importance of always looking for what they could do differently. One woman said, "I was learning as I went. I didn't already come in with management skills, I came in with work ethic, and, you know, I was pretty good at problem-solving, but everything else I had to learn" (I-1). Another said that she hoped that she would continue to learn until the day she died (I-3). One participant's description of the journey of her career was peppered with comments about her ability to learn, as she made her

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way through her organization, taking on new jobs every five years to work her way up to a senior leadership role:

So I was able to, compared to a lot of the other women at the same time, [take] chances.

Like I just kind of said I was good at it, I could do it, whether I could or not, and figured it out. You know, I was smart enough to figure it out (I-4).

I believe being resilient is important:

There was a definite theme of resilience among the participants. Some of them demonstrated resilience by persevering, despite the competing demands of work and family (I-3, I-6, I-7, I-10). One woman recalled a fear that she never wanted her boss to know that she did reports at midnight because, after work, she had to focus on her family commitments first, such as putting the kids to bed, making lunches, baking, whatever she felt was expected of her as a mother, before she could focus on her work commitments, so she could stay on top of things at the office (I-6). Another woman, echoing those thoughts, spoke about having to work long hours at night, after she put the children to bed, just to be sure she could balance everything (I-10). Another alternated the birth of children with her business partner, because they had no maternity benefits; if she wanted a family, she had to find an innovative way to balance work with family. She created a virtual work environment so that, for the first few months after the birth of her children, she could still work from home. This woman persevered because her work commitments and her desire to have a family were both important to her (I-7). One woman made a decision not to take a promotion that involved a move to Toronto, partly because she had a young daughter and moving would have been a challenge. She remained strong in her pursuit of advancement, despite the roadblocks that she faced because she chose to stay in Vancouver:

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Had we gone to Toronto, back whenever, there might have been opportunity to be at that VP level or the next level, but that's *if*. I think to get above this level I am at [in Vancouver], are very few. This is the problem of being in Vancouver: yes, most women, especially women, who have succeeded and got to that VP level, have taken the leap to go to Toronto—and get out of here and move up in that head office, get into that head-office world for a while. I have been able to still be in the head-office world from here quite a bit, because I work for Toronto, but the stigma is starting to go away now (I-4).

Some women felt that they were resilient in other ways, such as being able to take a family-owned business to new heights and successes, even in the face of economic downturns and overseas contract issues (I-1). One woman spoke about her strength in pushing a vision forward, even when others were not able to see what she could see for the future (I-5).

How resilient these women felt, in the face of their challenges, can be summarized simply: “I am resilient, I am strong, I can get over anything” (I-7).

I believe in developing oneself:

The women all expressed a desire to develop themselves through self-awareness. They always included a form of self-reflective practice, which was often a component of the advice they gave to other women leaders. Many of the stories were clear journeys of self-discovery, as they recalled the beginnings of their careers and shared how they behaved and thought, then and now. Many of the women thought it was important to be self-aware as a leader and gave that advice to new leaders: “Set time aside to work on yourself, because I think leadership is about you changing, not about changing other people” (I-1). The women, in brief, had in common a commitment to their own self-improvement through introspection; awareness of their thoughts, feelings and behaviors; learning from their mistakes; and seeking guidance from mentors.

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They often shared with me their internal reflections, their awareness of how their actions or behaviors might have impacted others, and their insights into how they recognized a need to change or improve along the way. They expressed a common belief that, as a leader, one should be self-reflective, aware, and emotionally intelligent:

I think it's about reinforcing to people, more than ever, that you can achieve way more than you think you can. It's about perseverance, and believing in adding value, and pushing yourself to step outside your comfort zone; being open to learning, sharing experiences, helping other people; you know, all those things together then make great things happen, and you can't predict, always, what those great things are. So it's about that perseverance on being a better person, building your character, learning, sharing, mentoring, adding value, even if you don't know where that will lead or whether that will personally benefit you, right? And I think if you take an approach like this on a regular basis, then those euphoric moments happen; you end up in places, doing things, and winning things, and being recognized, when you least expected it (I-1).

I believe I am driven:

Personal drive was a common theme interwoven within many of the stories. One woman stated outright that she was driven (I-4) and one reflected her desire to be the best that she could be: "I knew I could be more and I knew I could offer more, contribute more and give back" (I-6). In telling the story of the journey of her career, one woman spoke candidly: "I persevered because I was also very stubborn, I really wanted to make sure that I was successful" (I-1).

Most of the women revealed their sense of drive by telling how they seized opportunities throughout their careers. One disclosed several instances when she recognized opportunities and, even if she was not quite ready for a move, threw her hat in the ring anyway, because she was

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driven to move up in her career: “I loved my job, I just absolutely loved it, but I still had ambitions to be other things” (I-8).

The women seemed at ease as they spoke about forging towards success. They did not appear to have pushed or forced the process, but rather to have navigated it skillfully, assuredly, and calmly:

It’s a belief that things are possible. I would say that I don’t think I ever disregard any options from the table. And, you know, one of the things I always [speak] to, when I talk to people about when we are looking at situations, or problems, or solutions, is what is the perfect-world vision solution? Like, if there were no obstacles or barriers, what would this look like? And we always start from shoot-for-the-moon and then look at what we can incorporate from that. Can we do everything? Do we have financial, physical, or other barriers to prevent us from achieving that angle? And then what can we make happen? So I think that is how I approach a lot of stuff in terms of sometimes, when you do set, not crazy, but aggressive, or unusual, or different expectations, you do achieve them (I-5).

This calm assuredness came out in the way they spoke about their career journeys. In story after story I heard women who kept evolving with every experience they faced, and driving to be successful in their careers.

I believe I am confident:

Many of the women spoke about believing that they were confident in their own abilities and that they had not been afraid to take on big challenges. They felt they could learn what they needed to know to be successful, and they trusted their instincts to help guide them.

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One woman reflected that, even though she had a great deal of confidence— “My confidence, and can-do [attitude], and feeling like I can win at anything is a strength [that] can serve me well” (I-1) —she also understood that any strength overdone can be a weakness. She had a desire to balance that high confidence with a practice of looking at her blind spots, and she used this insight to ensure better leadership practice.

Many of the women held a belief that they could achieve more and they had confidence in their abilities to do so. They spoke about taking on big projects that involved risk and required them to challenge themselves. Many of their risky undertakings were successful: “My perception of building a lodge, in the moment, it was a risk. And the decision to move forward in kind of a bold way and just figuring out how to make it happen...we did make it happen” (I-5).

This confidence was also combined with advice for other women to aim higher and not to let their success be determined by the limitations of others. The women felt it was important to believe in oneself and one’s abilities.

Most of the women were confident in their ability to lead, to do a good job, and to learn what they needed to know to be better at their jobs. They were confident in the decisions they made in critical times of change or turbulence:

I think probably they [triumphant experiences] give me (as anything does, when you are successful), they help to build your confidence, in terms of the decisions that you make. I think it gives me confidence in my abilities, in myself, in my decision-making, in terms of the direction; I feel good about it. They make me feel better about the directions I chose to go in, because those experiences have been very positive (I-8).

Comments such as the one above were often coupled with confidence in ability to lead teams and organizations now and in the future.

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One woman felt that she had not always been a confident leader. She believed that she just fell into the role, and in many ways, was a reluctant leader. Now, at a later stage of her career and through peer mentorship and support networks, she is embracing her skill as a leader and gaining confidence (I-7).

I believe in setting goals for myself:

The women set goals for themselves and work hard to achieve them. Some articulated that their goals were intentional, while others seemed to look for opportunities and then set specific goals, once they took on a new role. Some goals were described in ways that felt realistic and measurable. For instance, one participant knew at sixteen that she wanted to be an accountant and set out to achieve that (I-9); another knew she wanted to “sit in the C-Suite (chief executives’ suite),” and made it happen (I-3). Others just knew they were meant to be leaders “I feel like leading has always been important to me. If I go right back through elementary school, and high school, and things that I did, leading was really important to me. That’s where I found value” (I-2).

I believe I have successfully accomplished many things:

Many of the women were proud of their accomplishments. They felt that they had done well and that they were respected in their organizations for what they had achieved: “I’m really proud of my dedication to hire the right people and get the right people on board” (I-1); “Ah, I am proud of what I have done. I believe that there are a lot of people [in the organization] who respect what I have done” (I-4); and “I am pretty proud of what I have built here in the last two years.” (I-5).

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The women all shared experiences about undertaking roles and projects in which they wanted to accomplish many things and surpass expectations. One woman spoke about running a fast-growing company, raising children, and trying to get payroll done at midnight:

It had to be done, and that's what I do; and the kids needed to go to bed; and the dogs needed to go out; and everything else. I know a lot of people who don't want my life (laugh), but I wouldn't trade it for anything (I-10).

The women spoke about achieving results and producing what was expected of them. One woman recalled her achievements proudly:

Well, from a financial perspective anybody [whom] I have ever worked for, I have always delivered their financial requirements, or targets, or the budgets, or whatever the pieces are. I would have achieved all of the goals that were set out for me" (I-5).

It was evident, in her telling of her story that she had worked hard at being successful.

There was also a clear sense of motivation and personal intention in the women's descriptions of their experiences; they all believed they had worked hard to get where they were:

I think I have worked hard for where I am. I think I have learned from my mistakes as I have gone along. I guess I just live by [believing that] when you set goals for yourself [you then] work hard to achieve them (I-9).

I believe in having an optimistic view of life:

The participants all expressed a positive view of their lives. They were happy about where they were in their careers and seemed to be optimistic about the future. They tended to expect that things would work out for the best:

I am an optimist, so I feel pretty good about most things, I can find a pony in there somewhere. I mean, even with [things] going all sideways and being a big impact financially

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and otherwise, you know, there always things to take away and learn. So I generally feel pretty good about almost anything that has happened, because I feel like it happens for a reason and, you know, my strengths outweigh my weaknesses” (I-1).

The women seemed to see opportunities, rather than problems. Not one blamed other people for their challenges or struggles. They were grateful for the people and the support they had in their lives, and not one reflected cynicism or a negative view of the world. One woman stated outright “I am a happy person” (I-6), and others made similar comments when they reflected on their career journeys (I-1, I-3, I-8, I-9, I-10, I-4, I-5, I-7).

Theme Two: Self in relationship with others

I believe I can trust others and myself:

The women spoke about trust in the context of trusting themselves: their instincts and their ability to make decisions or solve problems. They also spoke about the importance of having others find them trustworthy, capable of keeping their word, performing their job well, or being a confidant. One woman felt that it was critical that she be seen as a leader that employees could trust:

I don't take for granted that they trust me implicitly. Like, I have had some very interesting situations pop up, because they trust me and I don't take that for granted. So authenticity is really important to me. Integrity, authenticity...they're all kind of wrapped up almost in the same shell (I-2).

There was also a sense that the women trusted others to do good work and to co-operate with each other. One woman spoke about how she made a critical decision to hire her brother, based on how much she trusted him: “I said, who am I going to hire that is smart, that I can rely

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on, that I trust to run the plant, because they would have access to [proprietary information], and so on; and of course I thought of my bother” (I-1).

One woman spoke about trust in the context of providing people feedback and having difficult conversations. She felt that, if there was a solid foundation of trust between herself and the employee, even difficult feedback could be received well:

Those are big moments when it works [giving feedback] and really big—when they [the employees] thank you for it, which is pretty amazing because then it really shows they trust you. Like I feel that that’s a big deal, because the trust is there. They [not] only trusted you to give them that feedback but they actually listened to it and [then] they trusted that they could come back [to me] and say “yes actually you were right” or “I didn’t realize that’s how it was coming across” or whatever. Those are big moments (I-2).

There was only one anomaly. A participant said she did not think one should always trust one’s colleagues because they were often out to get one’s job. But, in every other story that she shared, she spoke about trust in a positive context, noting that as a leader she needed to foster trust and be trustworthy herself (I-4).

I believe that relationships are valuable:

Many stories reflected a picture of women valuing the relationships they had in both the present and the past. They spoke about people supporting them in their careers and giving them opportunities, often when they were very young. One woman spoke about her most triumphant moment as the day she realized she had developed a true partnership with her boss and how much she valued that relationship:

Early in my career, when I was working with the owner of the company, there was a defining moment, where I realized that I had become his right arm and you know

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he bounced everything off me, and everything was sort of done in partnership, after years of him really taking me under his wing and kind of teaching me and mentoring [me]. It went from that, sort of under his wing, to like side-by-side and that was a big deal (I-2).

Some women spoke about how honored they were to be surrounded by amazing professionals and that those relationships provided growth and development opportunities and timely feedback (I-1, I-2, I-5, I-8, I-9).

One woman, who runs a family-owned business, spoke with great respect about the other family members working in the business (I-1). She set up weekly meetings between herself, her brother, and her father (the founder), as a way to foster trust and openness:

I organized a Tuesday lunch so that, every Tuesday for those who were in town, we'd get together for lunch between my father, my brother, and I, and, to this day, we still go every Tuesday for lunch. More often than not we talk about boating and some other things now, but back in the day, it was letting them know what I was doing with staff, and plans, and suppliers, and banks, and all that stuff so that people knew what was happening and they had an opportunity to question things or give ideas; so that it didn't create problems later, as the executive team grew, as people were hired and more people got involved (I-1).

There was a definite theme of respectfulness in the way the women spoke about their teams, their colleagues, and their bosses. They valued mentoring relationships they have had, business partners who were aligned with their values, and owners and founders who gave them opportunities to be in partnership with them. They spoke about their families being supportive of them in their careers and feeling grateful that others saw their value:

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He [my boss] thinks I am fantastic and his wife thinks I am fantastic, which makes me so happy: to know I work for people like that and that they are proud of me, but also [that they] have that regard of whatever I have done. Appreciation is the word that I reflect on (I-6).

One participant spoke about being a ‘trusted partner’ as something she truly valued (I-2), and this was a theme for another participant as well (I-10). There was a sense that these two women really valued being trusted by the owners of the companies they worked for and that they needed to be working in an environment where their personal and professional values were aligned.

No one expressed negative feelings about a relationship. Even if the relationship was no longer intact (I-8); they still reflected something positive about the experience and the importance of that relationship.

I believe in my actions being aligned with my words and modeling the behaviors I wish to see in others:

Many of the women spoke about the importance of modeling what they wanted to see in others and being congruent with what they said and did (I-1, I-2, I-3, I-4, I-5, I-6, I-8, I-9, I-10).

One woman spoke about how she learned how to be in alignment as a leader:

It was one of the most intense experiences, but it really allowed me to crystalize what my values were, what was important to me, what were my real goals, and when were my statements and intent and action completely misaligned (I-9).

Another spoke about a desire to be in alignment with the work she was doing and what she personally valued (I-3) and another expressed her awareness of the importance of ensuring

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her behaviors, those of her managers, and the values her organization were in alignment because this connection was essential for engagement within her corporate culture (I-1).

Modeling the behaviors they wished to see in others was another theme. The women wanted to model what they expected of others and to be seen aligning their actions to their words. Leading by example was common way of expressing the idea: “How I lead now, it’s by example, with experience,” (I-10) and “Yes, lead by example” (I-4).

I believe in knowing and living my values:

There were comments from the women that it was important to know how their values influenced how they lead. One participant described a recent success when her actions were aligned to how she wants to lead:

I am really quite happy with it and in alignment in terms of my intent going into [the situation], in terms of my broader intent in the world (with younger leaders), and, in this case, specifically with younger female leaders. It just feels, right may not be the word, but certainly in alignment (I-3).

Two women spoke about their values with regard to family: one structured an entire organization around the value of family (I-7); the other felt that making the decision to be in a senior executive role could only happen if she could “be in a company where it was family [owned] or someone who gets family, because my values are around family” (I-6). The women expressed values that drove their personal decisions, as well as their leadership of others: “It was through the recruiting process that I started to understand what values meant. I started to understand how you align your personal values to organizational values, and finding an environment that was important to you” (I-9).

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I believe in supporting my success through engaging with my peers and seeking mentorship and coaching:

Many of the women valued their professional networks, and, in their advice to other women, often suggested building a network (I-1, I-3, I-4, I-6, I-7). One woman spoke about her network as a way of experiencing growth as a professional because, as president of her own company for more than twenty-five years, she had not experienced the feeling of being promoted (I-7).

Several of the women belonged to groups or organizations designed to offer networking and mentoring opportunities (I-1, I-2, I-3, I-4, I-5, I-6, I-7, I-8). Mentoring groups seem to be most valued because they provide safe places to learn and receive valuable feedback. One woman spoke about how amazing it was to be surrounded by CEO's of huge organizations and to have them "not only help you or support you but also to challenge you" (I-1). Many of the women spoke about having mentors and the value in having someone to talk to in confidence who could provide you with insights and share lessons learned:

One of the pieces of advice I would give would be, if you don't have a mentor, you need one and you might even need two. You need one within the business—or it's very good to have one within the business—but it's also really necessary, I think, to have those outside voices that don't work with you. I think it's good to find a good woman mentor who is a little bit older than you and has more experience than you; or [that] doesn't have to be older but has a longer tenure than you do currently. I have one in my life who used to work here and she doesn't work here anymore, but she has been instrumental in a number of different conversations in terms of framing, because, you know, experience gives you so much more perception and so much more understanding, and you can gain a

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lot more experience more quickly through those conversations with people, if you can be open with them rather [than] just sort of burning trees down as you go (I-8).

One participant spoke about the value of feedback and how important receiving feedback had been over the years:

I think I am probably more open and more [likely to] seek out feedback now more than ever, which is not something that I would have guessed because I would have thought well when I was new I was trying to find out a bunch of stuff. But I think I am more conscious of, that you have to ask for help and feedback (I-1).

Theme Three: Self as leader

I believe in valuing the individual:

It was evident that all the women viewed people, in particular those within their teams, with great respect—for their abilities, but also because they felt that people in general were valuable and had potential. They valued differences of opinion and felt that people were smart and could learn what they needed to learn to be successful. One woman described how she supported an individual in a time of great stress and change in his professional career. Her skill in being able to help someone transition through change was obvious, as was her belief in the man's human potential to make it through a dark moment and come out the other side feeling valued and respected:

This was his first interaction with the new company, and I said to him let me tell you what I see in this moment: I see a guy who has received news that he was in no way prepared for; it's come out of left field. He has also, in that moment, had a key member of his staff go off, and [he] recently made the decision to remove a manager. So I see a guy who is doing three jobs [and] that's trying to deal with perhaps the most startling

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news of his entire career, [and who is] maintaining a professional attitude to all of his employees, although perhaps a little bit more curt than normally he would have been. He is still providing all the answers and all the stuff while he works through [his own stuff]. So I see somebody that is dedicated, but [who] is really trying to rationalize what has happened to him. So I don't see any issues with what I have seen here today [the distress, the tears, the emotion] if anything it makes me see how important it is that we get past this so that you can continue to stay with us for the future (I-5).

I believe in developing others:

Many of the women felt it was their responsibility as leaders to develop others and help them succeed in their roles: "I constantly see opportunity for others that I am leading and I try to point those out quite regularly" (I-2). No matter what level they were at in the business, the women felt it important to give their time and energy towards people's growth: "My work now [as CEO] is developing people" (I-1). One woman reflected: "You can't make carbon copies of what you want, you just have to see it, and develop skills where you know that they can be developed, and take people for what they are everywhere else" (I-6). One woman spoke about her experience coaching a high- school basketball team: "One of my greatest experiences has been when I coach basketball, and seeing young women find themselves and be able to actually learn something so well that they can rely on it at an absolutely critical point in time" (I-9).

The women spoke about sharing their experiences with others to offer support and growth. One woman spoke about how her focus in the later part of her career was "into the generative space around helping leaders generate their own leadership and that of those around them" (I-3) as a way of passing along her wisdom to the next generation of leaders.

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There was a sense of pride in the women's commitment to get people on their teams promoted or in helping them seek out new opportunities; and overall there was a sense that the women took the development of others into consideration as they ran their organizations:

You know, that is how I lead now. It's by example, with experience, and also with [their] goals in mind of what they are wanting to do. Many staff that you meet, especially that are on our team now, they didn't get into the field to just be a teacher, right? There is something more that they are looking for within the industry. So they are all working for the most part, towards a goal, and if I can help them with any aspect of that, then that's how I feel I lead now. It's a different aspect of it, you know, really kind of working with people to get them to the next level and everything else that they want to do as well (I-10).

The stories about developing people seemed genuine and authentic, and all of the women expressed a willingness to support others.

I believe in leadership being about people and in being authentic:

The women spoke about their roles as leaders and how the majority of work they do now is related to developing of the people or teams they lead. One participant said, "My work now is developing people and making sure that we have the vision, and that we are moving things ahead, and I am removing obstacles" (I-1). Another reflected on the importance of how she was leading her team; a sign for her that she was doing a good job was people asking for what they needed from her and each other, giving her feedback and her team having the confidence to make that happen when it was faltering. For her this was paramount: "that's who I want to be as a leader" (I-9).

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Team was a central theme for the women: valuing their teams, recognizing they needed healthy teams to be successful themselves, recognizing their own skills in building those healthy teams. “I would say it’s my ability to build teams and to give people purpose and focus again to go forward. [That] would be what I reflect on [regarding] my achievements” (I-5).

One woman spoke about the importance of cultural fit and how it was the combination of the people, the environment and the culture that made for a perfect match and drove her passion to perform as the leader and create cultural fit for others:

That is where I get the energy and drive and passion to do what I do every day, that’s where it comes from. The position of the company and who we are, but also the culture and the people that are here, bringing those two things together, it’s the only reason, it makes it all worth it. I couldn’t imagine doing this for like a widget company you know. That’s where it comes to life for me and you know it’s not just because we have yummy [product]. I’ve had a situation in the past where it just was the right fit for me, the product, the brand, the experience, and the people that were there it just made this magical place (I-2).

One woman spoke about the value of being vulnerable and how that demonstrated strength and fostered trust in her team (I-8). Many of the women were conscious about how people experienced them; they wanted to be seen as authentic and transparent (I-1, I-2, I-3, I-4, I-5, I-6, I-7, I-8, I-9).

I believe women just beginning their leadership journeys should aim high, have mentors, know themselves, work hard and be a model for what they want to see in others:

When asked, what advice would you give a woman just beginning her journey in leadership, the women offered varied insights:

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There is probably lots of advice I would give but... I think the top things would be trust yourself, that you know more and that you are capable of more, than you are giving yourself credit for. I think that probably there would be a big chunk of women that tend to second guess themselves (I-1).

I think the advice is learn from other people. I think the peer mentoring, like just right away, try to get involved with groups that you can learn from other people and really set time aside to work on yourself, because I think leadership is about you changing not about changing other people (I-1).

I don't think that women aim high enough. In fact I have talked to a few of my leadership friends about the fact that I would like to write a book with chapters from all the different women, and the title of it is You're Aiming Too Low. And I think that women, particularly, aim at a level that they feel is comfortable and achievable, rather than challenging. And I think that we could benefit from 'Lets aim high enough and be challenged and maybe fail but we will land higher than we would, if we conservatively went after what people told us we should' (I-1).

There is a ton of different ways to lead and none of them [is] right or wrong, and none of them [is one] that you will always be able to wear, because every day, every situation, requires a different leadership card at that moment that you have to be able to pull out of your deck. And so [it's] just to find one that works for you, you know, and where you feel comfortable and you feel the most authentic, based on your experiences (I-2).

Anything is possible and...managing perceptions and managing their personal brand is going to be what sets [women leaders] apart, or holds them back, or moves them forward. That as women we don't do that intuitively or naturally, and that it is really and truly

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important [and] that they understand their brand and that they manage it to [be] the brand that they want to be (I-5).

I think the biggest thing is not to be afraid to take on challenges. Don't underestimate your ability (I-4).

One of the pieces of advice I would give would be, if you don't have a mentor you need one, and you might even need two. You need one within the business—or it's very good to have one within the business—but it's also really necessary, I think, to have those outside voices that don't work with you in whatever business or whatever you are doing (I-8).

Know yourself and accept yourself. Be authentic to it [yourself] but also be open to learning, because we are all different (I-9).

You have to get out of your organization and start making contacts with people outside. You know, it may lead to other career moves or it may not, but it's just really important, I think now, to get more involved (I-7).

Spend some time getting to know [yourself], what's important to [you], and why and what [your] values are, and how [you want] to demonstrate them, and to be gentle with [yourself] (I-3).

My high school parting words were 'only the strong survive' and I thought about them just the other day, because I am approaching almost 30 years of graduation, and I am going, yes, that's the truth. I would still stick by that. Everyone is strong enough. Just allow your mind to think strong and just get past your hard days" (I-6).

This was advice that was given to me nine years ago. It's you have to not take things so personally, because when you start taking things personally, that's when the emotional

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side of things get involved into stuff. Lead by example, so you don't need to be standing over people and telling them what to do in every position, but leading by example.

Always work harder than you expect them to work, right. So that's one thing. And it's, you need to find that balance between the personal level of things, you know, knowing so and so's name or how are the kids, without getting too personal. So we always say we are friendly, but we are not friends, right. You know, going into a leadership position, it's know the responsibilities that you have, 'cause I think a lot of the times, when I have faltered along the way, is not realizing the responsibilities I had in that type of position. Everyone is looking up to you right? So you need to be aware of that at all times, um, and proceed accordingly, based on that for sure. (I-10)

The themes that emerged in the advice the women gave for future women leaders revolved around the importance of encouraging women to aim higher (I-1, I-4), having mentors (I-1, I-8), making time for networking (I-7, I-1, I-4, I-6), being flexible in one's leadership style (I-2), modeling what one wishes to see in others (I-10), understanding the value in knowing and developing oneself (I-1, I-2, I-3, I-9), and consciously managing how people see you (I-5).

Findings summary

In summary, these findings have been captured as beliefs about self, self-in- relationship with others, and self as leader. This data is grounded in the women's reflections about their experiences, perceptions, feelings, and expectations. We see how they see themselves and what they believe.

In the following chapter, I draw conclusions based on the literature and findings of this research and provide my recommendations for future research.

Chapter Five: Conclusions, implications and recommendations

Conclusions

This chapter presents the conclusions that I have drawn from the findings of this research and the review of relevant literature. This research project was designed to identify what beliefs a sample of women leaders hold; to have these women share their thoughts and feelings about their leadership journeys, triumphs, challenges, and current successes; and to give advice for women just beginning their leadership journeys.

The process gave me insight into how the women saw themselves in the context of their leadership. What emerged were beliefs that I categorized as beliefs about self, beliefs about self-in-relationship with others, and beliefs about self-as-leader, as a way of creating a theoretical framework from which to base multiple interconnected constructs.

Through analysis, I have linked the women's beliefs to constructs of self-concept, self-efficacy, locus of control, trust (self and interpersonal), valuing relationships (understanding others), behavioral integrity, values, aspects of humanism, authenticity and giving advice.

This table summarizes the beliefs from my findings, and the theoretical framework from which to draw my conclusions:

Table 1

Summary of beliefs from findings, theoretical framework and conceptual connections

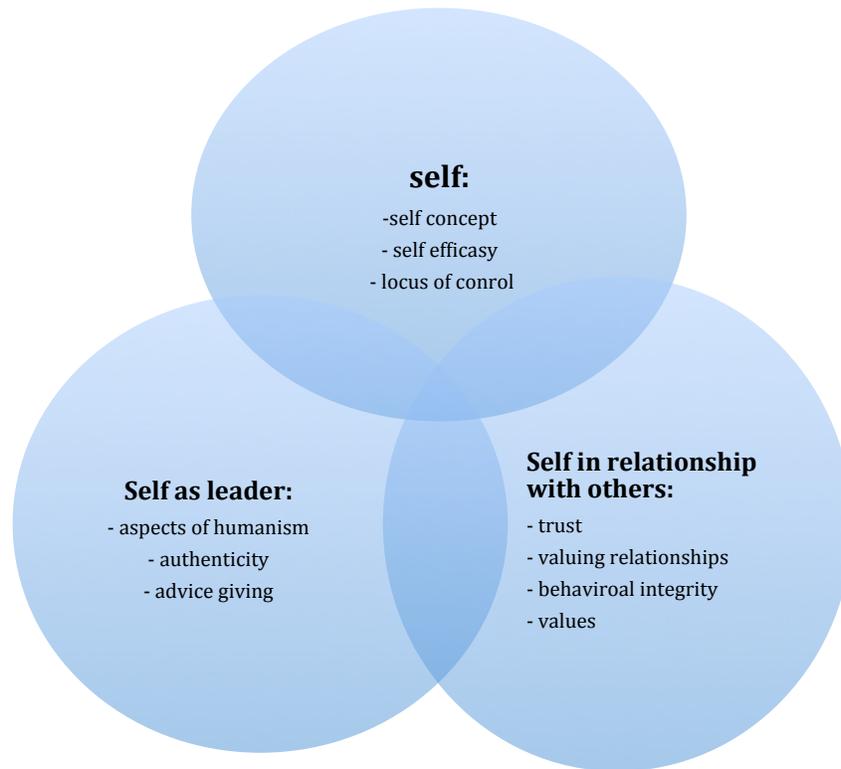
Findings	Theoretical Framework	Conceptual Connections
<p>Beliefs about self:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I believe one should and can learn from one’s mistakes, that being resilient is important, and that one should strive to develop oneself. 2. I am driven and confident in my abilities, and I believe in getting goals and accomplishing anything I set my mind to. 3. I believe in having an optimistic view of life. 	<p>Self</p>	<p>Self-concept</p> <p>Self-efficacy</p> <p>Locus of control</p>
<p>Beliefs about self and others:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I believe I can trust others and myself and that relationships are valuable and important. 2. I believe in my actions being aligned with my words, living my values and modeling the behaviors I wish to see in others. 3. I believe in supporting my success through engaging with my peers, as well as seeking mentorships and coaching. 	<p>Self-in-relationship with others</p>	<p>Trust (self and interpersonal)</p> <p>Valuing relationships (understanding others)</p> <p>Behavioral Integrity</p> <p>Values</p>

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<p>Beliefs about self as leader:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I believe in valuing the individual, developing others and coaching and mentoring others whenever possible. 2. I believe business is about people, that I am responsible for f them and ensuring there is cultural fit. 3. I believe in being authentic. 	<p>Self as leader</p>	<p>Aspects of humanism</p> <p>Authenticity</p>
<p>Advice for future women leaders:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I believe women should aim higher, be a role model for what they want to see in others and work hard. 2. I believe women should have mentors and peer networks. 3. I believe women should invest in knowing themselves. 	<p>Self as leader</p>	<p>Advice-giving</p>

I took the data from the table and re-organized it to conceptualize the theoretical framework that had emerged. This allowed me to represent visually, and in simple terms, the concepts and their connections to broader categories and theories.

Theoretical Framework:



The emergent constructs within the framework pointed to further review of literature that realization allowed me to connect the findings to other research, achieving two things: (1) situating this research within grander theoretical concepts which serves to validate the findings of this research; and (2) identifying gaps in research that this research fills. Below, I demonstrate in more detail how the findings of this research, paired with further review of literature, led to my conclusions.

Conclusion One: Beliefs about self (self-concept, self-efficacy, and internal locus of control)

A positive self-concept, which includes high self-efficacy and an internal locus of control, cultivates self-development, fosters self-confidence, promotes a commitment to goals, strengthens resilience, and inspires an optimistic view of life.

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In this research, I saw women who believed that mistakes were opportunities for growth, who valued learning, who saw the need to continually strive toward their own development. I heard women who were confident and driven, and who believed in their own abilities to set goals and accomplish anything they set their minds to. I found women who demonstrated resilience in the face of challenges and who had a positive and hopeful outlook on life. I have labeled these beliefs as beliefs about self and connected them to the constructs of self-concept, self-efficacy and locus of control. Their strength was demonstrated by stories relating how they navigated their careers with purpose and drive; how they sought opportunities to challenge themselves, advance and take on increasing responsibilities; how they described their ability set a goals; how they invested in self-reflection and learning; how they spoke about their journeys being positive and purposeful; how, when looking back, they felt proud about their accomplishments, grateful and hopeful for the future, and strong despite the challenges they faced.

Beliefs we hold about ourselves make up our self-concept. When a person has a positive self-concept, she believes that she can learn from her mistakes, that being resilient is important, and that one should strive to develop oneself. She is confident and believes in her own abilities. She is driven to succeed and willingly takes on new opportunities. She sets goals and sees herself in control of her life. A positive self-concept is a dynamic system made up of many related psychological constructs and, according to Markus and Wurf (1987), “self-concept and identity theorists appear to be converging on a notion of the self-concept as containing a variety of representations” (p. 307). My representation of self-concept that emerged from this research comprises self-efficacy and locus of control, interconnected with constructs of self-development, confidence, goals, resilience, and optimism.

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Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy includes a woman's beliefs about her confidence in her abilities, her drive, and her confidence that she can set and achieve goals. In a study focused on leadership development, Murphy et al (2016) describe self-efficacy as, "an individual's belief in his or her own abilities to achieve a certain level of performance" (p.74). According to Riding and Rayner (2001), "A strong sense of efficacy enhances human accomplishment and well-being in countless ways. Confident individuals approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than as threats to be avoided" (p. 242). Ross (2014) notes that

Self-leadership represents a process that involves intrinsic motivation (derived from the perception of competence in successfully achieving some personal standard of accomplishment) which leads to greater self-efficacy. This process influences self-perceptions of personal competence which influences the selection of higher personal standards or goals to achieve (p. 301).

Therefore, self-efficacy is part of our concept of self, because how we see ourselves in relationship to our ability to achieve goals and face challenges influences how we see ourselves overall.

Furthermore, leaders need to believe they achieve their goals and feel confident in their capabilities. As Murphy and Johnson (2016) write,

Within [Bandura's Social Cognitive] theory, specific task-related self-efficacy plays a vital role in organizing behavior in conjunction with one's goal systems, outcome expectations, perceived environmental facilitators and enablers, and environmental impediments. Specifically, research has shown that individuals high in self-efficacy for a

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given task, after controlling for performance, will perform better than those low in self-efficacy. Research on a wide array of topics has shown that self-efficacy is both a precursor to high levels of performance and an outcome of high levels of performance. Self-efficacy affects performance through intervening/mediating task engagement behaviors such as persistence, effort, goal setting, strategy usage, and choice. All of these task engagement behaviors have implications for succeeding in leader development efforts. Leadership researchers have concluded that leader self-efficacy may be one of the most important ingredients in successful leadership and team performance (p. 74-75).

In a study about goal-setting and self-efficacy, Schunk (1990) discovered that, “when students perceive satisfactory goal progress, they feel capable of improving their skills; goal attainment, coupled with high self efficacy leads students to set new challenging goals” (p 71). Thus, leaders who believe in the importance of setting goals and who believe they are successful at achieving their goals are likely to have high self-efficacy.

Both Murphy et al (2016) and Pajares and Schunk (1990) provide evidence that, when we have high self-efficacy, we are likely to achieve the goals we set for ourselves, feel confident about what we can and will accomplish, and continue driving towards new goals. Self-efficacy is much like a positive feedback loop, and the more we believe we can do things and consequently are successful, the more we want to set new goals and achieve them. Pajares and Schunk (2001) states that

Bandura painted a portrait of human behaviors and motivation in which the beliefs that people have about their capabilities are critical elements. In fact, according to Bandura, how people behave can often be better predicted by the beliefs they hold about their capabilities, which he called self-efficacy beliefs, than by what they are actually capable of

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accomplishing, for these self-perceptions help determine what individuals do with the knowledge and skills they have.

This comment reminds us that self-efficacy is contingent on context and beliefs about our own capabilities. If we see ourselves as capable, we are likely to continue to accomplish what we set out to do; if we see ourselves as incompetent in a particular domain, we may not even tackle the challenge at all.

Beginning with the beliefs related to the women's self-confidence, their ability to set goals and accomplish whatever they set their minds to, and their drive, and drawing from the literature, I have concluded that self-efficacy is linked to self-concept in that, the higher our sense of self-efficacy, the more likely we are to feel good about our overall concept of self, because we see ourselves as successful. This sense of self-approval, in turn, reinforces positive beliefs about our ability to accomplish things we set our minds to and our desires to drive toward new goals.

It is important to recognize that other theorists view the concept of self and self-efficacy as distinct constructs, but I do not disagree. I see high self-efficacy as confidence about one's capabilities and self-concept as the way in which one sees oneself overall. According to Riding and Rayner (2001), "the difference between self-efficacy and self-esteem beliefs, is not cosmetic. Self-efficacy is a judgment of the confidence that one has in one's abilities; self-concept is a description of one's own perceived self accompanied by an evaluative judgment of self-worth" (p. 245). However, I have connected self-efficacy to self-concept conceptually, and although there is an important distinction between the two concepts, they are presented as connected within this research. According to Ross (2014),

Over time, as the self-concept strengthens, the individual begins to turn from the self to focus on others. This is what is referred to as the "leadership aspiration" level. The individual

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with a strong positive self-concept begins to look beyond self-leadership and focuses on leading others. The individual believes in his or her ability to proactively and positively impact the lives of others. At this point leadership of others begins to emerge in the form of beliefs, values and actions associated with leadership. The individual emerges from exclusively focusing on self-leadership to leading others seeking to lead others represents a natural outcome in the evolution of the individual's self-concept (p. 306-307).

Ross's (2014) framework conceptualizes the idea that beliefs about self and beliefs about self-in-relationship with others eventually manifest as beliefs about self as leader, and this manifestation is connected to one's self-concept.

Locus of control

Beliefs about the importance of an optimistic view of life, confidence, and one's ability to achieve goals are also connected to our perception of how much control they have over events. I see this proposition as the concept of locus of control, which Rotter (1966) describes in terms of "internals" and "externals":

Internals believe that success or failure is due to their own efforts. In contrast, externals believe that the reinforcers in life are controlled by luck, chance, or powerful others.

Therefore, they see little impact of their own efforts on the amount of reinforcement they receive" (The Social Learning Theory, n.d.)

That is, we see the events of our lives through our beliefs about how much control we have over the happenings of our lives.

According to Howell and Avolio (1993),

Locus of control has been empirically correlated with leadership behavior and performance. Internally oriented managers exhibit greater confidence in their ability to

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influence the environment, are more capable in dealing with stressful situations, place greater reliance on open and supportive means of influence, pursue riskier and more innovative company strategies, and generate higher group and company performance than do externally oriented managers (p. 893).

Miller et al (1982) found that “managers who believe that their destiny lies in their own hands are more likely to control it actively” (p. 245).

In a study linking traits such as self-esteem, locus of control, emotional stability and generalized self-efficacy to job satisfaction and performance, researchers Judge and Bono (2001) found that these traits were “among the best dispositional predictors of job satisfaction” (p. 80).

Finally, in a study focused on an integrated model of goal setting, self-efficacy and personality traits, such as locus of control and need for achievement, Phillips et al (1997) discovered that individuals with a higher internal locus of control have higher self-efficacy. They also found that individuals with a higher locus of control, higher self-efficacy and goal orientation, a higher need for achievement and who “view intelligence as malleable” (p. 794) achieve higher levels of individual performance.

Self-development

Many of the women I interviewed believe that self-development, self-reflection and continuous learning were important. I, therefore, connect the belief in self-improvement to the construct self-development.

According to Murphy et al (2016), “self-efficacy [is] associated with a greater propensity to engage in self-directed developmental experiences” (p. 77). When we see ourselves as successful and competent, and we know that we can positively navigate life through the choices and decisions we make, we invest in the continual development of ourselves as a way of

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reinforcing the effects of the generative feedback loop that comes as a result of a positive self-concept, high self-efficacy, and internal locus of control. This combination feeds the drive to improve. Self-development is therefore a cornerstone of a positive self-concept.

Short (1998) states, “[Learning] from information that includes ourselves ... is the challenge we all face if we are to learn from different perspectives” (p. 55). Senge (1990) adds, “Many of the practices most conducive to developing one’s own personal mastery—developing a more systemic worldview, learning how to reflect on tacit assumptions, expressing ones’ vision and listening to others’ visions and joint inquiry into different people’s view of current reality—are imbedded in the disciplines for building learning organizations (p. 162).

According to Ross (2014), “A positive self-concept enables the individual to recognize the opportunities that exist to achieve personal and professional growth because the individual’s values support learning and associate learning with achieving” (p. 305).

Self-development is therefore connected to a positive self-concept:

Understanding other people and ourselves lets us imagine new ways of being human. At the same time, to change our world, ourselves, and our society, we have to think about what we ought to be like, as well as what we actually are like. (Gopnik, 2009, p. 8)

Confidence and goals

I connect beliefs related to the women’s confidence in their abilities—that they could achieve what they set their minds to—and beliefs related to setting and achieving goals to the constructs of self-concept and self-efficacy. According to Riding and Rayner (2001), “confidence is considered an integral component of an individual’s self-concept, [and] self-efficacy beliefs are often viewed as requisite judgments necessary to the creation of self-concept

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belief” (p. 246). Ross (2014) observes, “Self-leaders also show self-confidence and positive attitudes through their actions. The implication is obvious: A self-leader must possess the values, self-esteem and self-concept that help the individual be self-confident” (p.316).

Murphy and Johnson (2016) observe that, “Self-efficacy affects performance through intervening / mediating task engagement behaviors such as persistence, effort, goal setting, strategy usage and choice” (p. 74-75). They mean that high self-efficacy can influence our commitment to setting goals.

Ross (2014) notes that,

Positive self-perceptions lead the individual to select more ambitious goals, and these goals reflect rising personal standards because the individual feels more positive about his or her capability to achieve these ambitious goals. [Moreover] one of the important benefits of having a positive attitude is that a leader identifies opportunities to pursue. This means that a leader is able to avoid the pitfall of thinking “can’t” that [one] associate[s] with a negative attitude. The leader with a positive attitude identifies several choices of possible actions to pursue in dealing with a situation or, in achieving a goal, to satisfy the needs for competence and self-autonomy (pp. 300, 316).

I conclude that a positive self-concept is likely to promote a commitment to one’s goals, especially when coupled with high self-efficacy, because the individual feels confident in her ability to achieve the goals she sets.

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Resilience

The connection to resilience is more implicit than explicit. My data provides stories that embody resilience, as demonstrated by how the women viewed their challenges, rather than directly pointing to them. I labeled this demonstrated capacity as resilience and connected it to a positive self-concept, because a positive self-concept includes the ability to face challenges head on, to learn from experiences, and not to be discouraged by challenges. According to Murphy and Johnson (2016), “Leaders with higher developmental efficacy are more likely to be resilient to ego-bruising events, such as receiving negative developmental feedback or performing poorly during leader development” (p. 77).

Prince-Embury and Saklofske (2013) tell us that,

Individuals with high levels of perceived self-efficacy trust their own abilities in the face of adversity, tend to conceptualize problems as challenges rather than as threats or uncontrollable situations, experience less negative emotional arousal in demanding tasks, think in self-enhancing ways, motivate themselves, and show perseverance when confronted with difficult situations (p. 139).

Seeing challenges as opportunities to learn is related to the belief we have in our ability to face challenges and our belief in being resilient. It is what Prince-Embury and Saklofske (2013) call adaptability: “the degree to which an individual uses a mindset that views life changes as chances to grow and obstacles as challenges to overcome” (p. 189).

In a study of working Malaysian mothers, Lian and Tam (2014) state that “the added elements of motherhood in some working females increased the possibility of acute dual-role or multiple role stress as a mother, employee and spouse or partner” (p. 43). Their review of

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research on resilience and coping strategies shows that resilience is a key factor in women overcoming the stresses of dual-role expectations. Four women in my sample said that their most significant challenge was in being mothers *and* executives.

Our ability to adapt to difficult situations does in fact relate to self-efficacy and self-concept. Individuals who see challenges through the lens, “I am resilient, I am strong, I can get over anything” (I-7) demonstrate a belief in their resilience and strength. Therefore, a positive self-concept can strengthen resilience.

Optimistic view of life

I see a connection between being positive and hopeful in one’s beliefs about life and a positive self-concept. When we feel good about who we are, and confident in our abilities, we tend to be optimistic about our ability to face life’s challenges. As Goleman (1995) puts it, “Optimism, like hope, means having a strong expectation that, in general, things turn out all right in life, despite setbacks and frustrations” (p. 88).

Optimism is interconnected with self-efficacy, and therefore, self-concept. Goleman (1995) adds,

Albert Bandura, a Stanford psychologist who has done much of the research on self-efficacy, sums it up well: “People’s beliefs about their abilities have a profound effect on those abilities. Ability is not a fixed property; there is a huge variability in how you perform. People who have a sense of self-efficacy bounce back from failures; they approach things in terms of how to handle them rather than worrying about what can go wrong (p. 90).

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A positive self-concept that includes high self-efficacy and internal locus of control are embodied in people who are confident and inclined to seize opportunities as they present themselves; people who are committed to achieving goals with an optimistic view of life. Such people are resilient and have an ability to face life's challenges with positive outlook; they believe that they are in control of their own destinies. Finally, these individuals are keenly aware of their own strengths and challenges; they believe in being self-reflective and continually striving towards self-improvement.

Conclusion Two: Belief about self-in-relationship with others (trust, valuing relationships, behavioral integrity, values)

Interpersonal relationships include concepts related to trust (self and interpersonal), valuing relationships (understanding others), behavioral integrity and understanding, and knowing one's own values. Interpersonal relationships also comprise beliefs about self and beliefs about others.

In this research, I heard women who believed that relationships were instrumental in their personal and professional lives, that trust in themselves and others is paramount, that knowing their values is important, that living those values is critical to their own credibility, and that they want what they say and do to be aligned. I have labeled these beliefs as beliefs about self-in-relationship with others and connected them to the constructs of trust (self and interpersonal), valuing relationships (understanding others), behavioral integrity and values (understanding and living one's values). This connection was demonstrated by stories related to relationships the women had had over their careers, from key family members being the resources they trusted most, to valuing the partnerships created with owners of their organizations, to how valuable peer and mentoring networks have been over their careers. The women listened to others, made

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time for conversations, supported and coached, listened to feedback, consulted with people, valued diverse perspectives, fostered connection, and spoke respectfully about people. The evidence included stories about trusting their instincts and the critical importance of their employees trusting them, stories about learning the value of understanding their own values and then living those values, to stories about their desire to ensure what they were working on in their daily lives aligned with those values. They reflected on wanting to model the behaviors they expected to see in others, expressed willingness to support, develop and invest in others, and stressed the importance of connection with others in their life.

Clearly, interpersonal relationships form the conceptual basis from which this second conclusion is derived and serve to define self-in-relationship with others. Shahsavarani et al (2016) suggest that, “Interpersonal relationships usually involve some level of interdependence. People in a relationship tend to influence each other, share their thoughts and feelings, and engage in activities together” (p. 453). With this interdependence and mutual influence in mind, I demonstrate how I have connected the constructs of trust (self- and interpersonal), valuing relationship (understanding others), behavioural integrity and values to the women’s beliefs.

Trust (self and interpersonal)

I connect beliefs about trusting one’s instincts, trusting others, and commitment to developing and maintaining trust with others to the overall concept of trust with an inclusion of self-trust and interpersonal trust.

Pasnau (2014) hypothesizes that human beings value self-trust so much that “beliefs based on self-trust have intrinsic value” (p. 2321). Put another way, the beliefs we have where we trust we know what we know, have a greater value to us than if we do not trust that we knew.

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Govier (1993) posits that self-trust and trust of others are interconnected and linked to beliefs: “Trust in others can support and enhance trust in oneself, and trust in oneself can support and enhance trust in others. Trust is fundamentally an attitude, an attitude based on beliefs and feelings and implying expectations and dispositions” (pp.104, 117). Rousseau et al (1998) add that, “Psychologists commonly frame their assessments of trust in terms of attributes of trustors and trustees and focus upon a host of internal cognitions” (p. 393). Thus, it is not only the attributes of the individuals themselves that influence trust, but also the beliefs each holds about what trust means, what is expected of trust, and how trust is supposed to be developed and maintained in relationships with others. For example, one participant said, “I have learned to trust my instincts [and doing this has] helped me move forward much more rapidly in the last five years than, I would say, the first ten years of my career” (I-5). This participant continued to reflect on the importance of trusting herself and how trusting herself made her a better leader. She reflected a common view that trust is important: self-trust is fundamental to being able to trust others. Ebert (2009) states, “[trust] belongs to one of the very important intangible assets in relationships” (p.66).

Rousseau et al (1998) state that “trust is a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another” (p. 395). That is, we will accept the risk (vulnerability) of trusting that we will keep our word and complete a project on time, because we have always followed through on our commitments in the past (positive expectations of behavior). Acceptance of risk and positive expectations of behavior are evident in a participant who said that she needed to find a trustworthy person to help her manage and grow the organization: “I said, who am I going hire that is smart, that I can

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rely on, and that I trust to run the plant, because they would have access to [proprietary information], and of course I thought of my bother” (I-1).

A person with a propensity to trust others is likely to foster and value trust in her relationships. Rousseau et al (1998) observe, “Relational trust derives from repeated interactions over time between trustor and trustee. Information available to the trustor from within the relationship itself forms the basis of relational trust” (p. 399). As one participant put it,

I’m in a peer-mentoring group now, about three years with this group. I was an original member, but we have a lot of trust and people are willing to throw their deepest darkest secrets out and I think that that builds trust but it also creates a safe environment for you to really share your fears” (I-1).

We often demonstrate trust in individuals when we communicate openly with them, confide in them, or seek their advice and guidance. We demonstrate our own trustworthiness when we keep our word and follow through on our commitments. Being reliable, demonstrating integrity, communicating our own expectations, and meeting the expectations of others are also part of trust and trustworthiness. As Kouzes and Posner (2010) observe,

The truth is that trust rules. Getting people to work together begins with building mutual trust. Before asking for trust from others, you must demonstrate your own trust in them. That means taking the risk of disclosing what you stand for, value, want, hope for and are willing and unwilling to do. You also have to be predictable and consistent in your actions; forthright, candid and clear in your communication; and serious about your promises. And, as we’ve learned so many times, leaders are far better served when they are forthcoming with information. There’s nothing more destructive to trust than deceit and nothing more constructive than candor. (p. 89)

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One participant said trust is valuable when leading others: “I don’t take for granted that they trust me implicitly. I have had some very interesting situations pop up because they [employees] trust me and I don’t take that for granted.” Barrett (2010) postulates, “In order to successfully lead others, there has to be a high level of trust in a group. Trust is the glue that holds people together and the lubricant that allows energy and passion to flow” (p. 73). Jackson and Parry (2011) state that there is a “growing interest in the relationship between trust and effective leadership between leaders and followers” (p. 116). Therefore, examining trust from the perspective of self and self-in-relationship with others is essential in the context of interpersonal relationships.

Valuing relationships (understanding others)

Beliefs about the importance of relationships, the support that is received from those relationships, the significance of relationships in development and learning, the desire to maintain peer relationships and build relationships with employees all form the basis for my connection to the concept of valuing relationships.

Understanding others is a way of demonstrating the value we see in relationships, and an extension of the process of inquiry into self, because it involves a discovery into thoughts, feeling, beliefs, biases, and expectations we have of others. Just as learning about oneself helps one grow, and develop, and become more aligned with one’s own values, learning about others helps one to relate to others in a way that extends one’s own empowerment as well as theirs. Therefore, a conscious and ongoing re-evaluation of self creates the opportunity for an individual to apply her self-development to how she relates to others. A holistic understanding of self, extended to understanding of others allows us to see that others have experiences that are different from our own and to know and understand that our perspective, and experience, and

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truth are only one part of a matrix. According to Jackson-Dwyer (2014), the types of behavior required to maintain relationships include openness, which is defined as “direct discussion and listening to the another [that] includes self-disclosure” (p. 126).

Short (1998) says that, “[If our] goal is to learn,” then mutual inquiry is required. “Mutual inquiry is, at its core, a method to learn what is true – about you, about the other person and about your relationship” (p. 68). Understanding others helps us to empathize, understand different points of view, communicate more effectively, and build stronger relationships. For Moskowitz (2005)

Understanding other people—from detecting their presence, to focusing attention on them, to labeling them, to making inferences about what they are like and what they are likely to do, to remembering them—is one of the most frequent and important activities we humans engage in” (p. 2).

Understanding others, in its most holistic form, is an integral aspect of valuing relationships, because to understand others takes a great deal of effort. If relationships were not important, then why take the time to learn about others? An individual who has this broader and more holistic perspective of others and the world around her is likely to demonstrate that relationships are important and will invest in maintaining those relationships.

Engaging in networks and seeking out mentors are other ways to demonstrate the value of relationships. According to Ragins and Verbos (2007),

[A] relational perspective [of mentorship] incorporates the idea that the concept of self is nested within and defined by relationships and that relationships have the potential to increase the generative capacity of individuals by providing new knowledge, resources, identities, and forms of psychological growth. (p. 92)

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The value we see in others plays a role in the way that we develop and maintain interpersonal relationships. The more we value our relationships, the more we are invested in developing and nurturing them.

When we value relationships with others, we listen to people when they need us, we make time for them, we provide support when needed, we coach or mentor them, we take their feedback into consideration, we consult with them, we value their perspective and opinions, we create structures to foster connection, we speak about them in ways that are thoughtful and respectful, and we recognize that the relationship itself is part of our value system and the role our value system plays in how we feel and how we perform. Block (2009) says, “Weaving and strengthening the fabric of community is a collective effort and starts from a shift in our mindset about our connectedness” (p. 10).

All the women in this study demonstrated that they valued relationships and expressed the belief that understanding them was important. They gave advice about the importance of women developing and maintaining relationships. The literature supports this line of thinking, and I have concluded that valuing relationships includes understanding others.

Values (understanding and living one's values)

Beliefs about the importance of values and how they guide decisions and direction in one's life, commitment to one's vision, and valuing interpersonal relationships provide connection to the concept of values. Part of understanding others includes understanding one's own values, because, as individuals we are primarily in relationships with others; it is important to know our own values so that one can (when necessary or appropriate) help others understand those values better and thus can, in turn, better understand each other.

Russell (2000) writes,

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England and Lee (1974) identified seven ways in which values affect leaders: 1) Values affect leaders' perceptions of situations. 2) Leaders' values affect the solutions they generate regarding problems. 3) Values play a role in interpersonal relationships. 4) Values influence perceptions of individual and organizational successes. 5) Values provide a basis for differentiating between ethical and unethical behaviour. 6) Values affect the extent to which leaders accept or reject organizational pressures and goals. 7) Personal values may also affect managerial performance (p. 76).

Leaders who understand how to develop highly effective teams know that two factors are critical: trust and values. Barrett (2010) asserts that “above all else, you have to develop a climate of trust...to create internal cohesion in a team [and then you must create] a shared set of values [along with] a shared set of behaviors that support the shared values” (p. 271). Teams are extended forms of interpersonal relationships.

Finally, understanding and living one's values is important in terms of interpersonal relationships, because understanding one's values helps guide how an individual makes decisions and sets a personal vision and goals. Barrett (2010) observes that, “values-based decision making allows you to create a future that resonates deeply with who you really are. For example, if you value trust, then you can make decisions that allow you to display trust” (p. 112).

Understanding one's beliefs helps us to discover what we truly value, and this process helps us to get in touch with what will ultimately drive us forward. Setting a vision requires a firm grounding in values, because to set a vision means to set ourselves on a course of action towards obtaining something. A vision should be something one truly aspires to, and it should be derived from something that fuels passion. Values help to clarify what is important to strive

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towards; as Kouzes and Posner (2010) observe, “Values drive commitment. You cannot fully commit to something that isn’t important to you—no one can” (p. 31).

Although an aspect of values is about self-awareness, it bridges into the area of self-in-representation with others, because values are also about the collective. It is through this deep understanding of self and others that one connects as a person to those we are in relationships with.

I conclude that values are an integral aspect of interpersonal relationships.

Behavioral integrity

Beliefs related to the women being aware that their actions need to be aligned with their behavior and their desire to model behaviors to the concept of behavioral integrity. Behavioral integrity is interconnected with interpersonal relationships because the assessment of how our actions align with our words often occurs within the context of relationships. Simons et al (2016) make the point simply: “All relationships in life are assessed through the lens of behavioral integrity” (p. 7).

Simons et al (2011) describe behavioral integrity as

...the perception that another person, group, or entity lives by his word –delivers on promises and enacts the same values he espouses. This construct is more basic than trust or justice, and is typically measured as the perceived pattern of alignment between words and deeds. (Abstract)

Leaders are most often judged on their behavioral integrity and the topic of alignment between what they say and do is being more and more researched from the perspective of leadership.

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Behavioural integrity can be demonstrated by keeping one's word and aligning one's actions to what one says. It is not enough to know what we want and intend to do it, we must follow through and act on our intention. If a leader says she values people's input, wants people to give feedback, but never changes anything based on feedback, what message is she really sending about her behavioral integrity?

Behavioural integrity is also connected to credibility. Andrews et al (2013) state that, "To the extent managers' actions or deeds match their words, the greater the credibility the managers hold in the eyes of their employees" (p. 372). Credibility is primarily determined through the eyes of others, and it doesn't matter if you think you are credible; others have to experience you as credible. This then makes the case for the connection to behavioral integrity. If a leader frequently does not align what she says with what she does, her credibility is sure to diminish. Without credibility, a leader loses the trust of her followers, because trust is interwoven into credibility. According to Englebrecht et al (2015), "A leader who actively demonstrates integrity through honesty, consistency and moral behaviour will be successful in building trust in the leader/subordinate relationship" (p. 7). It follows that a leader who does not demonstrate integrity will not build trust successfully.

Behavioral integrity, trust, and values are integral aspects of relationships with others, as is a demonstrated willingness to value our relationships by working at understanding those we are in relationships with.

Who we are in relationship with others is an integration of beliefs about self and others, which form the basis for developing and nurturing relationships. A person who has a propensity to trust, trusts others, values relationships, understands and lives personal values and operates with behavioral integrity is likely to foster trust, be willing to work at understanding others,

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seeks guidance and learn from others. It is important for that person to align her decisions with her values, to model behaviors she wishes to see in others, and demonstrably align actions with words.

Conclusion Three: Beliefs about self as leader (aspects of humanism and authenticity)

Leaders with positive self-concept, a holistic perspective on self and others, a propensity to trust and who live their values and display behavioral integrity are likely to demonstrate a commitment to deepening their own self-awareness. They are likely to demonstrate that they value the individual, recognize the interconnectedness of interpersonal systems (self, self-in-relationship with others, and self as leader), and believe that aspects of humanism and authenticity are important in the context of leadership.

In this research, I saw the integration of self and self-and-others manifest itself in the women's beliefs about their being people-focused leaders and having a desire to be experienced as an authentic leader. I have labeled these traits as aspects of humanism and authenticity, and they are evidenced through the investment of the women creating engaged workforces and cultures, by fostering learning and facilitating highly effective teams. The women also genuinely see value in others, investing time and creating structures that support people development and seeing the function of leadership from a holistic perspective and a human one.

Who we are as leaders is who we are as persons, and who we are in relationships with others. Mansouri and Mhunpiew (2016) make the point well: "In simple terms leadership is our whole person in action" (p. 134). One's beliefs about self and self-in-relationship with others are integrated into how we see ourselves as leaders.

Aspects of humanism

The beliefs of the women that are related to carrying forward the value of relationships from a personal perspective to valuing them in the context of being leaders inform my connection of their beliefs to humanism. I introduce aspects of the concept of humanism as a continuation to the idea of valuing others, because a leader who values others is likely to be a leader who embodies aspect of humanism.

Many of the definitions related to humanism include ideas far broader than I discovered in this research. I use the terms “humanistic management” (Mele, 2016) and “locus of human value” (Jackson, 2002), to limit notions of humanism to the domain of management leadership, which is the focus of my research and analysis.

A leader who operates from a perspective of valuing people as the “locus of human value” (Jackson, 2002), whose management is “orientated towards people” (Mele, 2016), and who promotes an analog to Spitzbeck’s (2009) “Center of Excellence model,” is likely to be a humanistic leader, one who invests in the development of people, creates structures that support learning within the organization, leads change and transition effectively, fosters empowerment, and seeks cultural alignment.

In Jackson’s (2002) conceptual framework, “locus of human value” is the term used to describe “management’s perception of the value of people in organizations” (p. 457). He theorizes that different countries manage people differently depending on where they sit on the spectrum of humanism and instrumentalism, with instrumentalism defined as “people are...seen as a means to an end” and humanism defined as “people...valued as individuals” (p. 455). He found that countries such as Japan view “people [as having] value in their own right” (p. 455), and because of that belief, Japanese managers are more inclined to take a “developmental

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approach that sees people as an integral part of the organization.” Leaders with this kind of thinking develop policies and practices that support “continuous on-job training,” and see “staff as part of a corporate community”(p. 455). Many of the women spoke in terms of their own effectiveness as leaders when they expressed how important people were for the overall functioning of the organization.

Peus and Frey (2009) believe that “The Center of Excellence model” is the result of leaders who apply “humanistic principles” (p. 260). The five principles they identify are problem solving, mistakes as learning opportunities, constructive confrontation and conflict, questioning and curiosity, and creativity and fantasy (Spitzeck, 2009, p. 263).

The principle of problem solving closely relates to the theories related to self-efficacy introduced earlier in this research. Peus and Frey (2009) state that an organization that has a problem-solving culture is one that displays “cognitions of accomplishments” (p. 263) which is basically an “I can do attitude it.” The women in this project reflected an attitude that, together with others, they could accomplish many things within their organizations.

The principle of mistakes-as-learning is self-explanatory and closely linked to the concept of self-efficacy, which is about seeing mistakes as learning opportunities. (Spitzeck et al, 2009).

Finally, Mele (2016) postulates that a leader takes a humanistic perspective when she “consider(s) the business firm as a community of persons, where they can flourish” (p. 47). Participants demonstrated this humanistic perspective when they spoke about their leadership roles primarily being about finding, developing and engaging the best talent, and working hard to keep those employees engaged and committed to their organizations long term.

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Elements of humanism are present when a leader believes the people she leads are the central focal point of how she operates within her organization, and as an expression of this belief, she creates structures, policies, procedures that support a people-centered approach. A humanistic leader sees herself as a member of a community, which is the organization, and understands the interconnectedness of the human and structural parts of that community.

Block (2009) states that “The social fabric of community is formed from an expanding shared sense of belonging, it is shaped by the ideas that only when we are connected and care for the well-being of the whole that a civil and democratic society is created” (p. 9).

A leader who carries forward her practice of “personal mastery” (Senge, 1990) into her relationship with others and into the organization she is a part of, connects to and cares for the wellbeing of the whole and therefore, contributes to the creation of an effective organization.

The literature suggests that the interconnected matrix described thus far includes aspects of humanism; this humanism is a continuation of who the individual is, who she is in relationship with others, and who she is as a leader.

Authenticity

Beliefs about the desire to be authentic, my experience of the women’s genuineness, openness, and humility as well as the expression of their willingness to be vulnerable led me to note the importance of authenticity.

For all of these concepts to exist and function together, the person who embodies them must integrate them in a way that is unique and true for her. Each embodiment will be different, making each leader potentially authentic. Brown (2010) states:

Authenticity is not something we have or don’t have. It’s a practice—a conscious choice of how we want to live. Authenticity is a collection of choices that we have to make

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every day. It's about the choice to show up and be real, the choice to be honest [and] the choice to let our true selves be seen. (p.49)

Understanding self and translating that into who we are in relationship with others is also critical to the way we think about authentic leaders. As Avolio et al (2004) observe,

We conceive of authentic leaders as persons who have achieved high levels of authenticity in that they know who they are, what they believe and value, and they act upon those values and beliefs while transparently interacting with others (p. 802)

Shamir and Eilam (2005) elaborate:

We define authentic leaders on the basis of their self-concepts and the relationships between their self-concepts and their actions. Authentic leaders can be distinguished from less authentic or inauthentic leaders by four self-related characteristics: 1) The degree of person role merger i.e. the salience of the leadership role in their self-concept, 2) The level of self-concept clarity and the extent to which this clarity centers around strongly held values and convictions, 3) The extent to which their goals are self-concordant, and 4) The degree to which their behavior is consistent with their self-concept (p. 399).

Furthermore, Gardner et al (2005) state,

First and foremost, an authentic leader must achieve authenticity, through self-awareness, self-acceptance, and authentic actions and relationships. However, authentic leadership extends beyond the authenticity of the leader as a person to encompass authentic relations with followers and associates. These relationships are characterized by: a) transparency, openness, and trust, b) guidance toward worthy objectives, and c) an emphasis on follower development (p. 345).

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Goleman et al (2013) consider being authentic an important component of emotional intelligence:

The art of handling relationships well, begins with authenticity: acting from one's genuine feelings. Once leaders have attuned to their own vision and values, steadied in the positive emotional range and attuned to the emotions of the group, then relationship management skills [self-awareness, self-management, and empathy] let them interact in ways that catalyze resonance. (p. 51)

According to Wildermuth and Pauken (2008),

Authentic leaders.... strongly and visibly demonstrate their values in their leadership practices. Furthermore, the authentic leader's interest in the well-being of the employee leads him to recognize individual differences, identify complementary talents, and help employees build upon their strengths. Not surprisingly, Avolio et al. (2004) found significant relationships between AL and employee engagement" (p. 127).

Engagement requires leaders in particular to live their espoused values in order to facilitate engagement in those they lead, and Wildermouth and Pauken (2008) note that, "the first requirement of an engaging leader is that she herself is engaged" (p. 126).

I conclude that being an authentic leader must be grounded in the self and having the courage and compassion to bring that self into relationship with others; in forming connection to others; and in being that self and that self-in-relationship with others when in the role of leader.

Advice giving

The beliefs the women in this study held about themselves became the advice they gave others and they gave their advice within the context of being leaders. Therefore, I have situated their beliefs and the construct of advice-giving within the framework as self-as-leader. The

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participants offered advice about women aiming higher and driving towards their goals, investing in having a mentor and peer networks, committing to their personal development, and being a role model of what they wish to see in others.

As Henricson and Nelson (2017) note, “Advice-giving [is] an interactional activity, where information is offered rather than requested and where the information is given as a means to forward a certain course of action” (p. 106). The information that is offered comes from one’s experiences and beliefs.

According to Peluso et al (2016),

The term advice refer[s] to any form of communication in which a consumer uses prescriptive language that conveys a call to action to behave in a specified fashion. As such, advice captures any recommendation, instruction, or direction as to how someone should behave in a given situation. (p. 2)

Advice-giving can be seen as an act by one person with an expectation of action by another person. Myers (1989) suggests this expectation is likely to be one of the conditions wherein beliefs influence actions, because the act of giving advice requires one to recall what she believes, based on life experiences, and pass that on: “Our attitudes [are] also readily brought to mind if we are made self-conscious, say by looking in a mirror, or if the attitudes have been strongly forged through life experience” (p. 559).

In a study related to the beliefs held by health practitioners, Gremeaux et al (2015) discovered that “several studies have suggested that the fear-avoidance beliefs of health care providers could influence how they manage patients” (p. 731). In other words, the beliefs of the general practitioners influence how they manage, in this case, lower back pain with a patient.

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Given a general practitioner's role as educator and advice-giver, we can see that beliefs can influence the advice given and the action taken with someone else.

In research that investigated the layperson's view of wisdom, Konig and Gluck (2013) concluded that "the present findings concerning both what wisdom is and how it develops suggest that some people view wisdom as strongly related to a certain attitude toward oneself" (p. 17). This means that some people view a person's beliefs about himself or herself important criteria for considering the person wise. This connection looks at beliefs and wisdom shared from a different angle, but it supports the idea that beliefs are likely the basis for the advice one gives.

Although the scope of this research does not extend to how beliefs influence actions, it does offer evidence that beliefs affect actions, and research related to advice-giving provides insight that beliefs do influence the advice we give. I conclude that the women I interviewed offered their advice in terms of beliefs they held about self, self-in-relationship with others and self as leader because beliefs inform the advice we give.

I will now summarize the overall conclusions of this research.

Conclusion summary

I have demonstrated that the conceptual conclusions identified in analysis of the data connect to relevant contemporary research literature and theories and provide the evidence required to validate my research. What emerges is a theoretical framework that conceptualized beliefs related to self, self-in-relationship with others, self as leader. This framework can now be used for further investigation into how beliefs of leaders influence how they lead; thus, future research could lead to the development of a substantive or formal theory. Furthermore, the

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process of this research can be used to duplicate this study for use with broader audiences and samples.

Implications

The implications of this thesis are that ten women shared their stories so that others could learn from their experiences. I am grateful to them, for without their openness, I would not have their experiences and insights to inform my research and analysis.

The effect of the participants' stories and my research journey is that I will never be the same as I was before I began. I have experienced something that has changed the way I see the world and how I will function in it moving forward.

I have developed a framework that can be of service to future women leaders by helping them to identify and understand their beliefs and ensure that the beliefs they hold serve them in ways that support their personal and professional prosperity, integrity and authenticity.

I hope to find ways to pass on their stories, insights, and wisdom to upcoming leaders and that this research project sparks an interest in the topic of leaders' beliefs for other researchers.

I believe this research contributes to the field of leadership studies; it is a focused view of women's beliefs that helps to broaden what we know and understand about women as leaders, expanding on the diversity that their perspectives offer.

I had speculated that this project would offer an opportunity for women leaders to become more self-aware and to connect that awareness to how they lead, thus helping them lead more intentionally and mindfully. We would only know if that were true, if we were to ask the women themselves. They made comments about enjoying the process and appreciating the opportunity to reflect, so that might be a possible follow-up.

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A core aspect of the design of this research project was for the researcher to be self-reflective and mindful. In Buddhist psychology, one of the benefits of being mindful is to help one end one's own and others' suffering. But I also think that the benefit of being mindful is that we create the space to be more compassionate with ourselves and, in turn, others. Compassion is perhaps the goal of self-discovery. Without compassion, we cannot move forward and release the past. Without releasing the past, we cannot grow. Without a doubt, this project facilitated the deepening of my compassion towards myself, a releasing of the past, and growth that I hope I will transfer to the world around me.

Ultimately this research project has been about growth, certainly for the researcher and, I hope, for others. In addition to being mindful about who we are, we also grow through sharing who we are with the world. The gift the women of this project gave was a willingness to share with a stranger their thoughts, feelings, and experiences for no other reason than to support another woman's journey. Perhaps the willingness comes from being given an opportunity to speak; or maybe the willingness is something one learns, and when an opportunity presents itself one does not hold back. I am not sure it matters which explanation you choose. In the end, what matters is that someone has been heard, something has been discovered, and something has changed.

Recommendations

There is significant opportunity to investigate this area further from the fields of psychology, leadership, and related disciplines; women can lead in any field. The recommendations that come out of this thesis are

1. Support women leaders to cultivate a positive self-concept, foster high self-efficacy, strengthen resilience, and help them learn to operate from a balanced internal locus of control.
2. Support women leaders in continuing to learn how to integrate key concepts of self into their relationships with others and as leaders.
3. Connect women to each other in ways that fosters mentorship and coaching and provide opportunities to tell each other their stories, as a way of passing the torch of wisdom.
4. Investigate how women leaders' beliefs influence their actions and ultimately what beliefs support the most effective kind of leadership.
5. Examine the beliefs of more senior executives to discover differences and similarities findings of this research.

Practical application of these recommendations might include empowerment of women, and leadership and organizational development. Cornwall (2016) summarizes this approach well:

Ultimately, [changing beliefs] is about enabling people to stand back and inspect critically the beliefs about themselves and others they take for granted, and then using this expanded understanding to inform an analysis of what needs to change and how they can be part of that process of change. (p. 346)

In the context of empowerment of women this research can be used to facilitate individual or

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group discussions related to beliefs and inform future research related to women's empowerment. According to Cornwall (2016),

Researchers found again and again that where empowerment initiatives include a dimension to actively engage women in critical, conscious, reflection on their own circumstances and to share that process with other women—what Paulo Freire called *conscientização* and what feminists might describe as 'consciousness raising'—there can be a marked enhancement of a programme or project's transformative effects. (p. 346)

This research can also be used as a conscious-raising topic for groups or individuals who are interested in understanding and learning from their own beliefs.

Accountability for leadership and organizational development and how those are used in an organization lies with the most senior executives. It is not just another responsibility of organizational development or human resources departments. Senior executives must take ownership, because the core of this research is about personal insight and awareness. Senior leaders who want better leadership in their organizations must be willing to model the importance of discovering one's beliefs about self, self-in-relationship with others and self as leader, as a way of demonstrating their own behavioral integrity, and building trust and credibility with those they lead. According to Yang et al (2017),

While only limited existing research focuses on the connection between belief systems and organizational change, the importance of a leader's belief system and leadership style to the process of organizational change is significant. Thus, there is a need to systematically investigate how a leader's belief system influences the process of organizational change. (p. 95)

This line of thought might suggest investigating how a leader's belief system influences

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leadership within the organization as well as the process by which leaders are developed.

This framework is best viewed as a way to start a dialogue, not as a prescriptive model. If any aspect begins to awaken consciousness, then it has done its job. The grander goal here is for people to have conversations that raise their awareness about what the beliefs of women leaders are and how those beliefs might impact leadership action.

Thesis Summary

In summary, this thesis has been about discovering what beliefs women leaders hold. Using grounded theory research, I was able to examine and synthesize the women's beliefs about self, self-in-relationship with others, self as leader. I have created a theoretical framework to conceptualize constructs that are derived from the beliefs. Finally, I have drawn conclusions and recommendations that focus on the empowerment of women, and leadership and organizational development.

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Appendix

The questions posed were as follows:

- 1a) Tell me about the journey of your career and how you got to where you are today?
- 1b) As you share your story and reflect on your journey, how do you feel about it overall?
- 1c) What were your expectations of your journey and career?
- 1d) What are your perceptions about what you have achieved?
- 1e) What do you think others perceptions are about what you have achieved?
- 1f) Tell me about what you have learned about your self along the way?
- 1g) How has your journey influenced or affected the way in which you lead today?
- 2a) Tell me about your most triumphant moment in your career?
- 2b) How did you feel about that experience?
- 2c) What did that feeling (s) mean to you?
- 2d) What was your perception of that experience?
- 2e) What were your expectations of that experience?
- 2f) How has that experience influenced or affected how you lead today?
- 3a) Tell me about the most significant challenge you have faced over your career?
- 3b) How did you feel about that?
- 3c) What did that feeling(s) mean to you?
- 3d) What was your perception of that experience?
- 3e) What were your expectations of that experience?
- 3f) How has that experience influenced or affected how you lead today?
- 4a) Tell me about a success you have had in the past few weeks as a leader?
- 4b) How do you feel about it?

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4c) What does that feeling(s) mean to you?

4d) What is your perception of that experience?

4e) What are your expectations of that experience?

4f) How does that experience influence or affect how you lead?

5a) What advice would you give a woman just beginning her journey in leadership?

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