

KEEPING MORE WOMEN IN THE LEADERSHIP PIPELINE;  
DRIVERS, FACILITATORS AND ENABLERS TO WOMEN'S ADVANCEMENT

by

Charlene Dawn Frail

A Thesis

Presented to

The University of Guelph

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of Master of Arts in Leadership

Guelph, Ontario, Canada

© Charlene Dawn Frail, May, 2012

## Abstract

### KEEPING MORE WOMEN IN THE LEADERSHIP PIPELINE; DRIVERS, FACILITATORS AND ENABLERS TO WOMEN'S ADVANCEMENT

**Charlene Dawn Frail**  
**University of Guelph, 2012**

**Advisor:**  
**Dr. Michele Bowring**

Increasing the number of women in corporate senior leadership ranks has been frustratingly slow, despite legislated and voluntary efforts to drive gender diversity. Many of the efforts to resolve this issue have centered on the individual perspective of fixing the women, and considerably less attention has been paid to the structural perspective of fixing the company. Live interviews were conducted with 11 women leaders from 4 companies to determine which organizational practices they felt helped advance their careers. The research revealed 7 practices in 3 categories (drivers, facilitators, and enablers) that were common across all companies and all leaders. *Drivers* include strong mentors, developmental opportunities, and effective feedback. *Facilitators* include flextime and telecommuting. *Enablers* include high performance and career ownership. By using these findings as a template, companies can improve existing programs or design new ones that include the practices that result in promotions. The ultimate goal is to help companies get more of the right women into senior leadership ranks by showing companies the critical few practices that get the best results.

Keywords: gender diversity, women leaders, glass ceiling.

## **Acknowledgements**

A project of this magnitude takes the hands and hearts of many people, not the least of which is my Advisor, Michele Bowring who guided this study and kept it focused on the critical issues. Nothing would have been possible were it not for the enthusiastic participation of the corporations, their HR leaders and in particular, the women leaders themselves whose candor and intense desire to make a difference was evident throughout this project. When I began this journey I did not realize the incredible friendships that I would build among members of my cohort. They were there in good times, bad times, and most important, ugly times. You know who you are and I am forever grateful. Finally, thank you to my family who supported me every step of the way. To my four sons who I hope will be at the forefront when it comes to promoting women in the workplace, and to my husband who always had my back when I needed him. Thank you to you all.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Acknowledgements.....	3
Table of Contents.....	4
Introduction.....	7
An ongoing problem.....	8
Past Recommendations.....	9
A complex problem with multiple roots.....	10
A problem worth solving.....	11
Purpose of the Study.....	12
Literature Review.....	13
A Century at a Glance.....	13
A Review of Canadian Statistics.....	13
Early Works on Structural Perspective.....	14
Gendered Institutions.....	15
Early Adopters Take Action.....	16
Case Studies.....	17
The Pipeline Theory.....	18
Recommended Gender Diversity Action Plans.....	19
Methodology.....	22
Overview.....	22
Process.....	22

Company Selection .....	23
Participant Selection .....	23
Interview Schedule Development .....	24
Data Collection .....	24
Data Analysis .....	25
Limitations .....	26
Results.....	26
Three Key Advancement Drivers .....	26
Women Leader Demographics .....	27
Company Profiles.....	27
Common Categories.....	28
Common Initiatives.....	28
Individual Elements That Drive Structural Elements .....	30
Discussion.....	31
Career Advancement Drivers.....	32
Strong Mentors.....	32
Developmental Opportunities .....	33
Effective Feedback.....	35
Career Advancement Facilitators.....	36
Flexible Workplace.....	36
Individual Enablers .....	38
Top Performance.....	38
Career Ownership .....	38

Strengths and Limitations .....	39
Future research and implications .....	41
Conclusion .....	43
References.....	45
Appendix A.....	50
Timeline (Historica-Dominion Institute, 2011).....	50
Appendix B.....	51
Glossary of Terms.....	51
Appendix C.....	52
Telephone Invitation Scripts.....	52
Appendix D.....	53
Interview Questions for HR Leaders .....	53
Appendix E.....	55
Questions for Women Leaders.....	55

## **Introduction**

The number of women in senior leadership roles is discouragingly low. The progress of women at the top has been miniscule, and in some cases, has fallen backwards (Grant Thornton International, 2011). Why do so many enter the leadership ranks, yet so few make it to the top? Where are we losing the women in the leadership pipeline? What can we do to keep them in? Governments, academics and organizations have long been searching to answer the question of why so few women make it to the highest leadership levels. Despite the efforts of many, gender equality in the workplace remains as much an enigma today as it did a century ago. There is evidence that some organizations are making significant progress when it comes to promoting more women to the top. In this report I take a closer look at the more successful companies to determine what common practices exist among them that the women believe are critical to their career advancement.

Historically, research in this area has fallen into two categories: the individual perspective, and the structural perspective (Fletcher & Ely, 2003; Kanter, 1977).

The individual perspective focuses on the women's ability and willingness to perform in leadership roles. Research topics in this area have included the number of women available for leadership, their education level, their supposed inherent (or lack of) leadership capabilities, and their drive and motivation to lead. This perspective also takes into account a woman's desire to have and raise children, and a lack of desire for the high-stakes, pressure-laden, competition-focused corporate lifestyle. This work has resulted in both legislated and voluntary changes. Employment equity and anti-discrimination laws were passed, and companies implemented female/family-friendly work policies. However, these efforts have not significantly increased the number of women promoted into the senior ranks.

The structural perspective, on the other hand, concludes that organizational and cultural issues are major contributors to a woman's advancement, some of which are outside her direct span of control (Kanter, 1977). This perspective is based on the hierarchies, symbols, values and practices at an organizational level that result in a culture, or a set of norms, that overtly and covertly hold women back from rising up the leadership ranks. The structural perspective has been studied to a much lesser degree, and has been found to be an instrumental factor associated with the glass ceiling (Goodman, Fields, & Blum, 2003). It has long been thought by some that the behaviours of people inside the organizations are responsible for the gender differences that exist (Acker, 1990) and that "the system itself seemed to have an inbuilt propensity for institutionalizing gender inequality" (Whelehan, 1995, p. 4). Dr. Kumra asserts that, 'If processes were truly "fair", then the system would correct itself. The meritorious would be rewarded and talent would be recognized in all its forms' (Kumra, 2009, p. 10). The structural perspective seeks ways to level the organizational playing field and make the processes fair for everyone.

### **An ongoing problem**

The issue of gender equality in the workplace is not a new problem, but it is a persistent one. Canadians have been working on this problem for over 100 years (see Appendix A), and yet a Catalyst research study showed that while women make up 36.8% of managers, only 17.7% are at senior levels and 14% occupy Board seats (Catalyst Inc., 2011). Sadly, there has been no growth in the number of women leaders in the senior roles in Canada in the last two decades (Wohlbold & Chenier, 2011). Early studies helped us to understand the problem and how to define some of the core issues: perception that leadership is masculine, women leaders defy societal norms (social role theory), and subtle forms of discrimination identified as the double-bind (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003). It seemed as

though a new language was created to describe the ideas associated with the glass ceiling (see Appendix B). Then much was done to determine if women were in fact capable of leading and if they even desired to do so. Women were found to be just as capable and as ambitious as men (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003; Palframan, 2005; Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995). The issues of time in leadership, education and leadership capability have all been studied, as has salary inequity.

Finally, the most recent wave of research has shown the benefit of family-friendly work policies, the impact on profits, and the career paths of working mothers (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995; Carter & Wagner, 2011; Hewlett, Sherbin, & Sumberg, 2009). Flexible work arrangements and leadership development practices have also been studied. While this is all-important information, we have not yet seen an explanation that addresses the root cause of this issue. Family-friendly policies, while welcome by many and linked to retention, have not shown a link to promotions, and both supervisor and culture influence whether or not people take advantage of these benefits (Schwartz, 1994).

### **Past Recommendations**

The solution to the problem has not been forthcoming, but recommended actions are plentiful. As far back as 1977, Kanter said that power is a key element of discrimination and gave implementable suggestions on how to balance it. Burke recommended monitoring career progress and supporting career advancement (Burke & Mattis, 2005). The Conference Board of Canada said specific actions needed to include both career planning and career development (Griffith, MacBride-King, & Townsend, 1997). In the 1980s, Heilman (1986) gave organizations ways to address applicant-screening discrimination. In the 1990s, Catalyst, The Conference Board of Canada and the Glass Ceiling Commission Report all came out with specific actions

(Mattis, 2001; Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995; Griffith P. , MacBride-King, Townsend, Inc., & Canada, 1997). Yet gender equity remains a prevalent issue in this day and age (Wood, 2008; Burke & Mattis, 2005). Researchers found that many organizations still feel that managing gender equity and equal opportunity is not the organization's responsibility (Mattis, et al., 1994). Some opinions about solving the gender-diversity issue concluded, "the cost of doing so has simply become too high" (Helgesen & Johnson, 2010, p. 14). Perhaps then, denial is at the root of this issue. If this is true, then this passive resistance will be the greatest challenge in addressing the gender equity issue (Rutherford, 2011). This alludes to the fact that a solution is still a long way off.

### **A complex problem with multiple roots**

The key dilemma seems to be the fact that there is no single solution to improve the advancement of women and minorities in the private sector (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995). The problem that started out as a human rights pursuit, evolved into one associated with "political correctness" and "organizational effectiveness" (Harel, Tzafrir, & Baruch, 2003, p. 258). In 1995, the 250-page Glass Ceiling Commission Report emphatically declared that the glass ceiling does in fact still exist (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995). The 'think manager-think male' bias is alive and well and is a global phenomenon (Schein, Mueller, Lituchy, & Liu, 1996). The challenge still seems to be the difficult question of how to keep the women leaders and develop them into senior roles, in such a way that they are willing to stay. In order to solve the problem of career paths for women, we have to stop looking at them from the career path model designed for men (Burke & Mattis, 2005).

Even with all this compelling evidence that the business case is strong, "progress produces backlash" and if we fall into the trap of looking at only half the problem – women's

issues irrespective of men's – we risk alienating one half of the workforce while we focus on helping the other (Dominguez, 1992). If we are to be successful in making these changes, we have to recognize that the majority of men do not view the lack of equality for women as a “loss” for women, but they do perceive the changes associated with increased equality for women as a “loss” for men (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995).

### **A problem worth solving**

The business case for gender equity in senior leadership roles is strong and clear about the fact that there is a direct link to organizational performance (McKinsey & Company, 2008). “Discrimination creates a waste of talent and reduces effectiveness” (Harel, Tzafrir, & Baruch, 2003, p. 258). In order for companies, and countries, to remain successful, they must build sustainability and competitiveness into their strategic objectives. Many sources report that a key factor to achieving this is to have greater gender equality and more specifically, more women in senior leadership roles (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003; Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995). Organizations must take advantage of the largest pool of talent possible if they wish to forward their strategic agenda and to compete sustainably in today's global environment. Companies that fail to present diverse perspectives, opinions and decisions will be dealt with harshly. Maximum productivity and engagement will be required from every worker at every level. This will require a more balanced and inclusive approach to leadership to drive creativity and innovation in this age of the knowledge worker. This will be even more important in the coming years, as predictions point to the future being “disproportionately female” (Hewlett, 2007, p. 15). Women have made up a slight majority of the population in Canada for the past thirty years, and the 2010 population in Toronto was almost 51% women (Urquijo & Milan, 2011).

This study is important because it will help Canadian companies figure out better ways to get more women into senior roles, and how to keep them there. When organizations have a high turnover rate of women in senior roles their ratios of promotable women is negatively impacted. This turnover also sends the wrong message to other women on their way up the ladder that what waits for them is not worth the effort (Griffith, MacBride-King, & Townsend, 1997). When women see women leaving, a vicious cycle is created where more women want to leave (Helgesen & Johnson, 2010). High-potential women will find an outlet for their ambitions if companies do not make the efforts to keep them. Women are not sitting on the sidelines and many are fully engaging their potential in entrepreneurial ventures. One forecast predicts that by 2025 women will make up 55% of entrepreneurs in the US, as this route has presented itself as an alternative to women who are confronted with the glass ceiling. The skills required to be successful entrepreneurs are similar to the skills required to be a successful executive (Knorr, 2011). The impact seems clear. If we do not work to keep them, we will have to compete against them.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Gender equity remains a problem in Canada and the reasons to continue to search for a solution are strong. The primary purpose of this research study is to determine what organizational practices are common across companies and that women leaders believe helped them get promoted. Thus this study will give us a set of result-driven-best-practices that Canadian organizations can use as a reference when analyzing their own gender diversity initiatives.

## **Literature Review**

### **A Century at a Glance**

The gender diversity journey is well documented and has had three major waves since the turn of the twentieth century (Whelehan, 1995). The first wave, 1900-1950, is characterized by the struggle for civic equality. The suffrage movement, which actually had its beginnings in the mid-1800s, finally saw some results as women became “people” under law at different points around the globe. In 1946, the United Nations established a Sub-Commission of the Status of Women after an impassioned plea by US delegate Eleanor Roosevelt. The Sub-Commission established a global perspective of the plight of women (United Nations). The next thirty years encompassing the ‘60s, ‘70s, and ‘80s, represent the second wave of feminism, which gained momentum with the 1968 Miss America protest (Redstockings Inc., 2000-2012). This wave focused on the plight of white, middle-class women and gave birth to the phrase ‘the personal is political’ (Whelehan, 1995, p. 13). The literature during this second wave is sparse as it relates to structural aspects of discrimination and diversity. The third, and current, wave of feminism began in the 1990s. This wave added minority groups of women not previously represented, and began to address backlash arising from the efforts of the second wave (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2007).

### **A Review of Canadian Statistics**

In Canada, the problem of gender equity both in society and in business has a long and well-documented history (Historica-Dominion Institute, 2011). The first Canadian women to vote did so in 1916. In the late 1970s, the Canadian Human Rights Act prohibited discrimination based on sex. The United Nations declared 1975-1985 the Decade for Women, and during this time, in 1982, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms gave equality to both sexes. The foundation

for women's rights was laid but a deeper look behind the statistics shows that Canada may not be as progressive on the gender equity stage as one might think. The Supreme Court of Canada unanimously denied women the right to hold government office in 1928. The British Privy Council would reverse this decision the following year. The United Nations listed Canada as the most desirable country to live in in the world in 1997, but then fell to seventh place when gender equality was included. This same year, the Conference Board of Canada said that for Canada's top companies, "women's advancement has emerged as a significant leadership issue" (Griffith, MacBride-King, & Townsend, 1997, p. 3).

While it is true that we have come a long way, it is quite clear that we still have a long way to go. Statistics Canada (2012) for example, paints a vivid and discouraging picture with regards to equal pay for women and men. In 1978, a woman earned \$.55 compared to every \$1.00 a man earned. Progress had been made by 1994 and a woman's wage had increased to \$.70, fifteen years after the enactment of equal pay legislation. The surprising, and most discouraging news is that in 2008, after thirty years of equal pay legislation, women's compensation had risen only to \$.71. This tells us that legislation has addressed only part of the discrimination issue. If we use Canadian wages as a benchmark of the progress women have made in gender equality in the workplace, we can see that we have not yet reached the halfway point of this journey.

### **Early Works on Structural Perspective**

A limited amount of literature was produced on the structural perspective of gender diversity in the early years of the feminist movement. Mary Parker Follett was referred to as the mother of management and she was well known during the first wave as a pioneer in the field of organizational theory. Diversity was at the forefront of her efforts and her wisdom included her

belief that “all human interaction held potential, and that it needed cultivating” (Smith, 2002). Management theorist Peter Drucker wrote the introduction to *Mary Parker Follett, Prophet of Management*, and says Follett was a, “highly influential as a lecturer and writer and consultant to business and government leaders on both sides of the Atlantic (Graham, 2003, p. 1).” Yet as influential as she may have been to early management theories, you are barely able to find her name in the modern literature. In 1963, Betty Friedan wrote *The Feminine Mystique* and highlighted the dissatisfaction of women who felt held back by societal forces and longed to be and do more. In the same year as Friedan’s book was published, the US enacted their equal pay for equal work legislation. In 1975, a New York study revealed that male characteristics were more commonly associated with successful managers, and the ‘think manager, think male’ era was born (Schein, 1975). Kanter wrote her much-referenced edition of *Men and Women of the Corporation* (Kanter, 1977) where she equates the preference for men leaders, to the preference for power. Kanter proclaims that “structural change is a necessity,” (p. Preface) and that the problems associated with women in organizations are rooted in “powerlessness, not sex” (p. 6) When we compare Kanter’s early work with the literature available today, we can see just how insightful she was when she identified one of the primary issues for women as a lack of available developmental opportunities. This insight is still valid today and is one of the three main career advancement drivers identified by this study.

### **Gendered Institutions**

In the early 1990s, Joan Acker brought to life the concept of gendered organizations (1990; 1992). Other authors supported this concept, as well as the paradigm that a valuable contributor is someone who is ready, willing and able to put work before any other area of their lives (Kolb, Fletcher, Meyerson, Merrill-Sands, & Ely, 2003). The idea of gendered

organizations claims that companies were created for men by men. These men lived in a world where they were the sole breadwinners and women were the homemakers and mothers. At work, like-minded men created processes and procedures that were born of the nature of the role differences between men and women. Leadership was almost exclusively a male domain in these organizations. The processes, therefore, became well defined, very strong, and never questioned. Then along come the women who had leadership skills, talents and desires. The established rules of the game prejudiced the playing field. Acker describes specific processes and instances where the elements of an organization and its culture are definitely male. The opulent corner office and the country club membership are seen to be symbols of power. Heavy reliance on war and sports metaphors had never been questioned up to this point. To move forward, Acker prescribes a more democratic and supportive set of processes. They were originally defined when there was a lack of women in the workforce, and they need to be redefined taking the strong presence of women into account.

### **Early Adopters Take Action**

The clear messages of the 1990s and early 2000s seem to have gotten some attention as we see evidence of concerted effort after the turn of the century. A Conference Board of Canada report concluded that ‘best practice’ organizations are capitalizing on gender differences and “not leaving gender diversity to chance.” This report also provided a framework for organizations to develop a diversity scorecard (Orser, 2000, p. 23). The message was also clear that the primary reason women leave organizations is lack of opportunity, and that “talented women managers will seek opportunities through flight, rather than having to fight dated preconceptions” (Orser, 2000, p. 24).

This same research from the Conference Board of Canada points to some less encouraging information. CEOs and women leaders do not agree on the degree to which attitudinal barriers exist for women. This is a key problem because many authors believe the CEO must demonstrate commitment in order for gender diversity initiatives to be successful (Orser, 2000; Kilian, Hukai, & McCarty, 2004; McKinsey & Company, 2007). If the CEO does not see a problem worth fixing, then that belief will cascade down through the organization, and resources will not be committed to find a solution. Add to that the fact that the women leaders did not agree with the HR professionals about which initiatives were more helpful in advancing their careers. The women leaders felt that even when they did have the CEO's support, that support was not focused on activities that were actually driving results.

### **Case Studies**

The Catalyst organization has studied companies around the world and the resulting case studies are publicly available. Sodexo uses a 'top-down, bottom-up, middle-out strategy to drive diversity and inclusion' that is focused on the success of all employees, including women (Catalyst, 2012). Women at IBM benefit from a Women's Diversity Network Group where they have the opportunity to learn and network with women from around the world. Kimberly-Clark's One Women's Interactive Network champions women in North America. Ernst & Young's efforts to include men in the diversity conversation is documented in a Canadian case study, as is Royal Bank's efforts to be recognized as a leader in workforce diversity (Catalyst Inc., 2011). One study published in 2004 (Kilian, Hukai, & McCarty, 2004) identified two categories of structural strategies that were successful in promoting gender diversity:

- 1) Initiatives focused on the organizational culture becoming more accepting and embracing of difference included: commitment by senior management, manager accountability, and training & education about gender/race equity.
- 2) Programs to support individuals and included: networks, mentoring programs, identifying and developing diverse top talent, and work-life balance.

This study presents a broad approach to successful diversity interventions and reports that companies have “strikingly similar tactics and goals”. An understanding of which practices are most effective across the greatest number of companies would have been helpful.

### **The Pipeline Theory**

During 2000, more literature focused on analyzing the pipeline theory. The leadership pipeline refers to the jobs in the organization that have progression paths that lead to the top positions. In reality, the problem is not about getting women into the pipeline, rather it is about giving them the “support needed to reach their full potential” once they get there (Knight Higher Education Collaborative, 2001, p. 6). But successfully managing the leadership pipeline requires more than replacement planning. An integrated approach is required that includes both succession plans and the necessary leadership development to make those successions successful (Conger & Fulmer, 2003). The question of *where exactly* in the pipeline we are losing the women is an issue that has not received much attention. One perspective shared by a senior diversity officer is that there is not one spot the pipeline is leaking, but that thousands of little leaks are causing the problem (Barsch & Yee, 2011). The location and nature of the leak is an important question to answer because it defines the baseline of the very thing we are trying to measure. The idea of the pipeline being blocked is an interesting viewpoint that has been

discussed in the most recent literature (McKinsey & Company, 2012). Finding and addressing blockages in the leadership pipeline may be a way of preventing more serious leaks.

The Conference Board of Canada has identified the need to increase the number of women in the middle management levels (Wohlbold & Chenier, 2011), and two senior women at McKinsey believe we need to pay more attention to the transition from mid-management to the VP level (Barsch & Yee, 2011). These begin to address the root cause, but fall short because they define middle management as including both managers and directors (Wohlbold & Chenier, 2011, p. 2). They are focused at too high a level in the leadership pipeline. Some authors view leadership as having at least four distinct levels (Charan, Drotter, & Noel, 2000) where the bottom two levels (i.e. Supervisor and Manager) require people leadership skills and the top two levels (i.e. Director and Executive) require business leadership skills. Women may naturally grow as people leaders but require development to make the leap to business leadership just as the men do. If we were to analyze the numbers of women at these four levels and take flow-through into consideration, I believe we would find a sizeable leak in the pipeline at the transition point of Manager to Director.

### **Recommended Gender Diversity Action Plans**

There is much agreement on the critical elements that are required to make a diversity program successful:

- i. flexible work patterns and careers (Conference Board of Canada, 2006; McKinsey & Company, 2007; Cabrera, 2009; Shriver, 2009);
- ii. inclusive culture (Greer & Virick, 2008; Shriver, 2009),
- iii. driven from the top leaders (Kilian, Hukai, & McCarty, 2004; Greer & Virick, 2008; McKinsey & Company, 2008)

- iv. accountability for diversity metrics and behaviours (Kilian, Hukai, & McCarty, 2004; McKinsey & Company, 2007; Greer & Virick, 2008), and
- v. development opportunities (Kilian, Hukai, & McCarty, 2004; Greer & Virick, 2008; Shriver, 2009).

Various authors have identified different models that are useful when developing a solution. Baxter lists areas for structural change, including setting boundaries and providing feedback (Baxter, 2010). Job structure is one area that has shown to be particularly problematic. Kalev suggests more work should be done related to developing work teams and having weaker job boundaries (Kalev, 2009). Different groups inside an organization can take practical steps. Of particular interest is a list of simple, tactical actions that need to be taken by CEOs and HR executives (Valerio, 2009, p. 48). These key areas of support help the women to thrive, and simultaneously deal with attitudes that might otherwise marginalize the contributions of valuable women leaders.

Organizations have tried different tactics to get more women into senior leadership roles, but have achieved limited success. The Conference Board of Canada proclaims that if “organizations are to achieve relative gender balance, significant change in talent management and leadership management practices will be required” (Wohlbold & Chenier, 2011, p. 20). One author boldly places the need for action squarely on the shoulders of organizations to make it “feasible for women to stay” (Cabrera, 2009, p. 41). One of these significant changes is a paradigm shift that acknowledges, “diversity is not self-managing” (Corporate Leadership Council, 2010). The necessity of new talent and leadership management practices is the subject of a study from the London School of Business that included 61 companies in Europe. A key finding was that the organizations successfully promoting women were doing more to prepare

the women for leadership roles. Perhaps the most basic challenge of all is recognizing that gender diversity initiatives are change initiatives. In order to make them successful, a strong change management process is necessary (Kottke & Agars, 2005). The actions, or inactions, on the part of the organizations have a direct role in “creating and maintaining the glass ceiling” (Goodman, Fields, & Blum, 2003, p. 477). A masculine culture that has existed for so long is not easy to see. People have come to view the culture as normal, but these norms “only appear unbiased” (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000, p. 128). Unconscious biases are becoming conscious, but more work is needed to find non-threatening avenues to reveal and address them. Declaring diversity is part of the company’s strategic direction does not necessarily translate into action. Legislation alone does not drive behaviour, and advocacy at the senior level is critical to success (Churchman & Cleo, 2008). One study found that even though organizations may have a clear diversity initiative supported from the top, “male middle managers often resisted...simply ignoring equality policies” (Acker, 1994, p. 505).

Many companies are successfully implementing gender diversity strategies that effectively promote women through the leadership pipeline. However, the current literature fails to clearly address which of these strategies are common across multiple organizations. Dr. Val Singh found the same issue when she did her research in 2002 (Singh, 2002). Similarly, authors in the UK have identified the lack of empirical studies of women in leadership as an issue (Stead & Elliott, 2009). This project attempts to advance current research in this area by addressing the following overarching research question: What organizational talent management practices do corporate women believe are most beneficial for promoting women leaders? In the next section I will discuss how I intend to answer this question.

## **Methodology**

### **Overview**

This study shows that organizations are taking a broad range of steps to help promote women leaders. However, literature that shows which practices women leaders believe are most effective in driving their advancement is sparse. This inductive, exploratory study approaches the question of best practices from the viewpoint of the women leaders. What are the activities that most successfully influence career progression, and of those activities identified, which are common across all participating organizations?

### **Process**

This research was conducted using in-depth interviews in order to achieve a deeper understanding of the women's experiences. The interview method included asking women leaders several open-ended questions about a list of corporate practices that was provided to them. This method was effective for get the women to focus on their career advancement and to talk freely about their experiences. This method also allowed me to probe for deeper understanding of their responses, which would ultimately lead me to identify the categories found in the Results section. The Research Ethics Board approved the process involving human participants, including increased confidentiality for the women participants to protect them from the risk of being identified by the organization. Another major consideration was protecting data integrity to ensure protection of the companies' reputations.

A total of fifteen people were interviewed from four companies, representing three different industries. All interviews were conducted during regular business hours and with one exception, all were sixty minutes or less. The first step was to interview a senior Human Resource leader at each company to determine the organization's talent management practices.

Several initiatives were identified as gender-specific, but most were not. The company practices were summarized into a list that was sent to its respective women leaders. The women discussed the items and the degree of impact the items did or did not have on their career advancement.

### **Company Selection**

Twelve companies were invited to participate and six agreed to do so. Two companies later withdrew due to time and resource constraints. All companies were listed on the FP500 - Financial Post 2010 Biggest Canadian companies by Revenue, and were selected using the following criteria:

1. Canadian headquarters in/near Toronto, Ontario
2. Minimum of 30% women corporate officers
3. Corporate women officers numbered three or more
4. Non-government organizations
5. Company received public recognition for gender related efforts by one or more of the following institutions:
  - a. Working Mother Magazine
  - b. Catalyst
  - c. Top Company for Women
  - d. DiversityInc Top Companies for Diversity
  - e. National Association of Female Executives
  - f. Great Place to Work Institute; Best Workplaces in Canada for Women

### **Participant Selection**

Two groups of participants were selected at each company. The first group included the top executive officer and the top Human Resources leader. Both of these individuals were

identified using an Internet search, and were contacted by telephone and invited to participate using a common scripted invitation (see Appendix C). The top executive officer was not interviewed for this study, but was contacted in order to invite the company to participate. This was also done to help expedite the participation approval process for the HR leader. A senior member of the HR team was chosen because of their level of access to potentially sensitive information. The second group of participants included women leaders who had received at least one promotion at their respective company. Each HR leader provided a list of eight women from which three names were randomly selected using eight shuffled playing cards. The three women were contacted via email and invited to participate in the study. If two or more women were unavailable to participate, an additional name was selected using the same process, until a minimum of two women from each company had agreed to participate. Companies were not told who was selected or who participated.

### **Interview Schedule Development**

Interview questions for the HR leaders were designed to cover all major categories of common talent management practices (see Appendix D). I restricted questions to information that would be readily available in a standard HR system. Interview questions for the leaders were designed to facilitate robust conversations around the list provided from HR. The leader's questions focused on the degree of impact that the corporate initiatives had on the women's career advancement (see Appendix E).

### **Data Collection**

A copy of both the interview questions and the consent form was sent by email to all participants so they could prepare in advance. Signed consent forms were obtained either electronically or by fax from telephone interviewees, and in hard copy for in-person interviews.

Interviews started with a discussion of the consent form, confidentiality details, and the process if the interviewee felt uncomfortable answering any of the questions. The beginning of the women leaders' interviews also highlighted additional confidentiality associated with their individual participation, and that their selection was random based on a larger pool of names. The interview process evolved slightly after the first two were conducted. Originally, I walked through all of the questions and then the full list of items that had been compiled based on the HR leader interview. This format gave me a lot of detail-heavy information about the specific initiatives. After the first couple of interviews I altered the question strategy slightly by asking the women to speak to the things that they felt really drove their career advancement. The resulting information had less detail and more story-based information, which I found to be much more robust. The probing then naturally led to richer details of their experiences and how those initiatives drove their promotion. I found that when going through the list in order, there was too much valuable time spent on covering things that were not relevant. The interviews that were conducted using the new approach did not cover all of the questions in detail as the first ones did, and some questions were even left out altogether. I do not feel this impacted the quality of the answers or the study, and instead enhanced it. All interviews were recorded and detailed transcriptions were created.

### **Data Analysis**

Narrative data analysis was conducted on the interview transcripts, which included multiple reviews of both the recordings and the transcripts. Initially, a large grid was created using company name along one axis, and talent management practice categories along the other. The grid was populated using the data collected from the HR interviews. The next step was to overlay the responses from the women leaders and common trends were identified. Common

trends were identified and where different terminology was used to refer to the same activity, the leader interviews were reviewed again and where necessary, the recordings replayed. This provided confirmation that the women were meaning the same practices. An example of this was the use of different words like advice and guidance to refer to what I interpreted as feedback. After reexamining the intention, in these cases they were all grouped under the term feedback. Since the key drivers were so clear in the women's minds, there was no need to use tone or other vocal indicators to understand underlying meaning in their responses. Vocal intonation was used to confirm conviction that items identified were in fact *critical* to advancement in the women's opinions.

### **Limitations**

This study contained a small sample size of both companies and women leaders. While multiple companies would have met all selection criteria other than geographical location, travelling to these locations would have been cost prohibitive and unmanageable given the timeframe for the completion of this study. The small sample size does not seem to have impacted the results based on the scope of this project.

## **Results**

### **Three Key Advancement Drivers**

The interviews with the women leaders revealed a small number of practices identified as critical to advancement. The responses were put on the grid using different coloured notes, which allowed the trends to clearly stand out. Three key practices for driving promotions emerged as common across all leaders:

1. Strong mentors

2. Developmental opportunities
3. Effective feedback

Some natural overlap existed between these three items. For example, a strong mentor was able to give effective feedback and was helpful in suggesting or procuring appropriate developmental assignments. Developmental assignments created an environment conducive to soliciting and receiving effective feedback. While a clear prioritization of the three items did not emerge, there was full consensus that having a strong mentor was the most critical. Each of these three drivers is covered in detail later in this report.

### **Women Leader Demographics**

Eleven women leaders participated in the study and their average tenure at their current company was 15.7 years. Several women mentioned they did not intend to stay so long when they first entered the company. The inclusive and flexible culture was given as the key reason for staying. This supports Orser's proclamation that talented women will not stay in unsupportive environments. Six women held line positions and five held staff positions. Only one leader did not have children.

### **Company Profiles**

The four companies in the study had global operations and all had diversity and inclusion as part of their strategic direction for over twenty years. This is consistent with literature that says fixing the gender equity issue requires a long-term focus. None of our companies expressly listed diversity or inclusiveness in either their vision or mission statements that were posted on the Internet. However, all four included them in the corporate values descriptions. None of the companies had defined gender quotas, but each had targets and measures that were reviewed at the highest levels of leadership. Each company had a specific person or team of people

responsible for diversity programs and initiatives. This is consistent with current literature that says visible support from the top creates a culture where inclusiveness is seen as important, resulting in the initiatives receive more resources and more recognition.

### **Common Categories**

Interviews with the four HR leaders (one male, three female) revealed six categories of talent management practices that were common across all four companies. The leaders articulated several initiatives, policies and practices associated within these categories. A few of the items were gender-specific, but the vast majority was not. The six categories were: Company Strategy, Senior Leadership Support, Performance Evaluation, Career Planning, Training and Development, and Inclusive Workplace. The categories used to group the survey questions were fairly consistent with the six categories that emerged during data collection. In one case, a sub-category emerged as more important and was used as a category in the grid, rather than the category that was originally identified in the survey. Specifically, the survey grouped questions about company strategy and senior leadership support into a single category called gender diversity. These two items proved to be separate in the minds of the company leaders.

### **Common Initiatives**

In all cases, the list of items in each category was extensive. The companies were providing many initiatives and committing vast resources to drive gender diversity throughout the organization. The women leaders had different experiences with items in categories that did not emerge as key drivers. In some cases they were virtually unaware of the programs that were provided, and in other cases they were very aware of most of the initiatives. This was most evident in the training and development category. This difference can be partially explained by the fact that some programs were designed for specific departments or types of jobs. The

department of the leader in the study may have determined the degree of exposure to certain types of programs. In other cases there were so many programs available that the leaders did not have the time to learn about them all.

Several initiatives that the leaders did not identify as critical to advancement were common across all four companies. The women did feel, however, that these elements helped maintain an inclusive culture making their company a great place to work. They did express that these factors played heavily into their long-term retention. Flexible workplace policies came up repeatedly and the women felt the companies understood there were significant responsibilities outside the workplace. Flexibility as to when and where the work got done was extremely important to the women, even though the nature of their work roles permitted more flexibility for some women compared to the others. One leader eloquently captured the spirit of respecting the whole person not only for what they bring to the workplace, but also to their family and community.

People come to work as fully formed human beings with all kinds of interests and responsibilities outside of work. The more we can mesh the passion and the enthusiasm they have for the other parts of their life with their work life and make it work for them, I honestly, honestly, to my core believe you get a more productive employee, a more creative employee, and a more committed employee. There's a respect for who they are beyond the walls of the office. If that's respect as a parent, or perhaps they are training for the Ironman... caring for siblings... caring for parents... perhaps they volunteer in the community in a way that could use some flexibility with work, that gives them a lot of satisfaction and sense of accomplishment. It's a respect for all of that, regardless of what it is... I think the better we can respect them for their whole being, the better it becomes for everyone.

A common practice of note was an extremely robust performance evaluation process. Of particular interest is that leaders at certain levels receive a performance rating made by group

decision, and not a rating assigned arbitrarily by their leader. Candid discussions were held to ensure adequate evidence existed for the suggested rankings. In most cases, a member of the HR team would facilitate these discussions and would address any bias that became evident. One leader expressed the need to continue to be aware of unconscious biases.

We are way past the conscious biases. But sometimes you still see the unconscious biases. You do not see it as much at the junior level...it's when you get more senior and people are starting to evaluate the softer skills a lot more and looking at your presence & wardrobe... I think that women start out at a disadvantage.

All companies viewed career planning as distinct from succession planning. The succession planning process ensured a diverse slate of candidates for key jobs and senior leaders were heavily involved in this process. The career planning process ensured high potential employees were being tracked and placed into development opportunities that would build skills to ready them for the next level of responsibility. The goal was to integrate these two processes to ensure that business goals and professional goals were aligned. This reflects the research on successful pipeline management that indicates an integrated approach is necessary.

### **Individual Elements That Drive Structural Elements**

This research was intended to identify structural elements that drive promotions for women leaders. Two specific items came out from the women leaders as well as the HR leaders, as critical enablers for the structural elements to be effective: high performance and career ownership. The women in this study were all self-proclaimed high achievers who regularly received high ratings in performance evaluations. They all felt they had taken every opportunity to learn and to grow, and ensured they brought value to the company through top performance. Some of the women had received internal awards for exceptional performance. Several

commented that they felt their excellent performance and consistent results neutralized any negative bias based that may have occurred because of their gender.

The women felt strongly that they needed to take ownership for their careers and self-advocate. Some even expressed the sentiment that if they had not done so, they did not believe they would have advanced as far as they did. In some cases specific programs or processes existed to support these efforts, and all indicated that if they asked for help they received it. A common element among the women was that they got much of this information and support from their mentors.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this project was to determine if there are common practices across all the companies in the study, and that all the women leaders believe helped drive their promotions. A senior HR staff member was asked about available talent management initiatives and the women shared their career advancements stories during the interviews. The results can be grouped into three specific themes. The first theme includes three distinct corporate practices that emerged as career advancement drivers. The three drivers are strong mentors, developmental opportunities, and effective feedback. This finding is in line with the study of 61 companies in Europe that found the companies that did a better job of preparing women for leadership roles were more successful in promoting more women into them. The second theme involves two practices the women said were critical facilitators in that they made it easier for the women to perform at high levels. These two practices are flexible work hours and telecommuting. They were grouped into a single practice called flexible workplace. The third theme reveals two key individual enablers that made career advancement possible: top performance and career ownership. Even though this

study sought to identify structural elements to women's career advancement, all the women were adamant that their own behaviour was critical to the success of the corporate initiatives.

The findings in this study are consistent with previous research about effective diversity programs. This study builds on previous work by synthesizing a long list of initiatives into a list of the critical few best practices. In addition, the results take into account important contextual elements that, in the minds of the women, were critical considerations.

### **Career Advancement Drivers**

#### **Strong Mentors**

Without exception, having strong mentors along the way was the number one driver of advancement for the women in this study. There was a wide variety in the experiences associated with these mentors among the women, however. The stories ranged from having one key, senior-level supporter for many years, to having multiple mentors across various parts of the business for different developmental needs. Some found the formal mentoring programs very helpful in getting them set up with mentors, and others found that the informal relationships that naturally evolved were much more effective. Regardless of nature and number, the underlying reality is that the women claim they needed, wanted and received help to advance through the ranks.

This is my first large, large company and the pathways and processes are different in a large company. So you have to have learned the rules of the road in a large company and there were a lot of people who helped me.

The immediate supervisor often played a key role in the career management process, whether or not the women saw them as mentors. The supervisor was the one who most often discussed the leader's desire for increased responsibility, and found developmental opportunities to ensure the needed skills and experience were gained.

Sponsorship behaviours were key, particularly as the women reached the higher levels in the hierarchy. As each woman described the relationship they had with their mentors, it was clear that these advisors were strong advocates for the women and had a keen interest in their success. One woman shared, “I had a supporter in me. He saw something in me many years ago... and he called me and said I would like to be your mentor... I would like to help you.” While the women acknowledge that having an advocate in the boardroom was necessary, so was the person who gave them critical career and developmental advice. This was not always the same person, nor did it need to be. Both sponsoring and mentoring behaviours were described as advancement drivers. With regards to getting that critical advice, one leader said what was important was, “being able to have conversations with people in leadership roles that are open and honest and where the leader is really willing to give you the straight goods.” The mentoring was described as strong when it was integrated with sponsorship behaviours. These findings support the research done by Catalyst. In their report titled *Why Men Still Get More Promotions Than Women* (Ibarra, Carter, & Silva, 2010), they found that mentorship to develop skills was not enough, and that sponsorship in the form of advocacy behaviours was critical to the success of women leaders. One woman describes her experience:

I honestly think that if you do not have somebody pushing for you, it's going to be very difficult. People do not get promoted based on written reviews in a file. There's way too many people that [are top rated] around here and we cannot promote them all, and really you've got to have somebody in your corner pushing for you.

### **Developmental Opportunities**

The opportunities the women described as key to driving advancement achieved two main objectives. First, they built skills that were required to be successful at the next leadership level such as the ones shared by this leader, “project management skills, relationship skills, there

were many things that happened that there were battles over and how you deal with those battles... you evolve. Huge learning.” Second, they provided increased visibility to various people across levels and across departments. The visibility aspect of these opportunities may have influenced the leader’s perceived power. Authors have identified lack of power as a problem when it comes to gender issues (Kanter, 1977; Jacobson, 1985). Women from very different industries share their thoughts on these two objectives:

They assigned [someone] who was happy to help me with it who was there to catch me when I ran off the side of a cliff. That’s really important. Being allowed to try things being allowed to risk maybe not doing them perfectly the first time and having someone there to help you.

...assigned mandates that are going to give you that broader exposure to different leaders across the organization. When people are talking about individuals at the leadership table, if only one person knows of that particular woman, there’s not a lot that’s going to be said.

The opportunities themselves came from different places and from different people. In one case, the woman’s direct leader provided opportunities for her to develop within the existing department by taking on several cross-functional roles. Another woman volunteered to lead key committees or task forces. Another found opportunities to develop in different departments by taking on job-rotation opportunities. While all cited these were excellent opportunities to learn and grow, critical to advancement was that they performed well on these tasks and proved their capability. One woman described her success by saying, “They put me in the right place that really allowed me to shine.”

As noted earlier, Kanter’s (1977) work identified development opportunities as one of the three primary issues associated with women’s lack of progress, which is still a key factor today. There is a risk associated with these developmental opportunities that must be acknowledged.

Learning something new often requires increased output of time and energy. Women in this study reported that having flexible work arrangements allowed them to put in the extra hours and still successfully manage their other commitments. One woman described how she handled the situation, “When the children were younger I had to juggle myself because it was a priority for me to be there before they went to bed, but I did not mind working later on into the evening.”

Developmental opportunities can sometimes be problematic for women in global organizations where international experience is required. In some cases these companies sought creative ways for women to gain these experiences without having to relocate them. In other cases, women expressed a willingness to move earlier in their careers when they did not yet have so many responsibilities. This creates a dilemma on the part of the organization in that relocation is an expensive risk when the employee is untested. This points to the need for earlier identification of high-potential employees and may require a different path for women, as this leader points out:

International experience is viewed very highly... but the frustrating thing is that we only tend to be confident to move people after they've been here for five years and by that time you've got a house, a husband, a job and you may even have a kid, so especially as a woman, you are not going to want to move... We need to really change that paradigm and move people at the beginning before they have all these attachments because that's when they'd be willing to do it.

### **Effective Feedback**

All of the women in this study proactively sought out feedback if it was not already forthcoming. The distinguishing factor that made the feedback effective was that it helped them understand where they had made mistakes and gave them direction on how to overcome weaknesses. They all expressed that they had been given positive feedback, as is often the case

with top performers. However, they were also given the messages that were tough to deliver and tough to receive.

I had this lady... for a few years and she was really honest and good to give me feedback and on the other side I was ready to receive it... I did not realize that maybe I had been given feedback and maybe I was not taking it how I should have been taking it... She was the person at the time when I opened my mind to it she was giving it and I was taking it and it was definitely helping me... She was a really blunt woman and I think I appreciated that. She was authoritative... I fully respected her in her leadership role... She was willing to say it just as it was. She did not feel like she had to hide or skirt around it, she basically said it as it was and gave me examples, and that hit home.

The feedback that was most effective often came from their direct supervisor or a key mentor, although in a small number of cases the feedback came from clients or peers. The leader accepted the feedback as genuinely helpful because it came from someone who truly cared about them and their career. This often increased the desire to successfully implement the feedback and perform better in subsequent tasks. This not only made a good impression on the people around them, but also continuously improved the quality of their performance, as identified by this leader:

I was lucky to have a boss who was not shy about giving unvarnished feedback and was very big on coaching and feedback and also his boss was big on coaching... so we had a great mentoring circle. The other key tool we use is the 360 process... you get back information about strengths and weaknesses and what you can work on, so that was a bit of a learning experience too.

## **Career Advancement Facilitators**

### **Flexible Workplace**

Historically, companies have spent a lot of time and money to implement structures, processes, and benefits related to flexible work arrangements. Many of the efforts from

feminism's second stage reaped tremendous rewards for women who chose to work outside the home. The companies in this study made many programs available, and various women spoke about taking advantage of these work-life balance benefits at different points in their career. The need for such an environment is supported by Cabrera's work and her assertion that companies have a significant role in making it "feasible for women to stay." One senior leader in this study agrees that there is a business impact associated with this and said, "If we do not do a better job to try to make it worth their while then we are not going to grow to the extent we need to." Another leader expresses the business impact in another way:

I'm hoping I'll be evaluated on my results and quite frankly if this is not the kind of workplace that can accommodate me arriving at 9:00 then I'm in the wrong place and it will be time to take my skills and my career path elsewhere.

The practices that received the greatest accolades from the women related to their ability to advance in their careers were the telecommuting and flextime options. These women are all high achievers willing to make the sacrifices necessary to have a successful career. The flexible workplace allowed them to have that successful career without having to make unnecessary sacrifices. As one leader says, "We all put in way more than 40 hours a week, but I have this incredible flexibility, and that's why I stay." Having a flexible workplace afforded them some leeway to get the work done at a time and in a place that also enabled to manage non-work related obligations, which for most of the women involved children.

Our company uses the term work-life balance because everyone has to figure out what works for you. Quite frankly in an executive role you know you are not going to be working 40 hours a week. How do you balance and structure it so it works for you and your lifestyle.

With many high-tenured women in the study, they recounted memories of the days when their company was not able to provide this option. Mindsets changed over the years about an employee's ability to be productive at home, and technology advanced to a point where working remotely became a viable option.

## **Individual Enablers**

### **Top Performance**

All the women felt that being an exceptional performer was the price of entry in the leadership ranks, especially at the senior level. Some shared the perspective that it was easier to show top performance earlier in their career when their role had more of a technical flavour. To progress into and through the senior ranks required more than just talent. Many women commented that they had the opportunity to show their strong capabilities when they were put onto developmental projects. A key element to making this work successfully for career advancement was as one respondent put it, to work on "things that matter." This plays nicely into the hand of female workers who commonly believe that all their hard work will eventually get noticed. This is more likely to occur in a project with high visibility.

A lot of it is finding the way to get experience in the things you have not been able to demonstrate your ability in yet, and you have to have help to get that. Those things are not just going to fall out of the sky into your lap.

### **Career Ownership**

According to the women in the study, taking ownership of their careers involved behaviours such as expressing an interest in more senior roles, asking and looking for both internal and external development opportunities, and assertively advocating for themselves. This is an area where most women expressed a need to be aware of how their behaviour could be perceived, and some political maneuvering was part of their strategy.

In a boardroom, if a middle-aged man comes in and looks put together and looks the part, there is an automatic assumption of his competence unless he screws it up and proves otherwise. For the women, it's the reverse. Women have to prove themselves first. I do not think people realize that they look at people that way, but that's what it is.

The women also found that they had to drive the process differently as they made their way up the leadership hierarchy. The vast majority wished they had understood this dynamic earlier in their careers, rather than assuming their hard work would be recognized on its own merit and that they would be rewarded accordingly. All commented that when they did make their desires known, their leaders and the company played an active and enthusiastic role. This points to research that says there is an assumption by both men and women, about what women do and do not want out of their careers, especially if they are mothers (Hoobler, Lemmon, & Wayne, 2011). This also supports previous work on gendered institutions that exerts there is a preconceived notion, based on a male work model, of what it takes to be successful. If companies were to take a more proactive role in having career conversations with women much earlier, it may help meet the need identified by the Conference Board of Canada for more female middle managers.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

A key strength in this study is that it draws its conclusions from the perspectives of women leaders who have actually received promotions at the companies they are currently working for. This enabled them to speak directly to the structural practices that were drivers and facilitators in getting promoted. The second strength of this study is that it focused on practices that *all* the companies were using *and* that *all* the women felt were critical. This strength helps to deliver on my desire to not simply figure out what works, but to figure out what works best. Corporate resources are limited. We need to show companies how to get the greatest return on

the investment on their gender-equity dollar, if we are to help get more women promoted. If we cannot provide solutions that fall within the company's constraints, then we may never be able to solve this problem.

Three limiting factors exist within this study. First, the company and leader sample size was small. This was necessitated by the limited scope of the Masters project, but nonetheless points to a need to be aware that these results may not be transferrable across all industries, companies, or departments. The fact that women were selected who were happy with their companies and their careers may have been simply the luck of the draw. A larger sample may have produced different results. An interesting next step to further this research would be to take one company and test the findings against the larger population. The second limiting factor that must be highlighted is the type of companies that were considered for this research study. The companies were chosen from the Financial Post 500 biggest companies by revenue size. In my consulting practice, I come across companies that are not on the FP500 list that have extraordinary gender-diverse cultures. It is possible that the organization's large size adds a level of complexity when it comes to diversity issues, that smaller companies, or privately held companies, do not have to navigate. Again, future research would benefit by comparing the practices and results to different types of organizations. Finally, with such a complex problem as the gender-equity one, there are many factors involved. Factors not addressed in this study are the initiatives in the talent management categories that did not emerge as drivers or facilitators in the women's opinions. However, these categories were common across all four organizations making it necessary to question whether these things played a role, such as formal training opportunities.

## **Future research and implications**

This project supports the viewpoint that the glass ceiling does exist. It is important to remember that the companies selected for this study were chosen based on their gender-related efforts and their financial success. They represent Toronto-based FP500 companies that have been the most successful implementing gender diversity practices and reaping the rewards. However, everyone acknowledges they still have much work to do.

We do have a lot of very powerful leaders.... [we] have done a very good job of increasing the ratio... it may not be all the way where it needs to be yet but I have to say from what I've seen [we've] done an excellent job in that area.

The playing field is not level for women and visible minorities. These companies are opening eyes and taking a proactive approach to remove barriers, biases and obstacles. The adage that what gets measured gets done may explain some of the success these companies are having. Gender statistics are being measured and those numbers are taken right to the top. This is consistent with the research that says the CEO must show visible commitment to diversity if the initiatives are to have a successful impact.

More rigorous research is necessary to better understand the details behind the key advancement drivers. This work has been started by organizations like Catalyst who have begun the research mentorship vs. sponsorship topic. Understanding this driver better may prove to be the most beneficial for companies. Mentoring programs may be the practice that holds the most leverage since they tend to be relatively low-cost initiatives. One top executive recognized the potential mentoring has when she shared, "We've gone through a lot of cost reduction so we do not do a lot of training but there's so much we can do to support each other and I do not think we do enough of it."

Another important direction for this research would be to understand if these key drivers are equally effective in companies that do not share the other commonalities that existed among the companies in this study. Someone's career can be influenced by many invisible factors, and to understand the relationship between drivers and non-drivers, such as leadership development training and performance evaluation processes, would be valuable. The performance evaluation process was very robust at all companies in this study but were not included in the results because the women were not unanimous in their opinions about its importance. For example, this leader is not convinced they drive advancement:

To me those formal type reviews often are not really going to be what gets you there. It's going to be working with somebody that you feel comfortable with that you can talk to about where you want to go, what you need to do and who's going to help you get there"

However, based on the research available regarding the bias against women in a subjective performance evaluation process, it is my firm belief that the appraisal system is worthy of further study.

All companies in this study were large global organizations. Understanding what the drivers are in companies that have a national or regional scope would provide valuable information about solutions that large companies choose not to explore because of consistency and scalability. Government organizations were deliberately excluded from this study, as were non-profit entities. What can we learn by finding similarities among diverse organizational structures and core purposes?

Finally, if we are to truly move the needle on getting more women into senior roles, we need to know how we can measure the amount of bias in an organization such that the organization can measure its impact? Further research would be helpful to identify the diversity-inhibiting biases that impact promotion, and then create a tool to reveal the degree to which they

exist. With an objective, empirically based tool, perhaps the conversation around the need for change will be a bit easier to initiate.

This study has a major implication for future corporate gender-diversity initiatives. Companies can use these findings as a template for assessing current offerings or as a formula for creating a new program. This research presents a core program of the critical few initiatives that bring the greatest results and therefore provides an effective roadmap for getting started.

“There is a secret sauce here. There is a resilience and a commitment to the company that is unusual.”

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this project was to determine if there are common practices across all the companies in the study, and that all the women leaders believe helped drive their promotions. This study found three key drivers and two key facilitators to career advancement, that all fall into the defined structural perspective. These structural activities are: strong mentors, developmental opportunities, effective feedback, telecommuting and flextime. However, this study also found that two elements from the individual perspective played heavily into the ability to get promoted: top performance and career ownership. This finding is significant because it points to the danger of trying to give a simple solution to a complex problem, based on a one-sided view. Historically, research has focused on either the structural or the individual perspective. However, in the case of career ownership, there is a strong connection between what the employee must do and what the employer must do. Both parties must be actively involved if the employee is to have a successful career that also meets corporate objectives. This calls for a third perspective that approaches gender equity from a holistic approach. Instead of asking what organizational talent management practices are necessary, we should be asking what are the

mandatory elements that must be present, in order for gender equity to become a reality. Perhaps that will be the focus of the next wave of academic research.

## References

- Acker, J. (1994, Winter). Book Review: In the Way of Women: Men's Resistance to Sex Equality in Organizations. *SIGNS*, 19 (2), pp. 504-506.
- Acker, J. (1992). From Sex Roles to Gendered Institutions. *Contemporary Sociology*, 21 (5), 565-569.
- Acker, J. (1990). Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations. *Gender & Society*, 4, 139-158.
- Burke, R., & Mattis, M. (Eds.). (2005). *Supporting Women's Career Advancement: challenges and opportunities*. Northampton, MA: Edward Elger.
- Baxter, J. (2010). *The Language of Female Leadership*. New York, USA: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Barsch, J., & Yee, L. (2011, April). *Unlocking the Full Potential of Women in the US Economy*. Retrieved November 27, 2011, from McKinsey & Company ; Organization: [http://www.mckinsey.com/client\\_service/organization/latest\\_thinking/unlocking\\_the\\_full\\_potential.aspx](http://www.mckinsey.com/client_service/organization/latest_thinking/unlocking_the_full_potential.aspx)
- Brown, D., Brown, D., & Anastasopoulos, V. (2002, May). Women on Boards: Not Just the Right Thing... But the "Bright" Thing. *Organizational Excellence*. Ottawa, Ontario, Canada: The Conference Board of Canada.
- Cabrera, E. (2009). Fixing the Leaky Pipeline: Five Ways to Retain Female Talent. *People & Strategy*, 32 (1), 40-45.
- Carter, N., & Wagner, H. (2011, March). *The Bottom Line: Corporate Performance and Women's Representation on Boards (2004-2008)*. Retrieved November 28, 2011, from Catalyst; Research and Knowledge: <http://www.catalyst.org/publication/479/the-bottom-line-corporate-performance-and-womens-representation-on-boards-20042008>
- Catalyst. (2004). *Women and Men in U.S. Corporate Leadership: Same Workplace, Different Realities?* New York: Catalyst.
- Catalyst Inc. (2011, March). *Women in Management in Canada*. Retrieved November 27, 2011, from Research and Knowledge: <http://www.catalyst.org/publication/247/women-in-management-in-canada>
- Catalyst Inc. (2011). *Browse Research & Knowledge*. Retrieved April 24, 2012, from Catalyst's Research & Knowledge site: <http://www.catalyst.org/page/64/browse-research-knowledge>
- Catalyst. (2012). *Sodexo - Making Every Day Count: Driving Business Success Through the Employee Experience*. Retrieved May 16, 2012, from Research & Knowledge: <http://www.catalyst.org/publication/526/sodexomaking-every-day-count-driving-business-success-through-the-employee-experience>
- Churchman, S., & Cleo, T. (2008). Delivering Gender Diversity: Beyond the Business Case. *Strategic HR Review*, 7 (5), 17-22.
- Charan, R., Drotter, S., & Noel, J. (2000). *The Leadership Pipeline; How to Build the Leadership-Powered Company*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Conference Board of Canada. (2006). *Women Leaders on Leadership: Much to Laud, Much to Lament*. Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada.

- Conger, J., & Fulmer, R. (2003, December). Developing Your Leadership Pipeline. *Harvard Business Review*, pp. 76-84.
- Corporate Leadership Council. (2010). *Increasing the representation of women in senior management positions*. (W. P. Ltd., Producer) Retrieved 02 27, 2012, from Workinfo.com: <http://www.workinfo.com/free/downloads/97.htm>
- Eagly, A., & Karau, S. (2002). Role Congruity Theory of Prejudice Toward Female Leaders. *Psychological Review*, 109 (3), 573-598.
- Eagly, A., Johannesen-Schmidt, M., & van Engen, M. (2003). Transformational, Transactional, and Laissez-Faire Leadership Styles: A Meta-Analysis Comparing Women and Men. *Psychological Bulletin*, 129 (4), 569-591.
- Eagly, A., Karau, S., & Makhijani, M. (1995). Gender and the Effectiveness of Leaders: A Meta-Analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117 (1), 125-145. West Lafayette, Indiana: American Psychological Association, Inc.
- Encyclopaedia Britannica. (2007). *Feminism Reimagined: The Third Wave: Year in Review*. Retrieved April 15, 2010, from History and Society: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1376924/Feminism-Reimagined-The-Third-Wave-Year-In-Review-2007>
- Dominguez, C. (1992). The Glass Ceiling: Paradox and Promises. *Human Resource Management*, 31 (4), 385-392.
- Federal Glass Ceiling Commission. (1995). *Good For Business: Making full use of the nation's human capital*. U.S. Federal Government, U.S. Department of Labor. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Fletcher, J., & Ely, R. (2003). Introducing Gender: Overview. In R. Ely, E. Foldy, & M. Scully (Eds.), *Reader in Gender, Work, and Organization*. Malden, MA, USA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Goodman, J., Fields, D., & Blum, T. (2003). Cracks in the Glass Ceiling; in what kinds of organizations do women make it to the top? *Group & Organization Management*, 28 (4), 475-501.
- Graham, P. (2003). *Mary Parker Follett Prophet of Management*. Retrieved May 16, 2012, from Google Books: [http://books.google.ca/books?id=tZ4Z29T1GgIC&pg=PA1&lpg=PA1&dq=highly+influential+as+a+lecturer+and+writer+and+consultant+to+business+and+government+leaders+on+both+sides+of+the+Atlantic&source=bl&ots=qNcsq12u1C&sig=eRjV-IMTD00vIYTHzJh8YM0sXCA&hl=en&sa=X&ei=YBG0T\\_TzM86f6QHBI4wB&ved=0CFUQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=highly%20influential%20as%20a%20lecturer%20and%20writer%20and%20consultant%20to%20business%20and%20government%20leaders%20on%20both%20sides%20of%20the%20Atlantic&f=false](http://books.google.ca/books?id=tZ4Z29T1GgIC&pg=PA1&lpg=PA1&dq=highly+influential+as+a+lecturer+and+writer+and+consultant+to+business+and+government+leaders+on+both+sides+of+the+Atlantic&source=bl&ots=qNcsq12u1C&sig=eRjV-IMTD00vIYTHzJh8YM0sXCA&hl=en&sa=X&ei=YBG0T_TzM86f6QHBI4wB&ved=0CFUQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=highly%20influential%20as%20a%20lecturer%20and%20writer%20and%20consultant%20to%20business%20and%20government%20leaders%20on%20both%20sides%20of%20the%20Atlantic&f=false)
- Grant Thornton International. (2011). *Proportion of women in senior management falls to 2004 levels*. Retrieved March 9, 2012, from Grant Thornton Press Room: [http://www.internationalbusinessreport.com/Press-room/2011/women\\_in-senior\\_management.asp](http://www.internationalbusinessreport.com/Press-room/2011/women_in-senior_management.asp)
- Greer, C., & Virick, M. (2008). Diverse Succession Planning: Lessons from the Industry Leaders. *Human Resource Management*, 47 (2), 351-367.
- Griffith, P., MacBride-King, J., & Townsend, B. (1997). *Closing the Gap; Women's Advancement in Corporate and Professional Canada*. Canada: Conference Board of Canada.

- Griffith, P., MacBride-King, J., Townsend, B., Inc., C., & Canada, C. B. (1997). *Closing the gap: Women's advancement in corporate and professional Canada*. Ottawa: Conference Board of Canada.
- Ibarra, H., Carter, N., & Silva, C. (2010, September). Why Men Still Get More Promotions Than Women. *Harvard Business Review*.
- Harel, G., Tzafrir, S., & Baruch, Y. (2003). Achieving organizational effectiveness through promotion of women into managerial positions: HRM practice focus. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 14 (2), 247-263.
- Hewlett, S. A. (2007). *Off-Ramps and On-Ramps: Keeping Talented Women on the Road to Success*. Boston, MA, USA: Harvard Business School Publishing.
- Hewlett, S. A., Sherbin, L., & Sumberg, K. (2009). How Gen Y & Boomers Will Reshape Your Agenda. *Harvard Business Review*, 87 (7/8), 71-76.
- Heilman, M., & Martell, R. (1986). Exposure to Success Women: Antidote to Sex Discrimination in Applicant Screening Decisions? *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 37, 376-390.
- Helgesen, S., & Johnson, J. (2010). *The Female Vision: Women's real power at work 1st edition*. San Francisco, CA, USA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Historica-Dominion Institute. (2011). *Status of Women*. Retrieved November 26, 2011, from The Canadian Encyclopedia: [http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ART\\_A0007673](http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ART_A0007673)
- Hoobler, J., Lemmon, G., & Wayne, S. (2011). Women's underrepresentation in upper management: New insights on a persistent problem. *Organizational Dynamics*, 40, 151-156.
- Jacobson, A. (1985). *Women in charge: dilemmas of women in authority*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- Kumra, S. (2009). The Absence of Women on Boards - It's their choice, isn't it? *Governance* (191).
- Kalev, A. (2009). Cracking the Glass Cages? Restructuring and Ascriptive Inequality at Work. *American Journal of Sociology*, 114 (6), 1591-1643.
- Kanter, R. M. (1977). *Men and Women of the Corporation*. New York, USA: Basic Books.
- Kilian, C. M., Hukai, D., & McCarty, E. (2004). Building diversity in the pipeline to corporate leadership. *Journal of Management Development*, 24 (2), 155-168.
- Knight Higher Education Collaborative. (2001). Gender Intelligence. *Policy Perspectives*, 10 (2).
- Knorr, H. (2011). From top management to entrepreneurship: women's next move? *International Journal of Manpower*, 32 (1), 99-116.
- Kolb, D., Fletcher, J., Meyerson, D., Merrill-Sands, D., & Ely, R. (2003). Making Change: A Framework for Promoting Gender Equity in Organizations. In R. Ely, E. Foldy, & M. Scully (Eds.), *Reader in Gender, Work, and Organization*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Kottke, J., & Agars, M. (2005). Understanding the processes that facilitate and hinder efforts to advance women in organizations. *Career Development International*, 10 (3), 190-202.
- Mainiero, L. (1994). Getting anointed for advancement: The case of executive women. *Academy of Management Executive*, 8 (2), 53-64.

- Mattis, M. (2001). Advancing women in business organizations; Key leadership roles and behaviors of senior leaders and middle managers. *Journal of Management Development*, 20 (4), 371-388.
- Mattis, M., Resnick, J., Hirschberg, W., Tierney, A., Merrick, C., Manning, K., et al. (1994). *Cracking the Glass Ceiling: Strategies for Success*. Catalyst. New York: Catalyst.
- McKinsey & Company. (2008). *Women Matter 2: Female leadership, a competitive edge for the future*. Paris: McKinsey & Company.
- McKinsey & Company. (2012). *Women Matter 2012; Making the Breakthrough*. McKinsey & Company. Paris: McKinsey & Company.
- McKinsey & Company. (2007). *Women Matter; Gender diversity, a corporate performance driver*. Research Report, Paris.
- Meyerson, D., & Fletcher, J. (2000, Jan/Feb). A Modest Manifesto for Shattering the Glass Ceiling. *Harvard Business Review*, 78 (1), pp. 126-136.
- Orser, B. (2000). *Creating High-Performance Organizations; Leveraging Women's Leadership*. The Conference Board of Canada. Ottawa: Conference Board of Canada.
- Palframan, D. (2005, August). Women in Leadership: The Diversity Imperative - Supporting Actions for Change. *Executive Action Series*, 158. New York, New York: The Conference Board.
- PriceWaterhouseCoopers. (2008, March). The leaking pipeline: Where are our female leaders? UK: PWC Gender Advisory Council.
- Schwartz, D. (1994). *An Examination of the Impact of Family-Friendly Policies on the Glass Ceiling*. Families and Work Institute. New York: Cornell University.
- Schein, V. (2001). A Global Look at Psychological Barriers to Women's Progress in Management. *Journal of Social Issues*, 57 (4), 675-688.
- Schein, V. (1975). Relationships Between Sex Role Stereotypes and Requisite Management Characteristics Among Female Managers. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 60 (3), 340-344.
- Schein, V., Mueller, R., Lituchy, T., & Liu, J. (1996). Think Manager - Think Male: A Global Phenomenon? *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 17 (1), 35-41.
- Singh, V. (2002). *Managing Diversity for Strategic Advantage*. Cranfield School of Management. London: Council for Excellence in Management and Leadership.
- Shriver, M. (2009). *The Shriver Report; A Woman's Nation Changes Everything*. (H. Boushey, & A. O'Leary, Eds.) Washington, DC: Center for American Progress.
- Smith, M. K. (2002). *Mary Parker Follett: community, creative experience and informal education*. Retrieved April 15, 2012, from Infed: the encyclopaedia of informal education: <http://www.infed.org/thinkers/et-foll.htm>
- Statistics Canada. (2008, March 1). *Canada Year Book Historical Collection: Browse by year*. Retrieved April 15, 2012, from Statistics Canada web site: [http://www66.statcan.gc.ca/acyb\\_000-eng.htm](http://www66.statcan.gc.ca/acyb_000-eng.htm)
- Statistics Canada. (2012). *Statistics by Subject*. Retrieved April 14, 2012, from Labour Statistics: <http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/subject-sujet/theme-theme.action?pid=2621&lang=eng&more=0>
- Stead, V., & Elliott, C. (2009). *Women's Leadership*. Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rutherford, S. (2011). *Women's work, men's cultures: overcoming resistance and changing organizational cultures*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Redstockings Inc. (2000-2012). *The Miss America Protest: 1968*. Retrieved April 15, 2012, from Redstockings of the Women's Liberation Movement website: [http://www.redstockings.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=59&Itemid=103](http://www.redstockings.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=59&Itemid=103)
- Taberner, K. (2003, March). Women as Leaders: Shared Emotional Intelligence and Leadership Styles. Ontario, Canada: National Library of Canada.
- United Nations. (n.d.). *Short History of the Commission on the Status of Women*. Retrieved April 15, 2012, from UN Women: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/56sess.htm>
- Urquijo, C. R., & Milan, A. (2011). *Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report*. Statistics Canada, Social and Aboriginal Statistics Division. Ottawa: Minister of Industry.
- Whelehan, I. (1995). *Modern Feminist Thought: From the Second Wave to "Post-Feminism"*. New York, New York, USA: New York University Press.
- Wohlbold, E., & Chenier, L. (2011). *Women in Senior Management: Where Are They?* Conference Board of Canada, Human Resources Research.
- Wood, G. (2008). Gender stereotypical attitudes; Past, present and future influences on women's career advancement. *Equal Opportunities International*, 27 (7), 613-628.
- Valerio, A. M. (2009). *Developing Women Leaders: A Guide for Men and Women in Organizations*. Malden, MA, USA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- United Nations. (n.d.). *Short History of the Commission on the Status of Women*. Retrieved April 15, 2012, from UN Women: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/56sess.htm>
- Urquijo, C. R., & Milan, A. (2011). *Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report*. Statistics Canada, Social and Aboriginal Statistics Division. Ottawa: Minister of Industry.
- Williams, C. (1992). The Glass Escalator: Hidden Advantages for Men in the "Female" Professions. *Social Problems*, 39 (3), pp. 253-267.
- Whelehan, I. (1995). *Modern Feminist Thought: From the Second Wave to "Post-Feminism"*. New York, New York, USA: New York University Press.
- Wohlbold, E., & Chenier, L. (2011). *Women in Senior Management: Where Are They?* Conference Board of Canada, Human Resources Research.
- Wood, G. (2008). Gender stereotypical attitudes; Past, present and future influences on women's career advancement. *Equal Opportunities International*, 27 (7), 613-628.
- Valerio, A. M. (2009). *Developing Women Leaders: A Guide for Men and Women in Organizations*. Malden, MA, USA: Wiley-Blackwell.

## Appendix A

### Timeline (Historica-Dominion Institute, 2011)

- 1875 – first woman university graduate in Canada
- 1917 – 35,000 women employed in munitions factories in Ontario & Montreal; earned 50-80% male wages
- 1916 – Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta gave women provincial vote
- 1917 – Ontario & BC gave women provincial vote
- 1922 – all provinces except Quebec allowed women provincial vote
- 1928 – Supreme Court of Canada unanimously decided women were not “persons” allowed to hold government office
- 1929 – British Privy Council reversed decision, making women eligible for senatorial appointment
- 1930 – 23% undergrads and 35% grad students were women
- 1961 – women earned 59% men’s wages; full time
- 1967 – Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada established
- 1970 – commission presented report making 167 recommendations
- 1978 – Canadian Human Rights Act came into effect prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex; equal pay for work of equal value, value referring to skill, effort, responsibility & working conditions
- Mid-1980’s – women 45% of workforce, full-time women earned 72% of men’s wages
- 1982 – Charter of Rights and Freedoms in the Canadian Constitution give equality for both sexes
- 1988 – abortion decriminalized
- 1997 – United Nations ranked Canada first in the world as a desirable country to live, however, dropped to seventh when gender equality factored into equation

## Appendix B

### Glossary of Terms

**Double Bind:** no-win situation where women leaders are considered inadequate leaders if they display feminine leadership skills or unfeminine if they display masculine leadership skills.

**Gender Intelligence:** a greatly enhanced ability to recognize and reward human achievement that contributes to an institution's mission, whether it be the work of men or of women (Knight Higher Education Collaborative, 2001)

**Glass ceiling:** gender barriers to advancement at upper levels (Wohlbold & Chenier, 2011); a barrier so subtle that it is transparent yet so strong that it prevents women and minorities from moving up the management hierarchy (Burke & Mattis, 2005)

**Glass cliff:** when women are placed into precarious leadership positions with a higher risk of failure; failure is then attributed to gender (Wohlbold & Chenier, 2011)

**Glass escalator/elevator:** hidden advantages for men in the "female" professions (Williams, 1992)

**Glass walls:** barriers that exist inside a corporation preventing women from obtaining positions with line responsibility that lead to executive suite (.. Wellington states in Catalyst 1996 – referenced by (Taberner, 2003) )

**Labyrinth:** metaphor used by Alice Eagly and Linda Carli which better describes the complexity and the variety of obstacles, twists and turns women leaders face.

**Leadership Pipeline:** leadership positions in an organization that typically have a pathway to the top office

**Sticky floor:** gender barriers to advancement at lower levels (Wohlbold & Chenier, 2011)

**Leaking Pipeline:** the effect on an organization when recruitment supports a particular business driver but yet the headcount position is not sustained in later years (PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2008)

**Tokenism:** selecting and promoting individuals based solely on their outer diversity (Brown, Brown, & Anastasopoulos, 2002)

## Appendix C

### Telephone Invitation Scripts

Each senior executive will be contacted by telephone using the following voicemail script:

*“My name is Dawn Frail and I’m a graduate student at the University of Guelph. 416-949-0075. [dawn@dawnfrail.com](mailto:dawn@dawnfrail.com).  
I’m calling to invite (insert company name) to participate in a research study I’m doing which is for a Masters degree in Leadership.  
The study focuses on the development of women leaders and (insert company name) is 1 of only 12 companies being invited to participate.  
You were chosen because you met several criteria including public recognition for gender-related efforts.  
I will also extend this same invitation to (insert name of senior HR leader) who would likely be directly involved in the study if you graciously agree to participate.  
Thank you for considering my request. I’m exciting to begin this research, which I’m certain, will benefit many Canadians and my hope is that you are eager to participate.  
I’m sure you have questions so please feel free to contact me at 416-949-0075 or by email at [dawn@dawnfrail.com](mailto:dawn@dawnfrail.com).”*

Each senior HR leader will be contacted by telephone using the following voicemail script:

*“My name is Dawn Frail and I’m a graduate student at the University of Guelph. 416-949-0075. [dawn@dawnfrail.com](mailto:dawn@dawnfrail.com).  
I’m calling to invite (insert company name) to participate in a research study I’m doing which is for a Masters degree in Leadership.  
The study focuses on the development of women leaders and (insert company name) is 1 of only 12 companies being invited to participate.  
You were chosen because you met several criteria including public recognition for gender-related efforts.  
I have also extended this same invitation to (insert name of senior executive) and I am contacting you as well since you are the one who would likely be directly involved in the study if you graciously agree to participate.  
Thank you for considering my request. I’m exciting to begin this research, which I’m certain, will benefit many Canadians and my hope is that you are eager to participate.  
I’m sure you have questions so please feel free to contact me at 416-949-0075 or by email at [dawn@dawnfrail.com](mailto:dawn@dawnfrail.com).”*

## Appendix D

### Interview Questions for HR Leaders

#### Statistical Data

1. What are the percentages of Canadian employees based on gender:
  - a. Management
  - b. Non-Management
2. What is the breakdown of management employees based on gender:
  - a. Supervisor (leads individual contributors)
  - b. Manager (leads leaders and senior individual contributors)
  - c. Director (leads Managers)
  - d. Executive (top level leaders)
3. What percentage of women leaders are in line positions (i.e. sales, operations, profit & loss responsibility, etc.) versus staff positions (i.e. human resources, finance, support functions, etc.) compared to men?
4. What is the turnover rate for women leaders versus men leaders? By level?
5. What percentage of women leaders return from maternity leave?

#### Gender Diversity

6. Is gender diversity part of the strategic direction? If yes,
  - a. How long has gender been part of the company strategy?
  - b. Who is responsible for the gender strategy?
  - c. Are gender diversity metrics tracked?
  - d. Is pay tracked by gender?
  - e. Are gender diversity objectives linked to compensation?
  - f. How does the company deal with gender-based issues?
  - g. Do you have gender diversity quotas or targets, either formal or informal?
7. Are senior leaders directly involved in gender diversity efforts? How?
8. Do you have processes to proactively root out biases and identify barriers associated with gender? What are they?

#### Career Planning

9. What are the formal and informal processes for identifying high potential women leaders?
10. What is the career planning process for high potential women leaders?
11. Do you have a process to ensure a diverse slate of candidates for positions?

### **Training and Development**

12. What type of internal leadership development training is available for women leaders?  
External?
13. Other than training, what types of activities are used to develop women leaders (i.e. special projects, task forces, challenging/stretch assignments, transfer opportunities, etc.)?
14. Do you have a formal or informal mentoring process?
  - a. How are mentoring relationships selected, formed and established?
  - b. What percent of women versus men have mentors?
15. Is internal diversity training available?
16. What percentage of women versus men participates in development and training opportunities?
17. Do you have a reintegration program for women returning from leave?

### **Performance and Evaluation**

18. Does the company base rewards and recognition on transparent meritocratic or pay-for-performance criteria?
19. Describe any processes in place to ensure fair and unbiased performance evaluation?
20. Describe formal and informal feedback processes (i.e. performance reviews, peer reviews, 360 feedback, etc.).

### **Female/Family Friendly Workplace**

21. What family/female-friendly policies are currently in place (i.e. flextime, flexplace, telecommuting, daycare, maternity/parental leave, work/life balance tools, job share etc.)?
22. What is the extent of the usage of these benefits?
23. What support programs are available specifically for women (i.e. networking groups, support groups, segregated training, etc.)?
24. What is the extent of the usage of these benefits?

### **Closing**

25. Do you have any additional comments you'd like to make?

## Appendix E

### Questions for Women Leaders

#### Timeline

1. Describe your career path at your current company.

#### Organizational Practices

2. Describe your experiences with the items on your company's summary list and how they impacted your career advancement. (*company-specific checklist will be provided to each interviewee*)
3. Were there some items that were more important than others?
4. Describe any other factors that helped in your promotion(s) that do not appear on the list.
5. Were there any organizational factors that hindered your career progression?

#### Organizational Culture

6. Describe the company culture as it relates to gender diversity at the leadership levels.
7. How are gender issues handled in your company?
8. Describe how your network and key business relationships impacted your career progression.
9. Were there some relationships that were more important than others?

#### Net Promoter Score

10. On a scale of 0-10, how likely are you to recommend your company to a female colleague, friend or family member?
11. What are the reasons for giving the rating you did?

#### Closing

12. Do you have any additional comments you'd like to make?