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Narratives of women's leadership  
identity development: an assessment of  
senior-level information technology (IT)  
leaders following participation in a  
women-only training program

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Dissertation

**NARRATIVES OF WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT:  
AN ASSESSMENT OF SENIOR-LEVEL INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY  
(IT) LEADERS FOLLOWING PARTICIPATION IN A WOMEN-ONLY  
TRAINING PROGRAM**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
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## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to several members of my family. In one way or another, you have helped me achieve what at so many times along the way seemed like an unattainable dream. To my two little rays of sunshine, Joaquín and Juliana. I could not have done this without your love, smiles, and giggles. You inspire me every day to strive to be the best role model I can possibly be. To my husband, José, for always being my rock. Thank you for readily taking on more responsibilities at home so that I could complete this dissertation. I will never forget those long nights during the final months of this process when you frequently stayed up with me, keeping me company and cheering me on as I worked. To my parents, Lizette and José, thank you for your unconditional love and support. You have been my stalwart cheerleaders from the very beginning, never wavering in your belief that I could achieve this dream. And last, but not least, to my dear brother, José Manuel. I miss you greatly and know that you would have been so proud and right there by my side celebrating this achievement.

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TRAINING PROGRAM**

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**ABSTRACT**

Despite having made significant strides in the overall labor market, women continue to lag behind men at the senior and executive C-suite levels. The gap is even more striking in organizations within the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM). Although women-only leadership trainings have gained recent popularity as a strategy to address this, scholarship on the efficacy of such programs is still fairly scant. This study aimed to fill this gap in the research by looking into how graduates of such a program used the tools and knowledge gained during the training, to determine if and how it has impacted, in their view, their identity as leaders.

Eighteen senior-level Information Technology (IT) leaders, graduates of the same in-house women-only leadership program were interviewed using a narrative inquiry approach. Data gathered during the interviews revealed which strategies participants put into practice, how they applied them, as well as the perceived outcomes that they derived. The narratives revealed women’s perspective of their leadership trajectory and their understanding of the training’s impact.



Interviews were analyzed using content and thematic coding. Analysis of the participants' accounts pointed to the training's ability to facilitate leadership identity development through the following means: (1) the promotion of practical skills, (2) increased self-awareness and realization of others' perceptions, (3) feeling a sense of belonging and connectedness, and (4) feeling recognized and empowered. It was also clear that context plays a significant role on the impact that the training can have. Three themes related to this emerged; (1) the availability of advocates, (2) executive visibility, and (3) fit with the organization's leadership culture and ability to lead authentically. Participants' stories also revealed the ways in which the training affected their ability to deal with a male-dominated organization, which ultimately depended on how much of an effect they believed that being a woman has on their workplace experience.

Findings suggest that women-only leadership trainings can have a positive impact on senior-level leaders' leadership identity, yet careful consideration must be paid to the contextual factors identified. Findings also provided concrete evidence pointing to the perceived effectiveness of specific program components.

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## CHAPTER 1: THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

### Introduction

Women-only leadership training programs have proliferated in recent years as a possible solution to address the prevailing gender gap at the top echelons of leadership. Women-only training is distinct from other general leadership development efforts in that it provides a safe setting for the exploration of the social and psychological issues that women leaders tend to face in the workplace (Vinnicombe & Singh, 2002). As such, these efforts should not be conceived as a strategy aimed at “fixing-the-women,” but rather as an intervention that acknowledges the gendered nature of organizations and that addresses the subtle forms of gender bias that may be working to obstruct women’s advancement (Ely, Ibarra & Kolb, 2011). Hopkins, O’Neil, Passarelli, and Bilimoria (2008) make the case for this type of program and posit how efforts to develop women leaders need to take into consideration that organizational environments are in fact gendered and that “particularly those that are male-dominated, are not gender-neutral—they reflect environments where women’s presence, performance, and success are scrutinized, measured, and evaluated differently from men’s (O’Neil, Hopkins, & Bilimoria, 2008).” (p. 350).

As of late, the budding research on leadership development has begun to focus on the idea that leadership development and identity development are interconnected (Ibarra, Snook, Gillén Ramo, 2010; Petriglieri, 2011; Moorosi, 2013). Constructing and internalizing a leader identity is an important part of becoming a leader and the

construction of this identity is decidedly a social process – individuals see themselves as leaders and act in accordance to this notion, but in order to gain authority, others must grant them that identity (DeRue & Ashford, 2010).

This concept of identity development is especially relevant when looking at the development of women leaders. Given the prominence that social context plays on leadership identity development, it is likely that women face greater challenges than men in this regard. As cited by Karelaia & Guillén (2011), “Research suggests that because others may see women’s leadership attempts as less legitimate and thus accept them less, women may find it more difficult to develop self-concepts as leaders (Ridgeway, 2003)” (p. 9). This struggle tends to be more heightened at the most senior levels of leadership, where men usually dominate in numbers, and even more so within male-dominated industries. “The inability to identify female role models within an organization may signal to women that they are in the ‘wrong place’ and thereby strengthen their identity interference” (Karelaia & Guillén, 2011, p. 10).

Notwithstanding the relative popularity that women-only leadership training programs have attained, there is still a dearth of scholarship on the topic and very few empirical studies to date documenting its impact. Hopkins, O’Neil, Passarelli, and Bilimoria (2008) remarked several years ago on the lack of literature on the use of women-only leadership training programs, a circumstance that still holds true today. While existing theory on gender and leadership backs up the use of women-only training, studies of empirical rigor that offer insight into the actual effects it has on participants



and organizations are still scant. Moreover, there are no studies to date that have empirically looked at the construct of leadership identity development and how it relates to these women-only training programs.

This study aimed to fill the current gap in the women-only leadership development research by looking into how graduates of such a program used the tools and knowledge imparted during the training, to then examine their perceptions regarding if and how it has impacted their identity as leaders. It follows the idea set forth by Ely, Ibarra, and Kolb (2011), who postulate a framework for women-only training programs that takes into consideration identity transitions and the impact of gender dynamics on the claiming and granting processes of leadership identity formation and development. The authors state how “[w]hile the notion of developing a leader identity has gained popularity (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; DeRue & Ashford, 2005; van Knippenber, *et al.*, 2004), it has not been linked to theory and research on the gender dynamics associated with leader identity development” (for an exception see Hogue & Lord, 2007).” (Ely, Ibarra & Kolb (2011), p. 489). While their framework is solidly grounded on existing gender and leadership development theory, their assessment of program outcomes is anecdotal and based on their years of practice and experience. The present study was designed to empirically examine the possible transitions in women’s leadership identity after participating in a women-only leadership training program.

The sample selected for this study was composed of senior-level women leaders in the Information Technology (IT) field, an industry in which women account for only

25% of all professional jobs (U.S. Department of Commerce, August, 2011; NCWIT, May 2016). These women face even greater challenges ascending into top leadership positions, as they operate within an industry in which the visibility of women in leadership is even more restricted. Therefore, it is of great value to examine these women's perceptions regarding if and how participating in a women-only leadership training program has helped them further develop their identity as leaders. These are women who have been able to ascend to senior levels in the organization's hierarchy and whose leadership identity is expected to be well developed. Results from the study shed light into if and how this type of training can help women further grow their leadership identity within an organizational context in which male notions of leadership are likely to be more pervasive.

### **Context of the Problem**

Women's presence in the U.S. labor force has undeniably undergone a dramatic transformation over the past few decades. Significant advances have been made not just in terms of women's participation in the labor market, but also in the types of positions they now pursue and occupy, as well as the salaries they are able to earn. However, despite having made significant strides in the overall labor market, women continue to lag behind men when it comes to attaining top leadership positions, particularly at the senior and executive C-suite levels; a difference that is especially notable in the STEM fields (occupations in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics).

As of January 2014, women accounted for 46.9% of the U.S. labor force and

51.5% of management and professional positions (Catalyst, January 2014), but when the focus shifts toward positions of top leadership, the number of women who occupy these steeply declines. In Fortune 500 companies, women hold only 14.6% of executive officer positions, occupy approximately 17% of seats on governing boards, and only 4.6% hold the highest ranking title of Chief Executive Officer (Catalyst, January 2014). Even across all other organizations, only 27.9% of women hold Chief Executive positions, according to data from the 2015 Current Population Survey (U.S. Bureau for Labor Statistics, 2052). Paradoxically, women continue to earn the majority of bachelor's and master's degrees, and nearly half of doctorate degrees. In fact, by 2021–2022, women are projected to earn 61.9% of master's degrees and 53.6% of doctorate degrees (Hussar & Bailey, 2013).

Within the STEM fields, this discrepancy in women's workforce participation is even more striking. Based on data gathered by the U.S. Department of Commerce (August 2011), women hold less than 25% of overall STEM jobs. Over the past few years, little progress has been made to advance more women into these fields. Unequal participation traces back to educational attainment – more men than women tend to pursue these majors – and the numbers show that women in STEM majors are more likely than their male counterparts to forego pursuing occupations related to their degree upon graduation (U.S. Department of Commerce, August 2011).

Although the report by the U.S. Department of Commerce does not provide any evidence to explain this, it explores some plausible causes, including a lack of female role

models, prevailing gender stereotypes, and lack of family-friendly jobs and work environments. While women in IT tend to fare slightly better than their counterparts in other STEM fields, they hold merely a quarter of all professional IT-related jobs (U.S. Department of Commerce, August, 2011; NCWIT, May 2016). What is more, only 45% of technology companies nationwide have women in C-suite executive roles or in their board of directors (Shavin, 2014).

### **Problem Statement**

Significant gains have been made in women's overall participation in the labor force and management positions compared to three decades ago, but the pace of the change remains slow in advancing women into positions of top leadership. This is especially so within certain industry pockets such as the STEM fields.

Catalyst's widely-cited 1998 study found that women who have successfully attained high ranking positions in top management tend to attribute their success largely to company strategies; among these, the "identification and development of high-potential employees, high visibility assignments, and cross-functional job rotations . . . . [as well as] succession plans that incorporate gender diversity, formal mentoring programs, and programs that hold managers accountable for women's career advancement." (Burke & Nelson, Eds., 2002, p. 11)

One particular strategy being employed to address the gender gap in leadership positions is training geared specifically towards women. As stated by Ely, Ibarra, and

Kolb (2011), “. . . companies are increasingly turning to leadership development programs designed specifically for women in response to clients’ demand for more diversity among service providers (McCracken, 2000) and to ensure that their best and brightest are reaching their potential (Hewlett, 2007; Zahidi & Ibarra, 2010)” (p. 475). Nonetheless, there are only a handful of empirical studies to date documenting the impact of these programs, none of which have been carried out with women in the STEM fields. Furthermore, the exploration of how leadership development efforts can bolster leadership identity development is still a budding topic in the research—even more so within the women-only training literature. Ibarra, Snook, and Gillén Ramo (2010) draw attention to the importance of examining possible identity transitions, which researchers suggest take place throughout an individual’s career, from the time they first assume a leader identity and then as they subsequently grow and progress into higher-level roles. The authors note,

[j]ust how people reinvent their self-concepts . . . has not been explored . . .

Although this body of work makes a compelling case for leadership development as an identity transition, it has yet to articulate the mechanisms and process underlying identity’s dynamism in the development process or how knowledge of this process can guide the design of formal development efforts. (Ibarra, Snook, & Guillén Ramo, 2010, p.5–6)

## **Research Questions**

The present study examined the experience of senior-level IT women leaders after participating in a company-sponsored women-only leadership training program. Specifically, it examined women's perceptions of whether and how participation in this type of program has helped them further shape their identity as leaders to potentially move ahead in their careers and whether and how it has enhanced their capacity to better navigate gender dynamics in their organization. To achieve this objective the "life stories" or "personal narratives" of a group of senior-level women leaders who participated in a women-only leadership training program were collected and closely examined (Chase, 2005, p. 652). The focus was on these women's experiences and perceptions of their own behavior and interactions with others in the organization once they have gone back to work after completing a round of leadership training and having had the chance to apply the insights derived from the program. The following research questions were explored:

1. What impact do insights gained during a women-only leadership training program have on senior-level IT women leaders' perceptions of their leadership identity development?
2. What is the experience of participants implementing the tools learned and insights gained during a women-only leadership training program once they returned to their areas of work, within a male-dominated organizational context?

Participants were encouraged to identify and discuss all aspects of the training program that have contributed to their leadership development. Participants were especially encouraged to discuss how the insights gained from participation in the training interacted subsequently with the contextual dynamics of the organization in order to highlight — for better or for worse — the value of the training in relation to their future advancement (or lack of it) in the organization.

### **Relevance and Importance of the Topic**

According to the National Center for Women in Information Technology (NCWIT), the IT industry is currently one of the fastest growing in the United States, making finding and sustaining a qualified talent pool of leaders of pressing importance. In its 2010 report, the Center cites estimates from the U.S. Department of Labor, which predict that professional opportunities within this sector are likely to grow at a much quicker rate than in any other industry over the next few years, with more than 1.4 million new computing-related job openings by 2018. The NCWIT links this urgency of attracting a qualified pipeline of professionals and leaders to the topic of women’s career development and states how:

Highly-qualified women are well-positioned to move into these open jobs, yet the industry is failing to attract [them]. Furthermore, women already employed in the technology industry are leaving at staggering rates [and at an even higher pace than men]. Failing to capitalize on this talent threatens U.S. productivity, innovation, and competitiveness” (NCWIT, April 2010, p.2).

Clearly, skilled and qualified women can play a vital role both in maintaining an adequate talent pool within the IT industry and in filling its future professional talent needs. Even beyond a need to achieve more equality in the workforce, it is clear that making sure there is a growing pipeline of qualified women within IT will become a business imperative for companies in this field.

Moreover, organizations that actively develop and promote women into top leadership positions have been found to fare better than their counterparts. A study published by Catalyst in 2004, which looked at 353 Fortune 500 companies, found a strong correlation between the proportion of female representation in top management and organizational performance within a four-year time period (Coughlin, Wingard, and Holihan, Eds., 2005; Singh, Vinnicombe, & Tejersen, 2007). Findings revealed that return on equity (ROE) and total return to shareholders (TRS) was 35.1% and 34% higher, respectively, for companies with female board representation (Catalyst, 2004).

A comparable study conducted by the Glass Ceiling Research Center showed that organizations which actively use strategies to promote and develop women outperformed comparable organizations within their industry by 18 to 69 percent in profits (Coughlin, Wingard, and Holihan, Eds., 2005). Similar findings have also been reported in the UK (Singh, Vinnicombe, & Tejersen, 2007). A recent report compiled by Development Dimensions International (DDI) also reaffirms this. Their Global Leadership Forecast for 2014/2015 reports findings that organizations in the top 20% of financial performance have more women in leadership roles than those in the bottom 20%. That is, 37% of all



leaders are women in the former compared to 19% in the latter (DDI, 2014).

This is not to say that female leadership is better, but these findings provide an indication of some possible positive effects that female-inclusive practices can have on overall organizational effectiveness. For instance, companies with better diversity management may be more attractive to investors as well as consumers (Singh, Vinnicombe, & Tejersen, 2007). They may promote more company-wide inclusive work practices, which can have a positive effect on employee engagement, productivity, and ultimately, performance. Also, a diverse leadership team can generate more diversity of thought, which can enhance the problem-solving capabilities of an organization and the quality of decisions (Singh, Vinnicombe, & Tejersen, 2007; DDI, 2014).

Over the past twenty years, women have continued to represent close to half of the overall labor force and half of all management and professional positions, but gains at the top levels have been relatively modest. While the number of women in corporate officer positions has nearly doubled since 1995, the numbers have stagnated at around 14–16% for the past ten years (Catalyst, January 2014). And while in 2014 there were 23 female CEOs of Fortune 500 companies compared to a mere three at the beginning of the decade, the numbers have remained relatively unmoved over the past five years. Especially within certain industries, such as the STEM fields, women in executive leadership are a rare find. Douglas Branson (2007) remarks how such a laggard progress is problematic:

In the management ranks, women cannot be satisfied with incremental improvements...[otherwise, they become tokens, and] [t]okens draw attention from other group members, much more so than any of the dominants . . . . [Therefore,] they will have applied to them by the dominants many of the stereotypes associated with their type. To preserve their commonality, the dominants keep the token outside the dominant group. (p. 109–111)

According to Oakley (2000), as cited by Bilimoria, Godwin, and Zelechowski (2007), the research suggests that tokenism dynamics will still affect women in top leadership until there is at least a seven- to twelve-fold increase in the number of females in these positions. Therefore, although the current participation of women in top leadership is an indication of progress, if these numbers do not continue expand at quicker rate, they will continue to contribute to women's minority status and their being seen as stereotypical tokens of their demographic group. The implications are high, as tokens "are also subjected to expectations – explicit and tacit – that their performance must meet higher standards than the other leaders in the organization. This can lead to higher stress levels, which can in turn affect productivity, motivation, and effectiveness." (Coughlin, Wingard, & Hollihan, Eds., 2005, p. 10).

### **Significance of the Study**

Women-only leadership development programs have been identified as a potentially useful tool for bolstering the number of women occupying positions of top

leadership. Nonetheless, further research is warranted in order to empirically assess the effectiveness of this type of intervention and how it may help narrow the gender gap by supporting women's career advancement into the upper ranks of leadership. While evaluating the effectiveness of women-only training *per se* was not a direct goal of this study, its results provide the necessary groundwork for future research by gauging some of the subjective developmental outcomes derived from participation in such a program.

This study also helps widen our understanding of women's perceptions of their leadership identity development by offering insight into their personal experience and how they understood this type of training to impact their work lives. Additionally, the focus on senior-level leaders is germane in further advancing scholarship on the topic. These are women who have been able to ascend reasonably high on the organization's hierarchy and whose leadership identity is expected to be well developed, but who have also reached a level in the organization where many of their female peers tend to plateau.

Lastly, this study further uncovered the interplay between organizational context and interventions that are aimed at enhancing the capabilities of its individual members. The additional focus on women in the IT industry provided an opportunity to highlight the influence of a male-dominated organizational context on women's leadership identity development. Organizational culture impacts how participants are able to utilize the training content, while the changes in individuals' attitudes and behavior that stem from participation in these trainings could also set in motion the momentum for organizational change (Leonard & Goff, 2003).

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

Before delving into the topics of women-only leadership training and leadership identity development, a brief overview of the literature on gender and leadership is presented. The first two sections of this chapter will, respectively, explore the barriers to women's career advancement and the three different types of strategies that organizations tend to employ to support women's advancement into leadership roles. The third, and final, section will then focus on detailing the extant research on women-only leadership training and how it relates to leadership identity theory.

### **Barriers to Women's Advancement**

Burke and Nelson (2002) present a thorough overview of the three main hypotheses that have emerged as to why women still face significant barriers climbing the executive ranks in organizations. The first hypothesis, and least compelling of the three, is focused on the individual. It posits that there are inherent differences between men and women's capabilities and personalities that render the latter inadequate to properly exercise leadership behaviors. Gender differences are seen as deficiencies for women and, therefore, the reason for their lack of progress. Research has failed to provide any supporting evidence for these claims (Burke & Nelson, Eds., 2002; Powell, 1990). Women have not proven to be less competent or qualified than men to occupy leadership positions, as evidenced by their ability to break through the so-called "glass ceiling." In a meta-analysis of different studies that looked at subjective and objective measures of leader effectiveness and performance, Eagly, Karau, and Makhijani (1995)

found no confirming evidence of leadership effectiveness as related to gender. Their results do suggest a tendency correlated to gender in terms of an inclination toward certain leadership styles; these may be deemed as more or less effective depending on the context of the organization. In their conclusions, they state how

“... women fared poorly in settings in which leadership was defined in highly masculine terms . . . Men fared slightly worse than women in settings in which leadership was defined in less masculine terms . . . Although these findings remain modest in size, they suggest a pervasive gendering of leadership roles that can operate to the disadvantage of women or men.” (Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995, p. 140)

The second hypothesis has to do with social and attitudinal barriers. It points to gender stereotypes and biases that, in an overt or latent manner, are alive and present in our society (Burke & Nelson, 2002). That is, that despite the actual levels of performance displayed by women, stereotypes are so ingrained in our culture and our organizations that women are not evaluated in the same way as men, but rather tend to be undervalued.

Burke and Nelson (2002) cite Virginia Schein’s findings (1973, 1975) that “there is widespread agreement that the good manager is seen as male or masculine” (p. 6). This is reinforced by Chin (2008) who explains, “Studies of leadership have been largely confined to men for the simple reason that they have historically held most of the leadership roles in society and its institutions” (p. 702). Therefore, although considerable progress has been achieved in anti-discrimination practices and women’s rights in the

workplace, vestiges of some stereotypes and biases are still visible in our society due to the long history of a male-dominated work and leadership arena. Contrary to the first hypothesis, there is considerable evidence pointing to the validity of this theory. As stated by Scandura and Baugh (2002),

Gender roles are among the most pervasive in our society and influence behavior in a wide range of settings, including the workplace (Deaux, 1985; Deaux and Kite, 1993; Kessler and McKenna, 1978) . . . . There is clear research evidence that gender role expectations influence a number of important processes at work, such as the evaluation of leader effectiveness (Eagly and Johnson, 1990), evaluation of job applicants (Graves and Powell, 1988; Heilman, Martell, and Simon, 1988) and mentoring (Ragins, 1989; Scandura and Ragins, 1993). (p. 263)

Steinberg, True, and Russo (2008) also discuss the effects of gender on work and family roles, and speak to the prevalence of gender stereotypes and the detrimental effects they can potentially have on women's career advancement. Gender norms and expectations influence – whether overtly or tacitly – the perception of how women lead and, consequently, the ways in which the adequacy of their leadership style is evaluated (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Chin, 2008; Johnson, et. al., 2008).

Of special note is Eagly's (1987) social role theory, which maintains that people hold tacit expectations regarding behavior that is consistent with an individual's ascribed social role. As it relates to gender, women are expected to act in ways that reflect "communal" behavior patterns, while men are expected to be "agentic" (Eagly, 1987, p.

126). Cleveland, Stockdale, and Murphy (2000) summarize various findings within the field of social and personality psychology that show evidence to support the same notion; that people's assessments of leaders' effectiveness are laden with latent social expectations, so that leaders are valued differently depending on the extent to which they act in accordance to the observer's own stereotype of prototypical leadership.

Although acknowledgment of certain differences between the two genders is not by itself a problem, it becomes detrimental to women's advancement when these differences are deemed as weaknesses or shortfalls in their ability to successfully assume leadership positions. Ely & Rhode (2010) comment on this phenomenon in which latent stereotypes pervade leader evaluations:

In experiment after experiment, when women achieve in distinctly male arenas, they are seen as competent but are less well liked than equally successful men (Heilman, *et al.*, 2004:416). By the same token, when women performing traditionally male roles are seen as nice, they are liked but not respected (Rudman and Glick, 2001:744). (p. 379)

The third and final hypothesis presented by Burke and Nelson (2002) points to systemic barriers and the failure of organizational policies and practices to ensure equal treatment of men and women in the workplace and, therefore, equal access to top leadership ranks and roles. According to the authors, "[t]hese policies and practices include women's lack of opportunity and power in organizations, the existing sex ratio of groups in organizations, tokenism, lack of mentors and sponsors, and denial of access to

challenging assignments” (Burke & Nelson, 2002, p. 6). This third hypothesis is intimately connected with the second one, as it implies a structural bias present in the system, which ultimately works against women’s advancement. It suggests that biases and stereotypes have become institutionalized through policies and practices set in place within organizations, even if in the majority of cases bias and stereotyping tends to happen inadvertently. This third hypothesis refers to what Ely, Ibarra, and Kolb (2011) term as “second-generation forms of gender bias” and it is the direction that most of the current research on gender and leadership is taking.

### **Strategies Aimed at Advancing Women into Positions of Leadership**

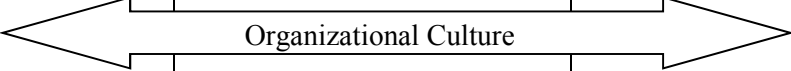
Taking into consideration the theories outlined above, there are a number of strategies that organizations employ when trying to create a more gender diverse workforce and leadership pipeline. A review of the literature reveals that these interventions can be clustered into three distinct strategies, whose interplay influences whether or not talented and qualified women ultimately gain access to high leadership positions. These are; the organization’s (a) leadership development mechanisms, (b) its support mechanisms, and (c) the processes and practices for selecting leaders into top positions. These, in turn, are strongly influenced by the organizational culture in which they are embedded.

Figure 1 displays this typology, developed from a review of the literature on women’s career advancement (please note that some interventions may serve more than one purpose and are therefore represented under multiple categories). The following sub-



sections of this chapter will provide a broad review of these three strategies and its most commonly used interventions.

Leadership Development Mechanisms	Support Mechanisms	Leadership Selection Processes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Training programs</li> <li>▪ High potential programs</li> <li>▪ Access to line experience jobs</li> <li>▪ Mentoring programs</li> <li>▪ Special assignments</li> <li>▪ Access to informal networks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Flexible work arrangements</li> <li>▪ Mentoring programs</li> <li>▪ Access to informal networks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Formal succession planning</li> <li>▪ Performance evaluation methods</li> <li>▪ Timing of promotions</li> <li>▪ Appreciation of flexible/non-traditional career paths</li> </ul>



*Figure 1.* Typology of the three distinct strategies used by organizations to advance women into positions of leadership. This typology was developed based on the review of the literature on women’s career advancement presented in Chapter 2. It depicts examples of leadership development mechanisms, support mechanisms, and leadership selection processes, accounting for the influence of organizational culture.

**Development Mechanisms.** Leadership development mechanisms involve a wide variety of methodologies and approaches. Among these, some of the most widely discussed with respect to women’s advancement into top leadership positions are access to informal networks, access to line experience jobs, mentoring programs, and women-targeted training.

Informal networks have been identified as a necessary development tool for those aspiring to climb up the leadership ranks (Ibarra, 1993). They can be instrumental in giving high potential individuals access to people in key positions of power and authority,

which can subsequently result in the expansion of these individuals' circle of influence inside the organization. Access to informal networks can also be a valuable source of organizational knowledge and can aid in developing organizational savvy, a competency that is crucial for effectively navigating an organization's political environment.

It has been shown that similarity, or "homophily<sup>1</sup>," facilitates the establishment of closer ties, better communication, and the development of trust, all of which are necessary conditions for gaining entry into informal networks (Ibarra, 1993; Kanter 1977; Lincoln & Miller, 1979). This is important to note given that, in general, women tend to have fewer same-sex network ties than their male counterparts, which is influenced by the limited availability of "similar others" who have high visibility, authority, and power at the top levels of the organization with whom to affiliate (Ibarra, 1993, p. 67). In essence, ". . . the segregated nature of organizational networks leaves women out of important connections and conversations;" hence the continued prevalence of the so-called "old boys' networks" (O'Neil, Hopkins, & Bilimoria, 2008).

Moreover, this may present an additional barrier for women with children, who tend to lack the time or even desire to engage in additional social activities outside of work (Rhode, 2003). Based on her analysis of personal networks of women and other minorities, Ibarra (1993) concluded that men and women may in fact require different approaches to creating these informal networks, which if used effectively can help bolster advancement opportunities.

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<sup>1</sup> Term used by H. Ibarra (1993) in her article "Personal networks of women and minorities in management: A conceptual framework"

Access to line experience jobs also presents an obstacle for some women trying to gain entry into top positions, as women tend to be better represented in careers that are not directly related to profit-and-loss experience. Wellington, Kropf, and Gerkovitch (2003) address this issue and point to top leadership's failure in making sure both men and women with top leadership potential get exposed to the same opportunities and experiences that will better prepare them for senior positions within their organizations. They found that "[a]bout two-thirds of women and more than half of the CEOs surveyed agree that the failure of senior leadership to assume accountability for women's advancement is a key barrier (Wellington, Kropf, and Gerkovitch, 2003, p. 19).

Another important career development tool that has shown promising potential in helping women advance is the use of mentoring programs (Giscombe, 2007). As cited by Woolnough and Davidson (2007), "Empirical research has consistently demonstrated that [in general,] mentees experience an array of positive outcomes from mentoring relationships, including enhanced career mobility, increased job satisfaction and increased visibility (Chao, 1997, Fagenson, 1989, Woolnough *et. al* 2005)" (p. 154). McKeen and Bujaki (2007) further speak to the importance of mentoring relationships in helping women, specifically, to overcome barriers to advancement:

A trusted guide, sponsor and interpreter – a mentor – is critical to (a) assisting women in decoding the masculine culture in organizations, (b) promoting women's successful functioning and advancement in organizations, and (c)

enhancing women's feelings of safety and belonging in such an environment.

(p. 198)

However, some of the same issues surrounding women's access to informal networks are also apparent in their development of mentoring relationships, such as limited access to potential mentors (Ragins & Cotton, 1991 – as cited by Giscombe, 2007).

Finally, women-only leadership training is another important tool that can be used to promote women's development and advancement. A thorough review of this practice, which is the focus of this study, will be addressed in the next section of this chapter.

**Support Mechanisms.** In addition to formal mentoring programs and access to informal networks, which act both as development tools and as valuable support mechanisms, flexible work arrangements, and other similar policies, have been noted for providing assistance, in particular, to working mothers. Flexible or alternative work arrangements, now commonplace in many organizations, have been mainly applauded for taking into consideration the particular necessities of working parents; and in general, the numbers show that it is usually women who benefit from these types arrangements and protected family leaves. In fact, out the total population of women with children under the age of eighteen, 70% are in the workforce (Catalyst, April 2016).

Organizations' acknowledgement of the importance of work-life balance is an invaluable accomplishment in the history of women in the workplace. Nonetheless, utilization of these benefits can sometimes lead to a negative perception of women's commitment to their careers (Finkel, Oswang, and She (1994); Burke, 2002; Powell &

Graves, 2003; Rhode, 2003; Hewlett & Buck, 2005; Branson, 2007; Brizendine, 2008). Findings by Judiesch and Lyness (1999) suggest that any type of family leave in a manager's career tends to be negatively associated with subsequent promotions and salary increases. Hewlett and Buck Luce (2005) also obtained similar findings in this respect:

As many as 35% of the women we surveyed report various aspects of their organization's cultures that effectively penalize people who take advantage of work-life policies . . . Of flexible work arrangements in general, 21% report that "there is an unspoken rule at my workplace that people who use these options will not be promoted" . . . . Transformation of the corporate culture seems to be a prerequisite. (p. 19)

Branson (2007) also reports that despite their talent and performance, women in business at age forty who took time off at some point in their careers, beyond the minimal maternity leave, end up earning 60% of what their male counterparts earn. This evidence suggests that the mere presence of work-life policies and programs is not a guarantee that they will be used in the way they were presumably intended, or that they will work effectively (Burke, 2002). Their implementation and usage is strongly influenced by organizational culture, along with the values and biases that define it.

**Selection Processes.** When it comes to processes for selecting individuals for senior leadership positions, these tend to be highly subjective and not necessarily driven by clear-cut, quantitative data. This subjectivity renders top leadership selection

processes extremely vulnerable to biases and subtle forms of discrimination.

Findings from Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky's (1992) meta-analytic study on gender and the evaluation of leaders reveal that even though there was only a small – almost negligible – overall tendency to evaluate males more favorably than females, the favorable tendency was stronger when evaluating male leaders on more general evaluative measures, such as perceptions of the leader's competence and satisfaction with the leader. As stated by Branson (2007), “[t]he corporate promotion tournament is an exemplar of what experts term second-generation job bias, those less blatant forms of discrimination that may go undetected by managers and by courts but that nonetheless disadvantage women and other minorities in the workplace” (p.16).

Research has also found that more so than men, women tend to have more flexible career paths that do not conform to traditional patterns (O’Neil, Hopkins, & Bilimoria, 2008; Lyness & Thompson, 2000). O’Neil, Hopkins, and Bilimoria (2008) discuss how this may pose a threat to women’s advancement into top leadership positions given that:

Although protean (Hall, 2004), boundaryless (Sullivan and Arthur, 2006), and kaleidoscope (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005) careers have been proposed as the emerging career patterns of the future, contemporary organizational career paths paradoxically remain largely defined by traditional dimensions of length of service, geographic mobility, and progression up the organizational ladder (McDonald, *et al.*, 2005). (O’Neil, Hopkins, & Bilimoria, 2008)

Finally, there is also the issue of the timing of promotions and their misalignment with the reality of most women's progression along life stages and career paths. Brizendine (2008) remarks how "[t]here's a certain age, long established by large organizations, at which professionals must decide to make their play for the big promotion – the one that will put them in line for the C-suite – and while it's a good time for men, it's not a good time for women (p. 36)". Eagly and Carli (2007) also address this issue, noting how the prime years for having children tend to coincide with the critical years for establishing one's credibility and securing a successful career path. For those who leave and try to come back into the workplace, the path is even more challenging. They report that about one-fourth of women who leave their jobs to care for children fail to find jobs – never mind promotions – when they are ready to go back to work (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

**The Implications of Organizational Culture.** Based on the above discussion, it is evident that organizational culture plays a crucial role in women's continued underrepresentation at the higher ranks of leadership, and even more so within male-dominated industries and professions. By nature, organizational culture is heavily influenced by the larger context of societal gender norms and beliefs. The effects of this are inevitable, given that,

[h]aving been created largely by and for men, organizational systems, work practices, structures, and norms tend to reflect masculine experience, masculine values, and masculine life situations. As a result, everything we come to regard as

normal and commonplace at work tends to privilege traits that are socially and culturally ascribed to men while devaluing and ignoring those ascribed to women (Kolb, Fletcher, Meyerson, Merrill-Sands & Ely, 1998, p. 13).

Although culture must not be seen as deterministic, it is imperative to acknowledge it as a powerful force that implicitly works to maintain the status quo. Leadership development mechanisms, support structures, and evaluation and selection processes are non-arguably imbued with the effects of culture.

### **Leadership Training as a Tool for Advancing Women**

The previous sections of this chapter aimed to contextualize women-only leadership training within the literature on gender and leadership theory, as well as within the gamut of existing interventions directed at closing the gender gap at the top levels of leadership. The following sub-sections will cover the topic of leadership development theory in general, to then address women-only leadership programs.

**Leadership Theory and Training.** Leadership theory is probably one of the most written about topics in the field of organizational behavior. As Popper (2005) points out, “[h]andbooks of leadership (e.g. Bass, 1990) contain references to thousands of studies presenting various view points and definitions of leadership” (p. 62). While there is a long history of leadership theory and research, the study of how to develop an organization’s leadership capability is still quite nascent by comparison (Day, *et al.*, 2014). Scholarship on the topic of has been merely budding over the last 10 to 15 years.



Although most would agree that the construct of leadership involves certain components of vision setting, combined with inspirational and motivational abilities to enhance the performance of organizational members (Kotter, 1990), in reality there is no single generally accepted theory to clearly and definitively define it. For instance, there are theories on visionary, servant, distributed, situational, transformational, results-based, and level 5, to name a few. Burke (2002) makes an interesting analogy to describe this process of defining leadership. He states, “[d]efining and attempting to clarify leadership is a lot like trying to define and describe love. First, we know when we see it and feel it, but finding accurately descriptive words for what we see and feel is not easy” (p. 242). This is not to say that leadership is a completely ambiguous construct, but it evidently involves a certain degree of relativity.

In terms of leadership development, most organizations rely on competency models to design such type of programs for their leaders. These may include a variety of technical, cognitive, and social skills, which are expected to correlate with successful leadership performance. Ulrich and Smallwood (2007) report that in their experience working with various types of organizations they have found that, regardless of industry, most rely on competency models that identify more or less the same set of generic traits; having a strong vision, fostering teamwork, and having emotional intelligence, to name a few. That is, there tends to be a high degree of alignment across different organizations as to what are essential leadership competencies.

Nonetheless, some findings suggest that given today’s business arena, the current

focus of leadership development should be one in which there is less emphasis on technical skills and more prominence given to the cognitive and social-emotional skills of leading (Goleman, 1998; Kouzes & Posner, 2002). In their review of leadership development research and theory Day, *et al.* (2014) further remark:

Given that individual leader development occurs in the context of ongoing adult development (Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2009), we need to focus on development as much as leadership to shed light on how this process unfolds . . . . there has been a change in focus associated with studies of leadership development broadly defined, away from leadership research and toward understanding and enhancing developmental processes. (p. 64)

Related to methods, one of the most traditional and widely-used approaches to leadership development is the classroom-based training technique. Day (2000) remarks on the prevalence of such programs by citing a 1995 study sponsored by the American Society of Training and Development (ASTD), which revealed that an estimated 85 percent of companies that have leadership development programs utilize a classroom-based methodology. However, Day (2000) also points out that “. . . many organizations are realizing that such programs are not enough. Classroom programs suffer from transfer of learning challenges and high start-up costs, among other limitations” (p. 586). This is an important issue when considering the effective implementation of any type of classroom training, but especially those aimed at leadership development, because of the high stakes involved and the difficulty in assessing positive outcomes.

Learning transference depends heavily on the context in which the content is presented, content relevance, and the specific techniques used within the broad spectrum of the classroom-based methodology. According to Conger (2004) “[t]raining does appear to have greater impact on development if it is customized around the specific leadership needs of the audience receiving the training and if program content addresses the organization’s real-life challenges using formats such as action learning” (p. 137). He also reflects that “[b]ecause managers often receive training apart from their back-at-work colleagues, they may receive little encouragement, feedback, or reinforcement when experimenting with new behaviors or approaches” (p. 137).

Other techniques and practices that are widely used in leadership development include 360-degree feedback, coaching, mentoring, networking, job assignments, and project-based action learning. These can either be used within a classroom-based setting or may be embedded in the learner’s everyday work (Day, 2000). Many of these techniques place a strong emphasis on learning either through or from one’s own experience, promote reflection, and invite the testing of new behaviors. Day (2000) argues that “[i]t is probably safe to conclude that any of these practices could be effective for leadership development, and that any could be ineffective. According to Day, leadership development is less about which specific practices are endorsed than about consistent and intentional implementation” (p. 606).

Further research is certainly needed to more conclusively assess the effects of some of these methods in order to better understand and enhance the current repertoire of

leadership development interventions. In reviewing the extant scholarship within the field of leadership development over the past twenty-five years, Day, *et al.* (2014) contend that “despite the significant advances in understanding leadership development . . . the field is still relatively immature . . . [and] is replete with opportunities for researchers and theorists” (p.80).

**Women-targeted Leadership Training.** Training that is specifically targeted at developing women leaders has become increasingly popular in the past decade or so. Some of these programs consist of women-only leadership training on its own, or a combination of formal training modules supplemented by other types of development tools and interventions, such as the ones described in the previous section. As is the case with general leadership development trainings, there is not a single agreed-upon design. What these programs do share in common is that they operate under the guiding principle that women can greatly benefit from being in a single-gender learning environment, where they can feel more at ease among similar others exploring issues that affect their leadership as women. Also, women-only trainings are usually complementary to other organizational leadership enhancement efforts that are offered to both male and female leaders; in other words, the former is not meant to substitute for the latter.

Although critics of this type of intervention argue that by highlighting gender differences these programs end up reinforcing discriminatory views against women, others contend that not acknowledging the differences in women’s experience contributes to their further exclusion from top leadership ranks (Vinnicombe & Singh, 2002).

Women-only programs are not intended to isolate women because they differ from men in terms of their capacity, but are rather an acknowledgement of the gendered nature of organizations. Women-only trainings, then, should not be devised as a “fix-the-women” approach, but rather as a platform that gives women the opportunity to more freely examine their development as leaders, while openly recognizing the influence of gender in their path to leadership (Vinnicombe & Singh, 2002; Ely, Ibarra & Kolb, 2011).

When leadership development efforts ignore the gendered nature of organizations, they severely hinder women’s opportunity for developing both self-awareness and a better understanding of their social context, which ultimately thwarts their growth as leaders. Hopkins, O’Neil, Passarelli, and Bilimoria (2008) state how “[g]iven that women face unique challenges in leadership, oftentimes unrecognized by others, it is imperative that leadership development strategies are advanced to meet their specific needs” (p.351). The authors also remark on the scarcity of research on the topic of women’s leadership development.

Without a robust body of research, then, it is difficult to determine whether it is worthwhile for organizations to invest in women-only leadership training. Notwithstanding its increasing popularity, scholarship on the topic is extremely limited. Debebe’s (2011) study is one of a handful that has empirically examined women-only development programs. She elicited stories from program participants in order to determine whether this type of intervention is particularly conducive to teaching/learning processes that enable transformational learning for participants; a research design that

yielded rich descriptions of participants' experience of the training and the meanings that it had for them. Her findings provided confirming evidence that this specific type of training does indeed offer the appropriate environment for transformational learning to take place, producing "a significant learning moment" for participants (p.689).

In her analysis, Debebe (2011) argues that two conditions were vital for producing these transformational learning moments; "...the coalescing of an all women environment and gender-sensitive teaching and learning practices. The result of this was the creation of an environment that was experienced as safe, because it holistically affirmed women's experiences" (Debebe, 2011, p. 704–705). Debebe (2011) thus suggests that an all-women environment in itself is not sufficient to facilitate transformational learning, but that the former must be combined with teaching methods and training content that take into account women's particular experience as leaders.

Clarke (2011) assessed women's opinions on the personal and professional impact of having participated in a government-sponsored women-only leadership training program that is available to women in both the private industry and the public sector in Australia. Study participants commented on the level of openness and intimacy that the women-only setting allowed for, how they felt it helped them develop more self-awareness and self-understanding of their leadership style, the opportunity it offered for networking with other participants and program presenters, and reported experiencing an increased confidence to deal with cultural barriers to their advancement. Nonetheless, Clarke (2011) states that participation in the program did not seem to have an immediate

effect on career progress: “While the majority felt that they had benefited in terms of personal and professional development, actual progress to more senior positions was dependent on a range of factors such as personal motivation, family issues, work context and organizational culture” (p. 507–508).

Just a few other research studies have been done, the majority of which are with women in academia. For instance, Harris and Leberman (2012) conducted a longitudinal case study of a women-only leadership training program for women in tertiary education in New Zealand. Their study assessed participants’ opinions of whether and how participating in the program has been helpful in their careers. According to their findings, the most salient themes identified by women were an increase in self-confidence and satisfaction with the networking opportunities offered by the program. Increased self-confidence has also been reported as a program outcome identified by women in other studies, as has the positive role of the training in building their professional networks (Clarke, 2011; Bonebright, Cottledge, and Lonquist, 2012; Moorosi, 2013).

Bonebright, Cottledge, and Lonquist (2012) also provide a description of a women-only program within an American university setting. While theirs is not an empirical study, the authors cite preliminary, unpublished findings from interviews conducted by a graduate researcher with past program participants. These include the above-mentioned findings, as well as the opportunity provided by the training to learn from other women’s experiences. They state that “[a]ccording to participants, self-confidence was created by providing space for women to develop their identities as

leaders and discuss common concerns with peers” (Bonebright, Cottledge, and Lonquist, 2012, p. 89). Hornsby, Morrow-Jones, and Ballam (2012) also conducted an in-house evaluation of a program offered to tenure- and clinical-track faculty. Their report includes findings regarding both participants’ and dean’s satisfaction with the program and reveals that graduates of the training have been promoted “at a higher rate [20%] than would be possible for all Ohio State faculty” (Hornsby, Morrow-Jones, & Ballam, 2012, p. 106). In the case of Harris and Leberman’s (2012) study, they report that more than 75% of study participants took on leadership roles after participating in the program.

Clearly, the available research examining women-only leadership trainings is very limited. Additional studies are needed to look at exactly how program participants apply the leadership development tools imparted during these trainings once they go back to work and just how this in turn impacts their ability to further develop as leaders and better navigate gender dynamics in their organizations.

Also, although women-only programs tend to share certain commonalities, they can vary greatly in terms of specific content covered, delivery methods used, and format, which can add to the challenge of drawing comparisons among them. The present study aims to add to existing scholarship by generating further empirical evidence on what aspects of a specific program are most helpful for participants and exactly how these are used once they are back at work. Debebe’s (2011) findings support the notion that insights from the training are carried on to women’s leadership practice in the workplace,



but her study merely scratches the surface on the topic. Her discussion centers on strategies that women use to remind themselves of the meaningful learning moments achieved during the program – maintaining the relationships and connections established with other program participants and the use of meaningful artifacts that act as visual reminders. Her findings suggest that the training gets the momentum going for the possibility of change and growth back in the workplace, but that some source of support is needed to keep it going. Nonetheless, a thorough description of the process that these women go through once they are back at work applying those insights is beyond the scope of her study.

The use of a narrative inquiry approach will set the proposed study apart from much of the existing literature. By focusing on women’s stories, the goal is to uncover aspects of their day-to-day interactions with peers, subordinates, and superiors to identify if and how the learning derived from the training has impacted these interactions and, ultimately, their leadership identity. It aims to go beyond obtaining broad statements from participants by having them recount specific events and the thoughts and feelings that these evoked, as well as the meanings that they hold for them, comparable to how Debebe (2011) used narratives to identify teaching/learning processes that were conducive to transformational learning. By using a narrative inquiry approach she was able to uncover particular “teaching/learning processes that enabled transformational learning” (p.689). She states how, “[p]articipants’ recall of the events of the training was vivid and full of nuanced feelings about the teaching and learning practices that had been critical in achieving insights” (Debebe, 2011, p. 689).

Finally, the research is also lacking in offering descriptions of how the organizational context either facilitates or impedes application of the material imparted during the training. As evidenced from the earlier discussion on barriers to women's advancement and the influence of organizational culture, the impact of these training programs must be considered in light of the social context of the organization. This would lead to a better understanding of the organizational conditions that could ultimately affect program's effectiveness. Although an in-depth exploration of the organizational culture is not within the scope of this study, women's narratives of their interactions with others is full of anecdotes that reveal aspects of the organization's culture and their perspectives on leadership-related aspects of the culture are also elicited.

### **Leadership Development as Identity Work**

New scholarship on the topic of leadership development has set forth the notion that in order to better address the needs of today's leaders these programs must integrate tools and practices that facilitate identity work. Let us first define the construct of leadership identity, to then explore how it relates to leadership development in general and its particular relevance to women's leadership development efforts.

**Leadership Identity Theory.** Identity refers to the meanings and characteristics that are ascribed to an individual, either by self or others, which are shaped by social interaction and social structures (Gecas, 1982; van Knippenberg, *et al.*, 2004). An individual usually possesses various identities depending on their social context, as postulated by Stryker & Burke (2000):

To refer to each group-based self, the theorists chose the term identity, asserting that persons have as many identities as distinct networks of relationships in which they occupy positions and play roles. In identity theory usage, social roles are expectations attached to positions occupied in networks of relationships; identities are internalized role expectations. (p. 286)

Leadership is one such identity that individuals can assume. Day & Harrison (2007) contend that development of a leadership identity is crucial for leaders “. . . because it grounds them in understanding who they are, their major goals and objectives, and their personal strengths and limitations” (p. 365). Furthermore, internalizing a leader identity is said to be a source of empowerment and a motivation to further grow one’s leadership capacity (Day & Harrison, 2007; Lord & Hall, 2005; De Rue, *et al.*, 2009).

Given the ambiguity of leadership as a construct, De Rue and Ashford (2010) argue that social interaction and social context are greater influences on leadership identity development than on other types of less ambiguous and more commonly studied identities:

These differing views about what leaders should do and what behaviors are appropriate, along with the fact that leadership occurs in the context of relationships and involves social exchange and influence processes, make the leader identity particularly ambiguous and susceptible to social construction. (De Rue, *et. al.*, 2009, p.7)

Their theory looks at patterns of influence in the development of a leadership identity and how these work to shape this identity both over time and in any given context. Adding to previous scholarship on the topic, De Rue and Ashford (2010) conceive leadership identity formation as independent of a formal leadership title and postulate that “leader and follower identities are not cognitions that [just] reside within an individual’s self-concept (Day & Harrison, 2007; Day & Lance, 2004; De Rue, *et al.* 2009); they are also socially constructed and inherently related (e.g., granting one person a leader identity frequently instantiates to a follower identity for others)” (p. 628). As such, a person’s identity as a leader is created and reinforced or weakened through a social exchange process of claiming and granting interactions.

The act of claiming involves behaviors that an individual engages in to assert him or herself as a leader, exhibiting characteristics that he or she deems as defining of that identity, while the process of granting refers to the actions of others to either affirm or disconfirm it. They explain that, it is “through repeated claiming-granting processes across situations and over time . . . that this situation-specific and socially affirmed leader identity will begin to transcend across situations and grow stronger” (De Rue, *et al.* 2009, p.17). The authors thus propose a dynamic view of a leader’s identity development. Through this social construction process a leader’s identity continually evolves, rejecting the notion that once assumed it remains static over time.

Of central importance to De Rue and Ashford’s (2010) relational theory of leadership identity is the dynamic interplay of three distinct levels of leadership identity

construal. They argue that all three levels – (a) individual internalization, (b) relational cognition, and (c) collective endorsement – need to be considered if one is to capture the true essence of leadership identity development, although they do not necessarily identify any directionality between the three. Individual internalization refers to the process by which an individual ascribes new qualities to his or her self-concept as a leader.

Relational cognition refers to the weakening or reinforcement of this self-concept “to the extent that it is relationally recognized through the adoption of reciprocal role identities as leader and follower (p. 629). Collective endorsement is about becoming regarded as a leader within the broader social context of the organization. Sources of collective endorsement are the judgments of followers, peers, and superiors, which grant the individual a collective notion of his or her identity as a leader within a given context or setting.

**Leadership Identity Theory and Leadership Training.** According to Ibarra, Snook, and Guillén Ramo (2010),

A compelling argument that the development of leadership skills is inextricably integrated with the development of the person’s self-concept as a leader is emerging. But, research and theorizing on leadership development have yet to specify the processes and moderating conditions that account for this identity transformation. (p.2)

Petriglieri (2011) reinforces this notion and advocates for a re-conceptualization of leadership programs as “identity workspaces,” where participants are invited to

examine their individual and collective identities as leaders. He argues that well developed leadership skills *per se*, although necessary, are not sufficient for leaders to be effective; they also need to cultivate their identity as leaders in order to be able to lead in a way that is authentic to them and that is in tune with the needs of their constituents and the organization.

Based on their years of experience developing and facilitating women-only leadership development programs, Ely, Ibarra, and Kolb (2011) make the case that the most important aspect that this type of intervention needs to address is fostering participants' leadership identity development. The authors contend that the concept of leadership identity development is intimately tied to women's ability to counteract the adverse effects that prevalent second-generation forms of gender bias pose to their advancement and progress in the workplace. As they point out,

If constructing and internalizing a leader identity is central to the process of becoming a leader, as recent theory would suggest (DeRue & Ashford, 201b; Ibarra, Snook, & Guillén Ramo, 2010; Lord & Hall, 2005), then these subtle yet pervasive forms of gender bias may impede women's progress by obstructing the identity work necessary to take up leadership roles. (p.475)

The authors emphasize the great benefits that some of the frequently-used leadership development tools and topics have on women's ability to subsequently manage these sources of gender bias, while building their leadership identity (e.g. 360-degree feedback, networking, negotiations, leading change, and managing career

transitions). Although their discussion draws on existing scholarship and their vast experience on the subject, it is mainly theoretical and anecdotal in nature when it comes to describing the impact on women's leadership identity development. Exactly how these tools help women further shape their identity as leaders once they are back on the job and have the opportunity to put their learning into practice is yet to be examined in a rigorous empirical study.

Moorosi's (2013) study of school leaders in South Africa examined the topic, but looked at a general leadership development program aimed at both men and women of varying levels of experience and used secondary data analysis. Her findings suggest that participation in this type of program provided a source for leadership identity development, especially among less privileged female leaders. In her study, she looked at interview data of program participants that focused on pre- and post-evaluations of their perceived strengths and weaknesses. Secondary data analysis was then used to examine leadership identity development. While this is a valid methodology, it also has its limitations, which the currently proposed study aims to address.

Since Moorosi's (2013) analysis was limited to existing data that were not originally collected with that specific intent, additional questions or probes that may have served to clarify or expand on the subject could not be made. Also, since the data were analyzed deductively using existing theory on the topic of identity development, additional themes not covered by current theory could not be brought to light. Although Moorosi (2013) provides confirming evidence for the presence of leadership identity

development subsequent to the training intervention, the employed methodology is not aimed at uncovering how this process takes place, nor participants' understanding of the context surrounding the application of the training material

Because of the importance that DeRue and Ashford (2010) give to social interaction and social context in the development of a leadership identity, their theory provides a sound theoretical framework from which to examine if and how a transition takes place in women's perceived leadership identity after going through a women-only leadership development program. As Ely, Ibarra, and Kolb (2011) remark, "[t]he social interactions in which people claim and grant leader identities do not occur *ex nihilo* but are shaped by culturally available ideologies about what it means to be a leader" (p. 476). Consequently, in order to better assess possible changes in training participants' leadership identity and ability to navigate gender, it is important to take into consideration their perceptions of these claiming and granting interactions within the cultural context of their organization.



## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of whether and how senior-level Information Technology (IT) women leaders perceive that participation in a women-only training program has impacted the development of their leadership identity. The following research questions were explored:

1. What impacts do insights gained during a women-only leadership training program have on senior-level IT women leaders' perceptions of their leadership identity development?
2. What is the experience of participants implementing the tools learned and insights gained during a women-only leadership training program once they returned to their areas of work, within a male-dominated organizational context?

The focus of this research was on women's perceptions, experiences, and understanding of their leadership identity development before and after participating in a women-only leadership training program. The questions that this study sought to answer were framed by a constructivism-interpretivism paradigm, which gives prominence to the way individuals perceive their reality, and the consequences that this holds for their behavior and social interactions (Patton, 2002). Furthermore, as explained by Ponterotto (2005), "[t]he constructivist position espouses a hermeneutical approach, which maintains that meaning is hidden and must be brought to the surface through deep

reflection (see Schwandt, 2000; Sciarra, 1999). This reflection can be stimulated by the interactive researcher-participant dialogue” (p. 129).

Therefore, a qualitative research strategy was best suited to accomplish the goals of this investigation. Qualitative research seeks to understand the perspective of the participants under study and the meanings they ascribe to their lived experience. The interpretive nature of qualitative research also allows for seeking meaning in the data collected in order to generate or inform theory (Maxwell, 2005; Creswell, 2009). A qualitative approach allowed me to look closely at the particular context in which the program graduates operate and helped to uncover the processes by which the participants utilize insights from the training and how their leadership identity developed, rather than narrowing the focus on objective outcomes.

**Narrative Inquiry.** Even more specifically, a life story narrative inquiry approach was used to gather and analyze the data for this study (sometimes also referred to as personal narrative). As stated by Musson (2004),

. . . the [life story] method prioritizes individual explanations and interpretations of actions and events, viewing them as lenses through which to access the meaning that human beings attribute to their experience. . . . Thus, the reflexivity of human beings is central to this perspective and it is this process of reflexivity, how human beings theorize and explain their past, present, and future, which the life history method seeks to capture (p.34).

Prior research conducted by Debebe (2011) and Moorosi (2013) informed the methodology that was used, both of which are described in the previous chapter. By using a narrative inquiry technique for data collection, this study sought to deepen the understanding of how a women-only training program may help further develop women's leadership identity, and how this plays out in their day-to-day work lives. Riessman (1993) emphasizes how narrative inquiry is very well suited for studies dealing with the construct of identity and that have a high degree of subjectivity.

### **Participant Sampling**

Study participants were selected from among women who completed a three-day, in-house, women-only training program offered by a large U.S. based, Fortune 500 company, in the Information Technology and Services industry (whose name will remain anonymous). This company began offering a women-only leadership development program for its high-potential senior-level leaders in 2010 as part of its formal diversity and inclusion strategy. It was created through the sponsorship of the company's only female board member at the time who identified the need to create a program focused on developing leadership identity and capacity in women in STEM, an area that other technology companies have been focusing on in recent years.

The intended goals of the program, as described by the company's Chief Diversity Officer, are to further develop the leadership talent of their women leaders by offering them the space and time to focus on themselves and their development, and through these means to encourage their retention. Some of the key metrics that are used

to measure the program's success are retention rate and job changes, both lateral and vertical, in addition to the training satisfaction ratings of participants. Retention and job changes are evaluated in comparison to both male and female counterparts who have not attended the program. Although specific figures were not provided, it was reported that program goals are not just being met, but in some cases they have exceeded expectations. The retention rate is higher for alumnae than those who have not gone through the program. The program has also received much praise from individuals throughout the organization and there is an aura of prestige around being chosen to participate.

Participation in the program is by invitation only – women are hand-picked by their executive leaders. HR Business Partners work with the executive leaders from each division to select from their pool of high-potential women. Eligible candidates must be, at a minimum, at the Director-level. To date, six cohorts of women (over 150 participants) have completed the program, which was developed in conjunction with a local university that has a well-known and highly regarded research and executive education center focused on issues pertaining to gender in the workplace. The offering was designed based on the extant research on the topic of women's leadership development and was customized to the organization. Inputs to the design of the program consisted of focus groups conducted with female senior leaders from across the organization, as well as interviews with both male and female top executives.

As part of this three-day training program, participants receive direct instruction and coaching from a team of external consultants who possess in-depth expertise in

women's leadership development and gender dynamics in organizations (see Appendix A for a list of topics covered). Also, one of the company's high-ranking executives offers a brief presentation during the session and engages in discussion with the participants. Executive coaches (some of whom are presenters in the training) are also available during a 360-degree feedback module to debrief reactions to individual results of the assessment and to facilitate action planning. After the program, participants have the opportunity to continue working with these coaches; however, this is currently done on a voluntary basis, since the costs need to be assumed by the participant's department. Any subsequent coaching that the women may wish to receive is beyond the scope of the program. In addition to the three-day classroom training, participants can participate in other smaller-scale development events for at least one year following the conclusion of the program. These include webinars, breakfasts, and fireside chats with the company's only female board member, as well as other high-ranking executives who were not present during the residential program. However, these are not held on a regular basis. Program alumnae are also sponsored to participate in local women's conferences.

**Sample characteristics.** The sample for this study consisted of 18 graduates of the above-described training program. The sample was composed mostly of individuals at the Vice President and above levels, with 11 fitting that category. The rest were at the Director and Senior Director levels. Table 1 displays the breakdown per specific hierarchical level. On average, participants were 48 years old, with an average of 26 years of experience – 16.29 of those at the current company – and an average of 2.8 years in their current position. Of this sample, 72% had experienced a promotion after going

through the training – 85% of which had been promoted once and 15% promoted twice. Thirteen of the women held graduate degrees, with eight possessing an MBA, and two held executive education certificates. The majority of the sample identified themselves as White/Caucasian. Only two belonged to a racial or ethnic minority. Tables 2 through 6 below present the descriptive statistics of the sample. Only one participant did not provide complete demographic information.

Table 1

*Sample Composition – Hierarchical Level*

Level	Cohort		
	Total	Early <sup>2</sup>	Recent <sup>3</sup>
Director	1	0	1
Senior Director	6	3	3
Vice President	9	5	4
Senior Vice President	2	2	0

<sup>2</sup> “Early” is defined as the first two cohorts of participants who went through the training in 2009 and 2010.

<sup>3</sup> “Recent” is defined as the two cohorts of participants who went through the training in 2013 and 2014.

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics of the Sample – Years of Experience*

Experience Measure	Cohort		
	Total	Early	Recent
Years of professional experience			
Average	25.79	26.61	24.88
Minimum	15.00	19.00	15.00
Maximum	35.00	32.50	35.00
Median	28.00	28.00	25.50
Years of IT industry experience			
Average	24.56	25.06	24.00
Minimum	15.00	15.00	15.00
Maximum	33.00	32.50	33.00
Median	28.00	28.00	24.50
Years of service at company			
Average	16.29	17.61	14.81
Minimum	4.00	7.00	4.00
Maximum	30.50	30.50	24.00
Median	16.00	16.00	15.50

Table 3

*Descriptive Statistics of the Sample – Time in Current Position*

Time in current position (in years)	Cohort		
	Total	Early	Recent
Average	3.47	3.95	2.86
Minimum	0.50	0.50	0.67
Maximum	17.00	17.00	5.50
Median	2.50	2.63	2.25

Table 4

*Descriptive Statistics of the Sample – Age*

Age	Cohort		
	Total	Early	Recent
Average	48.76	50.22	47.13
Minimum	35.00	41.00	35.00
Maximum	58.00	54.00	58.00
Median	50.00	51.00	48.00

Table 5

*Descriptive Statistics of the Sample – Number of Promotions*

Promotions Measure	Cohort		
	Total	Early	Recent
Total promotions at current company			
Average	3.41	3.30	3.57
Minimum	1.00	1.00	1.00
Maximum	7.00	7.00	6.00
Median	3.00	3.00	4.00
Promotions after the training			
Average	0.83	1.00	0.63
Minimum	0.00	0.00	0.00
Maximum	2.00	2.00	2.00
Median	1.00	1.00	0.50

Table 6

*Descriptive Statistics of the Sample – Highest Level of Education*

Educational Level	Cohort		
	Total	Early	Recent
Bachelor's Degree	3	2	1
Graduate Degree	13	7	6
MBA	8	5	3
Executive Education	2	1	1



**Sampling procedures.** In order to ensure that the sample contained both recent program alumnae as well as those who participated early on, participants were purposefully selected, as is usually the case with qualitative research (Creswell, 2009). Purposeful sampling “is a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can’t be gotten as well from other choices” (Maxwell, 2005, p.88). Patton (2002) further posits,

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting *information-rich cases* for study in-depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term *purposeful* sampling. Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations (p.230).

Ten program graduates were sought from the first two cohorts of the program (2009 and 2010) and ten from the last and second-to-last cohort (2013 and 2014) at the time of data collection. The total population of graduates targeted was about 60 women in each cohort category – early and recent.

A recruitment email (See Appendix B) was sent to program alumnae who fit the above-stated eligibility criteria, inviting them to participate in the study. This email was sent by the company’s Chief Diversity Officer and briefly explained the purpose of the study to potential research subjects. Prospective participants who had an interest were instructed to contact me directly. After the invitation email was sent, potential participants were given a week to state their interest in being interviewed. Two email

follow-ups were sent, in order to ensure that the target sample size was reached as close as possible – about 10 from each group (See Appendices C and D). Invitation emails and follow-ups were sent in the same manner as the initial recruitment email.

In case I ended up with more interested individuals than the desired sample size, the plan was to randomly select 10 subjects from each group (for a total of 20). This was explained in an email to those who expressed interest in participating (See Appendix E). In this email I also asked potential participants to indicate on which date they took the training in order to determine if they belonged to the “early” or “recent” cohorts described under Section I. Once the sample was selected, participants received an email notification (See Appendix F).

After the two initial recruitment emails were sent, I received only 18 responses. Four out of those 18 did not reply to the confirmation that they were selected as part of the sample. To make sure that I would have a robust sample that was as close as possible to 20 participants, a third and final invitation email was sent. In the end, 19 women were interviewed. Only 18 made it to the final sample, as one of these participants could have been easily identified by the organization based on certain characteristics. The final sample consisted of ten participants of the early cohorts and eight from the most recent. Table 7 provides the breakdown per specific cohort year.

Table 7

*Sample Composition by Cohort*

Cohort		Number of Participants
Early	2009	4
	2010	6
Recent	2013	7
	2014	1

**Data Collection Procedures**

**Interview process.** Once prospective subjects agreed to participate in the study, I promptly contacted them to arrange the date, time, and location for their interview (See Appendix F). Although participants had the option of doing the interview over the phone, it was stated that a face-to-face meeting was preferred. Six phone interviews were necessary, given that some program alumnae were located in different states. Only one of these remote interviews was with a local participant, since that happened to be more convenient for her. In order to best simulate a face-to-face experience, I conducted five of the remote interviews using Web-ex, a videoconferencing tool that some participants were already familiar with. Only one participant was unable to participate via videoconference and the interview was conducted via phone.

Since during the interview I asked participants to refer back to an exercise that was carried out during the training, I explained this beforehand via email, in order to give them a chance to complete the exercise and come in better prepared for the interview (See Appendix G). Doing this not only saved time during the interview, but also gave participants a chance for introspection on their own time, allowing them to give some

prior thought to their leadership trajectory. In this email, I also sent participants a copy of the informed consent form (See Appendix H) and a summary list of the training topics to help jog the interviewees' memory, (Appendix A). Most participants looked through the documents and completed the exercise prior to the interview and came ready to share their stories. The few who did not were offered a few minutes to think through the exercise.

At the beginning of each interview, I introduced myself, my background, and restated the purpose of the study. I also explained the measures that would be taken to ensure confidentiality of the data and anonymity of participants. I explained that participant IDs (which I assigned) would be used to identify them and that only I would have access to the master list of names and their assigned identification number. Also, any identifiable information, such as other people's names and department names that could be mentioned, would be replaced with dummy labels in the transcriptions, to the extent that this did not compromise the content of the interview. I explained to participants that their company would not have access to any of the raw data collected from the interviews. Once I reviewed the information covered on the consent form, I asked participants if they had any questions or if there was anything that needed to be clarified. I, then asked them to provide their verbal consent. At the end of each interview, I let participants know that could contact me either by phone or email, in case they later thought of additional details they wish to share with me and that we could schedule a follow-up conversation. No follow-ups had to be scheduled and participants were only interviewed once.

All interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed to ensure accuracy of the collected data. I also took some notes during each interview, but only when I wanted to remember certain details for further probing later on. This allowed me to remain an active listener during the interview process, rather than having to additionally focus on taking detailed notes. However, soon or immediately after each interview I wrote a quick summary of the conversation and my initial impressions. This practice helped in the later analysis of the data, as it offered an opportunity for preliminary reflection close to the time of the data collection, when the interaction with the participant was still fresh in my mind.

**Interview protocol.** In order to assess women's perceptions of their leadership identity development, I conducted semi-structured, qualitative interviews. The interview strategy followed a semi-structured approach, so that an interview guide with the specific issues to be explored was carefully outlined, but still allowed for a conversational-style interaction that gave me the flexibility to probe (Patton, 2002). This strategy is well-aligned with a narrative inquiry methodology, as it allows for focused data collection to take place in relation to a specific topic, while offering the necessary freedom to both the researcher and the participant as a storyteller. The questions were framed in a way to open up the conversation within set topics, and allowed for consistency across participants, but still allowing each interviewee to talk about their stories in ways that are meaningful to them (Riessman, 1993). Chase (2005) remarks on this:

To think of an interviewee as a narrator is to make a conceptual shift away from the idea that interviewees have answers to researchers' questions and toward the idea that interviewees are narrators with stories to tell and voices of their own. . . . Thus, narrative interviewing involves a paradox. On the one hand, a researcher needs to be well prepared to ask good questions that will invite the other's particular story; on the other hand, the very idea of a particular story is that it cannot be known, predicted or prepared for in advance" (p. 660–662).

Using the semi-structured interview protocol described above (see Appendix I), program alumnae were asked questions regarding their trajectory as leaders, as well as how they applied the tools learned during the program and the perceived impact that this has had on their leadership identity. Participants were asked to recall their classroom experience and to identify the content that was most relevant to them and the insights they derived. Then, they were asked to recall stories of when they went back to work and applied these insights, and how they have used them to further enhance their leadership capacity. I sought to elicit specific details of how they did it, how it made them feel about themselves as leaders, their perceptions of other's reactions to their behavior, as well as any outcomes they were able to identify, and the feelings and emotions that this may have evoked.

I addressed DeRue and Ashford's (2010) three levels of leadership identity development by asking participants questions related to their sense of self as leaders (individual internalization), as well as their perceptions of how others may view them

(relational cognition and collective endorsement), these questions. The narrative approach of the interview process was useful in trying to delve deeper into this and, whenever possible try to uncover these claiming and granting processes described by the authors. Finally, I also encouraged participants to rate the effects of the training on their evolution as leaders and asked them to compare themselves before and after their experience of the training. This was to provide a means for assessing how they view the idea that they may be dealing with issues differently after completing the program, and how their own and other's perceptions about their leadership identity may have shifted.

It is important to note that since the interviews gave participants the opportunity to reflect back on their lived experience; this re-telling of events provided them an opportunity for introspection that in some cases led to the development of new insights about themselves and their contexts that were not achieved prior to the interviews. Through this telling of the experience, the narrator and the listener, in a sense, interact to co-create the stories told (Riessman, 1993; Clandinin, 2013). A few of the women commented how they appreciated having the time to rethink about the training content and to reflect about their trajectory as leaders.

Demographic information was also collected from each participant through a brief survey that was sent prior to the interview with the topics to be covered. The survey, which was collected at the end of the interview process, included questions such as age, ethnicity, years of service at the company, current position/title, time in current position,

number of promotions while working at the company, number of direct reports, and level of education.

**Pilot study.** A pilot study was conducted with a sample of three program alumnae whose contact information was provided by the company's Chief Diversity Officer. I proceeded to contact them and explain the purpose of the overall study and the pilot. Through this pilot study I was able to test the interview protocol and make necessary modifications. Some of the questions on the semi-structured interview guide were revised to better align the questionnaire with the narrative inquiry framework and to make sure I was truly addressing my two research questions and the goals stated in my proposal. Based on the experience of the pilot interviews, I also decided to create a separate questionnaire with the demographic questions, which were then sent to participants in the email confirming the interview appointment (See Appendices J). Also, as a result of the pilot, I decided to create a worksheet that was used during the interview as a visual guide for the leadership trajectory exercise (See Appendix K).

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

The data analysis for this study was conducted in two phases. First, each interview was content and thematically analyzed on its own, following a holistic-content approach to narrative analysis, as described by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber (1998). Then, the entire set of interviews was thematically analyzed in the aggregate, following a categorical-content approach, to determine whether there are any apparent overarching themes and patterns (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). While the



final discussion would not revolve around each particular case study, I needed to pay attention to the connections, patterns, and themes within the stories told by each participant before being able to examine all of the interviews as a whole. Chase (2005) explains,

When it comes to interpreting narratives heard during interviews, narrative researchers begin with narrators' voices and stories, thereby extending the narrator-listener relationship and the active work of listening into the interpretive process. This is a move away from a traditional theme-oriented method of analyzing qualitative material. Rather than locating distinct themes *across* interviews, narrative researchers listen first to the stories *within* each narrative (p. 663).

I conducted a preliminary round of data analysis in parallel with the data collection by writing some notes immediately following each interview in order to capture my initial thoughts on the conversation. I also re-listened to each recording soon after conducting the interview and added any other details that stood out or additional impressions that came to mind after this second review of the interviews. This was captured in the form of handwritten reflection memos. This practice helped me to begin identifying the connections within the stories of each individual subject. It also helped me with the initial identification of a possible coding scheme, which I recorded on a separate analytic memo. I followed Maxwell's (2005) recommendation of not waiting until all the data had been collected to begin the analysis. By writing these memos and re-listening to

the tapes soon after the interviews, I was able remain close to the data throughout the collection process, while keeping an eye on the analysis from the very beginning.

Although I personally transcribed the three initial interviews, most of the transcribing process was outsourced to a transcription service. A confidentiality agreement was solicited from this provider to ensure the protection of participant's privacy and anonymity. Once I received the transcriptions, I re-listened to the tapes to check for accuracy and promptly removed identifiable information. I then proceeded to import the transcribed interviews to NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software program.

For the analysis, I first coded three interviews from the "early" cohorts and three from the "recent" cohorts. This was to develop an initial idea of the coding scheme, while being attentive to potential similarities and differences within the two groups. After completing this, I then analyzed the rest of the interviews. When I was just over halfway through the process, I began to clean up the codes – for instance, merging multiple codes that were referring to the same concept, whenever appropriate – and continued to synthesize codes under emerging themes. I decided to keep many of the descriptive codes that I created separate, rather than merging them into a category, and then proceeded to create a theme or category code under which to aggregate these. I continually reevaluated the clustering of codes throughout the entire coding and analysis process.

In the end, no significant differences were noted between the early and recent cohorts. I then thought about what other ways the sample might be compared and contrasted to further deepen the analysis. As part of the interview process, participants

were asked to rate the impact of the women-only training program on their evolution as leaders on a scale of one to ten, so I decided to create three comparison groups based on this self-assessment. Since ratings ranged from four to ten, I labeled each interview as medium-low (rating of 4–6), medium-high (7), or high (8–10) impact to explore differences between them and see what patterns emerged. I also labeled participants as seemingly satisfied or unsatisfied with the current progress of their careers, based on what I gathered from our conversation. This label was based on my own subjective assessment of participants' stories since I did not explicitly elicit this information from them. Nonetheless, those who were labeled as dissatisfied were those who openly expressed those feelings during the interview. I felt comfortable using this label, even given how subjective it was, since I used it to segregate the highly dissatisfied from the seemingly satisfied to look at patterns among the low-satisfaction group. Findings from these comparisons will be elaborated on in Chapter 4.

The following sub-sections will detail the two distinct approaches that I used for analyzing the entire dataset: holistic-content analysis and categorical-content analysis.

**Holistic-content analysis.** I followed the guidelines suggested by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) in order to first analyze the data using a holistic-content approach and capture this portion of the analysis in the form of handwritten analytical memos. I first read each transcription several times to detect the general meaning and the main foci of each woman's leadership story. I then wrote my general impression of each interview, including features that stood out in the stories. During this

process, I referred back to the initial memos that I wrote soon after the interviews were conducted and used those observations in my analysis. I went through each transcription one more time and proceeded to code the text using NVivo. I applied both descriptive and thematic analysis to code the portions of the interview that were of relevance to the research questions that I was seeking to address. Finally, I went back to the analytic memos for each interview and noted my conclusions on each of the major themes that I identified. As I went through this process for each individual interview, I updated the coding scheme whenever necessary. Although my discussion would not revolve around each individual case study, analyzing each interview on its own provided context for the themes identified and allowed me to pay attention to the connections among these.

**Categorical-content analysis.** The main discussion of my analysis focused on the overarching themes and patterns that emerged across the different interviews with the study participants. For this, I used a categorical-content analysis approach, as described by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998). I began by clustering the identified themes into broader overarching categories and creating sub-themes whenever necessary, to then uncover possible patterns across the interviews. Initially, I analyzed the data inductively, following a data-driven approach to identify substantive categories and emerging themes. After completing this, I then conducted an additional round of coding using codes based on DeRue and Ashford's (2010) theory on leadership identity development. I re-read each interview to see where I could identify instances of "individual internalization", "relational cognition", and "collective endorsement" in the women's stories (DeRue and Ashford's, 2010).

In order to address the second research question of this study, which seeks to uncover the experience of how participants implement the tools learned and insights gained during the training, I employed process coding. As described by Saldaña (2013), “[p]rocess coding uses gerunds (“-ing” words) exclusively to connote action in the data (Charmaz, 2002)” (p. 96). This allowed me to uncover the process of how the women went about implementing the lessons they learned during the training. For this, I selected the portions of the dataset in which participants recounted their experience trying out the strategies and tools that they learned at the training.

The above-described two-phased approach to analyzing the data was crucial in helping me make sense of the themes identified, while paying attention to context. It allowed me to first gain a sense of each woman’s individual experience, the factors that they deemed important in their development as leaders, and the circumstances that they faced along their trajectories, before looking at the dataset as a whole. When looking for patterns in the data, I was then able to refer to the memos that I had written for each participant, instead of solely relying on the clustering of themes that I had captured on NVivo. This practice allowed me to better contextualize the findings and was especially useful when looking at themes among the sub-groups selected for comparison.

### **Validity / Trustworthiness**

Validity in qualitative research is not about making sure that factual claims can be made about the results presented, but is rather concerned with the trustworthiness of these claims. In order to present results that can be deemed trustworthy, the qualitative

researcher must look to identify possible threats to validity and, whenever possible, take the appropriate measures to address these (Maxwell, 2005). The following are the identified threats to the validity of this study and the steps that were taken to strengthen the trustworthiness of the results:

- Given the recruitment strategy that was used for this study, I must acknowledge the possibility of selection bias. Women who agreed to participate could be the ones who most felt they got something out of the training and who wanted to share their experience; or on the contrary, it could be the women who had a very negative experience. It was not known what had been the experience of those who decided they did not want to be interviewed, nor the reasons for which they decided they did not want to participate.
- Member checks were conducted with research participants in order to verify that their stories have been accurately represented in the transcriptions and to ensure that participants are satisfied with the data reported before I conduct the analysis. Each participant was sent the transcript from their interview and given three days to respond back to indicate whether she wishes to make any revisions or add to her responses. I indicated in the emails that if I did not receive a confirmation by the stated date, I would assume that they did not wish to make changes. A few participants replied back, although none indicated wanting to make any changes. The interpretation of the stories (data analysis) however, was not member-checked with participants.

- In order to reduce researcher bias in the interpretation of the data, I had initially planned to use triangulation with multiple analysts (Patton, 2002). However, as noted by Bazeley and Jackson (2013), “Each person approaching the data will do so with their own goals and perspective, and so each will see and code differently. Coding is designed to support analysis – it is not an end in itself” (p. 93). I then decided to use their approach to ensure validity of the coding process. After I had coded the first few interviews, I met with one of my readers to discuss my approach to the coding process and to receive both guidance and a second opinion on the themes that were coming up in the data and how I was coding for those. Also, as was earlier mentioned, I repeatedly reevaluated the naming and clustering of codes throughout the entire coding and analysis process and went back and forth between the interviews to revise the coding. Halfway through the process, I began to organize and better define the codes, recoding portions of the previously coded text to match these revisions. To go a step further, after I was done with the entire sample, I took three of the initial interviews that I had coded and went through the process of recoding to see if my initial codes matched my second attempt at coding, which it did. In a few cases, I ended up coding portions of the text with some more specific codes under broader themes, but overall the second coding was in agreement with the work that I had initially done.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Findings from the interviews will be presented in three parts. The first section of this chapter will address the themes that emerged regarding the impact of the women-only training on participants' leadership identity development. The evidence gathered through the narrative inquiry approach suggests that the training facilitated these participants' leadership identity development through the following means: (1) the promotion of practical skills, (2) an increased self-awareness and understanding of others' perceptions, (3) feeling a sense of belonging and connectedness, and (4) feeling recognized and empowered. The second section will then address some of the contextual factors that seem to influence the impact of the training on women's leadership identity. The themes that emerged from the narratives were: (1) the availability of advocates, (2) executive visibility, and (3) fit with the organization's leadership culture and ability to lead authentically. Figure 2 visually summarizes these findings. The third, and final, section of the chapter will address the influence of the training on women's ability to deal with gender dynamics in a male-dominated context. For many participants, going through the training provided a sense of validation that the organization acknowledged their experience as women leaders and provided the means to develop cross-organizational relationships with other peer- and higher-ranking women. Some participants also reported having an increased awareness of gender dynamics in the workplace following the training, with some developing an added identity as change agents in their organization to help further promote diversity and inclusion.



Analyzing each interview on its own using a holistic-content approach and later using categorical-content analysis to look at the entire dataset was particularly useful for uncovering patterns in the data related to the identity development work that occurred post-training, while being mindful of the personal and contextual factors that could influence participants’ experience and application of the training content. Anecdotes and portions of participants’ leadership stories will be highlighted throughout the discussion of results in order to illustrate some of the salient themes.

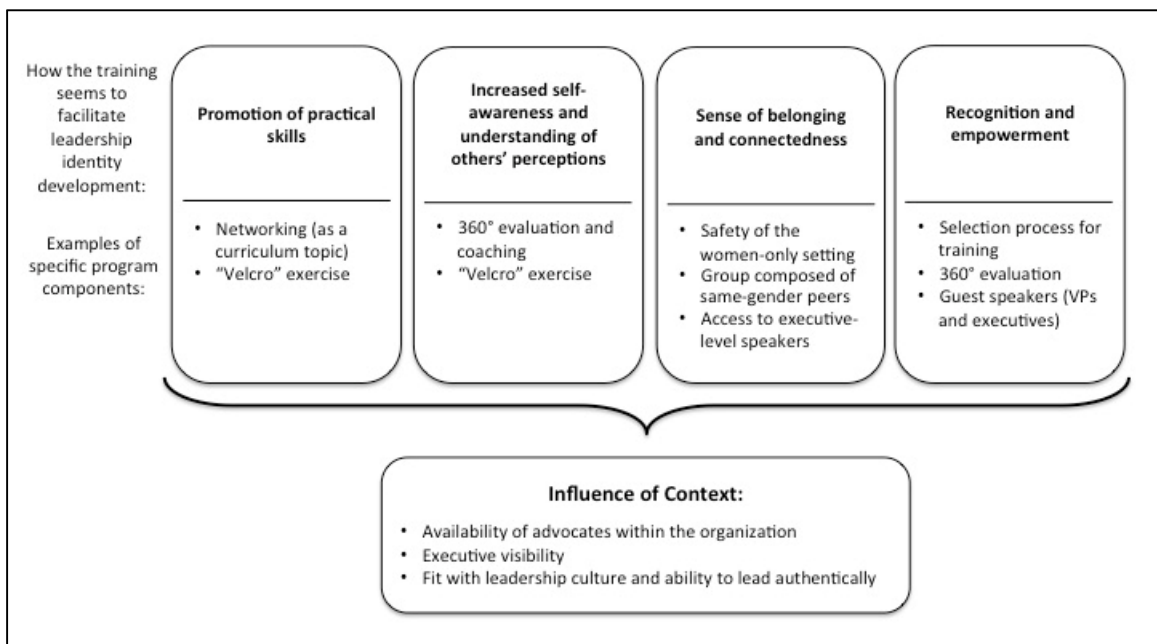


Figure 2. Conceptual model of the overarching themes in the data

### Part I - Impact of the Training on Women’s Leadership Identity Development

For a majority of participants (61%), the training had a strong impact on their evolution as leaders, based on their own self-assessment. Based on the accounts of the 18 participants whose leadership stories were examined, four major themes emerged with

regard to women's leadership identity development; (1) the promotion of practical skills, (2) increased self-awareness and realization of others' perceptions, (3) feeling a sense of belonging and connectedness, and (4) feeling recognized and empowered. For each theme, the associated practical takeaways from the training, as described by the women, will be discussed, as well as their perceived outcomes. The specific elements of the program that were mentioned by the women will be identified.

Although I had hoped to capture specific details in participants' accounts of the claiming and granting interactions described by DeRue and Ashford's (2010) leadership identity theory, this proved to be somewhat of a challenge. Participants' recollections did not always have such level of detail. Nonetheless, as will be seen in some of the examples presented in this section, many participants did talk about how their self-perceptions as leaders either changed or was reinforced as they utilized the insights from the training, and how this affected how others in the organization regarded them as leaders. These instances were coded under the different levels of leadership identity development described by the authors, as evidence of the presence of individual internalization, relational cognition, and collective endorsement, as perceived by the women.

#### **Leadership identity development through the promotion of practical skills.**

Many of the women interviewed talked about how they began to practice new skills based on the knowledge or insights that they derived from participating in the women-only training program. Implementing these tools in their day-to-day work and incorporating them into their leadership practice was perceived to have had a positive impact on how they felt about themselves as leaders, as well as their interactions with

others in the organization.

In particular, a number of the women interviewed cited the development of networking skills. The content of the curriculum related to networking was one of the most memorable aspects of the training for many. Eight participants (44%) indicated having used the content from the networking module in a way that has enriched their leadership practice. For example, one participant (#1) talked about how she continually uses the network diagram tool that is shared in this portion of the training to both strengthen and expand her internal and external networks in order to enhance her influence. Not being a natural networker, as she described herself, applying the networking strategies that she learned has played a significant role in her continued development as a leader. She states:

Like I thought the way they did the networking diagram, that to me was a big eye opener and since then, I've done a lot to expand my network. Because I felt like I had a pretty good network, but my network was connected [only internally] to my network. And, you know, and they said, "Wait a minute, you, you want to be connected to people who are going to connect you... further out into different places." So, ah, I've used that principle over and over again to take opportunities to expand my network.

This participant described the process of applying this new skill as; (1) creating a tangible, visual representation of her network, (2) monitoring her connections on a weekly basis, (3) setting goals for existing and possible new connections, (4) actively planning to meet new people, and (5) working on making purposeful connections. This

knowledge that she acquired at the training translated into the development of a new skill for her that has impacted the way that she now purposefully monitors her network and works to expand it. It has also influenced her abilities as a mentor to others – as she now teaches the tool to her protégés.

A few other women's stories closely resonate with the above-described experience. Some of these women also added to the process (1) making networking a priority in their day-to-day, (2) being proactive about networking, and (3) consciously setting time aside in their schedules to work on making new connections and keep up existing ones. One participant (#12) talks about how she now evaluates her network as an integral part of her quarterly development assessment. As a result of this process, she has set up quarterly meetings with other Vice Presidents and Senior Vice Presidents from across the organization where they discuss current challenges in their areas, as well as solutions as to how they can best integrate to provide a better experience to their customers. A few other participants also mentioned that a way to engage in networking that has yielded positive results and that feels much more natural to them, is to “engineer drive-bys,” as one participant (#14) phrased it. This entails purposefully walking by the offices of people with whom they would like to connect, to either have a quick chat with them or casually ask them out to lunch or a coffee to discuss an idea or ask for advice. Although engaging in networking was not a novel topic or strategy for women at their level, the instruction from the training did impart concrete practical advice that many of the women were able to put into practice. It offered a framework that they could use to thoughtfully expand and strengthen their connections, and also heightened the urgency of

engaging in purposeful networking as a necessary skill for enhancing their leadership. Improved execution through collaboration with other areas of the business and establishing key relationships with possible advocates are some of the outcomes derived from applying this skill.

Another illustration of how skills promoted in the training impacted the leadership identity of one participant (#4) was related to what is known in the training as the “Velcro” exercise – an exercise in which the women are encouraged to think about what are some of the attributes that “stick to them” as strong labels. These attributes that others project onto them can become such a salient part of their persona that they could potentially hinder their development. This participant talked about how her “Velcro” was that she had a problem saying ‘no’ to people when asked for help or when asked to take on extra tasks in addition to her already demanding workload. She felt that in order to be regarded as a team player, she had to comply with those requests, albeit feeling overwhelmed, overworked, and not very efficient. The training provided her the opportunity to learn an effective strategy to address this issue, which she referred to as the “yes, but...” technique. This technique taught her that instead of just quickly agreeing to these requests, she should be upfront about setting expectations. This meant communicating the conditions for her involvement and stating what resources she would need to effectively fulfill that request. She states:

I started that same day saying, ‘yes, but...’. That was my biggest thing. Because I with my ‘Velcro’ of ‘I can't say no’..... That was something that I could implement the next day... And it started changing, I feel like, people's perception

of me. Because all of a sudden, I was a better person because I wasn't working seven days a week. And I was still getting this stuff done, but with different resources.

**Leadership identity development through an increased self-awareness and understanding of others' perceptions.** One of the key tools that is used in this particular women-only leadership development training is a 360-degree evaluation, accompanied by a coaching session to discuss each participant's results and facilitate action planning. Ten interviewees (56%) specifically mentioned the 360-degree evaluation as one of the most memorable parts of the program and recounted how it gave them the space and opportunity for introspection, allowing them to reflect about themselves as leaders. As one participant (#4) put it: "It really did make a difference to me to be able to stop and focus on myself for a little bit. I was just never able to do that. I was always focused on the business or the people underneath...." This exercise was especially important for giving these women valuable insight into how they were being currently perceived by those who worked closely with them. Participants talked about how this opportunity allowed them to, in some cases, see themselves in a different light, and also to realize the importance of other people's perceptions of them and its impact on how they were regarded as leaders within the organization. As one interviewee explained (#1):

It gave me more insight than I would have had on how I'm perceived. I think it's important, because sometimes we have a view of how we're perceived, how we would like to be perceived, and then you realize, oh, that's something a little

different...I think...I have much more appreciation for all the ‘politics’ and what you need to do here.

One of the takeaways that this particular participant took from the training following this exercise was that she wanted to be perceived as being more broad in her expertise and not so narrowly-focused on certain types of initiatives. The feedback she received from her 360-evaluation combined with the “Velcro” exercise (described in the section above) motivated her to take action. Her desire to be viewed in a different light eventually led her to take up a role outside of her comfort zone, with the goal of expanding her skills and demonstrating that she could perform outside of people’s expectations of her capabilities. She recounts how this experience was challenging, but fulfilling for her. In the end, she was able to acquire a new skillset and in the process gain the trust of someone at a higher level in the organization, who ended up becoming one of her champions.

Another participant (#3) talked about how after going through her 360-degree feedback she realized that she needed to start being more intentional in the way that she interacted with others during meetings. Once she went back to work, this led her to change how she approached her team meetings and she believes that as a result, she saw an improvement in the outcomes of these. She described the process she followed as (1) thinking ahead of time about who will be in the meeting, (2) being intentional about the statements she made, and (3) pulling key people into the conversation. After putting this into practice, not only did she feel more effective, but she also felt that others began to see her in a different, more positive way. Since then, she feels like she has continued to

gain respect and increase trust of those who work with her.

This opportunity for introspection during the training and subsequent analysis of work interactions was a theme that also came up in other women's stories. Two participants (#12 and #13) shared a similar anecdote of how they now habitually analyze their meetings – both before and after – as a result from the insight gained during the training. Based on the feedback that they received in their 360-degree evaluation, among other sources, they internalized how they needed to be more facilitative in their approach as leaders, rather than trying to push their own agenda. Both of these women relate how they were known in the organization for their ability to drive results. Both, however, had reached a point in their careers where they needed to showcase different leadership abilities – influencing and engaging others to fulfill their vision, rather than dictating a course of action. One (#12) remarks of the training:

I think that that introspection piece is so important....What are you gonna do when... you have a conversation and you go into a meeting and it didn't come out the way you want? What would you have changed? I wouldn't have said that I would have reflected on all of that if I wasn't [*sic*, “weren't”] in the program.... I learned to bring on that softer skill, be part of the team, come in and say...what do you think? And bring them in as opposed to pushing an idea, promoting it, gaining adoption. And, wow, buy-in! Changing my strategy was *huge*.

The process that these participants began to follow can be synthesized as; (1) determining beforehand the desired the outcomes of a meeting, (2) deciding how they would like to be perceived during the meeting, (3) being aware of their approach during the meeting, (4)



evaluating if the desired outcome was reached, and if not, (5) evaluating what they could have done differently. This is a process that they still continue to practice to this day. Both of these participants, who were eventually promoted to Vice President roles, attribute some of the changes that they made in their leadership practice to the insight that they developed after going through the training.

For another participant (#4), her 360-degree evaluation report reaffirmed some of the feedback that she had been hearing for some time that she was too tactical and not strategic enough, even though people thought very highly of her and her performance. After reading the feedback on the report and debriefing about it with her assigned coach, she determined that she would greatly benefit from working individually with an executive coach. She wanted to know exactly how to change that perception of her that was holding her back. Getting to work with an executive coach was a turning point in her career and her journey as a leader, an experience that she describes as her “breakthrough moment.” Although the training program did not provide her with enough one-on-one attention to help her work on changing that perception, it did provide the necessary groundwork for her to become more self-aware and pushed her to seek that individualized guidance. According to her, participating in the training was the “first gate” she had to go through to achieve this. Gaining access to more personalized coaching eventually allowed her to fully analyze her situation and take some crucial steps to ultimately be regarded as a more strategic leader, and to eventually be chosen for a higher-level role.

Another example of how the opportunity for reflection led to positive changes in

participants' leadership identity was related to the "Velcro" exercise. One participant (#15) remarks:

...one of the big things with the, my 'Velcro' section, that leadership in context ... I loved the fact that it was being very mindful of where you are and what can lead you down a path that may not be as productive as a leader. That was very apparent to me. Lots of great note-taking as far as saying, "Okay, here's the things I want to make sure I do when I come out of the program" ....So, for me, that idea of knowing where my strengths are and, again, being very mindful of drifting into more of a leadership role versus more tactical role was very critical.

This participant's "Velcro" was that she was regarded as the go-to problem solver in her team – whenever an issue arose, she would be the one taking charge and taking care of solving it. Doing this exercise during the training helped her see that taking on that label was keeping her from expanding her influence as a leader. Her strategy when she went back to work was to include others in her development process by engaging them in conversation and inviting their feedback. She described the process that she followed to change that perception as; (1) meeting with her manager, Senior Vice President, and advocates to include them in the action planning process, (2) sharing her goals with her team, (3) setting expectations with her team of how they could operate differently, and (4) empowering her team members to take ownership of certain tasks and situations within a supportive environment. By candidly sharing her goals with her team she was able to empower them to want to help her achieve those goals. This has resulted in being able to enhance her leadership by focusing on more strategic tasks, while also enabling

her team to take on challenges and expand their own potential. This has allowed her to embrace a new leadership philosophy in which she is more cognizant of the importance of sharing her vision and influencing others. Since participating in the training she has continued to ascend the ranks in the organization and regards her development as a leader as an ongoing journey. She states,

I feel like it's still a work in progress for me. Really trying to make my voice heard. So, again, my natural tendency to be more of [a] behind the scenes person. Being more mindful of needing to be that face in front of the business...giving that vision, being a little bit more in the forefront to me is one of the changes...making sure that I'm more comfortable in giving those addresses to the entire team, not just my personal team, but to the large organizational team has been a change in philosophy for me.

**Leadership identity development through a sense of belonging and connectedness to other women leaders.** Another way in which participants' leadership identity was perceived by them to have been positively impacted was through the sense of belonging that the training provided them and the connections that they were able to establish as a result of participating in the program.

Over a quarter of the participants interviewed reported that the all-women setting of the training provided them with a sense of safety, in that they felt comfortable expressing themselves freely without fear of being judged. Some of these participants reported feeling like the training gave them the opportunity to be much more authentic in how they conducted themselves and offered them the confidence to open themselves up

in a room of peers who in some ways shared a same experience. They reported feeling like they found themselves in a place where they belonged. One of the women (#1) explained:

[I]t was interesting, even though I feel uncomfortable in a lot of the groups that I'm in here, immediately, we were only together for two and a half days and I felt like, "Wow, here's a place where I can be myself."

Another participant's (#3) feelings resonate with this account and she further explains this sentiment of belonging:

I loved the dialogue in the room, and I felt a part of that dialogue in the room....it was...like we were all equals. I felt like an equal in that room. For me, personally...I wasn't afraid to comment or (sighs) – you know, 'cause a lot of times I'm in the room with mostly men, so I would tend...maybe that became a learned thing, I just tended not to ...speak up. Because, again, like I said, my nature is more... demure in...just how I interact ... And then, if I'm the odd one in the room, I'm gonna be less apt to be vocal. But in this room it's all women, so I felt like a kindred...kindred spirit kind of thing.

Furthermore, the connections that these women were able to establish during the training were also influential in having them feel like they became part of a greater network of leaders. Some of the women (33%) talked about the bonding that took place given the all-women setting; with some even describing it as a "sisterhood," "sorority," or "new girls' club", in contrast to the familiar "old boys' club". Going through this program gave them an opportunity to be in a room with other peer- and more senior-level

women leaders from across the organization, a chance that they do not get to encounter too often in a male-dominated environment. As one participant (#17) explained:

I think for me it was, the reason [the women-only setting] was so appealing, because I think when you work in an industry that is so male-centric you don't often have the opportunity to engage with a lot of other senior women - to hear their journeys and how they just approach things. For me that was almost one of the crux of the reasons that I wanted to do the program, is that I just found that it really helped build your confidence, it helped bring to light and surface a lot of the different experiences or some of the differences about being a leader in a company such as [this one] – that, frankly, has always been known as an all-boys' network.

Almost all participants interviewed (89%) mentioned that one of the most important outcomes from participating in the program was the networking opportunity that it provided with other senior-level leaders in the company. This type of networking opportunity provided by the training is distinct from the practical networking skills that the training seeks to develop through its curriculum.

Going through the program created an instant connection not just among each cohort of participants, but also with the broader group of alumnae. In some cases (28%), the connections made with fellow classmates have helped them be more effective in their work, such as when they have needed to gain insight into a different department to get something accomplished. For instance, one participant (#14) described a recent experience that she had:

[W]hen certain scenarios come up, now I know I can pick up a phone. Just yesterday, someone that's, she's a Senior Vice President now...and it's like, "Hey, let's connect, you know, let's talk about what's going on – your world, my world." And more times than not, there's touch points there. That's...when I need some insight into a different organization that I haven't really engaged in, like, "Okay, I know you know such and such. Give me what your thoughts are on how he would react to this and help me prepare so that I can be able to connect with him".

Being a program alumna also offers a way to quickly establish a connection in parts of the organization with which they may not have a contact, as another participant (#1) explains:

You know, one of the things that's great about having a cohort that you could go to is: Okay, I need to build a relationship over there. I don't know that person, but two to one, there's somebody from [the alumnae group of the program] that works with that person and can help build that bridge. I think that's something that I take advantage of all the time.

In other cases (28%), the connections made during the training have served as a support system for the women. The way this particular training is designed, participants get to work in pairs as peer mentors to each other through certain portions of the program. One participant (#1) talked about how she frequently gets together with other women from her cohort, and regarding her peer mentor, says how "that relationship alone has been invaluable" for her development. It was a connection that they purposefully maintained after the training and that has provided an important source of support for

both of them. Another participant (#8) talks about her thoughts on the effect that having this support network has had on her abilities as a leader:

So I probably make more decisions and I'm bolder in the way that I move forward and probably quicker. So rather than contemplating something for a couple of days, I might just run something by someone...I feel like I have, with that technique and the network of women that I, colleagues that I have, I feel like I have sort of a safety net in that regard.

She explains how after going through the training she has continued to utilize the peer mentor technique with both the cohort of women that she established there, as well as other women with whom she has worked. Depending on the type of issue that she is facing, she has different individuals that she feels comfortable tapping into to serve as a sounding board.

A majority of participants (56%) also reported becoming actively involved in the organization's women's development initiatives as an outcome of their participation in the program. They talked about how going through this experience intensified their sense of camaraderie with other women who are also striving to get ahead in the organization, and inspired them to take action to help them out. They adopted this role as an integral part of their identity as leaders. One participant (#1) explains:

...[I had] more of a commitment to also to give back to the women that are trying to be like me and trying to get to the next level and fighting through all of the same things I, I fought through. I wanted to give, you know, be a part of a forum that could help them...get the skills that they need, or the connection that they

need, the networking, whatever, you know, it may be, be part of that program. Since going through the training, several participants have taken on leadership roles in some of the company's ongoing efforts to develop women leaders and have even worked to develop new programs and initiatives, or at the very least, collaborate in them. Some of the women even described themselves as becoming diversity advocates or change agents within the organization. For example, one of these participants (#7), who is currently a Vice President, explains:

It's still very common that I'm still the only woman...But I think more recently, I've become more confident myself in, um, making a point that we need to be actively inclusive and it needs to be something that we're comfortable talking about and acknowledging and that it does make a difference to the business results.

While going through the program was just one factor propelling her to incorporate this into her leadership identity, she acknowledges that it was a crucial influence in making her feel more confident and comfortable openly talking about the value and importance of diversity and inclusion.

Additionally, the social activities that are built into the program were of great value to some participants, since they allowed them to interact in a more personal way with some senior leaders. During the course of the program, participants have the opportunity to have lunch and dinner with the leaders who come in as guest speakers. One participant (#3) says that after getting a chance to engage in conversation with some of these leaders she now feels like she is "more in the club." She talks about how they



now recognize her when they see her. She also gave an example of a connection that she made during one of these activities and how she was able to contact that person later on to help out with a program that she was leading. Furthermore, having access to these senior- and executive-level speakers was very memorable for a good portion of the women sampled (38%). For them, it was a way to establish connections with people who are at a level that they might otherwise not have had direct access to and also gave them a chance to be exposed to their views on the direction of the business, and insight as to how decisions are made at the executive level.

**Leadership identity development through recognition and empowerment.**

Seven of the women interviewed (38%) reported that participating in the training resulted in a boost of confidence in their abilities as leaders. Just being picked for the program was perceived as a form of recognition (44%). As one participant (#4) explains: “I didn't have to go to the class and [yet] I felt empowered, because I realized how few people get accepted into the program.” Another participant (#3) recalls going through her cohort list prior to the training and feeling privileged to be considered among women whom she deemed to be of such high caliber. Being chosen for the program signaled to these women that the company valued their work and had a direct impact on their self-esteem and their commitment to keep growing their leadership potential within the company.

One of the women (#14) stated:

I felt like the company was investing in me. I felt valued. I felt committed...it was a nice symbol that the company is trying really hard and investing money in

keeping women at a senior level. Because it is hard to be a woman at a senior-level at this company.

Another participant (#7) remarks:

...it was an event that here, now five and a half years later, I mark as a turning point, as in a level of...validation. It's not just the information you get from that, but it's the validation, and the support that really does matter...I'm an effective leader and the company really does want me to be an effective leader.

The results from the 360-degree evaluation were also a source of recognition for some that resulted in higher confidence levels. One participant (#3) recounts how although she had been promoted to Senior Director just before going through the training, she internally doubted her ability to be successful in that new role. The feedback that she received on the 360-degree evaluation was pivotal in making her feel like others in the organization believed in her abilities and thought highly of her work. Through the feedback that she received she was able to see that her leadership style was considered effective by her supervisor, subordinates, and peers so that she was able to fully embrace it. She recounts:

I think I had to appreciate the fact that I did have a style and it was effective and it was working....And again I got lots of validation of...my capabilities, my style, things I don't think I just gave myself enough credit for.

Going through the process of the 360-degree evaluation also gave her the courage to begin soliciting continuous feedback from those who work closely with her. In the past, she had been somewhat hesitant to ask for that feedback due to fear of what she would

hear, albeit knowing how important it was. She feels that engaging in this practice has allowed her to build more trusting relationships at work and keep developing herself as a better leader.

For another participant (#18), being chosen for the training led her to realize that the company truly trusted her abilities, which empowered her to be bolder and take chances to innovate in her work. She recounts:

I think that it was a demonstration that the company cared about me, and I think that it empowered and enabled me to try...to be adventurous...to be more risky, to explore more opportunities.... I think that it gave me freedom, or reassurance, that I could...It brought clarity around a couple of points. Like, the company values you, or otherwise they wouldn't be [investing in you]. Number two, the company wants you to...the company is asking you, and it is accepting, and it is giving you the permission to try and experiment and go places.

This was something that she incorporated into her leadership practice upon getting back to work. When describing her trajectory, there were multiple instances where she believed in an idea and decided to look for a way to get involved in it and bring it to fruition. That attitude continues to be reflected in the goals and aspirations that she has for the next few years. Going through the training was a type of recognition that reaffirmed to her that those were important qualities of her leadership practice that she should continue to foster. Also, in addition to her formal role, she now engages in many “side projects” in the company that provide her with an incredible sense of satisfaction

and that have allowed her to personally grow as a leader and build her expertise within her field.

Another participant (#4) recalled the experience of hearing from a panel of other women in the company who had risen to the Vice President level. She talked about the impact that listening to this panel had on her confidence and motivation. She recalls:

Because it was probably the first probably honest dialogue that they said, it's right place, it's right time, it's putting yourself out there. I still remember the conversation with [one of our senior leaders] and listening to her and it was like, you have to be fearless.....But that was probably the most empowering thing was to hear from other people at [the company] who had made it to the vice presidency. Who just said you know, "I'm not some miracle worker. It's not like you know, I'm doing something that you're not [able to do] ... It's just that I have expertise and I've been rewarded for it because someone recognized this was [something I was] able to do. And the recognition came from myself, raising my hand and saying it.”

Hearing this affirmed for her the belief that she was her most important advocate and had a direct impact in her confidence to have that conversation with her superiors on how to attain the higher level.

## **Part II - Contextual Factors that Influence the Impact of the Training on Women's Leadership Identity Development**

Analysis of the data revealed that the extent to which the women perceived that the training had an impact on their leadership identity development was influenced by certain factors related to the organizational context. The following section will address the findings related to those factors. Before delving into those, however, a brief discussion of the personal characteristics that consistently came up in the narratives will be offered. The patterns that emerged when looking at some of the individual attributes have helped these women in their trajectory as leaders. These were the most recurrent themes regarding the leadership qualities that characterized the sample.

**Personal attributes of the sample.** As expected of leaders at their level, all of the women interviewed could be described as high-achievers with a proven track record of delivering results. Participants talked about their drive and determination throughout their careers to move up the ranks and about half of them described themselves as being very driven and passionate.

Many, at some point or another, have felt stagnant in their trajectory (44%). Nine participants (50%) expressed having been vocal at certain points in their careers about their desire to ascend up the leadership ranks. These women talked about how they took ownership of their career and openly sought or asked for growth opportunities – whether it was participating in new, interesting projects or being promoted into higher-level positions. For example, one participant (#1) recounts:

One of the things, I think, that was a highlight of my career was there was a job posted that I really, really wanted. It was a couple levels higher than I was. So I was kind of like in the first level manager and this will be jumping two bands... So I went and I talked to the [executive leader] and I said, “I’m really interested in this, and, you know, if you gave me, you know six months, I’m sure I could do all of these different things”...and I guess I impressed him so much, he put me in the job.

Seven participants (39%) also talked about how they experienced significant growth when they pushed themselves out of their comfort zone. One participant (#1) called it, doing “stretch assignments” – by either broadening their scope or skills or attaining a higher title.

The theme that “good work is not enough” was brought up by 56% of participants when describing their personal trajectory as leaders. Many interviewees talked about how they got to a point in their careers when they realized that strong execution skills were necessary, but not sufficient to get them to the next level in the organization, especially so when trying to move to beyond the Director level. They found that in order to continue progressing up the ranks, they needed to take control of their career trajectory. This meant sharing their aspirations with those above them and actively asking for opportunities, rather than waiting for others to take notice of their good work. They also had to vigorously focus on marketing themselves and their work to change others’ perception of them from doers to influencers. Ten participants reported having worked or to be currently working with an executive coach.

**Contextual factors.** The narrative inquiry approach for gathering the data was very well suited to uncover some of the contextual factors that have shaped participants' leadership identity development and that have had an impact on how the insights derived from the training translated into further identity development. Although questions aimed at understanding the organizational context were woven into the interview guide, participants' stories inevitably revealed these aspects, even when unprompted. After analyzing the data for topics related to the impact of the organizational context, the following overarching themes emerged; (1) availability of advocates, (2) executive visibility, and (3) fit with the organization's leadership culture.

*Availability of advocates.* The role advocates and importance of having champions in the organization was the most salient theme throughout the 18 leadership stories collected, mentioned by 78% of participants interviewed. In their view, having advocates in the organization was the element that had the most impact in helping them become regarded as high-level leaders, allowing them to move into more senior-level roles.

One participant (#4) explains: "But in the end it was the influential person at the top who believed in me, who understood me, who knew what I was trying to get to that made the difference." This participant also talked at length about how until she found a manager who believed in her and the value of the work that she was doing, she struggled to break through to the next level. It was after this encounter that other opportunities for further development opened up, including participation in the women-only leadership training. She believes that the training was then crucial for her to be able to set changes

in motion of how others viewed her as a leader, which eventually helped her gain advocates at the higher levels of the organization, helping her achieve a Vice President role.

Another participant (#1), who currently feels stagnant in her career also spoke about the impact of having advocates in the organization. Her two biggest champions recently left the company and a third one is en-route to retirement, so that he is no longer as influential as he used to be. With regard to this she states:

I think it's a critical piece [having a champion or advocate], because I think of all the times where I've taken a stretch job and been successful, it's always because I had somebody who said, "Yeah, I'm confident she can do this," and put me in that role.

Although she rated the training as having a significant impact on her development as a leader, and her story showed evidence of further identity development taking place, not having the right advocates has impeded her further development, especially at the collective endorsement level described by DeRue and Ashford (2010).

For many of the women, having individuals with influence in the organization who champion them has been directly related to their ability to get promoted into a higher-level role and having them feel like they are valued by the organization. As one participant (#12) at the Vice President level remarks:

[T]he opportunity to grow was really around, I learned you need to be strategic and you need to be thought of. And it's hard to have someone advocate. They should advocate for you without having to be asked. And I'm fortunate there's a



couple of people that have done that for me.

Another participant (#5) explains:

And having a network of people who can advocate for me when conversations come about promotion, or high potential programs, or opportunities like [this program] or other things, who could be advocates is key.... You know, knowing that there's people out there...in my organization. To have advocates outside of here it's been huge. And it also sort of makes [this company] feel a little smaller, you know?

***Executive visibility.*** Having organizational visibility, which is very closely tied to the ability to enlist influential advocates in the organization, seems to be an instrumental factor that either enables or hinders women's further development of their leadership identity. Close to 40% of the women interviewed brought up the importance of visibility, exposure, and being known by key individuals in the organization. Having the opportunity to participate in high-visibility initiatives has resulted, for some, in increased confidence and being regarded in a positive light in the organization, enhancing their leadership identity and subsequently enabling their advancement. At their level, if their work is "hidden" from the upper levels of the organization, it is especially difficult for them to break through to positions above Director and Senior Director.

When looking at the sub-group of participants that currently feels unfulfilled with their progression, the importance of executive visibility was increasingly apparent. This was a common thread across the specific stories of three women who communicated a level of dissatisfaction with the current progression of their career. Through the

program's 360-degree evaluation and by working with an executive coach, one participant (#11) pinpointed the issue of visibility as an obstacle in her further advancement as a leader. She explains:

At my boss's level and above I had become invisible. The truth is, since that major project we rolled-out, I hadn't been given any assignments with high visibility. Everything was internal to our organization. In the past, I had been representing our organization and cross-organizational [assignments]. I knew that that was a problem. The data supported that. The feedback supported that...The other thing...it's visible to others that I am not invited to the table for the most important meetings.

From this same group, three of the women also mentioned their physical distance from the company headquarters as a challenge in either gaining or maintaining visibility. For the women who work in remote offices, if they are unable to actively seek out networking opportunities and nourish those important work relationships, the physical distance can present a challenge to their visibility, how they are regarded in the organization, and how they are able to continue evolving as leaders. Since their opportunity to network face-to-face is much more limited, it requires even more of an effort to keep connected in meaningful ways. A participant (#17) who has overcome this challenge notes how keeping up the relationships that she created with fellow program alumnae has been useful in maintaining her organizational visibility.

So I think that some of those relationships have helped because some of those women executives aren't in [the company headquarters]. So understanding how

they've been able to continue to be influential and not be forgotten about if you are not in headquarters has been helpful as well.

For some of the women, participating in the training was a means to receiving more of this attention, as a result of being spotlighted as high-potentials (22%). However, this seems to vary greatly, depending on the participant's work division and the value that the executive leader gives to the program. One participant (#10) from the first cohort of the training who is now a Senior Vice President remarks:

[I]t also gave us a kind of a unique group. If you think of, you know, like the special forces of the military or something like... but this unique group of women that are getting more insight and limelight. We had our bio shared, not just with [the CEO]'s staff... but also with the board, and we had a particular board member, [name removed], who was very much an advocate for this thing too. So it gave us more visibility.

Visibility, then, can be both an enabler – by allowing the women to further grow their identity as leaders, especially at the collective endorsement level (DeRue & Ashford, 2010) – and an outcome of the training.

***Fit with the organization's leadership culture and ability to lead authentically.***

Fitting-in with the organization's leadership culture is another important pattern that was observed across the interviews. Being in alignment or misalignment with the culture's values has a direct impact on how participants view themselves as fitting-in within the organization and how others perceive their style as either effective or ineffective. Values can be shared across the organization, but may also be particular to a smaller division or

work team or even more or less relevant within certain groups.

For instance, one participant (#1) who is currently dissatisfied with the pace of her career advancement feels that there is a misalignment with her personality and some of the personal traits that the company, and her department in particular, seem to uphold in a leader. In her opinion, being vocal is not just regarded as a positive leadership quality in her work group, but is rather a defining and necessary attribute. In other words, if you are not vocal and highly assertive you will not earn others' respect as a leader. "Yeah, I would say that that's considered leadership here. Leadership is, okay, I have a seat at the table. You know, I speak my mind. I'm very confident..." However, when describing herself as a leader she says how this value clashes with her personal style:

I'm introverted, so I need that opportunity to listen and I only participate if I have something that I consider additional to say. I also spend a lot of time [in] behind-the-scenes type of leadership. So it's a little bit different. I'd say I'm more facilitative than, you know ... command and control, I'm definitely not that."

She reports how she has even tried to adapt by behaving in ways that she thinks are more in line with what is expected of a leader there, with more "slam the table" type of behavior, but without positive results. Acting that way did not feel authentic to her and she feels that others probably picked up on it too, making it an ineffective strategy. Her reserved demeanor is an aspect of her style that has been continually brought up during her performance reviews as an area for improvement, including the most recent one. She currently struggles with how to remain authentic to herself, while being viewed as a leader with the potential to move up to the next level. She feels that within her

department's culture, it is harder for her accomplishments to get noticed and be properly recognized because she does not fit that vocal type of leadership.

Even though many of the women describe the company's prototypical successful leader as someone who makes their voice heard and is both bold and confident, the more aggressive and "sales-centric" traits seem to be more pronounced in certain parts of the organization more than others. For instance, one participant (#13) who describes herself as "one tough chick", recognizes this about the culture of her division and how it could be an inhospitable environment for women who are not comfortable navigating that style. Among the sample of participants interviewed, there were six individuals (33%) who described themselves as introverts, yet only the participant whose story was highlighted above considers it to be a major obstacle in her advancement. Even though it was not possible to draw conclusions about how being an introvert or an extrovert impacts others' perceptions of leadership ability in the overall organization just based on this sample, the findings do highlight the importance of being able to lead in a way that both feels valued by the organization and feels authentic to the individual.

Another participant (#7), who also described herself as an introvert and is a Senior Vice President, feels that her preferred communication style contrasts in some ways with the style that is widely accepted in the culture – a very direct and highly assertive way of communicating. She reports how being an introvert has had its challenges, but that she has been able to manage it in a way that has not impeded her from continuing to grow in the company. The following passage describes how she manages this incongruity:

It requires focus and attention... From that perspective, it's fun and challenging and motivating to continue trying to be more and more effective in an environment that is not, you know, that communicates... [in] a way that I wouldn't normally communicate and naturally communicate. But... I think that anybody who's a leader in a corporation — male or female — is constantly having to hone their skills and refine how they communicate with people and learn and understand their own approach.... the feedback that I'm getting is that it's, that I'm able to do that, but it wouldn't come naturally to me.

As can be seen from the way she describes her situation, this mismatch of the prevalent culture and her natural inclination is not necessarily a source of dissonance for her, although it is outside her comfort zone. While challenging, she has found a way to incorporate this more direct style with her personal leadership inclinations and modify them in ways that feel genuine. She is still able to embrace her core as a leader by pushing herself to be aware of how to project herself in a way that is more effective, and others have perceived that change in a positive way.

Another participant (#17) talked about how she had been passed up for promotion before finally attaining her current position. The feedback that she received at that time was that her demeanor was perceived as too aggressive. Interestingly enough, she had been behaving in that manner because she thought that was the leadership style that was valued by the organization: "...in such a male dominated environment I think I had tried to train myself pretty early on to, say, act like a man." Once she received that insight, she recounts that it was almost a relief for her that she could embrace other aspects of her

personality that were more in line with how she wanted to project herself as a leader. Going through the training and working with an executive coach (not as a result of the program) were instrumental in helping her think about the changes that she had to make in order to project herself in a way that both felt authentic to her and that was valued by the organization. She explains this process:

I think the main item I probably put into practice was being just a bit more thoughtful in the communication tactics I was using, both with executives, peers, and people I would manage. And making sure that those communications, the way in which I presented myself, would align back to just my goal or my vision as a leader. And I don't think I had ever thought about that when I was interacting or communicating with people in the past.

Feeling that she could lead in a way that was true to her and that others in the organization recognized as effective allowed her to utilize the insights from the training to enhance her leadership identity.

**Cases of self-reported moderate-low impact of the training on leadership identity development.** During the interviews, I asked participants to rate the impact of the women-only training program on their evolution as leaders on a scale of one to ten – with one being the least impact and ten being the most. On average, participants rated the impact of the training to be a seven, with the highest score being a ten and the lowest being a four.

Seven participants in the sample (39%) rated the impact of the training on their development as leaders to be between a four and six. For this handful of participants, they

viewed that the training did not have a major impact on their leadership practice and, consequently, their leadership identity development. In these cases, participants either did not develop any groundbreaking insights, or if they did, the context in which they worked was not conducive to applying them. In the aggregate, this group was composed of three Vice Presidents, three Senior Directors, and one Director. Looking closely at this group of individuals further highlights the impact of the contextual variables identified in the above-discussion on whether and how the training can be of value to participants' development.

For the three women at the Vice President level, who attended the training while they were still Senior Directors, the topic of advocates was a predominant positive theme in their stories. All three came into the training with work experiences that had enabled them to build strong networks with influential individuals in the organization. Although they all indicated that the biggest value of training was in the expanded network that it provided, with one also indicating having used the content on developing networking skills and another mentioning the 360-degree evaluation and coaching, all things considered, the impact of going through the program was moderate to low (between 6 and 4). All three women also indicated that working with an executive coach was far more influential for them than going through the training, in terms of insights derived regarding their leadership and being able to translate those into concrete action items.

The one Director and two Senior Directors in this group reported being dissatisfied with the current state of their career progression. These three women have struggled to successfully implement any insights or tools learned in the program. All



three work in locations away from the company headquarters and remarked how that has been an impediment to both building a strong network and keeping visible. The theme of reduced visibility was especially dominant in the stories of two of the women in this group. For the other participant, misalignment with the leadership culture was a prevalent theme in her story. From what she described, the program had much more of an influence in her leadership identity initially, but its impact has dwindled over the past five years; precisely the time when she has begun to experience that feeling of misalignment with the leadership culture in her work area.

Also, looking at this group in general, three women found the content of the training to not be as memorable in comparison to the networking opportunity that it provided. All three mentioned that they do not see gender as having greatly impacted their experience as leaders. The three also expressed how men could and should benefit from participating in leadership development courses of that nature and prominence, and found that women talking about their negative experiences around gender-related issues was one of the less appealing aspects of the program.

### **Part III - Impact of the Training on Women's Ability to Navigate Gender Dynamics**

The following section will address the ways in which the participants sampled report that the women-only leadership training affected their ability to deal with a male-dominated organization. The data suggest that attending a women-only leadership training program was very significant for some participants, as it validated their experience as women leaders in the organization and provided a forum for them to develop a better cross-organizational support network. Participants also reported an

increased awareness of gender dynamics at play and developing a sense of agency to provoke change in the system. For some participants, however, the issue of gender was more pronounced in their life-stories than for others – with 50% indicating that gender has not had an impact on their personal trajectory or experience as leaders. As one participant (#5) explained:

I don't get wrapped up in it. I don't notice generally when I'm the only female in the room, or not. I feel like I've got the same voice as everybody else. And again, I feel like I do now appreciate that I have a unique perspective to bring...when you are the only female, or a minority in there because you look at things differently.

This ultimately influences the extent to which they viewed the training as useful in dealing with matters specifically related to gender.

Over 30% of participants indicated that being in a forum where they had the opportunity to openly share their experiences around gender in the workplace with other women who have faced similar issues gave them an incredible sense of validation that they were not alone in their experience. One leader (#10) explains:

I think it downplayed my belief that, "Well, it's just me, and, you know, I got to deal with it," and it's more of, "no, that's common," more of a validation of what you're feeling is not just unique to you, but that other women in the organization also share.

Although the curriculum gave participants an opportunity to learn about research-based gender differences and was interesting, learning from the other women in the group

– either fellow classmates or panel speakers – was the most enlightening, refreshing, and empowering experience for most. The majority of the women sampled talked about being either the only woman at their level within their team or just one of a few. Many also mentioned the lack of female role models at the top levels, especially within certain pockets of the organization that have been traditionally more male-dominated than the rest. The training helped participants counteract that isolating feeling of uniqueness that can result from limited access to other women in the organization who are at their peer-level or above. Furthermore, the fact that this training has such a high profile and is sponsored at the executive level also signaled to participants that the organization took notice of them and that it was acknowledging that their experience as women may be different from that of the majority. In their eyes, it was an indication that the organization recognized the possible challenges of leading in a work arena where a male worldview prevails. It was empowering and felt reassuring that the organization valued their leadership and was taking active steps to try to effect change. One participant (#8) explains:

I think it's one of the best programs I've ever been through and at the time it was just incredibly liberating. I was really on a high after I participated in it because it was just so ... It was just this great acknowledgement from [this company] of investing in women leaders and wanting to develop women leaders and acknowledging that that took something different than just osmosis and time.

For a number of participants, going through the training has also fostered in them a sense of agency. The increased confidence combined with a reaffirmation that some of

the issues that they experience as women are not unique to them as individuals, have prompted them to become active advocates in educating the organization on unconscious sources of bias that can create an un-level the playing field for women leaders. In doing so, they have assumed an identity as change agents in hopes of shifting the diversity landscape of the organization. This sense of agency is also manifested in many participants' active involvement in other women's development initiatives, as well as the conscious mentoring of women below them. One participant (#3) notes that participating in the training and later getting involved in different women's initiatives has been a way to create connections and synergies with similar others, which has also helped her feel less different.

Lastly, for the vast majority of participants, including those who do not feel a strong impact of gender dynamics in their work setting, the biggest value of the women-only training was the network to which it exposed them. The fact that the training was focused just on women provided an opportunity to be in a room full of other senior-level women leaders, an experience that they do not generally encounter in their day-to-day work lives. A few of them talked about how in a male-dominated organization men have more opportunities to engage with each other in social activities that are meaningful to them and that offer a chance to connect on a deeper level, which can result in the "boys' club" phenomenon. One participant (#13) notes how "if there is any kind of gender issue that comes up, it's really more of the social side. I'm not the one that they are going to ask to go to the [football] game because they have an extra ticket...it is a bit of a men's club on the social side". Another participant (#18) echoes this sentiment and links this

difference in gender to the opportunity for progression – she attributes her opportunity to ascend to her current level partly to a connection established during the training:

Sometimes I think that it's way too much of a club, because some opportunities, I believe, definitely the men think of other colleagues faster than anything else. But I don't know...because if I would hang out, if I would have more in common with more people in the upper management, I would be better off, I think. But I don't hang out as much with the people that matter, right?... It's very different, very different. You never know what you could have been. It's very, very hard to tell you what it could have been.

As was noted in the first section of this chapter, the sense of belonging and bonding that was created during the training has helped many of these women to expand their influence across the organization, creating a “women’s club” of sorts. The larger network with which they are now connected has resulted, for some, in a more positive organizational perception of their leadership through that expanded influence.

It is important to note that even though many of the participants interviewed expressed that being a woman has not necessarily hindered their ability to get ahead in the organization (most women in the sample were Vice Presidents or Senior Vice Presidents), their stories nonetheless revealed gendered notions at play. Despite this, definitive conclusions could not be drawn in terms of the overall effect of gender on the sampled women’s trajectories or the company’s attitude towards women leaders, based on how diverse opinions were on the topic. It should be noted, however, that while gender has not been an issue for most of the women sampled, for three of the women who

are dissatisfied with the current progress of their careers, gender was a central theme when describing the obstacles to their advancement. They expressed how they feel that as women they have either felt the impact of disparate treatment, or a work environment that operates mainly within a male worldview and that does not consider the gendered particularities of their experience.

Lastly, two minor themes that came up in the narratives of some participants and that are worth at least mentioning because of their relevance for future research were the identity as working mother and the experience with what is known in the women's leadership literature as double binds, particularly managing others' perceptions between the dichotomies of tactical vs. strategic and aggressive vs. personable. The relevance of both of these is tied to how they relate to the broader theme of "fit with the organization's leadership culture and ability to lead authentically." Although these came up in the narratives with enough frequency to pique my interest, their relative frequency in the sample was not significant enough to report them as a pattern in the data.

On a final note, many women commented that much of the content of the training could have easily been used in a mixed-gender audience, since it covered topics that are applicable to leaders in general. Although the portion of the curriculum dealing with gender dynamics was of interest to participants, for most, that part of the curriculum was not as memorable as the experience itself and the opportunity it offered to connect in a meaningful way with other senior leaders in the organization. Some also commented how the men in the organization should be more actively involved in these types of efforts for them to have maximum effectiveness.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS**

The use of a narrative inquiry approach allowed me as a researcher to better understand each woman's leadership journey and the impact of the women-only training program on the development of their identity as leaders. To answer the research questions posed in this study, women were asked to openly talk about their trajectory as leaders in order to uncover how they described themselves and their experience along the continuum of their careers – both prior to and post-training. Later, questions were asked about the training program specifically, and the impact that they believed it has had on their leadership practice. The goal was to uncover what aspects of the training they found to be most helpful, which strategies they decided to put into practice once they went back to work, how they went about applying these, as well as the perceived outcomes that they derived. All of the women interviewed very candidly recounted their leadership stories and their experience with the training. Throughout our conversations, features of the organizational context that have either helped or hindered their development were revealed. These details were either purposefully elicited by the questions that I asked, or casually interwoven in their stories.

This final chapter will provide a discussion of the findings presented earlier. The first section will cover the evidence supporting the training as a source of leadership identity development, tying these findings to the theory on leadership identity and to the body of research on women-only leadership development programs. The second section will address the influence of context and how these factors appear to either support or hinder program participants' leadership identity development. The third section will

present a discussion on the topic of gender dynamics and how these were manifested in women's stories. The fourth section will speak to the importance of considering both subjective and objective career outcomes when assessing the impact of participating in this type of training. To conclude, the final three sections will address the implications of these study's findings on practice, a discussion of the limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research on the topic of women-only leadership training.

### **Leadership Identity Development Post-training**

The evidence gathered through the life-story method suggests that participation in the women-only training facilitated the study participants' leadership identity development in a variety of ways, per the perceptions of the women interviewed. Although participants' stories were analyzed inductively, following a data-driven approach, DeRue and Ashford's (2010) definition of leadership identity was subsequently applied to guide the assessment of the construct.

As described in Chapter 2, DeRue and Ashford's (2010) theory looks at patterns of influence in the development of a leadership identity and how these work to shape it both over time and in any given context. The authors define leadership identity as a concept that is created, reinforced, or weakened through a social exchange process of claiming and granting interactions. Their theory postulates that there is a dynamic interplay of three distinct levels of leadership identity construal. These are; (a) individual internalization, (b) relational cognition, and (c) collective endorsement. Individual internalization refers to the process by which an individual ascribes new qualities to his or her self-concept as a leader. Relational cognition refers to the weakening or



strengthening of this self-concept through interactions with others – peers, supervisors, and subordinates, for instance. Collective endorsement is about becoming regarded as a leader within the broader social context of the organization.

Based on the findings presented in the previous chapter, attending the training and later applying the insights derived from it was a source of development for many of the women sampled across the different levels of leadership identity described by De Rue and Ashford (2010). Evidence of individual internalization, relational cognition, and collective endorsement, as perceived by the women interviewed, can be found across the leadership stories examined, although to varying extents. The examples presented in the findings show both instances in which women’s own perception of themselves as leaders evolved and where the perceptions of others in the organization changed, which either reinforced or added new qualities or aspects to their identity.

To illustrate through a concrete example, let us take the case of participant #4. As detailed in the previous chapter, she recounted how the training was useful for the development of her leadership identity through three of the four different themes presented. She talked about how the promotion of practical skills facilitated her identity development with the use of the “Yes, but…” technique that she learned during the “Velcro” exercise of the training. This allowed her to change the image that she was projecting of herself of not being able to say no to everyone’s requests. After implementing that change, she ultimately felt more effective in her work and was able to better focus on more important tasks, allowing her to enhance her leadership so that others began to view her more positively. Through an increased self-awareness and

understanding of others' perceptions she realized the importance of how she was not considered to be strategic enough by the executive leadership and how she needed to work on changing that perception if she wanted to get ahead. Also, being selected for the training was a source of recognition that, in her view, legitimized her overall leadership abilities and increased her confidence. She also felt empowered by hearing from other women at the Vice President level who spoke at the training's career panel, which further strengthened her sense of confidence and emboldened her to be more vocal about her achievements and demonstrate to others how she was deserving of that higher title. When describing all of these events, she talked about the changes that occurred in how she regarded herself as a leader and the qualities that she decided to put forward in her leadership style – individual realization – as well as the changes that, for her, were evident in how others perceived her as a leader, which reinforced these qualities and eventually allowed her to be regarded as a higher-level leader in the organization – relational cognition and collective endorsement.

Additionally, the sense of recognition that was facilitated by the training in some of the women can also be classified as a source of relational cognition and collective endorsement that strengthened certain aspects of their leadership identity. Being selected for the training signaled to participants that the organization valued their contribution as leaders. This was exemplified in the comment made by participant #7, who mentioned that she felt like being selected for the training felt like an indication that she was, in fact, an effective leader and that the company wanted her to succeed. Some of the feedback received through the 360-degree evaluation served this purpose as well in some cases. An

illustrative example is that of participant #3, who talked about how through the feedback received in this report she was able to realize that her leadership style was embraced by her team, giving her an enhanced sense of confidence and allowing her to fully embrace her style.

**Drivers of leadership identity development in a women-only training setting.**

Analysis of the sampled women's stories revealed that the ways in which the women-only training appears to have facilitated their further leadership identity development were through; (1) the promotion of practical skills, (2) an increased self-awareness and understanding of others' perceptions, (3) feeling a sense of belonging and connectedness, and (4) feeling recognized and empowered. These findings are in line with the few other studies that have been conducted on women-only leadership training programs. For instance, in Clarke's (2011) study, participants commented on the level of openness and intimacy that the women-only setting allowed for, how they felt it helped them develop more self-awareness and self-understanding of their leadership style, the opportunity it offered for networking with other participants and program presenters, and reported experiencing an increased confidence to deal with cultural barriers to their advancement. Other studies have found that some of the most salient outcomes identified by training participants were an increase in self-confidence and satisfaction with the networking opportunities offered by the program (Clarke, 2011; Bonebright, Cottledge, and Lonquist, 2012; Harris and Leberman 2012, Moorosi, 2013). The current study confirms all of these previous findings, while going further by developing an empirically derived conceptual model identifying the specific means through which the training contributed

to the further development of these senior-level leaders' leadership identity. The findings from this study pinpoint the specific training content that was perceived by these women to be the most influential and was experienced by them as having triggered cognitive changes, and provided insight into how their knowledge was translated into action in their day-to-day work lives and interactions, while also identifying the outcomes that participants perceived from this process.

### **The Influence of Context**

Based on these women's reports of their experiences, it is clear that context played a significant role on the impact that the training had on their individual's identity development as a leader, especially at the levels of relational cognition and collective endorsement that were described earlier. Specifically, three themes emerged related to the most influential factors across the sampled women's stories; (1) the availability of advocates, (2) executive visibility, and (3) fit with the organization's leadership culture and ability to lead authentically.

In cases where these contextual variables are favorable for participants, they can be conducive to further development. However, adverse contextual factors – such as a lack of influential advocates, limited executive visibility, and feeling misalignment with cultural values – can hinder the leadership identity development process, making it difficult for positive outcomes derived from the training to have a greater impact. For example, even if a participant internalized new leadership attributes as a result of going through the program and may even have experienced reinforcement of these attributes at the relational cognition level, without the right advocates in the organization it would be

very difficult to reach the level of collective endorsement. As can be seen from the interview excerpts presented in the previous chapter, for some of the women, the context in which they operate was a hurdle that prevented further development to take place at these levels, notwithstanding the learning that occurred as a result of the training. In this type of case, the identity work achieved through participation in the program may not be enough to help the individual get to the next hierarchical level in the organization, given that reaching that level of collective endorsement is necessary to break through to roles beyond Director and Senior Director. In fact, a positive cross-organizational perception of the individual's leadership abilities is essential in this particular organization, since top executives need to be in agreement concerning an individual's merit before bestowing titles of Vice President and above, as explained by a few of the women. When an individual struggles to further develop her leadership identity, ascending the ranks can become quite a challenging process.

Although other researchers have alluded to the influence of context and other variables on whether these women-only leadership trainings have an impact on actual advancement, this study provides an expanded description of what that influence looks like. Results from this study affirm that women-only leadership development programs can, indeed, be an effective tool for helping senior-level women further develop themselves to potentially move into higher-level positions, but also highlight the importance of considering its impact from a systemic perspective. Contextual variables must be examined and addressed in order for the training to have maximum impact on these women's leadership identity and subsequent career progression and satisfaction.

It should also be noted that not all new qualities internalized and recognized as a result of the program necessarily lead to an eventual change in title. This seems to be contingent, among other factors, on the importance that the organization places on these new qualities and how they translate into being positively regarded as a leader. To illustrate, in some cases it was clear that after going through the training, participants began to behave as diversity and inclusion change agents and added this quality to their identity as leaders by actively engaging in efforts to help women at the lower ranks of the organization. Some participants became more outspoken and actively advocated for the benefits of diversity and inclusion, others felt more comfortable calling out instances where gender bias might be going on, and some became more conscious about mentoring other women underneath them, or began to sponsor, co-create, or participate in company initiatives addressing the disparate impact of gender. While this quality was a source of pride, satisfaction, and confidence for many, and even though others in the organization positively recognized it – some have even become important allies of the diversity and inclusion efforts of the company – within their specific work areas and even in the broader organization this is not necessarily regarded as a trait that adds substantial value to their leadership. That is, it is not a quality that carries enough weight to influence these leaders' continued growth to the upper echelons of the organization.

### **Navigating Gender Dynamics Post-training: Being a Woman in a Male-dominated Organization**

Analysis of the sampled participants' stories showcased the ways in which the women-only leadership training affected these women's ability to deal with a male-

dominated organization. The extent to which women described that the training helped them better navigate gender dynamics depended on how much of an impact they see that being a woman has on how they are able to lead in a mostly male-defined context.

Gender dynamics was a topic purposefully addressed during the interviews, since I specifically asked participants to talk about their experience as women leaders in the organization. As discussed in the previous chapter, responses revealed that being a woman has had varying degrees of impact on these participants, with significant differences in how it has played out in their leadership trajectory. Half of the sample indicated that gender has not been an issue in their careers, albeit admitting that they have been in the minority for most, if not all, of their careers. Many also talked about being either the only woman at their level within their teams, or just one of a few, and how this can be amplified in certain parts of the organization that have been traditionally more male-dominated than the rest. In a marginal number of cases, participants talked about being actively discriminated against in the workplace, but this was not the norm across the sample.

As reported in the findings, over a quarter of the women sampled talked about how the training offered a sense of validation of their experience as women leaders. Some went further, and mentioned how the content that they were exposed to opened their eyes to considering the effect of gender on their trajectories in a way that they had not thought about before. In this regard, I found one participant's (#6) comment to be of significance. She states:

I can remember having the instructors...talking about issues and challenges that are fairly specific to women in the workplace. And until that moment in time, I had not recognized that those were things that I had experienced myself. Like if you had asked me before the program, “Have you ever experienced professional challenges just because you're a woman?” I would have told you “no”, because I didn't recognize them, but yet they were articulating this experience and I was sitting there with my mouth open like, “Gosh, I went through that exact thing,” but I didn't identify the fact that I was going through it because I was a woman.

Although this participant's comments are not representative of the broader group of women interviewed, it highlights the possibility that for some women it might be more difficult to pinpoint the extent to which gender may impact their experience at work – it might just not be as accentuated in their specific work environment or they may be so used to operating in such a context (and be successful in it) that the impact of gender is rendered opaque. Assumptions cannot be made about this, however, and delving deeper into this topic was beyond the scope of these interviews.

### **Subjective and Objective Career Outcomes and Leadership Identity Development**

The rationale for selecting a constructivism-interpretivism paradigm for this study was to pay special attention to the subjective aspects of leadership development as perceived by the study participants, and not just narrowly focus on objective outcomes, such as the number of promotions achieved. The body of literature on career success makes this critical distinction between subjective and objective achievements and the relative importance of both (Judge, Cable, & Boudreau, 1995; Ng, Eby, Sorensen &



Feldman, 2005).

It must be noted that although evidence of leadership identity development was documented across participants' stories, the ultimate outcome of an enhanced leadership identity was not necessarily an even more senior title, or a faster-paced career progression. Therefore, findings from this study suggest that positive psychological outcomes are an important, yet not sufficient component to achieving objective career success.

Looking at promotions data, 72% of participants experienced a change in title at some point after going through the training. Two out of the five who haven't experienced a promotion rated the training between a 4 or 5, so that both outcomes are aligned in these cases. For two others, they were promoted just before going through the program. The remaining participant highly rated the impact of the training, although her story revealed that the insights derived did not truly alter her leadership practice. There were also participants who were promoted at some point after the training and thought highly of its effect, but who currently feel stagnant and unsatisfied with the current state of their careers. Although the training bolstered their leadership identity, they still face some strong contextual obstacles that affect their desired growth.

For some of these lower-satisfaction individuals, despite receiving promotions, their path up the ranks have been much more arduous and full of contextual challenges. Clearly, merely looking at promotion data would not offer a complete picture of these women's leadership identity development, not to mention that it alone would not reveal the factors driving an individual's growth, or lack thereof.

Also, analysis of the interviews sheds some light on participant's meaning of success through the lens of their future career goals. When talking about their aspirations for the future, the predominant theme among participants' responses was the need to keep contributing in meaningful ways (66%) – by keeping challenged, continuing to innovate and drive results, growing the scope of their positions, developing the business, and increasing their overall impact as leaders.

They also talked about their desire to keep enhancing their leadership practice (33%) – by continuing to work on their personal brand and reputation (both internally and external to the organization), expanding their leadership skills, continuing to learn about the business, and working to make sure they have a seat at the table. In terms of hierarchical advancement, 33% percent explicitly mentioned the desire to attain a higher title, while 22% explicitly stated feeling satisfied with their current title and being more driven by growth in the ways described above. These data further support the idea of looking beyond quantitative data to assess an individual's success in the organization, and the importance of considering both objective and subjective measures of success when looking at the impact of the training.

### **Implications for Practice and Recommendations**

Findings from this study provided confirming evidence that women-only leadership development programs can be a useful tool in supporting the further development of senior-level women leaders in a male-dominated organization. These findings will be of interest to a variety of stakeholders. First, to practitioners within the field of Organizational Development and Training, especially those who have a focus on

the intersection of leadership development and diversity and inclusion efforts with an emphasis on gender. It will also be of benefit to organizations that either wish to implement women-only leadership development programs or that already have this type of initiative in place and want to maximize its impact. Additionally, women who are graduates of such programs can also utilize the insights derived from this study to try to maximize its impact on their leadership development and career growth. The following section will address recommendations geared towards these various stakeholders. Action items will also be outlined for the specific organization utilized in this study.

The main general takeaway for practice, based on the findings discussed, is the need to assess the implementation of women-only leadership development programs from a systemic perspective. The contextual factors identified in this study – the availability of advocates, access to executive visibility, and alignment with the leadership culture – heighten the importance of making sure that this type of program is structurally undergirded by a strong, systemically-driven strategy to maximize its impact. In other words, the training must be treated as one intervention within a more comprehensive strategy to develop and support women leaders. This can be done in a number of ways, outlined below.

Organizations implementing women-only leadership training programs must carefully examine how to best support program graduates, starting with the basic task of clearly defining expectations for participants and their managers. Organizations must ensure that the executive leadership, as well as the level of leaders who oversee the program participants, are engaged in the process and understand how the program is tied

to the organization's overall talent development strategy.

Although going through the program does not need to automatically qualify an individual for promotion to the next level, there must be conversations between participants and their managers about what participation in the training is meant to accomplish from a developmental perspective. If clear expectations are defined from the beginning and managers are better equipped to have these career development conversations, the positive psychological impact of the training would likely be maximized. Action planning around career development that engages key individuals in the process will likely lead to participants feeling more supported and more confident in their ability to succeed.

Even if managers fail to initiate these conversations, program participants should feel empowered to take the lead and carefully frame these conversations from a developmental perspective. Given the chance for introspection that this type of training offers, participants should hopefully have a much clearer idea of what their goals and aspirations are looking forward, and feel better equipped to articulate the type of support needed to work towards these.

Organizations must also carefully plan to have formal follow-up mechanisms in place, which includes designing supporting interventions to address the above-discussed contextual variables. As postulated by DeRue and Ashford's (2010) theory, an individual's leadership identity is fluid and changes over time, be it in a positive or negative direction. If the program is to sustain any positive changes that it set in motion in participants' leadership identity, then the follow-up is just as important as the initial

training intervention.

Specifically, it is recommended that special attention be given to continuing the opportunities for networking among program alumnae and opportunities for formal coaching. The networking opportunity that the training provided was one of the aspects of the program that women regarded as being the most meaningful and impactful and having these formal follow-up sessions in place will help to maintain the momentum created during the training. Short, yet formal, follow-up sessions that give program alumnae the opportunity to rekindle old connections, and possibly even establish new ones, should be considered. Ideally, the format of these sessions should be designed in a way that supports continued action planning and that incorporates peer mentoring.

Business units – in organizations in general and this one in particular – should also be encouraged to provide an executive coach to program graduates, although due to budgetary constraints, this might not always be a feasible option; hence, the importance of maximizing opportunities for peer mentoring. Though a peer mentor is by no means equivalent to an executive coach, and one is not meant to replace the other, they can be an invaluable source for impartial feedback and support around work and career-related issues in the absence of an executive coach. Those in charge of designing and implementing these training programs should serve as advocates of participants' continued development and orient managers and executives on the benefits and return on investment of providing these coaching opportunities for high-potential individuals. The positive impact of executive coaches was documented in many of the women's stories. Working with a coach can be tremendously useful in continuing the identity work that

was set in motion during the training. A coach can provide ongoing feedback and support participants with practical and customized strategies to address the contextual barriers that the individual may be facing. These two suggestions are also meant to sustain the changes that may occur in participants' identity as a result of an increased self-awareness and understanding of others' perceptions and the sense of belonging and connectedness provided by the training.

Program participants who are not currently working with an executive coach must also advocate for themselves and directly ask their managers for this opportunity. Training administrators should be ready to offer participants' their support to enable these conversations. This will be a much easier discussion to have if participants feel that they are supported by the organization in their development.

Also, for this organization in particular and for others who operate within a similar context, program design must take into consideration how to increase women's ability to gain visibility and access to potential advocates, without losing sight of women who are physically located away from the company headquarters. These are individuals who will likely need additional attention and support given the physical constraints to their visibility. For this organization in particular, a simple suggestion offered by some of the participants themselves is to maintain an updated program alumnae directory to which all leaders in the organization have access. A couple of the women interviewed mentioned using this talent database, so to speak, when looking to fill positions within their teams or for projects, or even offering this directory to their supervisors. The organization must also ensure that its executive leaders are not just aware of this

directory, but that it becomes an indispensable tool when it comes to sourcing internal talent.

Finally, findings from the study also provided concrete evidence pointing to the perceived effectiveness of specific program components. Organizations looking to design these types of trainings should consider which program components to use in light of the conceptual model that was developed based on the study's findings.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The present study sought to uncover the perceptions and experiences of senior-level IT leaders who participated in a women-only leadership development program, with the aim of uncovering their perspective on the program's effects on their leadership identity. However, interactions between these leaders and their subordinates, peers, or superiors were not directly observed, but rather assessed through the recollection of stories provided by program graduates themselves. Given the lack of empirical research on the topic, it was important to broaden our understanding of how senior-level women perceive that this type of training intervention has impacted the way they view themselves as leaders, their self-reporting of how others in the organization have been reacting to them, and how this process informs and shapes their leadership identity.

Framed from a constructivism-interpretivism paradigm, this study looked at leadership identity from the individual perspectives of the respondents and their perceptions of how the training may have equipped them to see themselves differently, act differently, and be seen differently by others, allowing them to further grow as leaders. Since the stories that women shared were based on recollection, the influence of

time on these individuals' ability to remember exact details must be acknowledged. In some cases, I was able to obtain detailed accounts of how participants applied the insights from the training, while in others the details were more scant. Furthermore, although interviews to assess the opinions of high-ranking executives were considered (that is, the individuals who selected the women for the program), these were not included in the final design, as the data that these would yield (albeit valuable) would not address the specific research questions under study.

It must also be noted that this investigation focused on a particular organization, almost following a case study approach. It also studied a particular training offering that was customized to a specific organization, although its overarching design was grounded on women's leadership development theory.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

As discussed in the previous section, it was difficult for participants to recall exactly what happened post-training with enough detail regarding specific interactions or the feelings that were evoked when trying to implement changes in their leadership practice. Future studies could employ a longitudinal approach to studying program participants' leadership identity development through the use of journaling. This could potentially maximize the level of detail obtained. Shifts in identity tend to occur in a gradual manner, as an individual tentatively experiments with new behaviors and attitudes before fully incorporating them into their identity. Therefore, this tactic would be useful to uncover the specific process through which participants add or shed certain



leadership qualities into their identity, including the feelings this evokes, and effects of other's reactions.

Additional cohorts of the program should be examined to further explore the possibility of additional themes that did not get enough clout within a sample of 18 graduates; as was the case the themes of identity as mother and double binds mentioned in the findings chapter, related to gender dynamics. Possible differences between organizational levels should also be further explored, since findings from this study provided an indication that there is a marked difference in what it takes to make the shift from a Director or Senior Director position to a more senior-level Vice President or Senior Vice President.

Also, findings could be more telling about the impact of gender if men of similar rank would be interviewed about their leadership trajectories. These opinions would shed some light on the differences or similarities in some of the contextual issues that men of the same rank and organization face.

Lastly, future investigations on the topic of leadership identity development and women-only leadership training should also further look into the population of senior-level women who are well connected in the organization to gain further insights as to: How they go about enlisting advocates? What are the characteristics of these advocates? What do these relationships look like?

**Appendix A:  
Summary of Training Topics**

- Your Leadership Story
- 360° Feedback and Coaching
- Projections of Others (“Velcro”)
- Understanding Gender Dynamics
- Negotiation
- Networking
- Career Panel with Senior Leaders
- Your History of the Future

**Appendix B:  
Recruitment Email to Participants from CDO**

Dear [program] Alumnus:

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study that is being conducted by Keila L. Viñas, M.A., a doctoral degree candidate in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Boston University's School of Education. Keila is currently working on her dissertation in which she is looking to assess the impact of a women-only leadership development program on senior-level women leaders within the Information Technology industry. Specifically, she wants to uncover if and how participation in this type of program can help further shape senior-level women's leadership identity. The study will try to shed light into women leaders' experience applying the knowledge and tools learned during the program once they have returned to their areas of work.

Keila is looking for **20** [Program] alumni who would be interested in sharing their experience with her, whether it is positive or negative. Keila will be looking for participants from the first two cohorts of the program (2009–2010) and from the last and second-to-last cohort (2013–2014). You are receiving this email because you meet this requirement.

The interview process should take about an hour. I ask you to participate and help be a part of advancing the existing scholarship on the topic of women's leadership development, while also helping us to internally assess the impact of our [Program].

If you would like to participate in this study please contact Keila directly at [kvinas@bu.edu](mailto:kvinas@bu.edu) or at 787-3078989. Keila will promptly contact you back with additional details. Please make sure to state your interest in participating by [insert date].

**It is important to note that this is an independent research study and that [this company] will not have access to the names of those who participate, nor will it have access to the raw interview data.** [This company] will only have access to the final report, in which the data will be reduced to the major themes. You may click here to read the participant consent form, which includes additional information regarding the measures that will be taken to protect your privacy and confidentiality.

Sincerely,

[Name removed]  
Chief Diversity Officer

**Appendix C:**  
**Follow-Up Recruitment Email to Participants from CDO**

*Will only be sent if the desired sample size has not been reached by the deadline stated on the initial recruitment email. A copy of that initial email will be included at the bottom of this one.*

Dear [program] Alumnus:

I would like to remind you about the research study that is being conducted by Keila L. Viñas, M.A., a doctoral degree candidate in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Boston University's School of Education, on the experience of graduates of the [Program]. Keila is still looking for additional participants who would be willing to be interviewed for an hour about topics related to their leadership identity development and their experience with the program, whether it is positive or negative.

If you would like to participate in this study please contact Keila directly at [kvinas@bu.edu](mailto:kvinas@bu.edu) or at 787-3078989. Keila will promptly contact you back with additional details. Please make sure to state your interest in participating by [insert date].

Once again, I ask you to participate and help be a part of advancing the existing scholarship on the topic of women's leadership development, while also helping us to internally assess the impact of our [Program].

For additional information, please refer to the email below.

Sincerely,

[Name removed]  
Chief Diversity Officer

**Appendix D:  
2<sup>nd</sup> Follow-Up Recruitment Email to Participants from CDO**

*This is the third and final email that will be sent to prospective participants. A copy of the previous two emails will be included at the bottom of this one.*

Dear [program] Alumnus:

I would like to send you a final reminder about the research study that is being conducted by Keila L. Viñas, M.A., a doctoral degree candidate in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Boston University's School of Education, on the experience of graduates of the [Program]. Keila is still looking for just a handful of participants to complete her sample.

If you would be willing to be interviewed for an hour about topics related to your trajectory as a leader and your experience with the program, whether it is positive or negative, please contact Keila directly at [kvinas@bu.edu](mailto:kvinas@bu.edu) or at 787-307898 by [insert date].

Once again, I ask you to participate and help be a part of advancing the existing scholarship on the topic of women's leadership development, while also helping us to internally assess the impact of our [Program].

Thanks to all of you who have already reached out to Keila to express interest in participating.

For additional information, please refer to the emails below.

Sincerely,

[Name removed]  
Chief Diversity Officer

**Appendix E:**  
**Immediate Response After Prospective Participants Express Interest**

Dear [insert name]:

Thank you for your interest in participating in my study. Could you let me know when you participated in the [Program] (month and year)?

From those who express interest in participating, I will be randomly selecting 20 participants total - 10 each from the “early” ([insert dates]) and “recent” ([insert dates]) cohorts of the program. This is to give everyone who is interested an equal chance of participating in the study. I will let you know by [insert date] if you have been selected to participate so that we can coordinate a date, time, and location for the interview.

Best regards,

Keila L. Viñas, M.A.  
Ed.D. Candidate, Boston University

**Appendix F:**  
**Confirmation of Participation and Beginning of Consent Process**

Dear [insert name]:

You have been selected as part of the sample for my study. Please contact me at your earliest convenience to arrange the date, time, and location for your interview. While a face-to-face interview is preferred, we may also conduct it over the phone, if that happens to be more convenient for you.

Attached you will find a copy of the participant consent form. Please read it carefully and keep a copy for your records. I will be going over this information at the beginning of our interview and you will have a chance to clarify any questions you may have. You will be able to provide your consent to participate at that point, which will be recorded on tape.

Thanks again for agreeing to participate in this study. I truly appreciate your participation, as I know how busy you must be.

Best regards,

Keila L. Viñas, M.A.  
Ed.D. Candidate, Boston University

**Appendix G:  
Date/Time/Location Confirmation and Sharing of Interview Exercise and  
Demographic Questionnaire**

Dear [insert name],

This is to confirm our meeting on [insert date] at [insert time].

Also, before we meet, I wanted to let you know that during our interview I will be referring back to the leadership story exercise that was carried out during the [training program]. If possible, I would like you to please look for that timeline (or roughly re-create it) and complete it to the present day. You can use the attached worksheet to capture your notes. I won't be collecting this, so feel free to just write down some notes that may be helpful to you. I would like you to identify on this timeline what you consider to be the key milestones in your development as a leader – both successes and challenges – and then plot where the [Program] would fall. Doing this short exercise beforehand will allow us to make more efficient use of our time together, as it'll help jog your memory of the important milestones in your trajectory as a leader, in preparation for our conversation.

In this interview I will also be asking some in-depth questions regarding your experience of the [training program] and how you later used the knowledge and insights that you derived from it. I'm including a list of the topics covered during the training, in case you would like to review it beforehand. We will also be spending some time talking about what it's like to be a woman leader at [your company].

Finally, I have attached a short demographic questionnaire that I would like you to complete, which I will collect during our meeting.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

I look forward to meeting with you soon.

Best regards,

Keila L. Viñas, M.A.  
Ed.D. Candidate, Boston University



## **Appendix H: Informed Consent Form**

Project Title:

NARRATIVES OF WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT: AN  
ASSESSMENT OF SENIOR-LEVEL IT LEADERS FOLLOWING PARTICIPATION  
IN A WOMEN-ONLY TRAINING PROGRAM

You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted by Keila L. Viñas, M.A., a doctoral degree candidate in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Boston University's School of Education. Please read carefully the information below and feel free to ask the researcher questions about anything that is unclear to you regarding your participation in this study.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to examine the experience of senior-level IT women leaders after participating in a company-sponsored women-only leadership development training program. It aims to examine women's perceptions of whether and how participation in this type of program has helped them further shape their identity as leaders and their experience applying the knowledge and tools learned.

### **Procedures**

The researcher will be interviewing 20 women from your company who have completed this type of training - 10 participants from the early cohorts of the program and ten from the most recent cohorts. If more than 20 women express their interest to participate in the study, the final sample will be chosen at random by the researcher.

The study involves an hour-long interview, which may be conducted either in person or over the phone, depending on what is more convenient for you. Whenever possible, face-to-face interviews are preferred. The interview will be digitally recorded to ensure accuracy of the data collected.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to answer any questions, or withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw, all information collected from you will be immediately destroyed and will not be used in the study. You may choose not to participate in this research study.

## **Confidentiality and Privacy**

Although the results of this study will be published in the form of a doctoral dissertation, no information that could individually identify any of the participants will be included. The main discussion of the analysis will focus on the overarching themes and patterns that emerge across the different interviews with the study participants. The results will not be presented as individual case studies. While demographic data will be collected, it will not be used in a way that could lead to the participants being identified.

A case ID number or pseudonym will be used to identify participants' transcribed interviews and any other identifying information (names of colleagues, department names, and the like) will be changed in the transcripts in order to ensure the interviewees' anonymity. Only the investigator will have access to the master-code list that links your personal information to the case ID number or pseudonym used. Once your interview has been transcribed, it will be sent to you for your review before it is used for analysis. You will be given three days to respond back to indicate whether you wish to make any revisions or add to your responses. If the researcher does not receive a confirmation by those three days, it will assumed that you do not wish to make any changes.

Only the final report will be shared with your company and only the researcher and her dissertation advisor will have access to the taped interviews. All data files will be stored in password-protected Dropbox folders that will only be accessible to the researcher. The master-code list will be kept in a separate Dropbox folder from the transcribed data, as will the audiotapes. All audiotapes as well as any other documents containing identifiable information, such as the master-code list, will be destroyed once the dissertation has been published. Transcriptions will be preserved, but these will not contain identifiable information.

Your company does not even need to know whether you participated in the study or not. All communication regarding your participation in the study will be conducted between you and the researcher.

The Institutional Review Board may review your study records for purposes such as quality control or safety. The Institutional Review Board is a group of people who review human research studies for safety and protection of people who take part in the studies.

## **Benefits**

While there are no direct benefits to you from participating in this study, your input may help advance the existing scholarship on the topic of women's leadership development, with a special focus on senior-level leaders in within the Information Technology industry. This study's results may help widen our understanding of women's perceptions

of their leadership identity development by offering insight into their personal experience and how they understand this type of training to be of impact in their work lives.

### **Risks**

The risk to you from participating in this study is minimal. The only foreseeable risk is that the information you provide during the interview is linked back to you. However, the researcher is greatly minimizing that risk by rigorously safeguarding each participant's confidentiality and privacy, as outlined under the Confidentiality and Privacy section above.

You may be uncomfortable with some of the questions and topics we will ask about. You do not have to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

A copy of the finalized dissertation will be made available to you.

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact the researcher directly at [kvinas@bu.edu](mailto:kvinas@bu.edu) or at 787-3078989, or you may also contact the researcher's dissertation advisor, Dr. Alan K. Gaynor at [agaynor@bu.edu](mailto:agaynor@bu.edu) or 617-721-5581. To obtain further information about your rights as a research subject you may call the Boston University Charles River Campus Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office at 617-358-6115.

Please keep a copy of this form for your records. The researcher will review this form with you at the beginning of your interview and you will have a chance to clarify any questions you may have. You will also be able to provide your consent to participate at that point, which will be recorded on tape.

## **Appendix I: Interview Protocol**

### **Opening Script**

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Thanks again for agreeing to participate in my study. I truly appreciate the time you are taking from your busy schedule to do this interview.

Today, I will be asking you some questions about your experience as a leader at [your company], both before and after participating in the [Program]. As I mentioned in my email, the interview should take about an hour and I will be digitally recording our conversation. Is that ok with you?

Before we begin, I would like to go over some of the details that are covered on the consent form that I sent you. Did you have a chance to read it carefully?

Please know that your participation in this study is completely voluntary and that you may withdraw from it at any time. If at any point you don't feel comfortable answering a question, just let me know and we will skip it.

The information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. Only the final report will be shared with your company and no information that could potentially identify you will be included. Neither tapes nor transcriptions will be shared. Once the taped interviews have been transcribed, any information that could identify you will be promptly removed.

Do you have any questions for me regarding the information I just covered or is there anything else that you would like me to clarify from the information provided on the consent form?

Do you agree to participate in the study?

## **Semi-Structured Interview Guide**

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*The following exercise will be emailed ahead of time:*

*I would like to refer back to an exercise that was carried out during the training, in which you were asked to chart out your leadership story. I would like you to please look for that timeline, or re-create it using the worksheet provided, and complete it to the present day.*

- *Identify on this timeline what you consider to be the key milestones in your development as a leader – this includes successes and challenges*
- *Identify where the leadership program falls on this timeline*

*(If the participant wasn't able to work on the timeline ahead of time, they will be handed the worksheet and a few minutes to think about the exercise before starting with the interview)*

1. From an organizational perspective, what does it take to be a successful leader in this company? How would you describe the prototypical leader at [this company]?
2. In what ways does this resonate with who you are as a leader and/or in what ways does it not?
  - If there are aspects that are incompatible with your leadership style, how do you deal with that?
3. Using the timeline that you prepared as a visual guide, tell me about yourself. Can you talk to me about your trajectory as a leader?
  - What have been some of the major positive influences that have shaped you into the leader you are today? (These can be both events and people)
  - What have been some of the major challenges that you have encountered in your development as a leader?
4. What's it like for you to be a female leader within this company?
5. You participated in the [training program] in [insert date]. Why do you believe that you were picked to participate in this program?
6. When you were told that you had been picked for the program, how did you feel about it?
  - What about it was or wasn't appealing to you?

7. Try to place yourself back in the classroom and tell me about your experience at the training. Can you tell me about some of the significant moments that stood out for you?
  - What topics were most impactful to you and in what way?
  - What insights, if any, were you able to derive from the training related to your role as a leader?
8. What difference did it make for you, if any, that this training was focused on women?
9. Based on the insights that you derived from the training, what were some of the practical takeaways that you decided you were going to put into practice once you returned to work? Were there any?
10. How exactly did you implement those takeaways and put them into practice? Guide me through that process of how you went about it, one by one. And if you didn't, tell me about that. What happened?
  - How did it feel trying out these strategies or tools?
  - What helped you?
  - What presented a challenge?
    - How did you handle those challenges?
  - How did others react to this? What feedback did you get?
  - What were the outcomes? Positive and/or negative
  - What impact has this had on how you think about yourself as a leader?
  - What impact do you think has this had on how others interact with you as a leader?
11. Referring back to the timeline, try to recall that point in time before you went through the [training program]. What kind of leader would you say you were you prior to the training and how does it compare to how you see yourself as a leader today?
  - What did you consider to be your strengths and limitations then vs. now?
12. On a scale of one to ten, with one being no impact and ten being the highest impact you can imagine, how would you rate the impact of the program on your development or evolution as a leader?
  - How did you come up with that rating?
  - In what ways, if at all, do you think that going through the program has changed you?
  - If you think you have changed as a consequence of the training, can you think of an anecdote that exemplifies how you are different?
13. How do you see that gender affects how you lead within the context of this organization, if at all?

14. How did the training affect how you viewed the impact of gender on your role as a leader, if at all?
15. Looking ahead, how do you see your future as a leader? What are your aspirations and goals?
16. How is the organization supportive of these aspirations and goals?
17. What have I missed that you would like to share? Is there anything you wish I had asked?
18. How did you feel doing this interview? Do you have any feedback for me regarding the interview process?

**Closing Script:**

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Thanks again for agreeing to participate in my study and for the time you have dedicated to this interview.

Once your interview has been transcribed, I will send it back to you for your review before it is used for analysis. You will be given three days to respond back to indicate whether you wish to make any revisions or add to your responses. If I don't hear back from you, I will assume that you do not wish to make any changes

Also, please know that you may contact me if at any point you think of something else that is relevant to our conversation today and would like to share it with me. We could then arrange additional time to talk, either in person or on the phone.

**Appendix J:  
Demographic Data Questionnaire**

**Demographic Data Questionnaire**

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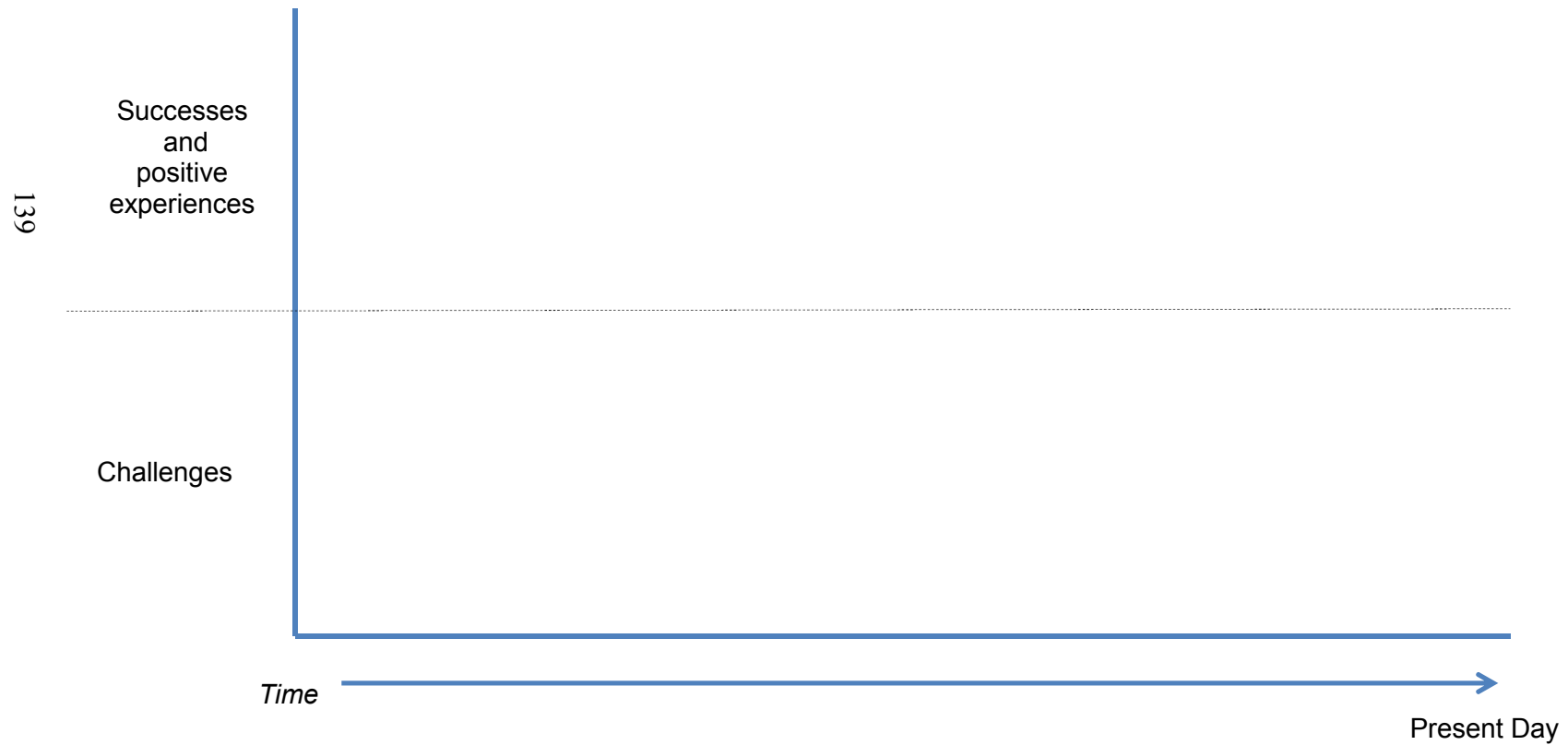
- Current organizational level (e.g. Director, Senior Director, Vice President, etc.)
  
- Time in current position:
  
- Current number of direct reports:
  
- Total number of promotions while working at this company:
  
- Number of promotions after participating in the [training program]:
  
- Highest level of education achieved and field of study:
  
- Years of service at this company:
  
- Total years of professional experience:
  
- Years of experience within the IT industry:
  
- Age:
  
- Race/Ethnicity:



## Appendix K: Exercise Handout

### My Leadership Story

- Identify on this timeline what you consider to be the key milestones in your development as a leader – this includes successes and challenges
- Plot where the training program falls on this timeline



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## CURRICULUM VITAE

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### EDUCATION

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**Boston University** Boston, MA  
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies January 2017  
Specialization in Human Resource Education

**Columbia University** New York, NY  
Master of Arts in Social-Organizational Psychology August 2002

**Villanova University** Villanova, PA  
Bachelor of Arts in Psychology; Sociology Minor May 2001

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

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**Boston University, School of Management** Boston, MA

**Research Assistant, MS in Investment Management Program** March 2011 – September 2012

- Assisted the MSIM Program Director on a variety of academic research projects focused on business education
- Most notably, co-authored study aimed at assessing determinants of objective and subjective career success for MSIM alumni, with special focus on the Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) designation; paper was presented at the 2012 Financial Education Association Conference and the 2013 Financial Management Association International Conference
- Collected and analyzed data related to measurements of learning success for the MSIM Program to ensure full compliance with AACSB accreditation standards
- Developed detailed grading rubrics for the three MSIM Program milestone projects to ensure curriculum learning goals are being properly and consistently measured

**Partners HealthCare – Brigham and Women’s Hospital** Boston, MA

**HR Project Manager** September 2008 – October 2010

- Reporting to the Vice President of Human Resources, provided support to all seven members of the Human Resources Senior Leadership Team in the development and execution of project plans for all major HR initiatives

- Co-managed several key projects across the different HR functional areas, including the following:
  - Employee health and wellness initiative
  - Organization-wide employee opinion survey
  - Behavioral competency modeling across job levels
  - Employee ideas program
  - Departmental mentoring program
  - Organization-wide job descriptions review for quality assurance and Joint Commission compliance
  - Revamping of new-hire on-boarding process
- Developed the project management discipline within the department by creating a standard project planning process and providing ongoing education and coaching to HR team members
- Facilitated HR metrics definition process with the Human Resources Senior Leadership Team, guided by industry best practices and organizational strategic objectives
- Completed best employer award applications on behalf of Brigham and Women's Hospital; up to ten per year

**Intern, Organizational Development and Learning**

February 2008 – August 2008

- Managed benchmark analysis and needs assessment process for an employee rewards and recognition program; subsequently provided recommendations for the development of a revamped rewards and recognition strategy
- Co-designed a variety of workshops and collaborated in the development of modules of a leadership development program for senior-level leaders
- Conducted research for training content, as well as best practices in organizational development and adult learning

**EVERTEC – Popular, Inc.**

San Juan, PR

**Training and Organizational Development Specialist**

December 2005 – August 2007

- Within a year and a half, grew company's internal training curriculum from zero to nine programs, working collaboratively with subject matter experts
- Managed knowledge transfer projects from beginning to end, encompassing the needs assessment, design, implementation, and evaluation phases
- Key player in planning team of company-wide transformational change strategy; designed and implemented a variety of interventions aimed at cultivating and sustaining the desired change
- Provided company-wide OD consulting support
- Facilitated action planning sessions with executive, senior, and department-level leaders based on employee engagement survey results, offering coaching and support throughout the implementation of those plans
- Partnered with other HR functions to implement projects such as new-hire on-boarding and telecommuting programs
- Drafted preliminary design of company's first succession planning strategy, aimed at ensuring continuity of the company's critical business areas

**Banco Popular de Puerto Rico – Popular, Inc.**

San Juan, PR

**Organizational Development Specialist**

August 2003 – November 2005

- Provided OD consulting support to ten of Banco Popular's lines of business
- Managed all aspects of the OD consulting process, from contracting of the engagement, to data collection, its subsequent analysis and problem diagnosis, all the way to design and implementation of a fitting intervention
- Designed and facilitated focus group sessions
- Developed a variety of OD assessment tools, such as surveys and interview guides
- Negotiated several contracts with vendors and external consultants for the co-design of OD interventions
- Key player in development and administration of corporate-wide employee engagement survey; involved in all aspects of the process, from survey design to results analysis and communication, culminating with the facilitation of action planning sessions with senior and department-level managers
- Concurrently participated in company's highly selective Management Trainee Program

**Management Trainee**

August 2003 – July 2004

- Participated in various professional and leadership development activities, including trainings and special project assignments, culminating with a final project presentation to Banco Popular's Executive Committee
- Acquired macro-vision of Bank's operations by rotating through its core lines of business and departments: Retail, Business and Corporate Banking, Insurance and Financial Services, Individual Credit Lending Services, Strategic Planning, Marketing, and Communications, and Human Resources

**Quality for Business Success, Inc.**

San Juan, PR

**I/O Psychology Consultant, Leadership and Talent Development** September 2002–July 2003

- Conducted psychometric and qualitative assessments for clients of the firm's executive development program and talent selection services
- Provided support during needs assessment portion of OD interventions

**PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS**

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Viñas, K.L., and Stewart, S.D. (2012) Is there career value in the CFA® designation? Presented at the Academy of Business Education/Financial Education Association 13th Annual Conference, Charleston, South Carolina.

## **PROFESSIONAL TRAININGS AND CERTIFICATIONS**

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A.K. Rice Institute Group Relations Conference; Facilitating and Managing Complex Systems Change; Organizational Development and Group Dynamics; Experiential Learning for Adults; Interpersonal Dynamics; Organizational Development and Business Consulting Skills; Workitect Competency Modeling Certification; Concepts of Project Management; SHRM HR Generalist