

# Factors Influencing Advancement of Women Senior Leaders in Aerospace Companies

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### ABSTRACT

This phenomenological qualitative study was performed to explore what professional and personal factors might have led to promotional opportunities of women into senior leadership roles. The problem researched in this study was the limited number of women in senior leadership positions in the aerospace industry.

### PROBLEM

The problem researched in this study was the limited number of women in senior leadership positions in the aerospace industry. The U. S. Department of Labor Glass Ceiling Commission study (1995) found that 97% of senior managers of the Fortune 1000 Industrial and Fortune 500 are Caucasian and 95 to 97% are men. The body of knowledge regarding the advancement of women in executive positions is limited. This study was designed to focus on the factors that led to the advancement of women into senior leadership positions.

### PURPOSE

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research study was to interview women senior leaders in the aerospace industry to explore the factors they perceived as beneficial to their advancement to senior leadership positions in the aerospace industry.

### RELEVANT LITERATURE

#### Theoretical Frameworks

- Bass' Transactional Leadership theory (2008)
- Burns' Transformational Leadership theory
- Weber' s Charismatic Leadership theory

#### Relevant Research

##### *Women in Leadership roles:*

A.H., & Carli, L. (2007a); Bell, E., & Nkomo, S. (2001); Bergman, B., & Hallberg, R. M. (2000); Budworth, M. & Mann, S. (2010) ; Eagly, A.H. (2007); Helfat, C.E., Harris, D., & Wolfson, P.J. (2000); Hopewell, L., McNeely, C.L., Kuiler, E.W., & Hahm, J. (2009); Linney, B. (2000)

##### *Mentoring Relationships:*

Casto, C., Caldwell, C., & Salazar, C. (2005); DeWall, M. (2006); Ensher, E. A., Murphy, S. E., & Sullivan, S. (2002); Holmes, J. (2005); Ingram, S., Bruning, S., & Mikawoz, I. (2009)

##### *Women in Engineering:*

Foor, C., Walden, S., & Trytten, D. (2007); Hersh, M. (2000); Ingram, S., Bruning, S., & Mikawoz, I. (2009).

### RESEARCH QUESTION

**Q1.** What professional and personal factors are important for women to reach executive levels in aerospace?

### PROCEDURES

This study used a qualitative approach using interviews and then analyzing the interviews for themes. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the personal and professional perceptions of advancement of a purposive sample of 15 women serving in senior leadership positions in aerospace companies headquartered in Northeastern United States. The participants were selected based on their positions as senior leaders and because of their experience in the aerospace industry.

### DATA ANALYSIS

Research participants answered 12 questions related to personal and professional factors that contributed to advancement into senior leadership positions. The interviews were conducted in person and over the telephone. The modified Van Kaam approach was used and responses were transcribed using Nvivo 9. By using the statistical software, themes emerged from the data analysis. The analysis was shared with participants and responses were verified for accuracy. Participants were encouraged to elaborate on their answer. The data were collected during interviews and then using qualitative approaches themes were developed in relationship to answering the Research Question.

### FINDINGS

#### *Theme Percentage Regarding Personal Attributes Contributing to Success*

Personal attribute	Ranking
Mentoring	53%
Career choice	47%
Commitment	33%
Family	21%
Expertise	21%
Value	21%
Personal drive	20%

### LIMITATIONS

Small sample size of 15 participants  
Advancement opportunities not considered senior leadership roles in some organizations  
Study did not consider aerospace companies outside Northeastern United States

### CONCLUSIONS

Attributes of self-preparation, commitment, experience, and courage can benefit any professional seeking to advance in various careers exists.

Research regarding women in leadership is limited in understanding how women who have advanced successfully obtained and maintained their success.

### SOCIAL CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study will address the knowledge base gap related to development of women leaders into senior management positions. In addition, could be beneficial to organizations by creating a diversity based leadership development tool to help women pursuing senior leadership roles.