

2020

## Strategies for Enhancing Organizational Performance by Advancing Women to Leadership Positions

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*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Veronica D. Brown

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Walden University  
2020

Abstract

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Leadership Positions

by

Veronica D. Brown

MS, DeVry University, 2014

MA, Webster University, 1999

BS, Virginia State University, 1986

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

June 2020

## Abstract

Approximately 45% of the U.S. labor force comprises women, but less than 5% work in executive positions due to ineffective succession strategies. Human resource (HR) managers who fail to implement succession strategies are at risk of losing competitive advantage and lower organizational performance due to a lack of equitable promotional and hiring processes for future female leaders. Grounded in the social role theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore succession strategies HR managers in the home improvement industry use to advance qualified women for leadership positions to improve organizations' performance. The participants comprised 6 HR managers from 6 home improvement companies in the southeast United States who successfully implemented strategies to advance women to leadership positions and improve organizational performance. Data were collected from face-to-face semistructured interviews, company documents, and archival documents. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Three themes emerged: the importance of leadership training, educational attainment, and having role models and mentors. Key recommendations include establishing collaborations and partnerships and creating mid-management succession plans. The implications for social change include the potential for HR managers to promote awareness of women's executive talents and reduce gender inequality. Enabling female employees to achieve their full potential and professional aspirations, and creating professional opportunities will also benefit employees, their families, and their communities.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this study to my parents, Mr. Paul and Mrs. Willa Lewis. Your support throughout this journey and all the adventures preceding my educational journey has been unwavering. You both have remained steadfast in your motivation, support, and spiritual guidance. Both of you have lifted me every time I wanted to quit, and you would remind me to keep my faith in the Lord and allow Him to guide me. Also, thank you for the many sacrifices, the assistance, and, most of all, how you have lightened the load. You have encouraged me and you have been my rock. In addition, I would like to dedicate this study, to Karen and Richard Sherman and CSM Lorenzo Keith you were always that voice of hope encouraging me to push harder when I felt discouraged. Posthumously, to Mr. Carey Brown and Mrs. Gladys Virginia Bailey. You may be physically absent, but the love you gave is forever present. I wish you were here to witness this milestone. I know you would be proud of the accomplishment I have made, as they are a result of your unwavering love and the foundation you provided for me.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Church (2014) noted that women are still not represented in significant numbers in top leadership positions in industries in the southeast United States. Historically, organizations have competed to recruit and promote male candidates (Conchie, 2013). Consequently, succession strategies for advancing women to leadership positions are crucial to the success and the continuity of business, particularly for top leadership positions (Long & Chrisman, 2014). Because of shortages of women in leadership positions, it has become imperative for business leaders to invest and focus their efforts on promoting more women to leadership positions to improve organizational performance. The intent of exploring succession strategies in this study is to advance women who have qualified for leadership positions to improve organizations' performance.

### **Background of the Problem**

Women in the United States have tried to position themselves for advancement to leadership positions by attending colleges and obtaining advanced degrees (Hurley & Choudhary, 2016). However, only 4.8% of senior-level positions within Standard & Poor's (S&P) 500 companies are presently held by women (Allen, French, & Poteet, 2016). Due to barriers and obstacles preventing women from obtaining leadership positions, leaders need an awareness of how succession strategies that help advance women to leadership positions can be used to enhance organizational performance.

Allen et al. (2016) noted that each year more women enter the workforce looking for jobs that are comparable to the degrees they have earned. However, after years of

remaining in certain positions, women are often unable to advance to higher managerial levels that are commensurate with the degrees and experience they have achieved (Bierema, 2016). Mastrangelo, Eddy, and Lorenzet (2014) asserted the importance of demonstrating to a younger generation of women entering the workforce that leadership opportunities are available and achievable and should be pursued. Nanton (2015) noted that leaders who gain an understanding of the impact of women in leadership positions might help reduce gender inequality in the workplace. Also, leaders who gain an understanding of women's leadership styles and how their leadership affects organizational effectiveness may be able to use this knowledge to aid in the development of succession strategies used as solutions for advancing women to leadership positions (Nanton, 2015). Additionally, understanding of the types of succession strategies necessary to support women in advancing to leadership positions may enable women and men to work together to create positive social change that may result in women gaining advancement throughout the corporate hierarchies (Klettner, Clarke, & Boersma, 2016).

### **Problem Statement**

Firms with more women in senior level positions in management teams have, on average, a lower risk of organizational failure and better overall performance (Perryman, Fernando, & Tripathy, 2016). However, only 4.8% of senior-level positions within Standard & Poor's (S&P) 500 companies are held by women (Allen et al., 2016). The general business problem is that some companies are negatively affected by diminished organizational performance and lower earnings caused by inadequate succession strategies. The specific business problem is that some human resource (HR) managers in

the home improvement industry lack succession strategies to advance women who have qualified for leadership positions to improve organizations' performance.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the succession strategies that some HR managers in the home improvement industry use to advance women who have qualified for leadership positions to improve organizations' performance. The targeted population consisted of HR managers from six home improvement companies in the southeast United States who have implemented successful succession strategies for advancing women to leadership positions and improving organizations' performance. The implications for positive social change included the potential for HR managers to gain information needed to provide advancement opportunities to women, thereby reducing gender inequality in leadership positions and demonstrating to a younger generation of women entering the workforce that leadership opportunities are available and achievable. Additionally, HR managers should learn of strategies for the development of mentoring programs that will enable female employees to achieve professional aspirations and create opportunities for personal accomplishment benefiting employees, families, and communities.

### **Nature of the Study**

Researchers use the qualitative method to explore attitudes, behaviors, motivations, and working strategies through personal interviews (Barnham, 2015). Conversely, a quantitative approach involves the measurement and examination of relationships or differences among variables. The quantitative method was not

appropriate for this study because I was not examining relationships or differences among variables. A mixed method study includes the combination of qualitative and quantitative elements to explore and examine philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks (Yin, 2018). The mixed method approach was not appropriate for this study because I did not use a quantitative study element to examine succession strategies used by HR managers to help women advance to leadership positions and improve organizations' performance.

Multiple case study research is a mechanism for the potential application of a theory or premise to the exploration of a group (Yin, 2018). Furthermore, a researcher conducting a multiple case study can explore differences within and between cases thereby allowing a researcher to retain the holistic characteristics of real-life events while investigating empirical events. According to Yin (2018), when the boundaries between a phenomenon and context are not clear, a researcher can use a multiple case study as is the case for the proposed exploration of succession strategies necessary to support gender parity in leadership positions to improve organizational performance. Additionally, multiple case study research is useful if a topic is complex or a group is too large for researchers to use a simple interview survey (Yin, 2018). In contrast, researchers using a phenomenological design, seek to understand the essence of a phenomenon by exploring the views of people who have experienced that phenomenon. The exploration and analyses involve long and in-depth interviews with participants (Yin, 2018) thereby making a phenomenological design inappropriate for this study. Qualitative researchers use an ethnographic design to observe societies or cultural phenomena (Yin, 2018),

which was not the objective of this study. The narrative design consists of collecting and telling stories about experiences of individuals (Yin, 2018) which was not the intent of the proposed study.

### **Research Question**

What succession strategies do some HR managers in the home improvement industry use to advance women to leadership positions to improve organizations' performance?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What succession strategies did your organizations' leaders use to support women in advancing to leadership positions to improve your organization's performance?
2. How do you identify your female employees as possessing talents needed to advance to leadership positions?
3. What, if any, succession strategies do you use to manage and support women who are already in leadership positions in your organization?
4. What, if any, barriers exist to implementing succession strategies for advancing women to leadership positions in your organization to improve organizational performance?
5. How did you address the barriers to implementing your succession strategies for advancing women to leadership positions in your organization to improve organizational performance?



6. What else would you like to add that we have not discussed regarding succession strategies your organization has used to advance women to leadership positions?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Alice Eagly developed the social role theory in 1987 and proposed that this theory, and the role of stereotyping, influences occupational roles (Eagly, 2013). The social role theory posits that men and women behave differently in social situations and take different roles due to the expectations that society puts upon them, thus creating stereotypes (Kiser, 2015). Social role theory recognizes the historical division of labor between women, who often assumed responsibilities at home, and men, who often assumed responsibilities outside the home (Eagly, 2013). Because of the coexistent gender differences in social behavior, expectations for men and women began to diverge (Eagly, 2013). These differences in social expectations transfer to future generations and, in turn, impinge on the social behavior of each gender and lead to stereotypes (Eagly, 2013). Consequently, obstacles such as gender role stereotypes and perceived gender roles may discourage women who are attempting to attain managerial positions (Koenig & Eagly, 2014). I used the social role theory as a potential lens to examine succession strategies for HR managers in the home improvement industry to identify and develop female employees capable of assuming top leadership positions to improve organizations' performance.

## **Operational Definitions**

*Effective leadership:* Effective leadership is how leaders motivate subordinates to develop themselves while achieving organizational goals (Conchie, 2013).

*Glass ceiling:* An invisible limit to professional advancement that is imposed upon women (Rachmawatia & Lantu, 2014).

*Labyrinth:* The complicated path women encounter when seeking advancement to senior leadership positions (Rhode & Packel, 2014).

*Organizational culture:* A set of shared values intended to guide employees toward acceptable and rewarding behavior that are effective desires of an organization (Cook & Glass, 2014).

*Organizational performance:* Organizational performance is established by leaders to provide the desired outcome that advances an organization financially and operationally (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015).

## **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

While conducting research, a researcher may discover inherent limits of the study. Concerns with truthful responding, access to participants, and survey instruments are just a few examples of restrictions in research (Kirkwood & Price, 2013). In the following sections, I delineated the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of this study to define the scope of the research.

### **Assumptions**

An assumption in a research study is a belief that is not tested or supported by empirical data (Osborne, 2017). Assumptions are facts considered to be true but are not

actually verified (Osborne, 2017). Assumptions carry risk and should be treated as such. Four assumptions guided the analysis and data collection for this study. First, it was assumed that the participants would answer the interview questions honestly. Secondly, it was assumed that participants would not be biased about succession strategies used for enhancing organizational performance with women in leadership. Thirdly, it was assumed that the organizations included in the study would have diverse employee populations, with qualified women to advance to leadership positions. Lastly, it was assumed that study participants would have adequate knowledge about succession strategies for advancing women to leadership positions and therefore have the background necessary to answer my questions.

### **Limitations**

As described by Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016), limitations are elements of a study that the researcher cannot control and therefore create a potential weakness in the study. Findings from this study had several limitations. First, the study participants had different levels of work ethics and managerial experiences that limited the applicability of the information they provided. Second, participants' background (age) influenced the results as well. Third, misinterpretation of some of the data collected resulted in errors in the findings. Fourth, the presence of the researcher during the interview session limited the willingness of participants to respond with candor. Fifth, there were inconsistencies between the organization's policy on leadership succession strategies and HR managers' perceptions of the process. Finally, the research was limited to six home improvement

stores in the study; therefore, the findings may not be representative of other business sectors.

### **Delimitations**

According to Lo (2016), delimitations are the boundaries and scope a researcher defines for study. First, the study sample population included female employees who worked in the home improvement industry and HR managers. Second, only participants from the southeast U.S. participated in this study. Finally, study participants only came from a Fortune 500 company, thus limiting the study.

### **Significance of the Study**

#### **Contribution to Business Practice**

The relative paucity of women in leadership positions has become the norm in some organizations. Although women comprise 45% of the labor force, women occupy less than 5% of executive positions (Allen et al., 2016). Some women choose the roles of wife and mother, while others choose to balance the roles of mother and career woman while trying to advance to leadership positions. Findings from this study might influence organizations to use their HR professionals more effectively to maximize leadership advancement opportunities for women to improve organizations' performance. The advancement of women to leadership positions can be a source of sustained competitive advantage and organizational growth (Eneh & Awara, 2016).

#### **Implications for Social Change**

The implications for positive social change include the potential for HR managers in the home improvement stores industry to gain information regarding how to develop

succession strategies to help women advance to leadership positions. As a result of women gaining greater representation in corporate leadership ranks, a younger generation of women entering the workforce may see that leadership opportunities are available and achievable. Additionally, HR managers in the home improvement industry might learn of strategies for the development of mentoring programs that enable female employees to achieve professional aspirations and create opportunities for personal accomplishment, potentially enabling these female employees to grow their careers and contribute economically and socially to the development of local communities.

### **A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

Researchers conduct literature reviews to understand the status of a topic and to identify future research questions (Fink, 2013). In this literature review, a synthesis of the social role theory is presented to address my central research question: what succession strategies do some HR managers in the home improvement industry use to advance women to leadership positions? To better understand the research that can help address this question, social role theory, interpretation of social role theory by social scientists, and social role theory as a problem-solving process was explored. Various themes surfaced in the literature, as well as prior studies about leadership styles, organizational performance, perceptions of men's and women's leadership styles, and succession strategies relevant to the advancement of women to leadership positions.

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the succession strategies that some HR managers in the home improvement industry use to advance women who have qualified for leadership positions. Historically, firms with more women

in senior level positions in management teams have, on average, a lower risk of organizational failure and better overall performance (Perryman et al., 2016). However, women occupy only 4.8% of senior-level positions within Standard & Poor's (S&P) 500 companies (Allen, French, & Poteet, 2016). Findings from this study might influence organizations to use their HR professionals more effectively to maximize leadership advancement opportunities for women with the goal to improve organizations' performance (Eneh & Awara, 2016).

This section includes a description of the search strategy used to find relevant literature on how employers might use succession strategies to specifically advance women to leadership positions within an organization. Eagly (1987) introduced social role theory and proposed the existence of a significant stereotypes of women in leadership positions. In this literature review, the social role theory in the context of this study is explored and elaborated upon. Additionally, I used the following four themes to guide preparation of the literature review section: (a) women in leadership, (b) the glass ceiling, (c) social role theory, and (d) gender diversity.

The following databases were accessed through Walden University to find sources used in this literature review: (a) PsycINFO, (b) ProQuest, (c) ABI/INFORM Complete, (d) Business Source Complete, (e) Google Scholar, and (f) EBSCO host. The keywords used in the search included *organizational performance*, *gender roles*, *women leadership*, *social role theory*, *glass ceilings*, and *succession planning*. 99 peer-reviewed articles and four peer-reviewed seminal studies for a total of 103 articles related to the topic were used. As shown in Table 1, journal articles dated from 2015 to 2018 were also

included. Additional information from seminal books and non-peer-reviewed articles to further develop understanding was obtained.

Table 1

*Literature Review Sources*

Sources	Seminal studies	Years 2015 to 2018	Total
Books (seminal)	1	4	5
Conceptual Framework articles	1	2	3
Dissertations	0	4	4
Non-peer-reviewed	0	4	4
Peer-reviewed journal articles	4	99	103
Total	6	113	119
Percentage of Total	5%	95%	100%

*Note.* Seminal publications contain information used before the current year and later recognized as being relevant and of primary influence in the current year.

### **Social Role Theory**

In the United States, men and women in the work environment are sometimes expected to conform to social roles imposed by society. Koenig and Eagly (2014) asserted that researchers can use the social role theory as a framework for examining the psychological processes that underlay stereotyping by focusing on observable behaviors of group members. Social life consists of occupational, family, friendship, and other roles, each associated with certain types of behavior (Koenig & Eagly, 2014). According to Blakely and Dziadosz (2015), a demonstration of human behavior is associated with the social role theory that implies behavior from the individual study to the social structure study. Social analysts use either direct or indirect observations of activities performed by members of a social group to obtain information about group stereotype creation. As a result, most behavioral differences between men and women are the result

of cultural stereotypes regarding how women and men are supposed to act (Koenig & Eagly, 2014).

**Interpretation of social role theory by social scientists.** Social scientists developed social role theory to compare individuals, called actors in social role theory, and the roles they played in different situations, like occupational roles compared to familial roles. According to Koenig and Eagly (2014), occupational roles seldom represent groups equally; however, other types of roles (i.e., familial and friendship) have similar occupancies, the act of taking possession, across most social groups. Also, Koenig and Eagly (2014) noted that Alexander, Brewer, and Herrmann (1999), three early contributors in the 1930s, provided different insights into the meaning of social role theory. Each author came from a different vocation but had an interest in the differences of opinion. Blakely and Dziadosz (2015) provided three perspectives on the use of social role theory: (a) the anthropologists' use of social role theory in the analysis of social systems, (b) the philosophers' studies of groups of people and how these groups evolved when they interact, and (c) the psychologists' view of social role theory as a strategy for learning new roles. Each of these elements is essential for researchers to gather and analyze data about human beings and how they develop socially, culturally, and physically within organizations.

Men and women may behave differently in social situations, and their roles may align with the expectations that society puts on them. Also, individuals with no sociological background are unaware of the conditions of a recipient who are considered handicapped by societal standards. Blakely and Dziadosz (2015) noted that care



management is necessary for enhancing the social image of individuals who suffer from chronic mental or physical illness. It is important to know that care management has services that include clinical care activities for individual patients with unique physical, psychological, and emotional needs (Blakely & Dziadosz, 2015). Also, when someone involves themselves in a particular role, he or she is socialized to perform certain behaviors that lead to high-risk needs like social services, and specialist services (Koenig & Eagly, 2014).

In the United States, individuals who require medical, mental or psychological assistance are considered to have special needs. People with special needs may be devalued, which may result in behavior that isolates the individuals from society (Fyall & Gazley, 2013). According to Blakely and Dziadosz (2015), understanding of social role theory is crucial to the care management practice because the approach can serve as a guide for assessing the appropriate care for individuals who are in a devalued social position. Furthermore, care managers can use the social role as a problem-solving technique to be used to find valued social places in the clinical business (Blakely & Dziadosz, 2015).

**Social role theory as a problem-solving process.** Although care management practice is often not viewed as a problem-solving process, skilled care managers can assess behavior problems and recommend the appropriate intervention. According to Blakely and Dziadosz (2015), appropriate interventions can help promote essential growth and development for clients' social functioning when consistently administered. Interventions may consist of assessments, treatments, and the provision of social support

to clients (Blakely & Dziadosz, 2015). In the clinical care arena, some interventions can cause more injuries instead of providing positive assistance to patients who are fragile. Therefore, providers must assess their clients' behavior to determine if a moderate or vigorous intervention should be applied while in a clinical type of setting (Koenig & Eagly, 2014). Also, social role behaviors can be evaluated by the problem-solving process as well especially for clients that want to pursue their goals.

Blakely and Dziadosz (2015) presumed care managers and clients together determined realistic desired goals. For example, a child in a wheelchair may want more activities outdoors as opposed to indoors to avoid negative handicap remarks. Care managers try to achieve the desired goal using positive factors as reinforcement and eliminating as many obstacles as possible (Blakely & Dziadosz, 2015). Through understanding social role theory and applying the problem-solving process, care managers can empower their clients without the clients feeling different in social situations (Hyde & Grieve, 2018).

**Social role theory as motivation to lead.** Some managers within various companies have hired additional female employees to lead in multiple organizational departments to ensure a more diverse staff of leaders are at the top positions. Elprana, Felfe, Gatzka, and Stiehl (2015) linked social role theory to the motivation of women in leadership roles, observing that female employees tend to take on responsibilities in an organization because of additional training and educational attainment. Fyall and Gazley (2013) noted women might be more motivated to participate in volunteer opportunities and lead since assisting others is culturally associated with the female roles.

Given the diverse makeup of people, some leaders are better at motivating people than are others. Elprana et al. (2015) noted three factors that may contribute to gender inequality in senior-level positions within professional organizations. First, traditional gender roles leave an indelible impact on society, and some beliefs regarding men's and women's behaviors may be transmitted from generation to generation. Second, women often have fewer same-sex role models in the senior level positions. Third, women who become aware of gender inequality issues may question management and therefore appeal to their gender roles and leadership roles. Moreover, societal members are increasingly challenging the roles of men and women in society, and many families have made male and female roles more egalitarian in terms of role responsibilities (Fyall & Gazley, 2013).

While the social role theory explores behavior, it is when a male or female occupy a particular role that he or she is socialized to perform specific actions. Elprana et al. (2015) explored how organizational leaders should increase the visibility of female leaders. Also, the experience of gender inequality among the younger generation of women may be linked to the social role theory. Although the motivation to lead is changing in society, jobs that are necessary, such as doctors and business executives, are attainable by both genders (Blakely & Dziadosz, 2015). As a society, males and females have made great strides in the workplace, and the contributions that each continues to make can produce more equality and enhanced job performance.

#### **Social role theory and gender differences in workplace job performance.**

Although some progress has occurred in the workplace, women are still underrepresented

in senior-level positions. According to Ng, Lam, and Feldman (2015), managers lack an understanding of why senior-level individuals of different genders experience more challenges and obstacles in the workplace. Ye, Wang, and Li (2018) noted that the term social role theory traditionally applied more to men's and women's physical differences than their behavioral differences and therefore, workplace job performance lacked gender equality based on socially defined gender roles.

Managers who assess their employees may evaluate what each employee does and may also evaluate personal characteristics. Ng et al. (2015) identified two performance behaviors that made a significant impact on productivity within-gender differences. The first performance behavior is organizational citizenship behavior (OCB; Ng et al., 2015). OCB includes positive behaviors that promote social cohesion or a positive reputation for the firm. Ye et al. (2018) introduced five positive OCB behaviors: (a) altruism, (b) courtesy, (c) sportsmanship, (d) conscientiousness, and (e) civic virtue. Each term associated with behavior in business. Altruism is assisting others without expecting any compensation. Courtesy is when an employee is polite and considerate towards other employees, sportsmanship is when an employee is not exhibiting any negative behavior, conscientiousness is when an employee exhibit self-control and discipline and finally, civic virtue is when an employee represents an organization in high esteem outside of official capacity. The second performance behavior is counterproductive work behavior (CWB; Ng et al., 2015). In contrast to OCB, CWB includes activities that can cause harm to colleagues, organizational property, or the firm's reputation.

Different cultures deal differently with gender roles in society. Ng et al. (2015) compared the relationship between OCB and CWB to the social role theory. Social role theory suggests that many gender differences in society are attributable to the different social roles to which males and females socialize with (Ng et al., 2015). Therefore, individuals are expected to engage in behaviors that are consistent with their culturally-defined gender roles (Ng et al., 2015). Consequently, females might be expected to favor homemaker duties and nurturing of children which might result in OCB behaviors. Conversely, males are expected to provide for their families and to display a more assertive role in the workplace (Ye et al., 2018).

**Corporate boards and social role theory effects.** The underrepresentation of women on some corporate boards may be related to social role theory. Chizema, Kamuriwo, and Shinozawa (2015) asserted that a lack of gender diversity in leadership positions on corporate boards has three causes: (a) women in their late twenties and early thirties want to focus their attention on child-rearing more so than career development, (b) women may not display traits of assertiveness and aggressiveness that are sometimes perceived by some male leaders as necessary, and (c) gender role attitudes for males and females are separate and distinct. Men are considered high achievers in the work environment while women are perceived as high achievers in the home environment (Chizema et al., 2015). Women on corporate boards are increasing. However, according to Adams (2015), a combination of regulatory, legislative, and investor-driven efforts has been necessary to produce this increase.

Barriers not adequately removed from a workplace can lower the morale of the entire corporate business and lower productivity. Although breaking down the barriers is no easy task for policy-makers, Adams (2015) asserted that interventions to ensure more women serve on corporate boards are vital to improving corporate governance. Additionally, firms with more boardroom diversity perform better overall when it comes to return on sales and return on invested capital (Adams, 2015). The number of women serving in boardrooms has increased slowly in both the U.S. and other countries. Chizema et al. (2015) asserted that social changes impacting economy and culture will be required to impact the perception of women's and men's behavior roles in societies around the world.

**Social role theory and inclusive leadership styles.** Inclusive leadership is the new leadership style of leading employees and teams by actively engaging with them, allowing decision-making to be heard, and treating employees fairly and with respect. According to Kopperud, Martinsen, and Humborstad (2014), the inclusive leadership style enables every member on a team to voice their opinion not like the old traditional style that what a leader or boss says is the final word. In some work environments, the tasks can be challenging and complex. In such instances, a different kind of leadership style such as transformational leadership can inspire those who prefer following to succeed as well. But a different leadership style called inclusive leadership that promotes collaboration has become critical to organizations' survival and success (Ye et al., 2018).

Ye et al. (2018) emphasized the critical roles of leaders' positive mood in the relationship between inclusive leadership and employee's learning from errors. One of

their methods of testing their theory was by incorporating the social role theory into their framework. Although inclusive leadership is not as well-known as the transformational, situational or authoritarian leadership styles, it too provides directions and can motivate people in business to do their best performance. According to Ye et al. (2018), inclusive leadership is the practice of leadership that includes all contributions of all stakeholders in an organization. Stringfellow (2017) observed that four key factors are essential for an organization to be productive by an inclusive leadership style: (a) diversity of markets, (b) diversity of customers, (c) diversity of ideas, and (d) diversity of talents.

Conversely, inclusive leadership style is about organizational culture change. The culture change requires leaders on all managerial levels to incorporate the leadership style into their business objective to be productive. When leaders are accessible, available and willing to interact with their employees professionally, fewer errors are performed on jobs (Ye et al., 2018). Although employees are learning from mistakes in a work environment and while the process can be costly, a motivation factor where an experienced leader who accepts the social role theory can work with an employee to influence a change through encouraging words and additional training (Kopperud et al., 2014). Managers should gauge their organizations and use different leadership styles for employees to minimize tension and uncertainties. Although successful leaders are the ones that can encourage followers to be creative and productive, the methods used to meet these goals vary from leader to leader.

**Behavioral differences.** By observing the activities of women and men in the society of the United States, individuals may form gender role beliefs. Within the context

of social role theory, business managers may have expectations that individuals will comply with the tendencies and actions commensurate with their roles (Skelly & Johnson, 2011). Furthermore, age, race, religion, or gender can influence role characteristics. Plus, gender-based role assumptions can carry over into the family setting (Blakely & Dziadosz, 2015).

A hiring manager from a corporate setting may favor candidates who are more qualified to fulfill the social expectations of a leader over candidates who do not possess such qualities. Some managers may believe that relevant social expectations for leadership roles include having an accepted perception of masculinity as well as well-developed technical and relational skills (Fyall & Gazley, 2013). Some members of society have associated specific traits such as assertiveness with male behavior. Correspondingly, some managers may believe that women do not possess enough male-type characteristics and may, therefore, fail to promote qualified women to senior-level positions (Baker, 2014).

Behavioral theory refers to actions and reactions to the stimuli present in the environment. Baker (2014) asserted that societal and cultural differences are a key component in the behavioral differences between men and women in the workplace and that the social role theory affects gender roles. As a result of a learning process, employees can learn behaviors from their environment, and the behaviors can also be unlearned. These gender differences are why some managers favor assigning leadership positions to women because some managers believe that with proper training, women can assume leadership roles based on how a woman thinks (Corrington & Hebl, 2018).



## **Organizational Barriers and Obstacles**

The strength of companies and succession strategies are dependent upon removal of barriers and obstacles that affect the upward mobility of female employees. As more women continue to enter the workforce, leaders must develop and implement career development programs and policies that support the advancement of women to leadership positions (Allen et al., 2016). A shortage of women in leadership positions does not derive from lack of toughness or management skill; instead, unrealistic expectations of women and a lack of succession strategies to support the hiring and promotion of a woman to higher positions both contribute to the shortage (Allen et al., 2016). Additionally, Berrey (2014) asserted that the removal of barriers and obstacles from a workforce environment contributes to an increase in an employee's productivity.

Understanding of barriers and obstacles can help organizations to create successful strategies for identifying and implementing change. According to Sharma and Kaur (2014), some members of society believe men seek leadership positions in organizations while women seek jobs at home. Interestingly, the younger generation of women does not agree with this societal viewpoint. The younger generation of women is pursuing leadership positions, and some have advanced to middle management positions (Berrey, 2014). Kawase, Carpelan-holmström, Kwong, and Sanfey (2016) asserted how vital it is to develop strategies for women to advance into leadership positions without creating difficulties in management roles. Some managers are aware of organizational barriers and obstacles and the need to remove these barriers in order to enable women to advance into leadership positions. The change for some small organizations will make a

significant impact immediately with employees and minimize the fear of the unknown in an organization.

**Glass ceiling.** Invisible barriers can cause some managers to fail to notice female employees for promotion to the next higher position. Often, when women try to advance within careers for which they both trained and obtained a higher education degree, they are not successful. Sharma and Kaur (2014) defined the glass ceiling as an invisible barrier that resembles a concrete roof. Metaphorically, the glass ceiling is impenetrable, and often women are declined from obtaining senior levels of management positions. Although some women have disagreed with the glass ceiling phenomenon that prevents women from achieving success like their male counterparts, some also believe this occurs at different organizational levels (Cook & Glass, 2015).

Some women executives believe that some qualified women who are eligible for higher positions in the corporate world cannot advance because of their gender and are often hired for non-revenue producing areas like public relations. According to Allen et al. (2016), more women than men have academic degrees that should qualify them for advancement. Allen et al. noted two observations in their research about women advancement in the workforce: (a) labor force participation between genders has declined, and (b) women outnumber men in part-time employment, a trend that minimizes the opportunities for women's advancement. To negate negative influences preventing women from advancing to leadership positions, leaders should acknowledge and view the succession strategies to promote women to top executive positions (Berrey, 2014).

Women who serve at the corporate levels believe that men who serve on corporate levels in organizations do not perceive the glass ceiling as a problem, thereby offering little resolution to the issue of advancing women to leadership positions. Fernandez and Campero (2017) asserted that the glass ceiling phenomenon might also be the result of external recruitment and hiring processes that describe some women's experience from achieving the same success as their male counterparts. In comparison, Cook and Glass (2015) noted that female employees may demonstrate a higher degree of innovation and are able to drive organizational profitability. Consequently, organizational leaders tend to benefit positively from a financial impact resulting from women in senior leadership positions. Finding a solution to the paucity of women in leadership requires acknowledgment of the problem by organizations. While barriers such as glass ceilings are indeed diminishing, it is incumbent upon women to remain educated and technically competent while competing for challenging leadership positions.

**Imposter syndrome.** From all the organizational barriers and obstacles that researchers have reported that prevent women from obtaining leadership positions, imposter syndrome is the least scrutinized one. Hutchins, Penney, and Sublett (2018) defined the imposter syndrome phenomenon as occurring when an employee who excels in all their tasks cannot receive a compliment or feels like a fake. According to Bernard, Hoggard, Neblett, and Neblett (2018), other self-sabotage feelings result in self-doubt and insecurity. In like manner, female employees of different nationalities and every demographics category may experience the feeling of being an imposter.

The term imposter syndrome considered through the lens of a non-medical person can denote a type of mental disorder. For instance, some employees cannot accept an accolade from their boss on achieving excellent ratings on the job because the management style is systemic to the problem of not receiving approval and the result can impact an employee and cause low self-esteem. Badawy, Gazdag, Bentley, and Brouer (2018) estimated 70% of female employees in lower and higher managerial leadership positions experience imposter feelings at some point in their careers. Badawy et al. (2018) also stated women are not the only ones who are affected by this syndrome; men can also experience the imposter syndrome phenomenon. Hutchins et al. (2018) asserted that in 1978, psychologists Pauline Rose Clance and Suzanne Imes identified the imposter syndrome. Both psychologists stated that some women who are not in leadership positions believe that low self-esteem can cause a lack of confidence in themselves to achieve leadership positions (Hutchins et al., 2018).

In the workplace where competitive job performance persists among men and women, the perception of an individual skill can cause self-doubt and the inability to perform to maximum capability. Hutchins et al. (2018) asserted that any employee can overcome the imposter feeling by addressing issues that are uncomfortable. Moreover, the difference between employees who experience imposter syndrome and those who do not depends on the response given. Repeated positive talks with self or engaging in conversations with other people who are positive can help build confidence. Furthermore, employees can overcome the impostor feeling if they seek therapy that focuses on identity and correcting faulty thinking (Badawy et al., 2018).

### **Women Remaining Competitive Within Organizations**

Some qualified women who work in predominantly male environments must remain competitive within organizations in order to avoid criticism by male employees who feel the job performance of female employees does not meet organizational standards. According to Fernandez and Campero (2017), the noncomplimentary feedback provided to some female employees may cause some managers to regard women as substandard and position them in jobs that are not crucial to the business. Smith (2015) studied the glass cliff theory and found that women are competitive especially in leadership positions when an organization is in a crisis and the risk of failure is higher.

As women become competitive at lower managerial levels within organizations, they demonstrate and develop their leadership abilities. Insufficient research is available regarding organizational circumstances such as policy or gender discrimination that influence the advancement of women to leadership positions (Smith, 2015). Cook and Glass (2015) noted that while the competition encountered by some female leaders is well-documented, their stories of confident and successful competition lacked adequate dissemination for others to gain knowledge and build skills. Also, according to Cook and Glass women who remain competitive within organizations are more likely serving in leadership positions because they are ambitious, critical thinkers, strategic problem solvers and can foster teamwork. Furthermore, hard work and personal sacrifices are two additional contributing factors (Cook & Glass, 2015).

Some cultures teach women to be less competitive in sports and on the job. On the other hand, some cultures encourage male counterparts to engage in healthy competition

to develop camaraderie and confidence. In 2015, 24 women in Standard and Poor's (S&P) 500 companies were CEOs due to remaining competitive in the workplace (Hurley & Choudhary, 2016). Small and medium-size firms are less likely to provide a high number of CEO positions in comparison to larger firms with significantly more employees (Hurley & Choudhary, 2016). Conversely, female employees obtaining additional education are not guaranteed top management positions compared to their male counterparts (Hurley & Choudhary, 2016). However, Smith (2015) suggested that evolving social, cultural, as well as changing demographics have had an impact on the composition of the U.S. population. Consequently, women in the workforce must remain competitive to contribute to the success within organizations.

**Role of organizational policies and practices.** The purpose of an organizational policy is to ensure that a company strategy eliminates all harmful practices. The glass ceiling concept is a term popularized by women in the 1980s. Often, many women did not receive promotions due to the glass ceiling concept. The idea referred to women and some minorities. Organizational policies and practices had limited modification throughout the years, and not much has changed in the 21st century (Ayers, 2015). Many women who were qualified were not given opportunities to advance their careers (Ayers, 2015). But at some point, it is vital for management on all levels to re-evaluate policies and practices and convey to employees the priorities of management (Hurley & Choudhary, 2016).

Managers are responsible for reviewing organizational policies and practices to eliminate barriers to advancement within their organizations. Skelly and Johnson (2011)

examined the impact of the glass ceiling on female professionals attempting to attain advancement to leadership positions. Skelly and Johnson (2011) also observed that women could conform to specific behavior based on their social roles, which also can be influenced by their gender. When women engage in certain behaviors, characteristics of these behaviors could not be ascribed to either male or female actions and did not conform with socially defined gender norms, thereby creating gender stereotypes. Social expectations of managerial roles requiring technical skills and relational skills caused limitations for women when their responses were not compatible with male-type qualities (Hurley & Choudhary, 2016). Depending on the awareness of an organization's culture and vision, changing policies and practices can result in many women and minorities gaining promotions over time. Proper use of human resource professionals can lead to leadership advancement for women at all managerial levels.

Human resources is a vital department in organizations that supports rapid organizational growth through recruitment for hiring and promotion. Fernandez and Campero (2017) approached the glass ceiling findings of advancing women to leadership positions differently than other researchers. Fernandez and Campero (2017) suggested that while other researchers focus on internal promotion biases, additional research can explore the mechanism of external recruitment and hiring processes. For example, some organizational leaders offer lower level positions to women while men are provided with more challenging jobs. In recent years, however, women like Mary Barra (CEO of General Motors) have been hired in the auto industry due to their ability to effectively change an organization quickly (Hurley & Choudhary, 2016). Moreover, to make

progress in overcoming the glass ceiling in recruitment, leaders of organizations can rewrite their policies to avoid gender disparities. Recruitment policies aimed at advancing women to leadership positions at middle management and senior management levels will further alleviate the glass ceiling effect.

The lack of updated organizational policies and practices also affects gender disparities in the medical field. Kawase, Carpelan-holmstrom, Kwong, and Sanfey (2016) examined factors that impede the advancement of women as leaders. Kawase et al. provided insight on career barriers faced by women surgeons. While women in the medical field are increasingly gaining opportunities to advance to top leadership roles, leadership and advancement gaps nevertheless remain (Kawase et al., 2016). Kawase et al. suggested that strategies must be developed and processed to overcome issues affecting operational leadership positions for women. According to Allen et al. (2016), the existence of gender bias is acknowledged and viewed by health administrators as an obstacle to overcome. Although medicine has attracted fewer women than men because of long working hours associated with the profession and the rigorous academic background required, succession strategies for enhancing organizational performance by advancing women to leadership positions should include assigning mentors (Kawase et al., 2016).

**Diversity management.** The most compelling reason for leaders to embrace diversified management is to enable the company to be successful in a challenging economy by hiring diverse employees who provide a broader cultural intelligence by meeting global requirements for goods and services. Sharma and Kaur (2014) suggested a



significant portion of the population of professional working women population affected by gender disparity within succession strategies. Researchers have reported that women handle emotions and relationships differently and more effectively than men due to their intuitive and empathetic skills. Organizations now perceive the importance of these skills in reducing barriers in the workforce environment (Berrey, 2014).

The importance of businesses being diverse has increased over the years due to increased global marketing. Likewise, more women continue to pursue work. Succession strategies to assist advancing women to leadership positions will provide a diverse social structure that caused underrepresentation in leadership positions due to perceived social roles (Sharma & Kaur, 2014). In comparison, Hurley and Choudhary (2016) concluded that women in leadership positions lead to a higher return on assets for companies. Also, as the needs of society rapidly evolves so should organizations be willing to represent those who need their services by increasing diversity numbers and leadership positions for women in senior management levels.

Organizations' primary objective is to improve their business strategy by fostering an environment that promotes authenticity and open communication that will drive innovations. Sharma and Kaur (2014) also noted that when employees are willing to share their cultural experiences at various management levels, they participate more fully in the creative process that drives innovation and maximize problem-solving. Berrey (2014) on the other hand noted that the term diversity management replaced the affirmative action programs. Berrey suggested that the term diversity management incorporated several relevant components including personnel policies, programs, and

mission statements that denoted diversity for the performance of women and people of color to reach different consumer markets.

Promoting a diverse ethnic culture in businesses is equally essential as gender diversity. Employees can learn and appreciate what values are important to other cultures. Berrey (2014) asserted that while women and men of color have made advancements, they are still underrepresented and to create a diverse workplace, an educational effort by society must promote progress for women into leadership positions such as on senior management levels. Further, a diverse workforce offers greater flexibility that cultivates understanding between cultures; customers will be different. Therefore, an increase in profit will result. Organizations that operate with mixed management and a diverse population of employees work from a shared value of increasing benefits. Additionally, a diverse management team generates a diverse workforce, resulting in a higher degree of cultural intelligence. When employees and customers are different, the values in other cultures are appreciated as well (Hurley & Choudhary, 2016).

### **Benefits of Women in Leadership**

Some company leaders do not believe women are assertive, aggressive, or task-oriented enough to succeed in management positions; however, those are some of the characteristic's organizations look for in leaders. Baker and Cangemi (2016) suggested the awareness and the urgency of women in senior leadership positions must be communicated to all managers on all levels if organizations want to attract qualified female employees. According to Smith (2014), the value of a leader's ability to captivate and communicate ideas is imperative for better productivity and development. Women

who possess networking skills can drive increased collaboration within teams and across different departments and other organizations.

Women in leadership positions has been a significant topic of discussion among women for years especially when the advantages like financial performance, relationship building and collaboration could be better in the workforce for profit and society. From the 1970s to the early 1990s, few women occupied management positions (Northouse, 2016). The uncertainty of few women serving in the senior management positions was due to perceptions of leadership skills, competence, and assertiveness. However, Baker and Cangemi (2016) interviewed several women who were able to overcome the glass ceiling phenomenon by exploring the career strategies they used to achieve success. The interviewees noted that: (a) performance expectations must be consistent, (b) a professional leadership style must be dependable, and (c) communication must be effective while pursuing highly visible assignments and succeeding in them.

Company leaders may associate femininity with nurturing, soft-spoken speech, and displays of modest behaviors. These are characteristics that may not be viewed as suitable at the executive level. Therefore, preferred leadership styles may favor men more than women (Baker & Cangemi, 2016). Other benefits consist of an influential mentor and networking with influential colleagues (Baker & Cangemi, 2016). In addition, women in leadership roles offer several benefits such as communicating well with different departments within the organization and individual employees. Also, female leaders may support the sharing of information to solve problems. Smith (2014) noted

that organizations could build a better foundation by hiring and promoting women from different backgrounds on all managerial levels.

**Workplace practices.** Female employees who are seeking leadership positions should be made to feel like a part of an organization to provide excellent opportunities for hard work until a leadership position is available. Beckwith, Carter, and Peters (2016) noted that while the American workforce continues to diversify, women of color make up only 11.9% of managerial and professional positions. Beckwith et al. (2016) listed four obstacles that affect the advancement of women of color to leadership positions: (a) lack of high visibility assignments, (b) minimal networking with influential colleagues, (c) lack of prominent sponsors and mentors, and (d) minimal role models of the same ethnicity. Women of color with aspirations of ascending to corporate leadership levels within organizations must make career decisions with a strategic intent (Beckwith et al., 2016).

Employees who are part of a team that is working together in a friendly environment are more motivated to work than employees in a non-friendly work environment. In some cases, it is vital to replace old methods of workplace practices that allow for increased productivity such as innovative females who desire the opportunity to excel in leadership positions. Bierema (2016) noted women are well prepared to assume leadership roles in any workplace. However, some organizations do not provide adequate structures to support the learning, development, and change management necessary to support the advancement of women (Bierema, 2016). Succession strategies are about having the right people in the right place at the right times to do the right things

(Osborne, 2017). Therefore, organizations that use succession strategies to advance women to leadership positions and allow them the opportunity to apply their skills can be successful in aligning jobs with the right people. Organizations that encourage their employees to apply for higher work positions and that care about employees' family life as well as their work are organizations that supports their staff members. Also, organizations that incorporate employees' ideas and allow for decision making to occur at the lowest management level provide an opportunity for growth and innovation.

**Gender diversity in leadership.** For an organization to empower women equally at the highest decision-making levels, gender diversity in leadership needs to be in place. According to Chisholm-Burns, Spivey, Hagemann, and Josephson (2017), women who try to advance in their career field continue to encounter unfairness in the workplace. Chisholm-Burns et al. (2017) also noted that the glass ceiling prohibits both women and organizations from reaching their full potential and denies both the benefits of gender diversity in leadership. Cook and Glass (2014) suggested that gender diversity in leadership starts at the interview process. Organizations have a much better chance of establishing gender diversity when their hiring decisions result in a more diverse set of candidates (Cook & Glass, 2014).

Within some organizations, the issue of gender parity in decision-making roles has been conscientiously adhere to, yet real changes in the workforce must occur from all leaders to be effective. Chisholm-Burns et al. (2017) noted that women in top leadership positions contribute to the development of diverse perspectives, skills, abilities, and ideas. Therefore, organizations with little to no female genders at the senior level

positions are missing opportunities to develop future leaders. The benefits of women in business leadership positions include the organization's ability to increase firm value, financial performance, economic growth, innovation, social responsiveness, and philanthropy (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017). Moreover, women who work alongside male decision-makers excel in leadership positions and establish successful interactions within male-dominated corporate networks (Cook & Glass, 2014). Bierema (2016) asserted that gender diversity in leadership is key to business success. However, CEOs and HR departments must be willing to do more than acknowledge the gender parity; they must engage.

**Perceptions of men's and women's leadership styles.** Gender perception in leadership plays a significant role in the workplace. Kiser (2015) examined the differences between how men and women differ in the work environment and their leadership styles. Kiser also focused on how attitudes can affect workers and leaders and why employees behave in the manner that they do. According to Stringfellow (2017), the differences between men and women are significant. Men may believe that when jobs are scarce, they have a priority over women for available positions (Stringfellow, 2017). Men may also believe that men are better political leaders and better business executives compared to women (Stringfellow, 2107).

Perceptions of men's and women's leadership styles in various organizations do merit some awareness of the differences in styles, abilities, and effectiveness. Women believe that employment allows them to demonstrate their leadership style and provides them with independence (Stringfellow, 2017). Although women are increasingly entering

the workforce and are seeking leadership positions compared to ten years ago, they are equally capable of leading businesses (Baker & Cangemi, 2016). Gender should not matter when it pertains to leadership positions; gender diversity should be the primary focus for all leaders.

The work environment in the past is no longer suitable for how organizations can operate in the present. Both men and women have more education today, and the younger generation of women are no longer accepting barriers that may prevent them from leading from the front in senior-level positions (Baker & Cangemi, 2016). As observed by Kiser (2015), leaders at all managerial levels must help change the perceptions and attitudes of men and women entering the workforce before the culture of an organization is negatively affected by the presence of few senior female leaders

**Absence of senior women leaders.** For organizations to bridge the gap of a lack of senior women leaders in the workplace, more multicultural and diversity training must occur for women and men to embrace their differences and understand that it is diversity that makes us stronger. Baker and Cangemi (2016) examined the reasons for the lack of women in senior leadership positions. Like Baker and Cangemi, Northouse (2016) asserted that women are continuing their education and yet are still underrepresented in government and the majority of professional sectors in society.

Another possible explanation for this phenomenon of absence of senior women leaders is that male senior executives may have limited experience in working with women. Consequently, male executives may not know how to establish gender diversity in an organization. Lo (2016) noted some organizations have a “boys’ club” mentality

that is overt, and some women decline challenging organizations for employment. Although leadership according to McCann and Sweet (2014) was once considered a male domain, women are increasingly learning regarding leadership capability in some organizations there are male advocates and supporters of women in leadership positions. While on the other hand, some organizations still marginalize women.

### **Transition**

In Section 1, the foundation of the study, the background of the problem, problem statement and the purpose statement is presented. The intent of exploring the scarcity of women in leadership positions is to make leaders aware of gender inequality at the senior-level positions while improving organizational performance by advancing women to leadership positions. Additionally, the attitudes, behaviors, and motivation levels of the interviewed participants was explored by using the nature of the study. Also, I was able to use the research question as an inquiry into the specific concern of the research while the conceptual framework provided a theory to the study. Moreover, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations were used to identify the boundaries of the research. The significance of the study discussed the value of organizations' benefitting from gender equality.

In Section 2, the purpose statement and describe the role of the researcher along with the participant eligibility criteria is stated. A discussion of the qualitative research method and case study design selected for this study is also provided. The population and sampling, and ethical research is described and discussion of the data collection



instruments and techniques used to collect data was presented. Section 2 also included discussion of the data organization and analysis techniques used.

In Section 3, the research findings are presented and a discussion of the applications this study has for professional practice is provided. A description of how the results of this study may have implications for social change are also presented. Finally, recommendations for further research and reflection on the doctoral study process is provided.

## Section 2: The Project

In this section, I provided content pertaining to the purpose statement, the role of the researcher, participants, research method and design, population and sampling, ethical research, and data collection processes. Analysis of the data, as well as, the strategies used to ensure the study's reliability and validity are also presented.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to explore the succession strategies in the home improvement industry that some HR managers used to advance women who have qualified for leadership positions that improve organizations' performance. The targeted population consisted of HR managers from six home improvement companies in the southeast United States who have implemented successful succession strategies for advancing women to leadership positions. The implications for positive social change included the potential for HR managers to gain information needed to provide advancement opportunities to women, thereby reducing gender inequality in leadership positions and demonstrating to a younger generation of women entering the workforce that leadership opportunities are available and achievable. Additionally, HR managers might learn about strategies for the development of mentoring programs that enable female employees to achieve professional aspirations and create opportunities for personal accomplishment benefiting employees, families and communities.

### **Role of the Researcher**

I needed to follow all guidelines for the role of a researcher in the data collection process. Sandeep, Bruno, and Mahadeo (2015) stated that in qualitative research, the

purpose of the researcher is to evaluate the thoughts and feelings of study participants. This process is not always easy. Sandeep et al. noted that participants might not openly discuss issues that are personal to them, thus making data collection challenging. To address this difficulty, Nanton (2015), asserted that leaders who gained an understanding of the impact of study participants could help assist researchers with appropriate steps, ensure that the rights and welfare of study participants meet the procedural guide and that the risks to the participants are minimized and are reasonable. For this study, communication and collaboration with others in a truthful manner ensured study participants were in a safe environment and well informed in their role of the study. For the data collection process to be accurate and successful, I depended on attention to detail in collecting data properly, which was vital to the success of the research.

I am familiar with a succession planning strategy due to various leadership roles fulfilled as a female officer in the United States Army for 25 years. My experiences has rendered her as a qualified researcher to expound on her exposure on some military roles. As a company commander, I was responsible for evaluating the job performance of noncommissioned officers (NCOs). Individuals who demonstrated adequate leadership ability received promotions to the next higher grade. Promotions given to soldiers resulted in increased responsibilities and at times organizations performance were improved. The objective throughout my tenure was to remove any obstacles or barriers that would prevent upward mobility for members of my staff. Each member of my team was treated with respect, permitted and encouraged additional training and schooling off duty and at times, while on duty.

I am aware that data collected in interviews is the responsibility of the researcher. Also, the primary responsibility was to safeguard any documents obtained from participants, to include safeguarding the participants (Sandeep et al., 2015). According to Kirkwood and Price (2013), a researcher may discover the limits of a study like untruthful responding. Consequently, applying precautionary measures to the process. The researcher adhered to the principles of the Belmont Report during the conducting of this study. I respected the diversity of ideas and the perspectives of participants without harassing, forcing, or intimidating them during the interview process. Moreover, should a study participant desired to withdraw from the study at any time he or she could end their participation without admonishment.

To avoid viewing data through a personal lens, I mitigated bias by awareness of common practices from past researchers. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016) noted that researchers could minimize bias by identifying personal biases initially rather than attempting to avoiding them. During the conducting of this study, once bias was identified, I adjusted the behavior and any action that occurred to prevent a repeated mistake. In addition, I remained ethical, unbiased, and honest in the study. Also, Caplan, Mortenson, and Lester (2017) suggested that participating in assessment training workshop like Harvard's Implicit Association Test can assist researchers with identifying bias before it has the chance to influence behavior. Another role as a researcher is to follow a systematic and objective approach to avoid seeking information that is opinionated based on beliefs (Sezer, Zhang, Gino, & Bazerman, 2016).

To successfully respond to questions that are uncomfortable to address, participants should make sure they understand the problem, rephrase the question as a lead in and then take time to respond. Barnham (2015) stated that qualitative research focuses on how people respond to different types of questions. To address the research questions, utilization of the interview protocol technique (see Appendix A) was incorporated. Castillo-Montoya (2016) defined the interview protocol as a procedural guide for directing a qualitative researcher throughout an interview process. According to Heydon and Powell (2018), the procedural level of interviewing includes a script of specific questions asked in an interview and specific questions asked at the conclusion of the conversation. By following a script, I remained prepared and focused on the questions to ask each participant. I started with a list of six open-ended interview questions on a notepad (see Appendix A). I spoke slowly and clearly and monitored the interviewees responses to see if they understood the questions. I was attentive to body languages that could suggest a lack of interest or disagreement. I used the entire allocated time for all the interviews to evaluate each criterion. More importantly, I guided the conversation and allowed the study participants to do most of the talking. Finally, I concluded the interview by summarizing critical points mentioned by the participants' and afterwards asking are there any specific questions.

### **Participants**

The targeted population for this study consists of HR managers employed in six home improvement industry companies. I chose the home improvement industry to learn more about the basis on why women were not promoted to senior leadership positions.

According to Quinn (2015), succession planning ensures that participants within the organization are available with the skills and experience to fulfill roles. It is a strategic process that develops and recognizes talent within, for this reason, succession planning is crucial. In this study, I applied three specific eligibility criteria to identify the sample. First, according to Benoot, Hannes, and Bilsen (2016), participants must be knowledgeable about the concept of successions planning. Second, participants must have experience with attempting to achieve gender equality in the home improvement industry. It is essential when all employees have access and can enjoy the same rewards and resources of a company because the result can increase organizational performance. Third, participants must discuss the research questions to reflect their situation and the world around them (see Flick, 2018).

An obstacle to interviewing participants is often their unwillingness to participate. Wilkerson, Iantaffi, Grey, Bockting, and Rosser (2014) noted that researchers conducting qualitative studies may struggle with gaining access to participants due to lack of availability or unwillingness of individuals to engage. Initially, I visited a home improvement company and discussed the purpose of the visit with a store manager to seek access to prospective HR participants. Afterwards, I obtained written permission from each prospective HR participant. To further gain access to potential participants, Turner and Almack (2017) asserted that a quality interview involving a sensitive study is contingent upon developing and maintaining a relationship built on trust with researchers. Often the experiences of participants have a profound influence on the shaping and unfolding of the research process. Finally, Quinton and Wilson (2016) indicated that the

use of social media like LinkedIn is helpful to building networks and relationships that can ultimately enhance business performance. Also, social networking tends to represent diverse ethnic groups. Although gaining access to HR participants is my primary selection method, a lack of eligible participants may limit me in addressing questions. In that case, I used an alternate plan and interviewed senior leaders such as directors and department managers who were eligible to participate in the study.

According to Wolgemuth et al. (2015), a researcher can gain immediate access to the participant's knowledge when they establish a working relationship built on trust and respect. Additionally, establishing a working relationship with participants can result in three benefits: (a) verbal communication that is clear and informative, (b) feedback that is honest and positive, and (c) creativity that can lead to other opportunities (Hagaman & Wutich, 2017). To ensure an established successful working relationship with the study participants, I conveyed ethical and social values in their behavior and language (see Kristensen & Ravn, 2015). I concluded each interview by informing participants that their contributions are valued and that their confidentiality was maintained (see Patton, 2015).

### **Research Method and Design**

Researchers who select the proper research methodology can address the research question of their study. Barnham (2015) asserted that researchers use the qualitative method to explore four crucial elements: (a) attitudes, (b) behaviors, (c) motivations, and (d) work strategies. I used the qualitative multiple case study for the proposed exploration of succession strategies necessary to support gender parity in leadership positions to

improve organizational performance. Also, the use of a multiple case study can assist in making the context clear when interviewing large groups (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016). More women are entering the workforce compared to ten years ago. Therefore, it is crucial that organizational leaders focus on adequate succession strategies at all levels. Leaders who are not aware of barriers for advancing women to leadership positions risk making critical decisions for an organizations' operation.

### **Research Method**

The method I selected to conduct this study was qualitative research. O'Reilly and Parker (2013) asserted that a qualitative researcher seeks to gain insight into a problem and provides a recommendation for additional analysis. According to Barnham (2015), qualitative research enables researchers' insights into underlying reasons and opinions. Additionally, researchers can base qualitative data collection on unstructured or semistructured techniques like group discussions, individual interviews, participation and observations (Kristensen & Ravn, 2015). Based on the definition of qualitative research, a better understanding of HR managers practices and lack thereof on establishing gender parity in senior-level positions can be obtained. Therefore, qualitative research was appropriate for the study because I explored a phenomenon through the lived experiences of the participant. Also, I can mitigate challenges through qualitative research if new findings emerge with potential solutions from the result of exploration.

Conversely, McCusker and Gunaydin (2015) suggested that quantitative methods are not appropriate for studies that does not exam individuals, relationships or differences among variables mathematically through statistical analysis. Likewise, a mixed method is



not suitable for this study because I did not integrate quantitative and qualitative data. Although it is imperative to provide a complete and comprehensive understanding of a research problem (Maxwell, 2015), Stoddart, Bugge, Shepherd, and Farquharson (2014), suggested that researchers use mixed methods when either a quantitative method or the qualitative method is inadequate to stand alone to develop perspectives and provide an understanding about a research problem.

### **Research Design**

The research design that I used for this study was a multiple case study. Yin (2018) asserted that case studies are suitable for an exploratory analysis because the objective is to answer detailed research questions like *how* or *what* while exploring a particular phenomenon for an in-depth understanding of a significant issue. Also, according to Yin, multiple case studies can be used to discuss different results or similar results in studies. Baskarada (2014) indicated that there are benefits for using multiple case studies: (a) a researcher can analyze the data within each situation and across different conditions and (b) researchers can study various cases to understand similarities and differences between the cases. Tumele (2015) noted other benefits to using a multiple case study in research, stating that evidence generated from a multiple case study is durable and reliable. Also, researchers can clarify if the findings from the results are valuable or not. Finally, researchers conducting multiple case studies explore non-numerical information about phenomenon through the participant's experiences (Fletcher, McPhee, & Dickson, 2015).

Narrative research is another qualitative design. According to Yin (2018), narrative designs can be substantial or abstract (Yin, 2018). Bryman and Bell (2015) noted that researchers use narrative designs to focus on human experiences and participants' lives. During the conduct of narrative interviews, individuals are allowed to tell their 'real life' experiences of specific phenomenon (Bryman & Bell, 2015). While a narrative approach is instrumental in research studies, the participants become the narrator for providing knowledge about a social issue or problem. Therefore, the accuracy of the story is viewed objectively with limited input from me, as the researcher. However, one of the significant aspects for researchers studying with a narrative approach is that the text is subjective (Tumele, 2015). For this reason, the narrative design was not appropriate for this study.

Understanding peoples' behavior and experiences related to a social phenomenon can challenge researchers not trained in the psychology field. According to Hirzel, Leyer, and Moormann (2017), the primary objective of the phenomenological design is to clarify the meaning of lived experiences from a person, or a group of people who are influenced by a social phenomenon. As a result, in my qualitative research, I conducted interviews to comprehend the experiences of participants who believed that some organizational performance is the result of insufficient succession strategies. Furthermore, Bryman and Bell (2015) viewed experiences and behavior as an integrated and inseparable relationship of a phenomenon. Baskarada (2014) also suggested that phenomenological research should be thorough. Before interviews occur, to get the essential understanding from participants', there is no guarantee that no misinterpretation of the participant's

views and comments will materialize. For this reason, the phenomenological design was not appropriate for this study.

Participants' responses to a situation or stimulus can often be confused with their customs. Experts who are concerned with why humans respond in certain situations realize the importance of understanding behavior and culture. According to Sangasubana (2011), ethnography is the art and science used to describe a group of people or culture. Ethnographers search for predictable patterns in the lived human experiences talking to and observing participants in their environment (Sangasubana, 2011). Further, for a more in-depth study, researchers use an ethnographic design to engage with participants while observing the lives of participants (Gottfert, 2015). Because some participants work in environments that are noisy, gathering and recording information can be difficult especially when trying to understand human experiences in their environment. Therefore, ethnography was not an appropriate design for this study.

When conducting research, data collection has a stopping point. According to Fusch and Ness (2015), data saturation occurs when the researcher collects sources of evidence for the study that represents both quality and quantity. Constantinou, Georgiou, and Perdikiogianni (2017) asserted that data saturation is when enough interviews from participants begin to show a consistent pattern or theme before stopping data collection. In other words, data saturation is when no new information appears. Constantinou et al. (as cited in Nelson, 2017) suggested achieving saturation in studies that use interviews; the process is called the comparative method for themes saturation (CoMeTS). CoMeTS involve two comparisons: (a) first, themes from all interviews are compared

with each other, and second (b) the sequence of interviews are rechecked multiple times to check for saturation. The purpose is because the series of interviews during the check makes saturation vary and, therefore, rechecking help confirm saturation. In this study, I achieved data saturation after the sixth interview.

### **Population and Sampling**

I used two sampling techniques for the study: purposeful and snowball. The research population consisted of HR managers in six home improvement companies in the southeast United States. O'Reilly and Parker (2012) asserted that a sampling technique is best used to reflect a proportion of a population represented. Also, to adequately address a research question in an exploratory qualitative study, Boddy (2016) suggested that a researcher use an appropriate sample size. According to Benoot, Hannes, and Bilsen (2016), researchers use the technique of purposeful sampling based on their intention. In my study, I selected participants who were capable of answering the research questions. By using the purposeful sampling method, I selected the HR managers who had responsibility for monitoring, recruiting, and overseeing the skill sets necessary for each position in the organization.

Gathering primary data sources for research can be difficult especially when the population is invisible. Etikan, Alkassim, and Abubakar (2015) noted that snowball sampling, also known as chain-referral, is the most popular in business studies because it focuses on primary data collection coming from employees of that specific company. The process of snowballing starts with asking the first participant for a referral of another prospective participant for the study. Reybold, Lammert, and Stribling (2012) also noted

that a researcher could solicit the participants with the snowball sampling method from the questionnaires as a data collection instrument through email. The advantage of applying the snowball sampling technique is that the process is cost-effective when recruiting a population that is invisible (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2013). Another reason why I used the snowball sampling method was being unfamiliar with the culture and environment surrounding the participants. As Etikan et al. (2015) suggested, the snowball technique can be used to recruit the right participants when a researcher is not familiar with the human resources work culture and management.

To determine the exact number of samples, I looked for the data saturation point of my study. Data saturation occurs when no new insights or themes emerge from additional data sources (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Nelson (2017) suggested setting a fixed number of interviews at the start of a project. Subsequently, researchers go through cycles of data collection and analysis until no new themes emerge. Conversely, Constantinou, Georgiou, and Perdikogianni (2017) stated researchers are unaware when they reach saturation until they are analyzing the collected data. Therefore, I ensured data saturation occurred after the sixth interview when no new data or no new themes emerged, and I had sufficient data to answer the research question.

The criteria I used for selecting participants for this study was critical for the success and continuity of businesses. Long and Chrisman (2014) noted that leaders on all levels should be aware of how to apply succession strategies to enhance organizational performance. According to Benoot et al. (2016), HR managers must be knowledgeable about or have experience with the business phenomenon in HR. In selecting HR

managers, Alagaraja and Shuck (2015) noted that HR managers must perform two critical functions in an organization: (a) oversee department functions and (b) manage employees. HR managers conduct periodic assessments to monitor department functions to determine when employees are in need of training and the type of training required to improve job performance and productivity (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). Also, HR managers rely on succession planning for employee development and monitoring employees who demonstrate the ability for upward mobility (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). Due to shortages of qualified women in leadership positions, succession planning may be explored by leaders with executive status and experience as a means of supporting gender parity in leadership positions and improving organizational performance.

There are times when business leaders are too busy to conduct on-site interviews, and the researcher has to plan for other options such as off-site sessions. For some interviewees, the reality of an interview setting can cause an interviewee to feel uncomfortable (McLachlan & Garcia, 2015). Wiederhold (2015) suggested conducting interviews outside of the typical office setting because an offsite location may lead to participants providing more genuine responses. Wiederhold also noted that by making the interview experience useful for all participants involved, interviewers can enjoy the experience as well. Before I scheduled an interview with a potential participant, I shared the following information: all offsite meetings would be in a public place and a quiet restaurant, coffee shop, or a hotel conference room is permissible. Then, I asked for particular locations, dates, and times that were convenient for the participant.

Furthermore, if the interview is in an office setting, Roulston (2014) suggested avoiding sitting behind a desk. Roulston encouraged barrier-free seating to help a non-threatening face-to-face conversation. To further supplement an interview, whether the discussion is in person or by telephone or telephone conference, I had the research questions in front of them and clarified details that were not understood. Finally, during the interview, I confirmed with the participants periodically to affirm that they wanted to continue with the interview process, thereby exhibiting respect for their time.

### **Ethical Research**

The informed consent form is a full disclosure document that participants must sign before participating in a research study. According to Petrovic (2017), the informed consent form includes information on the purpose of the study and interview procedures and also includes a statement of consent for participants and a confidentiality clause. The informed consent form is a necessary document the researcher uses to track the participation of volunteers (Bloss et al., 2016).

Before an interview occurred, I sent potential participants an email invitation to participate. Each request had the informed consent form as an attachment, and each participant was directed to read and provide an electronic acknowledgment to either accept or decline participation. Finally, after receiving the signed document, I maintain a copy of the form in the secured research records for 5 years to protect the rights of participants. Further, I returned a copy of the form to the confirmed participants.

Harriss and Atkinson (2013) suggested that all interviews with participants be conformed to ethical practices; therefore, the requirements are set forth by the Walden

University institutional review board (IRB). I advised each participant that the interview would be recorded with a digital voice recorder and that the details were transcribed for their review. Study participants would be able to leave the research study at any time, and I would discontinue the process of interviewing if a participant is no longer interested and desired to withdraw from the research study. Although risks are included in research when participants are involved, a researcher can minimize risks to participants if she or he is prepared to conduct the study (Dubois et al., 2012). No participants withdrew from the study. However, I would honor any participants' requests to withdraw from the study if they were uncomfortable with the procedures by destroying all the participants' data up to withdrawal requests.

Ripley (2006) stated that in clinical research, incentive payments to research participants have an essential benefit in the success of a project. Through payment to participants, researchers can make provision for transportation to appointments and medical care and can facilitate enrollment (Ripley, 2006). Marathe et al. (2018) also noted that payment to research participants is a common practice by some researchers, and there is moral connotation involved on whether fees are excessive or not. I took an approach to recruit research participants by sending them an email invitation, thanking those in advance who accepted the invitation and provided follow-up emails with those who had not committed. Furthermore, I conveyed that there were no monetary incentives for participating in the study.

Having ethical protection is vital for providing information about research and research participation. The information is useful to allow potential research participants



an informed decision about participating in research. Grady and Fauci (2016) suggested that research poses a minimal risk when the protection of the participants' rights and proper protocol is in place. Gerry, Muraszkievicz, and Vavoula (2016) noted that the protection of human subjects involved in research in the U.S. is based on the Belmont report. Therefore, I adhered to the principle of respecting the ideas of the participants without harassing and intimidating them during the interview process. The researcher solicited their suggestion for a conducive environment suitable for conducting an audio recording interview.

To protect all participants' privacy in this study, I used an alphanumeric code to refer to participants by letter and number (e.g., HIC1P1) and complied with Walden University IRB guidelines pertaining to proper security, destruction of consent forms, and research information. After a signed consent form was received from each participant affirming consent to participate in my research, I maintained a copy of the form in a secured research records for 5 years to protect the confidentiality of participants. Also, all printed copies of any interviewer's notes, any documentation received from the participant, to include transcripts are under protection by a password protected external hard-drive along with the interview recorder that is secure in a fireproof file cabinet kept in my home for 5 years as well. After the 5 years of confidentiality protection, I will properly destroy all hard copy documents and USB flash drive by placing items in an incinerator for appropriate disposal. The Walden IRB approval number for this study is 11-13-19-0629349.

Finally, as a researcher, it is imperative to conduct acceptable behavior in research. To remain on track ethically, following a proper protocol can assist a researcher in protecting participants' rights (Grady & Fauci, 2016). I adhered to the principles of respecting participants' rights outlined in the Walden University IRB guidelines. In contrast, Gerry, Muraszkiwicz, and Vavoula (2016) noted that research in the U.S. protects participants according to the Belmont report. I ensured that all signed documents such as informed consent forms were secured in a secured research record for 5 years.

As part of the interview process, I used member checking by returning a copy of the actual findings to all participants for review and checking for accuracy according to their experiences. The method of reviewing a researcher's conclusions or analyzed data is known as member checking, or participant validation (Birt et al., 2016). Also, by using member checking, researchers can apply additional information from participants' validation in refine study findings as applicable. Moreover, to refrain from asking unrelated questions that do not pertain to the research, I used the interview questions in the interview protocol (see Appendix A). Through the use of the interview protocol, I remained focused on the participant responses and observed any behavioral changes. I elicited the participants to engage in non-threatening conversations about their experiences while trying to understand their experiences and opinions (Olson, 2016). Harvey (2015) noted that the use of member checking is a way for participants to review the researcher's findings, while researchers may ask additional questions, they may not have thought of before.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

In this study, I served as the primary data collection instrument. According to Thomas, Oenning, and de Goulart (2018), researchers preparing to conduct research must formulate clear and functional instruments during the planning stage for the study. Fagarasanu and Kumar (2002) suggested that whenever measurement instruments are used the researcher needs to ensure that these instruments yield accurate information for the construct of interest. For this study, I drew primary research data from semistructured interviews and secondary data source consisted of publicly available company documents and archival information. I recorded the responses and captured the participants' reactions through observation methods, handwritten notes, audio recording, and interviews. I used open-ended interview questions (see Appendix B). Also, I encouraged participants to explain their experiences, as Olson (2016) suggested, with relevance to the study.

Data collection methods for qualitative research historically include at least two data gathering techniques: document review and semistructured interviews (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). As the primary data collection instrument in this study, I collected data from publicly available company documents and archival information. According to Kahn (1979), an interview is a purposeful discussion between two or more people who can help with the gathering of valid and reliable data relevant to the research objectives. According to Thompson (2016), a researcher conducts a document review by gathering information from reviews of a variety of existing sources, programs, and requirements

(i.e., documents, reports, data files, and other written artifacts) with the intention of collecting independently verifiable data and information.

In this study, I had the responsibility of ensuring that the information was reliable and valid. Potter and Levine-Donnerstein (2009) asserted when researchers are clear about what kind of content they want to analyze, they can better select the most appropriate strategies for demonstrating validity and reliability. Often in qualitative research, establishing both reliability and validity is a challenge because researchers must be subjective and creative in their approach (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). In this study, I used member checking to enhance the reliability and validity of the data collection process. According to Varpio, Ajjawi, Monrouxe, O'Brien, and Rees (2017), researchers conduct member checking by presenting data interpretations to all the participants for review.

To conduct member checking, I asked each participant to review the interpretation of the interview prior to analysis. Participants verified their information from the interview, and confirmed that the summary of the findings represented each participants' experience. Also, I conducted follow-up phone calls with participants from whom an email response was not received from and verified their information before finalizing the study findings.

Researchers conduct semistructured interviews to study participants using a more natural conversation pattern, and so that participants can build on one another's views (Leech, 2002). Also, I used the semistructured interviews to ascertain subjective responses from persons regarding a particular situation they have experienced. An

advantage of the semistructured interview is that participants are free to respond to open-ended questions using the participants' knowledge and feelings for a more meaningful answer. Therefore, a researcher can examine the participant's responses for a more clear and concise interpretation and especially when there is one opportunity to interview participants (McIntosh & Morse, 2015).

I adhered to an interview protocol (see Appendix A). Chetty, Partanen, Rasmussen, and Servais (2014) and Schwab and Syed (2015) that indicated researchers use interview protocols to guide and assist with conducting interviews in a fair and equitable manner and to achieve study reliability and validity. Chen et al. (2014) suggested that a protocol enhances consistency and provides standardization to the interview process. I used an interview protocol to serve as a reminder of the interview flow, participants' rights, interviewer guidelines, and the interview timeline. The interview protocol guide functioned as the process of implementing the open-ended interviews as well as an interview guide. The critical areas of the interview protocol guide are the purpose of the study, the interview questions, the audio recording prompts, and post-interview expectations used to validate the interview transcript.

### **Data Collection Technique**

I used data collection techniques to gather primary and secondary data to address the research question. According to Alberti-Alhtaybat, Al-Htaybat, and Hutaibat (2019), researchers that collect data from multiple sources might provide a more reliable perspective than researchers that use a single viewpoint to support information. The sources of data I used consisted of open-ended interviews, a review of publicly available

company documents, observation, and internal company documents pertaining to employee advancement opportunities. I notified each participant in the study to arrange for a convenient date and time for a semistructured interview. In contrast, according to McIntosh and Morse (2015) participants are free to respond to these open-ended questions as they wish, and the researcher may probe these responses. The pre-interview process consisted of following the interview protocol guide (see Appendix A); each participant received an e-mail confirmation notice that included interview questions and the consent form. Also, during the interview, I solicited documentation from all HR managers and senior leaders such as directors and department managers who were eligible for the study to provide information relevant to my study and were willing to do so. Moreover, I emphasized to each participant who wanted to participate in the research that they must read and sign their consent form before the interview begins. As suggested by Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, and Walter (2016), researchers use consent procedures to prevent maleficence and promote beneficence.

Doody and Noonan (2013) observed that interviews are frequently used to collect data in research because a researcher can further explore responses or findings from a participant through probing. A disadvantage to interviews is that I may have trouble with analyzing and summarizing results. However, due to each HR managers' thorough responses and each manager conducting a member check, I did not have any trouble analyzing and summarizing results. Additionally, another drawback is the handling of the personal information of the participants. As a researcher, one must always be sure to safeguard the participant's personal information.

I also collected data from publicly available company documents and internal company documents. According to Yin (2018), when it is necessary to track specific outcomes, archived documents are useful because an agency has already collected the information. The disadvantage can be that the data may be outdated and the information may not provide a complete picture of the situation. One crucial advantage of my study, all HR managers had updated information. Doody and Noonan (2013) suggested that researchers use interviews for quick data collection. In contrast, Weller et al. (2018) noted that open-ended questions used in interviews to explore topics in-depth are an advantage to the data collection technique.

I did not conduct a pilot study to evaluate feasibility. However, to improve my study design, I used member checking to support the validation of the interview content by the participant. After an interview, I uploaded the audio and notes from the voice recorder that had a transcript converter app to the desktop application. I transcribed the information into a Microsoft Word document using these tools.

In the research, I used member checking to support the validation of the study findings by asking the participants to review the interpretation of their interviews. According to Thomas (2017), member checking improves the credibility of qualitative research. Also, member checking is useful for obtaining participant approval for using quotations and indirect quotes where anonymity cannot be guaranteed. Tong, Morton, and Webster (2016) observed that member checking is a highly effective method for participants to further reflect and clarify their experiences. Based on the work of Harvey

(2015), who suggested that speaking is an act that belongs to the speaker and each speaker has the right to author their voice.

### **Data Organization Technique**

The best methods for remaining organized as collected data emerges for this study consist of manual and automated methods. Although the process is time-consuming, a well-organized research is time well spent. According to MacPhail, Khoza, Abler, and Ranganathan (2015), there is emerging assistance for conducting and reporting qualitative analysis and one example called the intercoder reliability (ICR), is like cataloging and labeling systems. MacPhail et al. (2015) suggested that cataloging and labeling systems is both reliable and replicable. Furthermore, each of the participants had a unique alphanumeric code assign during the interview. The purpose of the alphanumeric code was to automate the process of participants identification thereby reducing the need to depend on human recall during validation to ensure data quality. Also, listed in the interview protocol guide (see Appendix A) was the purpose of the alphanumeric code. More importantly, to protect the privacy of participants and the confidentiality of their personal information, researchers must use a research protocol (Harriss & Atkinson, 2013).

Another means of keeping track of data was by recording the open-ended interviews. This method allowed me to capture the participants' responses with minimal error and easily kept each participant's recording separated along with the related themes. Also, I created a verbatim transcription of each recording into a Word document. According to Cheraghi, Manookian, and Nasrabadi (2014), in qualitative content



analysis, the aim is to classify collected information into various categories. Proper advance technology allowed me to use another device call Livescribe smart pen to record the open-ended interviews responses as well. This device is like a research log that keeps track of each interview by assigning a file for each participant which allows me to retrieve quick information. Moreover, I synchronized the smart pen with the desktop application and transferred the interview data file onto the desktop file. Once all the data was successfully transferred to the desktop, all data file from the smart pen was deleted.

I was aware that any data collected in the interviews is the researcher's responsibility, as well as any documents obtained, is the researcher's primary responsibility to safeguard. Accordingly, I applied precautionary measures to store all data securely. I complied with the IRB guidelines on proper security and destruction of electronic and hard copies. Then, I stored all hard copy interviewer's notes, documentation, and transcripts on a password-protected secure USB flash drive and secured this flash drive in a lock and key fireproof file cabinet at the researcher's home for 5 years. Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, and Pedersen (2013) suggested when interviewing research participants, a researcher has an ethical requirement to provide confidentiality and protection for each research participant. After the 5 years of confidentiality protection, I will use a local paper-based shredding company to destroy all hard copy documents. I will also destroy the USB flash drive after the 5 years.

### **Data Analysis**

I used methodological triangulation to analyze the research data for a better understanding. According to Kaulio and Karlsson (1998), researchers use triangulation as

a means for increasing the validity and reliability of a user investigation. Abdalla, Oliveira, Azevedo, and Gonzalez (2018) also suggested that by using the strategy of triangulation, researchers can achieve study confirmability by the use of multiple methods. Joslin and Muller (2016) suggested that using triangulation a researcher can increase reliability by removing bias in data sources. However, different methods and data sources must be used to identify the various dimensions of a phenomenon. Abdalla et al. (2018) asserted researchers can use multiple methods to discover misleading dimensions in a phenomenon. Consequently, I used thematic analysis for comparisons and contrasts for each home improvement company.

I initiated logical and sequential process for the data analysis beginning with the use of methodological triangulation to get a better understanding of the research data, followed by a rich description of reliability and validity (Morse, 2015). Additionally, I put all the information in separate categories of responses received from the interview transcripts, publicly available company documents and internal company documents, which included both the public and internal company's operation procedures or protocol guide. Moreover, I collected company presentations and templates used to brief participating company executives. I gathered archival information and reference materials. Once all documents were collected, I carefully reviewed all the responses. I then evaluated the notes obtained from each HR manager and senior leaders such as directors and department managers who were eligible for the study. Afterward, I organized the data, coded the information based on similar responses, and identified common themes. Furthermore, each recording was transcribed onto a Word document

word for word. Cheraghi, Manookian, and Nasrabadi (2014) suggested that in qualitative content analysis, the aim is to classify collected information into various categories.

The data analysis technique used in research is called the thematic analysis. Often thematic analysis is used before collecting data and relates to the research question under study (Blair, 2015; Vaughn & Turner, 2016). Therefore, I incorporated thematic analysis for this study to answer the research question and further addressed the conceptual framework to gain additional insight and knowledge from data gathered. According to Baumgartner and Schneider (2010), using thematic analysis to process data allows researchers to conduct more granular research and analysis. Also, I coded and looked for themes in the interview transcripts and documents.

ATLAS.ti program is used to get a better understanding and interpretation of the participants and the situation. Sinkovics and Penz (2011) suggested that computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) can assist with facilitating analysis and interpretation of qualitative interview data obtained from participants' interviews. The software is designed to converge words to reveal common themes, providing researchers with query results, models, and charts. I used the ATLAS.ti software program to support the analysis of data by identifying common themes and codes taken from the interview transcripts, publicly available company documents, archival information, and notes obtained from participant interviews. Plamondon, Bottorff, and Cole (2015) suggested that to revisit collected data and to refine the results, it should be adequately organized as part of the data analysis.

According to Salmons and Kaczynski (2016), using technology as a tool in research involves the development of a unique set of competencies. Clark and Veale (2018) suggested the goal of coding is to reduce the data without losing the meaning of the original transcript. I used ATLAS.ti software program to create codes for each participant interview. After all the concepts, ideas and coding were organized into groups, themes were created and the logical and sequential process for the data analysis was completed.

The research question was aligned with the published literature and the conceptual framework lens used for this study. Fink (2013) suggested that to understand the status of a topic and to identify future research questions, a literature review is essential. The collection of data has a direct correlation with the social role theory to succession strategies used by HR managers in the home improvement industry. According to Theron (2015), the importance of analyzing qualitative data is to allow themes to emerge.

I focused on the critical themes of all participants based on their interview answers. I compared and coded participant responses in the same organizations before comparing and coding the responses to different organizations. I used the research question as an inquiry into the specific concern of the research while the conceptual framework provided a theory to the study that would allow critical themes to emerge. Vaughn and Turner (2016) note that to identify crucial themes in large amounts of text data, organizing the data question by question is helpful for the researcher. I determined themes as the final step of the data analysis process.

## **Reliability and Validity**

### **Reliability**

In this study, I addressed the dependability of the research by member checking of data interpretation. Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, and Walter (2016) suggested that researchers can use member checking to explore the credibility of participants. Member checking technique gives all participants a chance to review a copy of actual findings and check for accuracy according to their experiences. Also, the potential for researcher bias is reduced by actively involving the research participants in checking and confirming the results (Birt et al., 2016). Moreover, dependability in research causes repetition due to the consistency of examination (Amankwaa, 2016). I verified dependability by annotating step-by-step the process in the data collection procedures. To further the dependability process, I logged accounts of each interview, and also recorded major events during the study to show consistency. Korstjens and Moser (2017) emphasized the importance of having an analysis process that is in-line with a study design.

### **Validity**

I used methodological triangulation to ensure credibility in the collected data. According to Amankwaa (2016), credibility is confidence that the findings are accurate. To ensure credibility, I used member checking and allowed participants to review the findings and of the data. According to Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, and Nevelle (2014), researchers must provide rich and robust description of participants experiences. Although I did not use methods such as debriefing or a reflexive journal, Carter et al. (2014) suggested that researchers must have a variety of strategies like

member checking to ensure data dependability and credibility. Similar to Carter et al., Korstjens and Moser (2017) noted that member checking is a tool for credibility in qualitative research.

I applied thematic analysis that consists of several stages, such as coding, examining, and recording patterns or themes within the data. I included multiple participants in the study to lend credibility to the analysis of the data with various viewpoints. Having participants review the interpretation of the interview transcripts also added credibility before the responses were analyzed.

According to Amankwaa (2016), transferability is whether study findings have applicability in other contexts. I explored the topic and collected and analyzed the data that allowed participants to share their experience with the findings in the research. In conducting the study, I did not assume that the participants' experiences would replicate the research findings. Korstjens and Moser (2017) noted that a researcher's findings are transferable when the results can occur in a similar situation. I ensured transferability in this study by utilizing several techniques such as (a) describing the interview setting and (b) detailing notes of the data collection process so that all can be used when the reader assesses the applicability and transferability of the research results. I used data saturation as another element for research transferability; by utilizing this method Constantinou, Georgiou, and Perdikogianni (2017) noted that a consistent pattern or theme can become meaningful to a reader.

In this research, I addressed confirmability by keeping detailed notes of the research project. Korstjens and Moser (2017) suggested the importance of

maintaining research notes from the beginning of a research project to the development and reporting of the findings. Researchers demonstrate one crucial element of credibility by providing a rich, robust description of research findings. I used confirmability as another analytical technique and applied the audit strategy. Cruz and Tantia (2017) suggested that a paper trail is useful in showing how decision-making can produce a choice based on the process of data collection and how data can support the research findings that are confirmed. Finally, I displayed confirmability by documenting a step by step process in the data collecting. As suggested by Abdalla et al. (2018), readers can verify that the data information is the result of participants experiences more so than a researcher.

Researchers consider data saturation in qualitative research as essential for ensuring adequate and quality data are collected to support the study and demonstrate content validity. When researchers reach evidence that represents both quality and quantity but yield no new information, data saturation is achieved (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Conversely, Constantinou, Georgiou, and Perdikogianni (2017) stated researchers are unaware when they reach saturation until they are analyzing the collected data. I ensured data saturation was reached, which according to Tran, Porcher, Falissard, and Ravaud (2016) occurs when no new data and no new themes will occur. Also, I achieved enough data to answer the research question. I ensured that adequate and quality data was collected to support and replicate the study when the opportunity to obtain additional new information presents itself. Once all face-to-face interviews were concluded, I ensured that no new ideas emerged and I achieved data saturation.

### **Transition and Summary**

In Section 2 of this qualitative proposal, I outlined the research process that was used to explore the succession strategies of some HR managers in the home improvement industry and how they approach the advancement of women to leadership positions to improve organizations' performance. I explained the purpose of the study, the role as a researcher, and more importantly, the type of research performed. Furthermore, I identified the population and sampling methodology and described the research methods and the components of ethical research. Finally, I explained the data processes that consisted of data collection instruments, data collection techniques, data organization techniques, and data analysis.

In Section 3, I discussed the findings from the analysis of the collected data. I discussed the applications of the research and the introduced recommendations, reflections, and conclusions. Moreover, I introduced the need for social change according to the research results found in this study.



### Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the succession strategies that some HR managers in the home improvement industry use to advance women who have qualified for leadership positions to improve organizations' performance. The data came from semistructured interviews with HR managers, data files, management development guides, and other written artifacts at six home improvement companies in the southeast United States. Additionally, the notes in my journal contribute additional information to analyze the data. Three major themes emerged from the data analysis: leadership training, educational attainment, and role models, and mentors (terms used interchangeably by participants). One crucial element that participants disclosed is an organizational priority to ensure inclusiveness (opportunities for women to advance) to sustain continuity, productivity, morale, and overall organizational effectiveness. The next section contains the presentation of findings for each theme along with data summaries.

#### **Presentation of the Findings**

The overarching research question for this study was: what succession strategies do some HR managers in the home improvement industry use to advance women to leadership positions to improve organizations' performance? This study included semistructured interviews with open-ended questions, review of ancillary documents, and an extensive review of the extant literature. I used a purposive, convenient sample of six HR managers from six different companies in the southeast United States who have

strategies to advance women into leadership positions to improve organizations' performance. Participants names were omitted and coded as HICP1 through HICP6 for anonymity purposes. The interviews provided the opportunity and flexibility for participants to respond to questions and share other relevant information. I asked questions aimed at six home improvement companies who have implemented successful strategies for advancing women to leadership positions and improving organizational performance. All questions asked in each interview were straightforward and understandable to each participant to promote alignment of the study with the overarching research question. After the data collection was completed, I developed three key themes relevant to the main research question; leadership training, educational attainment, and role models and mentors. The themes were developed from the coding and cataloging process.

### **Theme 1: Leadership Training**

The first theme that emerged from the interviews was that of leadership training. Leadership training is one of the principles of social role theory that is crucial for management role. The emergent theme of leadership training aligns with this principle. The participants indicated that leadership training is a mechanism that HR managers can use to develop successful succession strategies for women. According to Morrison, Greenhaw, and Pigg (2019), it is imperative that leadership training contain orientation to the practice, and reinforces organization's mission. Also, participants all made similar statements that having a successful company involves sacrifices such as long hours, determination, and hard work. Having confidence and knowing the mission

of an organization should be the primary focus of effective leadership. HICP1 stated that leadership training must be current to be effective. Leaders should take the time to know their employees and differentiate excellent performance from a substandard performance. Although leadership training is vital for leaders to learn about organization sustainability, non-leaders can benefit from information on how to improve organizations (HICP1). Furthermore, “to develop leadership skills and enhance organization performance; leaders must attend leadership training regularly because of the training effects attitudes and performance” (HICP2). According to Castelli (2015), leaders who attend leadership training should help employees to develop their skills, especially if they are supervising those that work for them. HICP3 quoted, “leaders who attend leadership training while in a leadership position have a higher probability of improved leadership skills due to training exercises that increases participants’ motivation to change.”

Moreover, companies that engage in leadership training are quick to embrace that leadership training is worthwhile due to increased leadership skills, knowledge with addressing employee’s personal needs, and “the restoration of job satisfaction to employees” (HICP4). Participants HICP3 and HICP4 further agreed that leadership training improves the growth of individuals, provides assessments, counseling, and promotes equal opportunity and fair treatment of women. More importantly, “all leaders should inspire their employees to want to grow professionally and set goals for their organizations that are obtainable” (HICP5), but a key element to remember is there are no perfect leaders. Therefore, leaders who attend leadership training will not get answers to all their questions.

Rosch (2018) suggested that leaders must develop a leadership mindset if they want to be useful to employees and the organization. Although great leaders are described differently amongst genders and cultures, few leaders exhibit qualities to maximize their employee's capabilities. HICP6 stated that to have a pool of qualified diverse employee leaders who are properly trained can hopefully eliminate differences that should not be relevant to the employee or organization. Moreover, leaders should not confuse the term leadership with managing tasks. According to Willis (2019), knowing how to manage one's team is crucial for any management role. Consequently, all leaders should participant in leadership training to learn new techniques and refine old skills. When leaders develop new skills, they can assist employees in reaching their full potential, and ultimately, the organization will achieve its goals.

A review of the literature related to strategies for enhancing organizational performance by advancing woman to leadership positions were similar to what I learned from the interviews. When comparing the participants' responses, I explored the lived experiences and perceptions of some human resources managers who were more efficient in promoting a woman to leadership positions than others. Longenecker and Fink (2015) noted that leadership training rests on four significant foundations: (a) as a leader be prepared for changes because nothing is everlasting, (b) know your employees and manage their talents properly, (c) diversity is more significant when a leader has a global mindset, and (d) maintain competitive advantage through continuously learning. After several iterations of review, the data was organized by color-coding the theme. Additionally, reviewing publicly available company documents and archival information

supported the emerging theme of leadership training in the organization. Participants HICP2 and HICP6 agreed that leaders should attend women empowerment seminars with their qualified female employee's leaders to ensure that women employees within the organization can hear how other females have excelled in other organizations.

The study findings will assist managers with different strategies to use to enhance organizational performance. HICP6 stated, "leadership training offers greater flexibility and opportunities when follow-up training has top management support. Once leadership training is used as an enhancement tool, a new set of competencies and training methods can be applied to organizations." Chisholm-Burns, Spivey, Hagemann, and Josephson (2017) suggested proper leadership training must teach managers and executives how to give their organizations' competitive advantage. For an organization to reach its goal, a strong foundation of leadership training must be the driving force.

The leadership training theme that emerged from the participants' interviews also aligned with the review of the literature. The comparison of the participants' responses resulted in factors such as a status quo is more convenient at times than promoting women to leadership positions. Also, other significant elements from the literature review were consistent with the participants' responses, such as the role of organizational policies and practices, and the benefits of women in leadership positions are crucial for enhancing organizational performance. In comparison, Tafvelin, Hasson, Holmström, and von Thiele Schwarz (2019) concluded that leadership training provided improvements for formal leaders' as it related to employee well-being, while informal leaders' leadership training was associated with efficiency.

**Theme 2: Educational Attainment**

Educational attainment is the next principle of social role theory that emerged from my data. The emergent theme of educational attainment aligns with the theory. The participants indicated that education could be in both formal and informal settings and that instructional methods include teaching and training that HR managers can use to develop successful succession strategies for women. Social role theory and socioeconomic status (SES) have one thing in common; they both are associated with specific opportunities and resources (Hegelund et al., 2020). Although SES refers to a person's social hierarchy position, the social role theory is based on people's behavior in a social situation. And often, educational attainment is a vital component of where an individual is in the social class. Additionally, there are many expensive intervention programs listed in the United States, and education is one of society's most costly intervention program (Darling-Hammond, 2015). HICP1 said, "Often, the disappointment for women is trying to advance within careers and not being successful in spite of extensive training in a particular job and education." According to Hurley and Choudhary (2016), female employees who obtain additional education are not guaranteed top management positions compared to their male counterparts. HICP4 stated:

That supervisors should nominate female employees to fill school slots that are required for promotion and advancements to the next higher level. Also, obtaining professional education should be on the mind of everyone in an organization, especially women. Besides, pursuing higher civilian education can position some

women for advancement and make them competitive for critical leadership positions.

HICP2 stated that another possible determinant for an employee's success in an organization is overcoming obstacles. If pursuing education during the day is not possible, other options like online or night classes are different training methods for achieving positive results.

All participants agreed that pursuing higher education can prepare a person for a career. HICP2 mentioned, "when I became a manager, I had some college education under my belt. The position and responsibilities were high, but I needed the extra income to accomplish my goals. HICP3 stated, "some female employees believe that having a higher education pays off, and some do not agree." Herd et al. (2019) agreed that people with less education usually do not earn more than people with more knowledge, and while the opposite does occur, sheer luck is the result. Participants HICP1 and HICP3 agreed that educational attainment is essential because personal growth increases, and critical thinking skills are enhanced once exposed. HICP5 came from a family that values education. Therefore, an excellent educational foundation was imparted. Although HICP6 did not have the educational support like HICP5, to be a manager or compete for any leadership position, employees should have the opportunity to attain an education beyond high school (HICP6). All the participants noted there is a greater emphasis on educational attainment now than there was in the past. HICP5 shared, "leaders should identify courses, training, and certificate programs for eligible female employee's proficiency."

While some female employees should be allowed to attend remedial and reinforcement programs to increase growth further. As HICP4 stated:

Many female employees have taken the necessary actions to advance themselves to leadership positions to improve organization performance. And education is one of the ways. Also, some female employees have requested certain job positions from their superior, and some have asked to ‘shadow’ another employee that is performing at the next higher level of responsibility.

According to all participants, more college-educated women are entering the workforce. Although educational opportunities are increasing for women, there are significant barriers to overcome before women reach equal pay rates.

Smith-Woolley, Selzam, and Plomin (2019) asserted that top positions in business might be far from parity for women in the U.S., but improvements have increased within the workforce. HICP2 stated, “HR managers should provide routine counseling and substantive information to female employees on educational opportunities to enhance upward mobility in the workforce. Additionally, create an environment within the organization for other women to hear and understand how other women in various departments have excelled (HICP3). When HR managers get an overwhelming desire to improve organization performance, the attitudes for female employees who are currently in the labor force will change (HICP6). Many of the women will get training, education, and develop new skills throughout their work life to “keep with changes in the workplace” (HICP5).



Findings in this study align with Darling-Hammond (2015), job security and prospects are two sound reasons that educational attainment is crucial to how female employees feel about themselves. Participants HICP2 and HICP4 agreed that leaders should allow female employees to perform in developmental assignments where they have an opportunity to perform at the next higher level in different departments of the organization. Moreover, HICP5 stated:

that most female employees come to an organization knowing they have an uphill battle to advance to the top leadership position in a company. Yet, their mindset is, they have the educational tools, fitness ability, and moral compass to compete at any level of leadership if given a chance.

HICP4 concluded that cross-training leaders and repositioning qualified female employees to different jobs in the company are effective. By doing so, leaders are making sure everyone qualified to lead will develop their skills and make the company more competent and productive. HICP4 and HICP5 both indicated that female employees should obtain as much education as possible to enhance their credentials, which will make them more competitive. HICP3 stated:

Managers often select employees with higher education for promotion and subsequently to fill leadership positions within the immediate organization. By nominating and recommending qualified women for the next higher-level position and additional educational opportunity, managers can remove any impediments to their attendance at school necessary for their advancement to higher-level positions within the organization.

According to HICP6, “the most significant barrier in general to women is time and funding resources to send female employees to professional development courses and schools to qualify them to serve in higher-level positions.” In contrast, an organization may not always be able to release individuals to attend a course or school but may have to defer them to a later date (HICP2).

Findings in this study indicated that the participants noted that there are benefits when employees acquire additional education like a secure and stable life. Additionally, female employees are more apt to agree that school provides women empowerment and better career options. The consistency throughout my review of the literature emphasized the value of higher education and that a growing number of female employees are using advanced degrees to better prepare for promotional opportunities. Conversely, Heisig, Elbers, and Solga (2020) stated that both educational attainment and educational achievement resulted in educational success when female employees can acquire additional education.

### **Theme 3: Role Models and Mentors**

The third theme that is a principal of the social role theory is that men and women are socialized to behave differently in the workforce. The emergent theme of role models and mentors (terms used interchangeably by participants) aligns with this principal. The participants indicated that mentoring and assigning role models is a technique that HR managers can use to develop successful succession strategies for women. Role models sometimes provide advice regarding a particular matter. Whereas, according to Durbin and Tomlinson (2014), mentors over a long duration of time gives wisdom and support.

Both agree with the social role theory from a psychological and cultural standard. For instance, continuous positive feedback can result in behavior being emulated. Mentoring can be time-consuming. Also, mentoring is not one-sided, mentees must have accountability, commitment, and participate in their learning (HICP1). According to Itzhaki (2019), two essential elements are derived from mentoring: professional development and relationship building. Participant HICP1 suggested putting mentee's in charge of a small group and allowing them to take full control of programs and conduct briefings to prepare them for success and growth. All participants emphasized the importance of allowing mentees to perform short term, often temporary duties at the next level of responsibility.

In business, the competition for top leadership positions are generally greater, but the mentorship, although few in numbers, creates a significant challenge. In contrast, role models are often great in number because some people will imitate positive or negative behavior (HICP1). Participants HICP2 and HICP3 stated that mentors are charged with developing individuals and improving their organization for the near and long term. To help qualified female employees gain experience serving in top positions, supervisors should submit names of eligible female employees to their supervisor to serve as *acting* in the absence of incumbents to help them gain experience, knowledge, and visibility of functions and operations (HICP5). Mentors can serve as a counselor on a personal level, they can have interpersonal relations, and an organization as a whole can benefit due to better performance outcomes from inexperienced workers (Beckwith, Carter, & Peters, 2016).

Mentoring provides a long-term relationship that is focused on supporting the growth and development of the mentee (Butz, Spencer, Thayer-Hart, Cabrera, & Byars-Winston, 2019). According to HICP4, “mentors can be a personal advocate in a work setting. Mentors can assist female employees in gaining support from a more experienced employer when otherwise on their own; they cannot.” Many inexperienced employees attribute their professional growth to those mentors who provided guidance, patience, encouragement, and challenge them to think outside the box (HICP3). Whereas, individual coaching and counseling and showing personal interest in women’s development and advancement by leaders is essential (HICP4). Also, providing advice and educating female employees on what they need to do to be successful within the organization and their overall career is essential (HICP4). Participant HICP3 stated, “that many female employees that worked for him, as well as the ones he had the honor and privilege to teach, coach, and mentor, exemplified top leader attributes already.” HICP4 mentioned that in his more than 20 years as a manager, for the most part, mentoring females were less of a hassle compared to males. Therefore, more advancement opportunities, at times, were given to female employees. All the participants emphasized the importance of having a mentor, and they can assist with challenges and promote personal and professional growth. HICP5 mentioned:

that regular feedback should be given to peak performers. Additionally, putting female employees in team-building leadership situation exercises is beneficial to an organization. Make sure the activities have ethics, have honor codes, and their

value base. Allow female employees to work one level up for a day. Then, conduct after-action reviews and provide constructive feedback written and orally.

The relationship between a mentor and mentee is established on mutual trust and professionalism, which leads to a healthy outcome (Sanchez, Pryce, Silverthorn, Deane, & DuBois, 2019). Participant HICP5 commented related to female employees, leadership starts from the top down and female employees in crucial leadership positions provide role models for other females. Everyone needs a mentor to guide them along the way or to use as a sounding board in most organization.

There were several similarities from sources in the literature review with the purpose of a role model and mentor that surfaced in the study findings. Role models are people who are admired and often their behaviors are imitated. Whereas mentors are life-long learners who yearn to enhance other's talents and skills. Power and Wilson (2019) noted that employees who are empowered and provided with the learning opportunities they need to achieve would result in increased proficiencies. Organizations that have both role models and mentors is an organization that models personal and professional development.

### **Alignment to Social Role Theory**

Findings in this study confirmed my choice of social role theory as the conceptual framework for my research. Schneider and Bos (2019) noted that social role theory provides an explanation for how segregated social roles of men and women produce gender behavior. Because of the segregated roles, men and women are socialized to behave differently in the workforce and men are attributed to a higher status, power, and

leadership positions. As it relates to the social role theory, an essential framework for understanding specific roles that may impact women's ability to advance to leadership positions. Research on social role theory illustrated the differences in social expectations, and when men and women enacted their social expectations, their behavior dominated their gender expectations. By applying the social role theory, women in leadership roles are judged more harshly than their male counterparts in the same position. The responses from the participants and supplemental data provided practical insights into this study.

### **Application to Professional Practice**

This study is essential for HR managers to understand the importance of implementing a successful succession strategy to advance women who are qualified for leadership positions. Leaders primary goals are to hire qualified individuals and to have a more diverse, inclusive leadership team that will increase organization profits. Leaders should incorporate a formal succession strategy into their business to help address future growth, current staff skills, and a process of attracting and retaining diverse leadership talent. Other advantages of including a diverse and inclusive leadership team in an organization, workers' strengths, work ethic, innovations, and wisdom will complement those of everyone else on the team. In contrast, not having a diverse and inclusive leadership team can harm an organization's ability to hire and retain future employees. Results from this study could help managers to create a more successful succession strategy for acquiring top talent while reducing gender parity.

Findings in this study were consistent with Perrenoud and Sullivan (2016) in that leaders who prepare for employees' succession needs before it occurs minimize negative

impacts to an organization. In any organization, the leader is responsible for how the organization functions. Therefore, identifying a potential successor is as important as supporting the current leader to keep an organization operational (Ahmad, Mohamed, & Manaf, 2017). I also noted in the findings that once influencers such as organization leaders are in the right position, they can reinforce the practice of succession strategies for high-quality women who are qualified for leadership positions. According to Larat (2016), training and education are two elements that are vital for HR managers to do their job correctly. Therefore, by utilizing a successful succession strategy and preparing quality leaders through training are better equipped at all levels for advance opportunities and have better chances for success.

Succession strategies for advancing women to leadership positions are crucial to the success and the continuity of business, particularly for top leadership positions (Long & Chrisman, 2014). Because of shortages of women in leadership positions, it has become imperative for business leaders to invest and focus their efforts on promoting more women to leadership positions to improve organizational performance. By implementing a succession strategy properly, HR managers can assist their organization in developing potential leaders to fill critical positions. Results from this research study show that managers who apply succession strategies can enhance organizational performance by advancing women to leadership positions. Additionally, for the succession strategy to remain relevant and make a significant impact on the organization, support from senior leadership must take place.

### **Implications for Social Change**

As more women continue to enter the workforce, leaders must critically address gender equality through processes and policies. HR managers and business leaders can use the findings of this study to impact social change by advancing qualified female employees internally in an organization into leadership positions. According to Klettner, Clarke, and Boersma (2016), leadership positions that are filled with female employees may enable women and men to work together to create positive social change that may result in women gaining advancement. By implementing a succession strategy, leaders will attract gender parity from surrounding communities to consider employment for leadership positions.

The findings in this study could also impact society and communities by changing attitudes and behaviors in all leaders. With a changed mindset, more women could take the initiative to start their own business and hire other qualified women into leadership positions. Moreover, the findings in this study confirm that a company brand can increase the growth of an organization by establishing an environment that supports equality between male and female leaders which helps attract new talent.

Increasing managers' awareness of women's advancement opportunities can lead to a positive social change by reducing challenges women face related to wages, educational benefits, and management training. Exploring successful succession strategies for advancing women to leadership positions will help align the right person with the correct job position based on skillsets, especially with new hires. The findings of



this study showed the need to eliminate barriers that impact the organizations' leadership training, education opportunities, and role models to female employees.

### **Recommendations for Actions**

Organizations that maintained top performers are the organizations that updated their succession strategies regularly to prevent vacancies in critical leadership positions. The purpose of a succession strategy is to maintain a pool of qualified diverse employees that are adequately trained internally and capable of advancement in crucial leadership positions. Engaged employees may demonstrate management concerns if leaders apply policies on all managerial levels that a goal for the organization is to reduce gender inequality in leadership positions. Based on the results of this study, I recommended two actions; initiate collaborations and partnership, and create mid-management succession plans.

### **Collaboration and Partnerships**

Managers and qualified employees can work as a team on constructing a formal succession strategy to ensure that eligible employees are hired and developed for key positions within the organization. By establishing a partnership, increased brainstorming will provide additional ideas. Also, qualified employees can develop their skills, knowledge, and recruiting skills, while productivity improves. Leaders who developed partnerships generally prevented responsibilities from going unnoticed and remaining on track. Additionally, partnerships allow learning from others, and working as a team can be beneficial to all parties, as well as to the organization.

### **Middle Management Succession Planning**

Organizations that are interested in building internal talent should focus their attention on constructing a succession strategy for middle management. Based on the findings in my study, I recommend that leadership conduct a collaborative review of their organization succession plans and policies to ensure that women and men are treated equally in the workforce. The succession planning process should prioritize opportunities for gender equality. Identifying inadequate strategies such as the hiring process can harm an organization's culture, branding, and therefore organizational profits. Change in staff such as retirements, allows for a proactive approach to succession planning.

Incorporating a succession strategy at the middle management level helps managers to retain the knowledge of qualified employees rather than lose them for promotional opportunities elsewhere.

Business leaders and HR managers should focus on the implementation of succession planning. I will email each participant a copy of the abstract and recommendations for action. I will share findings from this study at HR conferences and seminars, research journals, and practitioner publications. I intend to publish this study on the ProQuest database and share findings with other business leaders and academic professionals through scholarly journals. Results from this study may benefit other researchers who are writing on succession strategies to advance women to leadership positions.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Shortages of women in leadership positions caused business leaders to review their policies and focus their efforts on promoting qualified women to leadership positions to improve organizational performance. The recommendation for further research is based on the purpose of this study; to provide a more in-depth understanding of strategies used to advance women for leadership positions to improve organizations' performance. Further research on increasing mentorship to heighten the number of women in traditionally male occupations. This study consisted of HR managers in the southeast United States, so further research may expand to different geographical locations to determine if that is a factor for promoting women to leadership positions.

Further research is needed to explore differences in organizational policies and the impact on females in leadership positions. Further research should compare large organizations to smaller organizations to see if there is a difference in gender leadership roles. A comparison of formal and informal succession plan programs between companies may provide additional insight to promoting women into leadership positions. Although women entering the workforce and advancing women to leadership positions have increased, gender inequality still exists. New research can expand the knowledge gained from six HR managers' experiences and strategies to inspire other organizations to create an environment where women can thrive in leadership roles.

### **Reflections**

I retired from the military after twenty-five years of service, and I contemplated whether to pursue another career or additional education. As a result, I decided to pursue

a doctoral program while relying on my military knowledge and experience on succession strategies. Exploring the research material allowed me to reflect on the process I used to advance women to leadership positions to improve organizations' performance. I was aware of succession strategies and women parity in the workforce are priorities both in the military and civilian sectors. Through this study process, I have gained knowledge from the business leaders about the importance of implementing a holistic approach to succession planning. As I reflect on my research doctoral journey, the process was insightful and informative.

The information I collected from the participant interviews and peer-reviewed articles, provided a broader approach to succession strategies and how to communicate those strategies to an organization. Each participant shared relevant information that included the organization process, procedure, and archival information that assisted me in attaining data saturation. The challenges that I had to overcome to be successful in Walden University's DBA program was sifting through information that was relevant. Also, exploring sources and learning how to use databases to refine search queries for superior research results was a challenge. From this process, my writing skills improved significantly, which included writing clearly and concisely to communicate with the reader effectively.

As I further reflect on my DBA experience, this process has taught me about time management and flexibility. My most memorable moment about the study was learning that no organization is perfect (military or civilian). I appreciate that all six participants agreed that leaders should invest in leadership training to advance women in leadership

positions. By obtaining my DBA, I may bring awareness to HR managers who can influence gender inequality in leadership positions through their hiring and promotional processes, succession plans, and organizational documents. I appreciate the opportunity to learn from professional faculty members, my chair, and supportive colleagues who provided encouragement during moments when I felt overwhelmed and frustrated. My overall experience with my DBA journey was both gratifying and humbling.

### **Conclusions**

Shortages of women in leadership positions have prompted the need to explore succession strategies. Although women are praised for having strong leadership traits and styles that are associated with effective leadership performance, there remains the underrepresentation of women in executive positions. Kiser (2015) suggested that the social role theory has caused men and women to behave differently because of the different roles they function within and due to the expectations that society places on them. Men often demonstrate assertiveness, which has caused some managers to believe women may not possess the necessary skills to lead or succeed. Leaders are less likely to promote women to senior-level positions. All the participants who participated in my research provided a productive discussion that advancements of women to leadership positions can improve organizations' performance. As more managers become aware of organizational barriers, gender inequality, strategies can be incorporated that will increase organization profits. As more women enter the workforce, strategies need to be in place for job advancement into leadership positions.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol Guide

Interview Scheduled Date \_\_\_\_\_ Interview Date \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Identification: HIC1P1

Consent to participate received  Disclosure and consent to record

Confirm confidentiality and voluntary  Informed that transcript will be available

The specific business problem is that some human resource (HR) managers in the home improvement industry lack succession strategies to advance women who have qualified for leadership positions to improve organizations' performance.

**Purpose of the study:** The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to explore the succession strategies that some HR managers in the home improvement industry use to advance women who have qualified for leadership positions to improve organizations' performance.

**Research question for this study:** What succession strategies do some HR managers in the home improvement industry use to advance women to leadership positions to improve organizations' performance?

**Start recording:**

Record Interview Start Time \_\_\_\_\_

**Stop recording:**

Record Interview End Time \_\_\_\_\_

Remind participant that the interview transcript will be sent for his/her review and approval.

Thank the participant for volunteering to share his/her personal experiences.

## Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What succession strategies did your organizations' leaders use to support women in advancing to leadership positions to improve your organization's performance?
2. How do you identify your female employees as possessing talents needed to advance to leadership positions?
3. What, if any, succession strategies do you use to manage and support women who are already in leadership positions in your organization?
4. What, if any, barriers exist to implementing succession strategies for advancing women to leadership positions in your organization to improve organizational performance?
5. How did you address the barriers to implementing your succession strategies for advancing women to leadership positions in your organization to improve organizational performance?
6. What else would you like to add that we have not discussed regarding succession strategies your organization has used to advance women to leadership positions?